

Welcome!

This school year welcomes two amazing new school directors at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations, who will play key roles in carrying out FECC's vision of catalyzing improvements in Flint's early childhood ecosystem to increase the universal quality of early childhood programs in Flint. We also welcomed familiar faces to new roles within the Genesee Intermediate School District. Dr. Jodi Ramos, former School Director at Educare Flint, now serves as Director of Early Childhood Programs for GISD, overseeing all early childhood initiatives in the district. Michelle Townsend, former School Director at Cummings Great Expectations, now serves as Education Manager for GISD early childhood programs. Needless to say, FECC is well-positioned to move toward a future where all Flint children have access to the highest quality early childhood education.

As we find a sense of normalcy amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we are also reflecting on the pandemic's impact on Flint's youngest learners and the role Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations played in supporting them. Findings from a national evaluation of child outcomes during the pandemic suggested that the efficient and effective pandemic response at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations contributed to the mitigation of losses in social-emotional development among enrolled children. These findings were shared by FECC's evaluation partner—the American Institutes for Research—at a national conference, demonstrating the success of our families despite the challenging realities of the pandemic.

Statewide, early childhood advocates have urged legislators to strengthen the sector by improving the early childhood talent pipeline. The bipartisan 2023 state budget makes positive strides toward our vision of a thriving early childhood workforce in Michigan by investing in Michigan's education preparation programs. The State's increased investments and our local partners' continued efforts toward improved early childhood systems necessitate improvements in the systems used to connect families with programs that best meet their needs. Our new partnership with the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators will ensure that improvements made to Genesee County's enrollment systems are available for children and families throughout Michigan.

As always, none of this work would be possible without the continued efforts of our staff, families, and partners, who demonstrate the value of our efforts daily. We look forward to all that the 2022-23 school year has to offer for Flint kids and families.

In partnership,

Ja'Nel



**Ja'Nel Jamerson**  
Educare Flint and  
Flint Early Childhood Collaborative



# Flint Early Childhood Collaborative Newsletter

STRONGER THAN EVER | SEPTEMBER 2022

# Excitement is High for New Leadership at Educare Flint & Cummings Great Expectations

HIGH QUALITY TEACHING



world's largest classroom—nature! One of Katie's biggest goals for Cummings is to make the courtyard something spectacular for both students and staff to explore and encourage nature-based early childhood education (ECE). "I would love to train more staff on the benefits of Nature-Based ECE and make the courtyard a place for teachers to use as an outdoor classroom to explore with students," says Katie. "It's really the focal point of the school and the staff is excited to give me their input about improvements."



**Chaika Stribling**

*School Director,  
Educare Flint*



**Katie Clark**

*School Director,  
Cummings Great Expectations*

Chaika echoes Katie's excitement as she settles into her new role as School Director at Educare Flint. With experiences ranging from early childhood to elementary education, Chaika brings an amazing depth and breadth of experience to her role at Educare Flint. Having earned a bachelor's degree in music and a master's degree in early childhood education, Chaika loves to use her creativity to help children learn and is excited to use her skills to lead the school toward further growth and success. Chaika has been a member of the Educare Flint team since it opened 5 years ago, serving as a Mentor Teacher (Early Childhood Specialist) for infant-toddler and preschool classrooms at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations. Her experience at Educare Flint is not limited to her occupation as a professional educator. Chaika participated in Educare Flint in her most important occupation—as a parent, bringing a unique blend of perspectives to her new role. Now as the second School Director in Educare Flint's history, she is excited to support other early childhood professionals in advancing their personal goals while setting a new standard for professionalizing the early childhood field. "I want to help teachers understand how great their work is, the professionals they are, and continue to establish ground in Flint," says Chaika. "Helping us be the beacon of life in the country, being the best that we can be." Chaika has a special place in her heart for children with special needs and wants to help parents who have children with special needs navigate the complexities of the education system, starting early, by strengthening how parents advocate for their children. "My goal is to help parents understand the services that Educare Flint provides to help support special needs children," says Chaika. "I want to make sure parents know that it is not something that they need to be afraid of."

Chaika and Katie have incredible ideas to further engage our community of families in the work we are doing. Building on the expansive work of their predecessors, they plan to develop a stronger presence in Flint through partnerships with parents, early childhood professionals, and community organizations.

It is said that leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality. Anyone who has had the chance to meet Katie or Chaika realizes that they have that capacity. It is obvious that their vision is strong but their real-world experience gives them the capacity to turn their vision into reality.

With Chaika and Katie leading Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations, both schools are well-positioned to continue demonstrating the value of increased investments in early childhood education while providing professional support for early childhood professionals.

The end of summer always brings feelings of excitement and anticipation as we look forward to the new school year ahead. This school year Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations are adding to that excitement and anticipation by welcoming two new School Directors—Katie Clark at Cummings Great Expectations and Chaika Stribling at Educare Flint.

With nearly 20 years of early childhood experience, both in the classroom and center management, Katie is a great addition to the Cummings team. In fact, Katie worked at Cummings when it first opened in 2016 and says she is thrilled to be back working in Flint. As she starts her first year as Cummings Great Expectations' School Director, she is bursting with excitement to meet the school's children and their families as they enter the building each morning. Getting to know the staff is one of Katie's highest priorities, as she believes that strong staff relationships allow her to better develop a shared vision for the school's future. "I love to have staff's input on everything," Katie shared. "It makes for better longevity and performance of the center." Katie also brings a passion for nature-based education, teaching, and learning, Katie's skill set strongly supports the Reggio-inspired approach intended for Cummings Great Expectations. Katie is looking forward to leveraging her background and the staff's expertise to identify opportunities to engage Cummings' students and families in the



# Developing the Next Standard in Kindergarten Transitions

## INTENSIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

COVID-19 has left parents feeling more anxious and less prepared for their child's transition into kindergarten than ever before. Whether it's not being able to walk kindergarteners into school on their first day or being unsure of which school to enroll them in, parents are asking for more opportunities to understand and navigate the transition to kindergarten. That being said, FECC partners are working to develop a new framework that can improve the quality of kindergarten transitions while also being replicable throughout other communities.

Our framework is designed around the experiences of students, parents, early childhood educators, and kindergarten teachers—helping each support and experience seamless transitions. In partnership with the American Institutes for Research (AIR), FECC has begun developing the Ready, Set, Succeed (RSS) kindergarten transition framework with an intentional focus on the experience of Black families and Black-majority schools.



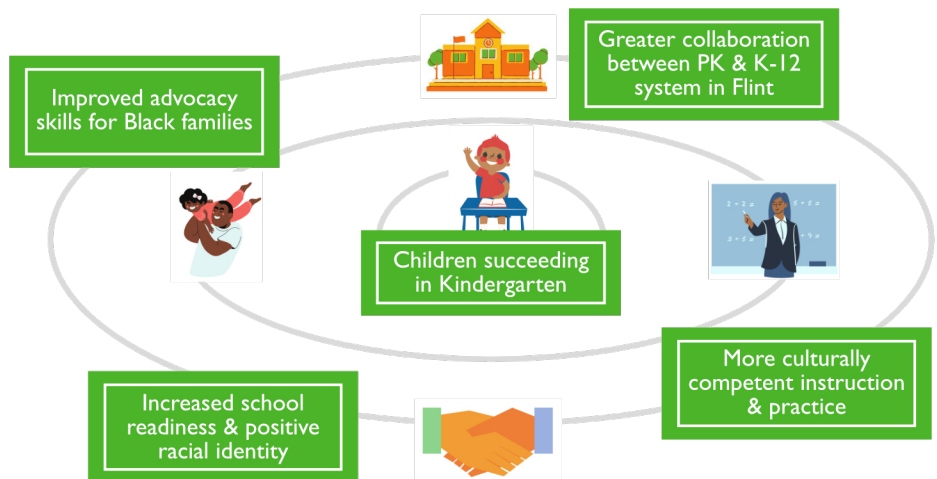
We are currently in phase one of the development process where we are collecting data, gathering input, and developing the core components of the system. As an initial step, FECC's Special Projects Manager, Chakara Wheeler, held a focus group with Flint parents to learn more about what support would be helpful in navigating the kindergarten transition.

During the focus group, parents emphasized the importance of informing parents about the options they have for their child moving on to kindergarten, specifically the timeframe in which transition activities should take place. Parents suggested that conversations with preschool

parents need to begin earlier, as many parents often feel rushed into making the decision of where their child should attend kindergarten.

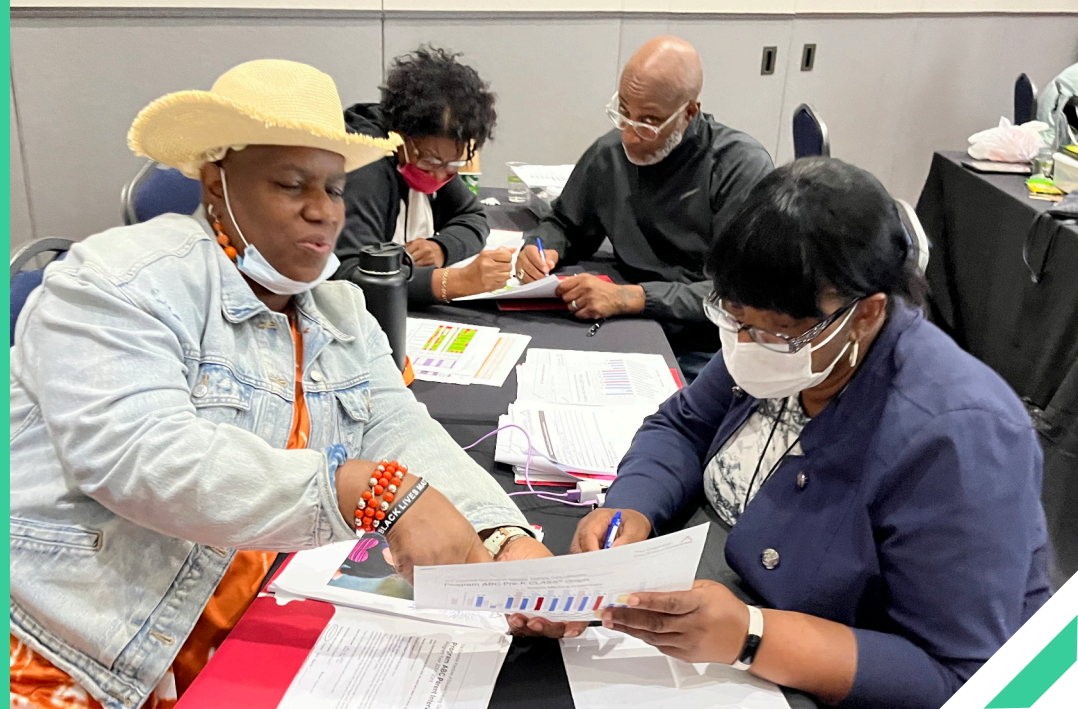
FECC's Research-Program-Partnership is incorporating feedback from the parent focus group into the core components of the RSS intervention.

### RSS Intended Outcomes: An Ecological Approach



# Driving Evidence-Based Instruction & Data-Informed Decision Making through Enhanced Professional Development

ENHANCED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



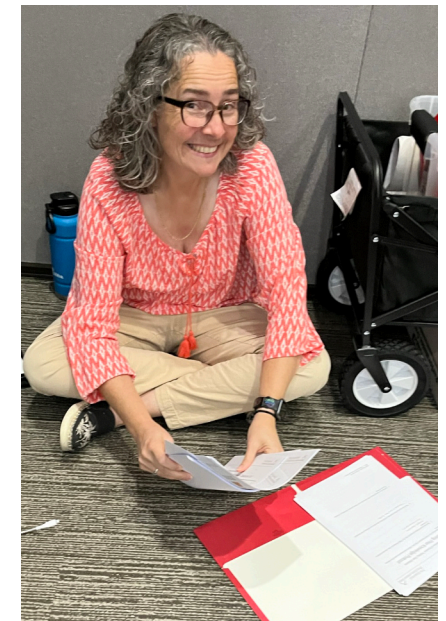
The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative (FECC) strives to improve the quality of early care and education programs by enhancing the professional development offerings available to professionals in the Flint area. Using The Essential Practices of Educare, Educare Flint staff are engaging early childhood professionals at all levels to improve the quality of their programs through data utilization. Additionally, Mentor Teachers (Early Childhood Specialists) at Educare Flint are developing a catalog of professional development offerings that address the needs of infant-toddler and preschool teachers.

Educare Flint Mentor Teachers, Christina Law, and Kendra Ogles, developed the first Educare Flint Early Childhood Summer Series, conducting professional development trainings throughout the summer designed to enhance early childhood teachers' pedagogy. Sessions ranged in topics from emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. "The feedback we received was all very positive," shared Christi.

In addition to locally-developed trainings, Educare Flint coordinated with the Educare Learning Network to host the Essential Practices of Educare—Data Utilization training for all staff at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations. Educare Flint Lead Teacher and Essential Practice of Educare Trainer, Christina Nellis, co-led the week-long Data Utilization training with Mentor Teachers, Kimberly Worth and Chaika Stribling. "Being able to have training done by peers gave it more authenticity," Christina shared. "The information was coming from people (the staff) we knew, and had firsthand experience."

With data at the center of everything we do, it is critical to our success that we are skilled at being able to identify relevant data and integrate those data into decision-making in our classrooms, relationships with families, partnerships with peers, and in our schools as a whole. Christina shared that after the training, she felt teachers were looking at data much

differently, starting to more regularly make connections between data and the way they planned lessons, the way they worked with individual students, and even down to how lunch meals were calculated. "We knew data was being used but had no idea that it was to this extent," said Christina.



# Data Suggests Educare Flint & Cummings Great Expectations' Pandemic Response Likely Mitigated Skills Loss for Flint Kids

RESEARCH



*"We know that the COVID-19 pandemic wasn't an easy time for families but this data shows us the positives that took place."*

*Lisa White - Senior Researcher, American Institutes for Research*

From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, FECC and its partners focused on ensuring that Flint children's destinies were not marked by yet another threat to public health. Although the pandemic forced Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations to pivot in ways we never foresaw, our partners remained steadfast in our commitment to providing the best possible foundation for Flint's youngest learners. The Genesee Intermediate School District's (GISD) quick transition to virtual learning, the C.S. Mott Foundation's support for enhanced technology options, the Community Foundation of Greater Flint's child-maternal nutrition initiatives, and countless other contributions helped in easing the burden of the pandemic for Flint families while ensuring their children remained on track for kindergarten.

A recent study on preschool-aged children's social-emotional development during the pandemic indicated that more than 40% of children experienced increased challenges in social-emotional development during the pandemic, with more than 70% of families indicating concerns about losses in their children's social-emotional development. However, recent findings from student outcome data at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations demonstrate that not only did students maintain their levels of pre-pandemic social-emotional development, but they also grew!

FECC's local evaluation partner, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) was recently selected to share these findings at the National Research Conference on Early Childhood. Lisa White, the Senior Researcher at AIR, described the feeling during their presentation as being one of astonishment for many of the session's participants. "People were curious to hear about what was happening at Educare Flint - what services might be buffering against the negative impacts," shared Lisa.

Many in attendance rightfully assumed that, given the challenges of the past two years, the social and emotional development of children at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations would have mirrored the outcomes of children nationally, especially given the ongoing challenges with Flint's water. However, armed with hard data from four different time points, Lisa demonstrated that, despite the hardships inherent to a global pandemic, Flint children continued to grow and thrive when it comes to their social and emotional skills during the pandemic.

The AIR team analyzed data collected in Fall 2019, Spring 2020 (pre-pandemic), Fall 2020, and Spring 2021, representing feedback from teachers on students of all ages around social and emotional skills. They found that the social-emotional development of students attending Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations did not decline over the pandemic. Instead, Flint kids experienced gains in social-emotional development when compared to the previous school year.

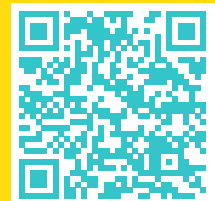
While additional research is needed to ascertain the cause of Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations' students' positive social-emotional outcomes during the pandemic, Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations' pandemic response demonstrates that Flint's pandemic response was unique when compared to other schools throughout the nation.

Data from a national survey of high-quality early childhood education centers indicated that while pandemic-related factors influenced the closure of early childhood sites across the country, Flint programs were among only three respondents that continued providing early childhood services to families throughout the pandemic. Needless to say, the strong family support provided by Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations throughout the pandemic likely contributed to children's social-emotional development.

Established in response to a public health emergency, Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations were quickly able to leverage their existing infrastructure and previous lessons learned to maximize opportunities for learning during the pandemic and intensify partnerships with families. While we feel that the support we provided was impactful, we also realize we are truly a reflection of our community. Flint families are strong, resilient, and driven. Together, we are changing the narrative about Flint—especially as it concerns our youngest citizens. This is not just a city that has been affected by a water emergency; it is a diverse community of people working to move forward together by building sustainable and equitable systems that are as resilient as Flint's families are strong.

**SEE HOW FLINT'S COVID-19 RESPONSE COMPARED TO OTHER EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS NATIONALLY**

**CLICK OR SCAN TO LEARN MORE**





## WHO WILL SPEAK UP FOR THE CHILDREN?

We posed this question in our 2022-2024 early childhood advocacy agenda. Our answer is quite simple, Flint & Genesee County will! Through the Genesee County Early Childhood Leadership & Advocacy Committee, local early childhood stakeholders are creating a more equitable system of early care and education that works for all families by partnering with policymakers to make common sense improvements to Michigan's laws, regulations, and financing.

In July, early childhood stakeholders joined Governor Whitmer at Mott Community College in Flint as she signed a historic bi-partisan education budget for the State of Michigan, committing over \$19 billion toward education. In the months leading up to this historic education budget, the Genesee County Early Childhood Leadership & Advocacy Committee conducted a letter-writing campaign, sending more than 60 letters to legislators and facilitating conversations with more than 40 legislators and staffers about the urgent need for enhanced early childhood funding in the State's 2023 budget.

A crucial element of the Committee's advocacy agenda was the emphasis on building a thriving early childhood workforce. The 2023 state budget helps create a framework for early childhood educators to strengthen their professional competencies while obtaining additional credentials— creating a pathway for stronger talent pipelines in Michigan's early care and education programs. The budget also makes positive strides toward providing sufficient funding to provide high-quality early care and education throughout Michigan, including resources to reduce barriers to services and give children a healthy start.

As legislators now engage in a busy election season, Genesee County's early childhood advocates are preparing to engage with newly elected officials, post-election day, to encourage increased and strategic investments in Michigan's early childhood education system.



[Click to read more about Gov. Whitmer's Education Budget](#)

# Early Childhood Advocates Gain Traction on Policy Priorities through Michigan's 2023 State Budget

ADVOCACY

## Strides Towards Our Advocacy Agenda

### ● Build A Thriving Childhood Workforce

- **MI Future Educator Fellowship Program** – \$25 million to offset tuition costs for college students earning their initial teacher certification. Requires recipients to agree to work in a Michigan public school or qualifying preschool program for at least 2 years for every year an award was received.
- **MI Future Educator Student Teacher Stipend** – \$50 million for higher ed. institutions to pay student teachers up to \$9,600 per semester.
- **Grow Your Own Program** – \$175 million to provide grants to districts and ISDs to provide a no-cost pathway for support staff members to become certified teachers.

### ● Reduce Barriers To Early Childhood Education

- **Great Start Readiness Program** – \$34 million. This year's budget allows over 50,000 four-year-olds in Michigan to be served and includes additional funding for the continued GSRP expansion. An increase in the per slot allotment to \$9,150 – consistent with the K-12 foundation allowance.
- **Tri-Share** – \$2.5 million – now considered ongoing.

### ● Give Children A Healthy Start

- **Early On** – Additional \$7.1 million.
- **Healthy Moms, Healthy Babies** – \$1.2 million to expand access to doula care.
- **Child & Adolescent Health Centers** – Additional \$25 million to expand access to school-based physical and mental health care



# Achieving Coordinated Enrollment in Genesee County while Providing Benefits for the Entire State

COORDINATED SYSTEMS

FECC partners have made large strides toward creating the next generation of enrollment support for our community by developing a coordinated enrollment system that would solve access barriers and become a sustainable model for communities throughout Michigan. To achieve this, FECC has launched a new partnership with the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) to develop a system that meets the unique needs of Genesee County families and providers while making the system available throughout Michigan. Leveraging an existing system, developed by the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District (OAISD), FECC partners will support enhancements that improve the user experience for parents and early childhood education providers of differing types.

“Flint (and Genesee) came to the conversation with a strong vision of what they needed and had some great functionality that we can see benefiting many communities,” Tom Johnson, Director of MI Collaboration Hub at MAISA explained.

After spending much of the spring and summer ideating on the system’s elements and governance structure at the local and regional level, we are now in the development phase of the system’s technology components and are starting to plan the coordinated information campaign as well as creating a referral network for early childhood programs.

Throughout this process, we will continue to connect with families, providers, and partners to gain greater insights into their experiences and validate the utility of developments.

From our participation in the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) Coordinated Enrollment Community of Practice (CoP), we know many communities share our urgent need and enthusiasm for an enrollment system that addresses critical barriers for families and providers in the enrollment process. FECC’s partnership with MAISA allows the previous and ongoing investments of OAISD to be leveraged with the resources provided to FECC by MDE to bring the benefit of a coordinated enrollment system to more Michigan counties at a lower cost. FECC plans to utilize the new coordinated enrollment system for the 2023-24 school year, launching the core components by March 2023

