

Flint Early Childhood Collaborative Newsletter

Leading Through Action | June 18, 2021



**Flint
Early Childhood
Collaborative**

Welcome!

As the year takes a more uplifting tone, the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative continues its efforts to improve early care and education in Flint through high-quality teaching and learning, intensive family engagement, enhanced professional development, research, advocacy, and coordinated systems. Our partners have worked tirelessly over the past quarter to make progress toward our goal of ensuring all Flint children have barrier-free access to high-quality early care and education. We are happy to share updates on our efforts through this newsletter.

At Educare Flint, a focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is improving high-quality teaching and learning with support from the Red Nose Day grant and RULER training. Parent Ambassadors and school staff are working with Flint Community Schools to get children and families ready for kindergarten through virtual transition workshops. With support from the C.S. Mott Foundation, FECC is partnering with Pondera Research to pilot enhanced professional development supports for early childhood professionals in Flint. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) and the FECC Research-Program Partnership have formalized two multi-year research agendas that aim to identify the most effective and equitable family engagement strategies at our hubs and improve equity and access in Flint early childhood programs. Finally, FECC has formalized a plan to sustain Flint's hub approach and improve the quality and sustainability of early care and education programs in Michigan.

None of these efforts would be possible without the ongoing support from all of our partners and stakeholders. We look forward to our continued partnership on behalf of Flint's children and families. If you missed the Q1 newsletter, click [here](#) to check it out.

Ja'Nel Jamerson

*Educare Flint and Flint Early
Childhood Collaborative*



Educare Flint Prioritizes Diversity, Equity & Inclusion with Red Nose Day Grant

High-Quality Teaching & Learning

School leaders at Educare Flint established a Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) committee to bring a more intentional focus on the value of DEI in early care and education for students, families, and staff. This committee comprises school leaders, including teaching staff, Family Engagement Advocates, the School Director, and the Executive Director.

As a member of the Educare Learning Network, Educare Flint was selected to receive the Red Nose Grant from Comic Relief, which will support Educare schools in strengthening supports for students, families, and staff. With support from the Red Nose Day grant, the DEI committee is working to ensure equity for students, families, and staff using social-emotional learning (SEL).

“The committee came about as we were looking for a way to ensure we were providing an equitable experience for all staff as we explore DEI, as well as making sure we are meeting the expectations of the Educare Learning Network and the GISD” Educare School Director, Dr. Jodi Ramos shared. “The staff on the committee were chosen (because) they have shown a passion for this work and have delved into this on their own time. With their initiative to learn and advocate on their own, we knew they would help to drive our work while always ensuring to consider multiple perspectives.”

Leanne Littlejohn is a Family Engagement Advocate at Educare Flint and serves on the DEI committee. Leanne reflected on the importance of diversity within the committee itself, “There are a lot of backgrounds in education and social work and forming this committee; (it) really speaks to the value leadership places on DEI and the importance of it here at Educare.” Leanne emphasized that the committee’s work is meant to have long-term systemic implications for Educare Flint and other early childhood programs in Flint. “To do this right, it’s going to take time. DEI isn’t about checking boxes or completing assignments, but the long path we walk together.”

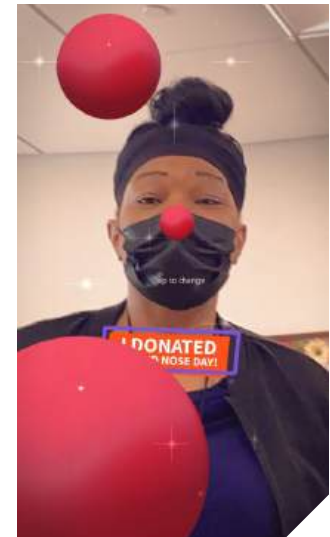
Lead Teacher, Jimmela Byrd, shared, “DEI matches what the Educare model stands for and helps us understand what DEI really is and how people aren’t always included. It helps us operate more inclusively by becoming more intentional and how valuable we all are and really gives extra support and help to the people around us to be seen and valued.”

The DEI committee is integrating the core aspects of the RULER training in its work to emphasize SEL. RULER, a systemic approach to SEL, embeds the principles of emotional intelligence into the PreK-12 education system, guiding how leaders lead, teachers teach, students learn, and families support students. RULER is an acronym for five emotional intelligence skills (Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, Regulating); its implementation begins with personal and professional learning for leaders and educators. It continues with classroom instruction for students as well as family engagement and education.

Family Engagement Advocate, Mariah Randle, shared that skills learned through the RULER training directly connect to DEI. “The emotional intelligence-based approach for staff and family enables staff to recognize and understand the feelings of children, family, and coworkers, and build skills for the school’s families to help people of all ages use their emotions wisely. We use RULER training to help with a person in the moment, in understanding the person’s emotions and talk things out instead of conflict or judging.” Mariah shared.

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~ Jimmela Byrd, Lead Teacher- Educare Flint



Parent Ambassadors and Staff Create Smooth Transitions for Incoming Kindergarteners in Flint

Intensive Family Engagement

Parent Ambassadors and staff from Educare Flint, Cummings Great Expectations, and Flint Community Schools hosted a series of Countdown to Kindergarten transition workshops to provide information and resources to families of children transitioning to kindergarten in the Fall. Topics ranged from developing routines to parent participation and student success.

Durant-Tuuri-Mott Elementary School Principal, Angela Ascencio-Mindlin, shared why these transition activities are essential to ensuring an excellent experience for families. "Our goal is to help families support their new students during this critical time of formation and development in their life. It's very important for us to build a positive impression with the students and families prior to the first day of school, and these workshops allow for that to happen."

"Head Start is a lot different from kindergarten," explained Cummings Great Expectations Family Engagement Advocate Rob Royce when discussing the importance of transition activities. With smaller classroom sizes, they're getting a lot more one-on-one attention in Head Start, whereas in kindergarten, you have bigger class sizes allowing the student to build their independence, and this can require more of a routine. The transition activities provided are helpful as they discuss establishing a sleep schedule, a homework schedule, and getting a whole new routine down."

Parent Ambassador, Brittany Wallace, emphasized the importance of "teaching your child how to become independent as much as possible, before coming to kindergarten and putting children on a schedule." She explained, "Let your child pick out their clothes, and let them have tasks at home. Even just small chores that they could help out with, like setting the table, watering the plants, these little things help them become more independent."

Early Childhood Specialist, Christi Law, shared, "Getting your student acclimated to a new larger school will take some time because kindergarten expectations are quite different." In addition, social and emotional skills are an integral part of a child's development, and a continued focus on this from early childhood education through kindergarten is critical. The packets provided during the workshops are designed to help assist children's continued development in these areas. "The more parents see and are involved, the more they will have the language, examples, and awareness of best practices," Christi explained.

In addition to the Countdown to Kindergarten transition workshops, the Parent Ambassadors purchased kindergarten backpacks and supplies for transitioning students at Educare Flint, Cummings Great Expectations, and Summerfield Early Learning Center. The backpack came with a matching lunch bag, pencil holder, and two additional zippered pouches for supplies. Other items included personal protection equipment, pencils, erasers, crayons, glue sticks, scissors, hand sanitizer, mask, student workbooks, and books on transitioning to kindergarten.

GISD Parent Navigator Charese McLean explained, "We simply wanted to ease the load for our transitioning families to ensure they have all the necessary school supplies to kick off kindergarten. Parents can now transfer those savings to other necessities."



ASSISTED
20
FAMILIES
With Kindergarten
Transition Workshops

FECC Pilots the Pondera Virtual Advisor and "Leading Without Authority" Training

Enhanced Professional Development

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, FECC and its partners are engaging center-based early childhood professionals improving the quality of their programs through high-quality teaching practices, embedded professional development, data utilization, and intensive family engagement.

Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations staff reflected on the benefits of embedded professional development in a video released by FECC. We know that each student has different needs, requiring different supports from their teachers. However, teachers don't often benefit from individualized support based on their needs. The Embedded Professional Development module supports center-based early care and education professionals in assessing teachers' strengths and targeted professional development needs to support them in reaching their full potential. Educators who get the individualized support they need to be effective are better equipped to influence and maintain high levels of student readiness. However, managing a diverse team where everyone has different needs for success is both an art and a science.

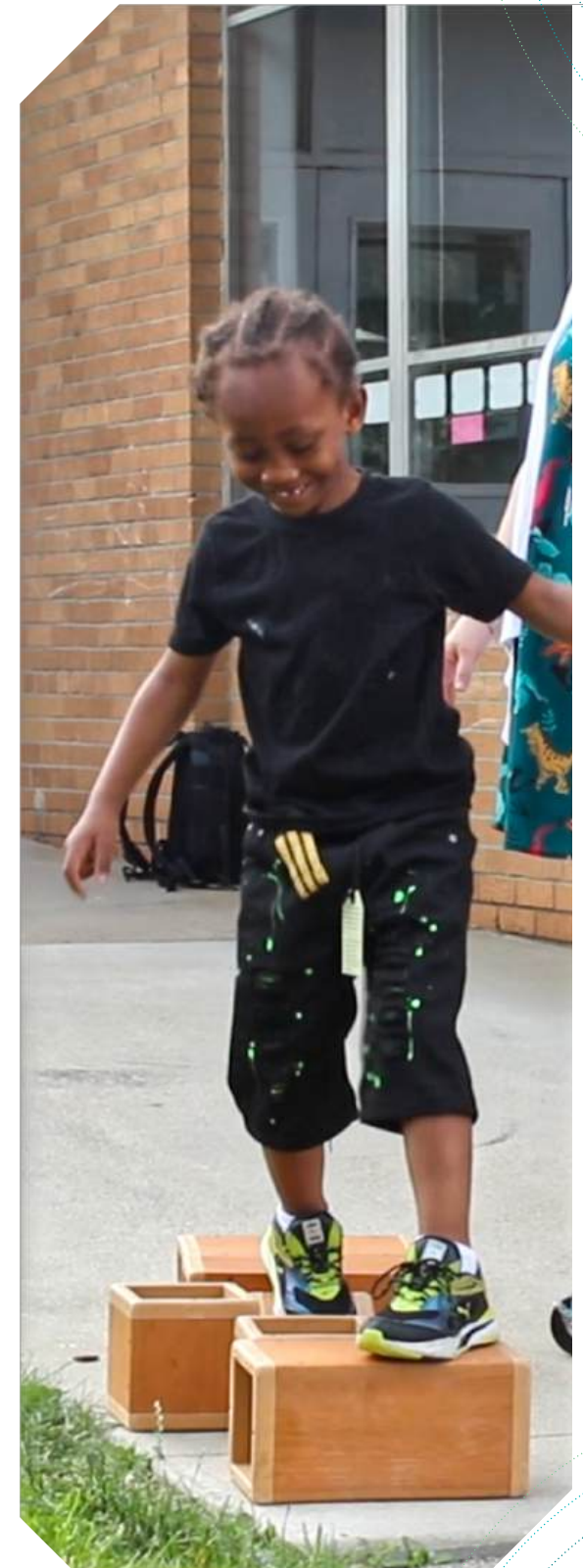
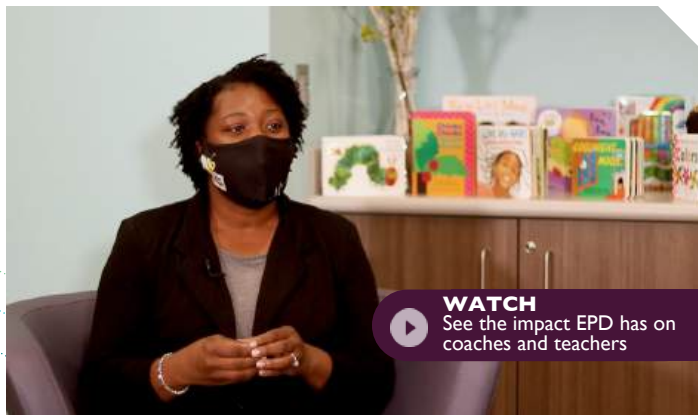
Early Childhood Specialists (ECS) play a central role in providing training and coaching for early care and education professionals throughout the Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD). With support from the C.S. Mott Foundation, FECC hosted the Leading Without Authority training from Pondera Research for ECS. The session focused on coaching strategies that ECS can use to influence instructional teams through lateral leadership. Skills covered in this training included networking, constructive persuasion and negotiation, consultation, and coalition building.

Pondera Coach, Rob Elliot, facilitated the session. "The (Early Childhood Specialists) expressed that they struggle at times to get things done because they felt they lack authority, as not being teachers, they don't have direct authority over the classrooms. What we talked out, was that when you lead with authority, you are exercising the need for compliance. When you lead with influence, rather, you are garnering something they want to do more for themselves. We can all create the conditions for people to be able to motivate themselves," Rob shared.

Dr. Jodi Ramos, school director at Educare Flint, explained the benefits of the training, "At the GISD, we view everyone as a leader. In this training, we found that our ECS's didn't feel like they had much authority to lead... They don't necessarily have that classroom authority, but they do have influence. The Leading Without Authority training enables them to use their influence, to foster a more long-term change."

The Leading Without Authority training is part of a broader pilot initiative underway by FECC that aims to support strong leadership among school staff at Educare Flint. The Pondera Virtual Advisor, a professional inventory assessment, has been administered with instructional and support staff at Educare Flint that provided information about the motivation, operating styles and modes of learning of each professional.

"Being able to have that mediated conversation allows us to see how to work best with each other. This also greatly ties into our DEI work. It explores all of our values from a cultural lens as well. When we self-manage, we start to recognize our own triggers, and that sets us up well to be able to talk to each other about anything which helps us grow," Dr. Ramos explained.



FECC's Research-Program Partnership Launches Dual Research Agendas

Research & Advocacy

The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative Research Program Partnership (RPP) emerged from an existing partnership between the Community Foundation of Greater Flint (CFGF) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) that supports the work of Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations. Today, the partnership includes members forming a broad coalition that includes school and district leadership, family engagement advocates, early childhood specialists, families themselves, community foundation members, funders, and local and national early childhood researchers. RPP members have generated research priorities together to ensure they are designed for the community by the community. We have developed the following research agendas to address these priorities:

1. Understanding intensive family engagement
2. Increasing access to and equity in early childhood programs in the Flint community

Intensive Family Engagement

The RPP's first research priority is to identify the most effective and equitable strategies of intensive family engagement at Educare Flint and Cummings. Additionally, the RPP will document how staff engages with families to help understand existing practices and inform new directions for intensive family engagement at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations.

The goals of the intensive family engagement study are as follows:

- Understand the needs and strengths of the families.
- Understand the historical biases that challenge our families.
- Document current approaches to family engagement at the two programs.
- Develop new and innovative strategies to engage families that prioritize parents as advocates for their children and families.
- Evaluate our efforts and conduct a rigorous evaluation of family engagement strategies.

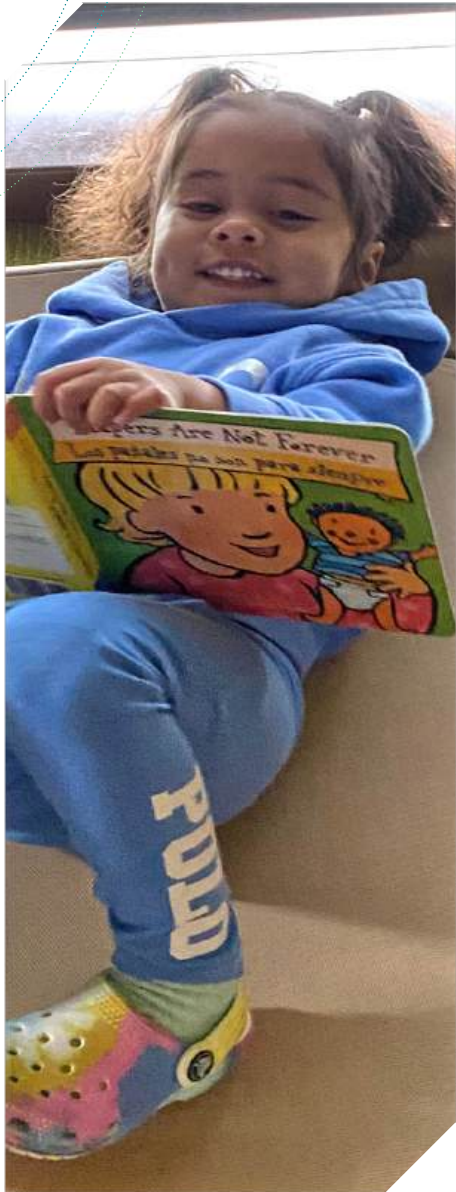
Early Childhood Equity & Access in Flint

The RPP's second research priority is broader, focusing on equity and access to early childhood programs in the Flint community as a whole. The RPP will rely on a mix of qualitative data (e.g., interviews, focus groups) and quantitative data (e.g., student learning and growth, kindergarten readiness scores) to understand how families in Flint access early childhood programs and how these programs promote children's development and learning. In addition, gaps will be documented related to early care and education access and quality.

The goals of this study are as follows:

- Understand the context of the early childhood Flint community.
- Document the landscape of early childhood programs in Flint.
- Explore the relationship between attending early childhood programs and child outcomes in preschool and into early elementary school.
- Understand the barriers to equitable access to high-quality early education in Flint.
- Work collaboratively to address these barriers.
- Evaluate our efforts.

Through these two agendas, the RPP hopes to build on the important work of engaging children and families at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations and gain understanding about the successes and challenges to achieving equitable access to high-quality early learning experiences for all families in Flint.



We believe that all children in Flint are worthy of an excellent, equitable education that provides them with limitless opportunities to thrive, and that systemic racial inequity must continually be recognized and confronted to promote strengths and develop skills in children, families, and staff.

~ FECC Research-Program Partnership



“A Blueprint for a Better Tomorrow.” FECC Solidifies its Plan to Sustain the Educare Model and Hub Approach in Flint

Coordinated Systems

The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative and its partners have formalized a 10-year plan to sustain its efforts of improving the availability and accessibility of early care and education programs in Flint and other areas where service gaps exist. FECC was established in response to the Flint Water Crisis to address early interventions for impacted children ages birth to five and their families. Now, only five years after the launch of its efforts, FECC is focusing on how to continue its public-private partnerships to deliver sustainable enhanced, high-quality early care and education services in Flint.

Multiple public and private funding sources support the Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations schools. FECC partners braid funding from Early Head Start, Head Start, Great Start to

Readiness Program, and the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) for the children it serves. Additionally, a temporary waiver in CCDF eligibility that included all Flint families who the Declaration of Emergency impacted provided additional funding critical to implementing the Educare model. Private donor funding has supported FECC’s community-wide research, advocacy, enhanced professional development, intensive family engagement, and system coordination strategies and contributed significantly to Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations’ initial construction and renovation. In FY 2021, the Michigan Legislature authorized an enhancement grant to continue the Educare model for the 2021-2022 school year after the CCDF waiver expired.

Data overwhelmingly shows the Educare model effectively mitigates the impacts of lead exposure and poverty on children’s development by reducing achievement gaps. However, FECC estimates an \$8.5 million total sustainability gap for Flint’s Educare model and hub approach over the next ten years. FECC formalized a sustainability plan that addresses this projected funding gap and leverages lessons learned to strengthen the stability and sustainability of early care and education programs throughout Michigan. It does so with a focus on two critical goals. First, FECC aims to influence local, state, and federal policy reforms to stabilize child care funding. Second, FECC aims to expand public-private partnerships in support of enhanced ECE services in Flint.

Maximizing public early childhood funding is essential to sustaining the Educare model in Flint and stabilizing childcare programs throughout the state. Therefore, in the short term, FECC will (1) continue to braid available federal and state funding to maximize the utility of available CCDF funds, (2) sustain the current state investment in Educare Flint & Cummings Great Expectations for one additional fiscal year, (3) secure a new temporary Flint recovery CCDF waiver for FYs 2023-2025, and (4) explore the feasibility of a local ECE millage in Genesee County. In the long-term, FECC will pursue the use of CCDF contracts and grants for providers.

Because public-private partnerships are increasingly being utilized to address funding gaps in early care and education services, FECC will use such partnerships to address the diversified funding needed to sustain the community-wide hub approach in Flint. In the short term, by (1) Cultivating and re-engaging major donors and (2) conducting annual giving campaigns. In the long-term, FECC aims to build a sustainable revenue source that provides longitudinal funding for the community-wide hub approach in Flint and will explore the feasibility of an operations endowment fund.



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