

# Flint Early Childhood Collaborative Newsletter

Building A Bridge To Action | September 24, 2021



Flint  
Early Childhood  
Collaborative

**GUARD  
EVERY**

## Welcome!

As we begin this new school year, we are looking forward to all the exciting opportunities we have to partner with Flint families and providers to improve the accessibility and availability of early care and education programs in our community. Despite the uncertainty of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, our partners have maintained an unwavering commitment to keeping our scholars, staff, and families safe while providing the highest quality services for our community. This work is more important than ever.

Over the past few months, the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative and our partners have focused on policy efforts to secure critical funding for families and early care and education programs throughout Michigan. While we have seen significant progress in this area, there is still much to be done. Additionally, we have been fortunate to collaborate with the Child Care Network in convening a home-based provider support group, which continues to serve as a platform to strengthen connections between providers and raise our awareness about their unique needs. At Educare Flint & Cummings Great Expectations, we hosted bridging ceremonies to celebrate the accomplishments of our scholars and families who transitioned to kindergarten. Finally, we have begun the initial steps towards developing a unified enrollment system in Genesee County that will improve the accessibility of early care and education programs in our community and serve as a pilot for the state.

Throughout these challenging times, we remain committed to partnering with local families and childcare providers to ensure Flint children are welcomed into safe and nurturing environments this Fall. We continue to partner with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and the HighScope Educational Research Foundation to collect pertinent information from our families that can be used to improve the responsiveness of our efforts. Recent feedback from families at Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations revealed that family relationships have remained strong despite the challenges of the pandemic and Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations have played a critical role in helping families navigate these challenges.

I hope the stories shared through this newsletter provide some insight into the perseverance, determination, and commitment of our partners as we continue to work toward a future where all Flint children and families are supported to enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn. We look forward to our continued partnership.

**Ja'Nel Jamerson**

Educare Flint and Flint Early  
Childhood Collaborative



# “You Go, but You Are Never Gone:” Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations Bid Farewell to Scholars Transitioning to Kindergarten

High-Quality Teaching



Both schools have a great partnership with the Flint Community Schools, which allows for them to help families find the school that is right for them and begin to familiarize scholars with their new schools before the beginning of the school year. Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations staff support transitioning families by providing information on important deadlines and requirements, facilitating school visits, and inviting elementary staff to speak to preschool parents throughout the school year. Even after scholars have moved on to kindergarten, the bridge back to Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations remains intact for families to receive guidance and support in navigating their early elementary experiences. “You go but you are never gone” shared Early Childhood Specialist Christi Law. “You are always family!”

**“You can’t believe the transformation we have seen in these children. They have become family!”**

~ Stephanie Blouir, Teacher - Cummings Great Expectations

Each year, the end of the summer brings feelings of excitement and anticipation as we look forward to a new school year and all the opportunity that comes with it. At Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations the end of summer is also a time to reflect on and celebrate the many accomplishments of young scholars as they prepare to transition to kindergarten.

Last month, Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations hosted Bridging Ceremonies for scholars and families moving on to kindergarten. What started as an idea by a teacher five years ago, when the first group of preschool scholars at Cummings Great Expectations moved on to kindergarten, has grown into a multi-day celebration across the entire Educare Flint & Cummings communities.

Many of the scholars transitioning this year have attended Cummings Great Expectations and Educare Flint since they were just three or four months old. “You can’t believe the transformation we have seen in these children” shared Cummings teacher Stephanie Blouir. “They have become family!” These events also give a time to celebrate the accomplishments of the entire family. It really takes a village and it is important to recognize the huge strides the parents have made as well.

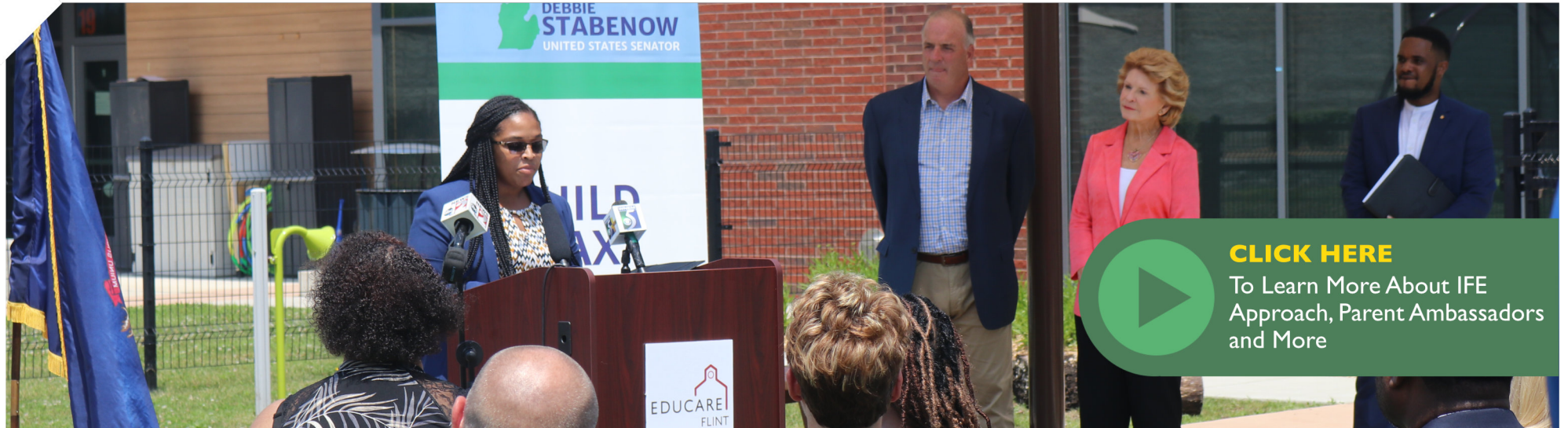
This year, to ensure safety, families participated in an outdoor drive-thru event but that didn’t change the feeling in the air. As family after family came to celebrate their child, the parking lots continued to fill as people decided to stay around to celebrate the accomplishments of their friends, neighbors and classmates.

Cummings School Director Michelle Townsend. The ceremonies are referred to as Bridging Ceremonies to speak to the important partnership between the preschool programs and elementary schools. “We are fortunate to be able to be that bridge for these students,” explained Educare Flint School Director Dr. Jodi Ramos.



# Parent Ambassadors Host Press Conference With Sen. Stabenow and Congressman Kildee, Raising Awareness About the Child Tax Credit

*Intensive Family Engagement*



**CLICK HERE**

To Learn More About IFE Approach, Parent Ambassadors and More

The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative and Parent Ambassadors proudly hosted U.S Senator Debbie Stabenow and Congressman Dan Kildee for a press conference raising awareness about the recently expanded Child Tax Credit.

Lead Parent Ambassador, Latrese Brown, participated as a speaker. As a Public Health Navigator at the City of Flint and former AmeriCorps service member, Ms. Brown has a good pulse and understanding of local families, the challenges they face, and the impact the expanded child tax credit could make in our community. When first asked about speaking, Latrese felt nervous but she felt compelled to do it for the community and the families she serves everyday. "I often see myself as a bridge to our families," Brown explained. "Whether it be a bridge to school or to government, many times parents don't know how to speak up and I enjoy being able to be that bridge for them"

As she prepared her remarks, Latrese reached out to many parents to get input on the message and what should be lifted. Standing next to titans of government, many would have caved, but Latrese shined. She shared that, while she was nervous prior to speaking, after approaching the podium she had a wave of confidence come over her. "I realized that this was bigger than me. I was there to represent our parents, our community. This was our shot and all of a sudden I lost all anxiety."

Senator Stabenow shared that "this pandemic has been tough for everyone, but families with children have been especially hard hit. This tax cut helps those who need it most to have additional resources to care for their children. It will improve the lives of millions of Michigan children, help moms and dads pay for child care and other essentials and allow them to successfully return to work.

This is just one of the many reasons why the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative is proud to support the effort to permanently extend the Child Tax Credit. "I hope we can get this done, and I think this next year will prove the value of all of this," Congressman Kildee said.

In the weeks following the press conference, several media outlets from Saginaw to Detroit contacted Ms. Brown to participate in interviews and learn more about the benefits of the expanded child tax credit for families.

"I appreciate the media helping tell the story because it allowed me to connect with the community better on this topic and help our community grow," Latrese shared. "The extension of this funding will allow for parents to expose their children to more opportunities, to spend more time with their children (without) having to work as much, and give greater opportunities to live healthier lives for our community,"



# Home-Based Provider Support Group Strengthens Connections and Professional Learning Opportunities for Genesee and Livingston County Professionals

Enhanced Professional Development



When people think of child care, oftentimes the first thing that comes to mind are center-based early childhood programs. However, based on data from the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education Household Public-Use Survey, home-based child care providers represent about 30% of all infant and toddler primary care arrangements. This is a large segment of the care being provided yet, according to data presented on the State of Michigan website, from 2010 - 2017, the number of home based providers dropped by 38.8%.

This is a disturbing trend that needs to be addressed. The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative has committed to ensuring home-based early care and education providers receive the support necessary to continue responding to the needs of Flint's youngest children and their families. "There are a lot of resources available for centers but home-based providers are often overlooked," explained Ja'Nel Jamerson, Executive Director, Flint Early Childhood Collaborative & Educare Flint. Home-based providers have unique strengths and challenges that may not be present in center-based learning environments, such as having children of various ages all in the same learning environment, requiring a provider be able to provide individualized learning opportunities that can be scaffolded to the level of the children.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative launched a partnership with the Child Care Network to develop consistent supports for home-based child care providers. Starting with a virtual home-based provider conference in early-2021, the Collaborative and Child Care Network has now formalized a support group for home-based child care providers in Genesee and Livingston Counties, which meets monthly and has upwards of 30 providers participating.



"It can be very isolating as a home provider and this group is helping to change that," shared Shannon Thompson, Child Care Networks' Quality Improvement Consultant For Genesee County. Through the work of the group, they have been able to bring in Erica Hill as a facilitator to present professional development opportunities each month. Hill, a former home provider herself, connected with the group's members right away through a common bond and offered practical solutions to address nuanced challenges and opportunities for home-based providers. Since launching the support group in May, many of the activities have been focused on helping providers scaffold their activities to different age ranges while also using common household items, such as buttons, toilet paper rolls, and more, to facilitate high-quality learning experiences for children in their care. The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative is proud to support this effort with funding to provide supplies to providers to assist them with implementing the training they receive through the support group.

The group is provider-led and all professional development topics are guided by what the providers have identified as priorities. One item that will be a training topic in the months to come will be on caring for children with special needs, which is a topic that has been requested by many of the providers. "Erica does a great job of presenting information in an easy to understand format and is always very open to questions and helping out" shared Brooke Rains, Resource Center Director at the Child Care Network. "At every meeting she provides her contact information and encourages providers to reach out with questions."

Plans are already underway for the 2022 Home-Based Provider Conference, which is slated to be bigger and better than ever. This year, the conference will be expanded to the entire state of Michigan to allow more home-based providers in the state to access professional development offerings that are tailored to the unique needs of child care providers.



The meetings are great because when any of us have a problem, during the meeting we can ask others and there is always someone who has found a solution. It is a very collaborative experience. The people there know what you're going through.



~ Shannon Warpup, Kid-e-Patch Daycare

# Building a Sustainable Future for Michigan's Children

Research & Advocacy

For the past two years, the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative has co-lead a group of child care advocates in identifying the policy changes needed to help ensure Michigan's youngest children and their families have access to high-quality early care and education services. As Michigan's governor and legislators have negotiated the state's fiscal year 2022 budget, we have been advocating for legislators to make a historic investment in the state's child care infrastructure. "There is no better investment than our children," said Senate Minority Leader Jim Ananich.

One key issue among early childhood advocates is the gap in funding between preschool and K-12 programs in the state. In late June, Michigan's legislature passed a school aid budget that included increased funding for the state-funded preschool program, Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), which increased per pupil funding to the same funding level for K-12 schools at \$8,700. This \$723 million appropriation effectively eliminates the funding gap between preschool and K-12 services by providing a funding increase of \$1,450 per full-day child in the GSRP program.

Another challenge that our community faces is the demand for quality preschool slots outpaces the supply. In Genesee County there are about 20% fewer funded GSRP slots available to families than children that are eligible for the program. The supplemental budget passed included an additional \$168.5 million investment to fund 22,000 more slots statewide, and ensure all eligible children in Michigan have access to GSRP.

While these investments show good progress, the Fiscal Year 2022 budget agreement just recently adopted and its \$1.4 billion investment in child care, shows far greater potential for a stronger future for our youth. In this new budget, the eligibility threshold for early care and education programs in Michigan increases from 150% of the federal poverty level to 185%, allowing many more working families to receive assistance towards quality child care. This increase means that a family of four, making up to \$53,000/yr is now eligible for assistance. Given that the average annual childcare costs are \$10,000/child, this assistance will be a game changer for many working families who earn too much to qualify for child care assistance, but too little to afford the cost of high-quality child care.

Keeping child care centers open and early childhood educators employed in their profession has become increasingly challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Early care and education is essential to the success of any workforce or economic development strategy," shared Ja'Nel Jamerson, Executive Director, Flint Early Childhood Collaborative & Educare Flint. "Early childhood educators are paid too little when compared to their K-12 counterparts, which often disincentivizes talented professionals from persisting in the field. We need to invest directly in front-line educators if we expect to provide a quality education for children." The FY '22 budget



appropriated \$700,708,800 to issue two rounds of provider stabilization grants over the next six months. It also appropriated \$30.0 million to provide up to \$1,000 in bonus pay and starting bonuses for current and new early child care employees. These investments are designed to help retain and attract more educators in the industry.

Another key component of the budget is transforming how Michigan's child care providers are reimbursed using the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). First, providers participating in the state's CCDF subsidy programs will see a permanent 30% increase in their reimbursement rates. Additionally, \$222 million has been appropriated to provide up to 50% reimbursement rate bonus payments to providers on top of the permanent rate increase over the next 39 biweekly pay periods.

One final provision of significance relates to reporting for reimbursements under the state's program. Historically, Michigan provides reimbursements to providers for children only when they are in attendance. If a student is sick or absent for any other reason, the provider is not eligible for reimbursement. As a provider, this fluctuation in subsidy reimbursements makes it extremely challenging to cover fixed expenses already incurred, let alone make decisions to hire staff and make other investments that strengthen the quality of care they provide. This revenue uncertainty has caused some providers to be unable to participate in the CCDF subsidy program. Ultimately, this reduces the number of slots available to eligible low-income families, many of whom depend on the subsidy to afford quality child care services. The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative continues to advocate for the use of contracts and block grants that provide a stable funding source for Michigan's child care providers. The newly approved budget will now ensure the reimbursements paid to providers are based on enrollment versus attendance through FY 2022-23.

"This expansion will provide broad access to critical early education programs for thousands of Michigan families," said Governor Whitmer.

The Flint Early Childhood Collaborative and our partners are appreciative of our elected officials' dedication to improving the accessibility and availability of high-quality early care and education programs in Michigan.

## Voices of Our Families!

Each fall and spring we facilitate a family interview to understand the needs and experiences of families. Despite the many challenges, many families reported improved parenting and saw Educare & Cummings as critical & effective support.

### Impact of COVID-19

% of caregivers that said that their parenting improved during the pandemic



31% of Educare caregivers & 33% of Cummings caregivers said that the pandemic improved their family relationship

### Family Relationships

98%	of caregivers shared warm relationships with their children.	100%
97%	of caregivers valued their relationship with their child.	100%
93%	of caregivers said who their children were comfortable with their physical affection.	100%
88%	of caregivers said their children would seek comfort when feeling upset.	88%

Parents ranked Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations as their most effective support during the pandemic!

[Download Educare Report](#)

[Download Cummings Report](#)

# “Rising tides lift all boats:” Flint’s Early Childhood Advocates Launch Plans for a New Unified Enrollment System

Coordinated Systems

Michigan’s children deserve barrier-free access to the quality early care and education programs for which they qualify. However, navigating the ins and outs of various conflicting application processes, timelines, and registration requirements can be daunting for any family. Solutions are needed to improve enrollment systems by providing more students and families the opportunity to access quality programs that are critical to establishing a foundation for later school success.

That was the message delivered through a joint effort between Governor Whitmer, the Michigan Legislature, and the C.S. Mott Foundation when collectively they provided \$1.5 million to develop a new unified enrollment system for early childhood education in Flint that can serve as a pilot and model for other regions in Michigan.

Flint’s families face significant barriers when trying to enroll their children into early childhood education programs. Processes and programs are unclear and cause frustration. Six months ago we released a newsletter explaining these challenges and how we intended to solve them. Today, that vision is one step closer to becoming a reality.

Starting later this year, the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative will begin convening parents and local stakeholders to design the new unified enrollment system, with a goal of launching the system for public use in early 2023. “At the Flint Early Childhood Collaborative, we believe in the mantra that ‘rising tides lift all boats.’ As we are working to improve services in Flint, we are committed to developing solutions that are applicable throughout Michigan” shared Ja’Nel Jamerson, Executive Director, Flint Early Childhood Collaborative & Educare Flint. “This is an ambitious undertaking but our partners are up for the challenge”

## The plan for moving forward has been outlined into 7 steps:

- 1 Determine whether the current third-party vendor contracted to operate the Michigan Preschool platform and support services would consider working on the development of an upgraded platform customized to meet the needs of the participating partner programs.
- 2 Coordinate with program partners and community stakeholders to select 10 to 12 representatives to serve as the System Design Steering Committee, responsible for creating a timeline for the UE work, establishing system priorities and policies, and providing oversight for system changes and all audits.
- 3 Establish a Community Advisory Group of 10-15 individuals representing a diverse demographic of Flint and Genesee County responsible for providing feedback on the process work of the System Design Steering Committee.
- 4 Identify when demand outpaces seat availability and examine how to expand high-quality options for available seating before launching a unified enrollment system. This task should be a collaboration between the Community Advisory Group and the System Design Steering Committee.
- 5 Begin to develop communication assets & outreach materials that would enable families to learn more about programs and the program eligibility requirements as the system design work takes place.
- 6 Maintain in-person and online opportunities for families to learn about program options and consider using tools that would allow GISD staff to answer questions via online chat sessions with families.
- 7 Consider instituting training for ambassadors or navigators that would allow interested parents, caretakers and community members to participate in and potentially earn stipends to help support enrollment and outreach efforts.

This work is going to take involvement from the entire community. If you would like to be involved in any of the committees, please contact Ja’Nel Jamerson at [jjamerson@cfgf.org](mailto:jjamerson@cfgf.org).



### OUR PARTNERS

