



New Partnerships Serving as Pillars in D.C. Community

By: Talia Newman, director of Early Head Start Partnerships, Syritha Robinson, advocacy director, and Pyper Davis, executive director, Educare Washington, D.C.

Educare Washington, D.C. offers a unique perspective supporting child care partners during the pandemic as the most recently funded Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (Partnerships) in the Educare Learning Network. Although Educare Washington, D.C.'s Partnerships [grant](#) has only been operational for about a year, we quickly sprang into action to support our child care partners in the wake of COVID-19, reflecting our deep commitment to establishing and promoting strong connections in the communities we serve during a time of great difficulty for many families.

Through our Partnerships grant, Educare Washington, D.C. partners with six child care programs to serve approximately 144 children in DC's Wards 7 and 8, home to the largest number of the District's [young children](#). Wards [7](#) and [8](#) have significant historical and cultural background, serving a predominantly African American community. However, over several decades, communities in Wards 7 and 8 have experienced a lag behind other parts of the city in economic [investment](#), food security, housing supports, employment opportunities, education indicators, and health care access. Stemming from structural inequities, disinvestment, and discriminatory and racist policies and practices in our city's [history](#), these disparities have produced profound [adverse outcomes](#) for Black residents today – with COVID-19 cases and mortalities disproportionately [impacting](#) neighborhoods in both wards.

Critical access to food and resources are harder to come by in under-served areas like Wards 7 and 8 – where only three major grocery stores serve families in both wards. Recognizing the need for more resources, especially during the current crisis, community organizers set up [mutual aid](#) programs to distribute food and toiletries. We were able to build on this community effort to provide diapers to families through Educare Washington, D.C.'s partnership with Greater DC Diaper Bank Hub. We also delivered diapers, wipes, and formula to the homes of families who did not have readily available transportation to the diaper bank.

Through our Partnerships, we have supported child care staff to strengthen relationships with the children and families they serve through virtual meetings and weekly phone conversations. Staff are now more attuned to and better able to meet the individualized and comprehensive needs of families.

Moreover, Educare Washington, D.C. supported our child care partners in applying for the federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), which offered forgivable loans to small businesses to pay their employees, mortgage interest, rent, and utility costs during the crisis as long as employees and compensation levels are maintained. Our child care partners, two of which received PPP loans, also felt more equipped to provide additional household necessities to families because of the extra financial support provided by Educare Washington, D.C.'s Partnerships program and the PPP.

Navigating New Partnerships with Creativity and Care

At the time COVID-19 hit, we were still building relationships with our child care partners. The length of formal agreements with our child care partners varied from two to seven months. Social distancing requirements required us to creatively foster open and ongoing communication and trust between Educare Washington, D.C. as the Early Head Start (EHS) grantee and among our partners. The virtual



relationship-building and ongoing professional learning opportunities we offered to our child care partners using technology like Zoom and PowerPoint presentations helped to maintain our connections and also allowed teachers and administrators to share successes, challenges, and ideas for activities to bring back to their own programs.

To support families, the Partnerships also offered child care partners developmentally appropriate activity calendars for daily educational experiences, resources to secure free meals and household supplies, and information and guidance to apply for rent and utility relief. We also created a COVID-19 enrollment policy to allow working parents who had lost their jobs and were initially deemed ineligible for the public child care assistance program to enroll in child care programs of their choice. Without the Partnership and uninterrupted EHS funding, our child care partners would not have received these vital resources, extra staff support, and guidance that have allowed them to maintain their businesses and continue to serve young children and their families.

As the District moves to reopen early care and education programs, we are all challenged to develop and implement new ways of working that allow us to safely serve young children and families who need child care. In addition to administering our Partnerships program, Educare Washington, D.C. also directly operates Head Start services, so we are also developing our own policies and procedures for reopening. As a member of a reopening work group convened by the District's Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Educare Washington, D.C. is able to bring the perspective of our child care partners to inform the District's reopening plans.

Sustaining the Power of Partnerships in the Face of Uncertainty

Many questions have surfaced for child care during COVID-19 especially around reopening — how many families will return to center-based care; how many children can safely be served; how child care businesses with reduced enrollments can generate enough revenue to stay open; how staff safely return to work; and how early childhood programs and community partners will have the resources to serve young children and parents experiencing trauma? Yet, even with high levels of stress and mounting challenges, our partners are committed to offering high-quality, comprehensive services using a two-generation approach.

We must address immediate policy considerations to reduce the uncertainties both providers and families face during this pandemic. At a minimum, child care stabilization funding is needed to cover increased costs of cleaning supplies and protective gear; compensation for additional staff to serve fewer children in smaller groups; technology to help small businesses automate their systems and to reach parents virtually; mental health and trauma services; employment, health, and housing supports for parents; and food.

Over the longer term, child care needs stronger infrastructure supports and consistent streams of public funding that cover the true cost of care. Our partners are holding steady because Partnership and PPP funds are keeping them afloat, but many child care programs across our city and the country don't have access to these funding sources. COVID-19 has further emphasized the benefits Partnerships offer to efficiently connect partners to information and community resources, supports for implementation, and training to strengthen their business operations and management. The more we can speak in a unified voice to policymakers, and grow and strengthen partnerships across Head Start, child care, pre-K, maternal and child health, and family support services, the better we are able to tackle economic and health inequities in the District and across the nation so that children, families, and communities prosper.



In light of recent events, Educare Washington, D.C. put forth a statement standing in solidarity with Black lives and committing to a more equitable future. Please see our Show Up, Stand Up, Speak Up – Demand Action statement and resources [here](#).