

## THE WELL-BEING OF HISPANIC/LATINE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

*A Snapshot Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Educare Network*



### Significance & Context

The tumultuous nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to new studies unpacking the experiences and outcomes of children and families over the past three years.<sup>1,2</sup> While researchers are building this much-needed knowledge base, fewer studies have specifically examined how children and families accessing early care and education (ECE)—a potential buffer from challenges<sup>3,4</sup>—are faring. Even more limited are studies that disaggregate and focus on data about children and families of specific racial/ethnic backgrounds<sup>5</sup>. Of those studies that do, few focus on the strengths and resiliency of children and families of different racial/ethnic backgrounds or how they are demonstrating resiliency.<sup>6,7</sup>

### Exploration & Evidence

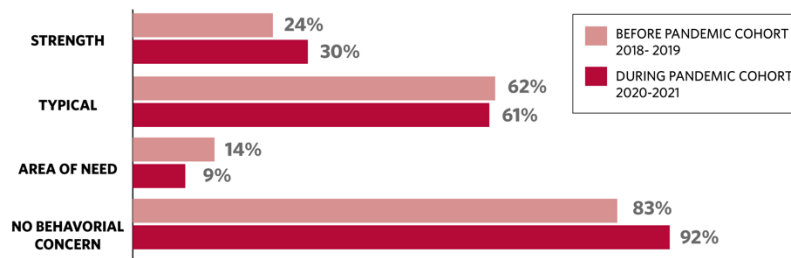
Start Early researchers explored indicators related to the well-being of Hispanic/Latine<sup>i</sup> children and families enrolled in a sample of 23 Early/Head Start programs within the Educare Network before and during the pandemic.

For the 1736 Hispanic children and families enrolled in Educare schools during the 2018-19 academic year and the 1297 enrolled during 2020-21, we examined a range of well-being indicators, including:

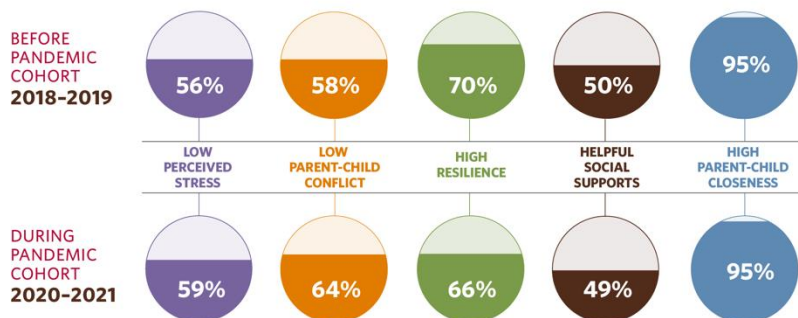
- teacher reports of children’s social-emotional protective factors (i.e., attachment, initiative, self-regulation) or any observed behavioral concerns; and
- family reports of perceived stress, resilience, level of support, and their relationship with their child from our annual family interview.

<sup>i</sup> The terms “Hispanic” and “Latine” are used in this Data Bite to refer to individuals whose cultural background originated in Latin American and/or Spanish-speaking countries or are descendants of persons from those countries. It is important to acknowledge that Hispanic or Latine individuals in the United States are racially diverse, have diverse racialized experiences, and represent diverse countries of origin with unique histories and cultures. Hereafter, ‘Hispanic’ will be used to describe this population.

We found that **Hispanic children enrolled in Educare schools during the pandemic received higher teacher ratings of their social-emotional skills than Hispanic children enrolled prior to the pandemic.** During the pandemic, the proportion of Hispanic children in Educare schools rated by their teachers as having ‘typical’ or ‘strong’ social emotional protective factors by the spring (91%) was higher than the proportion of Hispanic children in Educare receiving the same rating before the pandemic (86%). Similarly, **fewer Hispanic children were rated as having behavioral concerns during the pandemic.** Namely, in the spring of 2021, about 8% of Hispanic children who were enrolled in Educare were identified as having behavioral concerns compared to nearly 17% enrolled in the spring of 2019.



Hispanic families enrolled in Educare during the pandemic were also asked specific pandemic-related questions. Nearly half of Hispanic Educare families indicated that their own **emotional well-being and how well their family got along** was similar from before the pandemic compared to during.



## DATA COLLECTION DETAILS

Each Educare school is part of a research-practice partnership (RPP) with a local evaluation partner (LEP). Through these collaborative partnerships, data are collected at the local program level and as part of core studies including the [Educare National Evaluation](#) to assess child and family outcomes, staff practices, and program quality in a variety of domains. Researchers and evaluators at each Educare school have been studying implementation and outcomes since 2007 to document:

- core features of the Educare model
- unique local features
- dosage, intensity, content, and quality of child and family services
- child and family outcomes
- progress over time

As part of the Educare National Evaluation, cross-site semi-annual/annual assessments of children’s language, literacy, and social-emotional skills are completed, as well as caregivers’ social-emotional well-being, activities, relationships, and experiences at Educare.

Each Educare school also engages in on-going site-specific evaluations and data collection determined by the school and LEP to inform program practice, drive program improvement and professional development, evaluate locally driven initiatives, and determine compliance with a variety of ECE standards.

## Observations & Wonderings

The pandemic brought many adversities for young children and families, yet we observed that data on indicators of child and family well-being gathered among the cohort of Hispanic children and families enrolled in Educare *during* the pandemic looked comparable to data on the same well-being indicators for the previous cohort of Hispanic children and families enrolled *before* the pandemic began. These data cannot speak to *why* the sample of Hispanic children and families enrolled during the pandemic did not demonstrate lower levels of well-being or *how* child and family well-being will look in the long run. Below are wonderings that Educare RPPs have already begun to unpack, and researchers, policymakers, and practice leaders outside the Network might consider for their own future exploration and analyses.

- Are Hispanic children and families who remained enrolled in Educare from before through the pandemic characteristically similar or different (or have similar or unique experiences) to those who first enrolled in or exited Educare during the pandemic?
- Did more time enrolled in Educare provide a buffer against challenges faced during the pandemic?
- Did Educare provide new or different resources to families during the pandemic that made a difference in Hispanic children and families' well-being?
- Did Hispanic families enrolled in Educare leverage strengths, resources, or supports in new or different ways during the pandemic than they had prior to the pandemic?
- Were changes in classroom size, structures, or sociocultural practices during the pandemic associated with teachers' ratings of children's social emotional skills and behavior?
- Would different, potentially more culturally or linguistically relevant measures offer different insight into Hispanic children and families' well-being?

### QUESTIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS TO "BITE" INTO

**LEVERAGING DATA:** What does the well-being of Hispanic children and families enrolled in other ECE programs look like during the pandemic and subsequent recovery? What data or indicators of well-being are gathered and how?



**FOCUSING ON STRENGTHS:** How well do data or indicators of well-being emphasize the strengths rather than deficits of Hispanic children and families? How can ECE practitioners leverage the strengths and assets of the Hispanic communities and children and families enrolled in their programs?

**IMPROVING PROGRAMS:** What barriers might exist to implementing a strengths-based approach and how can they be successfully navigated? How are data about child and family well-being used for continuous quality improvement?

**IMPROVING POLICIES:** What systems and policy changes are needed to best support the well-being and leverage the strengths and assets of Hispanic children and families enrolled in ECE programs?

# NETWORK SPOTLIGHT

Highlighting one example of outstanding practice or innovation in the Educare Network

## EDUCARE MIAMI

**Educare Miami (MIA)**, located in Miami, Florida and housed within parent organization United Way Miami, is committed to elevating the quality of ECE in their community and beyond. MIA enrolls 116 children and their families from ages birth through age five. More than 80% of MIA children and families, and nearly all staff, identify as Hispanic.



The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented constraints and challenges for children, families, and ECE programs. Recognizing this, MIA program leaders, staff, and families rose to the challenge, demonstrating incredible resilience and creating new ways to provide continuous high-quality early learning for Educare children. MIA staff persisted in their professional development and learning, which ensured that they had access to the resources and skills needed to best support children and families in this difficult context. Moreover, the MIA team adapted teaching and environments for children and families while practicing safety protocols in-person and using digital technology when remote. MIA staff continued their partnerships with families through various mechanisms including hosting food drives and distributions and preparing and delivering meal kits and infant care packages. A pandemic response fund was arranged by MIA program leaders to aid families in need, with staff also coordinating a vaccine pop-up center at the school.

While program leaders and staff at MIA provided many direct supports for children and families, their efforts did not stop there! MIA received funding from the Buffet Early Childhood Fund to operate a Parent Ambassador program, a voluntary parent advocacy and leadership group in which families engage in training on communications, civic engagement, state and federal legislative advocacy, racial equity and justice, grassroots organizing, and financial literacy. In fact, several MIA families leveraged what they learned from this training and attended a roundtable with Miami-Dade County's Mayor to voice their concerns about the local housing crisis and learn about and brainstorm housing resources and solutions. At MIA, it was and continues to be an imperative practice to provide direct resources to children and families to *support* their well-being; and help elevate families as leaders in their schools, communities, and nationally to *sustain* the well-being of Hispanic children and families.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2020). *Kids, families, and COVID-19: Pandemic pain points and the urgent need to respond*. The Annie E. Foundation.
- <sup>2</sup> Feinberg, M. E., A Mogle, J., Lee, J. K., Tornello, S. L., Hostetler, M. L., Cifelli, J. A., ... & Hotez, E. (2022). Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on parent, child, and family functioning. *Family Process*, 61(1), 361-374.
- <sup>3</sup> Berry, D., Blair, C., Willoughby, M., Garrett-Peters, P., Vernon-Feagans, L., Mills-Koonce, W. R., & the Family Life Project Key Investigators. (2016). Household chaos and children's cognitive and socio-emotional development in early childhood: Does childcare play a buffering role? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 34, 115-127.
- <sup>4</sup> Smith, J. M. (2020). Early childhood education programs as protective experiences for low-income Latino children and their families. *Adversity and Resilience Science*, 1(3), 191-204.
- <sup>5</sup> Aikens, N., & Tarullo, L. (2022). *Measuring equity matters for early childhood programs*. Mathematica. <https://www.mathematica.org/blogs/measuring-equity-matters-for-early-childhood-programs>
- <sup>6</sup> Cabrera, N., Alonso, A., Chen, Y., & Ghosh, R. (2022). *Latinx families' strengths and resilience contribute to their well-being*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families.
- <sup>7</sup> Iruka, I. U., Curenton, S. M., Sims, J., Escayg, K.-A., Ibekwe-Okafor, N., & RAPID-EC. (2021). *Black parent voices: Resilience in the face of the two pandemics—COVID-19 and racism*. Researchers Investigating Sociocultural Equity and Race (RISER) Network.

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Please direct questions about Educare research and evaluation to the Network's National Coordinating Office at Start Early: [Amanda Stein](#), Managing Director, Research and Evaluation

### For More Information on:

- Network research and evaluation findings (The [Educare Insights series](#))
- The [Educare Network's Research Agenda to Advance Racial Equity](#)
- The [Educare 5 Policy Priorities to Ensure All Families Thrive](#)
- On [bringing Educare practices to your own program](#)

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## EDUCARE INSIGHTS DATA BITE

**WHAT:** Educare Insights Data Bites are short reads aimed at building awareness, sparking dialogue, and spurring further inquiry by situating descriptive data points, examples, and voices from the Network in the context of current challenges or opportunities within the ECE field. They are designed to drive hypotheses and more rigorous future analysis.

**WHO:** Data Bites invite problem solvers, innovators, practitioners, investors, and anyone who loves the ECE field to “bite” into questions and discussion about data on timely topics.

**WHY:** The Educare Network seeks to model and scale elements of [our approach to data utilization](#). We hope the Date Bites inspire more intentional use of data for program improvements, policy and systems change, and knowledge generation to ensure every family in every community has equitable access to quality early care and learning.