




EDUCARE[®]
Year in Review
2020-2021

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A Letter from Our Executive Director

Dear Colleagues,

This past year, we faced the challenges of a country still struggling through the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and decades of systemic inequities that unjustly position certain groups over others. Yet despite countless obstacles and uncertainties, the 2020-2021 school year was also transformational: for the Educare Learning Network, for the children and families we serve, and for the broader early childhood field.

Through collaboration, innovation and boundless imagination, our Network provided critical support, resources and connection for nearly 4,000 children and families, school staff and communities over the past year. We partnered with leaders across the field to strengthen our collective efforts, shed a light on the importance of access to high-quality care and education (even virtually and in the midst of a pandemic), and further deepen efforts to ensure classrooms, communities and policies reflect true diversity, equity and inclusion. We're especially proud to have launched our first-ever public policy agenda to support key areas of influence needed to help young children and families thrive, and to elevate family and provider voices. In the pages ahead, you'll find highlights of this remarkable year, including new partnerships, exciting and timely research, and more.

Today, we're at a critical time as a country and as a Network of early childhood leaders, educators, advocates and allies. There is still so much to be done to create just systems, turn back antiquated policies and laws, and advance our work to champion the importance of high-quality, equitable early childhood learning and care across the country. Let's be bold, brave and influential in our commitment to drive change in the early childhood field!

We're humbled to partner with you, grateful for your support as we advance our collective mission, and excited to share some of the highlights of our work together over the past fiscal year.

With gratitude,



Cynthia D. Jackson
Executive Director
Educare Learning Network

Who We Are: Educare Learning Network

As one of the nation's most diverse and effective networks of high-quality early childhood schools, we are learning hubs that innovate, evaluate and share best practices to transform the lives of young children and their families in under-resourced communities, and positively impact the broader early childhood field.

More than 2,000 staff provide early care and education in 25 independent nonprofit birth-to-five schools located in 15 states, the District of Columbia and on tribal land. Nearly 4,000 infant, toddler and preschool children attend our comprehensive center-based early care and education programs in urban, suburban and rural communities.



Our Impact: Stories from the Field

FAMILY | Educare Provides Critical Learning Experiences to Help Children Thrive

Educare California at Silicon Valley (ECSV) is located in the Santee neighborhood of East San Jose, a diverse neighborhood that is one of the city's most under-resourced. Nearly three-quarters of Santee families make less than 25 percent of the median Silicon Valley household income and more than 80 percent of Santee parents were born outside of the U.S., facing complex cultural, linguistic and financial barriers, including access to affordable housing.

Five-year-old Mason is a typical preschooler at ECSV, but Mason's school year was anything but typical. Because their community counted the highest rate of COVID-19 infections in Santa Clara County, Mason's parents were not comfortable sending him to an in-person preschool.



However, by leveraging their innovative and personalized approach to distance learning, ECSV could still welcome Mason and his family to its comprehensive program. Though COVID-19 deeply affected daily ECSV operations, the school's responsiveness and commitment to its community remained stronger than ever. Dedicated staff used formative assessments to develop customized curricula based on the interests and needs of children and families. For Mason, the remote program kept him connected to his teachers and gave him important tools to learn and grow at home.

Mason's mother shared that he was quiet, shy and felt depressed before enrolling at ECSV. Working with his teachers, Mason began to receive the attention he needed, was better able to connect with his sister and mother, and became more outgoing and independent.

"It has helped my child change dramatically," says his mother. Not only did the teachers support Mason's learning, but they created the best conditions for him to thrive, even under difficult circumstances.

Our Impact: Stories from the Field

WORKFORCE | Educare Teachers Nurture Culture of Collaboration During COVID-19



As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to challenge in-person early childhood education, the teaching staff at Educare Milwaukee are taking a collaborative approach to virtual instruction support. While the high-quality education provided by the school remains at the forefront, staff have been intentional about addressing the challenges that come with virtual learning - for teachers, children and parents.

“Teachers are doing something different now, so they need a new space and outlet to share resources and come together,” says Sandy Gadzichowski, Education Manager.

In order to address the challenges posed by this new model, instructional leaders formed reflective groups (or “communities of practice”) specifically to create space for teachers who were teaching virtually to share effective strategies and discuss challenges. Since October of 2020, these groups have met regularly, partnering with other departments and organizational leadership to optimize virtual learning supports.

One group recently created six new strategies with an action plan to help increase child attendance, engagement and communication in the virtual space. One strategy implements socialization activities that support peer interaction such as group lunches, guest speakers and dance parties. Another strategy focuses on increasing parent/guardian awareness of the impact of attendance, and includes sending home STAR postcards, letters to families, and distributing yard signs for children with 80% attendance.

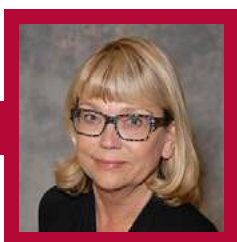
The development of these strategies has taken weight off the shoulders of teachers and made them feel more optimistic and supported in the virtual space. Teachers also feel encouraged by the support they are receiving from the collaborative approach of the virtual teacher community of practice. Educare Milwaukee hopes to continue using virtual engagement strategies in the future, even after all children and families can return to traditional in-person care and learning.

Educare Governance Council

In 2020, the Educare Learning Network (ELN) established the Educare Governance Council (EGC) to create clarity around its mission, help advance its work as a generative, peer-led Network and have a greater impact on the early childhood field.

This shared governance model ensures decisions made are reflective of input and priorities gathered from leadership in the field, starting with the 11 members of the EGC. Led by co-chairs Ginger Ward and Shawn Gerth, the Council has brought an energy and commitment to drive the work of the Network forward and has helped us remain focused, despite the pressing concerns of an ongoing pandemic.

The EGC consists of the following positions, with 2020-2021 representatives listed:



Executive Director Representative
Ginger Ward
Southwest Human Development
Educare Arizona



Executive Director Representative
Shawn Gerth
Educare California Silicon Valley



Executive Director Representative
Rafel Hart
Educare Omaha



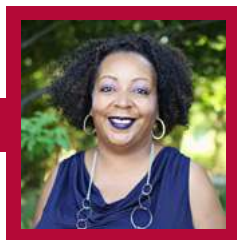
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Gladys Montes
United Way Miami
Educare Miami



Research Representative
Diane Horm
University of Oklahoma Tulsa
Educare Tulsa



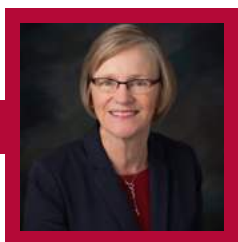
Policy Representative
Lori Pittman
Puget Sound Educational SD
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Practice Representative
Kelly Ramsey
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Sustainability Representative
Valerie Wheatley
Kingsley House
Educare New Orleans



Standing Member
Jessie Rasmussen, President
Buffett Early Childhood Fund



Standing Member
Diana Rauner, President
Start Early



Standing Member
Cynthia Jackson, Executive Director
Educare Learning Network

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging



As a Network, we are fierce advocates for the development, well-being and safety of all children and their families, but especially those from marginalized, under-served or otherwise vulnerable communities. We are committed to advancing equity, inclusion and belonging for all, and bring this focus into our classrooms each day, helping our youngest learners, our families and our workforce celebrate what makes them unique and develop confidence in their personal and social identities.

2021 Network Meeting

At our first virtual convening of the annual Educare Learning Network Meeting, we collectively deepened our Network commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (DEIB) and examined practice and program strategies to support this important work. Anchored by three keynote speakers - [Dr. Rosemarie Allen](#), [Frank Waln](#), and [Dr. Howard Stevenson](#) - the meeting challenged attendees to consider the effect of individual biases on personal and professional interactions; the influence of historical, structural racism on systems and policies; the educational opportunity gap in communities of color; and strategies to combat these systemic issues.

Supporting Equitable Educator Development Grant

This year, [Supporting Equitable Educator Development \(SEED\) grants from the Trust for Learning](#) were awarded to both the Network and Educare Omaha. On the Network side, we engaged expert consultants to review and audit professional development modules from the Essential Practices of Educare. Our goal is to ensure our modules reflect positive DEIB references; our materials reflect anti-bias, anti-racist practices; and our trainings are facilitated in a way that presents the Essential Practices of Educare through an anti-racist lens, in alignment with our increasing focus on DEIB. We also established a SEED Advisory Committee, made up of various professionals in the early childhood field with a passion or focus on anti-bias, anti-racist (ABAR) education and/or DEIB, to provide feedback on revised modules.

Educare Omaha partnered with Buffett Early Childhood Institute to launch a “Grow Your Own” program seeking to provide solutions to current challenges facing Omaha’s educator workforce: a need for meaningful diversity and inclusion efforts; a limited number of diverse early childhood educators; and lack of pathways to help incumbent and future educators grow within their practice.



Practice Consultation & Capacity Building

The ELN Early Childhood Practice Consultation (ECPC) team continues to provide direct practice consultation and capacity building to promote program excellence and practice sustainability at Educare schools. **This year, all trainings and professional development offerings were converted to virtual design and delivery.**

- **903** Network members were reached via **10,000+** hours of capacity building, via training, practice consultation, communities of practice, professional development and peer learning.
- **700+** hours of practice consultation alone were provided, tailored to meet the specific needs of each Educare school.
- **11** new leaders (executive directors, program administrators and school directors) participated in Leadership Onboarding this year.

The Essential Practices of Educare

The Essential Practices of Educare professional development series debuted in a virtual format for the first time this year! Through this new form of delivery, participants have access to an online learning management system to easily engage with facilitators and each other, along with downloadable materials for asynchronous work, live sessions and optional office hours. The response from early education and child care providers has been positive, with many reporting increased knowledge and competence after attending trainings. **In FY21, 69 trainings were offered: 52 by the Network, including Educare schools, and 17 by other authorized providers.**



The Educare Five Policy Agenda

The Educare Five, our first-ever policy agenda, was created through broad engagement of Network parents, school staff and leadership, and is based on the collective input of 160 Network members.



We launched The Educare Five at the 2021 Policy Exchange, featuring five virtual events designed to spark deep conversations around these policy priorities. Of key interest was [a listening session](#) where families, teachers, Educare school leaders and advocates shared firsthand accounts of needs and policy impacts specific to young children and those who care for them.

EHS-CCP Series & Webinar

We released [an 8-part blog series](#) informed by the Educare Partnerships community of practice, featuring stories from Educare schools' Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships across the country. *A Path to High-Quality Child Care through Partnerships* highlights the impact of COVID-19 on Partnerships grantees, their child care partners and the families they serve, and offers [our unique policy recommendations](#) to maintain, improve and grow our nation's supply of quality infant and toddler child care.

Peer Learning Think Tank Sessions

We hosted [five peer learning events](#) designed to foster greater understanding around specific, timely issues that had both policy and implementation implications.

Educare Insights Briefs

The [Educare Insights series](#) shares important research, practice and policy findings from the Educare Learning Network on critical topics in early childhood.

These written briefs help ensure that the research and evaluation conducted within the Network are both widely accessible and actionable, and include spotlight sections to amplify the voices and stories of Network members.

Topics covered so far include [dual language learners](#), [timing and length of enrollment](#), and [intensive family engagement quality improvement efforts](#).



COVID-19 Research Snapshots



Researchers from the Network and local evaluation partners conducted a qualitative study with Educare schools on their early response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how they navigated the shift to fully or partially remote programming and services for children, families and staff.

This study resulted in three Educare Insights snapshots:

- [Supporting & Engaging Families](#)
- [Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce](#)
- [Teaching Learning with Young Children](#)

We shared results of this study through [a webinar](#) (Navigating Crisis: Early Education Insights from the COVID-19 Pandemic) and [a follow-up blog post](#) on how our schools responded to challenges and leveraged learning opportunities.

Thought Partnership & Leadership

As a Network, we are active participants in the early childhood education field, contributing data and expertise to ongoing research and advocacy. Our partnerships at the national, state and local levels not only help improve widespread access to high-quality early learning programs, but also build stronger relationships in the field.

Educare leaders at various schools both led and participated in many partnership opportunities:

- Engaging the Gates Foundation in support of [the African-centered Racial Equity Justice Project](#) with Educare Black Majority Schools
- Leading facilitation of [a book study on Tulsa's Black Wall Street](#) to address race and bias education
- Joining Campaign for Grade-Level Reading's Learning Tuesdays webinars as a panelist on [quantifiable measures and bold responses to COVID impacts on children and families](#) and co-sponsor for [how early childhood educators help bridge pre-K and primary school](#)
- Partnering with National Head Start Association (NHSA)/Head Starter Network to launch [a white paper on expanding the talent pool in early education](#), in addition to co-leading and participating in resultant work circles
- Partnering with Trust for Learning for [the Ideal Learning Roundtable](#)
- Representing Educare in [an early learning study with the Hunt Institute](#)

Other partnerships focused on addressing challenges faced by early childhood centers and staff during COVID-19, as well as ongoing racial equity and social justice issues.

Red Nose Day 2021



Photo by Southwest Human Development/Educare Arizona

As a three-time recipient of Comic Relief's Red Nose Day grant, the Network exemplifies the Red Nose Day mission (keeping children safe, happy, educated and empowered) by expanding access to high-quality education for children and families nationwide. Funds received this year [made a difference](#) by connecting Educare staff with families during the pandemic and providing access to food drives and e-learning technology. This year Mom Khit, a teacher at Educare Los Angeles at Long Beach, [spoke about the impact of Red Nose Day on The Kelly Clarkson Show](#), and Mason, a student of Educare California at Silicon Valley, was featured in Walgreens' campaign.

Thank You To Our Supporters

The Educare Learning Network is generously funded by The Buffett Early Childhood Fund and is further supported by partnerships and contributions from a variety of foundations, organizations and individuals.

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Arabella Advisors
 Comic Relief US
 George Kaiser Family Foundation
 Richard W. Goldman Family Foundation
 The Buffett Early Childhood Fund
 Trust for Learning
 W.K. Kellogg Foundation

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 Kennebec Valley Community Action Program
 Kingsley House
 Lincoln Public Schools
 Long Beach Unified School District
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 Next Door
 Oklahoma City Public Schools
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 Project EAGLE (University of Kansas Medical Center)
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