

AN EVALUATION OF A QUALITY IMPROVEMENT APPROACH TO INTENSIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Highlights of Program and Family Outcomes in the Educare Learning Network

Currently, many ECE programs provide families with information and resources centered on supporting their child's learning and development and meeting families' basic needs. However, programming often neglects to incorporate family voice in meaningful ways, and leadership or staff capacity is not often built to move toward such practice¹. In 2018, the Educare Learning Network developed an Intensive Family Engagement (IFE) framework and implemented Targeted Supports, a quality improvement effort to deepen ECE programs' IFE policies and practices. The Network's approach to IFE was designed to develop professionals' capacity to employ intentional practices that support building strong relationships with families and elevating family voices. Guided by robust evidence on the strong impact of family engagement on child and family outcomes, IFE is one of the four core domains of practice in [Educare](#).

The pilot implementation and early lessons learned from Targeted Supports are detailed in an earlier [Educare Insights Brief: A Targeted Approach to Intensive Family Engagement in Early Education](#).

The current brief describes shifts in implementation and findings from the next phase of evaluation exploring changes in staff, program and family outcomes leveraging a mixed-methods design.



DEFINITION OF INTENSIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Intensive family engagement is partnering with families to build mutually respectful, goal-oriented relationships that support strong parent-child relationships, family well-being and ongoing learning and development for both parents and children.

Targeted Supports: Educare's Approach to IFE Quality Improvement

A key mechanism behind fostering positive relationships between families and ECE professionals is professional development or training centered on an approach to and strategies for family engagement. Existing research has documented effective strategies and tools such as targeted training, individualized coaching and Communities of Practice (CoPs) to improve the intensity, quality and success of family engagement efforts among ECE professionals, including both program leaders and staff.


Targeted Supports was created to support Educare schools to cultivate, apply and strengthen their IFE practices. The goals of this quality improvement effort are to provide direct support to Educare leaders and staff around expanding their knowledge, attitudes and skillsets to create and sustain an empowering, inclusive school culture that intentionally partners with families by leveraging the Educare Learning Network's IFE approach and tools. Each school received individualized consultation; a site visit to observe and document each school's learning environment, family–staff interactions and ongoing IFE activities; and ongoing implementation calls from members of the Network's early childhood practice consultation team* tailored to their school's family engagement priorities and goals. All schools participated in a core set of professional development and quality improvement activities, including training for leaders and staff focused on program-level strategies from the Educare Intensive Family Engagement Logic Model (shown on the next page) and CoP sessions with all participating Targeted Supports schools, which were also supported by the Network's practice consultation team.

Data Utilization	Embedded Professional Development
High-Quality Teaching Practices	Intensive Family Engagement

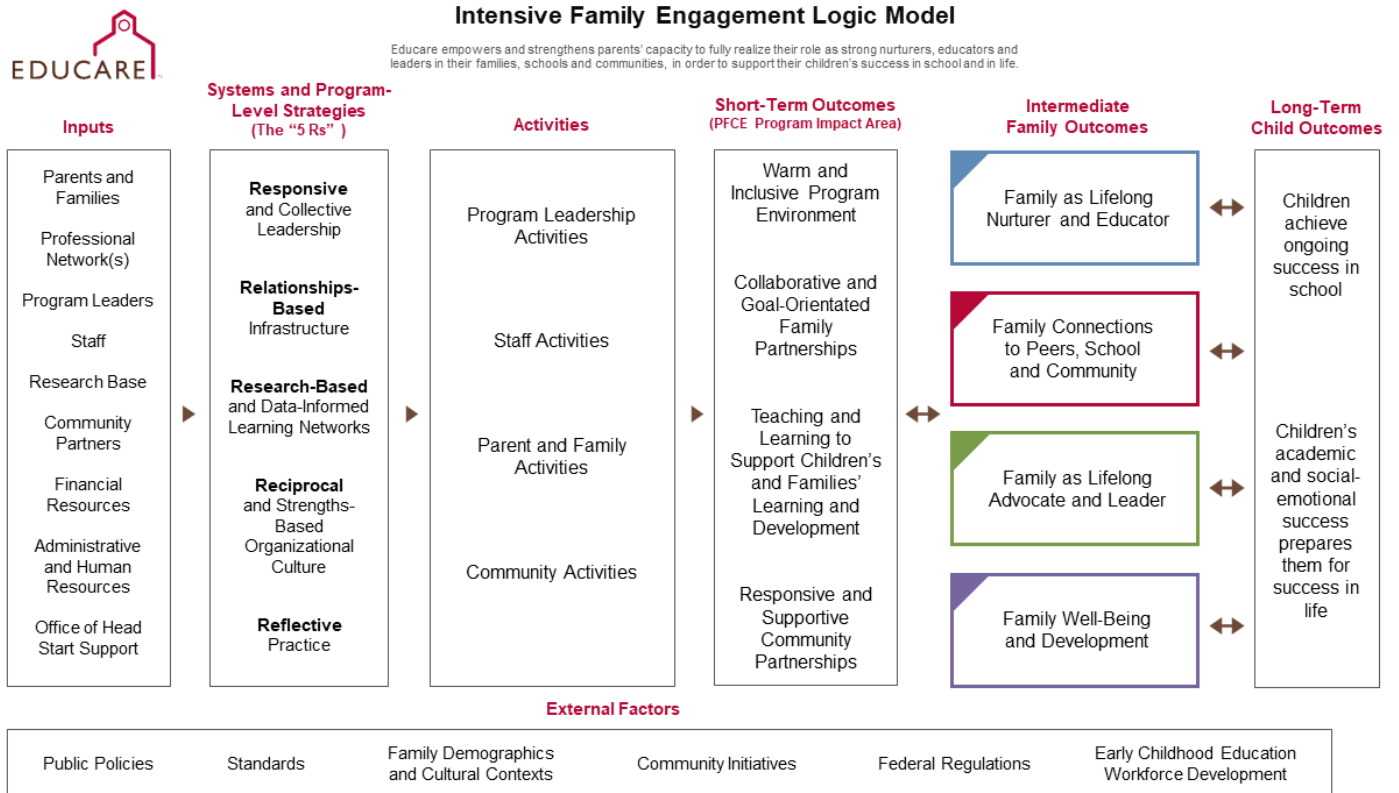
WHAT IS EDUCARE?

Educare schools provide full-day, year-round early education for children from six weeks to five years of age and their families from underserved communities. There are currently 25 operating Educare schools in diverse communities across the country, serving nearly 4,000 children and guiding the professional development for over 2,000 early childhood professionals in those schools. Educare schools are Early Head Start, Head Start and/or public Pre-K providers. All Educare schools leverage public-private partnerships, bringing together local school districts, philanthropic organizations, researchers, policymakers and families. These dynamic partnerships comprise the Educare Learning Network.

Educare's comprehensive model is grounded in research and includes four core features: 1) data utilization; 2) embedded professional development; 3) high-quality teaching practices; and 4) intensive family engagement. These features, in the context of strong leadership and community partner linkages, aim to enhance achievement and overall well-being among Educare children and families.



*The Educare Learning Network early childhood practice consultation team is housed at Start Early, a nonprofit public-private partnership advancing quality early learning and care for families with children. The team collaborates with schools in the Network as a thought partner and provides professional development and quality improvement experiences to build capacity, facilitate peer connections between schools and identify and learn from innovations occurring across the Network.



The Educare IFE Logic Model demonstrates how Educare's approach to IFE is grounded in five systems and program-level strategies, which guide the work activities and represents the "how" of IFE. The short-term program outcomes and intermediate family outcomes in the Logic Model map directly to the **Office of Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework**.

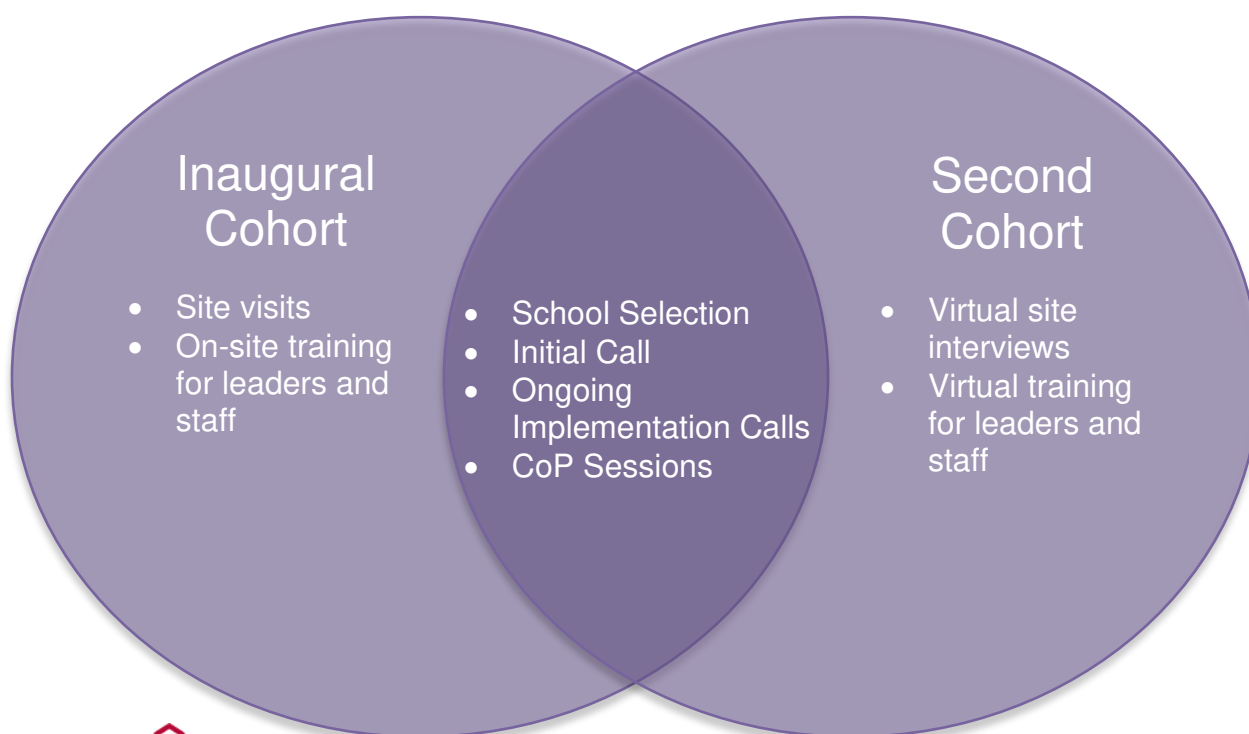


The Next Phase of Targeted Supports

Expanded and Redefined Delivery

During its pilot implementation and evaluation, the Targeted Supports inaugural cohort included four Educare schools (California at Silicon Valley, Flint, Los Angeles at Long Beach and Winnebago) that chose to engage in this quality improvement effort based on leadership and staff turnover and a shared desire to enrich their IFE practices. These four Educare schools represented the diversity of communities served by the Network. The enrollment at each of these schools ranged from 168-220 children. Families served by these schools largely identified as Hispanic or Latina/e/o/x, Asian, Vietnamese, Black/African American or Native American, and children were taught in a variety of languages, including English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Ho-Chunk. In 2020 the IFE Targeted Supports approach expanded to include two additional schools, Educare Chicago and Washington, DC, based on school and philanthropic donor interest. At the time, Educare Chicago served approximately 145 children and Educare Washington, DC served over 400 children predominately from Black/African American, English-speaking families.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the first year of Targeted Supports for the second cohort looked differently from the inaugural cohort's first year as described in the previous Educare Insights brief². On-site visits and leader/staff trainings were not scheduled for Educare Chicago and Washington, DC; instead, these sites participated in virtual training and interviews conducted by the Network's early childhood practice consultation team that addressed many of the same topics previously gathered through questions and observations during the on-site visits for the first cohort. All other Targeted Supports activities were delivered via the same approach before and during the COVID-19 pandemic to both cohorts.



Expanded Evaluation

The Educare Learning Network research team at Start Early expanded the evaluation of Targeted Supports in this next phase of implementation. Like the pilot evaluation, this next phase of evaluation examined changes in family engagement knowledge, attitudes and skillsets of school leaders and staff participating in Targeted Supports. Examining indicators of progress and outcomes for families enrolled in the participating Educare schools, and school leaders' and staff's reports of program-level practice change were additions to the Targeted Supports evaluation. Three evaluation questions were explored and evidence addressing each question is described below.

While participating in Targeted Supports:



What changes in IFE knowledge, attitudes and skillsets of school leaders and staff were reported by or observed in Educare schools?



What changes in program-level implementation of IFE practices and outcomes were reported by or observed in Educare schools?



What changes in indicators of family progress or outcomes were reported by or observed in Educare schools?

DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS 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 school 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
- child and family outcomes
- progress over time
- classroom and instruction quality
- leadership and staff professional development and practice

As part of the Educare National Evaluation, cross-site semi-annual/annual assessments of child, family, leadership and staff indicators and outcomes are administered. For the current evaluation, parent/family (N=2055) and staff data (N=595) from the 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years were analyzed to address the evaluation questions. Series of analysis of variance (ANOVAs) tests were performed on data from Targeted Supports schools only to explore change over time.

Additional qualitative data were gathered via focus groups conducted by researchers at Start Early in 2021 with leaders and staff from each participating Targeted Supports school to also address evaluation questions. A thematic analysis of the data was performed.



What changes in IFE knowledge, attitudes and skillsets of school leaders and staff were reported by or observed in Educare schools?

During their time participating in Targeted Supports, school leaders and staff expressed positive changes in their IFE knowledge, attitudes and skillsets. Focus group data indicated that CoP convenings were particularly encouraging and informative opportunities in which school leaders and staff connected across Educare schools involved in Targeted Supports learned about a range of IFE policies and practices being implemented. School leaders and staff noted that **learning about different IFE policies and practices from their peers, as well as associated successes and challenges, enabled them to feel increasingly knowledgeable, prepared and supported** in the implementation of their own IFE efforts.

Enhanced Staff Commitment & Confidence: Targeted Supports school staff reported that engaging in monthly implementation calls also led to changes in IFE knowledge, attitudes and skillsets for school leaders and staff. It was shared in focus groups that monthly engagement calls helped keep IFE at the forefront of programming; through this, **positive attitudes on the importance of IFE and advancing family engagement over family involvement increased** over the course of school leaders and staff's participation in Targeted Supports. Additionally, by deepening their IFE knowledge through monthly implementation calls and thus prioritizing IFE in programming, **school leaders and staff felt more equipped and skilled to create strong relationships effectively and meaningfully engage families.**

Increased Staff Collaboration: Analyses of staff survey data found **improvements in the interactions between teachers and family support staff while participating in Targeted Supports.** Specifically, mean teacher–family support staff interaction ratings were statistically significantly higher in 2020-21 than in 2018-19. Certain types of staff interactions contributed to this significant finding include planning and conducting home visits together; discussing family partnership agreements; and reviewing child and family data together. More positive reports of teacher–family support staff interactions in Targeted Supports schools over time might suggest that staff in different roles or working across teams were more aligned and collaborative in their IFE efforts.



Future Emphasis on Building Community Partnerships: Focus group data also indicated that some school leaders and staff participating in Targeted Supports wished they had more opportunities to learn about and be connected to community-based supports and resources that would benefit their families. Based on this feedback, the Network's early childhood practice consultation planned learning experiences and peer-to-peer exchanges to help school leaders and staff **improve strategies for identifying and building effective community partnerships to enhance family engagement and well-being.**



What changes in program-level implementation of IFE practices and outcomes were reported by or observed in Educare schools?

School leaders and staff highlighted numerous changes in program-level implementation of IFE practices and outcomes while participating in Targeted Supports.

Increased Focus on Family-Centered Goal Setting: One salient change was schools' **heightened intentionality to set goals with families that were driven by each family's cultural and linguistic background, strengths, needs and priorities**. Many school leaders and staff described using active listening skills and asking parents about their hopes and dreams for their child and family. Furthermore, school leaders and staff worked alongside families to help them attain these self-identified goals by planning and supporting concrete action steps. Some schools also started or advanced their efforts to provide child development workshops and learning opportunities for families—which were offered online and/or as recorded sessions, fostering families' accessibility to educational, useful information.

Strengthened School-Family Partnerships and Social Capital: Targeted Supports schools reported creating opportunities for families to connect with peers, school staff and others in their community. According to focus group data and as [previously reported](#), even while navigating the COVID-19 pandemic and the isolating effects it could have on building and sustaining relationships, **school leaders and staff were able to pivot to host socially distanced school events** such as virtual parent cafes which encouraged safe discussion spaces and modify daily procedures (i.e., drop-off and pick-up times) to **forge connection-making opportunities for families**. For example, one specific school facilitated a "Community in a Classroom," in which families were encouraged to connect with one another and staff outdoors at the school's gates for drop-off and pick-up; this created a cluster or a "family" of families. Families and the staff members learned about each other through these interactions and became a support group, sharing about daily life experiences as well as local resources. School leaders and staff also reported that they **began new or revamped existing school events to deepen relationships with engaged families and build engagement with new ones**, including facilitating video or over-the-phone meetings with families; hosting outdoor events; providing virtual school tours to new families; showcasing an outdoor art gallery of children's work; sharing monthly newsletters with parents; and facilitating culturally-based events.



We have created smaller communities of groups or clusters [outside the Educare building because of the COVID-19 pandemic] in which each family knows one another and intentionally connects with staff. Our staff then know every family and child by name and need, and the parents within clusters organically talk to one another and their neighboring cluster to build a community. Now, families know each other and talk about their child and what's going on in their community and form a support group."

Targeted Supports Participant

Engaged Fathers and Male Caregivers: A few of the virtual parent cafés were specifically for fathers or father-like figures, to help **advance father/male engagement**. School leaders and staff expressed that they saw an increase in the number of parents, including fathers, who attended or participated in parent cafés over the course of their years in Targeted Supports.

Advanced Parent Leadership and Advocacy Opportunities: Positive changes to promoting families' advocacy and leadership—both within and outside school—were also shared by school leaders and staff during focus groups. **Targeted Supports schools began and/or intensified their parent advocacy and leadership work by strengthening parent councils and committees**, some of which included leadership elections where families ran for positions or voted for nominees to lead and carry out policy and advocacy work at Educare. Among the Targeted Supports schools with existing parent councils and committees, higher numbers of parents, in particular fathers, participated in advocacy and leadership efforts.

Fostered Family Well-Being: Last, school leaders and staff also indicated a focus on supporting families' well-being. Focus groups revealed that **Targeted Supports schools were promoting educational information programming to families**, such as Homeless to House and home buying programs and breast cancer awareness resources. School leaders and staff were also **sharing mental health resources with families and providing necessary goods and services**, such as food and diaper drop-offs during heightened community cases of COVID-19 and Chromebooks for at-home learning.

Adapted in a Pandemic: It is important to acknowledge that some of the changes Targeted Supports schools made to their IFE practices were largely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; rather than a specific focus of their collective quality improvement efforts. **School leaders and staff recognized that they had to make quick, yet effective, changes to their family outreach and engagement strategies by providing resources, supports and events to and communicating with families virtually, through a hybrid format or socially distanced outdoors.** Additionally, the types of resources, supports and events provided for families were mostly specific to the needs of families as they navigated the COVID-19 pandemic. Although many positive changes in program's IFE efforts were reported, the COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to challenges in implementing such efforts. It was shared that families experienced burnout around COVID-19 protocols and restrictions; infections affected children and families' attendance; and staff shortages and turnover dampened some of the positive changes in the implementation of IFE practices observed and reported by school leaders and staff.



What **changes in indicators of family progress or outcomes** were reported by or observed in Educare schools?

Over time while participating in Targeted Supports, school leaders and staff observed and reported perceived changes in family progress and outcomes that map on to Educare's IFE Logic Model. Overall, focus groups unearthed that families voiced positive feedback with school leaders and staff regarding their IFE efforts.

Families as Lifelong Nurturer & Educator: Analyses of family interview data found that **parents reported lower levels of conflict with their child over the time in which their school participated in Targeted Supports**. Specifically, mean scores of parents' reports on the parent-child conflict scale³ were statistically significantly lower from 2018-19 through 2020-21. This evidence suggesting lower levels of conflict being reported between parents and their child/ren over the Targeted Supports years could indicate programs are strengthening supports for parents as lifelong nurturers and educators such as engaging families in educational, meaningful and accessible programming. For example, staff shared that families' attendance and participation, both synchronous and asynchronous, at child development workshops and learning opportunities increased.

Family Connections to Peers, School, & Community: School leaders and staff shared that **families appreciated and took advantage of their targeted efforts to frequently check in and provide varied, accessible options to connect with staff, other families and local resources or services**. These efforts supported improved trust and relationship building. Families' engagement in school functions, such as parent cafés increased. This strengthened their relationships with school leaders and staff and other Educare families while simultaneously boosting families' own understanding of how to navigate institutions (at and beyond their child's school) and locate and access resources in their community.



Other Family Outcomes: To a lesser degree, Educare school leaders and staff at some Targeted Supports schools noted that **school-facilitated parent leadership and advocacy opportunities fostered families' capacity and confidence to vocalize their child, family and community's needs with decision-makers at local, state and federal policy and systems levels**. In addition, some staff shared that during the Targeted Supports years, **families tended to participate in and/or seek out resources and social services (i.e., home buying programs; mental health supports) at higher levels than in previous years**, which may have been connected to conditions created by the pandemic.

Summary of Evaluation Findings

Evaluation findings from the Educare Learning Network on Targeted Supports:



Show that the **additional time, energy and resources devoted to advancing the quality of IFE policies and practices through Targeted Supports encouraged school leaders and staff:** a) to deepen their understanding of and positive attitudes toward family engagement vs. family involvement; b) brainstorm new, innovative ideas about how to partner with and support families; c) collaborate more readily across disciplines and roles, and d) keep IFE at the forefront of their work.



Demonstrate that a targeted approach to improving the intensity and quality of family engagement efforts in ECE programs helps to **align school leaders and staff in their program operations, services and processes** related to family engagement, and to **establish meaningful and relevant partnerships and relationships with and for families.**



Reveal that **intentionally implementing family-centered, accessible and intentional activities, spaces, training, programming and outreach methods contribute to improved family outcomes**, including family well-being; connections to peers, school and community; and knowledge, attitudes and skillsets needed to be lifelong nurturers and educators for their children and advocates and leaders in schools and communities.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE, POLICY AND RESEARCH

This quality improvement effort and its evaluation findings offer valuable insights into best practices and policies focused on IFE. Below we provide practice, policy and research recommendations to optimize the learning and development of young children and IFE in Educare schools and across the wider ECE field.

1 Promote positive changes in staff, program and family outcomes using a focused approach to IFE.

Findings from the second phase of implementation of Targeted Supports indicate that participating school leaders and staff experienced positive changes in their IFE knowledge, attitudes and skillsets and saw improvements in family outcomes. Practitioners who lead and participate in quality improvement efforts within ECE settings or programs should **integrate and apply a focused, intentional approach to family engagement by articulating a shared definition or vision of IFE and establishing program- and individual-level IFE goals** for families and staff. In addition, program leaders should embed IFE in written program policies and procedures as well as job responsibilities across roles. To further support positive outcomes for children and their families, ECE leaders should also **develop and embed routines and protect time for learning, reflection and interdisciplinary collaboration**, such as Communities of Practice (within and beyond their own program), to continually position staff to examine their efforts, troubleshoot barriers and create opportunities to intensify and improve the quality of family engagement policies and practices. Additionally, ECE professionals must **build mechanisms to communicate and partner with families and individuals and agencies within their local communities** with the intention of deepening relationships and creating responsive and culturally appropriate activities and tools to achieve family-identified goals.



2 Invest in and promote access to training and other professional development experiences for staff focused on IFE that move beyond meeting families' basic needs.

Our findings elucidated positive changes in the progress and outcomes of school leaders and staff in their IFE work, as well as in families who were enrolled in Targeted Supports schools at the time of its delivery. There are clear benefits to intensifying family engagement efforts in ECE programs, which adds to the need for ECE policy- and decision-makers and program leaders to increasingly **fund and plan professional development opportunities, especially those**



emphasize targeted, evidence-based approaches to IFE and elevating family voice and leadership opportunities. At the same time, to carry out IFE-related training in a way that is accessible to staff with varying roles, different types of ECE settings and programs situated in different socio-demographic and geographic contexts, it is imperative that **program and state policies are created and implemented providing adequate compensation or incentives, learning technologies, transportation, and culturally and linguistically responsive content and resources** to school leaders and staff.

3 Investigate changes in the developmental outcomes of children enrolled in programs participating in IFE quality improvement efforts.

The current brief describes changes in staff, program and family progress and outcomes during the delivery and implementation of Targeted Supports. Such progress and outcomes do not occur in a vacuum; rather, the experiences of children, families and school leaders and staff are interrelated and have influence on one another⁴. Future research should **consider examining the ways in which IFE quality improvement efforts similar to Targeted Supports**



contribute to children's developmental outcomes. Studies have found positive linkages between family engagement and children's learning and development⁵, but research must go beyond exploring these associations and investigate the mechanisms by which specific IFE quality improvement efforts at the staff- and program-levels work to support developmental and learning outcomes for the children enrolled in those programs. Relatedly, researchers need to **explore variations in relationships by assessing among which children—in regard to race/ethnicity, language and other socio-demographic features—benefit from or see no change in outcomes while enrolled in ECE programs implementing specific IFE quality improvement efforts.**

NETWORK SPOTLIGHT:

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



EDUCARE WASHINGTON, DC

Educare Washington, DC serves over 400 children and families, most of whom identify as Black/African American. Educare DC was selected to participate in Targeted Supports as part of a larger grant received through an anonymous donor. The anonymous donor and Educare DC wanted to enrich and expand their family engagement work by increasing parent voice and enhancing the overall quality and intensity of their family engagement efforts at the school. This school's IFE journey while participating in Targeted Supports is documented in this Network Spotlight.

Strengths and Areas for Improvement Identified Through Targeted Supports

The virtual site interview (which replaced a school site visit due to the COVID-19 pandemic) and reflective conversations early on in Educare DC's engagement with IFE Targeted Supports revealed the following strengths and opportunities for improvement:

Strengths

- **Leadership and Staff Commitment:** School leaders and staff emphasized their commitment to building strong, positive relationships with families. They desired to go deeper in their IFE work and sought out Targeted Supports as a structured way to help meet their commitment.
- **Streamlined Recruitment and Enrollment:** Staff developed and implemented an easy, efficient process for families' first experiences at Educare DC. Written plans with steps for making families feel welcome in the school at each stage of the recruitment and enrollment process were created to better support a seamless experience for incoming children and their families.
- **Inviting Environment:** Educare DC's facilities were stimulating and welcoming. Buildings have large, open spaces with floor-to-ceiling windows that allow children and families to observe and experience the surrounding environment and community. The outdoor spaces were also inviting with large garden areas that provide children, families and staff opportunities to sit, connect and learn.
- **Father/Male Caregiver Involvement:** Educare DC identified ongoing work focused on leveraging the skills and investments of fathers/ male caregivers in promoting their child's schooling and engaging in the parent-led, school-based policy council.

Opportunities for Improvement

- **Moving Beyond Involvement to Engagement:** School leaders and staff at Educare DC encouraged families' involvement in their child's schooling, especially through the recruitment and enrollment process, but their intentional strategies for fostering a sense of community and encouraging ongoing connections and interactions among families were identified as areas for further improvement.
- **Alignment Within Program Operations and Partners:** Educare DC has many moving parts within its various departments, which can often lead to siloed entities and competing priorities; because of this, alignment within and across these departments was noted as an area for improvement, with an eye toward reducing families' confusion stemming from duplicative programming efforts or services.
- **Parent Leadership and Advocacy Support:** The commitment to and practices for amplifying parents' voices at Educare DC were in place (e.g., policy council) but parents' perspectives and strengths needed to be expanded upon to deeply support parent leadership and advocacy beyond the walls of Educare DC.
- **Centering Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB):** School leaders and staff at Educare DC represented culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; however, their focus on advancing DEIB through other approaches (i.e., implementing culturally responsive practices; honoring and leveraging families' cultural and linguistic strengths) was not as clear as other areas of program emphasis.

Educare DC's School Goals During Targeted Supports

- ① Shift from parent/family *involvement* to parent/family *engagement* in all relevant programming.
- ② Enhance parent leadership and advocacy opportunities to elevate parent voice and perspectives.

Educare DC's Progress During Targeted Supports

① School leaders and staff observed progress toward short-term IFE program outcomes, **Collaborative and Goal-Oriented Family Partnerships** and **Teaching and Learning to Support Children and Families' Learning and Development**, and intermediate family outcome, **Family Well-Being and Development**. Namely, school leaders and staff at Educare DC prioritized forging deep relationships and connections with families. They asked families about their goals for their child's development and partnered with families to ensure that these goals were attainable and being met. It was important to Educare DC that their program was strengthening families' confidence and abilities to navigate their child's schooling in early childhood and beyond. School leaders and staff shared a common belief that parents are the experts on their child; therefore, it was essential for school leaders and staff to *learn from parents* about their child's interests, needs and strengths and to better understand and integrate families' cultural assets in their collaborative goal planning. Through an individualized approach, school leaders and staff conducted check-ins with parents and actively worked with families to provide relevant resources to promote family well-being and development. For example, some families experienced homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic, so school leaders and staff began working with a Homeless to House program to help alleviate homelessness. Educare DC provided accessible settings and useful methods to sustain their family engagement efforts, like virtual parent cafés and parent-teacher meetings, and still met with families during drop-off and pick-up times—though outdoors to follow COVID-19 restrictions.

“Here at Educare DC, we have a focus on making sure that the relationships we create with families are mutual and goal-oriented, and that we are responsive to the needs of each family. Those goals and activities are driven by what that particular family needs, knowing that none of our families are in a one-size-fits-all spot. So, really tailoring our strategic work that we do with families to meet their individual needs and their interests at every interaction with them that we have.



Ebony Glover
Family Engagement Specialist

② School leaders and staff observed progress toward the short-term program outcome, **Responsive and Supportive Community Partnerships** and intermediate family outcomes, **Family Connections to Peers, School and Community** and **Family as Lifelong Advocate and Leader**.

As one illustration, Educare DC school leaders and staff enhanced their commitment to and practices for supporting parent leadership and advocacy by bolstering parents' influence on program and system-level change and governance. Parents were encouraged to participate in virtual parent council and committees within the program, which provided opportunities for parents to advocate for their child's and community's needs and to serve on parent leadership positions at Educare DC. Since participating in Targeted Supports, Educare DC has experienced an increase in the number of parents who engaged in these virtual parent council and committee meetings and their elections for parent leadership positions had an increasingly high turnout over recent years. School leaders and staff also worked alongside families to channel and use passion in the form of advocacy to create the changes parents, school leaders and staff wanted to see at Educare DC and at a broader systems level. Families began understanding the strengths and challenges of other DC families, and thus started mobilizing together in their advocacy efforts within the school and the larger community. New and valuable connections were made among families and with community partners.



I'm proud of our work and effort to have our parents share their voices and be leaders. We work with our families to channel that passion and put it to really good use, and we [staff] don't shy away from that passion! We take those opportunities to help our families in the form of advocacy for their children, themselves, and their community.

Shaunda Clark White
Director of Family Engagement

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ESSENTIAL PRACTICES OF EDUCARE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Educare is offering a professional development series to provide practical instruction to center-based and school-based programs on how to improve program practice and ultimately deliver stronger outcomes for children and families. The Essential Practices of Educare is a flexible early childhood professional development program that helps practitioners develop their knowledge, behavior and practices to meet the increasingly rigorous quality standards in early education. Comprehensive training reaches four core practice areas, including intensive family engagement. For more information, [download The Essential Practices of Educare overview](#). For questions, contact us at EducareInquiry@EducareNetwork.org.