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Educare Learning Network

# What is Educare?

## **PROGRAM, PLACE, PARTNERSHIP and PLATFORM**

Educare is a research-based Program that prepares young, at-risk children for school; a specially designed Place that nurtures early learning and sends a bold message about the value of investing in the first five years; an innovative Partnership between the public and private sectors to create a more efficient, more effective early learning program; and a compelling Platform to drive change among policymakers, business leaders and early childhood providers by showing what quality early learning looks like.

# Educare: Attacking the Achievement Gap



**Educare Schools are dramatically changing** the life trajectories of thousands of children growing up in families facing the greatest obstacles to success—and changing the way America thinks about early education. Each Educare School is a comprehensive early childhood program aimed at preventing the achievement gap that takes root between children in poverty and their middle-income peers long before they enter kindergarten. Independent research shows Educare works. Experience also demonstrates that Educare is a powerful catalyst for improving early childhood practice, informing early childhood policy, and cultivating new private and public investments in the first five years of learning.



Through a growing coast-to-coast network of state-of-the-art, full-day, year-round schools, funded mostly by existing public dollars, Educare serves at-risk children from birth to five years. Each embraces a community's most vulnerable children with programming and instructional support that develop early skills and nurture the strong parent-child relationships that create the foundation for successful learning.

## Our Results

Research shows that children who experience Educare for a full five years arrive at elementary school performing on par with average kindergarteners, regardless of socio-economic standing. Educare children have more extensive vocabularies and are better able to recognize letters, numbers and colors than their peers. And children who experience Educare also develop strong social skills, including self-confidence, persistence and methods to manage frustration. All of these abilities are strong predictors of later success in academics—and in life. What's more, early findings indicate the gains Educare children make hold as they move through elementary school.



# Program

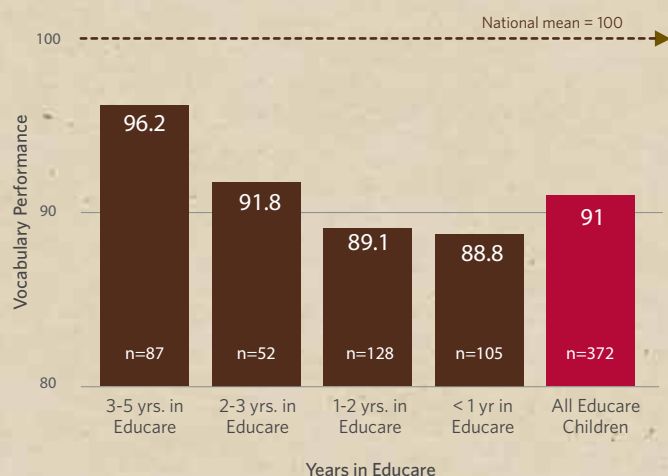
Educare is a **PROGRAM** based on the best early education practices that ensure the school-readiness of children most at risk for academic failure.

Young children who experience the world as predictable and supportive develop strong emotional foundations essential for learning. The Educare model draws from a wide range of research-based practices that foster learning environments that support infants, toddlers and young children who are growing up in stressful, impoverished communities.

Research shows that vocabulary growth among children from low-income homes lags behind that of their middle-income peers. Without intentional intervention, this gap, which is evident at nine months of age, only continues to widen.

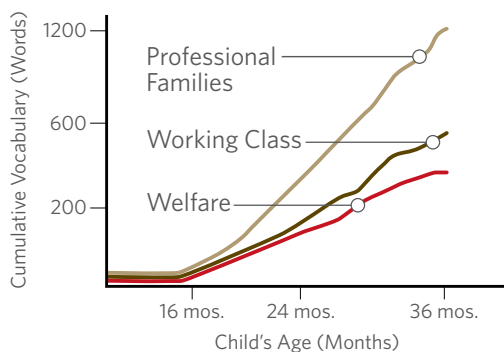
## Vocabulary: Children who spend more years in Educare emerge better prepared for kindergarten

### Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test



Yazejian, N., & Bryant, D. M. (2010). Promising Results: Educare implementation study data, January 2010. Chapel Hill: FPG Child Development Institute, UNC-CH.

## Disparities in Early Vocabulary Growth



Source: Hart, B. and Risley, T.R. (1995). "Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young Children." Baltimore, MD: Brooks Publishing Co.

At Educare Schools, teachers work with children—beginning in infancy and through preschool—and their parents to develop pre-literacy and early math skills such as letter and number recognition, problem solving, and counting. Equal emphasis is given to developing social-emotional skills: the ability to focus on a task, persistence, impulse control and cooperation with peers.

Central to Educare's mission is involving families in their children's development. Activities and interactions are aimed at strengthening parents' abilities to serve as champions for their child's learning after they leave Educare and enter primary and secondary schools.

A unique component of the Educare model is the practice of continuity of care. Each child stays with the same team of teachers from birth to age three. Children then move into a preschool classroom for students ages three to five with a different team of teachers. This continuity creates close bonds among children, teachers and parents, reinforcing the stable relationships essential to learning.

Educare demands high standards. Schools serve 140 to 200 children. Class sizes are kept small and teacher-child ratios are kept low to ensure individualized care. Infant-toddler classes serve eight children. Preschool classrooms serve 17 children. Each room has three teachers. Lead teachers hold bachelor degrees, and every four classrooms are supervised by master-degreed teachers who work as coaches inside classrooms.

Full-time social workers and various consultants (e.g., speech pathologists, nurses, visiting artists) provide additional support to each family. Teachers and social workers regularly review and evaluate their success in helping children grow and learn, and adjust practices accordingly.

This approach is paying off. Independent research by the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill finds that children who started Educare between birth and age two exceeded national averages on measures of school readiness. Those gains persisted even when controlling for risk factors such as maternal education, race and parents' ages. Kindergartners who spent their early years at Educare arrived at elementary school ready to learn and on par with middle-income peers.

# Place

Educare is much more than a successful education model. It is a memorable **PLACE** of early learning that sends a clear message that we must invest in early childhood education because children are born learning.



## A Showcase for Quality

Educare Schools are designed and constructed with children's learning in mind. Ample physical space and light allow babies, toddlers, and preschoolers to explore, learn and develop. Classrooms are safe, comfortable places that promote bonds between the teaching staff and young children. Spaces encourage interactive learning so that teachers and children are seen together reading, acting out stories, creating artwork, counting, or conducting simple experiments.

Inside every Educare School, significant space is devoted to family-related activities, including one-on-one counseling and support groups for mothers, fathers and grandparents. There is a room with computers to facilitate parents' efforts in job hunting or in researching elementary schools their children will eventually attend.

The first Educare School opened in Chicago in 2000. Today, Educare Schools are located throughout the country—from Seattle to Tulsa to Miami to Milwaukee—with more on the way. All Educare Schools are in economically disadvantaged communities, and each school is tailored to meet local needs. One Educare School in Tulsa includes an on-site health clinic. Denver Educare stands next to a teacher-training institute on the historic Clayton Early Learning campus. Educare in Waterville, Maine, is the first rural school in the Network.



# Partnership

Educare is about **PARTNERSHIP**. Philanthropists, Head Start and Early Head Start providers, and school officials partner to narrow the achievement gap for children in their communities. Each commits to securing the financing, program expertise and public support essential to maintaining Educare's high-quality standards.



## Joining Forces

The Ounce of Prevention Fund, with the Irving Harris Foundation, opened the first Educare School in Chicago. In 2003, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund and the Omaha Public Schools opened the second Educare on Omaha's north side. Soon after, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund and Ounce of Prevention Fund joined forces to support other local public-private partnerships in communities across the country to establish Educare Schools. Today, this joint initiative, known as the Educare Learning Network, supports the development of these schools and provides training, assistance and a forum for learning to Educare staff.

The Educare movement has been embraced by other major philanthropic organizations—the George Kaiser Family Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—that, along with the Buffett and Harris foundations, provide challenge grants through an Educare replication pool to support steady growth in the Network.

In each city where Educare has taken root, new public-private partnerships are created to share governance of each school. Local philanthropists provide private dollars to build the schools and facilitate the flow of public dollars that support day-to-day activities. Federal funds from Early Head Start and Head Start provide critical funding for program operations and often are augmented by state funds for child care and preschool programs that flow to local school districts and programs.

**“Public-private partnerships like Educare are the only way we’re going to get there. ... It takes adults putting egos aside, putting historical differences aside, and saying, ‘Let’s figure out a better way to do it.’ ... This, Educare, is a better way to do [early education]—and it’s starting to become a real national model.”**

Arne Duncan, Secretary, US Department of Education, speaking at Educare of Oklahoma City

# Platform

In cities and states across the nation, Educare is serving as a **PLATFORM** for raising awareness of the value and vital importance of learning during a child's first five years of life. It is changing practice and policies about how early education programs are created and sustained.



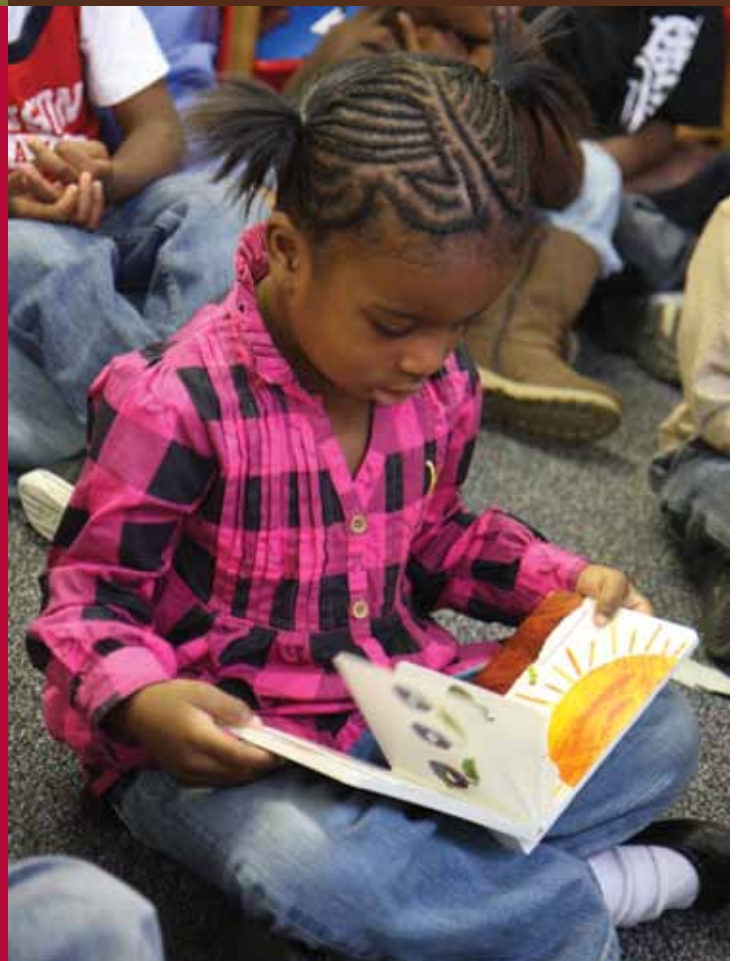
At-risk children who do not receive quality early care and education are **50 percent more likely to be placed in special-education classes, 25 percent more likely to drop out of school, 40 percent more likely to become a teen parent, and 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime.**

## A Wise Investment

Despite growing scientific evidence that brain growth and development occur most rapidly during the first five years of life, our society's current investment in children's education and care is lowest during those critical early years. Comprehensive learning programs for very young children of low-income parents remain scarce even though they can help prevent more costly interventions later in life.

At-risk children who do not receive quality early care and education are 25 percent more likely to drop out of school, 40 percent more likely to become a teen parent, 50 percent more likely to be placed in special-education classes, and 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime.

James J. Heckman, Ph.D., the 2000 Nobel Prize winner in economics, has determined that such social problems can be traced to an absence of social and emotional skills, such as perseverance and self-control—skills acquired during a child's earliest learning years. "The best evidence supports the policy prescription: invest in the very young," says Heckman.





## Building Better Teachers

Educare Schools also serve as a training ground for thousands of early learning professionals. In addition to visiting our schools, many are coached in the teaching methods and practices that we have implemented over the past decade. Those early childhood professionals bring elements of our high-quality approach to the children they serve, helping to raise standards in teaching and in education outcomes.

Building these communities of learning—and practice—that extend beyond the walls of Educare is a key component of our strategy to work beyond the walls of our schools.

Educare is setting dramatic new standards for high-quality early childhood education so that all American children, including those living in poverty, can share in the American dream of equal opportunity for all.

### Compared to peers

- The majority of Educare parents remain involved in their child's learning.
- About half of Educare graduates attend higher-performing institutions such as magnet, charter and gifted schools.
- Teachers report that most Educare parents participate in school activities, pick up their children's report cards and initiate conversations with teachers.

## A Catalyst for Change

Educare Schools serve as “showrooms” that demonstrate what high-quality, well-implemented early learning programs can look like and help to convince policymakers, business leaders and others that investments in early learning make a difference in the life outcomes for even the most at-risk children.

Educare Schools also help create new champions for early learning by demonstrating, in real early learning classrooms, what is possible. Educare partners and families have become powerful voices for change.

Educare of Omaha helped advocacy and philanthropic leaders make the case for Nebraska to dramatically increase its investments in early learning programs. The Nebraska state constitution now declares that learning begins at birth, and a \$60 million public/private endowment is expanding quality birth-to-three services.

Illinois increased funding of early childhood investments by over \$172 million after Educare opened in 2000, and is moving toward full funding of preschool services.

Educare of Tulsa helped to inspire a \$25 million pilot program to promote the school readiness of at-risk children. After visiting Educare of Omaha, the Kansas governor supported the



establishment of an \$11 million early childhood block grant with a set-aside for infants and toddlers.

Even before Educare of Central Maine opened its doors in 2010, it helped to promote expansion of state prekindergarten programs, the redirection of funds to early education and prevention programs and improvements to the state's child care quality standards.



The Educare movement and two related policy initiatives —the Birth to Five Policy Alliance, focused on state policies, and the First Five Years Fund, focused on federal policies— are supported by a group of like-minded philanthropists: the Buffett Early Childhood Fund; the W.K. Kellogg Foundation; the George Kaiser Family Foundation; The Children’s Initiative: A Project of the J.B. & M.K. Pritzker Foundation; the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; and the Irving Harris Foundation. More partners are welcome.

**For more information, visit [www.educareschools.org](http://www.educareschools.org).**

## Program Core Features

The core features of Educare Schools reflect the best-available, evidence-based strategies for effectively preparing at-risk young children and their families for success in school. The power of the Educare model is derived from these core features working together in a comprehensive, intentional and sustained way to achieve a high-quality early childhood program that helps children ages birth to five grow up safe, healthy and eager to learn.

The Educare Learning Network endorses these core features. Because the Educare network values continuous improvement and innovation, the core features may evolve in response to new research or evidence.

### Provide full-day, full-year services

### Maintain low staff-child ratios and small class sizes

- Infant-toddler classrooms: 3 adults and 8 children
- Preschool classrooms: 3 adults and 17 children

### Use research-based strategies

- Programs engage in a system of reciprocal data feedback and utilization for continuous program improvement and individualized planning for children and families.
- Parents are engaged in ongoing communication about their child's screenings and assessments.
- Programs participate in the national, multi-site Educare Learning Network Implementation Study.
- Programs secure a local evaluation partner to assist in ongoing local program evaluation and the national Implementation Study.

### Provide continuity of care

- To minimize transitions and help children develop secure relationships, primary caregiving is in place for all children.
- Each primary caregiver is assigned no more than four infants and toddlers or nine preschoolers.
- Children remain with the same teaching team from birth to age three.
- Children remain with a second set of teachers from age three until they transition to kindergarten.
- Program uses strategies to retain staff and maintain staff group assignments.

### Offer on-site family support services

- The program fosters the development of strong, positive relationships among children, families and staff.
- Staff use evidence-based strategies that help parents promote and sustain their children's learning and later success in school:
  - Promote and enhance the parent-child relationship
  - Provide parents with information about their child's growth and development
  - Encourage parents to get involved in their child's education and school
- Family support specialists have small caseloads, averaging 30 or fewer families.
- Staff develop strong relationships with community organizations to facilitate referrals for services not available on site, such as mental health services.

### **Maintain high staff qualifications and intensive staff development**

- In each classroom, there is a:
  - Lead teacher with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education;
  - Assistant teacher with an associate's degree in early childhood education; and
  - Teacher aide with a high school diploma/GED and courses or credential in child development.
- Master teachers have advanced degrees in early childhood education and special training in infancy for birth-to-age-three classrooms.
- If staff credentials above are not fully implemented, the agency clearly defines qualifications and expectations for staff to achieve the requirements.
- Master teachers oversee no more than four classrooms to provide intensive coaching, mentoring and support to teachers and to promote excellent classroom practice and staff retention.
- Family support supervisors have master's degrees in social work or its equivalent.
- Family support specialists have bachelor's or master's degrees in an appropriate field.
- With their supervisors, all staff members develop individual plans for professional development.
- Auxiliary staff (floaters and permanent substitutes) are available to maintain classroom ratios and support participation in professional development activities.
- Program supports all staff pursuing degrees in early childhood education.

### **Provide enhanced focus on language and literacy**

- Intentional emphasis on language and literacy in:
  - age-appropriate assessments
  - curriculum and lesson plans
  - program planning
  - family engagement work
  - teacher supervision
  - adult and peer interaction
- Master teachers review assessment data, observe classrooms and provide direct coaching to teachers on early language and literacy strategies.

### **Emphasize social-emotional development to promote school readiness**

- Social-emotional developmental theory informs all aspects of the program.
- Intentional emphasis on social-emotional development in:
  - age-appropriate screening and assessments
  - curriculum and lesson plans
  - program planning
  - family engagement work
  - teacher supervision
  - program operation
- All staff are trained annually on the discipline and guidance policy, which is based on proactive, positive approaches to discipline.
- The environment and staff behavior emphasize the centrality of relationships.
- All staff are trained on fostering engagement with children and families, with attention to verbal, non-verbal and written communications, as well as conflict resolution and cultural contexts.
- Transition planning for all moves into, within and from the program begins at least six months in advance and involves parents and multi-disciplinary staff teams.

### **Provide enhanced focus on problem-solving and numeracy**

- Curriculum emphasizes problem-solving and numeracy skills development.
- Staff include these skills in individual child strength plans, weekly lesson plans and the design of group interactions.

### **Integrate the arts**

- Programs use the arts to strengthen and support social-emotional, language and literacy development.
- Curriculum includes intentional emphasis on art experiences (drama, dance, music, story-telling and visual arts) to foster development.
- Community artists provide live performances and serve as classroom artists-in-residence.
- Parents, families and staff have opportunities to participate in arts activities.

### **Start early, with an emphasis on prenatal services**

- To promote maternal and child health and well-being, the program or community partners provide Early Head Start services to pregnant women and newborns.
- Programs enroll infants as early as families require.
- Some programs provide doula services (prenatal and childbirth assistance) to build relationships with families and between parent and child as early as possible.

### **Implement an interdisciplinary approach**

- Programs build effective teams among supervisors, teachers, family support, other staff, consultants and families.
- Staff implement and document strategies to ensure that everyone understands the importance of multiple perspectives and has the skills to be successful in their interdisciplinary efforts.
- Education and family support staff meet regularly to discuss and understand the child in the context of his or her family and conduct family/child reviews for each child a minimum of three times a year.
- Parent conferences include teachers, family support and other appropriate staff.
- Staff receive consultation from professionals with specialized information and expertise.

### **Implement reflective practice and supervision**

- All program design and management systems support the integration and infusion of reflective practice and supervision.
- Reflective practice is implemented as the organizational model, including sensitivity to context, commitment to growth and change, shared goals, open communication, commitment to reflecting on the work and clear professional standards.
- Reflective supervision—incorporating the elements of reflection, regularity and collaboration—is implemented as the supervisory model at all staff levels.
- Each supervisor manages six or fewer supervisees.
- All Educare staff participate in individual reflective supervision at least once a month, with an additional group or individual reflective supervision.
- Job descriptions and performance appraisals include reflective practice and supervision.