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.

Our Results

Research shows that children who experience Educare for a full five years arrive at elementary school performing on par with average kindergartners, 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

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.
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.

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.

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.

“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.”

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

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.

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 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.

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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.

A Catalyst for Change

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.

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Building Better Teachers

Educare Schools also 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.
Educare Learning Network

The Educare Learning Network is a partnership between the Ounce of Prevention Fund, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, other national philanthropies and public-private partners engaged in more than a dozen states across America. Together we form a coast-to-coast network of Educare Schools. Each serves as a catalyst for change—leveling the academic playing field for very young children at risk for school failure while also firing the imaginations of key decision-makers in the worlds of early childhood practice and policy.
The Power of Partnership

The Educare Learning Network team—a national staff housed at the Ounce of Prevention Fund, the Buffett foundation and more mature Educare sites—helps to develop new partnerships among like-minded individuals who want to create Educare Schools in their communities. The Network works with leaders from the public and private sectors to accomplish the shared goal of helping our most vulnerable children enter elementary school without the typical achievement gap between them and their middle-income peers.

To encourage the steady growth of the Educare network, five national early childhood funders—the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the George Kaiser Family Foundation, the Irving Harris Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—provide a $1 million Educare Replication Pool challenge grant to local partnerships for their capital campaigns. These grants help leverage local funds and, more importantly, create new private-sector champions who will advocate for early childhood education.

Before construction begins, the Network team also guides local partnerships in developing a shared governance plan for the Educare School and helps identify funding resources for the operational budget. Educare Schools draw on all public funding streams—including federal Head Start and Early Head Start, and local child care and preschool dollars—for a more effective use of existing assets. Operating budget gaps at Educare Schools often illuminate public policy gaps that, once addressed, provide opportunities for advocacy efforts to improve the odds for all children in need.

The Educare Learning Network provides extensive training and technical assistance to Educare School staff as they prepare, open, and begin evaluating their programs. Semiannual conferences occur at Educare sites to connect the vision and work of each independent Educare partnership.

Maintaining a Commitment to Learning

Sharing information with new and existing partners is central to Educare’s mission.

Once a new Educare School is established, its leaders join the Educare Learning Network to share successes, challenges and lessons learned to drive continuous improvement in the Educare model.

The Network provides a collaborative forum for Educare leadership and staff to solve problems and receive technical assistance and support. Because Educare Schools serve as platforms for policy and systems change, the Network members also work together to define, discuss and address critical issues facing the early childhood field.

Creating Communities of Learning

One of the Network’s most important functions is leadership development—providing expert knowledge, seasoned advice and peer support to those who run Educare Schools on a day-to-day basis.

The Educare network also provides extensive implementation assistance, consultation and training sessions, both regionally and on-site. In addition, it facilitates specialized peer learning groups for master teachers, family–support supervisors, and Educare program administrators and site directors. Special work groups address various issues associated with implementing the Educare model.

Cultivating a New Generation of Early Childhood Leaders

The Educare Learning Network convenes regional and national conferences, bringing together community partners, school officials and private philanthropists, as well as executive directors, site managers, master teachers and family–support supervisors.

The conferences provide program staff with direct access to the best minds in the field of center-based care. Experts who have participated in our Network meetings include early childhood development expert J. Ronald Lally, Reggio Children president and Modena-Reggio Emilia University professor Carlina Rinaldi, Erikson Institute president Samuel Meisels, and renowned pediatrician, neonatal researcher and child psychiatrist, T. Berry Brazelton.

Meetings also feature group presentations, strategy sessions with Educare executives and philanthropic partners, and workshops tailored for Educare program management staff.

Clockwise from top left: T. Berry Brazelton, Carlina Rinaldi, Samuel Meisels, J. Ronald Lally
"Not for the faint of heart"

Former Ounce President Harriet Meyer once said pursuing Educare is “not for the faint of heart”—and that’s true. Developing an Educare School requires every partner to stretch, sometimes in uncomfortable ways.

At the most basic level, Educare Learning Network members commit to creating an Educare School in their community and to embracing the Network’s shared mission, vision and values. They dedicate themselves to investigating promising practices that are emerging from the field of early childhood research and implementing with rigor those that are consistent with the Network’s theory of change.

They take advantage of the consulting services and technical assistance offered by the Network team on everything from building public-private partnerships, to fully implementing the Educare model, to advocating with public and private partners to increase early childhood investments for at-risk children. They take part in Network activities and meetings. And they participate in the Network’s evaluation work, including a review process that looks at whether members are adhering to the Network’s overarching principles and implementing Educare’s core features. The Educare Learning Network is committed to helping each Educare School become stronger in order to achieve the highest level of success for its children and families.

How Do I Learn More?

Visit us at www.educareschools.org.

Network Benefits

There are many benefits to being part of the Educare Learning Network, including access to the Educare brand through the use of its icon and logo. But that is just the beginning.

Members receive tailored implementation assistance, consultation and training in developing an Educare School. They have access to the latest research and are part of a peer network that supports their work and provides a forum to share successes, promising practices and lessons learned in early childhood development. The Network also provides a safe space for Educare staff to discuss struggles and develop strategies to overcome them. Members build new relationships and carry on conversations with the top experts in a variety of fields: early education, economics, philanthropy, public policy and advocacy, child psychology, social work and family support.

As part of the Network, members participate in a national, multi-site implementation study designed to document how program implementation contributes to quality and links to child and family outcomes. The assessment is an opportunity to continuously improve Educare practices. This research also will contribute to the early childhood knowledge base—and make history in the new century.
Policy Wins

“If [early childhood education] works in Oklahoma, why don’t we do it in the whole country? We’ve got an education system that’s leaving too many children behind.”

Then-US Senator Barack Obama
at Educare of Tulsa, March 2007
A Catalyst for Change

When an Educare School opens in a community, its impact reaches far beyond the young children and families served within its walls. As a platform for change, Educare fires imaginations, provokes dialogue and sparks policy changes that create new and promising education opportunities for children in poverty.

While infants, toddlers and their parents benefit from programming based on cutting-edge science that proves that early interventions can prevent the achievement gap, Educare also serves as a laboratory for generating data used to develop more effective teaching practices. And those techniques are taught and shared with other early childhood practitioners so that even more children can experience the kind of quality that prepares them for success in school and in life.

Sending a Message

In cities across the nation, Educare Schools stand as beacons of hope in otherwise distressed communities. Their striking architecture sends a strong signal that the investment in that neighborhood, and the investment in that community’s children, is not just the smart thing to do, it is the right thing to do. Policymakers hear that message when they visit an Educare School, and they experience the power of early childhood investments firsthand. As a showcase for data-driven programming and design, Educare has played an important role in cultivating new champions for birth-to-five programs and influenced or informed local, state and federal policies that are leveling the playing field for children and families living in poverty.

State Wins

**Illinois**

Educare of Chicago, the first school in the Network, opened in 2000 and has provided numerous leaders, including US Sen. Dick Durbin, with an opportunity to tour a high-quality school and learn how early childhood programs deliver a sound return on investment. In recent years, the state has increased early childhood investments by over $172 million, and is now providing high-quality early learning opportunities to more than 140,000 at-risk infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

**Kansas**

The state established an $11 million early childhood block grant, with a set-aside for infants and toddlers, informed by discussions with public and private-sector leaders from Educare of Omaha in neighboring Nebraska.

**Nebraska**

Educare of Omaha helped advocacy and philanthropic leaders make the case for the state to dramatically increase its investments in early learning programs for four year olds and establish a $60 million, public-private endowment to create and support services for birth to three across the state. The state constitution was also amended to include the declaration that learning begins at birth.

**Maine**

Even before Educare of Central Maine opened its doors, 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.

“Birth to five, there are tremendous learning opportunities for our kids. Early childhood education is one of the very best investments the government can ever make.”

Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn, at a bill-signing event at Educare of Chicago
Every community wants an Educare, but not everyone can have one. But we can all have best practice applications. You can bring people to advocacy, but Educare was the action piece. It allows us to show people what best practices look like and sound like. Educare showed them how we can help all preschoolers, all communities, and all parents. It makes the case that we need to invest more in early childhood.

Karen Baldacci, former First Lady of Maine
July 2010

Connecting to K-12

The genesis of any Educare School begins with forging a solid partnership with the local public school system. Educare Schools are located either adjacent to or very close to the neighboring elementary school to intentionally demonstrate that Educare students are being prepared for school success and to drive home the message that learning begins at birth.

But the relationship goes much deeper. Educare Schools are often constructed on land donated by the school district, which, in some instances, also provides custodial services and utilities. School districts also can direct local or federal dollars to help sustain an Educare operating budget.

Educare programs are designed to meet K-12 priorities such as reading by third grade and increasing high school graduation rates. And to ensure that gains made in the early years continue into elementary school, Educare staff focus on transitions through planning with parents and developing partnerships with kindergarten teachers to create a seamless and dynamic educational system.

In Omaha, where two Educare Schools operate, the public school system has embraced the value of early childhood education throughout the district. The school superintendent is a member of the Educare governing board. And Educare’s standards for high quality—class size, staff qualifications and child-staff ratios—are becoming the community norm.

“Educare means everything to us. It’s going to bring students into our school system who are ready to learn. No longer will we have to wait for students to fall behind before we help them. Educare will allow them to start school ready to learn.”

Jeffrey Smith, Superintendent of Balsz Elementary School District, at groundbreaking of Educare of Arizona in September 2010

Influencing Policy and Practice in the Classroom

Educare Schools are intentionally designed to serve the children and families who cross their thresholds, and to extend their reach into the communities by working with other early childhood education providers to build a more skilled early childhood workforce that benefits all children.

Educare of Miami-Dade provides resources and training for parents, teachers and providers who serve over 5,000 adults and 80,000 children annually. Educare of Miami-Dade’s Early Childhood Program Administrator’s Institute has benefitted more than 20,000 children during its first two years of operation.

Influencing Policy and Practice in the Classroom

Educare of Denver shares a campus with the Clayton Institute and Training Center and serves as a demonstration site for teacher education, leadership development, parent engagement and program evaluation to improve the quality of early childhood services throughout Colorado. Professionals come there to learn the latest in best practices in a real classroom setting.

Newer Educare Schools have been designed with observation rooms off the classroom spaces to allow students, other early education providers and visitors to see what effective early learning looks like, and what infants, toddlers and preschoolers need to succeed.
“It is not enough to think outside the box. We need to find a different box to frame our thinking. Educare is one of those different boxes. It has caused us to think differently about children and families and how we need to better embed and connect schools to their communities.”

Dr. Douglas D. Christensen, Retired Commissioner of Education, Nebraska Department of Education

“Educare is vital to creating high-quality early care and education. The organization is a catalyst for change in Florida, and beyond. Educare provides a framework for other organizations by demonstrating the importance of affordable, quality early learning for our children. I know that, together, we can achieve this goal for all our children.”


“Spending a morning at Educare, seeing the children so excited about what they were learning, really brought focus to our discussions about the child care policy barriers that often hinder access to high-quality early childhood education for children most in need. We found that when children come into Educare as a toddler and stay through their preschool years they tend to reach kindergarten ready for success. We also found that many children drop out of the program due to child care subsidy policies and processing. That helped motivate us to enact legislation to assure at-risk children a great chance for continuous enrollment in quality early care and education programs.”

Colorado State Rep. Tom Massey, R-60, after visiting Educare of Denver

An Integrated Strategy

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 Pritzker Children’s Initiative; the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; and the Irving Harris Foundation.