

EDUCARE

Children from low-income families typically enter kindergarten 12 to 14 months behind the national average in pre-reading and language skills. California is ranked 29th in the nation for the percentage of children in poverty. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, 43 percent of children in 2009 lived in low-income families, defined as an income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Economically disadvantaged children often grow up in stressful environments that can impede their cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Drawing on Educare

The Educare model was first established in 2000. Currently, there are 13 Educare centers in 10 states. Educare promotes school readiness by implementing programs that reduce the achievement gap in children ages 0 to 5. Educare targets disadvantaged children and their families, including children from low socioeconomic backgrounds who are less likely to attend high-quality preschool programs.

First 5 California is part of a public-private partnership that has committed to establishing California's first Educare center in Silicon Valley, with a second center to follow in Los Angeles.

Educare is a research-based program that helps to prepare young at-risk children for school by providing early learning experiences that boost children's outcomes. Educare bases its program on partnerships between public and private sectors, knitting together available funding for services to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers and their families. Educare builds upon a foundation of federal and state-funded early learning programs to provide developmentally appropriate services to children, using research-based practices to continually raise program quality. Preliminary data from the national evaluation of Educare shows promising results in promoting school readiness in at-risk young children.

Moving Educare "Beyond the Walls"

The guiding principles of the Educare model and the structural features necessary to achieve its promising practices build on existing early learning programs as a foundation. In California, this includes First 5 California's Power of Preschool program, Head Start, and Early Head Start. Incorporating these guiding principles and structural features into the design of the Child Signature Program (CSP) provides First 5 California with an opportunity to validate and/or augment existing efforts to improve quality learning standards and child outcomes throughout the state. These structural components and guiding principles are intended to facilitate child-centered, family-focused systems of care that are built on community partnerships and continually improved through ongoing evaluation and improvement. To that end, the CSP will focus on incorporating the most promising features of Educare (listed below) to develop a viable program model that can be implemented in California's diverse early care and education landscape.

- 1. Use of research-based practices and strategies for prenatal through age five services, including use of a data system that supports continuous program improvement and individualized planning for children and families:** High quality early care and education programs use research-based practices shown to produce gains in children’s developmental outcomes. However, expected gains are not achieved when effective models are implemented incompletely or poorly. Regular collection and use of data has been shown to facilitate proper implementation of research-based practices, measure progress towards desired outcomes in real time, and optimize program design and implementation through ongoing quality improvement.
- 2. Small class size and high staff / child ratios (3:8 for ages 0-3 and 3:17 for ages 3-5):** Staff to child ratio (the number of children assigned to one caregiver) and small class size (the number of children per classroom) are used by programs, including Educare, as proxies for enriching and engaging teacher-child interactions. Research shows that when child-to-staff ratios are low, teachers are more likely to engage with children in a responsive and supportive manner. Uniformly defined ratios do not exist across programs, despite recommendations by various national and state early childhood programs, professional organizations, and research and policy entities. The staff to child ratios proposed for the CSP will build upon existing standards delineated by early childhood education entities with a strong presence in California (i.e., Head Start).
- 3. High staff qualifications and intensive staff development:** Formal specialized education and ongoing monitoring and professional development for early education staff have been shown to be associated with higher levels of program quality, effective teaching practices, and improved outcomes for children. Embedding expectations for and support of teacher education and ongoing training into the CSP expansion will support a link between the CSP and First 5 California’s Teacher Signature Program (CARES Plus).
- 4. Continuity of care for groups of students across multiple years:** Continuity of care occurs when a child remains with the same primary caregiver and/or team of caregivers for an extended period of time. Educare uses this component as a means of facilitating supportive teacher-child relationships. Research shows that these relationships are essential to quality care and are linked to a host of positive child outcomes, through more positive teacher-child interactions, greater trust between teachers and parents, and greater security within the teacher-child relationship. Given that relationships are the foundation of early learning, the CSP is committed to identifying strategies for strengthening teacher-child relationships.
- 5. On-site family support and strong parent engagement:** Parent-child relationships provide the foundation for children’s social-emotional development and early learning. While no singular model of family support has been identified in the

literature as most effective in improving family engagement and outcomes, they share a common goal to enhance parents' capacities to support children's learning and development. Early childhood programs that provide family support services have been shown to enhance parent-child relationships and achieve improved outcomes for children and parents. Incorporating support for families into the CSP reinforces First 5 California's commitment to supporting parents as a child's first teacher. This feature aligns CSP efforts with First 5 California's Parent Signature Program efforts and builds upon PoP program criteria to develop and maintain meaningful partnerships with parents.

- 6. Reflective practice and supervision for ECE teachers:** Reflective practice involves an experienced teacher or other staff member reflecting on problems that arise in the classroom with a less experienced teacher/staff member, and applying knowledge of research, theory, data, and past experience to devise and implement effective solutions. While research is not clear as to the most effective type of teacher supervision for enhancing children's outcomes, generally speaking, reflective supervision tends to promote a caregiver's sensitivity toward children and is linked to more effective teaching practices. Teacher-to-teacher reflective practice groups have had more success when they are led by a supervisor, which in Educare is the Master Teacher. Implementing promising models of reflective practice and supervision are avenues for the CSP to capture data on teacher instruction and student development to improve child outcomes.
- 7. Implement an interdisciplinary team approach in ECE settings, including use of mental health and other professionals:** An interdisciplinary approach to early childhood intervention recognizes that children's and families' needs are complex and require knowledge and expertise from multiple resources and disciplines. Effective teams of supervisors, teachers, family support staff members, and other support staff members are built on-site. At the same time, external links to off-site support services are created with a view toward building sustainable and scalable service models in California. Although challenging in practice, this approach promotes the integration and coordination of services, employs a holistic approach to supporting children and families, and encourages systemic approaches to care. To incorporate a successful interdisciplinary model into the CSP, it is necessary to leverage service and funding partnerships with the broader early care and education community, including health, mental health, disability services, and the K-12 education system.
- 8. Focus on language and literacy in the ECE curriculum:** Research shows that the development of early language and literacy skills predicts later school success. Continued emphasis on language and literacy coupled with consideration of California's culturally and linguistically diverse population provides an opportunity for the CSP to promote and measure quality instructional practices that are linked to language abilities and later school success.

- 9. Focus on social-emotional development in the ECE curriculum:** There is strong consensus in the field of early childhood care and education that social-emotional development provides the foundation for learning and is linked to later school success. By augmenting existing efforts to address social-emotional development in the classroom setting and in the curriculum, the CSP will reinforce the emphasis placed on this developmental domain by the early childhood community and promote consistent measurement of child progress toward social-emotional goals.
- 10. Focus on numeracy and problem-solving in the ECE curriculum:** Logic and reasoning skills are an essential part of child development and early learning, and early math skills are predictive of later academic success. Continued emphasis on numeracy and problem solving provides the CSP with an opportunity to explore, promote, and measure the influence of quality instructional practices that support these skills, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse learners.
- 11. Integrating the arts into the ECE curriculum:** There is some evidence that integrating the arts into program curriculum supports the development of academic and social-emotional skills. Incorporating the arts into the CSP may also provide a means of enhancing classroom quality and identifying instructional strategies to address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students.
- 12. Start Early - Coordination with prenatal services:** Research has established the importance of maternal health and well-being in promoting children's positive outcomes. Early experiences set the stage for educational and social outcomes throughout childhood and into adulthood. In addition, children who begin quality early childhood programs early show the greatest gains in school readiness. To that end, the CSP will focus on deepening relationships with Early Head Start, home visiting, and other programs that promote maternal and child health and well-being. Establishing early relationships with families in vulnerable circumstances will enable the CSP to promote greater linkage to and continuity in service systems for children birth through age five.