

## 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.