

2013-
2021

EDUCARE NEW ORLEANS: EIGHT YEAR PROGRESS REPORT

Prepared for the Educare New Orleans Leadership Team

By the Local Evaluation Partner, Tulane University



Educare Overview

Educare is a national network of programs that utilize an evidence-based model that works to ensure children from at-risk families have access to effective early learning, thereby preparing them for long-term academic success. Educare's practices are rooted in their Theory of Change model, which is based on four core components: data utilization, embedded professional development, high-quality teaching practices and intensive family engagement.

- **Data Utilization:** Each school that enters the Educare network forms a research program partnership (RPP) with a qualified local evaluation partner (LEP). Data on individual and overall classroom performance and learning are collected from each school and reported back to the LEP for analysis. The LEP then provides feedback to the parents and teachers for classroom improvements. The data collected through the Educare teams can also be utilized to advance policy initiatives.
- **Embedded Professional Development:** Educare aims to foster continuous professional improvement through intensive staff development that ensures the highest standard of early childhood education. Interdisciplinary approaches are used to ensure children receive a comprehensive early education plan. Additionally, reflective practice and supervision is implemented for constant improvement throughout the duration of the program.
- **High Quality Teaching Practices:** Educare fosters high quality teaching practices to ensure academic success. Such practices include providing full-day, full-year services and maintaining high staff-child ratios and small class sizes. Additionally, the Educare curriculum is focused on skills that involve language and literacy, social-emotional development, early math concepts, problem-solving, and motor development. By focusing on classroom education and positive interactions, Educare focuses on instruction that is child-initiated, rather than merely teacher-directed.
- **Intensive Family Engagement:** Coupled with the classroom education, family engagement is crucial to the success of the child in the program. Educare Schools work to generate outcomes highlighted in the Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework. There is a particular focus on promoting the parent-child relationship, the parents' critical role in the emotional and cognitive development of their child and supporting the parent as an effective advocate on behalf of their child's education. Educare offers On-Site Family Support Services as well as Early Head Start services to pregnant women and newborns. In doing so, Educare tries to foster a strong relationship between parent and child as early as possible.

Executive Summary

Investment in early childhood education has been shown to drive success in school and life, with better education, economic, health and social outcomes such as crime, income, IQ, schooling, and the increase in caregiver's income. High-quality and child-centered early childhood education, particularly among disadvantaged children, has been shown to result in a 13% return on investment per child, per annum, through lower societal costs, including remedial education, health and criminal justice system expenditures and increase self-sufficiency and productivity among families.¹

Educare New Orleans has made great strides in early childhood outcomes. For example, during their time at Educare, there is a 54% increase in common early language assessment scores in children overall and, among children who started below average, there is a 30% increase to average or higher on a common early language assessments. Moreover, there is a 16% increase in language assessment scores among children who started below average and had been in the Educare program for less than 1 year.

Additionally, family-level outcomes, essential to a two-generational approach, are at the heart of Educare's state-of-the-art programming. Parent employment has remained relatively stable over the past eight years although unemployment is at 23% overall. There continue to be increases in parent expectations for their child to graduate from college or attend graduate or professional school, reaching almost 93% over the past eight years. Over the years the level of social capital among parents, including relationships with other parents and reported social supports, increased over time indicating that Educare New Orleans may have assisted parents in creating social support networks (note: there was a slight decrease in social capital over the past 2019/20 year, which may in part be contributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing guidelines).

At the classroom-level, outcomes are measured using The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®), an observation instrument that assesses the quality of teacher-child interactions in center-based preschool classrooms. On the CLASS measure, Educare New Orleans has surpassed both Orleans Parish and Louisiana state scores in the *Emotional Support* and *Classroom Organization* domains and is on par in the *Instructional Support* domain in their Pre-K classrooms. In their toddler classrooms, Educare New Orleans has surpassed both Orleans Parish and Louisiana averages for the *Engaged Support for Learning* domain and is on par for the *Emotional and Behavioral Support* domain. Compared to Educare nationally, Educare New Orleans performs at or just below CLASS measures at other sites.

The reach of Educare New Orleans goes beyond the walls of Educare by prioritizing changing parenting norms and through its Gulf Coast Teacher Training Academy, which trains early childhood professionals throughout the city and the Gulf South Region. Despite successes in these areas, societal-level factors continue to impede Educare's efforts to help parents reach every goals. For example, approximately 22% of parents surveyed annually report that they worry about food running out. Furthermore, approximately 4-8% of families in any given year experienced homelessness in the past year. Long-term enrollment in Educare is also key for child and family success, yet the majority (87%) of children in the program are only enrolled for 1-2 years while only 13% are enrolled for 3-4 years and less than 1% complete the 5-year program. These trends are common across all other Educare schools.

¹ Heckman, James J. "Invest in early childhood development: Reduce deficits, strengthen the economy." *The Heckman Equation* 7 (2012).

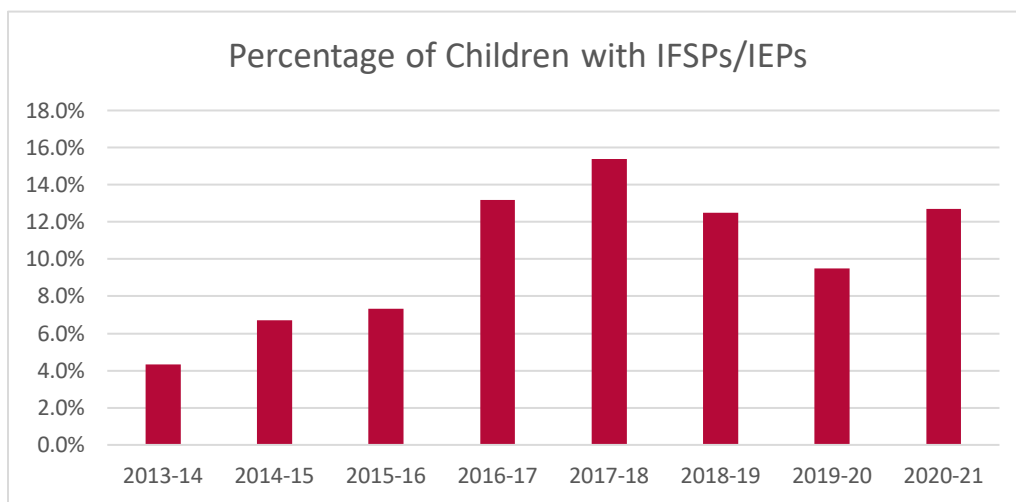
Below are detailed examples of key characteristics and outcomes over the seven-year period, organized within a two-generational framework: early childhood education, post-secondary and employment pathways, social capital, health and well-being, and economic supports for families.

Early Childhood Education

DOCUMENTED INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLANS

Children under the age of five who need assistance to perform at a similar developmental level as other children their age may receive one of two types of individualized education plans (otherwise known as disability plans): an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an Individualized Education Program (IEP). An IFSP is created for children three years old and younger to help them meet certain age-appropriate expectations. An IEP is designed to ensure that children, ages three and older, set and reach learning goals while receiving necessary accommodations to function at their highest level within a public-school setting.

When Educare New Orleans first opened in 2013, a total of 4 children enrolled had documented individualized education plans (1 IFSP and 3 IEPs). During the first full year of data collection (2014-2015), the number of children with documented plans more than doubled to 11 (3 IFSPs and 8 IEPs). This past year (2020-21) Educare New Orleans served 24 children with individualized education plans (4 IFSP and 20 IEPs), *who comprised approximately 12.7% of the total student population*. The table below shows that the percentage of IEP students has grown over the years and Educare is currently serving almost twice as many IEP students in 2021-21 than they did when they first opened.



READING AT HOME

Each year, over 50% of Educare parents report reading to their child at least 3 times a week, while less than 5% of parents report not reading to their child at all in the past week. Among parents who completed more than one parent interview, almost half of all parents (47.5%) reported increasing daily reading within the first year of being enrolled at Educare New Orleans.

CHILD PROGRESS MEASURES

A primary goal of Educare New Orleans is to have 90% of children achieve school readiness by reaching language, social emotional and executive function benchmarks. Assessments currently administered include the Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA), Preschool Language Scale, Fifth Edition (PLS-5), Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Fourth Edition (PPVT-4), and Minnesota Executive Function Scale (MEFS).

Social Emotional Health

The Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) is a strength-based approach to measuring social-emotional skills. The assessment involves classroom teachers filling out a questionnaire regarding child's initiative or their ability to use independent thought and action to meet his or her needs; their ability to form positive relationships and the attachment a child has with adults in their life; and self-control or the child's ability to experience a range of emotions and express them appropriately.

Within the walls of Educare New Orleans, there have been demonstrable improvements in children's initiative, attachment, and self-control. For example, among children who have had more than one DECA:

- 14.5% of children had a behavioral problem score at baseline
 - Among the 14.5% of children who had a behavioral problem score at baseline, 56.4% no longer had a problem score at last assessment
- 22.4% of children had a protective factors problem score at baseline
 - Among the 22.4% of children who had a protective factors problem score at baseline, 57.6% no longer had a problem score at last assessment
- 21.8% of children had an attachment problem score at baseline
 - Among the 21.8% of children that had an attachment problem score at baseline, 72.7% no longer had a problem score at last assessment
- 24.6% of children had an initiation problem score at baseline
 - Among the 24.6% of children that had an initiative problem score at baseline, 54.6% no longer had a problem score at last assessment
- 18.2% of children had a self-regulation problem score at baseline
 - Among the 18.2% of children that had a self-regulation problem score at baseline, 57.3% no longer had a problem score at last assessment

For those children that have been enrolled in the program for two years or more and started below baseline on their initial assessment, 64.0% of them increased their averages scores to typical or above on the DECA.

Language & Vocabulary

The Preschool Language Scale, Fifth Edition (PLS-5) is an interactive and play based assessment of developmental language skills administered by the Tulane evaluation partner. It measures language through two subscales: auditory comprehension and expressive communication. In all years, among children who started below average at baseline, 38.4% increased auditory comprehension to average or higher and 36.2% increased expressive communication on the last assessment administered. For those children who have been enrolled in the program for two years or more, 39.0% of those who started below average increased their scores to average or higher. Across all years 84.1% of students scored within the normal range or above (≥ 85) on the PLS assessment overall.

The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Fourth Edition (PPVT-4) is a measure of receptive vocabulary administered by the Tulane evaluator. The PPVT measures children's ability to identify pictures based on words spoken to them. In all years, among children who started below average on the PPVT, 57.0% of children increased to average or higher on the last assessment given. For those who have been enrolled in the program for two years or more, 59.4% of those who started below average increased their scores to average or higher. Across all years 79.2% of all students scored within the normal range or above (≥ 85) on the PPVT assessment overall.

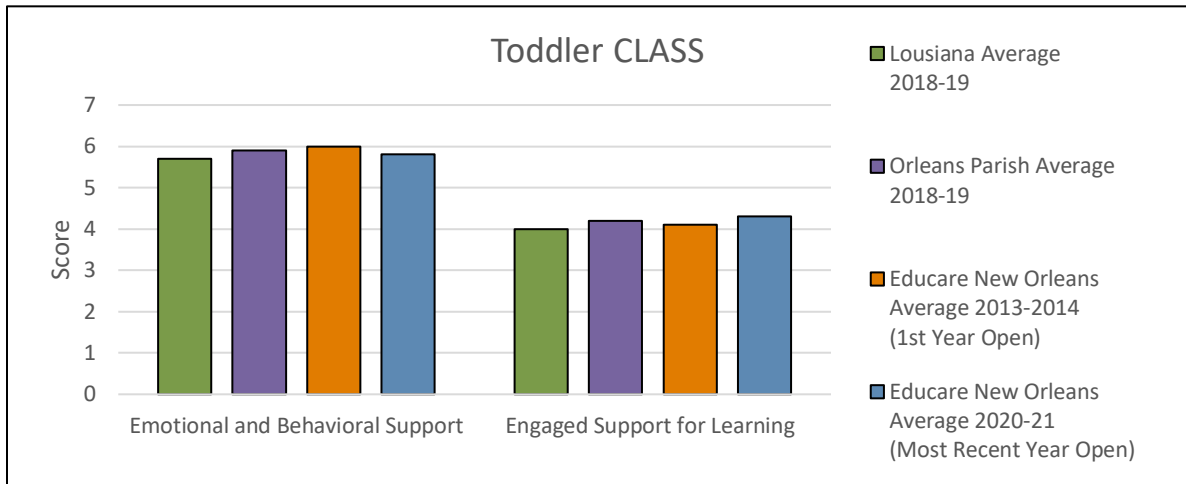
Executive Function

The Minnesota Executive Function Scale (MEFS) is an assessment of executive function administered on an iPad by the Tulane evaluator that measures three skills: cognitive flexibility, working memory, and inhibitory control. These skills help children think about something in different ways, hold information in their mind, and ignore distractions or impulses. The normed assessment has a mean standard score of 100, with a range of 85-115 considered meeting developmental expectations. MEFS has been administered for the past four years and was implemented as part of the Mindfulness & Mastery Acceleration grants from the University of Nebraska Medical Center and the Buffet Early Childhood Fund. Across all years, on average 93.7% of children scored within the normal range or above on the MEFS assessment and are considered to be meeting expectations. For children that were enrolled in the program for two years or more, 81.3% of those who started below average increased their score to meeting or exceeding expectations on their last assessment.

CLASSROOM MEASURES

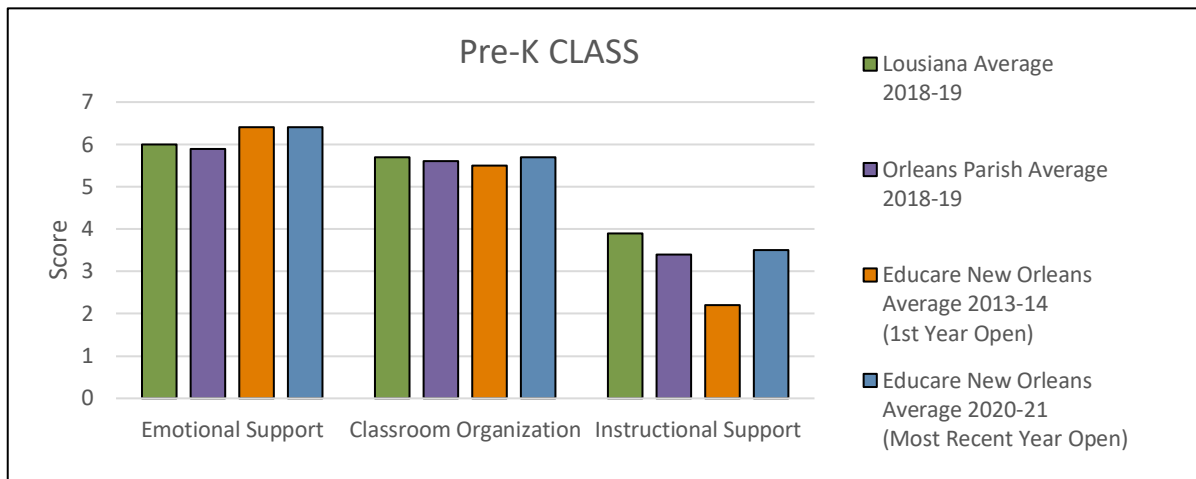
The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is a classroom observational measure that assesses the quality of instruction in the classroom and focuses on the interactions between students and teachers. CLASS observations are normally conducted in the fall and then again in the spring of each school year. In the 2020-2021 school year twelve observations were done in the fall and only four were collected in the spring.

The Toddler CLASS measure is used if most children in the classroom are between 18 and 36 months. Educare New Orleans has consistently scored on par on the Toddler CLASS with the Louisiana State and Orleans Parish averages. Scores on the Emotional and Behavioral Support and the Engaged Support for Learning measure have remained stable across the eight years the site has been open (see chart below).



* Each subscale is scored 1 to 7, with 7 being the highest quality.

The Pre-K CLASS is used if most children in the classroom are over 36 months. Since opening in 2013, Educare New Orleans has consistently scored on par or higher in Emotional Support and Classroom Organization than the Orleans Parish and Louisiana State public school averages for these measures (see chart below). In 2013, Educare New Orleans scored lower for Instructional Support. Through professional development and coaching over the last eight years, Educare New Orleans has increased their average Instructional Support by 59% since opening. Educare is now on par with both the Orleans Parish average and with the Louisiana average in all three domains.



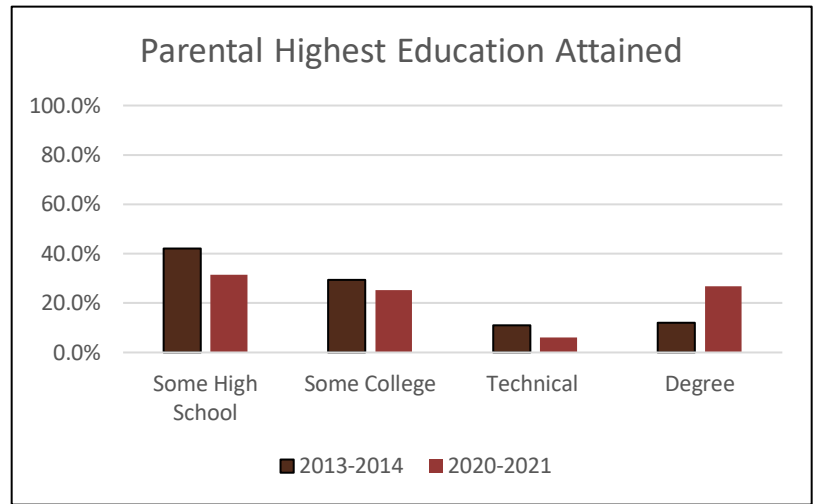
* Each subscale is scored 1 to 7, with 7 being the highest quality.

Post-Secondary & Employment Pathways

PARENT EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT

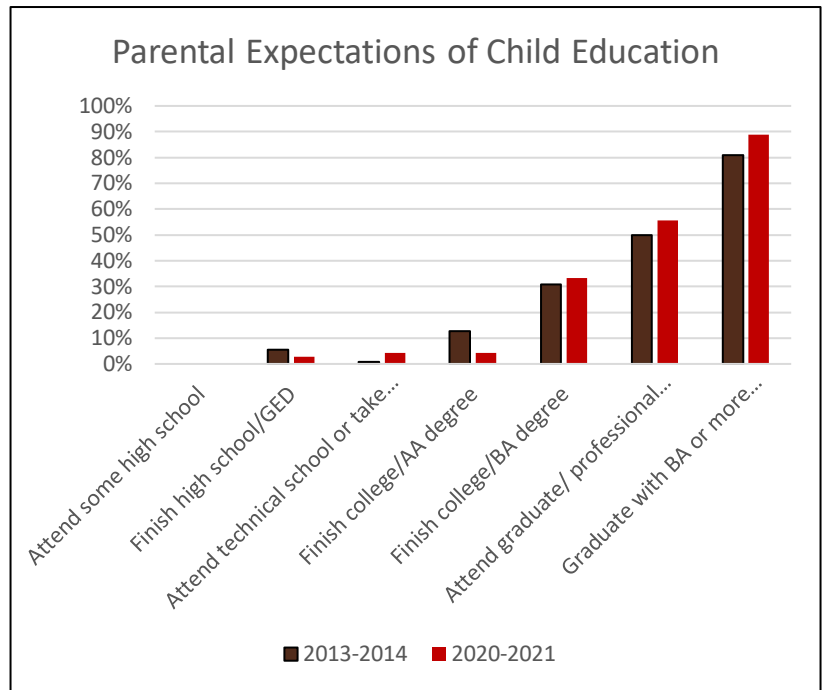
In the years since Educare New Orleans opened the majority of parents have had high school diplomas and/or some college. However, in the 2020-21 school year, there were more parents who had a college degree (Associate, Bachelor, Master, or Doctoral) (26.9%) than in 2013-14 (the first year at Educare New Orleans). Since 2013, nearly a quarter of parents (23.4%) have been enrolled in school annually.

The percentage of caregivers in the workforce has stayed relatively stable over the past seven years, with approximately 72% of caregivers who are currently in the workforce, working part-time, full-time or seasonally. However, the percentage of full-time employment dropped by 8.5% from 2019/20 (prior to the pandemic) to 2020/21. The percentage of those no longer in the workforce rose by almost 5% in that same time (from 6.8% in 2019/20 to 11.9% in 2020/21). As a result of the employment climate in New Orleans, many of Educare families rely on both the formal and informal economy to support themselves. Efforts to increase employment must be sensitive to the unique employment opportunities available in this city and should focus on both job training and increasing educational attainment.



PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS FOR CHILD EDUCATION

Research shows that education can be a strong predictor in economic mobility.² Family Advocates assist parents with goal setting and redefining success for both themselves and their children. Since 2013, more than 80% of Educare parents each year expect their child to graduate with a bachelor's or more advanced degree.



² The Aspen Institute. "Children & Families at the Center". (2017).

Social Capital

Social capital is a key factor in the success of the two-generation model and can be attained through peer support; contact with family, friends, and neighbors; participation in community; social networks; and much more.³ Since 2016, parents have been asked to identify their social supports and how helpful these individuals or groups have been in the past 3 to 6 months in raising a young child. There has been little difference year to year. Parents consistently identified the following individuals or groups as the most helpful and supportive:

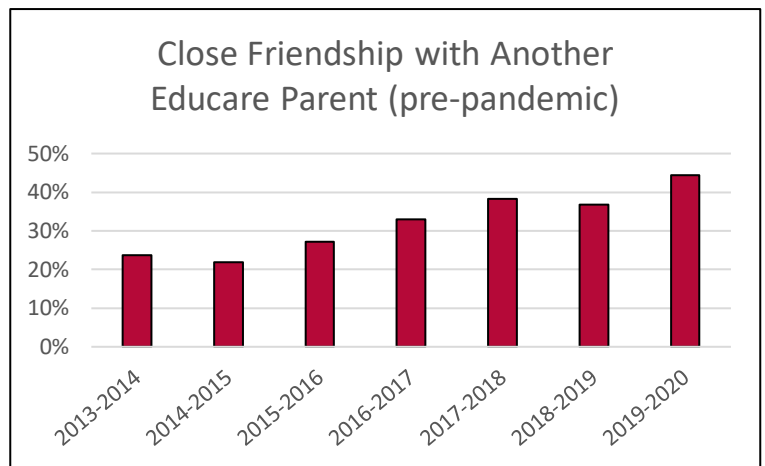
Types of Social Supports Parents Find Most Helpful in Descending Order, 2016-2021

Types of Support	Who is included
Kinship	Parents, Relatives
Spouse/Partner	Partner, Partner’s Parents, Partner’s Relatives
Professional	Child’s Physician, Early Childhood Intervention Program, Professional Helpers, Professional Agencies
Informal	Friends, Partner’s Friends, Other Parents, My Children, Church
Programs/Organizations	Co-workers, Parent Groups, Social Groups, School/Child Care Center

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS AND FACILITATION CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN EDUCARE PARENTS

In 2015, Educare New Orleans set a Family Engagement goal to have 25% or more of parents report close friendships with other Educare parents. Educare New Orleans has exceeded this goal every year since 2015: an average of 31% of parents reported a close friendship with one or more Educare parents (see chart below). Just prior to the pandemic shutdown of schools in the spring 2020, 44% of parents reported a close friendship with another Educare parent, an all-time high. At that time, 38.4% of parents reported that they had a conversation with another parent at least 1-2 times a week and 28.8% said they had 3-7 conversations with other parents per week.

There are several ways in which parents were able to develop friendships with other Educare parents: conversing during pick up and drop off, while volunteering in the classroom, during classroom-based activities or events, and at parent meetings. In order to help curb the transmission of COVID-19, school operating procedures did not allow for these in-person activities, leaving few opportunities for parents to interact with each other at school. Educare has made great strides to facilitate parent conversations and it is most certain that they will continue to do so as pandemic related restrictions placed on schools lessen in the future.

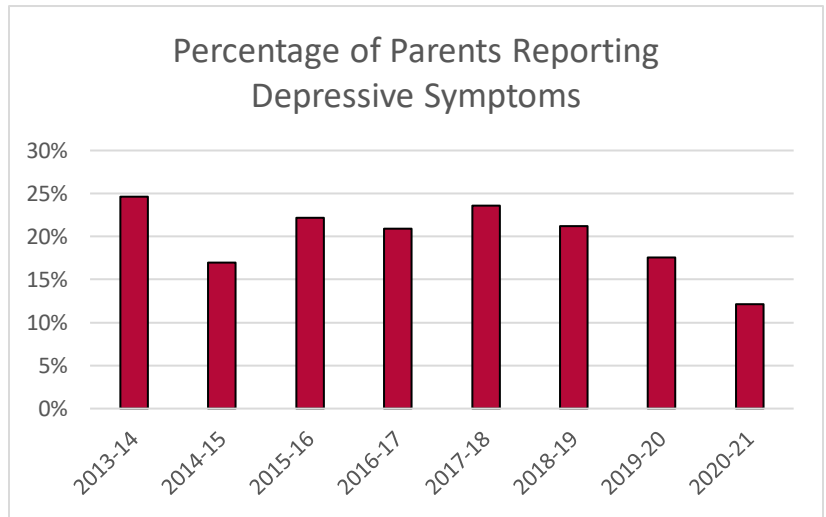


³ The Aspen Institute. "What is 2Gen?" <https://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/two-generation/what-is-2gen/>

Health & Wellbeing

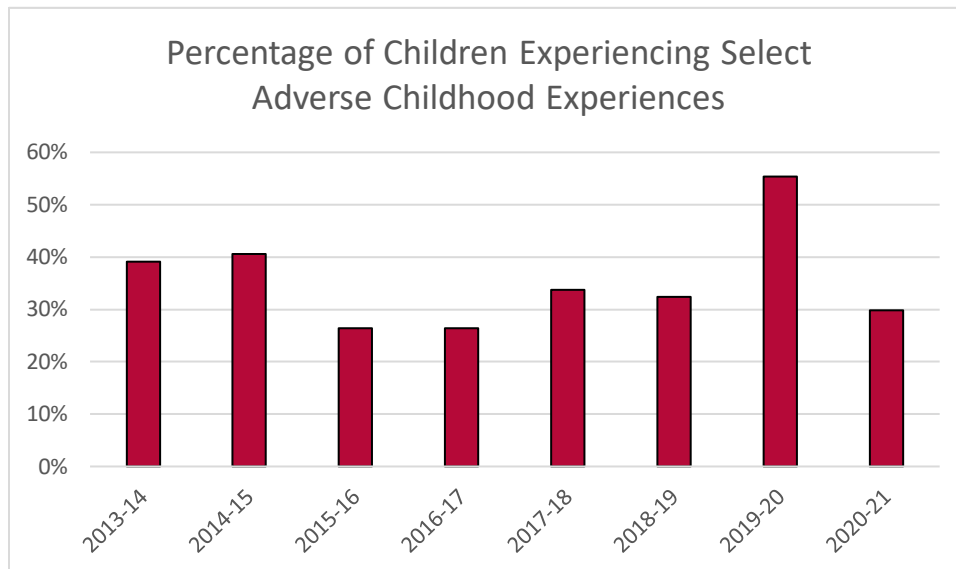
DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS

Since the opening of Educare New Orleans in 2013, on average one in five parents (21.0%) reported depressive symptoms each year. In 2020-21, the percentage of parents reporting depressive symptoms reached its lowest rate at 12% (see chart). The lower rate of depressive symptoms reported in 2020-21 was unexpected given the ongoing stress of the pandemic but still in line with positive gains in seen in other parent outcomes. For example, in an open ended question on the effects of the pandemic some parents wrote about the positive effects of spending more time with their child(ren) and when asked how their parenting was affected by the pandemic, 61.2% said it made it better.



ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

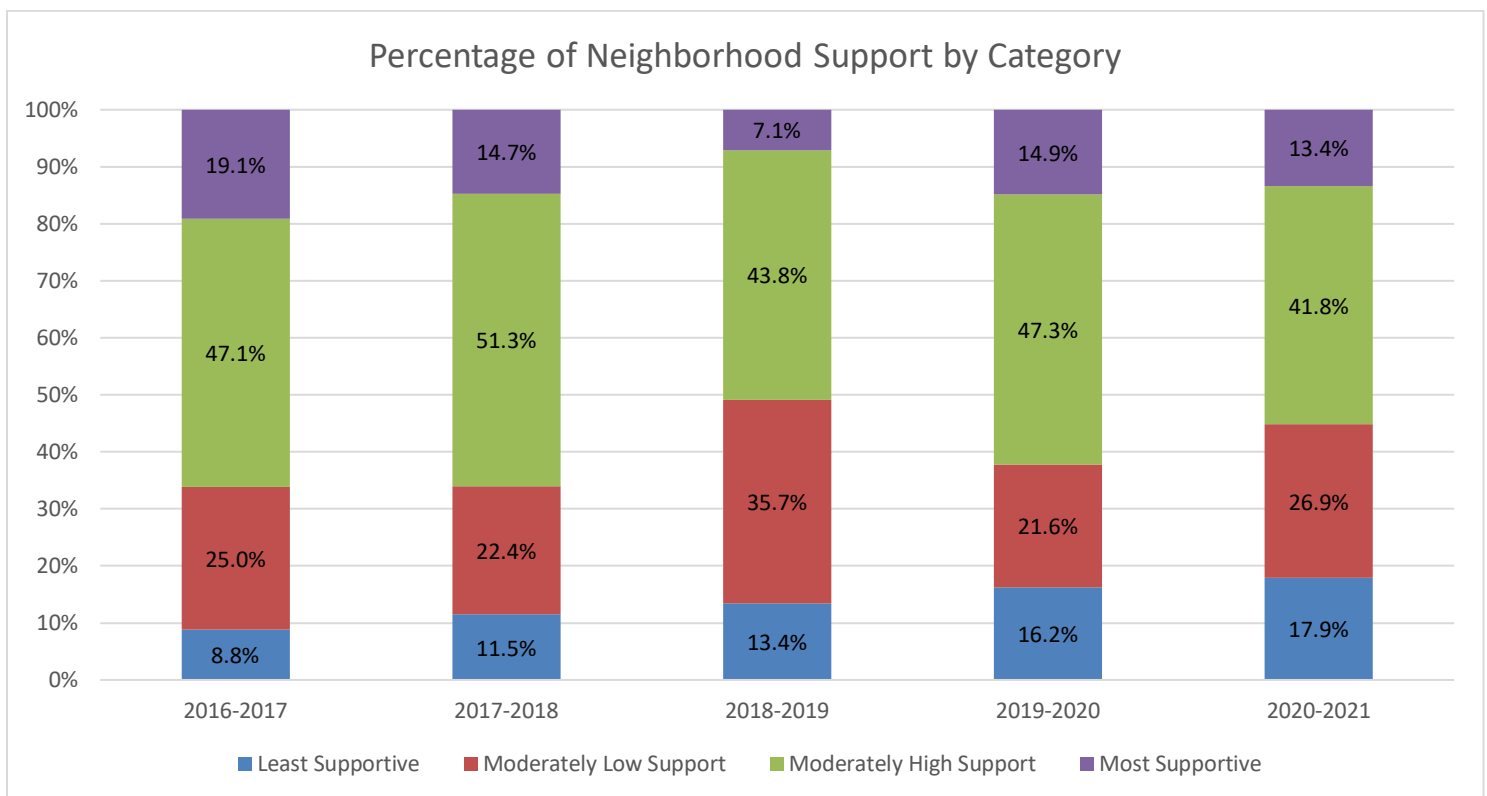
On average, 30% of families report their child experienced or witnessed violent crime, domestic violence, incarceration of a loved one or the death of someone important to them in the past year. Looking at the chart below, changes from year to year are probably due to the introduction of new families rather than significant differences in the experiences of existing Educare families.



PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

Research shows that both parental neighborhood perceptions and objective measures of neighborhood safety are strong predictors of child behavioral outcomes. The quality of social relationships between community members can directly affect social-emotional development in children, particularly attachment, even if there is a perceived lack of neighborhood safety among parents. In the 2020-21 school year, most Educare families reported their neighborhoods were safe. Approximately 56.7% of parents reported “Definitely Agree” that their children are safe in their neighborhood, and 43.9% reported “Definitely Disagree” that there are people in their neighborhood who are bad influences.

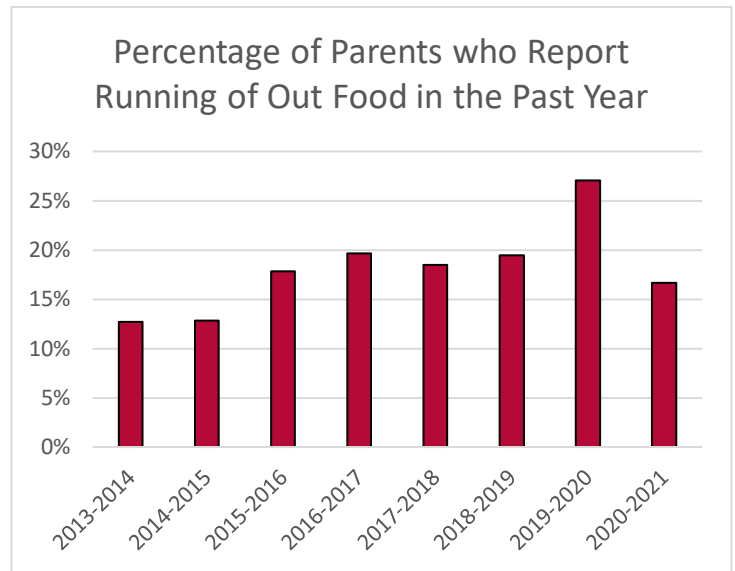
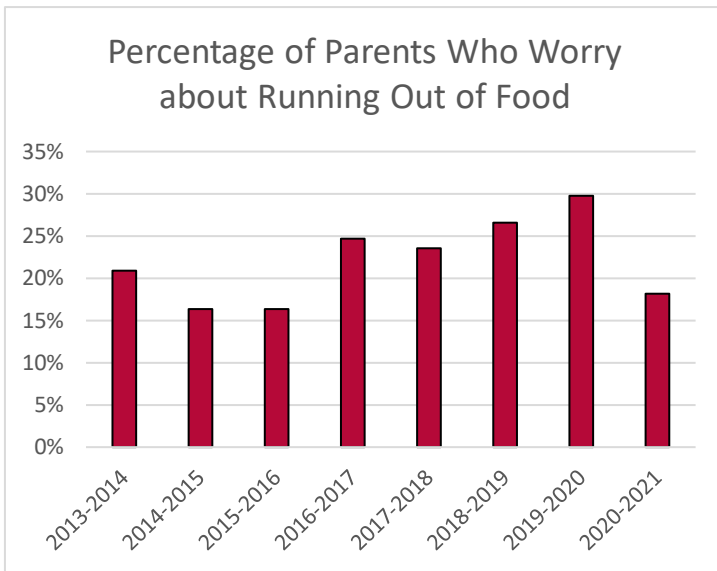
Using an adapted neighborhood support scale⁴, from 2016-2021, a plurality of Educare New Orleans families lived in Moderately High Support neighborhoods (41.8%-51.3%). Those living in Most Supportive Neighborhoods averaged to 16.7%. Those living in Least Supportive neighborhoods averaged 12.6% and increased each year from 8.8% in 2016 to 17.9% in 2021.



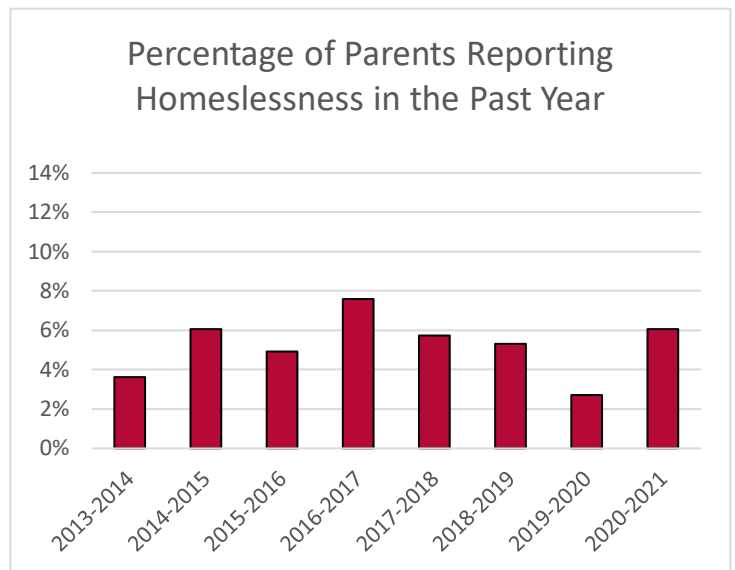
⁴ Adapted from the National Survey of Children’s Health 2003

Economic Supports

On average, about one-fifth of Educare New Orleans parents (22%) reported they were worried about running out of food each year, and 19% did run out of food at some point. Food insecurity was highest just prior to the start of the pandemic. Educare Family Support Staff worked with families to make sure they had access to food resources during the pandemic shut-down, for instance parents received grocery delivery and could pick up food and snacks for their kids at Educare once a week. The percentage of parents who worried about running out of food was the lowest it has been in five years in 2020-2021, the percentage of parents who ran out of food was down by 10% from the previous year, this could be in part due to the consistent support provided by Family Advocates throughout the pandemic.



Although the majority of Educare families have stable housing, on average, approximately 4%-6% of families experienced homelessness in a given year. The city is in the middle of an affordable housing crisis⁵ and homelessness may continue to be an issue.



⁵ HousingNOLA. "HousingNOLA 2019 Semi Annual Data Report". (2019)

Conclusion

There have been many positive changes seen within the two-generational framework since Educare New Orleans opened in the 2013-14 school year. There have been improvements in child outcome measures, classroom measures, parental expectations for child education, and social capital. When schools shifted to remote learning in the spring of 2020, Educare staff offered families supplies and learning support outside of the walls of Educare. Despite hardships brought on by the pandemic, Educare families reported fewer symptoms of depression and fewer families ran out of food in the past year. Continued investment in intensive family engagement remains vitally important as the Family Support Staff continue to connect families with services, including medical, food, housing, and behavioral health.