

# **DATA DRIVEN PRACTICE: USING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT DATA TO INFORM INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AT EDUCARE OF WASHINGTON, D.C**



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***I dedicate this paper to my father, Timothy Sorge, whom I lost in the first year of my doctoral studies. No one was more excited to call me Dr. Sorge, and I know every time I am addressed as such he will be looking down and beaming with pride.***

***I miss you every day, Dad!***

**My deep appreciation to:**

*My LLO Cohort 2 colleagues, for our community of support, encouragement and humor that got us to this point.*

*Vanderbilt LLO Faculty, including my advisor, Tracey Armstrong, for your dedication to us and everything you have taught us.*

*My former and current colleagues and mentors for your constant support and confidence in me.*

*My former teachers for all my years of schooling. Thank you for instilling a love of learning and scaffolding my knowledge and curiosity from elementary school to EDHS to GWU!*

*Educare DC for allowing me to come back home for this project.*

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**My sincere thanks and love to:**

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*My sister, my partner in crime since day one, for supporting everything I have ever attempted (even the crazy stuff) and for always being my best friend.*

*My mother who sincerely believes I can do anything. Inheriting your green eyes and patient, gentle spirit undoubtably got me here today.*

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*My brothers for keeping me grounded and making sure I'm not taking myself too seriously, while always following those things up with, "I love you" and "I'm proud of you."*

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## Key Terms

Term:	Definition:
<b>Family Engagement</b>	The systematic inclusion of families in activities and programs that promote children’s development, learning, and wellness, including in planning, development, and evaluation <sup>1</sup> . (Also mentioned as “Parent Engagement”)
<b>Family Engagement Specialist (FES)</b>	Specialist role at Educare DC that maintains relationships with a caseload of Educare DC Families, including providing resources, making connections and informing parents on services provided by Educare DC.
<b>Family Child Review (FCR)</b>	Multi-disciplinary review meetings conducted at Educare DC to discuss both family and child goals and challenges.
<b>Family Partnership Agreement (FPA)</b>	Process in which family engagement staff and families review individual progress, revise goals and evaluate and track whether goals are met. <sup>2</sup>
<b>Family Needs Assessment</b>	Required by Head Start during enrollment of a child and intake of a family, this document identifies a family’s strengths and needs in areas of family well-being, parent-child relationships, family’s connections to community and leaders and family transitions.

<sup>1</sup>Definition retrieved from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Website: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/fei/definition/#:~:text=Family%20engagement%20refers%20to%20the,planning%2C%20development%2C%20and%20evaluation.>

<sup>2</sup> This is required by Head Start Programs: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-52-family-partnership-services>

## Executive Summary

Educare of Washington, D.C. (Educare DC) is a birth to age five school serving low-income families in the District of Columbia. Educare DC seeks to close the achievement gap for children in poverty through comprehensive education, health and family services for children in the district. The school builds on the Head Start model of comprehensive services to children and families, and provides a full-day, year-round program for 160 children in Washington, D.C.<sup>3</sup> Educare DC is a part of a larger system of Educare schools called the Educare Learning Network.

Although Educare DC is collecting data from families in multiple ways, including twice a year through the research partnership with the University of Maryland, the data is not always effectively being utilized by teachers in the classroom. The data is being used in other ways, such as to inform family engagement practices by the family support team and to feed up to a national Educare study. But classroom teachers are not consistently using the data to inform their instruction and may not have proper access to this data due to data sharing issues.

Research has shown (Bruckman & Blanton, 2003; DeLoatche, Bradley-Klug, Ogg, Kromrey & Sundman-Wheat, 2015; Hindman, Miller, Froyen, & Skibbe, 2012) that family engagement can significantly improve outcomes for children in early care and education (ECE) programs, particularly for children from low-income families. Research has also been done in the kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) space, and some in the ECE space, around family engagement data utilization by teachers. In addition to the research base, Educare's national model also includes both an emphasis on family engagement, as well as an emphasis on data utilization. With this model as the standard under which Educare DC is operating, the problem of practice is focused on where the breakdown in this model may be occurring with regard to optimizing access to and utilization of family engagement data.

Using the existing literature as a foundation, this study sought to understand the perceptions of families, teachers and family engagement staff with regard to family engagement data, with a focus on optimizing family engagement data utilization in the classroom. The intent of this study was a better understanding of family engagement data by three key stakeholder groups at Educare DC: families, teachers, and family engagement staff. Through conducting focus groups of these three stakeholder groups, this study sought to answer the following questions with findings and recommendations.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.educaredc.org/about/>

## Research Questions:

1. *How is family engagement data currently being utilized by family engagement staff and teachers?*
2. *To what extent could family engagement data be better facilitated by teachers and family engagement staff to improve child and family outcomes?*
3. *What factors are inhibiting the sharing of family engagement data between various stakeholders?*

***Finding 1: The role of Family Engagement Specialists at Educare DC is effectively meeting a specific need in gathering and utilizing family engagement data because of the trusted, responsive relationships between family engagement specialists and Educare DC families.***

Educare DC parents and teachers find the family engagement specialists extremely helpful in serving families in multiple ways. Educare DC families refer to the approachability and relatability of family engagement specialists and how important that is for sharing information that is pertinent to their child's education. Educare DC teachers also noted that parents feel more comfortable talking to family engagement specialist because they know that there is a lot of empathy in the relationship and parents are more likely to be open with their family engagement specialist.

***Finding 2: Both teachers and family engagement specialists at Educare DC are eager for more opportunities for data sharing since they acknowledge how important data are to informing their practice and relationship-building.***

Educare DC teachers and family engagement specialists expressed how important data sharing is to their work. Teachers spoke about specific instances in their classroom where having family engagement data was so helpful to improving their instructional practices in the classroom. They also mentioned times where data was not shared and how that affected the child in the classroom and how they planned for instruction.

***Finding 3: Educare DC's existing family engagement data and the systems in which this data is collected is helpful for all three stakeholder groups. However, data systems and data sharing could be improved.***

All three stakeholder groups referred to ways in which Educare DC collects family engagement data. Most references were to the forms and documents completed during enrollment (such



as the Family Needs Assessment) and during quarterly meetings between parents, teachers and/or family engagement specialists (such as Family-Child Reviews, home visits and parent meetings). Some references targeted more informal ways of collecting data such as the current use of Zoom meetings with parents at the beginning of the week to determine family needs for food, supplies and services.

***Finding 4: Educare DC has several systems and structures for data sharing among teachers, parents and family engagement specialists, but some are more effective than others, and COVID-19 has highlighted gaps in the existing systems.***

Teachers and Family Engagement Specialists noted that before COVID-19 began, it was easier to share most data by word of mouth because they saw each other often at the school. But, due to COVID-19 all three stakeholder groups are now more likely to use technology to communicate. Teachers expressed that the switch to virtual due to COVID-19 actually helped improve communication because everyone was forced to use a common platform and any breakdowns from forgetting to “catch someone in the hall” were alleviated by ensuring all information was entered into systems online. Teachers also said that parents are more likely to respond and communicate with them on their child’s progress since doing so in a virtual format is the only option and parents spoke about being grateful that teachers were providing so many resources and spending one-on-one time with them going over activities and goals for their child.

***Recommendation 1: Design a data sharing and data utilization system using Improvement Science and PDSA cycles of inquiry.***

***Recommendation 2: Implement the Data Sharing and Utilization System with Educare DC leadership’s support and train staff with fidelity on the new system.***

***Recommendation 3: Plan for on-going evaluation of family engagement data sharing and utilization systems to continuously improve.***

After enacting recommendations 1 and 2, Educare DC should plan for on-going evaluations of data sharing systems and data utilization in the classroom through plan, do, study, act (PDSA) cycles to ensure the recommendations are having a positive effect on child and family outcomes.



## Introduction

Educare of Washington, D.C. (Educare DC) is a birth to age five school for low-income families in the District of Columbia. Educare DC seeks to close the achievement gap for children in poverty through comprehensive education, health and family services for children in the district. The school builds on the Head Start model of comprehensive services to children and families, and provides a full-day, year-round program for 160 children in Washington, D.C.<sup>4</sup>

Children at Educare DC receive a nutritious breakfast, lunch, and snack each day, and spend the day receiving high-quality instruction from experienced and educated teachers. These teachers follow their children as they move classrooms and age groups through an evidence-based model called continuity of care (Essa et al., 1999). These teachers also have access to professional learning opportunities to grow their development as teachers while at Educare DC. Engaging families is another key component of the Educare model. Family engagement empowers parents as their child's first teacher and helps parents to develop skills to positively interact with their child.

Educare DC is a part of a larger system of Educare schools called the Educare Learning Network. There are 24 Educare Schools across the nation, and all are a part of a longitudinal study being conducted by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (FPG). Several studies have already been conducted using the Educare national data and have shown significant outcomes after just one year of being an Educare student (Yazejian, Bryant, Hans, Horm, St. Clair, File, & Burchinal, 2017). As a part of this larger study, data are often collected at Educare DC through their local evaluation partner (LEP), the University of Maryland. These data are fed upward to the FPG study and are used at Educare DC to improve practices in leadership, teaching and family engagement.

## Problem of Practice

Although Educare DC is collecting family engagement data on an on-going basis through family engagement specialists, and also several times a year from parents through a research partnership with the University of Maryland (UMD), the data are not being fully utilized by teachers in the classroom. The family engagement data that is collected is being used in other ways (such as to inform family engagement practices by the family engagement specialists team at Educare DC, and to feed up to the national Educare study), but Educare DC classroom teachers are not consistently using the family engagement data to inform their instruction or their interactions with families of the children in their classroom. The University of Maryland serves as Educare DC's research partner (also called the Local Evaluation Partner LEP) for the Educare National Study. Each Educare school across the Educare Network has an LEP that

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.educaredc.org/about/>

collects data multiple times throughout the year on several facets of Educare programs, including family engagement and classroom practices. This study focused primarily on family engagement data, including that collected by the LEP, and how the data were utilized by Educare DC staff, particularly by Educare DC teachers for instructional practices.

In addition to the data collected by the LEP, family engagement data is collected by Educare DC staff in several ways, including a Family Needs Assessment, Family Partnership Agreements, Family Child Reviews and both formal and informal communication between families, family engagement specialists and teachers. Family engagement specialists collect data through a family partnership agreement that is completed when the family enrolls their child at Educare DC. This agreement describes goals the family has for themselves and their child. The agreement also documents how Educare DC can help connect the family to services and resources that would be helpful, and how the family can interact closely with Educare DC staff to work toward meeting their goals collaboratively.

Family Child Reviews are on-going, interdisciplinary meetings of Educare DC staff to review goals of both the family and the child. The meetings consist of the assigned Educare DC teacher and family engagement specialist and their supervisors (the Family Engagement Director and Master Teacher). Additional Educare DC staff are invited depending on the family's needs and may include staff such as the Health Director, the Mental Health Consultant, or therapists. These reviews are now done bi-annually for every child but were historically only conducted if there was a known issue that needs to be addressed in a multi-disciplinary manner.

Lastly, family engagement data is collected by Educare DC staff both formally and informally daily. This can include more formal mechanisms such as direct questions from teachers and/or family engagement staff on things such as immediate needs (i.e., food security, housing security, etc.) or informally through conversations at drop-off and pick-up or conversations resulting from observed needs such as child clothing needs, transportation needs, etc. This informal and on-going data collection is the most common and the most responsive, but not always the most well-documented form of data on families.

Research has shown (Bruckman & Blanton, 2003; DeLoatche, Bradley-Klug, Ogg, Kromrey & Sundman-Wheat, 2015; Hindman, Miller, Froyen, & Skibbe, 2012) that family engagement can significantly improve outcomes for children in early care and education (ECE) programs, particularly for children from low-income families. Research has also been done in the kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) space, and some in the ECE space, around family engagement data utilization by teachers. This research has shown not only that using data in the classroom can lead to better outcomes for children (Katz & Earl, 2007), and that there are particular conditions that can lead to increasing teacher motivation to use data in the classroom, such as leadership's focus on data utilization and trusting relationships with other teachers around using data (Vanlommel, Vanhoof, & Van Petegem, P., 2016).

In addition to the research base, Educare’s national model<sup>5</sup> also includes both an emphasis on family engagement, as well as an emphasis on data utilization (see Figure 1). With this model as the standard under which Educare DC is operating, the problem of practice becomes focused on where the breakdown in this model may be occurring with regard to optimizing access to data, rather than how to set this model up for the school. Educare DC teachers are invested and involved in using data that are collected about their classroom practices regularly through the coaching model that has been set up at the school. However, the data that are collected by the same researchers on families are not being utilized by teachers in the classroom to improve instruction. This study explores to what extent existing data is not being shared/transferred and accessed among various stakeholders at Educare DC, including teachers, families, and family engagement staff. As explained in Figure 1, to achieve positive child and family outcomes, there must be connections between the intensive family engagement and high-quality teaching practices.

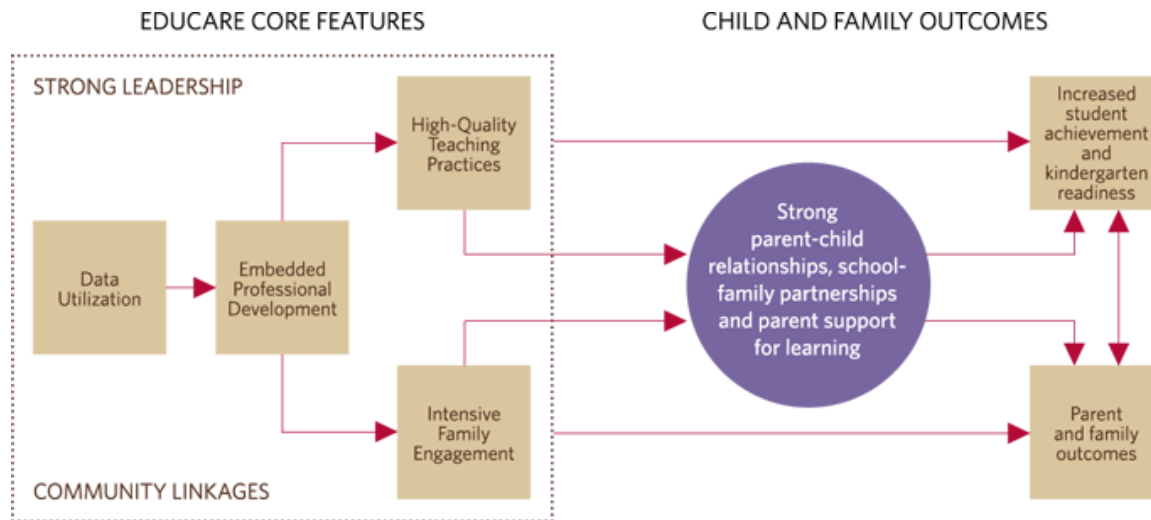


Figure 1 The Educare Model

<sup>5</sup> The Educare Model: <https://www.educareschools.org/our-approach/educare-model/>

# Literature Review

## Foundations of Family Engagement in Early Childhood

Family engagement in a child's education is a topic that is well documented in the literature and has been emphasized in early childhood for over 50 years. Beginning with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model of the developing child situated within spheres of influence starting with the school and family and extending out to policy and culture, families have been recognized as their child's first teacher. Research supports the importance of a strong relationship between child and caregiver, child and parent, and parent and caregiver (Howes & Hamilton, 1992), particularly for children from lower income backgrounds (Dearing, Kreider, & Weiss, 2008). With this as a basis for understanding the importance of both parent/family and teacher in a child's first five years of life, there is continued research that seeks to understand just how much this can have an effect on a child's academic, social and emotional outcomes.

Several studies using Head Start data have been conducted to better understand family engagement and parent-teacher interactions. Parent-teacher interactions have been found to lead to parents feeling more empowered to guide their child's learning and those parents who formed partnerships with educators feeling like they were better parents (Bruckman and Blanton, 2003). In comparing parent involvement across Head Start settings nationally, a randomized control study by DeLoatche, Bradley-Klug, Ogg, Kromrey and Sundman-Wheat (2015) found that family involvement could be increased through overlap with other community and school involvement, as well as a tailored focus on family backgrounds.

A review of existing literature on high-quality practices across disciplines, including family engagement and its associations with child and family outcomes, identified several key outcomes (Forry, Moodie, Simkin & Rothenberg, 2011). A provider (educator)'s attitude, knowledge and behavior were drawn out as the key items that influenced outcomes for children. The review also looked at the major positive effects on child, family, and provider outcomes when high-quality practices were used to improve provider/family relationships. Specifically, researchers found that positive effects from family engagement were found for a child's academic and cognitive skills (Dunst, 2002), including literacy (Roggman et al., 2008) and school readiness (Sheridan et al., 2010), and for a child's social emotional skills (Mendez, 2010; Reid et al., 2007). The authors also noted research that described improved family outcomes because of positive family-provider engagement (Kaczmarek et al., 2004; Tirvette et al., 2010).

## Funds of Knowledge

The Funds of Knowledge theory was developed to describe the particular knowledge, skills, artifacts, and other resources that families of all types possess in relation to child development (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). The funds of knowledge theory builds upon Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of development, which posits that social processes, including interactions with community and society, are the bases of cognition and that cognition cannot be separated from social interaction. Funds of knowledge provide a way to describe what each family is bringing into a school and what each child brings into the classroom.

The theory behind funds of knowledge is critical to this study because of how it relates to teaching in the classroom by using the data provided through family engagement to leverage funds of knowledge in classroom instruction. Funds of knowledge can vary because one's experiences and cultural background. Hogg (2011) noted that the funds of knowledge theory has been used to study early literacy instruction due to language differences for English language learners. Fundamentally, the use of funds of knowledge in the classroom strengthens what central research on family engagement already has highlighted: social relationships and mutual trust with families can lead to greater child success in the classroom and beyond (Gonzalez, Wyman & O'Connor, 2011).

## Data-Driven Practice: Data Use in the Classroom

There is another body of research around data use by teachers which directly informs this study. Data use for improving instructional practices has been explored and studied in early childhood settings and resulted in increased prevalence of coaches and professional learning communities. Snyder (2019) noted that instructional practices of teachers are highly informed by using the data provided to both teachers and their coaches. Data use in the classroom provides teachers the ability to improve their effectiveness through matching instructional strategies to the needs of students in their classroom (Gullo, 2013). And particularly relevant for this study, Van Lare (2016) found that using data to target specific "trouble spots" of students in the classroom led to better outcomes and a theory of "what works" best in their classrooms.

Particularly for children who may have experienced trauma, having the family engagement data could make a major difference in the teacher's social-emotional practices in the classroom and the use of trauma-informed care in the classroom. Cummings et al. (2017) noted that teachers need to make major changes in positive social and emotional responses around engaging in proper reactions for children who have experienced trauma, so using family engagement data in the classroom is vital for effectively serving these children. Often, young children who have experienced trauma will have behavioral problems in the classroom

(Bartlett, 2019), so ensuring teachers understand family engagement data can make a big difference on how teachers respond to children and plan for individualized instructional practices.

Research confirms the importance of data use for classroom instruction, and under which conditions data is used best by teachers. Data has been collected on the importance internal and external factors on teacher data use (Barnes et al., 2019). Teachers' beliefs about data have been found to influence how they use data in the classroom, but external factors, such as how school leadership views and promotes data usage by classroom teachers, impacted overall data use by teachers (Barnes et al., 2019). Similarly, a study conducted by Brawley and Stormont (2013) on teachers' perceptions of data in early childhood found that early childhood educators identified data practices as particularly important and valuable. This study noted the literature base around the importance of making data easily available for teachers so that it can be used to inform instructional decision making.

Motivation has been identified by research as a factor in teacher use of data in the classroom but there were several other factors effecting data use in the classroom, i.e., forming trusting relationships with other teachers using data and being able to talk with them about it, as well as having a school environment that promotes data use (Vanlommel, Vanhoof & Van Petegem, 2016). School Leadership establishing and promoting data use in the classroom and defining organizational conditions around using data also leads to increases in teacher use of data in the classroom (Anderson, Leithwood & Strauss 2010).

Another factor in increasing teacher use of data is professional development around how to effectively use data in the classroom. In 2017 study, Jimerson found that teachers had specific professional learning needs that needed to be met to effectively use data in the classroom for instructional purposes. Results from a study by Zweig, Irwin, Kook, and Cox (2015) supported the need for professional development for teachers, noting that with the array of additional data requirements place on early educators for accountability purposes, trainings on how to properly use and share data were needed. The literature's focus on the importance of the environment around data use indicates that data use in the classroom would improve if systems and processes were in place to encourage and promote it properly, including providing adequate professional development to staff.

Major studies already conducted on Educare schools offer more research context and insight surrounding data use by Educare teachers. The first, by Stein and Connors (2016), specifically explored Educare teachers' perceptions of data collection and use in their schools. Through a self-report method, the researchers found that two data use constructs were correlated: "Informed about Data" and "Data Use Practices." Since these were positively correlated, indicating that teachers who felt positive about data and those who use data were likely to occur together. Also, of note, both were correlated with better reflective supervision and positive interdisciplinary practice between other teachers, staff, and family support staff.

Literature on Educare schools has examined the relationship between Educare research partners, called local evaluation partners or LEPS, and Educare teachers and found that in

order for data collected by the LEP to be utilized in any way in the classroom, there needed to be strong relationships between LEP researchers and classroom teachers, adequate training for teachers on data utilization, and school directors ensuring data were being utilized (Guss, Norris, Horn, Monroe & Wolfe, 2012). Both Educare studies provide context for understanding the intersection of data usage and family engagement data in the Educare classroom.

Importantly for the problem of practice in this study, there is literature that addresses the barriers and breakdowns around data sharing that can impact data use in instructional classroom practices. Notably, a study of special education preschool teachers revealed how important teachers felt data collection and use in the classroom were, but that there were significant breakdowns in communication and collaboration around data when it came to other stakeholders such as therapists, aides, etc. (Sandall et al., 2004). Communication systems among team members were an important aspect that influenced data collection and data use in instructional practices and is relevant to the communication system needs around data collection and data use in classrooms at Educare DC.



## Conceptual Framework

Educare DC’s need for better parent engagement data use in the classroom to inform instruction was assessed through the conceptual framework on page 17. This framework is based on the ecological model of systems originally posited by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and extended by the work of Pianta and Walsh (1996) around the school-family relationship. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model places the child in the center of concentric circles that represent external spheres of influence called “systems.” Each ecological system represents an environment that influences the child at a different level – from close family and school life in the microsystem to distant influences in the macro and chronosystems such as cultural norms and governmental affairs.

Pianta and Walsh (1996) proposed that the ecology of schooling was about the “interactions and transactions among persons (parents, teachers, students), settings (home, school), and institutions (community, governments) that are oriented to support developmental and educational progress of students” (as cited in Downer & Myers, 2010, p. 4). Figure 2 presents an adaptation (as cited in Downer & Myers, 2010) of how Pianta and Walsh extended Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model. These ecological models have guided early childhood education since their inception because they emphasize the idea that a child does not develop in a vacuum, but rather with multiple spheres of influence and interactions in multiple systems and settings.

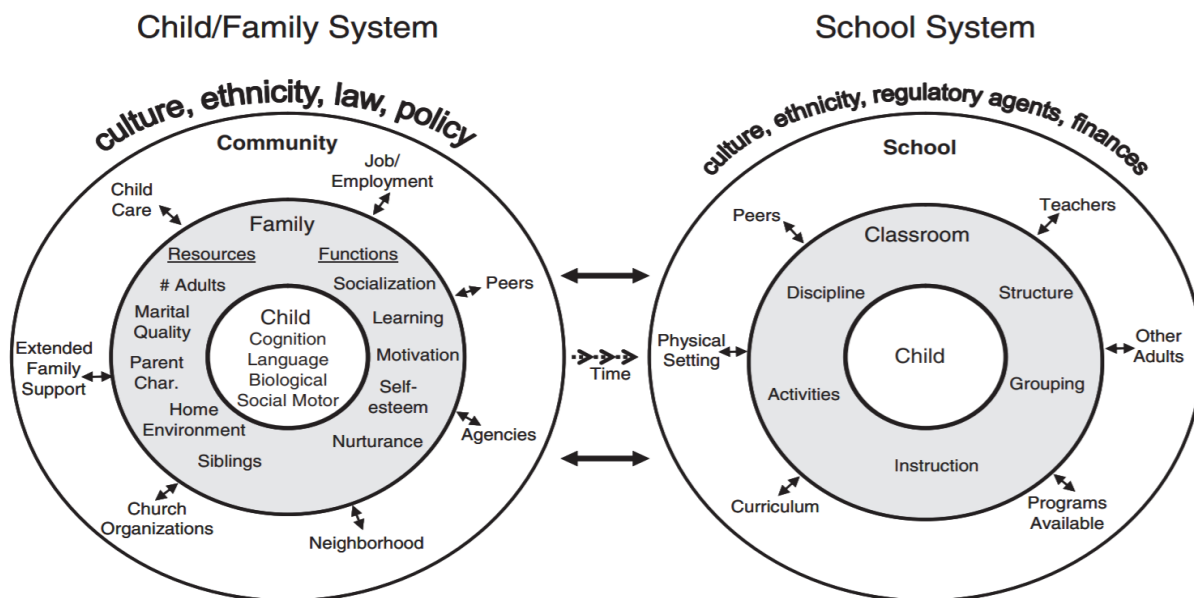


Figure 2 Extended Ecological Model from Pianta and Walsh (as adapted by Downer & Myers, 2010)

Creating the conceptual framework (see Figure 3) that mirrors ecological systems thinking was necessary to understanding Educare DC's problem of practice within multiple other systems, thus allowing the researcher to look at the problem of practice through several other systems level lenses. This framework outlines both concepts from the literature around evidence-based connections and practices, as well as systems level processes for improvement. The concepts described inside the circle are based in literature on how data sharing and data use in the classroom can lead to better child and family outcomes, which aligns with the Educare model. The outer circles describe a focus on how to share and utilize data and then use improvement science and systems thinking to guide Educare DC toward improvement. Both parts of the conceptual framework stress the interconnectivity and interdependence of the key stakeholders in this study: teachers, family engagement staff and families.

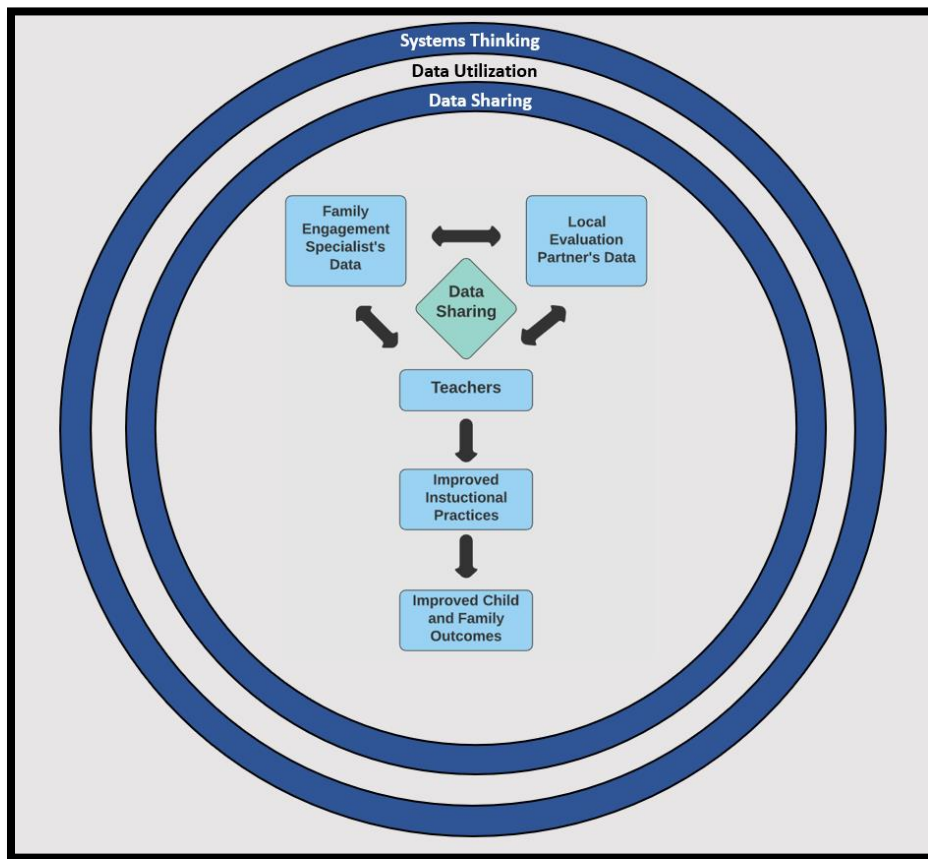


Figure 3 Conceptual Framework of Educare DC's Problem of Practice

## Evidence-based Use of Family Engagement Data in Instructional Practices

The content inside the inner circle of the conceptual framework (see Figure 4) represents the day-to-day use of family engagement data in the classroom. This is based on literature described in the preceding section. Beginning with the desired ultimate goal of improved child and family outcomes originating directly from the Educare model, literature has shown that family engagement and involvement in the classroom leads to positive effects on both child (Dearing, Kreider, & Weiss, 2008; Dunst, 2002; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Hindman, Miller, Froyen, & Skibbe, 2012; Rimm-Kaufman, Pinanta, Cox, & Bradley, 2003; Roggerman et al., 2009,) and family (Kaczmarek et al., 2004; Trivette et al., 2010) outcomes. Teachers' classroom instructional practices can either be informed or uninformed by family engagement data, yet research indicates that better child and family outcomes can be attained with strong family engagement practices.

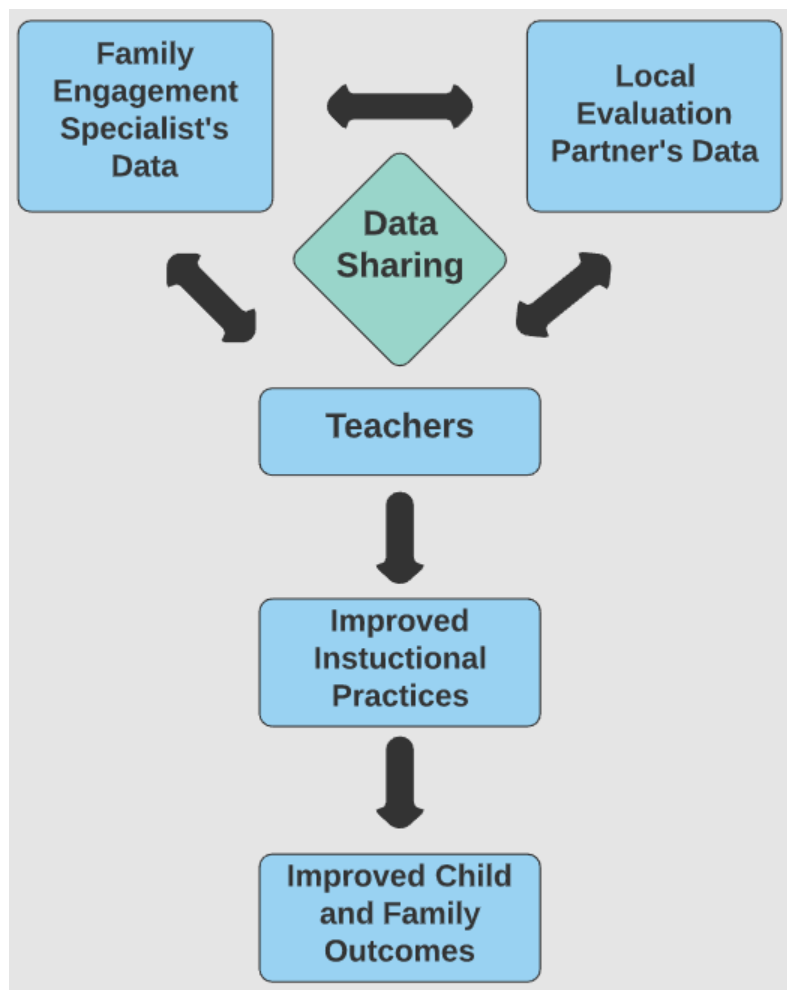


Figure 4 Inner Circle of Conceptual Framework

The literature confirms that teachers understand the importance of using data in their classrooms to inform instructional practices and identify them as important and valuable (Brawley & Stormont, 2013; Cummings et al., 2017; Gullo, 2013; Snyder, 2019). Research also indicates that teaching practices and pedagogy, particularly in Educare schools, are informed by the data available to the teachers and teachers value having data to inform their instructional practices in the classroom (Stein & Connors, 2016). However, as Jimerson (2017) notes, continued professional development on how to use data in the classroom is needed., Factors such as coaches and communities of practice have been identified in the literature as approaches that can facilitate better data use in the classroom. Since Educare already integrates both coaches and communities of practices, increasing professional development around data for all staff could enhance data usage to inform instruction.

Additionally, data sharing is an area of professional development that research has shown can improve outcomes if leadership is supportive and conditions are set up to promote data sharing and data use in the classroom (Anderson, 2010; Vanlommel, Vanhoof, & Van Petegem, 2016). Specifically, for Educare schools, data sharing by both family engagement staff and LEPs are key for teachers' ability improve classroom instruction with regard to family engagement. A study of an Educare school by Stein and Connors (2016) found correlation between data sharing and positive interdisciplinary practice between teachers and family support staff. Another study at an Educare school looked at the relationship between LEPs and Educare teachers and found that data sharing through strong relationships partnered with adequate training on data utilization for Educare staff led to better outcomes for children and families. Finally, key to understanding how important data sharing is to data usage in the classroom are the findings on barriers to data sharing such as communication and collaboration breakdowns noted in Sandall et al. (2004) and described in the literature review above. Without proper data sharing systems, training on how to communicate and collaborate while sharing data, and support by leadership on data use and data sharing, data-driven instructional practices cannot be fully implemented.

## **A Framework for Evidence-based Improvement: Systems Thinking and Improvement Science**

The outer circles of the conceptual model represent a framework for improvement that should guide the work of improving Educare DC's problem of practice. They are modeled after Ecological Systems thinking, because these interactions with the inner circle are vital to overall improvement. This framework examines data exchanges in and between systems that have touchpoints between multiple stakeholders and institutions. An adage of unknown origin in systems thinking is "Every system is perfectly designed to achieve exactly the results it gets." Systems thinking seeks to understand how specific pieces within a system are interconnected and interdependent. By examining the complexity of the system, it is easier to understand how a change in one part of the system will ultimately affect other parts of the

system in a way that is either predictable or even unintended (Laird, 2018, slide 7). Regarding improvement, improving on any one piece of the system without regard to the rest of the system will inevitably lead to failure (Ackoff, 1994). In order to improve, Educare DC will need to be able to see the systems in which they exist and the system that they create as a school and understand how changes in one area will lead to changes across that system and between larger systems in which they reside.

## **Seeing the System: Using Improvement Science in Practice**

Since Educare DC's problem of practice centers around using family engagement data in a systemic way to improve classroom instruction, literature on improvement science is useful in examining how to make meaningful improvements. Improvement science is an applied science that seeks to build on empirical knowledge by bringing in institutional and organization-specific knowledge through a series of experimentations and scale-up activities (Lewis, 2015). In education, particularly education reform, many empirical studies are done, but when replicated, results are varied. Improvement Science seeks to understand the questions, "What works? For whom? And under which conditions?" (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow & LeMahieu, 2015, p. 140).

Since empirical research is built off extremely controlled conditions, improvement science seeks to understand how conditions can be changed to achieve success over time, understanding that improvement is situated within organizational contexts. Bryk, Gomez, Grunow and LeMahieu (2015) describe improvement science as "deploy[ing] rapid tests of change to guide the development, revision, and continued fine-tuning of new tools, processes, work roles, and relationships," (p. 8). Improvement science is a form of quality improvement but takes a user-centered approach to the work rather than just relying on empirical data. In education, improvement science breaks down the barriers between research and practice that are constructed through extremely controlled situations necessary for empirical research. "Improvement science brings educators into regular interaction with a broad array of academic and technical experts [because] learning to improve demands the active, full engagement of educators" (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow & LeMahieu, 2015, p. 9). For Educare DC, this would allow for educators and family engagement specialists to be key players in improvement process.

Improvement science builds upon the basic tenets of scientific inquiry in ways that can be used in everyday improvement practice for an organization. A key tool used in improvement science is the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Inquiry Cycle. Figure 5 displays this four-step cycle developed by Langley et al. (2009) that is used to rapidly test a hypothesis based on what is known about the subject. This tool encapsulates the steps that are needed to test a hypothesized improvement and understand if the improvement made a difference.

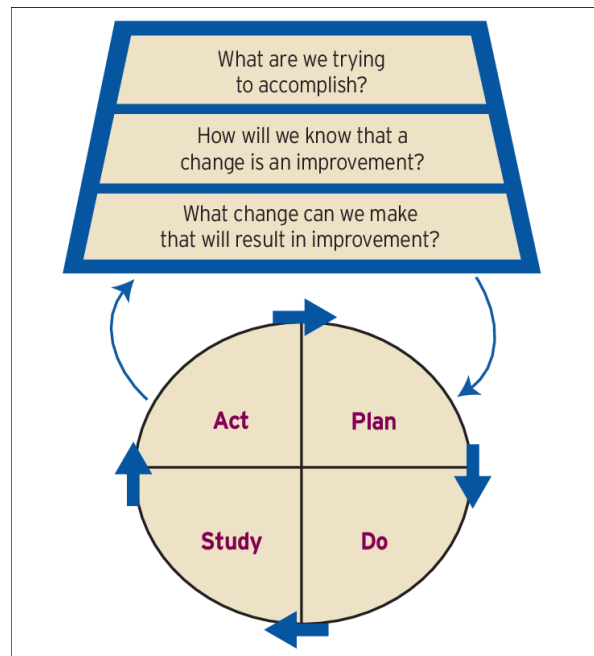


Figure 5 Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle (Langley et al., 2009)

PDSA testing cycles are meant to be repeated based on original theory plus the data that is collected to fully understand if an improvement was successful. Langley et al. (2009) note that, “Knowledge is built iteratively by making predictions that are based on the current theory, testing the predictions with data, improving the theory according to the results, making predictions on the basis of the revised theory, and so forth,” (p. 145). This continuous cycle of learning and adjusting based on data is crucial for improvement and for scalability that will lead to full implementation of the change. Figure 6 (Langley et al., 2009) depicts this series of PDSA cycling that are necessary for fully understanding changes that result in improvement at scale.

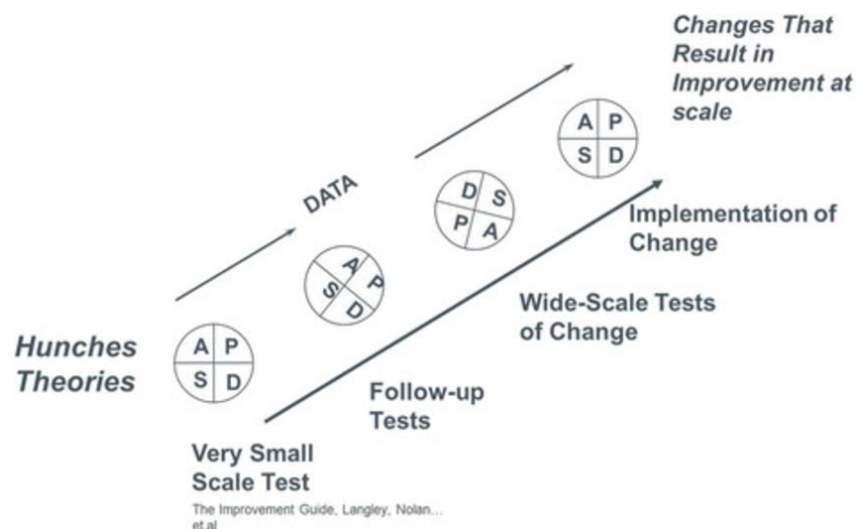


Figure 6 Sequential PDSA cycles for Knowledge Building (Langley et al., 2009)



## The Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework

This study was also informed by a framework developed by the National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement which is housed in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Parent, Family and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework for Early Childhood Systems (2018) is based in research around the benefits of increasing family engagement and links the foundations of data utilization (through continuous learning and quality improvement), teaching and learning, along with other program aspects, to family engagement and positive parent-child relationships. The framework is an ecological model that examines systems and their influences on young children and their families. It is important for this study because it encompasses the whole early childhood system within which family engagement resides. This framework is also the guiding framework for family engagement throughout the entire Head Start community.

### Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems

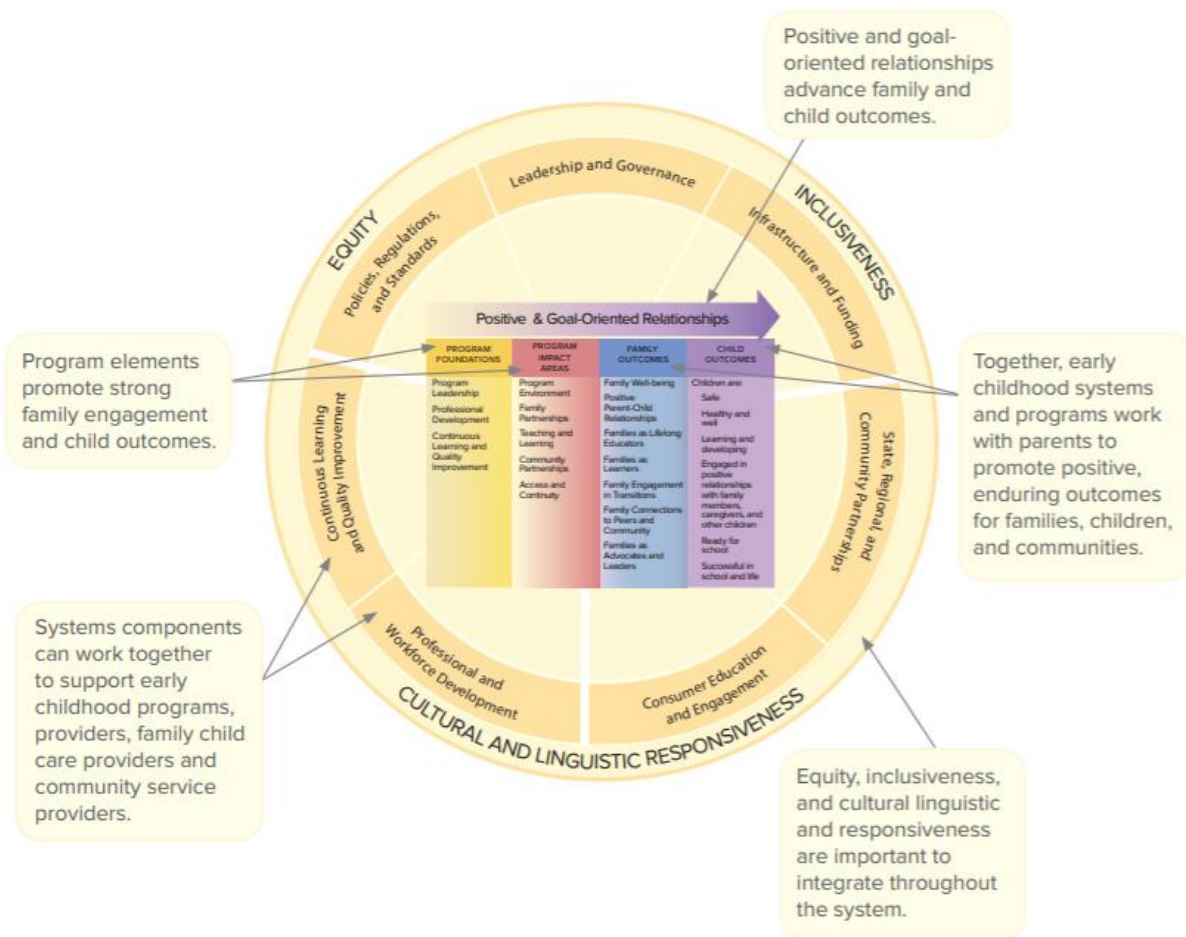


Figure 7 The PFCE Framework developed by the National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement



In understanding the full conceptual framework for this study featured on page 17, Educare DC will need to consider multiple contexts for change. While the ecological models guiding the conceptual framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Pianta & Walsh, 1996) focus on the importance of the child in context, which emphasizes the need for on-going data and communication across spheres of influence, systems thinking focuses on how to improve using data in and across systems, spanning the spheres of influence that the ecological models describe. The conceptual model for this study includes both an ecological perspective and a systems thinking perspective. If Educare DC wants to make impactful change to their problem of practice, they will have to center thinking on the family in context (as illustrated by the ecological models and the PFCE Framework), while also taking a systems thinking approach that posits that a change in one part of the system will create ripple effects to change other parts of the system. Further, the conceptual framework emphasizes the need to understand the interactions that are taking place between all these considerations as Educare DC seeks to improve their problem of practice.

## Research Questions

Using the existing literature as a foundation, this study sought to understand the perceptions of the use and sharing of family engagement data by families, teachers and family engagement staff, with a focus on optimizing family engagement data utilization in the classroom. The intent of this study was to gain a better understanding of family engagement data utilization at Educare DC by families, teachers and family engagement staff. The findings from this study can inform Educare sites around the country with regard to better utilization of family engagement data in the classroom and further assist the Educare DC community in determining how to better serve children and families in the program. Findings and recommendations in this paper will provide Educare DC leadership with guidance and knowledge so that they can optimize systems to support the sharing and utilization of family engagement data on an on-going basis.

The study explored the following research questions:

- 1. How is family engagement data currently being utilized by family engagement staff and teachers?**
- 2. To what extent could family engagement data be better facilitated by teachers and family engagement staff to improve child and family outcomes?**
- 3. What factors are inhibiting the sharing of family engagement data between various stakeholders?**

The research questions for this study related directly back to the conceptual framework developed by the researcher. Specifically, the outer circles of the framework describing data sharing, data utilization, and improvement science can be tied directly to the research questions for this study. Figure 8 describes the intersection of each research question with key concepts identified in the literature and included in the conceptual framework for this study.

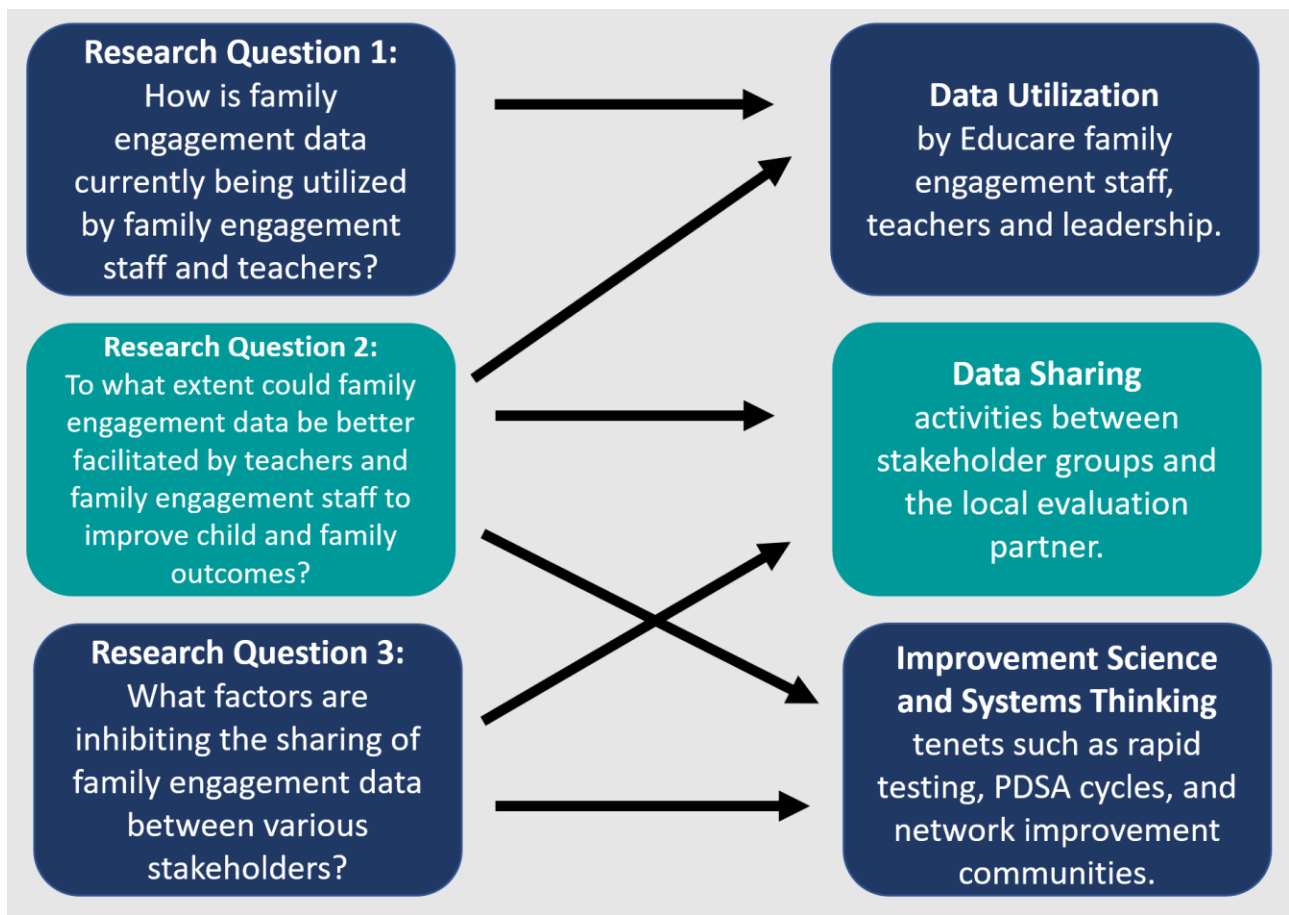


Figure 8 Research Questions Connected to Conceptual Framework

## Methods

The following sections describe the design, data collection process and methods of the study. All aspects of the methods section were impacted by COVID-19, but none more than the actual procedures section. Specific changes that had to be made because of COVID-19 are noted in each section, including how and why the changes were implemented.

The method of data collection chosen for this study were focus groups of three key stakeholder groups at Educare DC. The method of utilizing focus groups was chosen because it allows the researcher to “get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others,” (Patton, 1990, p. 386). Focus groups allow participants to express their points of views and experiences openly, as well as hear from their peers and elaborate on how their own experiences compare or differ from their peers. Additionally, the researcher chose to employ individual semi-structured interviews with focus group participants to dig deeper into specific content mentioned in the focus group. The researcher conducted one of these additional interviews after the family engagement focus group.

## Design and Data Collection

The researcher began by reviewing existing survey data results collected by the University of Maryland for Educare DC and then conducted focus groups of three key stakeholder groups (parents/families, teachers and family engagement staff). The focus groups were to be conducted at separate times and hosted at Educare DC in a conference room within the school, but due to COVID-19 restrictions, this was done via video conferencing. Focus group questions were developed based on the analysis of the existing family engagement data collected by the University of Maryland and research identified in the literature review. The following questions, adapted from Zweig, Irwin, Kook, & Cox, 2015, were used for all three focus groups (parents/families, teachers and family engagement staff or FES):

- 1. What data on family engagement do you know about and/or use in your daily work/interactions with (other Educare DC/Educare DC) staff?**
- 2. How are you supported as a (family/parent, teacher or FES) in sharing and using data that is collected through the Parent Survey and on-going through daily interactions at Educare DC?**
- 3. How could you be better supported as a (parent/family member, teacher or FES) with regard to family engagement data and making connections to the education and instruction in Educare DC classrooms?**

The questions used for all focus groups corresponded directly to the research question for this study, creating coherence in the study design (Maxwell, 2013). These focus group questions also relate directly to the research questions, as displayed in Figure 8. By connecting the focus group questions to multiple research questions, the researcher was able to make connections at the systems level, which guided recommendations in the latter portion of this paper. Figure 9 describes these connections.

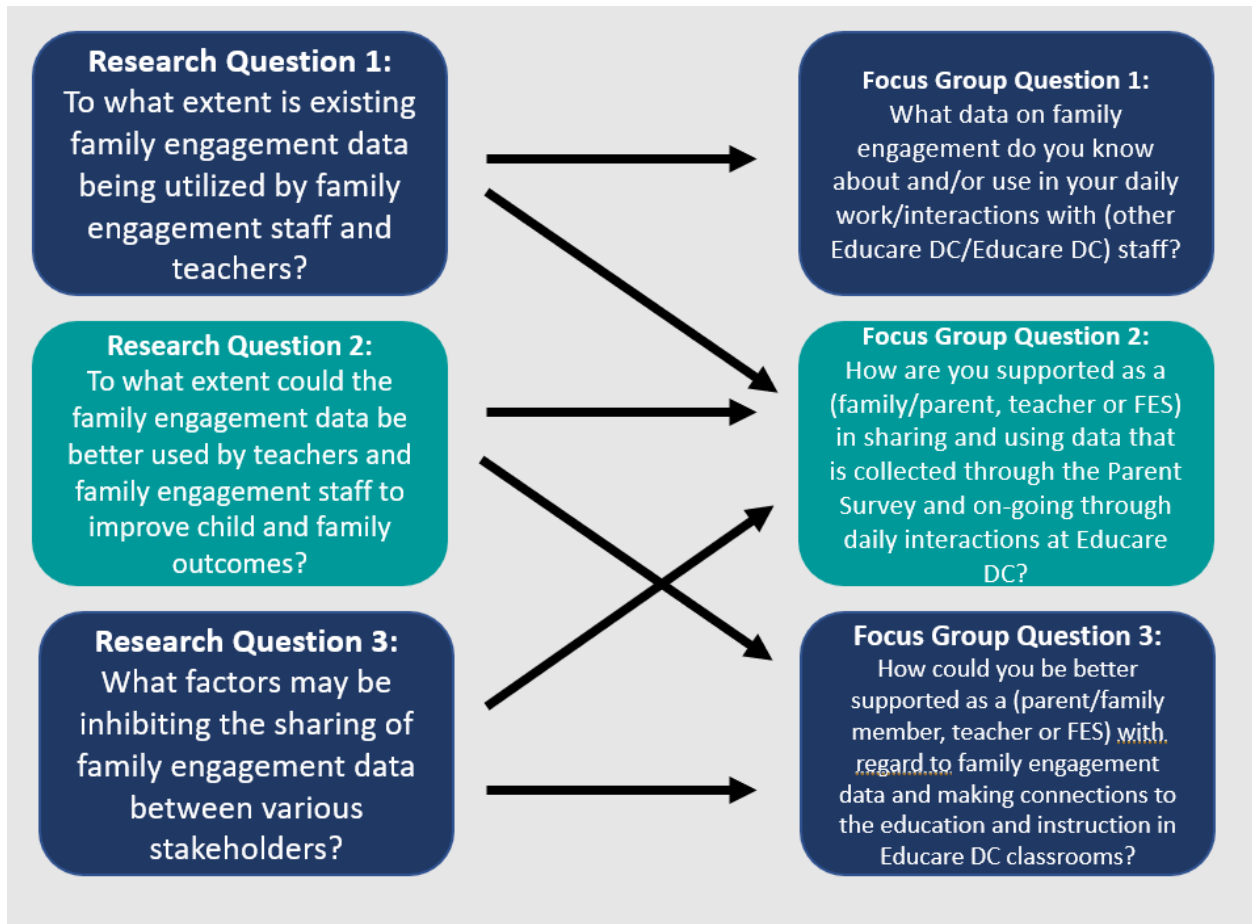


Figure 9 Research Questions Connected to Focus Group Questions

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered the anticipated data collection process for this study. Data collection was planned to begin in the spring of 2020 but when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Educare D.C. was closed along with schools and other head start programs in the District of Columbia. The Federal Office of Head Start (OHS) released the following guidance for Head Start programs on March 13, 2020:

*In response to COVID-19, OHS is advising grantees to coordinate with local health authorities and implement their existing policies and procedures related to closure of Head Start centers during infectious disease outbreaks. Closure of centers in areas heavily impacted by COVID-19 is an important element of containing and limiting its spread.*

*In recognition of the unique circumstances associated with COVID-19, OHS is directing programs to continue to pay wages and provide benefits for staff unable to report to work during center closures necessary to address COVID-19. During center closures, employees should continue to engage families and to deliver services to the extent possible, remotely.<sup>6</sup>*

Educare DC continued to pay staff and serve families remotely from the spring through summer of 2020. In the fall of 2020, Educare opened for half-day in-person services for children and the option for families to receive remote services. Due to these circumstances, data collection through focus groups and semi-structured interviews were postponed until Educare's partial reopening in the fall of 2020. Due to some families' opting for remote status, focus groups were moved to virtual setting to be conducted via Zoom. Educare DC had been using Zoom throughout the prior months during the shut-down, so all three stakeholder groups (parents, family engagement specialists and teachers) were familiar with the platform. Zoom also allowed for digital recordings of the focus groups and audio transcripts to be automatically generated. Conducting focus groups via Zoom also allowed remote working staff to join simultaneously with staff in classrooms which was helpful due to differences in scheduling during the partial opening.

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<http://hsicc.cmail19.com/t/ViewEmail/j/143E01E0599BEF9A2540EF23F30FEDED/79A087682734D8FDF6A1C87C670A6B9F>

## Recruitment

This updated format of Zoom did not affect how participant outreach was conducted. Information on the focus groups was still delivered through supervisory administration at Educare DC. For the family engagement staff focus group, the family engagement supervisor provided information on the best time for the focus group to be held virtually with family engagement staff. The family engagement supervisor then provided staff with the timing of the focus group, as well as a recruitment letter describing this study, the data collection process and information on confidentiality and anonymity. The family engagement supervisor also provided reminders to family engagement staff about the focus group.

Outreach for the focus group with family members and parents was conducted by family engagement staff and the family engagement supervisor. The family engagement supervisor shared the Zoom information and recruitment letter with family engagement staff and asked them to pass it along to the parents they worked with via email or text (or in person for the families that were participating in part-time services in the classroom). The family engagement staff provided the families with reminders about the focus group and how to log on to the focus group using Zoom.

Participant outreach for the focus group with teachers was done by the school director. The researcher worked with the school director to determine the best time for the scheduling the focus group based on the teachers' schedules. The school director then provided teachers with the timing of the focus group, as well as a recruitment letter describing this study, the data collection process and information on confidentiality and anonymity. The school director provided reminders to teachers as needed about the focus group.

## Procedures

All three focus groups were held via a Zoom meeting with both audio and video as options, although a few participants in the parent focus group did not use video and chose to join through audio only. At the beginning of each focus group, the researcher described the purpose of the study and how the data would help Educare DC better serve children and families through improved practices. The researcher shared the information on confidentiality and anonymity of the data and obtained consent from participants.



The researcher then did introductions and began asking the focus group the following three questions:

1. What data on family engagement do you know about and/or use in your daily work/interactions with (other Educare DC/Educare DC) staff?
2. How are you supported as a (family/parent, teacher or FES) in sharing and using data that is collected through the Parent Survey and on-going through daily interactions at Educare DC?
3. How could you be better supported as a (parent/family member, teacher or FES) with regard to family engagement data and making connections to the education and instruction in Educare DC classrooms?

Each focus group lasted between 30-45 minutes. The focus group for family engagement staff had two participants join out of four total possible participants. The focus group for parent and families had a total of eight participants, with one participant dropping off the Zoom call early and a different participant joining the group about 10 minutes late. The focus group for teachers had five participants out of a total of forty teachers. With each focus group, the researcher added probing questions as needed to the three major questions above. As new terms emerged through conversation, the researcher asked for more information or for examples to ensure data was robust and complete.

During the first focus group with family engagement staff, question two was answered by staff based on historical knowledge because the staff shared that the Parent Survey had not been administered in the spring of or fall of 2020. At the time of these focus groups, it had been almost a full year since parents had done this survey. During the next focus group with parents and families, when asked question two, only one parent responded, and many other parents asked for clarification and mentioned confusion. The researcher changed the question so that it was more general by asking about specific times parents had expressed needs to Educare DC staff and how they were supported in doing that. This question still provided usable data on daily interactions with Educare DC staff and how data was being shared between parents and Educare DC staff. Additionally, because this question was harder for parents to answer, the researcher conducted a short follow-up interview with one participant from the Family Engagement focus group to gather more data on this question. The family engagement specialist provided additional information and clarity on this question and this data was also added and coded during the analysis process.

## Analysis

A qualitative analysis of the focus group data was conducted by the researcher after completing the focus groups. After each focus group, audio transcripts were downloaded from Zoom and saved for analysis. Using thematic analysis procedures, each audio transcript was read several times. The first reading was done for familiarity, the second to begin identifying possible codes, and additional readings were done to finalize key codes. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) note the process from coding to interpretation involves “the transcendence of ‘factual’ data and cautious analysis of what is to be made of them” (p. 46).

Next, codes were compared across focus groups and matched to develop themes from the data. Codes were dropped that were only mentioned once or that did not lead to the development of a theme. As themes were developed, they were defined and tagged using specific codes through all three sets of data. Finally, themes were solidified and codes that were not relevant were deleted. Given that codes can be nested or embedded within one another, can overlap and can intersect based on the segments of raw data they are attached to, the findings (see Table 1) represent the themes and sub-themes that were drawn from the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

The researcher identified several themes and sub-themes from the three stakeholder groups. These themes were identified as spanning all three focus group sessions and the one follow-up interview. The themes emerged through coding the data and finding specific through lines that all three stakeholder groups identified and elaborated on in the data collection process.

Themes	Sub-themes and key words
<b>Tool and Processes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educare DC required documents such as: Family Child Reviews, Family Needs Assessments, etc.</li> <li>• Software and online platforms such as ChildPlus, Zoom, Remind App</li> <li>• Text, call and emailing</li> </ul>
<b>Relationships and Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Method of Communication: In person, email and text, through software</li> <li>• Perception of relationship: trust, relatability</li> </ul>
<b>Data Sharing and Data Sensitivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balance between sharing and sensitivity</li> <li>• Systems and structures for data sharing</li> <li>• Relationships and ease of data sharing</li> </ul>

*Table 1 Themes and Sub-themes from Thematic Analysis*

The themes that emerged from the data answered each research question posed by the researcher for this study. The findings incorporate these themes and describe how the thematic analysis surfaced key perceptions, assumptions, and catalysts for utilizing family engagement data to improve classroom instruction at Educare DC. Each finding includes details and quotes from the stakeholder groups that support the finding and help to answer one of the three research questions posed in this study.

# Findings

The following three findings address the research questions posed in this study. Each finding is organized by the research question it primarily answers.

**RQ1: How is family engagement data currently being utilized by family engagement staff and teachers?**

***Finding 1: The role of family engagement specialists at Educare DC is effectively meeting a specific need in gathering and utilizing family engagement data because of the trusted, responsive relationships between family engagement specialists and Educare DC families.***

Educare DC parents and teachers find the family engagement specialists extremely helpful in serving families in multiple ways. Educare DC families refer to the approachability and relatability of family engagement specialists and how important that is for sharing information that is pertinent to their child’s education. Educare DC teachers also mention that parents feel more comfortable talking to family engagement specialist because they know that there is a lot of empathy in the relationship and parents are more likely to open up to their family engagement specialist.

**“She’s just more relatable and she’s easy to talk to. And she gets the job done.”**  
**-Educare DC Parent speaking about Educare DC FES**

**“Any issues that I will have, I will just go straight to her for her support.”**

**-Educare DC Parent speaking about Educare DC FES**

Educare DC parents also note how resourceful their family engagement specialists are when they approach them with needs and ask about resources. Parents in the focus group described specific examples around housing, employment, education and nutrition, in which their family engagement specialist not only provided resources, but made calls and accompanied them to meetings in order to ensure their needs were met. The family engagement specialists were described as true parent advocates for the families that they served.

The responsiveness of Educare DC’s family engagement specialists was noted by all three stakeholder groups. Specifically, being able to

**“The families really trust the Family Engagement Specialists. They have that person they connect with and families have a great relationship with the FES. Parents will call and text the FES really anytime of the day or night.”**

**- Educare DC Teacher**

text, call and email was identified as being vital for families, particularly during COVID-19. Every parent in the parent focus group mentioned at least one specific instance of texting their family engagement specialist and the responsiveness that followed the texting. Educare DC teachers also described how important the responsiveness of the family engagement specialists was to their work and how impactful it was on the families in their classroom.

Educare DC family engagement specialists noted the importance of building and maintaining trust for sustaining the relationship and maintaining communication between parents and family engagement specialists. They noted that confidentiality around sensitive information was vital to sustaining that trusting relationship.

**“The work that we're doing is all about building rapport and relationship building, so you don't want to create any cracks in that by not being trustworthy or an advocate for those families”**

**- Educare DC Family Engagement Specialist**

**RQ 2: To what extent could family engagement data be facilitated better by teachers and family engagement staff to improve child and family outcomes?**

***Finding 2: Both teachers and family engagement specialists at Educare DC are eager for more opportunities for data sharing since they acknowledge how important data is to informing their practice and relationship-building.***

Educare DC teachers and family engagement specialists expressed how important data sharing is to their work. Teachers described specific instances in their classroom where having family engagement data was so helpful to improving their instructional practices in the classroom. They also mentioned times where data was not shared and how that effected the child's experience in the classroom, as well as effecting how they planned for instruction.

***Finding 2.1: Educare DC teachers desire more data sharing opportunities to improve classroom practices.***

Specifically, Educare DC teachers expressed needing more frequent and proactive data sharing from family engagement specialists. All teacher participants in focus groups agreed that receiving family engagement data for the children in their classrooms would have a positive effect on their instructional practices. Educare DC teachers expressed that they would like to see more proactive data sharing to avoid the barriers associated with being uninformed about family needs and circumstances.

**“It does vary from FES to FES the amount of communication they provide to you as a teacher in regard to what a parent needs. I had an experience where [important family engagement data was not shared] and had we known prior then that child's experience in the classroom could have been different, because then we would have had an idea what to look out for and what to plan for.”**

**- Educare DC Teacher**

One Educare DC teacher told a story about how she was having trouble connecting with a family, and after several tries, she asked the family engagement specialist for help. The family engagement specialist then shared data on a particular issue the family had been

experiencing for quite some time. The teacher then made connections to changes in the child’s demeanor and activity in the classroom and realized she could have been planning more appropriately for the child in the classroom had she known this information sooner. Other teachers expressed having similar experiences and reiterated how important receiving frequent and proactive family engagement data was to their classroom practices.

Educare DC teachers also expressed that the relationship that they have with the family engagement specialist and the family engagement specialist’s style of communication can sometimes determine the amount of data that is shared or how timely the data sharing is happening. Most teachers expressed positive relationships with their family engagement specialists and approved of the communication style. A few noted that there were some disconnects with family data being shared or being shared in a timely manner. In these cases, the teachers explained they had to adapt their practices and make sure they were doing everything they could to proactively facilitate the sharing of family engagement data. Some noted that they would contact the FES more often. Overall, teachers noted that this was the exception, not the norm for them.

***Finding 2.2: Family engagement specialists acknowledge how important sharing their data on families with teachers is but note the importance of maintaining confidentiality.***

**“Typically, one of our safe statements is to say, the family is experiencing a challenge at this time. So, if you observe something in the classroom that might seem a little off, this is why.”**

**– Educare DC Family Engagement Specialist**

Family engagement specialists are also responsible for confidentiality of sensitive data to maintain trusted relationships with families. The family engagement specialists stressed how important they knew it was to make connections for teachers in the classroom, but also expressed how vital it was for them to maintain confidentiality in order to sustain trust in the relationships they have with families. The family engagement specialists talked about specific strategies they use to make sure teachers are aware that families are facing a challenge without violating confidentiality of the families, particularly in sensitive situations. They also expressed that the balance of what and

when to share information was a key part of their job and why their job was so important.

Similarly, family engagement staff expressed the need for sharing of data on children’s progress in the classroom from teachers to inform their practice in serving families. They noted that for conversations with families, knowing a child’s classroom performance could

affect the conversation. They noted needs around school readiness and helping families plan for the transition to kindergarten. Family engagement specialists expressed that they could help the family with planning for the right fit for transitioning to a new school, as well as helping families with what to expect during a transition between schools.

***Finding 2.3: Family engagement specialists desire shared data from teachers on children’s learning and developmental progress in order to better serve families.***

Family engagement specialists also particularly noted how important it was to share data around any developmental issues for children in the classroom. They expressed how daunting it is for a family to begin the process of early intervention services and how overwhelming it is for a parent navigating these services for the first time. Family engagement specialists talked about how they had assisted families in the past in understanding the process and learning how to be an advocate for their child. One family engagement specialist said they personally accompanied the parent to initial meetings with early intervention services and talked with them afterward about what happened, explaining the language that was used (which the parent was unfamiliar with prior), and gave information on what to expect next.

**“If we know a child needs early intervention services...we can help [families] by going to meetings about the services with them and helping them understand and manage the process so that they are better equipped to advocate for their child.”**

**– Educare DC Family Engagement Specialist**



### **RQ 3: What factors are inhibiting the sharing of family engagement data between various stakeholders?**

***Finding 3: Educare DC’s existing family engagement data and the systems in which this data is collected are helpful for all three stakeholder groups, however, data systems and data sharing could be improved.***

All three stakeholder groups referred to ways in which Educare DC collects family engagement data. Most references were to the forms and documents completed during enrollment (such as the Family Needs Assessment) and during quarterly meetings between parents, teachers and/or family engagement specialists (such as Family-Child Reviews, home visits and parent meetings). Some references were to more informal ways of collecting data such as the current use of Zoom meetings with parents at the beginning of the week to determine family needs for food, supplies and services.

Lastly, all three stakeholder groups were asked specifically about the data collected by the local evaluation partner (University of Maryland) for the Educare National Study. It should be noted that Educare parents have not been able to provide data for this study in a year due to COVID-19, so parent data on this topic were limited.

***Finding 3.1 Multi-disciplinary Meetings such as the Family Child Review Meetings (also known as interdisciplinary meetings) and home visits are valued highly and found to be impactful on all three stakeholder groups.***

#### **Family-Child Review Meetings**

Family-Child Review Meetings (also called interdisciplinary meetings by stakeholders) were valued highly by teachers and family engagement specialists. These meetings bring together teachers, family engagement specialists, school leaders and comprehensive services

coordinators (such as the health coordinator). These meetings were historically held reactively to address a particular challenge a child was having in the classroom. However, participants noted that these meetings were now being held proactively for all children to adequately provide a whole child education.

Both teachers and family engagement specialists note that these meetings provide a wholistic view of the full context in which each child is situated. Teachers said not only did it help them understand the family situation, but more broadly what the environment around the family might be so that they could make connections to a child's success in the classroom. Family engagement specialists also appreciated how these interdisciplinary meetings allowed them to view the child's progress in the classroom and have open discussions on how that has been facilitated or inhibited by what they know is happening with the family outside of school walls.

**“We had a child who was doing a lot of biting and what I found out from the family was that they were going through a separation. I then shared with the teachers that the family was experiencing a challenging time, and this is possibly why you’re seeing the challenging behavior in the classroom. So, we brought the Educare DC team together [in an interdisciplinary meeting] to make sure we were meeting the needs of not just the child, but the family as a whole. It’s a wholistic approach to serving children and families.”**

**– Educare DC Family Engagement Specialist**

## Home Visits

Home Visits are an important part of the Educare DC model and are required by Head Start for teachers. It is recommended that family engagement specialists attend home visits, but it is not required. All three stakeholder groups expressed that having the family engagement specialist attend home visits with teachers led to better outcomes for the family and allowed for connections to be made early in the child's tenure at Educare.

Parents told stories of how they remembered the full team coming to do a home visit and how much it meant to have the family engagement specialists forming relationships with them while the teachers met their child and did child screenings. Parents believe that setting goals with both teachers and family engagement specialist together led to future success for both their child in the classroom and for themselves as they received help accessing services and resources.

**“My family engagement person and then one of [my child’s] teachers came out to the house and they interacted with [my child] and asked some of my goals that I have for myself and my family. I found that very helpful. And since then, they check on me; making sure that those goals that I’ve had for [my child] and for myself and for my family, that I’ve been keeping track of it and they send tons of information to help me with these goals as well.”**

- Educare DC Parent

Teachers and family engagement specialists agreed that completing the home visit as a multi-disciplinary team led to better outcomes for their work and for the child and family. They noted that this allowed them to begin the relationship with the family and child with everyone on the same page. It also allowed for better relationship-building over time due to the shared experience of having done the home visit as a team, rather than one-off conversations with families that may not be shared across the team.

**“When we were both [the teaching team and the FES] able to go on the home visit together, they brought perspectives we didn’t have at that visit and we talked through and acknowledged any bias or preconceived notions right after the visit so we could better support the family.**

***I think it was a win for the program in general.”***

**- Educare DC Family Engagement Specialist**

***Finding 3.2: Aggregate data that is collected on Family Needs Assessments and the Parent Survey is being used by family engagement specialists and leadership to improve overall services to families, but stakeholders indicate they would like to see more from this data, particularly through timely delivery of de-identified data at the classroom and family level.***

### **Family Needs Assessment**

In both the teacher and family engagement focus groups, it was mentioned that aggregate data was being used well by staff to improve offerings and programming for families. Family engagement specialists particularly noted how they aggregated the data they collected in talking with families and presented it to leadership every month. They talked about specific instances in which leadership saw this aggregate data and instituted programs for families based on a demonstrated need that the data presented.

**“We do the [family] needs assessment to see if it's something that can benefit families across the entire program. So, we take that information to our leadership team, to our education team, to our comprehensive team and to those community partners.”**

**– Educare DC Family Engagement Specialist**

### **Parent Survey Data**

As a part of the Educare National Study, Educare DC’s local evaluation partner conducts research on the effectiveness and impact of Educare DC’s services on the children and families they serve. As a part of this study, researchers from University of Maryland conduct Parent Surveys in the fall and spring of each year<sup>7</sup> to learn more about the parents’ involvement at Educare DC and the parents’ environments outside of Educare DC (see Appendix for full survey).

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<sup>7</sup> As noted above, Parents have not completed this survey in the year 2020 due to COVID-19.

Many parents in the focus group did not remember taking the survey, most likely due to COVID-19 changing when the survey is administered. One parent did highlight a connection that was made based on a response she gave to the survey around mental health and mindfulness. Most other parents noted that they were not familiar with the survey.

**“I think last school year we did the survey. I don't know if it led to the mindfulness classes, but more of these would be helpful. I know for me and my household, we're running. A lot. I was really thankful to have mindfulness education.”**

**-Educare DC Parent**

During focus groups, Educare DC teachers said they do not have access to this data for the children in their classroom, and only one teacher described someone from the LEP talking with them about the data and how it might impact their classroom. The teachers do note that family engagement team and leadership share data at an aggregate level during Professional Development days, but teachers note that seeing the data at the classroom level would be helpful for their instruction and planning.

**“Sometimes I think we find out on our own as opposed to knowing what that parent survey is asking and how the parents responded. We talk to parents and that lets us know why [the child's] day is the way it is.”**

**- Educare DC Teacher**

**“I don't know if it's coming from the survey or not, but our FES makes sure to give us information when families are in need [so we can] help the child in the classroom.”**

**- Educare DC Teacher**

Family engagement specialists acknowledged they do have greater access to the parent data from this survey, but it is still in the aggregate form. They noted that they try to share what they can with teachers, but that they cannot be certain that they are informing every teacher properly due to the lack of disaggregated, de-identified data. They note that they receive information on the percentages of families

that are experiencing different types of hardships, but cannot give out targeted resources or serve the family in an in-depth way because they do not know which family is experiencing the hardship. They instead do mass offerings of services hoping that the family in need will let them know they need additional resources or direct help with the hardship.

Family engagement specialists and teachers also note the time lapse between when the data is collected and when it is presented to them. Particularly, teachers note that since they see aggregated data from family engagement during professional development days, they are unsure when or if needs were met for families. Family engagement specialists also note the lapse in time between when the survey is conducted and when they received the aggregate data. They mention that the time lapse is particularly challenging since the nature of the hardships noted in this parent survey (such as depression, food scarcity and employment needs) are time sensitive.

***“If we had the data, we could be a better support for families in particular areas of need. For instance, they may answer questions about domestic violence, but they may not tell us about that. But if we know that it is happening, then we can do gentle resources to families, so we address the need and better serve families.”***

**– Educare DC Family Engagement Specialist**

***“We get that information once or twice a year, but we may not even know by the percentages who we’ve helped or who still needs resources.”***

**– Educare DC Family Engagement Specialist**



***Finding 4: Educare DC has several systems and structures for data sharing among teachers, parents and family engagement specialists, but some are more effective than others, and COVID-19 has highlighted gaps in the existing systems.***

#### **Information sharing before and during COVID-19**

Teachers and Family engagement specialists noted that before COVID-19 began, it was easier to share most data by word of mouth because working in the same building you were likely to see your colleague in the hallway or common spaces. Teachers noted that family engagement specialists would often come to their classroom on a daily basis to check-in on any updates from morning drop-off or to deliver information from parents that had called or text them. Some teachers noted that their family engagement specialist’s office was attached to their classroom with a window, so they could wave or motion to them if they had information to share.

Now, in the wake of COVID-19, all three stakeholder groups are more likely to use technology (texting, calling, the Child Plus software program or email were all mentioned) to communicate with one another than word of mouth, which was to be expected since many of Educare’s services are still being done virtually. Teachers expressed that the switch to virtual due to COVID-19 actually helped improve communication because everyone was forced to use a common platform and any breakdowns for forgetting to “catch someone in the hall” were alleviated by ensuring all information was entered into systems online. Teachers said information is now flowing to them in a more open way and as things change rapidly, they are informed about it in real time as opposed to “days later”.

**“On site, information had to pass through multiple people and there was a time delay. Now that we are virtual, communication is more straightforward. It’s quicker—I get the information I need faster.”**

**– Educare DC Teacher**

Teachers also said that parents are more likely to respond and communicate with them on their child's progress since doing so in a virtual format is the only option. They noted specific software and systems such as the Remind app that provide both teachers and parents easy access to open communication. Teachers expressed that parents are very engaged despite the virtual setting, and parents spoke about being grateful that teachers are providing so many resources and spending one-on-one time with them going over activities and goals for their child.

Parents noted that prior to COVID-19, they would use word-of-mouth or texting and calling to deliver information to both teachers and/or family engagement specialists. They mentioned they are not more likely to use email or the remind app to contact Educare DC staff. They said they still most often reach out directly to their family engagement specialists through text and feel that texting gets the fastest response. They noted that they contact teachers most often through email, Zoom or through the remind app, and that they appreciate the virtual set-up for communication so that they can stay engaged in their child's progress in the classroom.

***“I can honestly say even with the pandemic going on, my child has been excelling tremendously.***

**His vocabulary is increasing. I just see my child improve, and even with so many limitations that we have with this pandemic. I'm shocked at how well everything is going virtually.”**

**- Educare DC Parent**

**“Talking to the teachers on Zoom after my child's virtual activity makes me feel a little bit better that they care because they take the time on Zoom. There're some technical difficulties here and there, but it's never a big issue. I use the remind app to contact [my child's] teachers. And I definitely text my family engagement specialist, send her emails. They always respond.”**

## Data and Information Sharing Systems

Several systems for sharing data among teachers, family engagement specialists and parents were mentioned by all three stakeholder groups. Two were spoken about often by teachers and family engagement specialists: SharePoint spreadsheets and ChildPlus software. Teachers particularly noted that during COVID-19, Educare DC began using a Microsoft excel spreadsheet for every classroom that is saved on SharePoint. The spreadsheet is shared with teachers, family engagement specialists and their supervisors. It has viewing rights and editing rights so that only teachers and family engagement specialists linked to specific classes can access and edit the spreadsheet. Teachers expressed that this spreadsheet has helped to ensure that everyone is up to date on necessary data in real time. Teachers in the focus group all agreed that this system of using a shared spreadsheet has been the most productive and easiest to use option for sharing data between Educare DC staff.

**“The spreadsheet helps tremendously. Family engagement, teachers and supervisors have access so we can all view it and collaborate about changes.”**

**- Educare DC Teacher**

Another data sharing platform that was mentioned in teacher and family engagement specialists focus groups was ChildPlus. ChildPlus is one of the most popular software systems used in Head Start programs and is used to track important data on children and families such as attendance, health information and assessments of children. It is vital for head start programs to collect this data because each program is required to submit an annual Program Information Report<sup>8</sup> (PIR) to the Office of Head Start that requires this sort of data.

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on Head Start PIR requirements: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/data-ongoing-monitoring/article/program-information-report-pir>

Teachers said that they are required to enter attendance for children in their classroom into the ChildPlus system but have few other reasons to use the software. One teacher said that she makes attendance notes in the software if she knows a family is going to go on vacation. It was unclear in focus groups if all teachers had been trained on using ChildPlus, but teachers expressed difficulty using the software. Teachers said they almost always preferred sending an email to their family engagement specialist rather than using ChildPlus because then they had the thread of responses for reference in the future.

***“I prefer email because child plus is hard to navigate for me.***

**It just seems like you are going through a maze. To get to something, you have to go through this other thing and it’s just confusing on how to get to anything on there.”**

**– Educare DC Teacher**

Family engagement specialists noted that ChildPlus was their primary software and that they were very familiar with it. They felt comfortable using it, and noted feeling trained well on using it. They did note that teachers did not have the same sort of access in the software that they had. They said they did not usually use this platform to inform teachers on family engagement data.

The remind app was also mentioned by both parents and teachers as being helpful to their communication. Both groups spoke about the remind app, saying it was helpful in sharing educational data and reminders between parents and teachers. But, for family engagement data, parents said that texting, calling and emailing were still preferred for making sure Educare staff had that information.

## Discussion

The analysis and findings of this study provide clear information on how vital and successful the relationship is between families and family engagement specialists. Families clearly appreciate the role of the family engagement specialist in meeting their needs and helping their family to grow and thrive. Educare DC's family engagement specialists were found to be extremely responsive to parents needs around the clock. Family Engagement staff were also found to be the main conduits of gathering data from families – more than teachers, comprehensive service coordinators or administrators. Participants in the study mentioned family engagement staff receiving texts from parents as late as 11 pm on weeknights. Families are utilizing the supports that family engagement staff provide, including texting and calling their cell phones. Families have trusting, responsive relationships with family engagement staff, and lean on them during times of crisis.

This is consistent with research stating family engagement improves child and family outcomes (Dearing, Kreider, & Weiss, 2008; Dunst, 2002; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Hindman, Miller, Froyen, and Skibbe, 2012; Kaczmarek et al., 2004; Rimm-Kaufman, Pinanta, Cox, & Bradley, 2003; Roggerman et al., 2009; Trivette et al., 2010) This is also consistent with the Conceptual Framework for this study with incorporated the concepts in both the Educare Model and the Parent, Family and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework with regard to the need for positive, responsive and goal-oriented relationships with families.

The PFCE Framework is also important for this discussion because many Head Start programs share a family engagement specialist (sometimes also called a Family Services Coordinator or other similar titles) with other programs that are funded by the same Head Start grant. This could mean that a family engagement specialist has a caseload over 100 families that are spread across large geographical spaces (sometime full counties). The PFCE Framework emphasizes how important family engagement is to both the family's success and the child's success, and Educare commits to funding programs so that the caseload for family engagement specialists is small enough to form great individual relationships.

This study's findings show that Educare DC has a family engagement team that has built and maintained positive relationships with parents in the school. Parents feel they can reach out easily to their FES and they will get a prompt response. The data also shows that families trust their FES and because of this, the family engagement team has the most robust data on families. Although families acknowledged talking with teachers, the data show that they more often share family data with their FES.

Since families are sharing most of their data with the FES rather than teachers, administrators or other staff, Educare DC will need develop and test systems to ensure that family engagement data is being utilized in the classroom. **This study revealed that both teachers and family engagement staff want more data sharing, but unfortunately current systems are**

**hindering data sharing and utilization, which means there is a gap in instructional practices for teachers in the classroom.** To improve instructional practices in the classroom through family engagement data utilization, Educare DC will need to develop and examine which systems and processes support better data sharing between teachers and family engagement specialists and how Educare DC leadership can facilitate these processes.

Data sharing and data utilization were key parts of the conceptual framework for this study and are core features of the Educare model. The findings of this study indicate that family engagement data is being collected from families and utilized well by the family engagement team. All three stakeholder groups acknowledge that family engagement data influences children's success in the classroom and emphasize their views on the value of data, which is consistent with the literature (Brawley & Stormont, 2013; Cummings et al., 2017; Gullo, 2013; Snyder, 2019; Stein & Connors, 2016). However, the literature informing the conceptual framework for this study noted the need for more training on data sharing and data utilization (Jimerson, 2017; Sandall et al., 2004), as well as the need for an overall system of support for data sharing and utilization that is led and supported by school leadership (Anderson, 2010; Guss, Norris, Horm, Monroe and Wolfe, 2012; Vanlommel, Vanhoof, and Van Petegem, 2016). The findings from this study did not indicate that there was a clear connection between family engagement data and teacher use of the data to inform instructional practices in the classroom.

It is important for Educare DC to take a systems level approach to developing better data sharing and data utilization strategies for improvement. Using improvement science, Educare DC could engage in rapid testing cycles as they adjust parts of their system to evaluate which small changes lead to positive outcomes, followed by scaling those changes up for implementation (Langley, et al., 2009) The findings also indicated data sharing issues regarding the data collected by the LEP, which could be resolved through Educare leadership asking for this data to be presented to all staff, rather than segments of staff. This could be connected to the larger improvement science efforts for data sharing and utilization.

Although it is easier to use word of mouth to share data, this can lead to gaps in data records and communication breakdowns. Taking a systems level approach to data sharing and utilization in order to find an evidence-based solution seeks to alleviate gaps created by different communication styles of Educare DC staff and ensure there is a record of family engagement data over time. Educare DC teachers specifically described how the switch to virtual administration due to COVID-19 provided major improvements in the access, timeliness, and utilization of family engagement data because of new systems and structures. Using improvement science, this switch can be examined and then tested again over time to better understand if this change to the system can be scaled up and implemented long-term. Additionally, Stein and Connors (2016) study on how to share data between an Educare school and an LEP speaks directly to the findings from this study around data sharing. Using the information from that study and a systems thinking approach to understanding data sharing and data utilization could address the concerns raised in these findings.

## Recommendations

In consideration of the study's findings around gaps in data sharing, it is recommended that Educare DC develop more robust data sharing and data utilization systems through a series of rapid testing cycles consistent with improvement science principles. The goal of increasing the utilization of family engagement data to improve classroom instruction will require Educare DC staff to work collaboratively through a common data sharing and data utilization system, and improvement science can help determine which system works best for Educare DC staff and how to scale this system for improvement.

### ***Recommendation 1: Design a Data Sharing and Data Utilization System using Improvement Science and PDSA cycles of inquiry.***

To improve data-driven instructional practices in the classroom using family engagement data, a data sharing and utilization system is needed that all staff can access and use proficiently. Teachers in the study specifically mentioned how much better data sharing around family engagement data has become now that all stakeholders are required and expected to use the same system to share data virtually due to COVID-19. Teachers said less data fell through the cracks because of communication breakdowns, participation in entering data and usability problems with current software. Educare DC should use the tenets of improvement science to conduct rapid testing cycles of options for data sharing systems (Langley et al., 2009), and eventually determine a successful system of data sharing to scale up to the organizational level.

In order to determine the right system for sharing data across Educare DC staff, a series of rapid testing cycles allow for theories around data sharing to be tested and refined (Langley, et al., 2009). PDSA testing cycles will allow Educare staff to assess the validity of systems and adjust along the way. PDSA cycles follow the scientific method, but allow for predictions to be quickly tested and gaps in knowledge to be identified and understood in order to make a change in the next testing cycle (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow & LeMahieu, 2015, p. 121). Over time, Educare DC will be able to identify what is working well with a data sharing and utilization system and what needs to be adjusted in order to see change. Figure 10 describes how Educare DC could deploy these rapid tests using the PDSA cycle of inquiry.



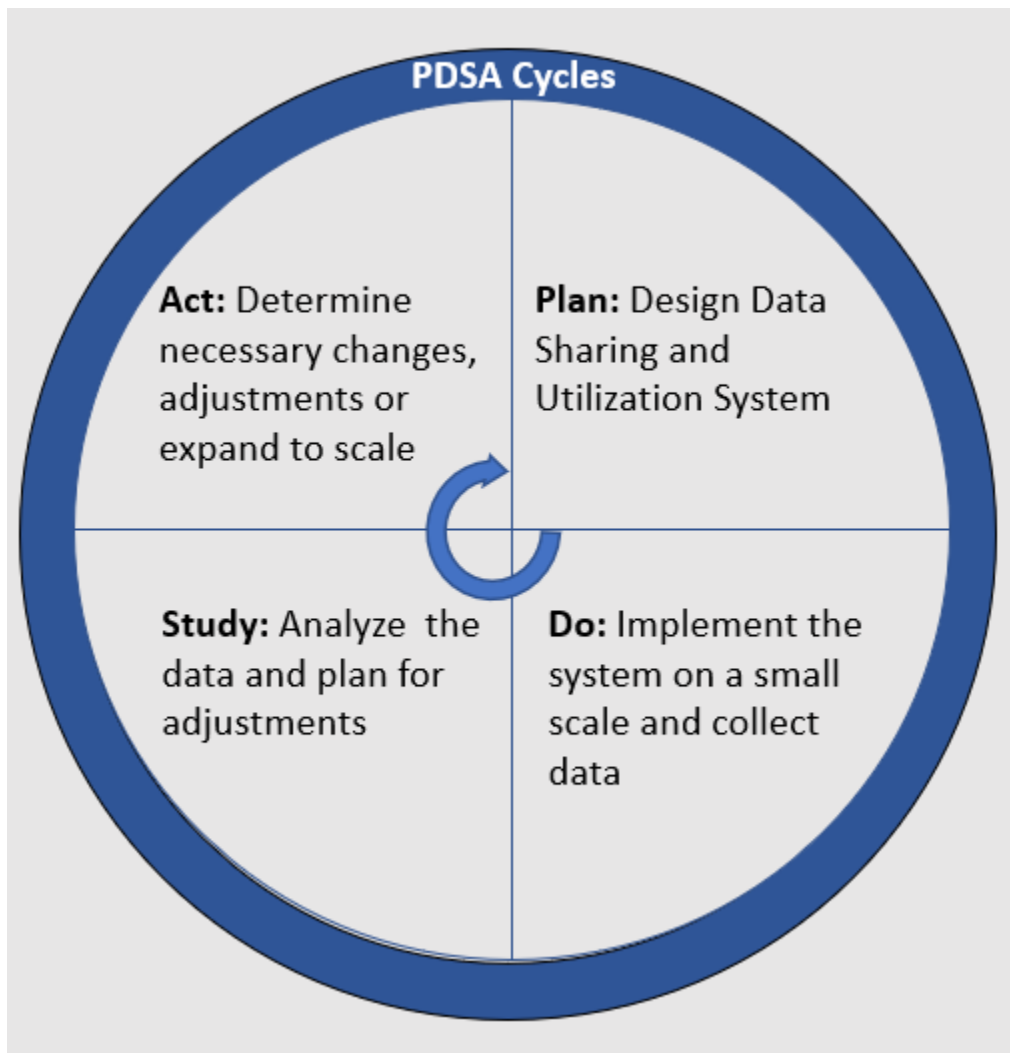


Figure 10 PDSA Cycle of Inquiry for Educare DC Data Sharing and Utilization System (adapted from Langley et al. (2009) & Bryk, Gomez, Grunow & LeMahieu, 2015, p. 122)

### **Interdisciplinary meetings for a more wholistic approach to serving families.**

One key system to conduct PDSA cycles on would be the interdisciplinary meetings that are conducted by Educare DC staff. Educare DC's model of serving children, families and communities is based on a whole child approach to education and care. The PFCE Framework used by Head Start also calls for intense family engagement in order to serve the whole child. This is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model and Pianta and Walsh's (1996) adapted ecological model with the child situated within spheres of influence starting with the school and family and extending out to policy, and also re-emphasized in the conceptual framework guiding this study. Serving the whole child is key to success at Educare DC.

Participants in all three stakeholder groups in this study specifically called out instances where multi-disciplinary meetings led to better outcomes for children and families. Particularly, home visits completed by multi-disciplinary teams and family-child reviews (or interdisciplinary meetings) were cited by all three stakeholder groups as particularly helpful. These occurrences should be baked into Educare DC's systems and structures instead of occurring as possible based on scheduling.

Additionally, teachers noted that neither home visits nor interdisciplinary meetings had been occurring during COVID-19. For interdisciplinary meetings, these could be done virtually with Educare DC staff if planned ahead and these may be particularly helpful during this time when families are facing new and increasing hardships. Home visits would of course have to wait until it is safe due to COVID-19, but once it is, having a full team of teachers and family engagement specialist attend the home visits together would create opportunities for rich data sharing and relationship-building with families. Particularly if the full team could attend the initial home visit to meet the child and family together as a team of professionals to serve the family, this would likely lead to better outcomes for the child and family. If Educare DC conducted PDSA cycles on these interdisciplinary meetings and home visits, Educare leadership could better understand how these meetings lead to meaningful data sharing and data utilization in the classroom.

### **Data Sharing and Utilization System Options**

This study revealed several options for current data sharing systems by Educare DC staff that could be tested using PDSA cycles. Some family engagement data sharing is done through ChildPlus, but teachers noted having access and usability issues. Teachers referenced a Microsoft SharePoint excel spreadsheet for each class that was used to share data between teachers, family engagement and supervisors during COVID-19. Either of these could be chosen to begin PDSA cycles of inquiry since both of these are currently being used in some way by Educare DC staff, and combined with Educare DC practices such as interdisciplinary meetings and home visits, these could serve as a new data sharing and utilization system for the school.

Educare DC could also invest in a new data system for sharing family engagement data, such as Ready Rosie. Ready Rosie<sup>9</sup> can link to the assessment and planning platform that teachers already use in the classroom (Teaching Strategies GOLD) and allow family engagement specialists to add their data and collaborate with teachers to find great resources and activities from the resource bank to send to parents. Additionally, data dashboards such as those being piloted by ACORN Evaluation<sup>10</sup>, will help all stakeholders view important data and make connections through a single online platform. Both of these systems are made with a

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.readyrosie.com/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://acornevaluation.com/big-data-small-children-big-impact/>

head start audience in mind and noted by the National Head Start Association and the Office of Head Start.

When full in-person instruction resumes, teachers will be simultaneously teaching and communicating with parents as they drop-off their child, which leaves little time for interaction with parents depending on how many children are already in the classroom. Using these types of technology will help teachers get information out to parents quickly and easily. Additionally, parents going back to work after the pandemic will likely have even busier schedules, so being able to schedule a video chat via Zoom may be a helpful alternative to having to come in-person for shorter meetings with teachers and staff.

***Recommendation 2: Implement the Data Sharing and Utilization System with Educare DC leadership’s support and train staff with fidelity on the new system.***

Once Educare DC determines the appropriate data sharing system, it will be important to train staff on the system and garner support from leadership. Training on how to properly share and use data in the classroom was noted as very important in the literature (Jimerson, 2017; Sandall et al., 2004) and would be vital to all staff understanding a new data sharing system. Educare DC teachers and family engagement specialists expressed how much they valued data use in the classroom, consistent with the literature (Brawley & Stormont, 2013; Cummings, et al., 2017; Gullo, 2013; Snyder, 2019), but without training on how to properly use the data sharing system and how best to utilize data in the classroom, the literature suggests issues may arise. Educare DC leadership should consider trainings for staff to ensure the system is implemented with fidelity by both teachers and family engagement staff.

Educare DC’s leadership will be vital in supporting staff in increasing family engagement data utilization in the classroom. Leadership sets the tone for the school on the importance of data utilization, and the school environment has been found to be a large factor in teacher motivation around data utilization in the classroom (Vanlommel, Vanhoof and Van Petegem, 2016). School Leadership establishing and promoting data use in the classroom and organizational conditions around using data also leads to increases in teacher use of data in the classroom (Anderson, Leithwood and Strauss 2010). Educare DC leadership can establish an environment that promotes data sharing and utilization, which would encourage Educare DC to share and use data for instructional practices in the classroom.

Educare DC leadership should also work to ensure that through these new data sharing systems, teachers feel informed about how to utilize data in the classroom. The literature found correlation between data use in the classroom and how informed they were about data in their professional practice (Stein & Connors, 2016). Educare DC leaders should also ensure data sharing and use is a part of reflective supervision and interdisciplinary practice, as the data from Stein and Connors (2016) notes these are all positively correlated with teachers’ feelings about data use in the classroom. By promoting an environment where data sharing

and data utilization are positive activities, Educare DC's leadership is more likely to achieve the outcomes literature notes around data utilization.

Additionally, Educare DC leadership should ensure that they are prioritizing the sharing of family engagement data collected through the local evaluation partner with Educare DC staff. This was noted as an area of need in the findings of this study, and in the literature. A strong relationships between local evaluation partner researchers and classroom teachers, adequate training for teachers on data utilization, and school directors ensuring data were being utilized are noted as key for Educare schools to fully utilize LEP data in the classroom (Guss, Norris, Horm, Monroe & Wolfe, 2012). Through the Research-to-Practice-Partnership (RPP) that each Educare school has with their local evaluation partner, Educare leadership should ask the LEP to present findings on family engagement data directly to both teachers and family engagement staff, so that gaps in knowledge are eliminated. This can be done as Educare DC leadership continues to ensure data utilization training and promotes an environment that encourages data utilization by all Educare DC staff to improve child and family outcomes. Figure 11, from the Conceptual Framework, should be referred to as Educare DC evaluates if their implementation is effective, because it should show improved child and family outcomes.

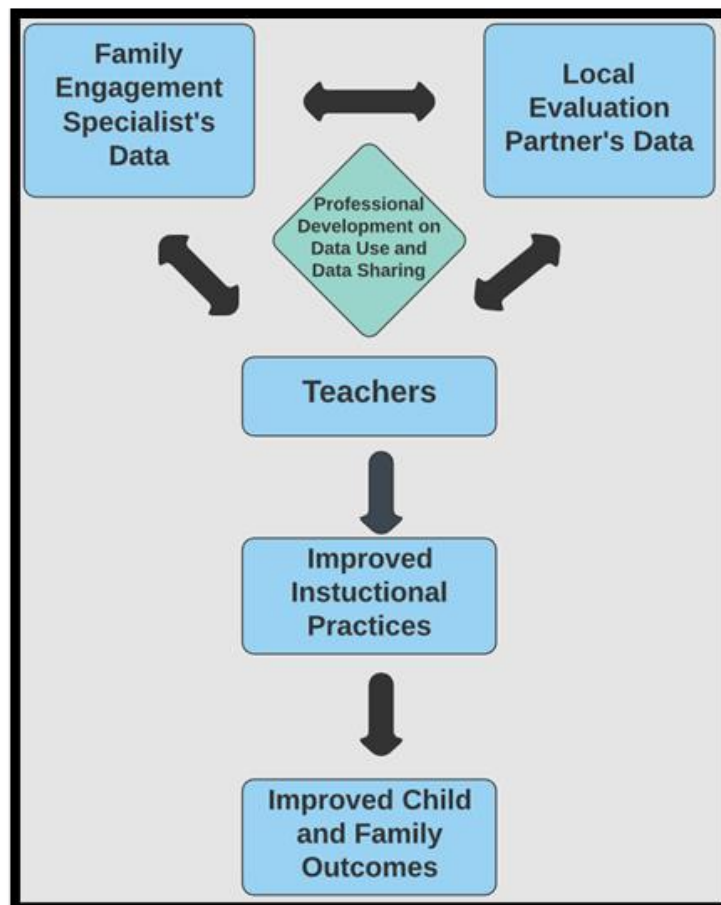


Figure 11 Section of Conceptual Framework for this Study

**Recommendation 3: Plan for on-going evaluation of family engagement data sharing and utilization systems to continuously improve.**

After enacting recommendations 1 and 2, Educare DC should plan for on-going evaluations of data sharing systems and data utilization in the classroom to ensure the recommendations are having a positive effect on child and family outcomes. Evaluating these systems can be informed by improvement science and systems thinking frameworks that are referenced in the conceptual framework of this study.

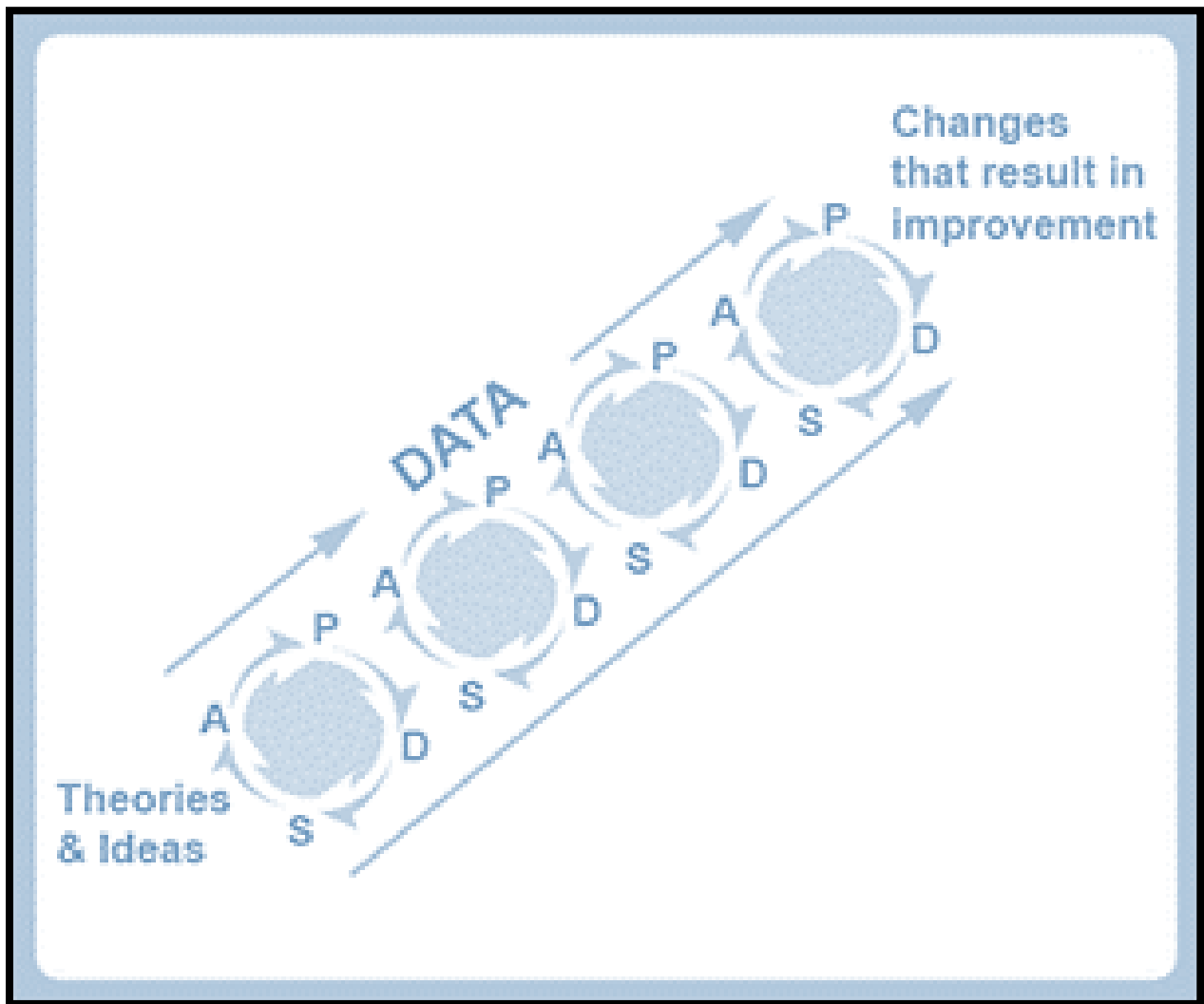


Figure 12 PDSA Cycles of Inquiry leading to Improvement (Langley et al., 2009)

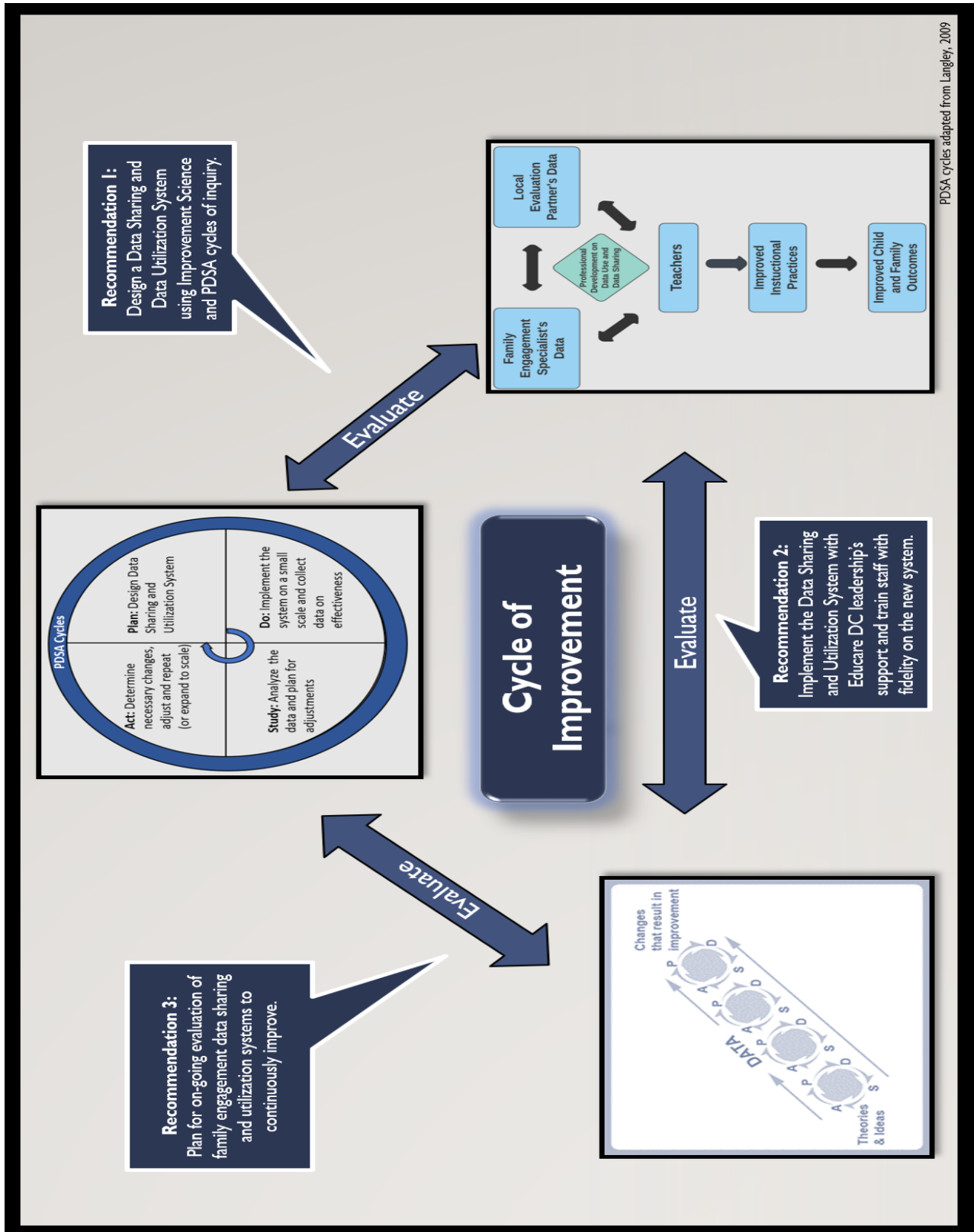
Utilizing additional PDSA cycles after data sharing, training and utilization are in place will allow Educare DC to see larger changes over time. Systems thinking and Improvement Science stress the importance of on-going evaluation, noting that, “this process builds toward a robust base of professional knowledge about what works, for whom and under what set of conditions,” (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow & LeMahieu, 2015, p. 140). Figure 12 from Langley (2009) describes the process of utilizing PDSA rapid testing cycles so that an organization can move from ideas to real changes that result in improvement. Educare DC will need to continue to employ PDSA cycles as they continuously improve over time.

Educare DC leadership should also consider forming a Network Improvement Community on improving systems for sharing and utilizing family engagement data in the classroom with other Educare schools. The Educare Learning Network<sup>11</sup> provides a great conduit for this work. Educare DC could work with other Educare schools through a Network Improvement Community (NIC) with a goal of accelerating social learning through the methods of improvement science, as described by Bryk, Gomez, Grunow & LeMahieu (2015). These communities allow for collective innovation and experimentation under the spirit of the mantra, “Probably Wrong and Definitely Incomplete,” (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow & LeMahieu, 2015, p. 163). Educare DC participating in this sort of larger learning experience could help improve outcomes for children and families at Educare schools around the country, while also improving professional practice for Educare teachers, family engagement staff and leaders.

Figure 13 represents how all three recommendations, relate to the overall Cycle of Improvement for Educare DC. Through utilizing each step of this process to test assumptions and incorporate data at the systems level using Improvement Science as a guide, Educare DC can determine how to make a lasting improvement to their problem of practice. Through improving these data sharing systems and providing professional development for all Educare DC staff on the tested system, Educare DC can successfully improve child and family outcomes.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.educareschools.org/our-approach/educare-learning-network/>



PDSA cycles adapted from Langley, 2009

Figure 13 Cycle of Improvement for Educare DC



## Limitations

The onset of the global pandemic had a major impact on the planning and execution of this study. The researcher had to make major changes to timing, all aspects of methods other than the analysis, and discussion based on the differences in how services were being delivered to families. Additionally, some of the main ways Educare DC was already collecting and utilizing family engagement data were changed because of COVID-19, specifically home visiting and the parent survey administered by the LEP. The parent focus group had little knowledge of the parent survey, so responses to that major question in the parent focus group were limited. Additionally, data sharing changed drastically because of COVID-19, and for teachers this actually ended up being positive for them during the time of data collection. But because of this pandemic and the nature of serving Educare DC families at this time, the results of this study were directly impacted and may not be as directly applicable once full in-person instruction resumes.

Specifically, using Zoom for focus groups created challenges for some participants who may have had less interruptions or technology issues if the data collection had been done in person in an Educare conference room as originally planned. It is noted that human interaction over video conferencing is different than in-person because of attention spans and body language. This format did provide limitations in this study.

Another possible limitation of this study is the researcher's prior employment as a teacher at Educare DC. Although this was helpful when Educare DC staff and parents referenced Educare specific terms and practices, it may have caused some participants to withhold responses due to personal relationships with the researcher or prior experiences with the researcher. Data analysis may have also been influenced by the researcher's prior employment experiences while working at Educare DC. Additionally, because this project was done by an individual researcher rather than a team, codes could not be compared for intercoder reliability. This opportunity for bias may have limited the analysis and findings.

## Conclusion

This study revealed that Educare DC is successfully establishing and maintaining trusting and responsive relationships with families, and that family engagement data is being collected often from multiple sources. This is consistent with literature on how to best serve children and families. For teachers to use this data in the classroom to improve instructions, data sharing systems and practices will need to be implemented, evaluated, and refined through a continuous quality improvement lens. After determining a data sharing system that works effectively for all three stakeholder groups – families, teachers, and family engagement specialists – Educare DC will see improvements in both child and family outcomes and full fidelity of the Educare model through the addition of increased data utilization.

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## Appendix: University of Maryland 2019 Parent Survey

# Parent Interview for Educare Learning Network Implementation Study School Year 2019-20

***This interview should be done with the adult who takes the most care of and knows the child the best. If the parent has multiple children enrolled in Educare, ask about the oldest child when using this set of questions. Use the supplementary form(s) to ask the parent specific questions about the other child/children who are enrolled in Educare***

*(This page will be removed before sending the information to be summarized for the Implementation Study, and an ID number will be used to keep this information confidential.)*

Parent name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_

Child ID \_\_\_\_\_

Names of Other Children Enrolled \_\_\_\_\_

Sibling ID(s) \_\_\_\_\_





## A. Demographic Information

Everyone in a family plays an important role in caring for a child. This section of the interview focuses on the primary caregiver. Please select one caregiver for section A. In other sections of the interview, two caregivers can provide one response based on their agreed answer.

1. Child's date of birth: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Month Day Year
2. Mother's date of birth (**child's birth mother**): \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Month Day Year
3. Primary caregiver's date of birth (if different than birth mother): \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Month Day Year
4. Where were you (child/children's **primary caregiver**) born? Country \_\_\_\_\_
5. Where was your child born? Country \_\_\_\_\_
6. What language does your child hear most frequently at home? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Who is your child/children's **primary caregiver**? (**Please select one.**)  
 a. Mother                       d. Grandfather                       g. Foster parent/guardian  
 b. Father                         e. Aunt                                 h. Other (**Specify:**  
\_\_\_\_\_)  
 c. Grandmother                 f. Other relative
8. What is the highest level of education of your child's **primary caregiver** (who you selected for #7)? (**Please select one – the highest level of education achieved for that individual.**)  
 a. Eighth grade or less  
 b. Some high school but no diploma or no GED  
 c. High School diploma or GED  
 d. Some college but no degree  
 e. High school diploma or GED, plus technical training or certificate  
 f. AA, AS, two-year degree  
 g. Bachelor's degree or higher  
 h. Other (**Specify:** \_\_\_\_\_)
9. Which **one** option best describes your (child's **primary caregiver**) current employment status?  
 Employed: If yes, check all that apply:  
 Working full-time (35 hours per week or more)  
 Working part-time (less than 35 hours per week)  
 Working only part of the year (less than 12 months)  
 Unemployed (e.g., laid off, between jobs, looking for work)  
 Not in the Labor Force (e.g., retired, at home parent)

10. Are you (child's **primary caregiver**) currently enrolled in school or a training program?
- Yes, in school: Which school: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Yes, in training program: Which program: \_\_\_\_\_
  - No – not in school or training program at this time
11. Which best describes your family structure?
- a. Two-parent
  - b. Single-parent
  - c. Other (**Specify:** \_\_\_\_\_)
12. How many people live in the household with your child?
- a. Altogether, there are \_\_\_ total adults (age 18 and older) living in your child's household.
  - b. Altogether, there are \_\_\_ total children (age 17 and younger) living in your child's household.
13. Does your child currently have special needs or a disability that has made him/her eligible for special education services (your child has an Individualized Family Service Plan - IFSP or an Individual Education Plan- IEP)?  a. Yes  b. No  c. I don't know
- If yes, please select the area(s) that apply to your child's special need. Check all that apply:
- \_\_\_ a. Autism/Autism Spectrum Disorder
  - \_\_\_ b. Speech or language impairment
  - \_\_\_ c. Social/Emotional behavior
  - \_\_\_ d. Development disability/Intellectual delay
  - \_\_\_ e. Physical/Orthopedic/Fine motor impairment
  - \_\_\_ f. Specific learning disability (including dyslexia, ADHD, among others),  
Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_ g. Hearing impairment including deafness
  - \_\_\_ h. Visual impairment, including blindness
  - \_\_\_ i. Down syndrome
  - \_\_\_ j. Other, please describe \_\_\_\_\_

## B. Activities with Your Child/Children

The following questions are about activities you do with your child/children.

1. **In the past week**, have you or someone in your family done the following things with your child/children? If yes, tell us how many times you have done this in the past week.

In the past <u>week</u> , have you or someone in your family:	Circle an answer for each activity				
	No	1-2 times	3 -5 times	6-7 times	Not Applicable
a. Read your child a story?	a	b	c	d	e
b. Told your child a story?	a	b	c	d	e
c. Sang songs to your child?	a	b	c	d	e
d. Described/narrated what the child was experiencing?	a	b	c	d	e
e. Taught him/her songs or music?	a	b	c	d	e
f. Played with toys or games indoors?	a	b	c	d	e
g. Talked with him/her while doing everyday tasks and errands like going to the post office, the bank or the store?	a	b	c	d	e
h. Talked about what happened at Educare?	a	b	c	d	e
i. Talked about TV programs or videos?	a	b	c	d	e
j. Played counting games like singing songs with numbers or reading books with numbers?	a	b	c	d	e

The following three items are for parents of children age 2 years and older (parents of children younger than 2 years old do not need to answer the following three items). In the past <u>week</u> , have you or someone in your family:	Circle an answer for each activity				
	No	1-2 times	3 -5 times	6-7 times	Not Applicable
k. Taught him/her letters, words, or numbers?	a	b	c	d	e
l. Worked on arts with him/her, such as drawing pictures, scribbling, and making things?	a	b	c	d	e
m. Played a game, sport, or exercised together?	a	b	c	d	e

**Parents with children of all ages should resume answering the following questions.**

2. **In the past year**, have you or someone in your family done the following things with your child/children? If yes, tell me how many times you have done this in the past year.

<b>In the past year, have you or someone in your family, with your child/children: Circle the appropriate letter for each item</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>1-2 times</b>	<b>3-4 times</b>	<b>Every Month</b>	<b>Every week</b>
<b>a.</b> Visited a library?	a	b	c	d	e
<b>b.</b> Visited a playground, park, or community pool?	a	b	c	d	e
<b>c.</b> Participated in a formal or structured activity outside of Educare hours (e.g., karate, dance, art class, gymnastics)?	a	b	c	d	e
<b>d.</b> Visited a museum, special exhibit, or historical site?	a	b	c	d	e
<b>e.</b> Visited a zoo, aquarium, or farm?	a	b	c	d	e
<b>f.</b> Attended a community event (e.g., parade, festival, fair, sporting event)?	a	b	c	d	e
<b>g.</b> Attended a family activity at a faith institution (e.g., fish fry, VBS, program at a synagogue, mosque, church, etc.)?	a	b	c	d	e

About how many children’s books do you have in your home?

- A. 1-10
- B. 11-25
- C. 26-50
- D. More than 50

### **C. Relationship with Other Parents at Educare**

*The following questions are about your relationship with other parents at Educare.*

1. **In the past week**, how often have you had conversations with other parents at Educare (for example, at Educare events, during drop-off and pick-up, in the classroom, etc.)? **[Choose one]**

- a. None       b. 1-2 times       c. 3-5 times       d. 6-7 times

2. Have you established close friendships with other parents at Educare that have lasted 3 or more months?

*Consider a **close friend** as someone with whom you can count on sharing your personal feelings, and someone you can trust and who trusts you. You support each other by helping out when help is needed or connecting each other with people or resources that are needed.*

- No       Yes       NA – enrolled less than 3 months ago

## D. Relationship with Your Child

We would like to know about your relationship with your child. Please reflect on the degree to which each of the following statements currently applies to your relationship with your child.

<b>Circle the appropriate number for each item:</b>	<b>Definitely does not apply</b>	<b>Not really</b>	<b>Neutral, not Sure</b>	<b>Applies somewhat</b>	<b>Definitely applies</b>
1. You share an affectionate, warm relationship with your child.	1	2	3	4	5
2. You and your child always seem to be struggling with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
3. If upset, your child will seek comfort from you.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Your child is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from you.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Your child values his/her relationship with you.	1	2	3	4	5
6. When you praise your child, he/she beams with pride.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Your child easily becomes angry with you.	1	2	3	4	5
8. It is easy to be in tune with what your child is feeling.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Your child remains angry or is resistant after being disciplined.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Dealing with your child drains your energy.	1	2	3	4	5
11. When your child is in a bad mood, you know you're in for a long and difficult day.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Your child's feelings toward you can be unpredictable or can change suddenly.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Your child is sneaky or manipulative with you.	1	2	3	4	5

<b>The following two items are for parents of children age 2 years and older (parents of children younger than 2 years old do not need to answer the following two items).</b>	<b>Definitely does not apply</b>	<b>Not really</b>	<b>Neutral, not Sure</b>	<b>Applies somewhat</b>	<b>Definitely applies</b>
14. Your child spontaneously shares information about himself/herself.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Your child openly shares his/her feelings and experiences with you.	1	2	3	4	5

Adapted from Robert C. Pianta Child-Parent Relationship Scale (1992)

## E. Your Hopes for Your Child's Future

We would like to know how you feel about your child's future schooling.

1. How far do you think your child will go in school?
  - Attend some high school
  - Finish high school or get a GED
  - Attend technical school after high school (GED) or take some college courses
  - Finish college and get an AA degree
  - Finish college and get a BA degree
  - Attend graduate or professional school after college
2. Have you discussed this goal with your child?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
3. Have you discussed this goal with another family member?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
4. How important is saving for college to you?

1	2	3	4	5
Not very important		Not sure		Very important
5. How much have you planned for your child's future?

1	2	3	4	5
Very little		Not sure		A lot

## F. Child and Family Health

We would like to find out about your child's health and nutrition.

1. Overall, would you say your child's health is...
  - a. Excellent
  - b. Very good
  - c. Good
  - d. Fair
  - e. Poor
6. Does this child have special health needs?
  - Yes
  - No
  - a. If yes, please tell us all that apply:

<input type="checkbox"/> a. Allergies (see part b)	<input type="checkbox"/> e. Anemia	<input type="checkbox"/> i. Obesity
<input type="checkbox"/> b. Diabetes	<input type="checkbox"/> f. Eczema	<input type="checkbox"/> j. Vision problems
<input type="checkbox"/> c. Sickle Cell Disease	<input type="checkbox"/> g. Hearing difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/> k. Other (Specify: _____)
<input type="checkbox"/> d. High lead levels	<input type="checkbox"/> h. Asthma	
  - b. If you marked in **part a** this child has allergies, has a doctor, nurse, or other medical professional told you that s/he has any of the following? *If yes, please tell us all that apply:*
    - a. Food allergy (*sometimes doctors prescribe an epi-pen for these allergies*)
    - b. Food intolerance or sensitivity (*other than lactose intolerance*)

c. Environmental allergies (e.g., hay fever, or allergy to mold, pollen, trees, animals)

d. Allergy to insect sting (e.g., bees or wasps)

7. The next two questions are about the food in your household in the last year, and whether you have been able to afford all of the food you need.

a. In the last 12 months, how often have you been worried about whether your food would run out before you got money to buy more? Would you say...

a. Never

b. Sometimes

c. Often

b. In the last 12 months, how often did the food you bought actually run out and you didn't have money to get more? Would you say...

a. Never

b. Sometimes

c. Often

8. The next two questions are about homelessness in the last year. *We define homelessness as a temporary situation in which families are living in a shelter, with family or friends, or another non-permanent arrangement.*

a. In the last 12 months, how often have you been worried that you and your children might become homeless? Would you say...

a. Never

b. Sometimes

c. Often

b. In the last 12 months, were you and your children ever homeless?

a. No

b. Yes

## G. Your Feelings

*Almost everyone experiences times of feeling sad or depressed, like when a person close to you has died or if there are problems at work or in the family. The next 4 questions are about such times.*

1. Have you ever had **2 years or more** in your life when you felt depressed or sad most days, even if you felt OK sometimes?

a. Yes

b. No

2. In the last 12 months, have you had **2 weeks or longer** when nearly every day you felt sad, empty or depressed for most of the day or you lost interest in most things like work, hobbies, and other things you usually enjoy?

a. Yes

b. No

3. In the last month, have you had a period of **1 week or more** when nearly every day you felt sad, empty, or depressed for most of the day or you lost interest in most things like work, hobbies, and other things you usually enjoy?

a. Yes

b. No

4. OPTIONAL: What are the things in your life that have made you feel sad in the past month?

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## H. Your Stress Level

Instructions: The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, please indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way.

<i>Circle the appropriate number for each item</i>	Never	Almost never	Some times	Fairly often	Very often
1. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	1	2	3	4	5
2. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?	1	2	3	4	5
3. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?	1	2	3	4	5
4. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	1	2	3	4	5

Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., and Mermelstein, R. (1983). *Perceived Stress Index*

## I. Your Resilience Level

At present, how true do you think these statements are about you?

<i>Circle the appropriate number for each item</i>	Not at all true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Completely true
1. I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times	1	2	3	4
2. I have a hard time making it through stressful events	1	2	3	4
3. It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event	1	2	3	4
4. It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens	1	2	3	4
5. I usually come through difficult times with little trouble	1	2	3	4
6. I tend to take a long time to get over set-backs in my life	1	2	3	4

Adapted from Brief Resilience Scale (BRS), Smith et al. (2008), Ohio State University. Brief Resilience Scale.



## J. Your Social Supports

Listed below are people and groups that oftentimes are helpful to members of a family raising a young child. This questionnaire asks you to indicate how helpful each source is to **you or your family**. Please **circle** the response that best describes how helpful the sources have been to your family during the past **3 to 6 months**. If a source of help has not been available to your family during this period of time, circle the NA (Not Available) response. If another source that has been helpful is not listed you can add that source(s) to items 19 and 20.

How helpful has each of the following been to you in terms of raising your child(ren):	Not Available	Not at All Helpful	Sometimes Helpful	Generally Helpful	Very Helpful	Extremely Helpful
1. My parents	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. My spouse or partner's parents	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. My relatives/kin	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. My spouse or partner's relatives/kin	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Spouse or partner	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. My friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. My spouse or partner's friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. My own children	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Other parents	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Co-workers	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Parent groups	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Social groups/clubs	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. Church members/minister	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. My family or child's physician	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. Early childhood intervention program	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. School/child care center	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. Professional helpers (social workers, teachers, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. Professional agencies (public health, social services, mental health, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

Dunst, Jenkins & Trivette (1984). Family Support Scale.

## K. Your Neighborhood/Community

Think about the people in your neighborhood/community and how supportive you think that they are toward your family and your child.

How would you rate your neighborhood? <i>Circle the appropriate number for each item</i>	Definitely Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Definitely Agree
1. Your child is safe in your neighborhood.	1	2	3	4
2. People in your neighborhood watch out for each other's children.	1	2	3	4
3. People in the neighborhood help each other out.	1	2	3	4
4. There are people you can count on in your neighborhood.	1	2	3	4
5. There are adults nearby who you trust to help your child if she/he got hurt playing outside.	1	2	3	4
6. There are people in the neighborhood who might be a bad influence on your child.	1	2	3	4

Adapted from National Survey of Children's Health 2003

## L. What Happened to You Last Year

The next questions are about things that may have happened in your household over the past year. Some of the questions are about situations that can be difficult for families. Please remember, all of your answers are held in the strictest confidence and will not be shared with anyone outside of the Educare program.

**In the Past Year:** Circle the appropriate response for each item

Yes	No	1. Did you get married?
Yes	No	2. Did you become engaged to be married?
Yes	No	3. Did you get divorced?
Yes	No	4. Did you separate from your partner (e.g., spouse, girl/boyfriend), even though you may be back together now?
Yes	No	5. Did you separate from another family member (e.g., moved out from relative's home, older child moved out, child went to live with a relative)?
Yes	No	6. Did you gain a new family member (e.g., through birth, adoption, someone moving in)?
Yes	No	7. Was there a death of someone important in your child's life?
Yes	No	8. Was there a major change in your living conditions (e.g., moving, deterioration of home or neighborhood)? If yes, describe: _____
Yes	No	9. Has a family member been the victim of a violent crime?
Yes	No	10. Has your child lived with someone else at some point during the past year?
Yes	No	11. Has a family member had a serious illness?
Yes	No	12. Has a family member been jailed or in prison?
Yes	No	13. Has your child been a witness to domestic violence?

<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	14. Has your child lived with someone who had a problem with alcohol or drugs?
<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	15. Has there been a change in your work (e.g., new job, lost job, change in location)? If yes, describe: _____
<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	16. Have there been any other events which you think have affected you or your child in the past year? If yes, describe _____

## **M. Final Thoughts About Your Educare School**

1. What do you like most about your participation in Educare?

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2. What do you like least about your participation in Educare?

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3. In addition to what you already receive from Educare, what other services and supports could Educare provide that would benefit you and your family?

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Thank you for taking the time to complete this interview. Your participation is a valuable contribution to the Educare Program. If you have any questions, please contact your Educare Evaluator whose name and phone number are listed below.