

Early Returns on Educare of Chicago

A Report to Investors

PUBLISHED BY THE OUNCE OF PREVENTION FUND



Two months into the school year, and five-year-old Kyle is struggling.

While others in his kindergarten classroom are able to chime in as their teacher leads them in an alphabet game, none of the letters seem to be “clicking” for Kyle. He will proudly tell you he can count to ten, but his disappointment is palpable when he isn’t able to correctly recognize a “6” or “4” from among the other numbers.

He’s frustrated and unfortunately can’t find the words to express how he feels. So he shows his frustration the only way he knows – by acting out, or lashing out at other students. Or sometimes he just withdraws completely. At least by misbehaving, he can get someone to focus on him for a while – and since he’s often overlooked amidst his stressful home environment, it is attention he desperately craves.

Kyle’s escalating frustration is matched by that of his teacher, who knows she just can’t give him – or similar children – the attention and support needed to make up their academic deficits. Already, she’s afraid she’s looking at another case in which the education system – and ultimately another child – fails.

She also knows it didn’t have to be that way. Another of her students, Nicole, on paper looks just like Kyle. The difference is that Nicole arrived at kindergarten having been immersed for five years in a high-quality, evidence-based, early education program uniquely geared toward at-risk children. Nicole’s entry into public education has been positive and affirming, and she is clearly thriving. An early intervention paved the way to a wholly different outcome.

Educare Is Closing the Achievement Gap

Educare was developed by the Ounce of Prevention Fund to address the achievement gap that exists for children like Kyle.

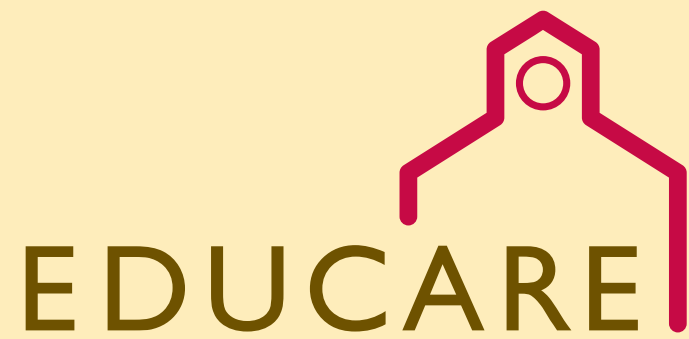
Educare is a state-of-the-art school open full day and full year to serve at-risk children from birth to five years. With attention to rigorous implementation, it bridges the gap between what research has found to be most effective in supporting children at risk for academic failure and what most children in poverty actually experience. Educare provides high-quality, outcomes-based learning environments for low-income babies, toddlers, and preschoolers to help them arrive at kindergarten safe, healthy, and ready to learn.

Educare of Chicago blends public funding from Head Start, child care, and preschool to provide a comprehensive approach to the developmental needs of each child. Its opening in 2000 generated widespread interest in the promise that Educare’s evidence-based approach holds for improving educational experiences for the most vulnerable children.

The Buffett Early Childhood Fund soon joined with the Ounce to create the Bounce Learning Network, a growing network of Educare Centers that are serving as catalysts for broader early childhood programmatic and policy change nationwide.

Included in the Educare Model is a commitment to ongoing evaluation. In Chicago we use public and private funds to evaluate the quality of classroom environments and rigorously assess Educare students’ progress every fall and spring. In addition, the Educare Follow-Up Study¹ is documenting the progress of Educare of Chicago graduates in kindergarten and early elementary school.

We are thrilled to report that our efforts appear to be working. Among some of the most difficult to reach children, Educare of Chicago is improving early language and literacy skills, creating active and engaged learners, and putting vulnerable children on the pathway toward school success.



EDUCARE

Why Is It Important?

Most of the nation's low-income, at-risk children enter kindergarten well below average on readiness measures and well behind their higher-income peers. The achievement gap apparent at 18 months continues through high school and correlates to students' increased risk for academic failure. This achievement gap is linked to many of society's major economic and social problems, including illiteracy, teen pregnancy, high drop-out rates, unemployment, and adverse health conditions.²

Educare Is Improving Children's Language Skills

Early language and comprehension skills are strong predictors of future school achievement. Educare of Chicago envelops children in a language-rich environment from birth. Highly trained, qualified teachers use storytelling, singing, and enriched conversations to model expressive language and build a child's listening-comprehension skills.

Children enrolled at Educare of Chicago from birth to age five were half as likely to score in the most-at-risk range on standardized tests as were children who entered the program at age three³. This finding confirms that early exposure to Educare's intensive program, over time, effectively mitigates the impact of risks faced by our most vulnerable children. Children at Educare of Chicago score better on measures of language, vocabulary, and concept skills compared to their peers in Head Start programs.^{4,5,6}



Educare is:

- A **Program** to prepare young, at-risk children for school by implementing the approaches that science tells us are necessary.
- A **Place** that nurtures early learning and sends a firm message that we must invest in early childhood – because children are born learning.
- A **Partnership** between the private and public sectors to create a birth-to-five program that achieves high levels of quality.
- A **Platform for Change** in which the Educare Center serves as a "showroom for quality" and a catalyst to drive policy change.



Educare Is Enhancing Early Literacy Skills

Children are most successful at learning to read in elementary school when they have developed key early literacy skills. Research shows that first-grade reading ability is a strong predictor of 11th-grade reading comprehension, vocabulary, and general knowledge.⁷

Educare's small class sizes and high staff-to-child ratios enable teachers to work individually with children to strengthen preliteracy skills such as letter recognition, rhyming, and letter sounds.

Nearly all children graduate from Educare of Chicago with early literacy skills that meet or exceed expected developmental ranges, including skill areas that require a more advanced capacity for processing individual letter sounds, beginning sounds, and rhyming sounds.⁸

Educare Is Helping Children Become Active, Engaged Learners

Social and emotional skills – the capacity to control one's behavior, to get along with peers, and to ask for and receive help – are critical to school success.

At Educare, children stay with the same teachers for the first three years of life. This "continuity of care" helps children form the healthy, secure attachments to adults and caregivers that are needed to develop a sense of curiosity, persistence, self-confidence, and hopefulness. Educare is committed to this key strategy for building the solid foundation a child must have to become an active, engaged learner – one who demonstrates patience, regulates his or her emotions, and cooperates with teachers and other students.

Nearly 80 percent of teachers in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and nearly 90 percent of our children's parents report that children graduate from Educare with the social and emotional skills and behaviors that enable them to engage successfully in the classroom.⁹

Educare of Chicago graduates are able to regulate their emotions and problem-solve socially, and they show persistence under the stress of more difficult learning tasks – all protective factors needed to thrive in difficult situations and environments both in and out of the classroom. Preschool teachers rate 88 percent of Educare five-year-olds as having social skills on a par with or better than national averages.⁹ And Educare graduates are 50 percent less likely to demonstrate behavioral problems at transition to kindergarten compared to other children from low-income communities (15 percent versus 34 percent).^{10,11}



Educare Is Helping Students Enter Elementary School Ready to Succeed

Nearly 85 percent of Educare of Chicago graduates score in the average-to-above-average range compared to their peers nationally on a test specifically designed to measure school readiness.¹²

At the beginning of the kindergarten year, CPS teachers rated 75 percent of Educare of Chicago children as being prepared "on average" or "excellently" for kindergarten. By the end of kindergarten, those same teachers rated 86 percent of Educare graduates as being "on average" or "excellently" prepared for first grade.¹¹



Today, the innovative Educare Model started in Chicago has gained the attention of program providers, philanthropic leaders, school officials, and policy-makers who have invested in five additional Educare Centers throughout the country and joined the Bounce Learning Network. Eight more Educare Centers are under development.

Through restricted grants, the Ounce of Prevention Fund provides training and technical assistance to ensure that the Educare Model is implemented as designed.¹³



The Importance of Continued Investments

We are very pleased with our findings to date and with the expansion of the Educare Model, but we know there is more to do. As we uphold our commitment to continuous improvement, we look forward to enhancing our core programs through innovations such as the Infant and Toddler Language and Literacy Promotion Project¹⁴ and the Early Childhood Mental Health Project.¹⁵

Additionally, we are launching the Early Math Initiative¹⁶ to improve early math literacy and problem-solving skills. This new initiative will intensify staff development around building and strengthening children's early mathematical thinking skills, and intensify engagement of parents around math and other academic skills.

In partnership with the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, we are planning a randomized control study of our Educare Model throughout the Bounce Learning Network. This gold-standard evaluation will provide new evidence on the potential impact of high-quality early childhood experiences for young children at risk for school failure.

Private investment in the Ounce allows us to continue to lead the field through program innovation and policy change, moving us one step closer to closing the achievement gap and changing the life trajectories of vulnerable children.

FOOTNOTES

1. Generously funded by the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation and the Alvin H. Baum Family Fund.
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7. Cunningham, A.E., and Stanovich, K.E. (1997). "Early Reading Acquisition and its Relation to Reading Experience and Ability 10 Years Later." *Developmental Psychology*, Vol 33 (6), November, 934-945.
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10. Rimm-Kaufman, S.E., Pianta, R.C., and Cox, M.J. (2000). "Teachers' Judgments of Problems in the Transition to Kindergarten." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15 (2), 147-166.
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12. Bracken, B.A. (1998, 1984). *Bracken Basic Concept Scale-Revised*. San Antonio, TX: The Psychological Corporation, Harcourt Brace & Company.
13. Generously funded by the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation.
14. Generously funded by the Louis R. Lurie Foundation, Polk Bros. Foundation, Chauncey and Marion Deering McCormick Foundation, Prince Charitable Trusts, and The Children's Initiative - A Project of the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation.
15. Generously funded in part by The Blowitz-Ridgeway Foundation.
16. Generously funded in part by the Louis R. Lurie Foundation.

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