

To: Educare Executive Directors, School Directors, and Local Evaluation Partners

From: National Evaluation Partner Team at Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, UNC-CH

Re: Educare National Evaluation Required Measures

Date: January 10, 2025

This memo serves as an updated version of the memo dated August 12, 2022, reminding everyone of the measures required by the Educare National Evaluation and the options that exist.

In 2019, a cross-Network committee, which would later become the Educare Research, Evaluation, and Data Strategy (EREDS) Work Group, was charged with:

- realigning “the ELN national evaluation with the transition of the Network from being an evaluation of the Educare model and demonstration of how quality early childhood education can close the achievement gap to a Network focused on practice innovation, improvement and field impact.”
- reducing the Educare National Evaluation core data collection battery to enable school teams and LEPs to undertake new activities.

Because schools are different in many other ways, the committee strongly believed that the core data is, and should continue to be, a shared feature of Educare that is the same across schools. Also, the committee noted that if schools innovate with different practices, and use different measures, it will be difficult to know whether any differences were due to practices or measures. Thus, opt-out rules or procedures were not recommended.

Below we list the current Educare National Evaluation required measures that emerged from the 2019 process and subsequent decisions by EREDS, highlighting some background, how the data have been/could be useful, and ways Local Evaluation Partners (LEPs) and programs have worked together to gather information both for program improvement and telling the evolving Educare story. We conclude with a discussion of how and when data is available to LEPs and a short overview of the history and governance of the evaluation.

- I. Child Measures**
- II. Parent/Family Measures**
- III. Classroom Measures**
- IV. Staff Measures**
- V. Access to Educare National Evaluation Data**
- VI. History and Governance**

For a summary table see the document entitled:

EducareNationalEvaluation_RequiredMeasures_2024-25.pdf

Please reach out either to Gisele Crawford (gisele.crawford@unc.edu) or Noreen Yazejian (noreen.yazejian@unc.edu) if you have any questions.

I. Child Measures

Information about children is gathered to track **language** skills, **social-emotional** functioning, **disabilities** information, and **attendance**.

Language

Background. There is not a perfect language measure. An ideal tool for Educare would span birth-5, be available in multiple languages, allow for national comparisons, be free of racial/ethnic/gender bias, and provide information to enable teachers to individualize instruction. We¹ settled on retaining the PLS-5 Auditory Communication in English and/or Spanish as a measure of children’s language development over time from age 2 through spring before kindergarten, and kept the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-4 (PPVT-4) for a 50% subsample of Pre-K/Head Start children through the 2023-24 school year. Starting in 2024-25, the PPVT is no longer required by the Educare National Evaluation.

Options. Schools have may choose to gather and share with FPG the PLS-5 Expressive Communication subscale, and also can collect the PPVT-4 with age-eligible children, in the fall and spring, if they find the other measures and additional time points to be helpful. For Spanish speaking children, some schools use the PLS-5 DLL administration combining the English and Spanish measures in one test session; others prefer to obtain a score on the Spanish PLS and a separate score on the English. LEPs can administer the measures, or sites may have speech language pathologists complete the language tools (and FPG does not need to certify such individuals).

LEP Partnerships/Use. The PLS-5 is a lengthy measure (can take up to an hour); LEPs can divide the session if children need breaks. In general, schools serving large proportions of Hispanic/Latine children and families appreciate that the PLS-5 can measure both English and Spanish language skills. Schools find the PLS-5 useful as a tool to suggest whether children are on track with language development or might need additional screening. The PLS-5 also allows researchers to conduct longitudinal analyses of children’s language skills.

Social-emotional

Background. When the evaluation started in 2007, many Educare schools were using the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) to meet the Head Start requirements for a social-emotional screener, so it became the tool for measuring social-emotional functioning and it continues to meet Head Start requirements. Teachers rate children’s skills in the fall and spring.

Options. LEPs enter DECA ratings into FPG’s data entry website. As with most measures, a template is available that allows LEPs to upload multiple DECAs into the system at once. LEPs can make some modifications to e-DECA data and successfully use this upload feature.

LEP Partnership/Use. LEPs should provide training to teachers about how to use the tool. The DECA identifies areas of both strength and concern for children and includes companion materials for helping staff support children’s resilience.

¹ See the section on History and Governance for information about how decisions are made.

Disabilities

Background. In early evaluation years, LEPs collected from programs minimal data about children with disabilities and entered it into FPG's data entry website. In 2016, a disabilities workgroup recommended gathering annual information, including the disability type. Starting in the 2016-17 program year, LEPs populate a spreadsheet annually in the summer for the previous year to indicate which children had an IFSP or IEP *at any time* during the previous year and, if so, the type of disability.

Options. FPG sets target dates for LEPs to complete a set of error corrections for the previous year prior to generating these spreadsheets, and then target dates for completion of the spreadsheets. LEPs and schools across the Network differ in when it is possible for them to complete this task, and FPG accommodates some variation in completion of these tasks.

LEP Partnership/Use. LEPs often meet with program Child Plus/other management information system (MIS) staff to determine the best way to get information about disabilities (and attendance; see below) from program data systems. We imagine that programs might think this effort is duplicative; since the information is already in their systems, why can't the evaluation just use that information? However, with 25 Educare schools attempting to have information that can be merged and connected with other types of data, we have to ensure that the information is gathered in a standardized way. Some LEPs have worked with school staff to help automate the process of downloading the information needed for the evaluation. This information helps describe the Educare sample of children, was presented in a Network research brief, and is currently being used in a paper on the outcomes of Educare children with disabilities.

Attendance

Background. Confirming other research in early childhood, a 2015 Educare publication showed that dosage in Educare was important—children who entered at Educare at earlier ages and stayed longer generally had better outcomes. We know that attendance rate is also important. In 2008-09, we started collecting for each child the total number of days attended and the total number of days possible to have attended between enrollment and exit dates. LEPs share attendance information with FPG in a spreadsheet annually in the summer/fall for the previous year.

Options. As with disabilities data, FPG strives to support LEPs' and schools' need for adjustments in target dates for completion, within reason.

LEP Partnership/Use. Similar to information about disabilities, LEPs partner with programs to obtain attendance information from either MIS or other attendance tracking mechanisms. Attendance data in relation to child outcomes was presented in a Network research brief and is being written up for journal publication. The attendance information during the pandemic could be particularly enlightening.

II. Parent/Family Measures.

Information gathered about Educare families falls within the four categories of intermediate outcomes in the Educare intensive family engagement logic model-- Family as Lifelong Nurturer and Educator; Family Connections to Peers, School, and Community; Family as Lifelong Advocate and Leader; and Family Well-being and Development. These questions/categories also align with the Office of Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement framework.

Educare National Evaluation Required Measures

Currently, information is obtained from parents through the annual parent interview and the spring parent survey.

Background. The family measures have changed multiple times over the years—including the content, timing, and mode of data collection. For the first two years of the evaluation (2007-2009), families were interviewed twice, in the fall and spring, typically by family engagement staff (in rare cases LEPs interview families). From the beginning, a “sibling supplement” has been included for families with multiple children in Educare, to obtain child-specific information without requiring families to complete two full interviews. Starting in 2009-10, to reduce burdens on programs, the spring interview was eliminated. However, there was a desire to have a final data collection point with families of children going to kindergarten to get feedback about Educare and document transition activities, so a kindergarten exit survey was developed that year. In the 2012-13 year, in response to work to better align the evaluation with the then-new family engagement logic model, the evaluation added back a spring assessment, in the form of a confidential survey. This method allowed us to ask questions about the parent’s relationships with staff and also did not add burden to Educare FES staff. Parents complete the spring survey electronically or on paper and deliver it to the LEPs in a sealed envelope. In the 2018-19 year, the kindergarten exit interview was eliminated as a separate tool, and questions about kindergarten transition were incorporated into the spring survey. Parents report about relationships (parent-child, parent teacher) separately for each of their enrolled Educare children.

The 2022 spring survey included measures related to discrimination and racial/ethnic socialization of young children which had been discussed and approved by EREDS.

Options. Schools have always had the option to add additional measures and scales to the annual interview, and many have done so over the years. Starting in 2017, some scales were deemed optional; LEPs and programs discuss options and then relay site-level decisions to FPG, so that the interview can be customized. Currently two scales related to resilience and neighborhoods are optional.

The interview responses can be entered directly into FPG’s data website by the interviewer. Alternatively, the interview can be gathered on paper and LEPs can then enter the data.

Spring parent surveys are distributed and collected by LEP staff to protect confidentiality. LEPs either distribute paper surveys with return envelopes or links to electronic surveys. For several years, LEPs devised their own electronic versions using the questions provided by FPG. FPG developed an upload option and data dictionary to facilitate upload of these electronic data into FPG’s system. Beginning with the 202-23 school year, FPG devised a system to provide links to family-specific surveys for LEPs to distribute, with the data families enter going directly into FPG’s database (eliminating the need for LEPs to create e-surveys and upload the data).

LEP Partnership/Use. Most family interviews are gathered by family engagement staff, and it is hoped that the information is useful in developing family partnership agreements. Spring surveys are designed to gather feedback from parents about their experiences at Educare and can be used for program improvement. The data from interviews and surveys are available to LEPs as soon as they are entered.

III. Classroom Measures

Educare National Evaluation Required Measures

Information currently gathered about classrooms includes global quality observations (infant-toddler/Early Head Start classrooms), instructional quality observations (preschool/Head Start classrooms), and classroom structural characteristics (e.g., languages used, staff-child ratios).

Background. When the evaluation began, global quality was documented with the Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R) for infant and toddler classrooms and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) for preschool classrooms. Literacy environmental quality was documented with the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) for preschool classrooms for the first 3 years of the study then dropped. Starting in the second year (2008-09), an observation coversheet was added to gather information about group sizes, ratios, and use of languages other than English. When the Office of Head Start adopted the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Pre-K as part of its Designation Renewal System in 2009, Educare also added the measure to the battery. In 2011, the Toddler CLASS was added. Several sites participated in Teachstone’s field testing of the Infant CLASS in 2012-14 although it was never required by the National Evaluation.

When new versions of the ECERS and ITERS were published, Educare pilot tested and then adopted them (ECERS-3 in 2016-17, ITERS-3 in 2017-18). The ECERS-3 was dropped as a required measure after the 2017-18 year. When EREDS met in 2019, efforts to streamline the battery led to retaining the classroom observation coversheet for all classrooms, the ITERS-3 for infant-toddler classrooms, and the CLASS Pre-K for preschool classrooms; the Toddler CLASS was dropped.

Options. For the ITERS-3 and CLASS Pre-K, observations are only required every other year for classes with a returning lead teacher. Some sites choose to gather them every year, or more than once per year.

Schools have always had the option to include additional classroom measures that they find useful. The FPG data system accepts some of these options (ECERS-3, Toddler CLASS, Infant CLASS) and allows the user to pull the raw data for local use.

LEP Partnership/Use. In some cases, LEPs may obtain ITERS-3 or CLASS Pre-K data from state quality rating system/QRIS observers or other trained, external observers so that the number of times a classroom is observed can be minimized. The classroom quality measures have been used to show that Educare provides high-quality care. At the local level, the data are shared with school staff and leadership by LEPs and used to develop coaching plans for improvement.

IV. Staff Measures

Educare staff play an integral role in the collection of all Educare National Evaluation data – being observed, facilitating children’s participation in assessments, facilitating parent survey collection and interviewing parents, completing DECAs, and sharing administrative data. In addition, three categories of staff—teaching, family engagement, and mentor teaching staff— complete annual surveys that include questions about workplace climate and job stress, interdisciplinary practice, and personal characteristics (e.g., education level, training). Every four years, questions are included about one of the four core Educare features (i.e., data utilization, embedded professional development, high-quality teaching practices, intensive family engagement) to help document implementation. In 2021, questions were added about challenges related to Covid-19, and in 2022, surveys included questions on beliefs about racial/ethnic socialization and experiences of discrimination.

Educare National Evaluation Required Measures

Background. The staff survey data are among the most sensitive of the data gathered by the National Evaluation because of the potential for respondents to be identified and for the information shared to be misused (e.g., negative feedback about program leadership could be held against someone). Because of this, the staff data are controlled very strictly. No one except NEP/FPG staff see completed surveys, and datasets containing staff data are completely de-identified before sharing with LEPs, even a site's own data. If fewer than three staff in a job category complete a survey (e.g., family engagement or mentor teaching staff), these data are not shared with LEPs because of the chance for an LEP to know a person's identity.

We have asked staff 82 different scales or types of questions over the years since 2007, changing the surveys in response to the desire to know more about staff roles, satisfaction with Network supports, beliefs about teaching and how children learn and develop, and classroom/family engagement/mentor teaching practices.

Options. Because of the sensitive nature of the data as noted above, the NEP/FPG sends links to the staff surveys to individual staff members' email addresses if the staff member has requested an English survey. Staff responses are captured in a secure website housed at FPG. Paper surveys are provided to those who prefer a Spanish version, to any individual who requests one, or at a few schools where they are distributed at a staff event where completion is required. LEPs provide envelopes for each staff member to protect confidentiality, then ship them directly to FPG for entry.

LEP Partnership/Use. Because of the need for confidentiality, staff survey data are the only National Evaluation data not immediately available to LEPs and schools. FPG staff enter and clean the data from paper forms. Then an extra step of de-identifying data must be completed by the FPG staff who process the datasets, while project staff read all open-ended responses to ensure the removal of names/other identifying information. In order to improve turnaround time, the NEP, LEPs, and school leaders came to agreements about when the surveys will be completed and when FPG will produce summary reports.

The staff data have been used by schools to see where they are in relation to other schools in the Network on workplace climate and implementation of the core features as reported by staff.

V. Access to Educare National Evaluation Data

There are different ways LEPs can retrieve and use the data they submit to FPG.

Raw data, site-level only. LEPs have immediate access to all their raw data (EXCEPT for staff survey data) as soon as they enter it into FPG's online data entry system. To see and use their own Educare school's data at any time, LEPs can download reports or spreadsheets. They can't retrieve data about other Educare schools in this way.

Processed data, longitudinal, network comparison. FPG also provides processed datasets and summary reports that allow LEPs to compare their own data to aggregated data for other schools, as well as to compare data across years and combine different types of data in analyses. Datasets are updated every few months with new data. The processed datasets include additional summary scores, calculated by FPG. A summary report for each type of data is created and shared at generally the same time each year.

- FPG shared a summary report of the 2023-24 **fall parent interview** in early February 2024, with all of the data schools had entered by the end of January. We always share an updated version in the fall with (presumably) all sites' data. LEPs have access to their own site's raw data as soon as it is entered in FPG system (no comparison to other or all sites).

Educare National Evaluation Required Measures

- Because of the need for confidentiality, **staff survey data** are only made available in these processed datasets and summary reports. A few years ago, FPG engaged in a process with LEPs and schools to commit to some harder deadlines for staff survey data, so FPG could provide datasets and reports earlier. Even with those agreements, there are inevitably schools that continue collecting staff surveys past the deadline, which we support but which also means that the processed datasets and summary reports (comparing the LEP's own site to the combined Others and All) we share in June are incomplete and then updated in the fall.
- Each year FPG reminds LEPs to enter their **spring parent surveys** by June 30 so we can provide datasets/summaries in August. Every year, we have to make choices about sharing incomplete datasets and summaries vs. waiting for all LEPs to enter data. If we run the reports with a few sites missing, the sites that did submit surveys will see their own results but the comparison columns for Others and All will not represent the whole Network. LEPs that submit late might have to wait a few months. FPG produces a report in the fall after all the surveys have been submitted and when time permits. Meanwhile, LEPs always have access to their own, raw data once they enter it (showing only their own site's data, not a comparison to Others or All).
- In the fall, we also run summary reports for other measures – class observations, child assessments – and some others such as turnover.

VI. History and Governance

Beginning in 2007, the year that cross-site data collection began, executive directors, local evaluators, and FPG and Start Early staff would meet together for a day at least once a year to discuss options and decide on the evaluation study protocol for the next year. By 2013, the network had grown in number and our joint meetings with program leaders were reduced to half-a-day. By 2016 our time together was shortened to 90 minutes and was optional for program leaders, so decisions about what measures would be part of the core and what would be dropped were made by committees, which included only some program leaders and LEPs. With the advent of shared governance beginning in 2019, the Educare Research, Evaluation, and Data Strategy (EREDS) Work Group, with NEP, LEP, Educare program leadership, and funder representatives, has responsibility for determining and approving changes to measures. The roles of our NEP team continue to be coordinating the decision-making process, providing the data and expertise to inform the process, thus arriving at a protocol each year that maximizes the collection of the most useful information for the Network to advance its goals while minimizing respondents' burden.

EREDS first met in September of 2019 and recommended scaling back some of the core data collection to free up resources for sub-studies. This work group dropped the ECERS-3 as a required measure, shortened staff and parent surveys/interviews, continued to offer some sections of the parent interview as optional, added questions to the parent survey related to kindergarten transition to eliminate a separate survey, and allowed schools to gather PPVTs on just a 50% subsample of children. We renamed the study the Educare National Evaluation, rather than the Educare Implementation Study, to reflect that we were no longer focusing on implementation and outcomes per se. The current battery represents the latest in a series of adaptations that have occurred over the years.