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Executive Summary

Educare of Lincoln opened in March 2013, and is currently a collaborative effort between the Buffett Early Childhood Fund (BECF), Lincoln Public Schools (LPS), and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). Educare of Lincoln is part of the larger, national network of now 24 Educare Centers located throughout the US. Educare builds on Head Start and Early Head Start guidelines and practices. This report focuses on activities and assessments in the 2017-2018 school year.

*Educare is designed to give students in poverty an improved chance for success in school and life by providing the highest quality care and education from birth to age five. Educare’s program model is specifically designed to help at-risk children and their families overcome barriers. Educare’s mission is to ensure that children receive the services they need to arrive at kindergarten ready to learn on par with their more economically advantaged peers.*

The Evaluation of Educare of Lincoln is provided by the College of Education and Human Sciences, University of Nebraska - Lincoln, as the Local Evaluation Partner (LEP). Data collectors work in conjunction with LEPs from other Educare programs and the National Evaluation Partner (NEP), Frank Porter Graham Institute, University of North Carolina. The evaluation is designed to answer to following questions:

**Who are Educare of Lincoln Families and Children?**

The Educare of Lincoln families are diverse and busy, comprised of many immigrants, non-English speaking families, presenting both challenges and opportunities. With 57% of Educare of Lincoln’s parents born outside of the U.S. and 46% of children’s first language differing from English, the typical classroom in Educare of Lincoln is both diverse and unique. The majority (60%) of Educare of Lincoln’s families are two-parent households with an average of three children per household. Of the 111 children Educare of Lincoln served in the 2017-2018 school year, 73% were reported to be in excellent or very good health, and 27% in good to fair health.

**How Are Families Faring and Contributing to Their Children’s Development?**

Through family interviews, parents reported both strengths and stressors related to their functioning and supports for their children’s development. To help facilitate learning at home, 36% of parents in Educare of Lincoln report they read to their children at least three times per week while 19% report reading to their children daily or six times per week. In addition, 23% of parents reported playing counting games daily or six times per week with their children and 26% reported talking with their children about numbers and letters daily. Concerning parent-child relationships at Educare of Lincoln, 95% reported maintaining an affectionate relationship with their child, which was reflected by the average Closeness score of 4.7 out of 5 on the Parent-Child Relationship Scale. Eighty-two percent of parents reported they aspired for their children to attain a BA degree or attend graduate school. However, 60% of families in Educare
of Lincoln reported food security issues (worrying about or experiencing running out of food in the last 12 months). In addition to food security issues, 8% of families report they sometimes or often worry about being homeless while 4% of families reported having no home in the last 12 months.

**Are Classrooms High Quality?**

Classroom quality was measured for all classrooms using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R), and the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-3rd Edition (ECERS-3). Educare of Lincoln’s classrooms continue to meet and exceed quality standards, indicated by scores above 5 on a 1-to-7 scale for most of the quality indicators. For those areas that scored below the high quality range, staff have set goals and the program has put into place supports for increasing these scores.

![Observation Averages 2017-2018](image)

**Figure 1. Observation averages 2017 - 2018**

**Are Children Benefitting?**

Child assessments administered to preschool children in the fall and spring demonstrate that Educare of Lincoln children progressed relative to their peers during the 2017-2018 school year, indicating the children gained more skills than would typically be expected in most areas. Educare’s goal is for children to reach a standard score of 100 or higher on the assessments administered before entering kindergarten, as one indicator of school readiness and predictor of later success. Scores in receptive vocabulary (as measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT)) increased almost 4.6 points (from 94.1 to 98.7), the greatest annual gain on this measure since Educare of Lincoln opened. As well, for the first time, children demonstrated fall to spring gains on the Preschool Language Scale (PLS) in both English and combination Spanish/English. Infants and toddlers assessed on the Day-C2 demonstrated gains
in both receptive and expressive language. In areas of social-emotional development (measured by the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)) and executive functioning skills (measured by the Minnesota Executive Function Scale (MEFS)), children also showed some gains and there were some, but few, areas of no change or decline (see full report for details).

Figure 2. Student outcomes 2017 – 2018

**Key Recommendations**

Based on the evaluation findings, the UNL research team offers a few key recommendations going for the coming school year.

**Parent Support**

- Facilitate parent support networks especially for new parents. Hosting social gatherings, support groups, and event nights, e.g., family reading night, could be a positive way to encourage parents’ interactions with each other. The interesting and unique diversity of Lincoln Educare also suggests making diversity a celebration point, perhaps highlighting foods from parents’ countries of origin.
- Assure parents that if they do run out of food, the program will help them get food by accessing community resources.
- Continue stepped-up efforts to loan children’s books in English and home languages, encouraging parents to read to their children, and modeling reading in different ways. Parent meetings may include books for families to borrow (in multiple languages), as well as field trips to the library.
- Send home a math activity each month or emphasizing and demonstrating age appropriate, simple math activities during parent meetings for parents to do at home.
• Continue to look for ways to help families and children further identify with the community.

Classroom Quality and Staff
• Establish Program Structure as defined by the Environment Rating Scales early in the year. Master Teachers may conduct periodic observations using the classroom measures and LEP teams can set goals leading to improvements in Program Structure.
• Keep focusing on specific areas (such as Emotional Support), but maintain a balance with other developmental areas (such as Instructional Support).
• Work with program administration on addressing factors related to Environment Ratings Scales subscales of Personal Care and Interactions to address items that received lower scores, in preschool classrooms.
• Use Classroom PAC meetings to support parent networking as well as for providing information and interaction with teachers.

Child Outcomes
• Participate in interventions around social-emotional development and executive function, providing teachers and parents with resources, ideas and activities to support executive functioning.
• Continue to build on opportunities for math activities.
• Continue to look for ways to increase conceptual meanings and connections for children.
• Engage parents in activities to support their children’s development at home including supporting home language.
Introduction

Educare of Lincoln
Educare of Lincoln opened in March 2013, as a collaborative effort among Community Action of Lincoln (CAL), the Buffett Early Childhood Fund (BECF), Lincoln Public Schools (LPS), and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). In order to provide high quality early childhood education and care, funds were provided through multiple sources including the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, Head Start, Lincoln Public Schools, the College of Education and Human Sciences, UNL, and the University of Nebraska Foundation. Funds also were provided from the Lincoln Community Foundation. On July 1, 2016, the partnership was reconfigured. At that time, Educare of Lincoln became a partnership of Lincoln Public Schools, the University of Nebraska, and the Buffett Early Childhood Fund.

The Educare Model
Educare of Lincoln is part of the larger, national network of 24 Educare Centers located throughout the US. Educare builds on Head Start and Early Head Start guidelines and practices. More information about the Educare Model can be found at: www.educareschools.org.

Educare is designed to give students in poverty an improved chance for success in school and life by advocating for and providing the highest quality care and education from birth to age five. Students and families from low-income homes often face unique barriers in developing foundations for academic success. Educare’s program model is designed to help at-risk students and their families overcome such barriers. Educare’s mission is to ensure that these students receive the services they need to arrive at kindergarten ready to learn and participate on par with their more economically advantaged peers.

Educare is based on research from a variety of relevant disciplines, such as early childhood development, social work, and other allied fields. Social-emotional developmental theory informs all aspects of the model, as the development of healthy relationships and positive social-emotional skills are a key component of student academic success. Educare incorporates ongoing evaluations to assess the quality of classroom environments and students’ progress. Data are used for program improvements and policy development at the state and national levels.
The Educare Model’s core features include data utilization, embedded professional development, high-quality teaching practices, and intensive family engagement. Through the coordinated implementation of these core features, Educare promotes high-quality early childhood programs that encourage strong family-school partnerships and parental support for children’s learning, helping to ensure that children grow up safe, healthy, and eager to learn. In turn, children are better prepared for kindergarten, increasing their chances for long-term academic and life success.

**Figure 3. Educare core features**

**Evaluation**

As noted above, the data and evaluation play a special role in the Educare Network. Each Educare has a Local Evaluation Partner (LEP) and common data are collected across all sites and aggregated by the National Evaluation Partner (NEP). LEPs collect some unique local data as well, to help the program understand matters of local interest. The College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is the LEP for Educare of Lincoln. The evaluation is coordinated by Departments of Child, Youth, and Family Studies and Speech and Language Pathology. Under the supervision of faculty, graduate students are involved in data collection. In addition, after data are collected, teachers and parents are informed about children’s development, teachers and Master Teachers receive classroom observation scores, data dashboards are prepared, and this annual report aggregates for the year. Altogether, there are two major purposes of the evaluation:

1. **Internal:** to use data in a timely fashion to inform the program about its own practices and progress and,
2. **External:** to present aggregate reports and scholarly articles that can inform about the network’s efforts overall and inform the field as innovations are implemented in Educare (e.g. Yazejian, Bryant, Freel, & Burchinal, 2015).
Throughout 2017-2018, evaluation activities have focused on the first goal by providing child-level reports to classroom teachers and administrative staff. Parents were also given reports about their own children in order to bring all possible sources of information into the planning process for children’s growth and well-being. In addition, classroom reports were given to all classroom teams and master teachers for all the classroom measures. Dashboard reports have been prepared for the Policy Council during the school year. For aggregate reporting, data are shared with Frank Porter Graham for Educare cross-site reports.

This evaluation report of Educare focuses on determining the overall effectiveness of the programs in providing early childhood services, parenting education, and family support services. The purpose of the program evaluation is to help the program improve and develop practices while concurrently examining the overall effectiveness of the program. The information in this evaluation report should be considered part of an ongoing evaluation. Throughout, we identify recommendations that the data suggest for program consideration.

This evaluation report strives to answer the following questions:

- Who does Educare of Lincoln serve?
- How are families faring and contributing to their children’s development?
- Are classrooms of high quality?
- Are children benefitting and achieving positive outcomes in language development, general school readiness, social-emotional development, and other ways?

These questions are answered by collecting data across multiple sources. In addition, we provide information about a comparative group based on what source is most meaningful for the type of data and can inform potential goals or recommendations. As a general guideline, parent data are compared to the Educare Network, as this provides an opportunity to see how similar or different Lincoln families are to those of the network as a whole. Classroom observation scores are compared to previous years and child assessment scores are compared from fall to spring. Where appropriate, additional comparisons are made and data across multiple years are presented as a way to explore trends.

**Enhancements to the Program Model/Program Context**

To provide some additional context for these data, Educare Lincoln participated in an Acceleration grant with four other Educare programs. These programs received funding for a targeted project to supplement the Educare program model. The focus of this acceleration
project and activities was on social-emotional development and supports as a foundation to improving Executive Function (EF) in children.

Program components over the 3 years of the grant emphases changed. Emphases included interviews with staff and efforts to integrate all social emotional emphases in year 1. In focus groups, staff said they wanted to all “get on the same page” in regard to social emotional development. First, they all took a common course offered by Michelle Rupiper and Marjorie Kostelnik; this course was compatible with Positive Behavior Supports which became the framework for the program. Teachers began to take on-line modules. In year 2 the Positive Behavior Supports model grew—a PBS team was formed, staff continued to complete modules, all received training in trauma informed care and executive functioning. In this year, the PBS framework was enhanced by fall and spring measurement using the Early Childhood System-Wide Evaluation Tool (EC SET), and the Minnesota Executive Function Scale (MEFS) with children from age 2 to 5 and some adults (See Figures 4). In year 3, more trauma informed training was provide for parents and staff and brain bags were given to parents. Reflective consultation and parent groups as well as yoga for teachers was added.

Figure 4.
Program model

The Early Childhood System-Wide Evaluation Tool (EC-SET) is a tool designed to assess program-wide adherence to the Positive Behavior Supports model. Lincoln Educare has been assessed using this model over 4 assessment periods. Each assessment, evaluators interview 10 Staff (teachers, administrators) and 15 children and review documents.
The System-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) is designed to assess and evaluate the critical features of program-wide effective behavior support across each academic school year. The SET results are used to: assess features that are in place; determine annual goals for program-wide effective behavior support; evaluate ongoing efforts toward program-wide behavior support; design and revise procedures as needed; compare efforts toward program-wide effective behavior support from year to year.

The figure below demonstrates progress that was made in Lincoln Educare from Spring of 2016 to Fall of 2017. Early on, improvements were made in defining and teaching behavioral expectations. Later goals related to management support and data feedback demonstrated continued improvement as overall EC-SET scores improved.

### Domains of the EC-SET
- **Defining expectations**: 3 or fewer positive rules.
- **Documented system for teaching behavioral expectations to students on a monthly basis**.
- **Documented system for acknowledging student behaviors**.
- **Documented system for dealing with and reporting specific behaviors and extreme emergencies**.
- Referral systems and referrals collected, reports to staff, use data to make decisions.
- Program improvement includes behavior support, active program-wide team, reports back to staff, action plan.
- Budget for building wide behavioral support, out-of-building liaison with district or state.

![Improvement in System-Wide Behavioral Support in One Program Over 4 Assessments (2 Years-S-F-S-F)](image)

*Figure 5. Lincoln Educare EC SET scores over four assessments*

**Future Activities**: Lincoln Educare is part of a group of 12 Educare sites that applied for and was funded to “scale up” Executive Function from 2018-2021. Thus, in years 4, 5 and 6, Lincoln
Educare expects to add specific activities to support Executive Function in classrooms, for subgroups of children with Executive Function challenges, for teachers and for parents. Lincoln Educare will continue to implement the social emotional framework begun in Years 1-3, and measurement will be continued.

Who Are the Families and Children Served by Educare of Lincoln?

In this section, we address the families and children being served by Educare of Lincoln. The information comes from the fall parent interview. We compare the characteristics of Lincoln families with Educare Learning Network (ELN) family data aggregated across the Educare Network sites for the same year. In addition, we compare returning families with families who were new to Educare this year. Educare of Lincoln served 148 children overall in 2017-2018, with some turnover. For the 2017-2018 school year parent surveys were completed for 110 children in Fall 2017. This data collection included 100 surveys completed by mothers; 6 by fathers and 4 by others.
**Diverse Cultural Context:** Perhaps because of Lincoln’s role as an Immigration and Naturalization Service-receiving community, Educare of Lincoln is unique to the Educare network in that the families of children served include a large percentage of diverse immigrants. Fifty-seven percent of parents were born outside the US, in 18 different countries, including Cameroon, Chad, China, Egypt, Eritrea, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Libya, Mexico, Nigeria, El Salvador, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates. In addition, 13% of children were born outside the US.

Parents reported that for 54% of children, the child’s first language is English, 23% Spanish, with 23% speaking first other languages, with Arabic being most prevalent. However, for 70% of children, parents reported English was the child’s strongest language, for 16% Spanish was the strongest language. Reports of languages spoken most in the home was a bit different--53% reported English was spoken most, 21% reported Spanish is spoken most and 26% reported speaking other languages most at home.

In Educare of Lincoln, diversity goes beyond the countries of origin and languages; 45% of children’s race is reported to be white, 34% black, 1% Asian, 3% Native American, 15% multi-racial, and 3% other. Twenty-four percent of children’s ethnicity is Hispanic, and 76% non-Hispanic.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Children Served by Educare of Lincoln</th>
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<tr>
<td>29%</td>
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**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Parents/Guardians Served by Educare Lincoln, New and Returning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents born outside U.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
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</table>

Figure 6. Educare of Lincoln Families
Primary Caregivers: Mothers reported they are children’s primary caregivers for 92% of children, fathers reported to be children’s primary caregivers for 6% of the children and grandparents and foster parents for 3% of the children. At the time of the interview, over 63% of children’s birth mothers were 30 or older; another 27% were in the 26-29 age range and 10% were in the 20-25 age range. At the time of childbirth, 7% of mothers were 19 or younger; the teenager birth rate in some Educare sites was higher (at 12%). Mean age for mothers when the Educare child was born was 29 years.

Education and Work: Primary caregivers reported having no high school degree in 20% of returning cases but only 16% among new ones; 23% of returning and 20% of new parents had a high school degree; 21% of returning and 18% of new parents had some college or some technical training; 34% of returning and 40% of new parents had 2 years of college or more. The large majority of Educare caregivers were employed full time (59%; 69% returning and 41% new), another 20% (13% returning and 20% new) indicated they were employed part-time or part of year. Only 5% (5% returning and 6% new) of the primary caregivers listed themselves as not in the labor force at all. As well, 29% (26% returning and 41% new) indicated they were in school or in a training program.

Family Structure: Two-parent (60%; 55% returning and 67% new) and single-parent (40%; 44% returning and 29% new) families were fairly evenly divided in the Lincoln Educare population. Children lived with their mothers in 92% of cases reported; with their father in 51%, with a brother (60%) or sister (46%), with a grandmother (7%) or grandfather (4%). The mean number of adults in households was 1.7 and mean number of children was 2.9. More households had two or more adults (62%) than one adult (39%). More households had two (31%), three (23%), four (16%) or more (18%) children living together than having only one child (11%).

Children with Special Needs: While Head Start requires that at least 10% of children served qualify for special education, Educare Lincoln has only 11 children who are qualifying for an IEP (Individualized Education Plan and Part B for 3-5 year olds) and four children having an IFSP (Individualized Family Support Plan and Part and Part C for 0-3 year olds). For all children, 5% of the Educare population had a verified disability, according to program records.

Child Health: While 73% (69% returning and 78% new) of parents reported children were in excellent or very good health, another 27% (29% returning and 22% new) reported children were in good to fair health. These rates show Lincoln parents reported lower rates of excellent or very good health and higher rates of good to fair health than the Educare Learning Network (82% as excellent or very good and 17% for good or fair). Twenty-three percent indicated that their child had special health needs. Most frequently mentioned health needs were allergies, eczema, asthma and other needs.
How are Families Faring and Contributing to Their Children’s Development?

In this section, we highlight some of the experiences of families and other factors that may contribute to children’s development. Again, we compare to the ELN and returning and new families for reference points.

What do families report about their nutrition and health-related matters?

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Food worry</th>
<th>Food run out</th>
<th>Home worry</th>
<th>Homeless</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returning</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Food and home security:** About 38% (29% returning and 49% new) of families reported being worried sometimes or often about food running out (compared to 26% for the ELN), and 22% (21% returning and 28% new) reported that food sometimes or often does run out before they are able to buy more (comparable to 16% for the ELN). Also, 8% (7% returning and 10% new) of the families reported that they sometimes or often worry about being homeless (comparable to 13% for the ELN), and about 4% reported having no home in the last 12 months (similar to 6% for the ELN).

What do families report about stressors and supports?

**Neighborhood:** People were asked questions about their neighborhoods. The overall score indicated that about 36% (35% returning and 37% new) of parents live in neighborhoods where they feel a strength of or high support (vs. 56% for the ELN).

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**Kudos! Data-Demonstrated Effects of the Program**

While new parents to Educare this past year were slightly more demographically advantaged than returning parents (e.g., a higher percentage of new parents compared to returning parents lived in two-parent households and new parents had slightly higher educational levels than returning parents), being in the program longer associates with reduced food insecurity, reduced housing insecurity and reduced depression. Returning parents were also much more likely than new parents to be employed full time and to say the program had been helpful to them.
Relationships with Other Parents: Parents were asked how many times they have a conversation with other parents when they drop off children—39% (27% returning and 49% new) of parents said they never did this (compared to 36% for the ELN) and 46% (53% returning and 39% new) did so once or twice a week (vs. 38% for the ELN). Also, 68% (71% returning and 63% new) (vs. 62% for the ELN) said they had not talked to other parents in a meeting the previous week; 51% (63% returning and 37% new) said they didn’t have a friendship with other parents (same as 60% for the ELN); and 32% (36% returning and 27% new) reported having a close friendship with another caregiver in Educare (vs. 36% for ELN). These relationships among Educare parents facilitated receiving some referral recommendations for services and resources for about 41% (30% returning and 47% new) of Educare families (slightly better than 32% for the ELN).

Parenting Depression, Life Events. The Parent Interview asks several questions regarding depression, perceived stress, and parents’ perceived ability to bounce back after setbacks and well-being. Educare of Lincoln’s parents are also asked to report on whether 19 different life events occurred for them in the previous year—these involve major changes in family life, including death, divorce, job changes, housing changes that cumulatively have been associated with stress.

Regarding depression, a small percentage of parents 17% (15% returning and 20% new) report they had felt depressed in the past 2 years. Also, 10% (8% returning and 12% new) report they had been depressed for 2 weeks or more in the past year and 10% (10% returning and new) said they had been depressed for a week or more in the past month. Finally, 12% of parents answered “yes” to two out of three depression questions compared to 18% for the ELN. Fewer parents answered “yes” to two out of three depression questions in 2017-2018 vs. 2016-2017 (12% vs. 22%).

Perceived stress mean sum scores were 8.0, similar to the 8.5 mean sum scores for the ELN. Parents’ resiliency item scores were 3.18 on average and similar to the 3.26 average score for the ELN. Similarly, average scores on the well-being items were 76.6 (on a scale of 100) which is similar to 77.0 for the ELN. Lincoln Educare parents had higher scores than ELN on feeling safe and part of community but lower scores than ELN, in general, when it came to questions about life as a whole, health (considerably lower), what they are achieving in life, and personal relationships.
Lincoln Educare parents reported 2.2 (compared to 2.3 for the ELN) major life events in the past year, with one parent reporting 8 major life events. Lincoln parents have same or higher than ELN rates of positive events, such as engagement to marry (9% for Lincoln and 6% for ELN). However, they showed much higher rates of negative events including these: child changed school (22% versus 14% for ELN), child saw domestic violence (10% versus 5% for ELN), a family member was a victim of violent crime (7% versus 5%), incarcerated 10% versus 12% for ELN, children living with someone with alcohol/drugs (10% versus 4%); and lower in some others, death of someone important for child (8.82% versus 15.2 for ELN), separated or divorced from partner (16% versus 23% for ELN).

While parents of Lincoln Educare faced many life and parenting challenges, 65% (56% returning and 39% new) viewed the Educare program as very or extremely helpful.

**What do we know about parenting activities and relationships with children?**

**Activities with Child:** What do parents do with their children? Parents were asked how frequently they performed a number of typical parent-child activities with their child. These items are from the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment Scale (HOME; Caldwell & Bradley, 1984). The activities parents and children most frequently shared included: talking about Educare; talking during errands; playing with toys or games indoors; playing counting games. Less frequent were: working on arts; playing sport or games outdoor; talking about TV or videos; telling the child a story; teaching the child songs or music. Lincoln Educare parents tended to report fewer activities with their children than was true for the Early Learning Network (ELN) of all Educare sites. However, In Lincoln Educare, (43%) of the parents reported playing with toys or games indoors with the child every day (62% for ELN) and 44% said they talk with their child about Educare every day (51.80% for ELN) and over half of the parents (52%) talk with their children during errands (62% for ELN).

Lincoln Educare parents were comparable to others in the ELN in frequenting community activities. In Lincoln Educare, parents were three to four times more likely to take a child to a park and zoo than to a library, or museum, and the least likely to go to a play or concert, which is relative to what was reported for ELN. Special experiences do seem to be in short order; 70% of parents had never been to a play, concert or live show with their child; 58% had never been to a museum or art gallery, nor to a zoo/aquarium or petting fair (27%). However, 97% of parents had taken their child to a park in the past month, compared to only 87% for the ELN.

**Kudos! Data-Driven Improvements**

**Visiting Libraries! Library Cards!** Two years ago, 61% of children had never visited a library; last year the percentage was reduced to 56% and this year it was 58% (same as for the ELN). The last two years, staff were hard at work encouraging families to get library cards. For example, at the NAEYC Week of the Young Child parent fair in April, representatives from the Lincoln Public Libraries signed families up for library cards. Last year, 38% visited a library once, twice or three times monthly (same as for the ELN). Perhaps by next fall the goal could be for more visiting a library at least monthly.
**Reading and Literacy/Numeracy Activities with Children:** Reading to children daily is often found to be an important predictor of language development; 19% of parents (31% returning and 2% new) reported they read to children daily or 6 times a week (vs. 27% for the ELN) and 36% (39% returning and 33% new) reported reading at least three times a week, comparable to the 37% reported by the ELN. Also, 8% (3% returning and 14% new) of parents reported they never read to their child (7% for the ELN).

Over half (55%; 48% returning and 63% new; same as for ELN) had never visited a library with their child while 5% (0% returning and 10% new) visited a library every week. Thirty-six percent (47% returning and 22% new) visited a library once, twice or three times monthly, similar to the average for the ELN (38%).

Home environment plays an important role in the contribution to children’s language and cognitive development. This essential role can be supported through having a rich environment of books, especially books in the home language. However, 32% (19% returning and 47% new) of the families in Lincoln (19% for the ELN) reported having fewer than 10 books at their homes. For books in home language, 42% (28% returning and 60% new) compared to (37% for the ELN) of the families reported having a few or no books, which may affect maintaining their home languages and building literacy skills.

Learning about letters, words and numbers is important for children’s foundation in reading and math. At Educare of Lincoln, 21% (29% returning and 10% new) of parents (38% for the ELN) said they talk with their child about letters or numbers daily while 3% (5% returning and 0% new) said they never do this (5% for the ELN). With specific counting games, 10% (5% returning and 16% new) never play counting games (vs. 7% for the ELN) while 23% (29% returning and 16% new) play counting games daily or six times per week (compared to 38% for the ELN).

**Parent-Child Relationship Scale:** Parents reported many positive aspects of their relationships with children. The 16-item Parent-Child Relationship Scale (CPRS; Pianta, 1992) reports on parent-child Closeness, Conflict and Parent-Child Total. Almost all (95%) said that they definitely share an affectionate relationship with their child. The mean Closeness score on this scale was 4.7 out of 5.0 possible, which was the same as the ELN average of 4.7; Conflict was 2.0 out of 5.0, which was slightly higher than the 1.9 ELN average.

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**Kudos! Data-Driven Improvements**

**Feeling Safe in Lincoln and Exploring Parks!** Lincoln Educare parents report greater feelings of safety and neighborhood well-being than is true for the ELN in general. Lincoln Educare parents take their children to parks more than ELN parents in other sites. Lincoln has a great Children’s Museum and Children’s Zoo; many more parents had taken their children to a petting zoo or zoo this year than last! Educare can build on these strengths the community provides.
Parents’ Aspirations for their Children: Parents had high aspirations for their children; 83% indicated they hoped their child attains a BA degree or graduate school (slightly lower than the ELN where 87% of parents said they expected their child to finish college); only 4% indicated they hoped for only a high school degree or less for their child.
Are Classrooms High Quality?
Classroom Quality Measures

Classroom quality was measured for all classrooms once throughout the year using the following measures: Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R), and the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-3rd Edition (ECERS-3). Both measures use a 1 to 7 scale with ratings of 5 and above considered indications of high quality.

The environmental rating scale (ERS) measures (ITERS-R and ECERS-3) focus primarily on the physical environments that children frequent daily. The ERS examine safety and hygiene practices and food standards (e.g., nutritional guideline adherence), measures time utilization for creative learning opportunities (such as art and music), and ensures classroom materials are diverse, clean, and developmentally appropriate.

CLASS is a measure that focuses and analyzes the interactions that take place between the teacher(s) and children. CLASS rates a teacher’s attitude, actions that expand children’s learning, methods of promoting problem solving and positive social-emotional interactions. There are three CLASS scales used in the Educare network: Infant, Toddler, and Preschool.

Classroom observation data were compared to previous two years to look at trends across time, taking into consideration changes in staffing and classroom make-up (e.g., different children, etc.).

Infant and Toddler Classroom Quality

Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R; Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 2006). The quality of infant and toddler classrooms was measured using the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ITERS-R). This observational tool is used to assess the quality of infant and toddler classrooms in various domains including: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language (Listening and Talking), Learning Activities, Interaction, Program Structure, and Parents and Staff, as well as an overall rating of quality.
Seven classrooms were observed and rated using the ITERS-R this year. The resulting scores are illustrated in Figure 7.

![Figure 7. ITERS-R Averages 2015/2016-2017/2018](image)

Classrooms has an overall average of 5.5, indicating high levels of quality. Areas of highest ratings (overall score of 6.6 and 6.7 across all rooms) were Language and Interactions. Opportunities for improvement exist within Personal Care Routines, Program Structure, but scores were very good overall. Improvement or similar scores across subscales were seen between the current and previous years (as indicated in the chart). The infant/toddler rooms scored similarly to the Educare Network average overall score of 5.4 in 2016-2017.

**Infant CLASS Observation Rating (Hamre, Paro, Pianta, & LoCasale-Crouch, 2014).** According to its authors, the CLASS “is a rating tool that provides a common lens and language focused on what matters—the classroom interactions that boost student learning.” This was the third year the Infant Classroom Assessment Scoring System (Infant CLASS) was completed in classrooms with the majority of students under the age of 12 months. Whereas the Environment Rating Scales (ITERS and ECERS) rate materials and the environment, the CLASS focuses instead on what teachers are doing with those materials to boost learning, examining closely the interactions occurring. The Infant CLASS has one overall domain—Responsive
Caregiving. We observe consistent, very high levels of quality in the infant classrooms over the recent years.

**Figure 8.** Infant CLASS domain mean by year

**Toddler CLASS Observation Rating (Pianta, LaParo, & Hamre, 2012).** The Toddler Classroom Assessment Scoring System (Toddler CLASS) was completed in each infant or toddler classroom with the majority of enrolled students over the age of 12 months. The Toddler CLASS has two domains: Emotional-Behavioral Support and Engaged Support for Learning. These dimensions include aspects such as: Positive Climate (focuses on how teachers interact with students to develop warm relationships that promote students’ enjoyment of the classroom community) and Facilitation of Learning and Development (focuses on how well teachers facilitate activities to support students’ learning and understanding opportunities).

**Figure 9.** Toddler CLASS domain means by year
Toddler CLASS scores were very good for Emotional & Behavioral Support and good for Engaged Support for Learning, consistent with previous years. The ratings are similar to the ELN averages of 6.2 for Emotional and Behavioral Support and 3.9 for Engaged Support for Learning 2016-2017. Teaching staff are supported by Master Teachers to set goals around improving practices identified by the CLASS observation.

**Preschool Classroom Quality**

*Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-3rd Edition (ECERS-3; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2015).* The quality of preschool classrooms was measured using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – 3rd Edition (ECERS-3). This observational tool is used to assess the quality of preschool classrooms in various domains including: Space and Furnishings; Personal Care Routines; Language and Literacy; Learning Activities; Interactions; Program Structure, as well as an overall rating of quality.

Five preschool classrooms were observed using the ECERS-3. The following chart illustrates the resulting classroom observation ratings, both by subscale and overall.

![ECERS-3 Subscale and Overall Means by Year](chart)

*Figure 10. ECERS-3 & ECERS-R Averages*
The overall ECERS-3 scores were similar to previous years and near the ‘high quality’ range. The ECERS-3 subscale scores show some slight differences from previous years (see figure) and areas of strength (indicated by scores of 5 or higher) and areas for potential improvement (indicated by scores of below 5). As with CLASS, teaching staff and Master Teachers work together to address areas of need. The ECERS-3 overall score for the ELN in 2017-2018 was 4.5.

**Preschool CLASS Observation Rating (Pianta, LaParo, & Hamre, 2008).** The Pre-K version of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) was completed with each preschool classroom. The Pre-K CLASS has three domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. Instructional Support tends to be the domain with the most opportunity for improvement as it challenges teachers to effectively extend language, model advanced language, and to promote higher-order thinking skills. The table below show the individual domains and dimensions.

![Figure 11. CLASS PreK domain means by year](image)

**Scores on the Preschool CLASS were very good in the Emotional Support and Classroom Organization domains, which is consistent with previous years. The Instructional Support domain increased from 1.9 last year to 2.5 this year, however, provides an area of improvement. CLASS PreK scores for the ELN in 2017-2018 were slightly higher at 6.2 for Emotional Support, 5.7 for Classroom Organization, and 3.2 for Instructional Support.**

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**KUDOS! Data-driven Improvements**
- Infant toddler classrooms showed improvements in 6 of 7 domains of the ITERS-R.
- Preschool classrooms improved Instructional Support while maintaining scores on Emotional Support and Classroom Organization.
Are Children Benefitting?

Children were assessed twice each school year on multiple measures. There was typically at least a six-month interval between fall and spring assessments on these measures. The measures selected were from the national Educare evaluation model and evaluated individual students on language, vocabulary, school readiness and social/emotional factors. For all of the norm-referenced assessments given, the goal was for students to score at or above a standard score of 100 (standard score). The language assessments using the standard scores were the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-4; Dunn & Dunn, 2007), the Preschool Language Scales (PLS-5; Zimmerman, Steiner, & Pond, 2011; Zimmerman, Steiner, & Pond, 2012), and the Developmental Assessment of Young Children-Second Edition (Day-C2; Voress & Maddox, 2012). In addition, we administered a measure of math ability, the Woodcock Johnson: Applied Problems subscale (WJ-AP; Schrank, McGrew, & Mather, 2014), with all preschool children in the fall and spring. Children’s social-emotional development was measured using the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA; LeBuffe & Naglieri, 1999) in fall and spring for all children. We also administered a measure of executive function, the Minnesota Executive Function Scale (MEFS; Carlson & Zelazo, 2014), in fall and spring to all children aged 2 years and older.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>What it measures</th>
<th>Collected by whom?</th>
<th>Collected with whom?</th>
<th>Collected when?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PPVT-4</td>
<td>English Receptive Language</td>
<td>LEP team</td>
<td>PreK, 2 &amp; 3 year olds</td>
<td>Fall &amp; Spring for PreK At 2 &amp; 3 year birthdays (once a year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLS-5</td>
<td>Auditory comprehension, expressive communication and beginning literacy skills.</td>
<td>LEP team</td>
<td>PreK, 2 &amp; 3 year olds English &amp; Spanish</td>
<td>Fall &amp; Spring for PreK At 3 year birthday (once a year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day-C2</td>
<td>Receptive and expressive language</td>
<td>Teacher, home visitor or parent</td>
<td>Infants &amp; Toddlers</td>
<td>Fall &amp; Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WJ-AP</td>
<td>Math skills</td>
<td>LEP team</td>
<td>PreK only</td>
<td>Fall &amp; Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECA</td>
<td>Social-emotional, protective factors</td>
<td>Teaching staff</td>
<td>All children</td>
<td>Fall &amp; Spring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most of our measures are scored using standard scores because they allow teachers, evaluators, and researchers to make comparisons across assessments and age groups. Standard scores are scores that have the same meaning no matter the context. They also allow comparison of growth. A standard score of 100 represents the average score for children of the same age. If the child’s score increases from fall to spring, that indicates that the child gained skills faster than would be expected based on typical growth. When comparing scores of different age groups (as in the table below), a higher score for the younger children does not mean that they have higher skills than the preschool children but that they were performing more closely to the average of their peers than the preschool children. The goal of Educare is for all students to reach standard scores of 100 or higher on the assessments given. By scoring close to the mean of 100, it indicates children’s development is on track and on par with their more advantaged peers. Scores for measures that do not have standard scores (DECA and MEFS) are explained in the findings.

**Language and School Readiness Outcomes.** PPVT-4, and PLS-5 in English were administered individually to children by UNL Speech and Language Pathology (SLP) masters students under direct supervision of senior SLP faculty. MEFS, PLS-5 Spanish, and WJ-AP were administered by UNL graduate students from the department of Child, Youth, and Family Studies. The Day-C2 was administered by data collectors from UNMC for the Sixpence evaluation. Administration was conducted at the Educare site. Children were invited to come to the testing rooms with assessment administrators. PPVTs took about 10-15 minutes each; PLS English administration was about 45 minutes and was conducted in a separate session from PPVT; PLS Spanish administration took about 1 hour because the administration assessed the child’s Spanish and English abilities. Day-C2 took about 20-30 minutes and it was based on observations from the teacher or home visitor or parent report. MEFS, and WJ-AP took about 10 minutes each.

Children’s fall and spring scores on each assessment were used for paired analyses (meaning the child had both a fall and spring score) to look at change. There were 53 matched preschool children on the vocabulary measures (PPVT, Dunn & Dunn, 2007), 48 matched PLS-5 (Zimmerman, Steiner, & Pond, 2011; Zimmerman, Steiner, & Pond, 2012) scores, and 82 children in the executive function measure in the fall and spring. The following chart shows the mean scores across measures in fall and spring.
Figure 13. Child outcomes on assessments

**PPVT-4.** The preschool children averaged 94.1 in the fall and 98.7 in the spring, a significant increase of 4.6 points over the school year. Thus, children gained more than expected from fall to spring and ended the year near the national average of 100.

Children also completed the PPVT-4 when they turned age 3. This year, 18 children completed the PPVT-4 as “turning 3s.” These children averaged 99.2 or almost at the national average and goal of 100.

**PLS-5 Auditory Comprehension (AC) English.** Preschool children averaged 92.0 in the fall and 97.7 in the spring, essentially showing substantial change and did show above average growth but still were just below the national average. This year 16 children were assessed in English as “turning 2s and turning 3s” and these children were just below the national average with an average score of 98.0.

**PLS-5 Auditory Comprehension (AC) Spanish and English/Spanish Combination Scores.** Twelve children were assessed for a combination score in Spanish and English (first in Spanish and then in English) and these children showed the same pattern of better-than-average growth with an average score of 104.5 in fall and 108.7 in the spring. Seven of the children “turning 2 and 3” were assessed and averaged 98.0.
**KUDOS! Data-driven Improvements**

Educare Lincoln children in both preschool and infant toddler rooms showed major improvements in language development, by every measure—PPVT, PLS, DayC and in both English and Spanish. Teaching staff can feel good that their attention to language environments is paying off with this best-ever annual growth in language development in Lincoln Educare.

**Day-C2.** Twenty-four children had the Day-C2 collected in both fall and spring. Findings for receptive language showed children averaging lower than the goal of 100 but with significant positive change from fall to spring. The fall average was 96.7 and spring mean score was 99.5. For expressive skills, children also showed gains from fall to spring with scores increasing from 96.3 to a mean of 98.6 in spring.

**Woodcock Johnson-Applied Problems.** Forty-eight preschool children were assessed using the WJ-AP measure. The mean score in fall was 94.4, which decreased slightly to a mean of 91.6 in spring.

**Minnesota Executive Function Scale (MEFS).** Sixty-eight children ages 2 years and older were assessed in fall and spring. Of those, 60 children were in the preschool classrooms. The MEFS uses standard score which show how the children at Educare are doing compared to a national sample. A score of 100 means they are scoring at the national average and is the goal. As we can see, Educare children score slightly below the national averages but show growth from fall to spring for older age groups.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEFS Scores by Age in Fall and Spring</th>
<th>Toddler (8)</th>
<th>Preschool (60)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fall 2017</strong></td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>96.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spring 2018</strong></td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>97.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social Emotional Outcomes.** All children experience changes and challenges in their lives. The DECA is a standardized, social-emotional measure used to assess a child’s protective factors. Protective factors are resources or characteristics that buffer risk and build resilience. Risk factors are negative influences, situations and characteristics that reduce ability to cope. Resilience is the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change. Protective factors include these dimensions:

- **Attachment/relationships:** Ability to have positive connections with others (shows affection, happiness, trusts, seeks others)
- **Initiative:** Ability to use independent thought and actions to meet needs (explores, persistent, tries new things)
- **Self-regulation:** Ability to express emotions and manage behaviors in healthy ways (shows patience, shares, cooperates, calms him/herself)
- **Lack of behavioral concerns:** Children with underdeveloped protective factors are more likely to experience emotional and behavioral problems
There are three versions of the DECA form, based on the child’s age (0-18 months, 18-36 months and 36-60 months). There are 33-38 items, depending on the form. The infant version contains items for attachment and initiative, the toddler version adds in self-regulation and the preschool version includes all domains. The domains are then used to create a Total Protective Factors score for all versions. DECA forms are completed by teaching staff who know the children and looks at the frequency of behaviors over the last 4 weeks.

DECA scores are reported as t-scores, with scores between 41-59 considered ‘average’, below 40 is considered an area of concern and above 60 is seen as a strength, with the exception of the behavior concern domain, for which, scores about 60 indicate a concern (meaning, the higher the score, the more behavior concerns reported). The developers advise that, when looking across different age versions, to compare the Total Protective Factors scores only.

One hundred twelve children were assessed using the DECA in fall and spring. Looking at all DECA forms completed (children who had either fall and spring but may have had different age versions in fall and spring), we see an overall decrease in Protective Factors scores for children who were infants in the fall (from 51.5 to 47.5). However, both means are still in the ‘typical’ range. Nine of the 12 infants switched from the infant to the toddler version from fall to spring and, when we look at score categories, we see a decrease in scores in the ‘concern range’ from 25% to 17% (with one child moving from concern to typical). Children who were toddlers in the fall increased their total Protective Factors scores from 47.0 to 48.4 (10 of the 27 fall toddlers switched to the prek version of the tool in spring). In addition, the percentage of children in the concern category fell from 22% to 11%. For the 74 preschool children, their total Protective Factor scores decreased slightly from fall to spring (53.1 to 52.5). Preschool children in the concern category increased slightly from 5 to 7% but children in the typical range also increased from 64 to 71%, however, this was due to a drop in preschool children in the strengths range from 31 to 22%. It is important to note the small changes and that, essentially, we see no change from fall to spring. See the charts below for details on means and percentage of children in each category.
Figure 14. DECA protective factors scores

Figure 15. DECA protective factors percentages by age
When we look at children who were administered the same age version in fall to spring (3 infants, 17 toddlers and 74 preschool aged children), we can explore the subscale changes that may contribute to the changes in the total Protective Factors scores and get a sense of how children are doing compared on the same age version of the tool. In three cases, the sample size for infants is too small to include. For the toddlers and preschool aged children, subscale scores from fall and spring are reported in the table below. By examining the subscales, we can identify that the small drops in Protective Factors scores were likely due to decreases in Attachment in Toddlers and Self-Regulation in PreK children.

*Figure 16. DECA subscale means by age*
Summary/Conclusions

Educare of Lincoln had many successes in the 2017-2018 school year. The program is continuing to empower parents while improving children’s literacy and vocabulary skills, social-emotional behaviors, and executive functioning in a high-quality setting. Children may enter Educare of Lincoln with varying challenges including food and home insecurity, emotional and behavioral problems, and a lack of opportunities for social and academic growth. The Educare curriculum exposes children to literacy-rich environments with teachers trained to facilitate growth in areas of cognitive ability and social-emotional attitudes. As terrific as the program is, the data show areas where improvements can still be made.

**Recommendations for Working with Parents:** Differences in outlook and resources between new and returning families demonstrate how effectively the program is working with parents. Lincoln Educare is making progress in getting parents library cards and in promoting literacy activities. Recommendations for further supporting families include:

- Given that not all parents feel a sense of community with other parents, the program can continue to **facilitate parent support networks** especially for new parents. Hosting social gatherings, support groups, and event nights, e.g., family reading night, could be a positive way to encourage parents’ interactions with each other. The interesting and unique diversity of Lincoln Educare also suggests making diversity a celebration point, perhaps highlighting foods from parents’ countries of origin.

- New parents’ worries about food running out were indicated this past year (while returning parents’ rates of worry were much lower). The program can assure parents that if they do run out of food, the program will **help them get food by accessing community resources**.

- Lincoln Educare is still running behind the ELN in parents’ reading to their children daily, and daily reading is especially rare for new parents. While efforts have been made to get children’s books to parents, including books in children’s home language, as of last fall (2017), Lincoln Educare still lagged behind the ELN in books available to children in the homes. **We recommend continuing stepped-up efforts to loan children’s books in English and home languages, encouraging parents to read to their children, and modeling reading in different ways.** Parent meetings may include books for families to borrow (in multiple languages), as well as **field trips to the library**. There are great bonuses for language growth when parents read daily or almost daily and the program is already planning on lending books next year.

- While math learning early on is a special focus for the program, fewer parents play math and counting games with their children in Lincoln than for the ELN. **We recommend sending home a math activity each month or emphasizing and demonstrating age appropriate, simple math activities during parent meetings for at-home activities.**
Given that many Educare parents had not attended special events for children in Lincoln as of Fall 2017, this area is still a goal. Families do go to Lincoln parks, but attendance at the Children’s Museum and Zoo is fairly low and could be addressed given outstanding opportunities in Lincoln in these areas. Continuing to look for ways to help families and children further identify with the community will build family and community.

**Recommendations for Classrooms:** Educare of Lincoln classrooms continue to show high levels of quality with all averages near or greater than the “good” standard of scoring 5 or above. Infant/toddler ITERS-R scores improved in 6 or 7 subscales and CLASS Instructional Support scores for preschool classrooms improved over last year with no reduction in Emotional Support or Classroom Management scores. As new staff and children enter the program, a consistent, intentional focus on maintaining quality and building on the skills of teaching staff will be key.

Recommendations for achieving this include:

- In both preschool and infant-toddler Rating Scales, Program Structure scores decreased from the previous year. Thus, an emphasis on establishing Program Structure early in the year is a good investment. Master Teachers may conduct periodic observations using the classroom measures and LEP teams can set goals leading to improvements in Program Structure.
- Keep focusing on specific areas (such as Emotional Support), but maintain a balance with other developmental areas (such as Instructional Support).
- Work with program administration on addressing factors related to Ratings Scales subscales of Personal Care and Interactions to address items that received lower scores, in preschool classrooms.
- Many Educare Lincoln parents report little interaction with other parents. Classroom PAC meetings provide opportunities to support parent networking as well as for providing information and interaction with teachers.

When new versions of measures or clarifications occur, there should be a focus on these new items and plans for supporting each low-scoring domain. Teachers’ feedback should be a major consideration for program evaluation as well. Each teacher brings specific skill sets to the program and these skills should be utilized to their maximum extent. Looking ahead, it may be beneficial to provide opportunities for professional development in areas that teachers are lacking necessary skill sets or may be interested in. New teachers, i.e., having just graduated and received their degree, are entering the program with limited experience and may not have encountered students with extensive needs. Teachers who have been with Educare of Lincoln for two years or more may be receiving repetitive professional development training and may find it beneficial to uptake training in areas they have not have yet encountered.
**Recommendations for Child Outcomes:** This year growth in many areas of child development was observed. Growth in language development was particularly exciting with increments from fall to spring on all language measures observed for the first time. High quality classrooms and supports for learning add to the opportunities for growth. Continuation of Acceleration Grant and Math Early On provide opportunities for the future. Educare Lincoln children may face unique obstacles; therefore, continued emphasis on helping children reach peer norms on language, math, social-emotional and school readiness measures will better equip them for future success. These goals may be achieved by:

- Participating in interventions around social-emotional development and executive function, including providing teachers and parent with resources, ideas and activities to support executive functioning particularly.
- Continuing to build on opportunities for math activities.
- Continuing to look for ways to increase conceptual meanings and connections for children.
- Engaging parents in activities to support their children’s development at home including supporting home language.
Overall, Educare of Lincoln has worked to achieve its goals and the data continue to show growth across domains. The partnership with the program and Evaluation team has served to guide programing with data and to reflect on progress using these findings.