

EDCI IMPACT SUMMARY

Prepared by Duke Center for Child & Family Policy and EDCI, July 2016

The East Durham Children’s Initiative (EDCI) is a place-based nonprofit organization that walks alongside children and families on their journey from cradle to college or career. EDCI focuses its efforts on a 120-block area of East Durham referred to as the EDCI Zone. Many children and youth in this area experience significant challenges that impede their ability to succeed at school and beyond. They also have great potential to excel given the right supports.

Established in 2010, EDCI’s vision is that all children in the EDCI Zone graduate from high school, ready for college or career. To achieve this vision, EDCI provides children and families with a continuum of comprehensive and high-quality supports, extending from before birth through high school graduation.

EDCI’s pipeline of services is made possible through its collaboration with more than 40 partner organizations and community members. EDCI works collectively with stakeholders to bring together fragmented services in a way that is coordinated and guided by the needs and interests of EDCI Zone children and families. When opportunities do not exist, EDCI invests in new programs and partnerships to fill the gaps.

EDCI ZONE

In 2008, Durham community leaders and the Children’s Environmental Health Initiative of Duke University identified East Durham as the city’s most distressed area.¹ Based on this finding and community input, a 120-block, 1.2-square-mile area east of downtown Durham was identified as EDCI’s target area. About 3,800 of the nearly 11,500 residents in the EDCI Zone and its surrounding area are under 18 years old.²



The East Durham community has many assets that often go unnoticed. Engaged neighbors and families, active grassroots community groups, historic buildings, local businesses, and investments in neighborhood revitalization are just some of its strengths. Despite these bright spots, many EDCI Zone residents continue to struggle with high rates of poverty, crime, and unemployment. Only 25 percent of residents are homeowners, contributing to high rates of transiency and other challenges related to gentrification. Risk factors for children include high rates of child maltreatment and obesity, as well as limited access to high-quality child care and preschool opportunities, tutoring, and out-of-school programs.^{2 3 4}

The public schools that serve EDCI Zone children are among those with the lowest average test scores in Durham. At Y.E. Smith Elementary School, 95 percent of the students are Black or Hispanic and virtually all qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.¹⁰ About half of Y.E. Smith students enter kindergarten with no pre-kindergarten experience.³ In 2015, only 12.6 percent of third through fifth graders were reading at or above grade level based on North Carolina End-Of-Grade Tests.⁵

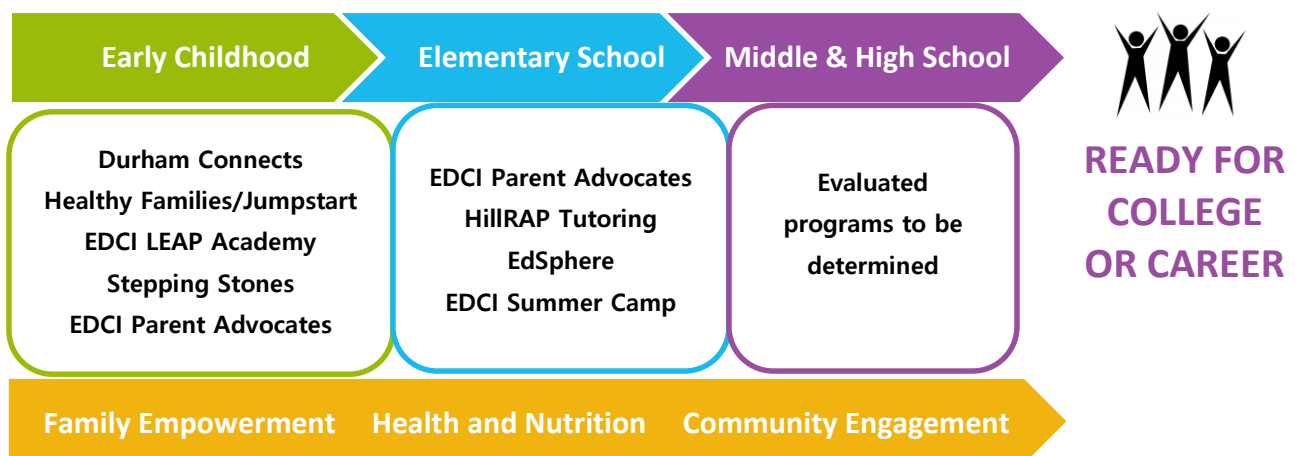
EDCI EVALUATION

The Center for Child and Family Policy (CCFP) at Duke University has conducted an annual evaluation of EDCI since 2011. CCFP has a strong track record in evaluation work at local, state, and national levels. CCFP researchers are laying the foundation for a rigorous longitudinal evaluation of the long-term impact of EDCI services on child wellbeing, education, and community-level outcomes. In the interim, the goal of CCFP’s evaluation is to assess if EDCI core programs are implemented as planned and achieve their intended results.

Each year, CCFP prepares a comprehensive evaluation report that assesses enrollment as well as program implementation and outcomes. This Impact Summary highlights select findings from CCFP’s Year Four EDCI Evaluation Report, including the evaluation of nine core programs (Fig 1).

In its first four years (July 2011–June 2015), EDCI focused on building and strengthening its services for early childhood and elementary school aged children and their families. The nine EDCI programs selected for evaluation by CCFP focus on these two age groups and contribute to EDCI short-term objectives. These core programs represent about 25 percent of all EDCI programs and services included the pipeline.

Figure 1. EDCI core programs evaluated by CCFP, 2014–2015



EDCI IMPACT

EDCI has made remarkable strides in building its pipeline and engaging EDCI Zone children and caregivers in services since its founding. Over 1,000 children from nearly 600 families have been enrolled in EDCI since 2011.⁶ This represents 77 percent of EDCI's overall goal to reach 1,300 children by June 2017. Enrollment rates have steadily increased over the past four years with the implementation of improved family engagement and data collection strategies. Fifty-eight percent of all children enrolled in EDCI since 2011 are still actively engaged in one or more EDCI programs. This is a strong retention rate, especially given EDCI's early stage of development and the high rates of transiency in the area.

EDCI's theory of change predicts that by providing children and youth with multiple, high-quality opportunities from cradle to college or career, EDCI can over time successfully improve high school graduation rates and alleviate the impact of intergenerational poverty on East Durham families and community members. According to recent evaluation data, the number of children enrolled in multiple EDCI programs has increased over time. As of June 2014, approximately 25 percent of enrolled children have been engaged in three or more evaluated EDCI programs.⁶ This is a noteworthy achievement given the challenges of service coordination for families living in poverty, such as a lack of time, access to transportation, and high rates of transiency. These connections will continue to increase as children grow older, relationships develop, and more opportunities become available as a part of the EDCI pipeline.

Other selected findings are summarized below, followed by a short summary of challenges facing EDCI's model and service delivery.

1. EDCI MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

The facts are clear: most young children living in poverty start school at a disadvantage. Research shows that less than half of low-income children are ready for school by age five, compared to 75 percent of their more affluent peers.⁷ When children arrive at kindergarten unprepared, they can present deficits in language, physical, social, and emotional health. Studies show that kindergarten readiness is predictive of third grade achievement and has a lasting impact on children beyond elementary school.⁸ The consequences include lower rates of high school graduation and higher rates of unemployment and incarceration.^{9 10 11}

Early learning opportunities are essential to student success. It is where the path to high school graduation begins. Because of this, EDCI and its partners allocate significant resources toward providing a strong continuum of high-quality services for families with young children living in the EDCI Zone. Ideally, resources begin with children before they are born and continue through their first day of kindergarten and beyond.

Five early childhood programs are currently included in EDCI's evaluation. The outcomes of these programs are strong and contribute significantly to EDCI's overarching goals of promoting children who are healthy and ready to learn and prepared for kindergarten. For example, most families participating in Healthy Families Durham and Jumpstart home-visiting services demonstrate improved parenting attitudes and safe home environments.⁶ Almost all Healthy Families Durham and Jumpstart children are up-to-date on immunizations. In Year

Four, EDCI Early Childhood Parent Advocates worked with nearly 40 EDCI Zone families with more than 80 children. Through workshops and home visits, Early Childhood Parent Advocates helped to equip parents in their roles as their children's first and most important teachers. All rising kindergarteners attending EDCI's new half-day preschool, EDCI LEAP Academy, were assessed to be ready for school upon graduation. In addition, students attending the Stepping Stones summer program made significant improvements in key areas related to school readiness, including social expression, self-regulation, motor skills, and kindergarten academics. Clearly, EDCI is hitting the mark with its early childhood investment.

Almost 40 percent of children engaged with EDCI since 2011 were younger than five years old at the time of their enrollment.⁶ For the families of these young children living in poverty, links to other supportive services are critical. These links provide referrals to community resources or agencies for food assistance, transportation, mental and physical health services, and access to child care. Specifically, over 80 percent of families in core EDCI early childhood programs (i.e., Durham Connects, Healthy Families Durham/Jumpstart, EDCI LEAP Academy) are connected to other services in the EDCI pipeline. Several EDCI and its partners' connections amplify the impact of individual programs that help children during their significant years of early brain development.

2. EDCI BUILDS SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

Parents and caregivers play a critical role, if not the most important role, in their children's wellbeing and success at school. Parent involvement has been consistently demonstrated in research to be strongly related to educational outcomes. This association is particularly true for involvement such as reading with children, creating supportive home environments for learning, and setting high expectations for academic achievement. Research also indicates that given the right support, caregivers can become more successfully engaged with their children. When this happens, their children tend to do better.^{12 13}

No other programs support parents and caregivers quite like the EDCI Parent Advocate program. The EDCI Parent Advocate program is one-of-a-kind, with seven dedicated staff focused on supporting caregivers' engagement in their children's education by: 1) providing information and skill-building opportunities, 2) facilitating parent-school communication, 3) developing supportive home environments, and 4) increasing access to community resources. Early Childhood Parent Advocates support EDCI Zone families with children birth to five years old. Elementary School Parent Advocate services are currently available to EDCI Zone families with children attending one of four target elementary schools in East Durham.

Parent and caregiver engagement in their children's success at school represents a challenge for many EDCI Zone children and youth. When EDCI was first established, local schools and community members reported that parent involvement was exceptionally low, with non-existent Parent Teacher Associations and poor attendance at school meetings and events. Neighborhood schools were among the lowest performing in the district, with many students struggling to keep up in reading and math. Stability at home continues to be an issue for many EDCI Zone families struggling with the day-to-day and long-term challenges of poverty.

Even as a relatively young program, Parent Advocates have made significant connections with East Durham families. Approximately 200 families including about 400 children have been actively engaged with a Parent Advocate since 2011.⁶ Early Childhood Parent Advocates have made over 500 contacts with families, 48 percent of which have been at home. During home visits, Early Childhood Parent Advocates promote positive parent-child interactions, early learning, community referrals, and screening for developmental delays. Elementary School Parent Advocates made close to 1,400 family contacts last year, most of which were related to providing information about services and assisting parents with school-related needs.

EDCI Parent Advocates currently serve as the primary connection between EDCI Zone families and its pipeline of services. In many ways, they serve as the glue that brings EDCI and the community together through trusting relationships. These kinds of relationships take time to build, but are worth the effort. They provide the necessary foundation on which EDCI is established and on which it will continue to be successful.

3. EDCI IMPROVES OUTCOMES THROUGH MULTIPLE PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

As previously mentioned, the theory of change guiding EDCI strategy is that participation in multiple EDCI programs over time will lead to improved academic achievement. To date, only 24 percent of enrolled children have been involved in three or more EDCI programs. Nevertheless, early data from CCFP's report indicate a significant positive relationship between engagement in multiple EDCI programs and improved outcomes.⁶

A promising example of such acceleration in outcomes comes from EDCI Summer Camp 2015. The most significant, if not the only, predictor of children's literacy was their participation in multiple programs in the EDCI pipeline. Furthermore, the level of improvement was directly and positively correlated to the number of programs attended. Similarly promising results, albeit less conclusive due to small sample sizes, were observed in other programs (e.g., EDCI LEAP Academy, HillRAP).⁶

The implications of the above findings are far reaching. These results provide a very strong argument for EDCI's comprehensive approach and its emphasis on connecting families to multiple opportunities. Many national initiatives also believe that a comprehensive and place-based approach is necessary to transform educational outcomes for children living in poverty.^{14 15} EDCI's evaluation findings also provide support for programs that are still in the beginning stages, as cross participation in underperforming programs still boosts outcomes in individual children. In other words, this indicates that a child's achievement increases when he or she is enrolled in several programs, even if those separate programs appear to produce no conclusive impacts when assessed in isolation.⁶

With EDCI's success in increasing family enrollment, retention, and engagement in the pipeline, the number of children involved in multiple EDCI programs will continue to rise. As this happens, EDCI's longitudinal evaluation will be able to draw more nuanced conclusions on the impact of multiple program connections on individual children, as well as its effects on the community overall. Future analysis will determine which combinations of programs and levels of family engagement are most directly related to other key outcomes. These are exciting next steps in EDCI's evaluation.

4. EDCI ENSURES CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

It is widely understood that the effectiveness of a given program depends not only on its conceptual model but in large measure also on the quality of its implementation. In the real world, it may take significant time and several tries to get the program implementation right.¹⁶ Are the protocols adequate and being followed? Is the target population being reached? Is the staff engaged and on board? Answers to these and others are critical before measurable results can be expected.¹⁷

EDCI leverages the expertise of CCFP to ensure that programs are continuously improving and are optimally implemented. After assessing community needs and CCFP's recommendations, EDCI adapts its services and, more importantly, fills gaps in services as needed by offering its own innovative programs.

The history of EDCI programs confirms the notion that adjusting implementation to achieve the highest impact possible takes time and sometimes numerous iterations. In fact, CCFP evaluation data show that it can take up to three years or more for a program to become fully operational and for donors to see measurable outcomes.⁶

Today, Durham Connects, HillRAP, and EDCI Summer Camp are cornerstone programs in EDCI's pipeline. However, it took some years to achieve their desired outcomes in the EDCI Zone. Using data and feedback, changes were made to each of these programs over the past four years with respect to how they serve families in the EDCI Zone, resulting in increased and demonstrable impact. Outcomes resulting from these changes included increased engagement rates with Durham Connects nurses in the EDCI Zone, improved literacy skills for low-performing readers, and increased camp attendance contributing to the prevention of summer learning loss.⁶

Other EDCI programs are still in early stages of development and are undergoing changes. For example, the EDCI Parent Advocate program has made significant progress to date connecting with families and making referrals, but is still working on strengthening its design and measuring parent engagement.⁶ Based on CCFP recommendations, the program has made revisions to its protocols and procedures, including the development of a home visit checklist, a new tiered system of family support, and parent and teacher surveys. Given the newness of the Parent Advocate program, and the unique value of its work with families, its outcomes are well within the expected range.

On the other hand, data for some programs have lead EDCI to reconsider continuation. Last year, challenges with school implementation and buy-in resulted in poor overall results for students using EdSphere. After consulting with staff and partners, the decision was made to discontinue EdSphere and explore alternative literacy interventions.⁶

In all cases, EDCI's agility and responsiveness to inputs, as well as evaluation data, ensure the best possible services are provided to EDCI Zone families, now and in the future.

EDCI CHALLENGES

CCFP's evaluation also identifies potential barriers that are inherent in EDCI's partnership-focused, community-based approach. Two of these areas are highlighted below.

In light of its collaborative model, EDCI must incorporate various and often competing priorities in its work. There are times when the desires of the community and partners may not align with EDCI's priorities, and vice versa. To achieve its mission, EDCI must reach consensus with stakeholders through open communication, flexibility, and identifying common ground. Often, although not always, alignment and buy-in are achieved. According to CCFP feedback, EDCI's cooperation with partners and families improved greatly last year.⁶

EDCI's measurement-based approach requires adherence to protocols, as well as systemic and rigorous data collection. This is a challenge in any field or business, but especially when, as is the case with EDCI, the data come from numerous partners, transient communities, or access to data is limited (e.g., student data). Fortunately, the importance of data has become a focus for nonprofits and a requirement for donors. EDCI's experience is considerable and provides opportunities to help partners in the development of common processes and measurements.

Despite these challenges, the closing note is a promising one: EDCI has not only delivered tangible results in its first four years, but is also aware of the challenges and is well prepared to address them in the years ahead. It is a commitment worth making for the children and families of East Durham on their journey to school success.

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