

EDUCARE NETWORK

Family Leadership Strategy Report

MAY 2024



Table of Contents

EDUCARE FAMILY LEADERSHIP STRATEGY REPORT **Executive Summary** 1 **EDUCARE FAMILY LEADERSHIP** Approach and Recommendations 7 **1.** Educare Family Leadership Definition 7 2. Educare Network Family Leadership Values and Guiding Principles 8 **3.** Educare Family Engagement Foundations 9 4. Educare Family Leadership Success Criteria 10 5. Recommendations for Building Family Leadership Across the Educare Network 16 6. Considerations for Potential Family Leadership Resources and Barriers 23



EDUCARE FAMILY LEADERSHIP STRATEGY REPORT Executive Summary

The Educare Network is a national network of early childhood champions comprised of 25 schools located in 15 states, the District of Columbia, and on tribal land. The Network includes infants, toddlers, preschoolers, parents, early childhood professionals, and leaders. At Educare, we work together to ensure that every child and family can thrive. As part of the Educare model, our efforts include advocating for equitable policy and systems change at the local, state, and federal levels. Our policy and advocacy efforts are guided and supported by both the Educare Policy Workgroup (EPWG) and family-led policy and advocacy programs across our schools.

In 2023, with sponsorship from the EPWG and Educare National Coordinating Office (NCO), a Steering Committee—comprised of Network parent leaders and staff with extensive experience supporting family leadership efforts—was formed to lead the process of strategy development for Educare Network Family Leadership efforts. The Steering Committee (SC) developed the recommendations contained in this report by building on existing effective family leadership efforts, including use of Network data, a <u>Network family</u> engagement logic model, and our Network family engagement theory of change.

As a result of the Steering Committee's work, foundational definitions, frameworks, and considerations were outlined for the Educare Network, including:

1.

Educare Family Leadership Definition

2.

Educare Family Leadership Values and Guiding Principles

3. Educare Family Engagement Foundations

4. Educare Family Leadership Success Criteria

5.

Recommendations for Building Family Leadership across the Educare Network

Considerations for Potential Resources and Barriers to Family Leadership Efforts

6.





Priority recommendations identified for the **Educare Network**:

- Include families, from the beginning, in development and decision-making forums and Network development opportunities, including the annual Educare Network Meeting.
- Provide financial and other resources that remove barriers to parent participation (food, childcare, expenses, etc.) and compensate parents equitably for their expertise and skills.
- Establish a family leadership steering committee composed of primarily family leaders with a few Network staff liaisons to inform/guide the work of Network.
- Continue to support Parent Ambassador initiatives, which offer valuable insights to the network about family engagement, leadership, and advocacy.
- Build/join coalition among other family leadership organizations and initiatives such as UPLAN, Parent Nation, Strolling Thunder, Fathers, Families & Healthy Communities, etc.
 Define Educare Network's unique value add or point of view as part of a potential coalition.



Priority recommendations identified for Educare schools:

- Identify and prioritize resources for family leadership.
- Use Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment (PELA) with a multidisciplinary team (including families) to support goal setting, action planning, and intentional implementation of improvement plans.
- Provide funds to prevent or address unforeseen circumstances to avert family crisis (emergency funds).
- Co-create and share clear messaging about boundaries, ethics, and behavioral expectations for staff and families when they are representing the organization.
- Provide clear and respectful messaging about the use of agency funds.
- Support a network of peer-to-peer outreach to develop and sustain family leadership within an organization.

These recommendations were built on a foundation of resources, experiences, data, and efforts from individual Educare schools across the country. With the intention that this important body of work not "sit on a shelf", the Educare NCO worked with the SC and an advisory group of family leaders over the past year to bring the full set of family leadership recommendations to life through an interactive suite of resources for those working to strengthen family leadership efforts.

Steering Committee Members

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Family Leadership Strategy Development Process

The Educare Policy Workgroup (EPWG) guides and supports the collective Network's engagement in early childhood policy and advocacy. A key priority of the EPWG's work focuses on cultivating a Network family leadership strategy, including analysis of promising practices and identification of necessary supports. To ensure a strong foundation for this work, a Steering Committee (SC), including parent representatives from across the Network, convened over the summer of 2023 to develop a set of family leadership criteria and recommendations.

The Educare Family Leadership Steering Committee:

- Described shared understanding, success criteria, and recommendations relative to a family leadership strategy for the Educare Network;
- Built on existing effective family leadership efforts, including the use of current and future Network data, Network family engagement logic model, and Network family engagement theory of change in considering key elements and recommendations moving forward;
- Utilized data and their own expertise on family leadership to inform the final recommendations.

Network Engagement

Following the initial drafting of recommendations by the Steering Committee, broad feedback was solicited from across the Network. A draft report and recommendations were distributed to the EPWG, the Network SC, school directors, executive directors, and the NCO and to participants from the 2023 Parent Ambassadors Institute for review, transparency, and to garner feedback. Revisions to the draft report were made in response to the feedback.

Terminology

- This report uses parent, caregiver, and family leadership interchangeably to describe those who are actively caring for a child/ren and who are engaged in policy and advocacy.
- This report uses the term "school" to describe Educare affiliated organizations. However, this term is meant to be flexible to respond to different models of operation, including Educare schools that are embedded in larger agencies, part of a multischool unit, or another type of organizational configuration. It is important to note that sometimes family leadership initiatives that Network parents are part of may be supported by Educare schools, but are operated at a community, state, regional, or national level.
- An additional clarification is that the identified success criteria uses the term "agency" to align with the Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment (PELA) tool that is used as a basis for the criteria. Schools are invited to amend the terminology in ways that are most reflective of their organizational body using the tools and recommendations.



EDUCARE FAMILY LEADERSHIP

Approach and Recommendations

1. Educare Family Leadership Definition

The Steering Committee (SC) reviewed multiple definitions and components of leadership. Through this process, the SC developed a shared definition of family leadership. As such, the Educare Network defines **family leadership** as:

Equitable opportunities for parents and caregivers of young children to:

- Hold roles of influence and power from the start
- Support others
- Shape decisions
- Drive change, and
- Make lasting impact in their families, schools, and communities.

Of note, the SC discussed the importance of identifying this plain language description of family leadership to promote accessibility.

2. Educare Network Family Leadership Values and Guiding Principles

Adapted from the Parent Ambassador Implementation Guide

Values

- Families bring truth to public policy and are invaluable to civic discourse.
- Parents and caregivers are leaders in their families, programs, and communities.
- Parents and caregivers are not a problem to be fixed, rather they are assets with inherent value.
- Parents and caregivers are the drivers of the solutions to societal problems that impact families.
- Every parent or caregiver starts in a different place and has a different trajectory.
- Every parent or caregiver owns their own story.

Guiding Principles

- Programs will foster opportunities for family members to share their stories that are intentional, respectful, and benefit the parent as much or more than the program itself.
- Programs will avoid and advocate against tokenism.
- Programs will identify and provide opportunities for shared power and family voice.
- Family voice will be included from the beginning and throughout the process of change, not as an afterthought.
- The development and integration of family leadership strategies are built on a foundation of strong family engagement and racial equity.
- Staff and family members meet each other where they are.
- Listening, respect (of time, perspectives), and relationships are key.

- Programs will embrace and honor diversity to foster belonging.
- Programs will offer a variety of equitable and accessible methods for families to voice their experience and expertise.
- Programs will recognize, accept, and address mistakes in order to evolve and improve.



3. Educare Family Engagement Foundations

Cultivating a culture in which family leadership is integrated into the fabric of an organization requires a foundation of strong family engagement practices, values, organizational structures, and intentional allocation of resources. To further develop and sustain family leadership as a focus within the Educare Network, both individual schools and the broader Network must continue to nurture family engagement as a foundation.

The Educare Network has existing core documents and training that are supported by research to identify the priorities and strategies within intensive family engagement. They include:

- Educare Intensive Family Engagement Theory of Change
- Educare Intensive Family Engagement Logic Model
- Essential Practices of Educare: Foundations of Intensive Family Engagement
- Essential Practices of Educare: Intensive Family Engagement in Practice

The Steering Committee identified the following elements of family engagement as critical foundations for any family leadership efforts:

- Genuine relationships and trust between families and staff are essential.
- Parents and caregivers must believe that staff care about what they have to say.
- Community among parents and caregivers is an important tool for empowerment.
- Basic physical and emotional needs for children and adults in families must be addressed for parents and caregivers to fully engage and thrive.
- Resources must be allocated in a way that supports ample staffing, space, and funds to make participation feasible and appealing to parents and caregivers (food, child care, stipends, etc.).



4 • Educare Family Leadership Success Criteria

The Steering Committee (SC) identified the <u>Parent Engagement and Leadership</u> <u>Assessment Tool (PELA)</u> from the Center for the Study of Social Policy as a critical resource for establishing success criteria recommendations for the Educare Network. The SC reviewed and adapted PELA indicators to establish baseline expectations and adopted the "integrated" indicators as aspirational goals for Network schools. The SC also recommends that the baseline criteria below be used as general guidance for Network members rather than strict requirements. The intent is for all Network schools to consider their current state of progress towards family leadership integration and make good faith efforts to grow and improve.

Note: Some of the baseline criteria align with the integrated success criteria based on the assumptions that all Educare schools are meeting/exceeding Head Start Performance Standards.

Parent Leadership Success Criteria

Adapted from the Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Tool

DIMENSION	BASELINE CRITERIA	INTEGRATED SUCCESS CRITERIA
Pillar 1: F	amily Centered	
Commitment	Agency has a definition of parent engagement, a defined strategy and multi-year goals.	Leaders regularly talk to staff about the importance and benefits of building trusting relationships with all adults that matter in the child's life.
	Same as integrated success criteria.	Leaders prioritize parent engagement in the agency budget and allocate resources to ensure consistent programming.
Capacity	Same as integrated success criteria.	All agency staff are expected to understand the importance of engaging parents, including fathers; front-line staff have specific expectations outlined in their job descriptions; supervisors provide staff with training and professional development, coaching, mentoring, and reflective practice to help them continually improve. *
	Child care (or stipend), translation, and meals are provided at all parent events and meetings.	Child care and other support are automatically provided at all events parents are invited to, including galas, staff meetings, work groups, etc.

Practice	Programs, events, and meetings always allow time for parents to get to know other parents and share their experiences.	Programs, events, and meetings emphasize building relationships, and are often co-facilitated by parent leaders.	
	Agency programs emphasize partnership with parents to shape and improve programs.	Parents are invited to advance their leadership in a variety of ways, including formal leadership training, policy advocacy, and paraprofessional roles leading to staff positions; staff provide ongoing coaching and mentoring to help parents reach personal and professional goals.	
Influence	Parents have consistent opportunities to give feedback and suggestions, including focus groups, listening sessions, and surveys.	Parents have opportunities to influence decisions at all levels, from care decisions for their child, to program delivery, to agency decision-making.*	
	A group of parent leaders are formally or informally advising the agency on ways to improve parent engagement and other program strategies.	Boards and committees include significant parent representation, and parent leaders are supported to actively seek input from all parents.*	
DIMENSION	BASELINE CRITERIA	INTEGRATED SUCCESS CRITERIA	
Pillar 2: Equity-Driven			
Commitment	Agency has specific goals in its strategic plan around diversity, inclusion, and equity, and is taking active steps to	Agency can demonstrate progress addressing issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity.	

plan around diversity, inclusion, and equity, and is taking active steps to achieve them (specific goals are not needed if success criteria is met).	addressing issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity.
Agency prioritizes and allocates resources for some equity strategies and assigns ownership of roles related to follow-through.	Agency allocates sufficient resources to build its capacity to address equity issues internally and externally.

Capacity	Same as integrated success criteria. Most of the staff interacting with	Agency collects, breaks out, and analyzes data by race/ethnicity in programs and operates and uses this information to guide program strategy and organizational policy (unless disaggregation leads to identification risks). Program staff and leadership represent
	parents represent cultures of the families in the community and/or speak the primary language spoken by families.	cultures of the families in the community and parents have access to formal pathways to become leaders and employees.
Practice	Same as integrated success criteria.	Staff and parents co-create program strategies to ensure they are welcoming and inclusive.
	Staff ask parents for feedback on how well programs address core equity issues and act on and/or respond to that feedback.	Staff and parents co-create program strategies to ensure they address priority equity issues.
Influence	Agency sometimes conducts focus groups or listening sessions to understand how parents of different racial and ethnic backgrounds experience programs and policies.	Agency leaders regularly listen to parents representing marginalized communities about their experiences with agency policies, practices and programs, and directs changes to address concerns.
	Same as integrated success criteria.	Parents are encouraged to voice complaints about equity issues and there is a formal process to address them.
DIMENSION	BASELINE CRITERIA	INTEGRATED SUCCESS CRITERIA
Pillar 3: C	Collaborative	
Commitment	Agency has specific goals in its strategic plan to expand and strengthen its efforts to work in partnership with parents and develop their leadership.	Agency's mission and goals include partnering with parents, developing their leadership, and supporting them to build their power to change systems.
	Agency allocates necessary funds to achieve strategic goals.	Agency prioritizes resources for developing strong partnerships with parents and community and developing parents' leadership skills.

Capacity	Agency helps parent leaders learn to participate in policy change processes by offering or connecting them to training on civic skills, reading budgets, collecting and analyzing data, public speaking, etc.	Agency helps parent leaders advocate for policy change by offering or connecting them to opportunities to build skills in planning a rally, delivering testimony at a hearing, and attracting media attention.
	Agency helps parents advocate for their children by coaching them or connecting them to training on their rights and how to ask questions and address concerns.	Agency helps parents advocate for their children by offering coaching, training, and mentoring to advocate for their children in system and policy change efforts.
Practice	Parents have regular opportunities to connect with parent and community organizations.	Parent leaders are encouraged to become active in other community organizations, coalitions, committees, and work groups.
	Parent leaders are regularly supported to participate in intra- or inter- agency working groups to provide their perspectives on programs, policies and practices in agencies, and systems.	Parent leaders are supported to present and lead discussions at conferences, meetings, and work groups discussing policy and systems changes.
Influence	Parent leaders of diverse backgrounds are supported in decision-making roles affecting agency policies and practices.	Parent leaders of diverse backgrounds are well represented and supported in decision-making roles affecting agency policies and practices.
	Agency regularly invites parents to join advocacy efforts to share their experiences with decision-makers, and parent leaders receive training to educate them on the issues and policy process.	In addition to integrating parents into agency advocacy efforts, agency leaders join, and support advocacy efforts led by parents and community organizations.

DIMENSION	BASELINE CRITERIA	INTEGRATED SUCCESS CRITERIA		
Pillar 4: Transparent				
Commitment	Agency has a written policy that outlines the agency's commitment to transparency and inclusion.	Agency has a written policy, co-created with a representative group of parent leaders, that outlines the agency commitment to transparency and inclusion.		
	Agency makes efforts to shift the practices of coalitions and work groups they participate in toward greater transparency.	Agency leaders publicly advocate for practices supporting transparency and inclusion in all coalitions and work groups they participate in, so that parents can fully participate.		
Capacity	Agency staff work to facilitate understanding of the strengths of families and the context of communities they represent to gain full buy-in from professional partners.	Agency staff, professional partners, and parents work together to design meetings that are accessible to everyone.		
	Staff are sometimes included in conversations about challenges or opportunities facing the agency and have meaningful input on strategies to address them.	Agency leaders include staff at all levels in planning and problem-solving, providing them with information they need to participate fully. As a result, staff feel confident in their efforts to engage parents in agency change efforts.		
Practice	When parents are invited to participate, staff makes most documents accessible to parents–acronyms are spelled out, presenters use plain language, and materials are translated.	Agency regularly includes parent leaders in the planning of events and meetings. As a result, all aspects of the meeting, including materials, promote transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness.		
	Parent leaders are encouraged to participate in the decision-making processes and are made aware of how decisions are made.	Parent leaders participate in the design of the decision-making process.		

Influence	Same as integrated success criteria.	There is a defined process for including parents in a "feedback loop:" parent leaders are involved in the effort to get parent input from the beginning and included in the agency's report back to parents about how their feedback influenced decisions.
	Same as integrated success criteria.	Parent leaders are informed and asked for their input when an agency is defining a problem, coming up with a solution, putting the solution into action, and learning what worked and didn't work.

* Items designated with an asterisk indicate criteria that are expected as baseline when an Educare school operates as an independent organization. The SC recognizes that Educare schools operate in a variety of organizational structures that may impact the priorities and feasibility for change at the agency level. Citation: Parent Engagement & Leadership Assessment Guide and Toolkit. (2019). Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy.



5. Recommendations for Building Family Leadership Across the Educare Network

The following Steering Committee recommendations are intended to shape a shared, efficient approach to ensuring all Educare Schools can meet and exceed the success criteria outlined above. If the success criteria for family leadership is the goal, then the following recommendations—at both the School and Network levels—are the approach we believe will help the Educare Network to achieve that goal quickly and collaboratively.

The recommendations have been organized into four core areas—Infrastructure, Family Supports, Equity, and Community Partnerships—to create the Educare Building Family Leadership approach. Further details, interactive tools, and resources can be found on our new virtual space, <u>Building Family Leadership</u>, a place for growing and strengthening family leadership across the Educare Network and beyond.



Infrastructure

Key components that create, strengthen, or expand capacity for family leadership efforts



Family Supports

Access to supports that promote, support, or enhance the participation of families in policy and advocacy or other leadership efforts



Equity

Equitable and inclusive policies and practices that break down barriers created by systemic and institutional racism and honor families' lived experiences



Community Partnerships

Strong partnerships with families and community organizations to provide support, reveal leadership, and expand capacity for family-led policy and other family leadership efforts After developing the recommendations, the SC gathered feedback from across the Network to determine which were of greatest priority. The priority recommendations are highlighted in yellow and indicated by this icon \bigotimes .



Infrastructure

Key components that create, strengthen, or expand capacity for family leadership efforts

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Co-create and share clear messaging about boundaries, ethics, and behavioral expectations for staff and families when they are representing the organization.	SCHOOL
Provide clinical mental health consultation for staff supporting family engagement and leadership initiatives.	SCHOOL
Identify and prioritize resources for family leadership.	SCHOOL
Develop dedicated staff positions/roles for family leadership.	SCHOOL



Family Supports

Access to supports that promote, support, or enhance the participation of families in policy and advocacy or other leadership efforts

Develop guidance and professional development opportunities related to male involvement.	SCHOOL
Provide funds to prevent or address unforeseen circumstances to avert family crisis (emergency funds).	SCHOOL
Provide mental health consultation and referrals for families.	SCHOOL
Provide financial and other resources that remove barriers to family participation (child care, food, expenses, etc.) and compensate parents and caregivers equitably for their expertise and skill.	SCHOOL
Utilize reflective practice approaches, motivational interviewing, etc., to support and empower family leaders as informed decision makers.	SCHOOL
Offer civics training for families and staff.	SCHOOL



Equitable and inclusive policies and practices that break down barriers created by systemic and institutional racism and honor families' lived experiences

Provide guidance and training for Network members to understand and avoid tokenism.	NETWORK
Define "parent" as an inclusive term to describe those who are actively involved in a parenting role.	NETWORK SCHOOL
Assure outreach/educational materials are available in accessible formats and languages, using plain language.	NETWORK SCHOOL
Identify/develop tools to examine policies, procedures, and practices through a justice and equity lens; promote within the Network.	NETWORK SCHOOL
Personalize outreach and encouragement.	NETWORK SCHOOL
Offer diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) and justice training for all network members (and beyond).	SCHOOL
Provide clear and respectful messaging about the use of agency funds.	SCHOOL
Create a glossary of terms for family engagement and leadership to promote accessibility.	SCHOOL
Develop training pathways, incentives, and encouragement for parents and caregivers to become employed with the organization.	SCHOOL



Strong partnerships with families and community organizations to provide support, reveal leadership, and expand capacity for family-led policy and other family leadership efforts

议	Build/join coalition among other family leadership organizations and initiatives such as UPLAN, Parent Nation, Strolling Thunder, Fathers, Families & Healthy Communities, etc. Define the Educare Network's unique value add or point of view as part of a potential coalition.	NETWORK
	Develop/commission a family leadership training that is co-developed with families.	NETWORK
	Develop mechanisms for continued networking, collaboration, and other opportunities for family leadership alumni.	NETWORK
	Explore opportunities for sustainability, expansion, and refinement through programs like Frontiers of Innovation.	SCHOOL
	Utilize the resources of the Network by reaching out to other schools to learn more about their experiences, lessons learned, etc.	SCHOOL
	Support a network of peer-to-peer outreach to develop and sustain family leadership within organization.	SCHOOL
	Cultivate/strengthen Parent Ambassador alumni groups to support further leadership development and networking.	SCHOOL
	Foster leadership through parenting and/or caregiver-child focused opportunities or other experiences as an entry point for leadership development (e.g. cooking classes, substitute training, resident parent artist).	SCHOOL
	Cultivate community, state, and/or national partnerships with joint interests in family leadership development.	SCHOOL

Recommendations Accomplished Since the Report

In the months since the Steering Committee developed their recommendations, the Educare National Coordinating Office, in partnership with an advisory group of Network family leaders and design contractors, has already implemented the following subset of SC recommendations:

Support formal mentoring relationships between schools to cultivate family leadership advancement.	NETWORK
Develop a visual to conceptualize the relationship between family engagement, family leadership, Parent Ambassadors, and other related concepts.	NETWORK
Convene a workgroup to examine and revise the "Ladder of Participation or Engagement" drafted by Lori Pittman, Educare Seattle.	NETWORK
Develop a tool that highlights schools that offer best practice exemplars and/ or innovative practices, specific to family leadership (but this would also be helpful across multiple areas of practice, structure, and leadership).	NETWORK
Define roles and responsibilities of the Educare National Coordinating Office.	NETWORK
Formally recommend, encourage, and support the use of the Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Tool (PELA). Provide access and technical assistance for the use of the Qualtrics data collection form that has already been developed by the Research and Evaluation team at the Educare National Coordinating Office.	NETWORK SCHOOL

6. Considerations for Potential Family Leadership Resources and Barriers

During the process of reviewing data, identifying success criteria, and developing recommendations, the Steering Committee also identified both barriers and resources relevant to family leadership development. This information may be helpful in terms of planning at both the Network and school levels.

Resources

Parents and caregivers themselves are one of the greatest resources within the Network and for cultivating and sustaining family leadership work. In an integrated, co-designed approach, parents and caregivers are the drivers of change, lead the onboarding of new family leaders, and propel the work forward. Other resources identified by the Steering Committee include:

- Innovative use of existing funding streams to support family leadership work
- Partnerships and private foundations that seek to invest in family leadership
- Support from Educare National Coordinating Office and other schools within Network.

Barriers

Lack of funding is often a barrier to fully implementing a desired vision for a family leadership model. However, the perception of inadequate resources (scarcity mindset), can also limit the vision from even developing. Of note, Educare schools with the most robust family leadership efforts all started with developing their vision and then worked to identify financial resources and partnerships to support their vision. Other potential barriers or challenges the Steering Committee felt important to flag include:

- Some perspectives may not be represented in data collection efforts when methods of outreach are not fully accessible and/or culturally relevant.
- Fear can be a barrier for organizations (loss of control) and for parents and caregivers (unknown, power differential, tokenism, self-doubt, etc.)
- Tokenism of parents and caregivers, both conscious and unconscious, may sometimes occur.

- Inadequate and/or inconsistent support and compensation for families, and/or delayed payment may limit participation. Contributing factors may be lack of financial resources, agency rules, state rules, federal (IRS) rules, and agency procedures.
- Gatekeeping of information and resources, such having one parent/caregiver as a primary point of contact, may lead to inequitable sharing of information and opportunities with families.

Conclusion

Building on a long history of Network family leadership efforts, the efforts of the Steering Committee captured in this report are intended to guide and inform the family leadership efforts of schools across the Educare Network. We look forward to continuing to collaborate, innovate, and evaluate our efforts in service to ensuring all young children and families—across the Educare Network and beyond—can thrive.



Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge funding support from Schreiber Philanthropy, UBS Optimus Foundation, Share Our Strength-No Kid Hungry, Kini Fund, and the Buffet Early Childhood Fund.

Thank you to the Family Leadership Steering Committee for leading the development of this report and to the other Educare Network members who contributed to this work.

Further details, interactive tools, and resources can be found on our new virtual space, **Building Family Leadership**, a place for growing and strengthening family leadership across the Educare Network and beyond.





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