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One Year of High-Quality Early Education Improves Outcomes for Low-Income Infants & Toddlers

TULSA, OKLA (Feb. 8, 2017) — Fewer than half of children from low-income families are considered ready for school at age 5. Since 85% of brain development occurs by age three, early child education is vital to a child's future success in school.

A new study by OU-Tulsa and four other universities have found that infants and toddlers from low-income families who attended a high-quality, center-based early education program do better in language and social skills after only one year than children who do not attend the program. Participants were assessed after one year of attending Educare sites in four cities, including Tulsa Educare. Children who participated had better language skills, fewer problem behaviors, and more positive interactions with their parents than children who didn't participate in a program.

The study appears in the journal *Child Development*. It is based on research conducted at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Chicago, OU-Tulsa, the University of Nebraska Medical Center, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

"This study shows high-quality early childhood programming that starts in infancy makes a difference in the lives of young children who are growing up in poverty," said Diane Horm, Ph.D., director of the OU-Tulsa Early Childhood Education Institute and principle investigator for the Tulsa site of the study. "The achievement gap has been a critical problem and this study shows the power of starting in infancy and toddlerhood, and how it will set children on a path to short- and long-term success."

Researchers randomly assigned 239 infants and toddlers (ages 6 weeks to 19 months) from low-income families to attend or not attend local Educare programs at five schools (Chicago, Milwaukee, two in Omaha, and Tulsa). About half of the children were African American and about a third were Hispanic. One year later, they measured the children's language skills, observed them playing with their primary caregiver (usually mothers), and asked parents to rate their children's social and emotional skills.

The differences between children who attended Educare and children who did not attend were larger than differences seen in previous studies of similar programs, such as Early Head Start or home visiting programs. The findings from this study extend those of the Abecedarian Project and other research suggesting that starting a comprehensive early childhood education program early can improve the outcomes of infants and toddlers from low-income families. The study will follow the children's progress through age 5 and at that time, assess their abilities in academic areas that predict later success in school.

Educare includes specific components that may contribute to the positive development of children from low-income families. In particular, all teachers have at least a B.A. degree, and many have an M.A. degree. They are supervised by master teachers, who provide ongoing professional development and coaching on research-based best practices. Educare staff conduct at least two home visits and two parent conferences each year. In addition, they offer meetings, activities, classes, and social events geared to parents and families.

“This study reinforces the incredible results Educare’s evidence-based, early childhood education program has on the outcomes of children from low-income families,” said Caren Calhoun, executive director of Tulsa Educare. “Educare is specifically designed to let children explore, learn and develop in a safe space. Our commitment to small class sizes, well-trained and bachelor degreed teachers and family engagement helps our students develop the skills necessary to be socially and academically successful.”

The research was funded by the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, the Brady Education Foundation, the George Kaiser Family Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ounce of Prevention Fund, and an anonymous foundation.

The ECEI is part of the OU Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education. It is one component of the Early Childhood Education research and academic programs available at OU-Tulsa.

OU-Tulsa is a nationally-recognized center for higher education offering a wide range of 30+ undergraduate, Master’s, and Doctorate level degrees, as well as graduate certificates. Programs include architecture, engineering, education, nursing, public health, occupational and physical therapy, human relations, library and information studies, organizational dynamics, public administration, social work, as well as medicine through the OU-TU School of Community Medicine. Since 1957, OU-Tulsa has provided higher education to NE Oklahoma and moved to the 60-acre Schusterman Campus in 1999. For more information, visit ou.edu/tulsa.

Educare is an early education program for children from 6 weeks to 5 years that operates in 21 schools in 18 U.S. cities. The program is designed to reduce the achievement gap between children from low-income families and those from more economically advantaged families. It offers full-day, year-round comprehensive services, including enriching educational experiences, in infant-toddler classrooms of 8 children and 3 adults.

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Summarized from Child Development, *Child and Parenting Outcomes After One Year of Educare* by Yazejian, N (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Bryant, M (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Hans, S (University of Chicago), Horm, D (University of Oklahoma-Tulsa), St. Clair, L (formerly at University of Nebraska Medical Center, now at Omaha Program Evaluation Services), File, N (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), and Burchinal, M (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). Copyright 2017 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.



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