

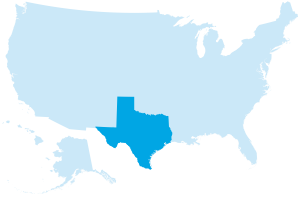


CASE STUDY

Implementing The Essential 0-5 Survey Across 25 Early Childhood Campuses

Scaling program improvement
by giving leaders autonomy and
a common framework

MEET THE PROGRAM



NAME

Karin Scott, Chief Performance Officer

ORGANIZATION

Child Care Associates

SYSTEM TYPE

Head Start/Early Head Start

LOCATION

Fort Worth, TX

START EARLY PD SOLUTION

The Essential 0-5 Survey

The Challenge: Plateaued CLASS scores and a top-down approach to improvement

At Child Care Associates in Texas, the central office team noticed that, after a period of gains, its CLASS evaluations of childcare and Head Start/Early Head Start providers had plateaued. System leaders decided it was time to change how they approached outcomes improvement and they made three important decisions:

- 1) Shift ownership of CCA's education vision from the central office to instructional leaders at CCA's campuses
- 2) Recommit to listening to families across the organization, using their perceptions about their experience at CCA as a critical performance measure
- 3) Implement The Essential 0-5 Survey from Start Early across 25 campuses to provide a unified program improvement framework to support leaders in this transition and to provide a meaningful process for families to share their perspective

KARIN SCOTT, CHIEF PERFORMANCE OFFICER, CHILD CARE ASSOCIATES:

"We've done parent and staff surveys in the past, but not necessarily with a focus on educational outcomes – which is a north star for us as an organization. The Essential Survey aligns everything with that focus. An introduction to The Essential Survey tool showed how it really gives baseline information about how campuses are doing at the leadership and campus level to get alignment and ensure children are kindergarten ready.

"Improving CLASS instructional support scores was important to CCA – but our goal in using The Essential Survey was to focus on how supporting leaders will drive improvement in the classroom."

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT PERCEPTION

Education Week's Research Center reports* a startling gap in principal and teacher perceptions of leader impact.

69%
of principals
completely agree
that teachers are
empowered to
bring problems
to them.

25%
of teachers
completely
agree
with this
statement.

86%
of principals
completely agree
that they support
teachers who start
innovative work
or new initiatives

45%
of teachers
completely
agree
with this
statement.

In reviewing data from The Essential Survey, early childhood leaders are often surprised to learn they view their leadership differently from their staff – and the survey's toolkit helps teams close this gap.

*Education Week Research Center Special Report, "Inside the Principal-Teacher Relationship," Oct. 18, 2019

The Implementation: Using The Essential Survey to elevate staff voice and redesign program improvement

The Child Care Associates team prepared for their Essential Survey rollout, including dedicating a staff project manager to ensure the implementation's success across multiple child care sites.

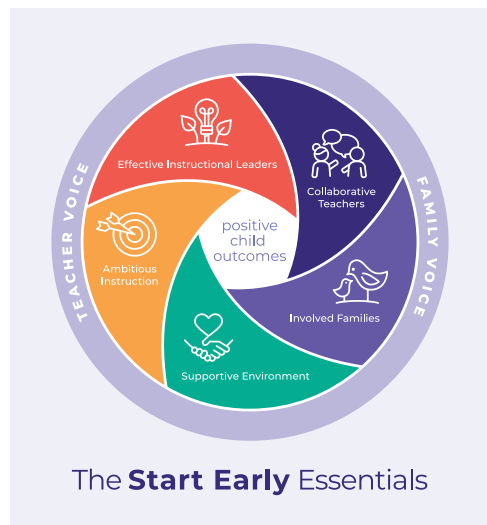
KARIN SCOTT:

"The Start Early support team gave us a lot of Essential Survey resources that we could fit to the organization and our parents. It was also really valuable having a staff person focused on the implementation who could work with campus leadership to make sure they were comfortable and the survey was successful. Creating buy-in for a process like this isn't a one-and-done. It takes implementation resources and time to get what you want out of it."

The Impact: Energized leaders re-shaping daily practice to improve outcomes and equity

Karin Scott outlines four key outcomes the CCA team continues to experience with their annual Essential Survey implementation.

Outcome One – Our entire team now uses a common framework to talk about improvement.



"Having The Start Early Essentials as a common framework to talk about improvement work was helpful.

"At the system level, we are figuring out how WE contribute to some of the things at campuses that may be out of their control and how we can better support them. We can see how our policies and procedures impact outcomes at the campus level. We're trying to be flexible and meet staff where they are, and I feel like the Essential Survey framework and process allows for that.

"At the campus level, I was excited to see that there were tough conversations around effective leadership happening. Having that survey data available opened the door to having some of those less comfortable conversations about how staff is experiencing leadership – and I'm excited to see how campuses are taking on some of those leadership challenges in their improvement cycles.

"Previously, campus director meetings were report outs; now we've made an intentional effort to transform into a community of practice centered on Start Early Essentials work. We use the meeting time to bring people together who are working on common strategies, Essentials, or problems of practice and allow them to have time to talk with and learn from each other – to share out what's working and lift up people getting better outcomes or implementing a practice with fidelity. We're lifting up the fail fast mentality even when it doesn't work, sharing that information with the other campuses and talking together about how they pivoted. With The Start Early Essentials, we now have a framework to communicate and develop an informed strategy."

Outcome Two – We are reducing leader & teacher overwhelm by focusing on where they CAN have impact.

“The heart of The Essential Survey is leadership development and building leaders’ capacity and skill set – giving them a roadmap. This type of work doesn’t always come naturally to everyone, so having the Survey toolkit’s steps and processes available has been super helpful.

“It can get overwhelming when you’re dealing with deep root causes to early childhood issues, like a national labor shortage or systemic racism. Focusing on where you CAN make an impact has been helpful. The toolkit’s root cause analysis allows us to dig down to root causes and build strategies to affect the most change with limited resources. We focus on what do I have the ability to impact and where do I need to bring people in for support. With the Survey, we have steps laid out and everyone knows what comes next, why we’re doing it, and how. It’s contributed to feeling less powerless in situations.

“When it comes to developing a plan, we encouraged leaders to look for things they could get wings on so teams didn’t feel stuck. There are things you can’t control, but focus on what you can impact that will snowball and make a larger impact over time.”

Outcome Three – Staff at all levels are making proactive, positive changes in daily practice.

“Everyone’s buying into the Essential Survey process and taking ownership at the campus level – it’s exciting! It really creates authentic buy-in, which will lead to the sustainability you need to improve outcomes over time. The only way we can do this at scale is if there’s ownership at the campus level.

“The Essential Survey got teams into the practice of reviewing data. Regular data conversations are being scheduled and happening in a systematic way. We are actually looking at data instead of jumping straight to ‘what are we going to do about it.’ We’re seeing informal data collection at the site-level; people want to know quickly how things are going based on the changes they’ve made. They’re taking it into their own hands to make easy, accessible processes for people. They’re rethinking how they use their time.

“I’ve seen improvement in campus leaders’ ability to have these conversations and plan for the follow-up piece. Because they create their own strategies, there’s more ownership in implementation of it – and how it’s going. It’s good to see.”

Outcome Four – We have more data to help us drive equity for families of color.

“There is a huge equity piece to the Essential Survey work. We serve majority families of color and we need to know how they’re feeling about the services they are receiving, as well as how we can improve. This is a great tool to do that.”

Looking Ahead: Implementing the Essential Survey annually to sustain a culture that values and supports leaders

The CCA team is committed to sustaining and growing their leader-centered program improvement efforts.

KARIN SCOTT:

“The Essential Survey is something we’re investing in longer term, not a one-off strategy. We’re trying to make a culture shift – and it takes time. You’ve got to stick with it. We created a community of practice around The Start Early Essentials for people who are working on the same things – that’s part of our monthly campus directors’ meetings. We’re creating intentional space and time for that conversation to happen and want leaders to see that even if they’re struggling, they’ll be given support and opportunities to develop improvement strategies.

“It was important before the pandemic, but now more than ever we need to know how people are feeling. We want staff to feel like they are valued and cared for while they’re here – and make sure they keep doing this work because it’s important for our community.

“Our long-term hope is that our staff are supported and feel motivated to do their best work, which in turns leads to better interactions with children and teachers and better outcomes for families.”

To learn more about The Essential Survey, please visit StartEarly.org/EssentialSurvey.



ABOUT KARIN SCOTT

Passionate about improving people’s lives through education, Karin Scott serves as Chief Performance Officer at Child Care Associates. She is dedicated to building strong partnerships to design, develop and implement continuous improvement efforts that accelerate results for children and families. Karin has a fierce belief that anyone can be a “data person” and use information to improve systems and lives.



ABOUT CCA

Child Care Associates (CCA) is the largest child development nonprofit organization in North Texas. CCA has served over 639,000 young children and their families since its establishment in 1968. Regional support for young children has increased over the past 5 years, creating an opportunity to propel CCA’s services and the early learning system to new levels of impact and quality. CCA has been a trusted community partner for the last 55 years, working at the forefront of quality early childhood care and education. Learn more at childcareassociates.org.