

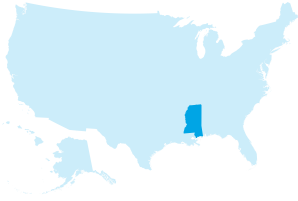


## CASE STUDY

The State of Mississippi and Start Early's The Essential Practices of Educare<sup>™</sup>

A committed team of trainers creates a common understanding of "high quality" across Mississippi's early childhood systems

## MEET THE PROGRAM



### ORGANIZATION

**The State of Mississippi's Cross-Disciplinary Early Childhood Training Team**

### TRAINERS

**Loretta Dyer, M.Ed.,**  
Education Coach, Delta Health Alliance

**Amye Hoskins,**  
Professional Development Specialist, MS Dept of Education, Office of Early Childhood

**Tamara Smith, M.Ed.,**  
Professional Development Specialist at Midtown Partners & Childcare Director at Little Samaritan Montessori

**Holly Spivey, M.Ed.,**  
Head Start Collaboration Director & Education Policy Advisor, Office of Governor Tate Reeves

### PROGRAMS SERVED

**Childcare, Head Start, and Public Pre-K Programs**

### LOCATION

**Mississippi**

### START EARLY PD SOLUTION

**The Essential Practices of Educare**

**The Challenge:** Without an established QRIS, Mississippi sought a common framework for quality for its diverse early childhood education providers.

In 2019, Mississippi education leaders were beginning an early childhood quality improvement effort for several targeted communities when the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) introduced them to the successful outcomes of Educare Schools, a WKKF grantee. Curious, several state decision-makers took a road trip to nearby Louisiana to get an in-person look at Educare's New Orleans center and The Essential Practices of Educare™ Train-The-Trainer program. They hoped to find new perspectives on quality that would meet the unique needs of their state.

"We liked that The Essential Practices of Educare was detailed, practical, and easily understood," said Holly Spivey, Head Start Collaboration Director & Education Policy Advisor in the Office of Governor Tate Reeves. Spivey and the evaluation team saw a different kind of professional development program that prioritized meeting educators where they were at. For the first time, they saw the possibility of creating a common understanding of high quality across Mississippi's three largest providers of early childhood education: Head Start, childcare, and the Department of Education's public schools.

Inspired, the team expanded its quality improvement ambitions from a few communities to the entire state, focusing on Head Start, public pre-K, and childcare programs in an intentional effort to impact the majority of Mississippi's youngest learners. They hoped that by creating peer learning communities through The Essential Practices, they could not only introduce common quality standards but lift up the best of the three early childhood models and encourage educators to learn from each other.

With the Kellogg Foundation's support, the state created a professional learning model unique to Mississippi: a "Dream Team" of four trainers with diverse early education roles and backgrounds who would complete The Essential Practices of Educare Train-the-Trainer program and embark on a statewide effort to change the conversation about quality.

**The Implementation:** A cross-disciplinary team trained to implement The Essential Practices of Educare statewide, with hopes of establishing a shared understanding of early childhood best practices and sparking a quality improvement dialogue among early education peers.

Mississippi's team of four trainers became authorized to offer The Essential Practices to Mississippi's Head Start, public pre-K and childcare programs just as the COVID-19 pandemic began. Undeterred, the team worked closely with their Start Early practice consultant to pivot to online training to ensure they didn't lose any time.

**TAMARA SMITH:**

"We had to implement The Essential Practices of Educare in COVID but it wasn't challenging; it was very creative how we adjusted to keep the attention of the participant virtually. We did a lot of practicing and testing with my center, and a lot of reflective feedback with each other, to see how it looked. But the most valuable piece was having the Start Early practice consultant come on and give us feedback. She has been awesome through this process."

**AMYE HOSKINS:**

"Our Start Early practice consultant, Nicole, has been a godsend for us across our regions and state. She's always there and reaching out to us, always willing to assist and give advice on how we can implement The Essential Practices of Educare. It's important to utilize the practice consultant assigned to your state but to also practice with that person to get additional insight and advice. We practice a lot and we communicate a lot so that helped us really understand each other and our vision of what we wanted to accomplish as a training team."

**The Impact:** With a focus on equity and cross-pollinating ideas, Mississippi's Essential Practices training team has already increased educator engagement and dialogue around quality.

The Mississippi training team chose Start Early's Essential Practices of Educare because it creates space for educators to respond to and get curious about foundational material. They attribute the early success of their efforts to five important guiding principles.

**Principle One – Meeting people where they are at is critical to training success.****TAMARA SMITH:**

"When we talk about high-quality teaching practices, across Mississippi and across the nation, most people don't understand what that means – but they aren't saying, 'I don't understand.' We had to look at where our state was and ask, 'How do we implement this training so that they will get it and be able to bring it back to their programs?' We go in to The Essential Practices of Educare training with a mindset of meeting people where they are at – as if teachers don't know anything – and start from there. And we've found that creates more participation over time."

**AMYE HOSKINS:**

"I think what's unique about The Essential Practices of Educare is the fact that it's a base – a foundation that a lot of people need. It's not so profound that people can't understand it. It's a very relatable PD that people are able to engage and understand on their level. It gives them opportunities to really talk about what they're doing and how they can change, or how they can redirect what they're doing to make it better."

**HOLLY SPIVEY:**

"What I see with all four of the Essential Practices modules is it's usable. And when I saw this, I was like, this is not going to be something that is so much work or so difficult that it's a burden to teachers and directors – but it's something they can walk away from and say there's something I can get out of it."

**Across the country, The Essential Practices of Educare is successfully implemented in school, center, and family child care settings with participants ranging from paraprofessionals to those with graduate degrees in education.**

• **Setting:** Participants come from all program types – 40% schools, 30% community-based organizations, 20% family childcare homes, and 10% other.

• **Education:** Over 50% of participants have bachelor's or advanced degrees and the remaining 40% have high school diplomas, associate's degrees, or certifications.

• **Role:** Participants are evenly divided among teachers, administrators, coaches, paraeducators, and family support staff.

• **Tenure:** 45% of participants have been in education for more than ten years and 45% for 1-9 years. Currently at 10%, the fastest growing segment of participants is professionals who've been in the field for less than one year.



### **Principle Two – Equal access to training creates equity among educators.**

#### **AMYE HOSKINS:**

“From the Department of Education standpoint, The Essential Practices of Educare training is a great opportunity to allow all educators across the state to be on the same page. Typically childcare doesn't receive as much PD as the normal public school teacher. So we want to make sure The Essential Practices of Educare is accessible across the state and allows everyone to have the same opportunity. It creates equity among educators.”

#### **HOLLY SPIVEY:**

“We didn't originally think about The Essential Practices of Educare as a workforce development equity move, but that's naturally what's happening.”

### **Principle Three – Training educators from diverse programs at the same time increases engagement and creates a cross-pollination of best practices across the state.**

#### **TAMARA SMITH:**

“We have people from all parts of the state learning from each other as a group. We'll say, 'Tell us what's happening and how do you overcome that challenge,' so they can listen to people across the state and how they handle it – and then they can take it back to their classroom.”

#### **AMYE HOSKINS:**

“When educators come together who are not from the same program, they're able to discuss and feed off each other and gain different strategies that somebody else may be using – and give advice from their particular center. When Loretta talks about different types of assessment, they want to get more information about how they could implement them. They reach out to us for additional resources to get started, because they've gained an understanding of something they aren't doing. We have gotten overwhelming participation and overwhelming praise for this.”

#### **LORETTA DYER:**

“Not only the teachers benefit from The Essential Practices of Educare, but also the administrators and directors and education specialists that we've trained alongside them. It gives them ideas of how they can implement it as well.”

**Principle Four – A flexible professional development design is essential for localized, authentic conversations about quality.****HOLLY SPIVEY:**

"I usually present on what is high quality and why does it matter. I've often been surprised with where people take that foundational learning and what they notice. The Essential Practices of Educare has made them more curious about the context in which learning is happening. In some cases they may ask, 'What was going on before that event happened', or 'Who was the principal?' or 'Where were those children before they came to that teacher versus where were they when they left?' Where people pick up and take the conversation can be so completely different with different groups of educators and I think The Essential Practices of Educare supports us in that way – I'm not left out on a limb when the conversation goes in different directions."

**TAMARA SMITH:**

"People haven't come across resources like The Essential Practices of Educare. They say, 'Oh wow, here's something that's working and it's presented as quality' – and they just hunger for more. In Mississippi, everyone's definition of quality is different, so for us to do the training and for them to see what high quality looks like and see this is information they can take back is really valuable."

**Principle Five – When a diverse training team facilitates The Essential Practices of Educare, it increases value and insight for participants.****AMYE HOSKINS:**

"We know, as educators, time is of the essence in this moment. Everyone is Zoom-ed out and trying to get educators to tune in for this long period of time – I can honestly say the four of us have created a really great Essential Practices of Educare training session that's engaging and interactive. Once they get on they see it's not just one of these ordinary trainings where they will just listen. We've had an opportunity to really build and feed off each other as a training team. Once they come they are engaged, even the people who don't normally say anything."

**TAMARA SMITH:**

"As trainers, we are unique – by representing childcare, the Department of Education, and Early Head Start, we relate better with the people on the ground. 'I understand where you all are coming from. I understand your stress in the classroom ...but here are things you can implement that will work.' Staff see me doing the Essential Practices of Educare training at my center, but when they see us all four work together to do the training? THEN they came back and started implementing the language from Loretta. And I was like wow, I've been saying this the whole time but they got it once they heard it from others and from their peers."

**HOLLY SPIVEY:**

"I also think the beauty of four people in the room is if someone asks a question, one of the other three can hop in to support the answer. We have all been able to do that."



## **Looking Ahead:** Expanding access to The Essential Practices of Educare and designing customized follow-up to support implementation.

The training team wants to take their work with The Essential Practices of Educare even further. In the short term, they are focused on expanding the reach of The Essential Practices training series. But soon they hope to create a model that allows them to follow trainings with technical assistance to ensure participants feel supported as they apply their learning to daily practice.

### **HOLLY SPIVEY:**

“When we have done the High-Quality Teaching Practices module, we have had other groups reach back out and say would you please come and do it for our group? It’s spreading. Start Early sends an evaluation a few months later but we are also trying to figure out how we, too, can loop back around and see if there’s something else we can help them with to support implementation. We haven’t perfected it, but are talking that through as a team”

### **AMYE HOSKINS:**

“Our hope is to try to reach as many educators across the state as possible because we know The Essential Practices of Educare is a great training ...and we want to be able to allow more educators to network with each other across the state.”

To learn more about The Essential Practices of Educare, please visit [StartEarly.org/TheEssentialPractices](https://StartEarly.org/TheEssentialPractices).

