



EARLY CHILDHOOD

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

The **College of Education and Human Sciences (CEHS)** at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is committed to strengthening children, youth, families, schools, and communities—and to the interrelationships among them. CEHS is home to many of the University's efforts to focus on the needs of children from birth to age 8.

The University of **Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools (CYFS)** is the heart of these efforts in the college. It is an interdisciplinary research center with more than 100 faculty members who do research on a range of topics related to positive child development; educational success; and supports for families, schools, and communities. The Center has several staff members who provide specific benefits to researchers to develop and conduct their research, including assistance with proposing and implementing studies, analyzing data, and sharing results. The research model is highly collaborative, as we work with community partners to ensure that our work is meaningful and useful in actual practice. The Center hosts a conference on alternate years titled the "CYFS Summit on Research in Early Childhood." It is a highly successful conference that attracts early childhood researchers, practitioners, and policy makers and creates intentional bridges among them.

PRINCIPLES WHICH GUIDE OUR WORK

- Early education and development are the foundation upon which children build their futures. Our research embraces all aspects of early childhood including children's cognitive, language, physical, and social-emotional development. In all, we aim to improve the opportunities, experiences, and outcomes for children with challenges and disparities that place them at risk for social isolation and school failure.
- By working across disciplines, we support positive and healthy learning for all children and closing the access and achievement gap for those who are disadvantaged or have unique learning needs.
- We conduct research in actual homes, schools, and communities with parents, educational providers, and early childhood agencies as partners. We emphasize the strengths of children, families, and schools; we use their strengths to help them acquire greater skills and competencies.
- Our research programs are sensitive to children's contexts and cultures, and we are highly effective at producing important child-centered and family-centered outcomes.
- Our research is exploring a range of important early childhood topics, and our results have been shown to improve early childhood classrooms, child care programs, and home visitation interventions. Using high quality research designs, we have demonstrated improvements in children's language, behavior, social-emotional, and cognitive skills. Improvements in parenting, family involvement, and parent-teacher relationships have been proven through our intervention research.
- Research at UNL is concerned primarily about links between research and practice and about methods for engaging in meaningful partnerships between university-based researchers and practitioners. Through collaborations, researchers and field-based partners learn together about effective programs and how to implement them to have positive and significant impacts on the children, families, and schools about whom we are all concerned.

SELECTED EXAMPLES OF OUR RESEARCH IN ACTION

- Family involvement and partnerships – This research helps teachers create partnerships with parents to strengthen the parent-child relationship and enhance preschool children’s cognitive, behavior, and social-emotional skills. We work mainly with underachieving young children and families in poverty to close the achievement gap.
- High quality early childhood intervention – Our research integrates all the important components of early childhood instruction through home visits, high quality preschool classrooms, and a focus on transitions from preschool to kindergarten and elementary school. The importance of language and early literacy is part of our research focus.
- Early childhood science and math instruction – Researchers work to strengthen the skills of pre-kindergarten mathematics teachers through professional development that is feasible and effective in increasing children’s mathematics learning.
- Nutrition and health – We work with childcare staff to ensure healthy food choices and feeding practices in childcare settings. We also work with parents, teachers, and pediatricians to address childhood obesity through collaboration and integrated interventions to help children and families establish healthy habits.
- Coaching early childhood teachers – We provide individualized professional development to teachers to help them work effectively with young children and families at risk. The focus of coaching includes parenting skills and children’s early literacy, behavior, social skills, and other skills children need to be ready for school.
- Mental health – Our early childhood mental health research is based out of Porto Alegre in Rio Grande do Sul. This research focuses on parent and child mental health and the interactional effect of social support, education, community resources and quality of life on early childhood mental health and development. We work primarily with underserved populations in rural communities.

OTHER TOPICS OF ACTIVE INTEREST TO UNL EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCHERS INCLUDE:

- Early childhood services for children and families in rural communities where access to professionals is limited.
- Home visiting models of service delivery.
- Innovations related to technology.
- Brain development and early learning.

The College of Education and Human Sciences is also home to the Ruth Staples Child Development Lab. The mission of the Ruth Staples Child Development Lab is education, outreach, and research. This mission distinguishes the Child Development Lab from other early childhood programs which exist solely to provide the service of child care and education.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:



The University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Early Childhood Education: cyfs.unl.edu/brasil

Nebraska’s Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families, and Schools: cyfs.unl.edu

The Ruth Staples Child Development Lab: cehs.unl.edu/cyaf/ruth-staples-lab

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