



# Learning Frontiers: Promoting Equitable and Effective Early Learning in PreK-Grade 3

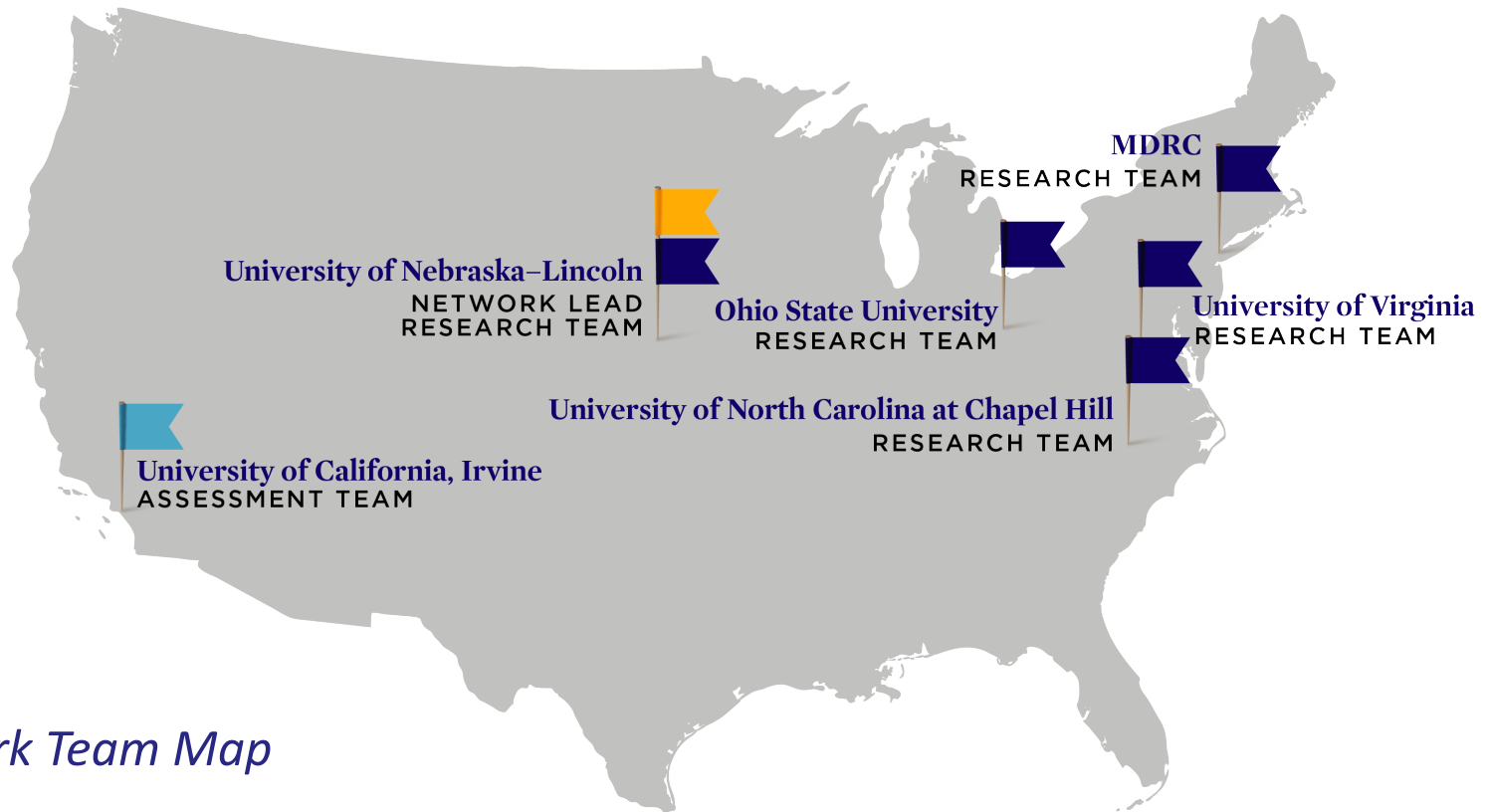
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The Early Learning Network seeks to advance the understanding of *policies and practices* that narrow opportunity gaps and *maintain early learning success* as children transition *from preschool to elementary school* and beyond.

# Network Team Map



## *Network Team Map*

- ◆ Five Research Teams
- ◆ One Assessment Team
- ◆ Network Lead



# Nebraska Specific ELN Research:

## *Objectives:*

- Determine the influence of *ecological systems* on children's learning over time
- Identify *malleable factors* that promote children's academic and social-emotional learning, and close opportunity gaps, for historically marginalized students



- Large-scale research in Nebraska between 2016-2022
- Goal: to gain a better understanding of areas that are open to change to inform equitable and effective early learning opportunities for all students
- Comprised of 3 interrelated studies



# Learning Frontiers

PreK to Grade 3



- Chadron Public Schools
  - Gordon-Rushville Public Schools
  - Creighton Community Schools
  - O'Neill Public Schools
  - Gering Public Schools
  - Northwest Community Action Partnership
  - Norfolk Public Schools
  - Columbus Public Schools
  - Omaha Public Schools
  - Central Nebraska Community Action Partnership
  - Cozad Public Schools
  - Lincoln Public School
  - Kearney Public Schools
  - McCook Public Schools
  - Fairbury Public Schools
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  - Norfolk Public Schools
  - Northwest Community Action Partnership
  - Omaha Public Schools
  - O'Neill Public Schools

# Policy and Practice Study 1

- Descriptive study of systems-level **policies and practices**
- Data contributed by 14 Nebraska communities
- Data collection included site visits & interviews

# Study 1: Participants

Interview Type	Interview Count
Board Member	8
Early Childhood Teacher	18
Head Start Teacher	7
Parent	35
Primary Teacher	31
Principal	16
Superintendent	11
Other (e.g., student service coordinator)	4
Total	130



# Classroom Observation Study 2

- Classroom-focused study to **identify teaching practices** associated with children's school readiness and achievement
- Data contributed by:
  - 21 Nebraska school districts
  - 2 community agencies
- Measures:
  - CLASS and EduSnap observations
  - Teacher report of student skills

# Study 2: Participants

Child	Total (n=1215)
<b>Gender</b>	
Female/Male	54.3%/45.7%
<b>Grade level</b>	
Preschool	17%
K	22.1%
1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	28%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	17.5%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	15.5%
<b>Language</b>	
English	99.2%
Spanish	12.9%
Other	2.8%

Teacher	Total (n=310) %
<b>Gender</b>	
Female/Male	97%/3%
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>	
Black	1%
Hispanic	2%
Other	0.7%
White	96.4%
<b>Highest Education</b>	
Associates	0.7%
Bachelor's	49.5%
Master's	47.2%
Specialist/Other	2.6%

# Longitudinal Study 3

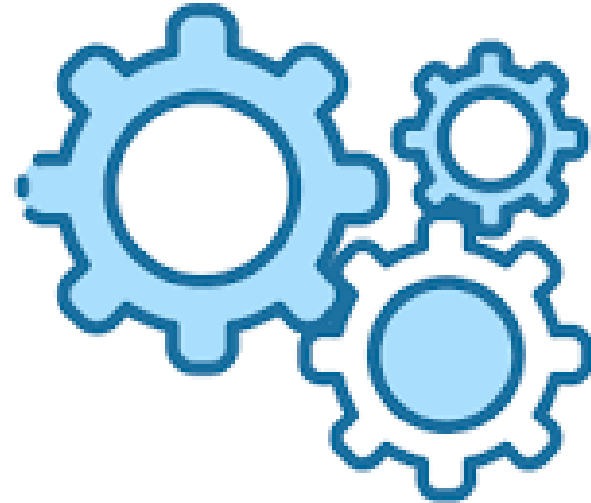
- Longitudinal study to identify malleable factors associated with early learning **over time** from preschool through the early elementary school grades
- Data contributed by:
  - 171 Nebraska urban and rural school districts and community agencies
- Measures:
  - Parent and teacher report of relationships and child skills
  - Direct academic assessment

# Study 3: Participants

Child	Total (n=357)
<b>Gender</b>	
Female/Male	49.6%/50.4%
<b>Child race/ethnicity</b>	
Black, non-Hispanic	13%
Hispanic, any race	24.4%
Other, non-Hispanic	6%
White, non-Hispanic	56.6%
<b>Parent Education</b>	
< HS diploma/GED	18.2%
HS diploma/GED	21.8%
Some college/2-year	39.7%
4-year degree +	20.3%

# Study Integration

- Multi-Source
- Multi-Method
- Multi-Design



# Cross-Study Results

- Three primary impact areas:
  - Classroom Experiences & Learning Opportunities
  - Relationships
  - Sustained High-Quality Experiences
- Full report at [learningfrontiers.unl.edu](https://learningfrontiers.unl.edu) or





Classroom Experiences  
& Learning Opportunities

**High-quality early learning experiences from pre-K to third grade matter for children.**



## Classroom Experiences & Learning Opportunities

- Peer interactions & adult-supported learning opportunities allow students to:
  - Better access and use information
  - Engage with instructional content
  - Develop academic and social skills that foster future success





## Classroom Experiences & Learning Opportunities

- Teacher use of scaffolding predicts:
  - Positive attitudes toward learning
  - Greater social skills
  - Fewer problem behaviors



## CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES & LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

### KEY TAKEAWAY

Children's opportunities and experiences in classrooms should include **culturally responsive, intentional and supportive interactions** focused on **social-emotional, cognitive and language development**.

### ACTION STEPS

#### *Practice*

Provide **high-quality professional learning\* opportunities** to support the implementation of **culturally responsive, intentional and supportive**:

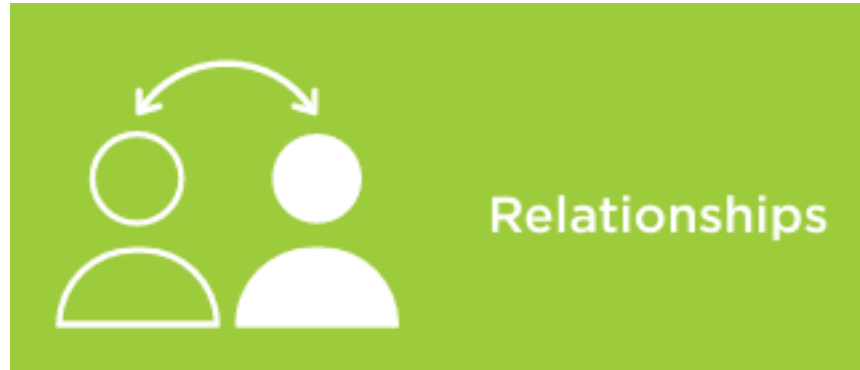
- One-on-one, **formal and informal language exchanges**.
- **Teacher-student and student-student** interactions.
- Developmentally sequenced, **content-rich** instruction.
- **Modeling/scaffolding**.

#### *Policy*

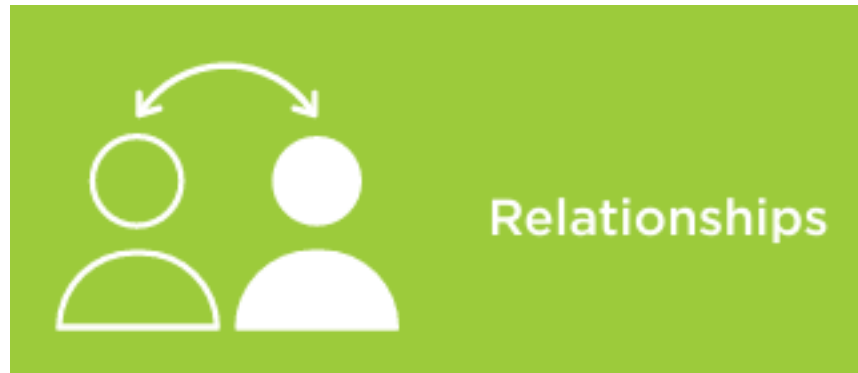
Ensure **family voice** is included in decision-making structures and processes to enhance learning among all children, including those from marginalized groups.

#### *Research*

Develop or improve **research-based** tools that are **culturally responsive** for **measuring individualized children's experiences, skills and outcomes**, including constructs related to learning, such as creativity, joy and multiple dialects.

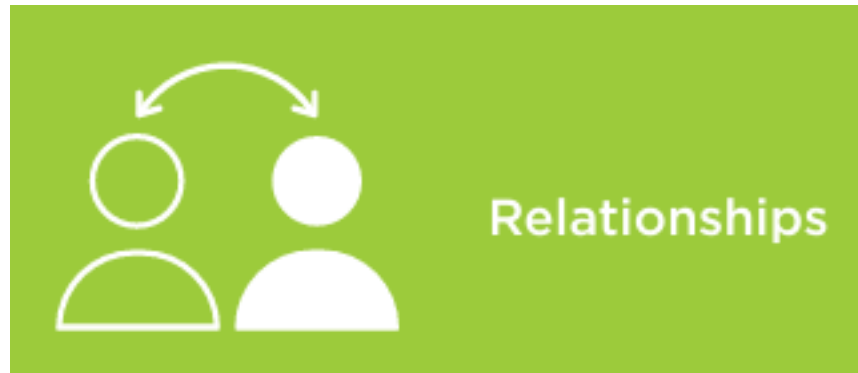


Relationships among families, students and teachers during the early school years are important for learning and development



- Positive teacher-child & parent-teacher relationships promote children's:
  - Academic, language, and social-emotional skills
  - Especially for children from minoritized backgrounds

*"The teacher will call after school using her own time; I appreciate getting that communication rather than just a note." - Parent*



- Parent Engagement
  - Good communication with parents on both academics and behaviors builds consistency between home and school
  - Parents' support of children's learning at home increases from pre-K through kindergarten
  - Parent participation in school activities increases during pre-K but decreases through the end of kindergarten



## RELATIONSHIPS

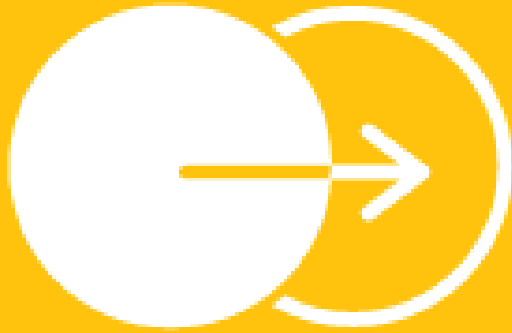
### KEY TAKEAWAY

High-quality educational experiences should include educators' use of practices to:

- Engage and form **relationships with families**.
- Create and maintain positive interpersonal **connections with students**.
- Promote and support positive **peer relationships**.

### ACTION STEPS

<i>Practice</i>	<i>Policy</i>	<i>Research</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide <b>high-quality professional learning* opportunities</b> to:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Engage and form <b>relationships with families</b>.</li><li>› Create and maintain positive interpersonal <b>connections with students</b>.</li><li>› Promote and support positive <b>peer relationships</b>.</li></ul></li><li>• Support the <b>pre-K to kindergarten transition</b> and later grade-level transitions.</li></ul>	Build and modify current <b>structures/systems</b> (e.g., time, resources) to support <b>educators' skills</b> at forming, strengthening and maintaining <b>effective and meaningful relationships</b> with and among students and families across the pre-K to third grade continuum.	Identify existing and new research-based <b>practices and approaches</b> for building and maintaining <b>quality relationships</b> with and among students and families that can be applied <b>across contexts</b> (e.g., rural/urban, pre-K, early elementary).



## Sustained High-Quality Experiences

Consistent, high-quality early learning opportunities promote positive child development.



- When students move between schools, there is less consistency in what they are being taught, which is a barrier to learning
  - *Some preschoolers stay and some go to other schools. For the ones who stay, we communicate about what has worked and what hasn't. The kids that are going to other schools —we have less communication. Pre-K Coordinator*





- Positive school environments are fostered through alignment across pre-K to third grade:
  - Structures
  - Policies
  - Practices
  - Curricula and assessments foster
- These factors promote smooth student transitions and educational experiences across grade levels



## SUSTAINED HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENCES

### KEY TAKEAWAY

Educational experiences should include **consistency and continuity** of high-quality opportunities **across pre-K to third grade**, including alignment of experiences within the early elementary grades (K-3).

### ACTION STEPS

<i>Practice</i>	<i>Policy</i>	<i>Research</i>
<p>Provide <b>high-quality professional learning* opportunities</b> to support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Implementation of <b>evidence-based, aligned curricula.</b></li><li>• <b>Continuity of instructional content</b> and <b>positive interactions</b> across pre-K to third grade.</li></ul>	<p>Invest in the use of <b>integrated data systems</b> to promote <b>alignment.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify <b>barriers and facilitators</b> to implementing <b>aligned educational experiences</b> in diverse pre-K to third grade systems from the perspectives of families, educators and administrators.</li><li>• Develop and/or identify <b>evidence-based, culturally relevant</b> curricula, practices and assessments grounded in social-behavioral and academic content that promote <b>continuity in instruction</b> and teacher <b>practices</b> across pre-K to third grade.</li></ul>

# Policy Implications



Public investments in affordable high-quality early learning experiences are important for positive student outcomes



Rural schools would benefit from additional educational resources and community resources to support students

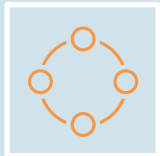


Promoting economic security and providing additional resources to families helps promote early learning and development

# Practice Implications



Schools and students may benefit from focused efforts to promote sustained positive teacher-child and parent-teacher relationships



Attention to aligned practices across the Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum is recommended



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Learning Frontiers  
PreK to Grade 3

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*Thank you!*