



2017-2018 ANNUAL REPORT



NEBRASKA CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON
CHILDREN, YOUTH, FAMILIES & SCHOOLS



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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools is a hub for research collaboration and partnership. It's a place where researchers come together from diverse backgrounds and disciplines with like-minded goals and a unity of purpose. A place where research begins — and has the opportunity to grow. A place that impacts lives.

We're committed to conducting, supporting and sharing high-quality research in the social, behavioral and educational sciences — and to fostering a vibrant, interdisciplinary research community. The center's progress would not be possible without support from and collaboration with our diverse partners in research, policy and practice. Our partnerships across the University of Nebraska, funding agencies and various other stakeholders are what leverage strengths and produce some of the most significant outcomes.

The stories featured in this report provide a glimpse into the life-changing research being conducted in partnership with CYFS — not only in Nebraska, but across the globe. You'll read about researchers who are finding ways to improve lives by addressing adolescent bullying, increasing understanding of child temperament, investigating quality of life concerns among rural ethnic minorities, fostering parent-teacher relationships, ensuring students have access to science, technology, engineering and math, and more.

Together with our valued partners, we're building knowledge to achieve a shared mission: to impact lives through research that advances learning and development. We look forward to another year of collaboration and innovation.

Susan M. Sheridan



Susan M. Sheridan, Ph.D.

George Holmes University Professor & Willa Cather Emeritus Professor of Educational Psychology

Director, Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families & Schools

Our mission is to impact lives through research that advances learning and development.

Our vision is that all children, youth, families and schools have the opportunity to realize their potential and reach beyond.

We conduct research through grant-funded programs, provide comprehensive research support, and share research findings across audiences and platforms.



Owen Ludvik, son of Dana Ludvik, CYFS communications & media specialist

ABOUT CYFS

CYFS was founded in 2004 as an interdisciplinary research center within the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. CYFS receives support as a UNL Program of Excellence, and its research programs are funded through external grants and contracts.

CYFS conducts, supports and shares research in the following areas:

- Academic intervention and learning
- Early education and development
- Psychosocial development and behavioral health
- Research and evaluation methods
- Rural education



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STUDY AIMS TO ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR RURAL NEBRASKA MINORITIES, COMMUNITIES

“Good jobs and education are important to everyone, regardless of ethnicity.”



From left: Evan Choi, Soo-Young Hong, Irene Padasas, Maria de Guzman and Rodrigo Cantarero



As populations in many rural Nebraska counties decline, those that are stable or growing share a common element: ethnic diversity.

Maria de Guzman, associate professor and extension specialist in the Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies, is leading a team of researchers exploring how cultural and economic resources generated by diverse populations can help smaller communities not only survive, but thrive.

Investigators identified which factors are most relevant to rural ethnic minorities in determining the quality of life — generally, perceptions of and satisfaction with life, and the degree to which people believe their goals and standards are being met. Through focus groups, interviews and surveys, researchers collected data from ethnic minorities in Madison, Platte and Scotts Bluff counties in Nebraska.

“There has been little information about which factors non-majority groups consider important,” said de Guzman, the project’s principal investigator. “For example, good jobs and education are important to everyone, regardless of ethnicity. But we want to identify additional, specific factors important to people in these ethnic groups in smaller communities.”

Data collection began with learning perspectives

of key informants, including school administrators, diversity coordinators from businesses, librarians and other individuals identified as knowledgeable about the counties’ ethnic minorities. Based on these data, a survey was developed to examine which factors — such as community resources, economic opportunities and social connections — have the greatest impact on residents’ well-being.

After initial data analysis was completed, researchers created fact sheets and geographic information system (GIS) maps of Nebraska to help visually illustrate the geography of poverty, migration and other factors.

De Guzman said pinpointing which culture-specific factors rural minorities deem essential to quality of life will help develop educational tools for community responders serving those groups.

“Ethnic minority studies are done mostly on the East and West Coasts, but there is very little research done in the Midwest, especially in rural communities,” de Guzman said. “Even for Omaha and Lincoln, ethnic minorities have different experiences than those who live elsewhere, such as California.”

Researchers also believe addressing such needs may increase the likelihood of those citizens remaining in their communities and contributing to their towns’ economic and social success, and overall vitality.

“The graying of America is also occurring in Nebraska, so ensuring people stay here brings the resource of young people to the labor force,” said Rodrigo Cantarero, associate professor of community and regional planning, and co-PI. “It’s like giving a shot to the state’s economy.”

The project was funded by the University of Nebraska’s Rural Futures Institute Research and Engagement Grant. The project’s key investigators include de Guzman; Cantarero; Soo-Young Hong, associate professor of child, youth and family studies; Yan Ruth Xia, professor of child, youth and family studies; and Nebraska Extension educators Jill Goedecken, Jackie Guzman and Lee Sherry.

PROJECT ENHANCES NEBRASKA STEM ACCESS, UNDERSTANDING

Recent studies show that 85 percent of the U.S. population has access to 4G — fourth-generation — broadband network technology.

Which means 15 percent of Americans do not.

In Nebraska, the numbers are better: A recent report by Nebraska Broadband indicates broadband is available to 99.5 percent of the state’s residents.

As technology evolves into fifth and sixth generations and beyond, Nebraska researchers have launched a project to help ensure the state’s residents not only have access to such technology, but are able to maximize it.

Fourteen elementary teachers from 14 rural Nebraska high-needs schools — those where the percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches met or exceeded the state’s average within the past three years — are participating in a five-year program focused on developing educational leadership in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, known as STEM.



Teachers participate in a STEM education class at Henzlik Hall.

“Connectivity is all about what you do with it. Everyone must have access, and know how to use it, to be able to enjoy the benefits.”

The NebraskaSTEM project for supporting elementary rural teacher leadership is designed to help Nebraska teachers facilitate high-quality STEM learning opportunities for K-6 students in rural Nebraska.

“We are positioning these 14 teachers as leaders, who will go back to their schools and share effective STEM teaching with several other teachers,” said Amanda Thomas, principal investigator and assistant professor of mathematics education in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education.

Guy Trainin, co-PI and TLTE department chair, said that because new STEM jobs are emerging throughout Nebraska — part of the “Silicon Prairie” concept — it is crucial that rapidly evolving technology reaches everyone in the state.

“Connectivity is all about what you do with it,” he said. “Everyone must have access, and know how to use it, to be able to enjoy the benefits. Otherwise, in some ways, we end up with two societies.”

The teachers were chosen from an applicant pool of 40 certified elementary teachers who currently teach, or intend to teach, in high-needs, rural Nebraska schools. They began their 14-month journey to a master’s degree focused on elementary STEM education with the completion of three on-campus summer courses on pedagogy, physics and math.

“This project increases our ability to reach out to communities across Nebraska to help teachers reach the next level in their career,” Trainin said. “Bringing together teachers from similar rural schools who are dealing with similar problems — that meeting of the minds is powerful.”



From left: Wendy Smith, Guy Trainin, Amanda Thomas and Leen-Kiat Soh

Because of their size and location, Thomas said, rural schools often lack the same resources of their larger urban and suburban counterparts, including access to instructional coaches or professional development. While previous funding has provided opportunities for STEM teachers throughout Nebraska — including many in Lincoln and Omaha — this project’s focus on rural, elementary STEM initiatives makes it unique.

The team recruited potential applicants through the UNL Center for Science, Mathematics and Computer Education, various networks of teachers and organizations, and at conferences.

“We wanted to make sure anyone who might be a candidate could apply,” Thomas said.

As they returned to their schools to begin the new academic year, project teachers continued their own education through online courses and work on their theses. They also will develop a STEM project for their own school, attend conferences together, meet for professional leadership training and receive ongoing guidance from Thomas and Trainin.

“The whole idea is to be able to have that two-way communication that helps us learn, too, about what works and doesn’t work in rural communities,” Trainin said.

As NebraskaSTEM master teaching fellows (MTFs), the teachers will conduct ongoing mentorship and professional development with their colleagues, sharing their knowledge and skills as they implement high-quality STEM instruction in their classrooms. The MTFs will disseminate their work through scholarly publications, conference presentations and professional development related to STEM initiatives in rural Nebraska schools.

The project is funded by the National Science Foundation’s Robert Noyce Scholarship Program. Along with Thomas and Trainin, the project also includes co-PI Wendy Smith, research associate professor in the Center for Science, Mathematics and Computer Education; Leen-Kiat Soh, professor of computer science and engineering; and various other collaborators from TLTE, CYFS, the College of Engineering and the School of Natural Resources.

FINE-TUNING GLOBAL MEASUREMENT STANDARDS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

Measuring early childhood development and learning worldwide has its challenges. But University of Nebraska researchers are working with the U.N. and other international organizations to ensure standardized global measurement tools are not restrained by borders.

Abbie Raikes, associate professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Public Health, and Natalie Koziol, CYFS research assistant professor, are examining the accuracy and reliability of measurement tools designed to monitor standards developed through the Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes initiative.

Founded in 2014, the MELQO initiative is a joint effort among UNESCO, UNICEF, Brookings Institution and the World Bank. The initiative has established a set of standard, global measurement tools to assess early childhood development and learning, as well as the quality of early learning environments — primarily in low- and middle-income countries.

For its program, CYFS' Nebraska Academy for Methodology, Analytics and Psychometrics has received data from Ethiopia, Lesotho, Liberia and Tanzania to examine the measurement tools' effectiveness.

"We want to see if the tools are truly measuring what they are intended to measure," Koziol said. "We have found evidence of commonalities across different countries, so it seems possible to move in the direction of global measurement."

Once core measurement standards are pinpointed, they will be tailored to various countries and cultures.

"Literacy is important across all countries, for example, but how we measure it will differ because of different languages and dialects," Koziol said. "It is important to make culturally sensitive adaptations that don't change the underlying meaning of the constructs."

As MELQO's technical director, Raikes has traveled to several countries where data are being gathered. Her initial visit typically consists of meeting with education officials and other stakeholders to answer their questions and discuss research priorities and standards. Subsequent visits focus on training observers and helping set up and customize research.

"We try to build capacity for measurement in the country rather than have our team do the work," said Raikes, CYFS faculty affiliate. "It's more cost-effective for us and makes the research more effective and efficient."

Raikes noted that each country uses the measurement tools for specific policy purposes. For example, data gathered in Tanzania have been used to identify teachers who need more training.

"Gathering good information on children's learning and development is crucial to ensuring all children have an equal chance," she said. "Our project is designed to make information gathering easier and more reliable. We've carved a path forward, and the work is contributing to the global discussion."

This project is funded by the Children's Investment Fund Foundation and is a sub-award from UNMC. Along with Raikes and Koziol, the research team includes Dawn Davis, ECE project manager, and graduate research assistants Anna Burton and Katelyn Hepworth.



From left: Dawn Davis, Abbie Raikes, Natalie Koziol, Anna Burton and Katelyn Hepworth



Gathering good information on children's learning and development is crucial to ensuring all children have an equal chance.

Classroom in Maseru, Lesotho

IDENTIFYING IMMIGRANT FAMILIES' HEALTH ISSUES THROUGH DATA

Although studies reveal that immigrants and ethnic minorities are among those at greatest risk for poor health outcomes, little research exists on rural immigrants who experience a disproportionate burden of poverty and economic hardship.

Evan Choi, associate professor of child, youth and family studies, is using restricted-access versions of U.S. Census Bureau data to examine rural, low-income immigrant families and their health-related behaviors — and how they relate to their children's health and developmental outcomes.

Choi's research merges census data with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Health Interview Survey to explore both factors at individual, family and community levels. Findings will help streamline census data collection programs, and will pave the way for future health education programs designed for low-income, rural immigrant families.

The combined data show that economic resources are key factors in determining children's health and behavioral outcomes. For example, children of immigrant families living in high-poverty census tracts were found to have more health and behavioral problems. Also, when immigrant families face health care access and affordability issues, their children's development is worse than those without such issues.

Thanks to census data access, Choi was able to explore factors outside the home environment. For

example, he examined neighborhood characteristics, including socioeconomic status, race and ethnic composition, and community resources such as schools, hospitals, doctors and green space.

"I believe the implications I can make from this study are more valid, because we're looking at the whole country, and not just limiting data to Nebraska or California or other specific regions," Choi said. "This study provides a better cross-section of the population."

The National Health Interview Survey is an annual longitudinal survey that captures health information on more than 12,000 families each year. Choi pooled NHIS data from 2013 through 2015 with census information to better understand neighborhood characteristics. Using five data sets, he examined poverty and unemployment rates, minority population compositions, "food deserts" — urban areas where buying affordable or high-quality food is difficult — community resources and other factors. Data were accumulated for more than 38,000 families — 9,000 of which were immigrant families.

Because his research relied on restricted census data, Choi underwent a rigorous background check and was required to submit an additional research proposal to the Census Bureau and the National Center for Health Statistics, outlining which data he planned to access.

Choi notes that rural immigrant families represent one of Nebraska's largest emerging populations. Using this study's baseline data, he plans to seek additional grant funding to design, develop and evaluate a high-impact, culturally sensitive health education program for the state's low-income, rural immigrant families.

"I think we can better target high-poverty rural areas specifically," he said.

This project is funded by the Central Plains Federal Statistical Research Data Center. Along with Choi, graduate research assistant Jinyoung Lee also was part of the research team.



Evan Choi, principal investigator

PARENT-TEACHER TIES DRIVE POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

When parents and teachers work well together, student behavior improves, along with their academic and social skills, according to a recent CYFS study.

Using the research-based program known as Teachers and Parents as Partners, the study examined how strong relationships between schools and families in rural communities affect children's behavioral outcomes. Developed by researchers at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, TAPP supports collaboration between teachers and parents to enhance students' academic, behavioral and social outcomes.

Led by Susan Sheridan, CYFS director, the study found relationships forged through TAPP produced positive behavioral outcomes for children.

"When children have significant behavior problems, parents and teachers often are at odds," said Sheridan, who developed the TAPP program. "But the TAPP process generates



From left: Amanda Witte, co-principal investigator, and Susan Sheridan, principal investigator

collaboration between teachers and parents, and those positive relationships are pathways to positive outcomes for children. The stronger the connection between home and school, the better the outcomes."

The four-year study included 267 students, grades K-3, along with their parents and teachers, in 45 Midwestern rural schools. The effects were measured both in students' homes and schools.

Teachers reported that over the course of the study, children participating in TAPP showed significant reductions in behavioral issues compared to those in the control group, outperforming 73 percent of students whose parents and teachers were not participating. Parents receiving TAPP reported more rapid improvements in their child's social skills and

adaptive behaviors, and decreases in aggression, noncompliance and temper tantrums, compared to control group students.

Additionally, teachers reported better relationships with TAPP group parents and demonstrated more effective classroom management skills than with those who did not participate. Parents who participated in TAPP also noted better relationships with teachers, practiced more effective parenting strategies and felt more effective in their parenting roles. The positive effects of the 8- to 10-week intervention were maintained one year later.

This project was funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. Findings were published in the Journal of School Psychology, School Psychology Quarterly and the Elementary School Journal. Along with Sheridan, the research team included Amanda Witte, CYFS research assistant professor, and several graduate students in educational psychology.

FINDING WAYS TO BATTLE ADOLESCENT BULLYING, PEER THREAT

Take a moment to recall a particularly overwhelming day. Now imagine enduring even worse stress, every day — at age 11.

For youth experiencing bullying, exclusion and other forms of peer threat, anxiety can become acute.

Meredith Martin, assistant professor of educational psychology, is exploring ways to tailor solutions and enhance the lives of children dealing with emotional — and sometimes, physical — pain caused by classmates.

“Feeling safe is a fundamental human need,” Martin said. “If children don’t feel safe, it’s much harder for them to learn other things, such as math, English or social skills. I tell my students, ‘How can you expect a child to sit still in his or her seat and pay attention to your math lesson when they’re worried about getting

beat up during lunch?’ They don’t have the energy for anything else but to try to feel safe.”

Martin’s research intends to pinpoint factors that contribute to peer threat and to help understand how children cope in different ways, and ultimately develop strategies that can be individually tailored to help children deal with potential threats.

Peer threat has a wide range of symptoms, including aggression, yelling, insults, social exclusion and even violence. Martin notes that in a given school year, about 36 percent of youth report being bullied.

To provide a better understanding of the Peer Social Defense Framework, which asserts that safety and security are fundamental psychological goals motivating children’s responses to interpersonal threats, Martin is gathering data online from 150 youths, ages 10-16, from across the country. Data are collected through two assessments: The Social Defense Inventory, a self-report questionnaire of youths’ affective and behavioral responses to peer threat; and the Go/No-Go Association Task, an implicit cognitive task that captures internal representations of the peer group.

“Not every strategy fits every kid — there are no ‘one size fits all’ solutions,” she said. “It’s really about finding each child’s unique strengths and weaknesses, then building on those to help the individual. We need to tailor different approaches to ensure we’re using the most effective strategies for each child.”

Maintaining constant vigilance and readiness to defend oneself, Martin said, takes so much energy and attentional resources, stress levels

can become damaging. Victimized youth lack social skills, tend to be more inhibited and often have impaired emotional development.

“When someone is repeatedly exposed to interpersonal threat, they become good at anticipating future threats so they can be prepared to manage them effectively — basically, it’s better to be safe than sorry,” Martin said.

“Unfortunately, many children who are repeatedly exposed to interpersonal threat become so good at staying alert to avoid potential threats that they begin to expect threat constantly.”

As a result, she said, some children begin to perceive threats that don’t actually exist. For example, if a peer were to approach with good intentions, an insecure child may instinctively anticipate how that interaction could go wrong and begin to use social defense behaviors to avoid or defuse the situation.

The ultimate goal of the study, Martin said, is to help develop measures to effectively and efficiently identify youth adopting insecure profiles.

“Feeling safe and secure is the foundation for learning and exploration, so it’s important we spend the time and resources needed to fix the problem of bullying and peer threat,” she said.

The project is funded by a Layman Award from UNL’s Office of Research and Economic Development.



“If children don’t feel safe, it’s much harder for them to learn other things, such as math, English or social skills.”

Meredith Martin, principal investigator



RESEARCH PROVIDES INSIGHTS INTO CHILD TEMPERAMENT

Gregory is having a bad day. A school field trip has been canceled, and he is angry.

He is joined by a teacher and a kindergartner, who together discuss ways Gregory might cope with his emotions and keep his behavior under control.

Soon, Gregory is feeling better about things.

But Gregory is not a child. He is a puppet — Gregory the Grumpy, one of the characters of INSIGHTS, a comprehensive, preventive intervention that helps early learners understand their temperament and the temperaments of others. The process teaches children how to interact with others, and helps parents and teachers craft strategies that match a child's temperament.

Developed in 2008 by New York University researchers, INSIGHTS is delivered to children once a week for 10 weeks in kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. Teachers use puppets and drama therapy techniques to teach children that, while certain situations may be easy for some individuals, they may be more challenging for others. The children engage the puppets in daily dilemmas to encourage empathy and strengthen their problem-solving skills.

Interaction with the puppets can be tailored to each child's temperament, and helps children begin to identify temperaments most like their own.

"INSIGHTS helps children create a good emotional foundation and develop self-awareness, which often, many adults don't have," said Gwen Nugent, CYFS research professor and principal investigator of the project, which replicates the NYU research in a rural setting.

“INSIGHTS helps children create a good emotional foundation and develop self-awareness.”

The four-year research program will be conducted in 30 rural elementary schools in eastern and central Nebraska. Study participants will include approximately 630 children and their parents. During the study's first year, kindergartners will receive INSIGHTS intervention, with assessments before and after. The same group will receive INSIGHTS again as first-graders.

Parents also receive intervention during the same 10-week period, giving them an opportunity to learn new strategies to address their children's behavior at home.

Nugent notes that INSIGHTS was found to improve the attention skills of economically disadvantaged children in a previous study completed in New York City. Although the Nebraska study is the first INSIGHTS efficacy trial conducted outside a large, urban setting, Nugent expects the same core results: improvements in attention, behavior and critical thinking.

The grant is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. Along with Nugent, the research team includes co-PIs James Bovaird, director, Nebraska Academy for Methodology, Analytics and Psychometrics; Lisa Crockett, professor of psychology; Kathleen Rudasill, professor of educational psychology and associate dean for research and faculty development at Virginia Commonwealth University, and the developer of the Nebraska project; Susan Sheridan, CYFS director; and Jentry Barrett, project manager.

From left: Kathleen Rudasill, co-principal investigator; Gwen Nugent, principal investigator



STUDY EXAMINES STEM PATHWAYS IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Elvira Abrica, principal investigator

As demand increases for a growing workforce in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, the nation's colleges and universities strive to recruit and retain students from diverse backgrounds.

Open-access institutions, including community colleges, enroll the majority of U.S. college students and play a crucial role in increasing the number of graduates with STEM degrees.

Elvira Abrica, assistant professor of educational leadership and higher education, is examining institutional factors within community colleges that affect students' ability to successfully transfer to four-year institutions in STEM fields. She is also analyzing institutional factors at four-year schools that shape STEM bachelor's degree completion among those who began at the community college level.

Funded by a Layman Award from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Office of Research and Economic Development, Abrica's research explores community college characteristics that may

promote successful STEM transfer for racially minoritized student populations. Her work focuses on higher education access and opportunity for underrepresented and underserved populations.

To help identify which factors shape STEM transfer, Abrica is examining national, longitudinal data from the National Center for Education Statistics, which provides information about college student outcomes and higher education institutions.

Preliminary findings show a range of factors that contribute to student outcomes, including student ability and motivation, and various institutional contexts. But mathematics proficiency is key.

"Math is what everything else hinges on," Abrica said. "Prior research shows that being successful in STEM as a transfer student comes from being able to get past low-level math courses."

Students of color are disproportionately enrolled in low-level math courses, creating further limits to STEM access, Abrica said. She added that education cannot function with increasing

gaps between rich and poor, and white and nonwhite populations.

"You can't have post-secondary institutions completely comprised of student bodies that don't reflect the surrounding demographic context," she said. "It's just common sense that the scales cannot be tipped so heavily."

To expand her research, Abrica plans to pursue federal funding to more closely examine individual and institutional factors that shape community college-level STEM success.

"Ensuring the nation's economic prosperity and meeting the needs of our technologically driven economy depends on embracing the nation's diverse demographics and meaningful inclusion in STEM," Abrica said.

Along with Abrica, other research team members include Deryl Hatch-Tocaimaza, assistant professor of educational administration; Natalie Koziol, CYFS research assistant professor; and several graduate and undergraduate research assistants.

EXAMINING STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE THE ARITHMETIC-TO-ALGEBRA TRANSITION

For students struggling to learn math, confusion and frustration can be common denominators. But a recent University of Nebraska project aims to remove those negative factors from the equation.

According to previous studies, students with math learning difficulties experience the most severe and persistent underachievement in algebra compared to their peers. Jessica Namkung, assistant professor of special education and communication disorders, is exploring ways to help such students prepare for algebra.

"Algebra can be very abstract and very confusing for students who are already struggling in foundational math," Namkung said. "A lot of times, algebra is taught as procedure without building the concept of why you do it."

Namkung's research is built around a 10-week process that focuses on helping students struggling in math understand the basics of algebra.

To launch the project, Namkung worked with Lincoln Public Schools math and special education teachers to get their feedback and to ensure the process aligned with their curriculum. Graduate and undergraduate students will work as tutors. A target of 50 middle school students will be recruited — half to receive the intervention, half to serve as a control group.

During the process, pairs of students are assigned tutors three days a week for five weeks.

These sessions focus on building conceptual understanding, learning new math vocabulary, and building fluency with manipulating and solving algebraic equations.

Before the intervention, each student is pre-tested, then randomly assigned to either the treatment or control group. After the tutoring process, students are tested again. Namkung expects the treatment group will show significantly higher improvement scores than control group students.

"Algebra is the gatekeeper of college, STEM majors and more advanced technical careers," Namkung said. "But how do we get there without understanding the foundations beyond basic arithmetic — to prepare students for variables, equations, expressions and other elements of algebra? That's what this research aims to do."

Namkung was motivated to conduct

this study after reviewing research conducted during a 20-year span. She found fewer than 15 studies focused on the secondary math domains for students with math learning difficulties.

"Most research in math learning difficulties has exclusively focused on foundational skills at the elementary level," she said. "It is extremely difficult to find an evidence-based intervention that targets on-grade level standards for secondary students. It intrigued me."

Namkung is pursuing additional funding to expand her research in the middle and high school levels, and to determine which factors have the greatest impact on algebra learning for secondary students with math learning difficulties.



Jessica Namkung, principal investigator

RESEARCH EXPLORES OUTDOOR EFFECTS ON CHILDREN WITH AUTISM



A study participant walks the green space route.

Birds sing and a cool breeze rustles through the leaves as a pair of squirrels scurry through the tall, green grass and up a tree — all under blue skies and sunshine.

Such scenes are typical during a leisurely, summer walk through a park — relaxing and uplifting for most people. For University of Nebraska researchers, however, those elements may prove to be even more significant.

Julia Torquati, professor of child, youth and family studies, is examining the restorative potential of natural environments for children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Her project explores whether natural environments can pave the way to individualized plans to help children with autism better focus and self-regulate in school. Torquati, who also serves as interim chair of the Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies, notes substantial evidence that suggests natural environments are mentally restorative. While human-made, urban landscapes pepper us with stimulation, nature helps us relax and rejuvenate.

“We’re really testing whether the walk is restorative.”

At the center of the research is Attention Restoration Theory, which is based on two attentional systems: directed attention and involuntary attention. Directed attention enables us to focus on demanding tasks such



A study participant walks the urban route.

as driving, reading and writing, but can become fatiguing. With involuntary attention, however, less mental effort is required. This is where natural environments fit into the equation. Urban distractions are replaced by forests, streams, rivers, lakes and oceans — interesting, engaging scenes that require little mental effort.

For Torquati’s research, 30 children diagnosed with autism will twice visit the Center for Brain, Biology and Behavior — CB3 — to complete subtests from the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, which simulate assignments in a school environment. After they finish the test, the children take a 20-minute campus walk.

One walk features a route through green space — plenty of grass and trees — while the other walk is more urban, featuring roads and railroad tracks.

Researchers document the walks using GoPro mini-cameras and test the hypothesis that during

the nature walk, children will exhibit fewer behaviors associated with autism, such as repetitive movements.

Once data are gathered and analyzed, researchers compare children’s attention, impulse control, spatial working memory, verbal working memory and cortisol response.

Until Torquati’s research, no Attention Restoration Theory study had specifically targeted children with ASD. While other research has focused on attention deficits, she said, this project aims to provide information for developing and incorporating nature interventions into individually tailored plans for schools.

The project is part of a larger study led by Georgia State University, funded by a grant from the U.S. Forest Service. Along with Torquati, the team also includes co-PI Anne Schutte, associate professor of psychology; graduate research assistants Keting Chen and Hyerim Shin; and undergraduate research assistants Samantha Moore and Yiling Zhang.

2017–2018 LAYMAN AWARDS

Funded by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Office of Research and Economic Development, Layman awards provide seed money to untenured faculty and support researchers pursuing external funding.

The following Layman awards are housed in CYFS.



KELLEY BUCHHEISTER

Assistant Professor, Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies

“Train the Coach Approach: Sustaining High-Quality Mathematical Learning in Early Childhood Settings”

Engaging preschool children in high-quality mathematics experiences and fostering mathematical reasoning are critical to promoting kindergarten readiness. However, preschool teachers are sometimes limited in their knowledge of mathematical content and ability to implement strategies that enrich children’s mathematical learning. Even when teachers receive training, the benefits are undermined by the persistent teacher turnover in the early childhood field.

The research team of Buchheister, Rachel Schachter and Holly Hatton-Bowers aims to address these obstacles by developing center-based leaders’ mathematical knowledge and coaching capacity to support classroom teachers. This innovative design will enhance early childhood teachers’ practice and children’s mathematical outcomes. The findings will inform further development and scale-up of the “Train the Coach Approach.”



MATTHEW GORMLEY

Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Psychology

“Teachers and Parents as Partners-Vertical (TAPP-V): Supporting Students with ADHD Across Grade-Level Transitions”

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, a neurodevelopmental disorder defined by developmentally inappropriate levels of inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity, is among the most common reasons for mental health referral for school-aged children. Gormley aims to use Teachers and Parents as Partners — a research-based intervention aimed at establishing parent-teacher relationships to help ensure children’s academic success — to provide ongoing benefits to students with ADHD.

The research aims to identify, measure and change problem behavior by observing ADHD-diagnosed students’ classroom behavior, then consulting with parents and teachers to develop tailored interventions. After summer break, the intervention plan will be transferred to each student’s new teachers.



ELLIOT TEBBE

Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Psychology

“Development and Preliminary Test of the Empowering Networks to Eliminate Trans Stigma (E-NETS) Intervention”

Trans and gender non-conforming populations experience high rates of adverse health outcomes, such as anxiety, depression and heightened suicide risk, and a severe lack of access to appropriate health care providers and health information.

Tebbe’s research aims to develop and test the efficacy of a cognitive-behavioral therapy intervention intended to decrease depression and anxiety by targeting universal risk factors, such as emotion regulation and low social connection, and TGNC-specific risk factors, such as internalized stigma.

Using video and expressive writing tasks to collect data across three time points, he will explore differences in participants receiving the intervention and those who do not, and effects over time.



JULIE TIPPENS

Assistant Professor, Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies

“The Roles of Community Health Workers in Addressing Adolescent Maternal Mental Health in a Kenyan Refugee Camp”

More than 26 million conflict-affected women and girls are of reproductive age. Pregnant and postpartum refugee adolescents in East Africa are at increased risk for poor maternal health outcomes due to early childbearing, exposure to trauma, fragmented social support, inadequate nutrition and health workforce shortages.

Tippens’ research explores the roles of community health workers in improving refugee adolescents’ maternal mental and physical health in Kenya’s Kakuma refugee camp. Her research is designed to compile evidence to help develop low-cost, scalable interventions to improve refugees’ psychosocial well-being. The study aims to generate critical data to develop interventions that can be tailored and replicated whenever and wherever future humanitarian crises and refugee situations arise.



CYNTHIA WILLIS-ESQUEDA

Associate Professor, Department of Psychology

“Dental Wars: Arming Immigrants with the Tools to Combat Poor Dental Health and Stigma”

Although oral disease is mostly preventable, it remains one of the world’s most common illnesses. Limited access and high cost make dental services prohibitive for many Latinx immigrant families.

Willis-Esqueda will collaborate with nonprofit community center partners and a public health service dentist to examine 100 Latinx immigrants in Lincoln, Nebraska, and assess their dental health and dietary patterns.

The study will also explore perceptions held by Latinx immigrants on dental aesthetics, dietary composition and daily dental hygiene, as well as resulting psychological ramifications, such as self-esteem, distress and well-being. Willis-Esqueda’s data will be used to design an intervention study for both urban and rural settings in Nebraska to enhance dental health and oral health literacy among immigrant families.



Conference attendees finish the day viewing graduate posters.



EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH SUMMIT CONNECTS RESEARCH, PRACTICE AND POLICY



University of Nebraska President Hank Bounds

Creating connections among early childhood research, practice and policy – and how each element can enhance the lives of young children and their families – provided the central theme of the 2018 CYFS Summit on Research in Early Childhood.

More than 200 attendees, including researchers from across the University of Nebraska system, practitioners, administrators, community partners and policymakers, gathered April 25 at Nebraska Innovation Campus for the fifth daylong biennial summit, which highlighted the latest findings in early childhood research from faculty, and the implications for practice and policy.

“We believe the early childhood research being conducted across University of Nebraska campuses has immediate implications for practice, and we have already seen its positive impact on children and families,” said Susan Sheridan, CYFS director. “Different perspectives, participation and ongoing support of early childhood research are helping to build a strong foundation for future generations.”

University of Nebraska President Hank Bounds welcomed attendees to the summit, praising the ongoing efforts of early childhood research.



From left: Cynthia Krittenbrink and Sandra Scruggs

“It’s hard to have aspirations for your children when you don’t know what ‘good’ looks like,” Bounds said. “If we don’t expose children to other opportunities, we could become a state that spirals more and more toward lack of opportunity. All the work you do will ensure we avoid that.”

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, the Stanley and Debra Lefkowitz Faculty Fellow in the Department of Psychology at Temple University and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, delivered the summit’s keynote address. She outlined how social scientists balance the need to perform basic science with their desire to be relevant to the questions and issues of their time.

Hirsh-Pasek emphasized the need to share accurate information with the public, through traditional means – working with journalists is key, she said – and by using social media.

“There is so much misinformation about our work,” she said. “If we begin to talk about what we know and share it as much as possible, people will better understand what we do.”

She also lauded the work of Nebraska researchers.



Kathy Hirsh-Pasek

“Nebraska’s work in early childhood research is drawing attention from around the country,” Hirsh-Pasek said. “You have top-flight scientists here and a ready community. Both are needed.”

The importance of local and global research partnerships was emphasized throughout the day’s breakout sessions, discussions and poster presentations. Research topics spanned school readiness, parent engagement, special education, health and nutrition, STEM, social-emotional development, and teacher training and professional development.

The event concluded with 40 graduate students presenting their work in a poster session.

The summit was sponsored by CYFS; the Nebraska Academy for Early Childhood Research; the Buffett Early Childhood Institute; First Five Nebraska; and the College of Education and Human Sciences.

LANDSCAPE OF SUPPORT

Snapshot of Cumulative CYFS Grant Activity

Support for the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools is generated primarily through external grants. The graphic below highlights grant activity since the center's inception in 2004.

Internal grants funded

\$970,579

External grants funded

\$80,832,841



Research Impact

The figures below show indicators of research impact for CYFS.

548 Total grants submitted

217 Total grants funded

41% Grant submission success rate (based on known decisions)

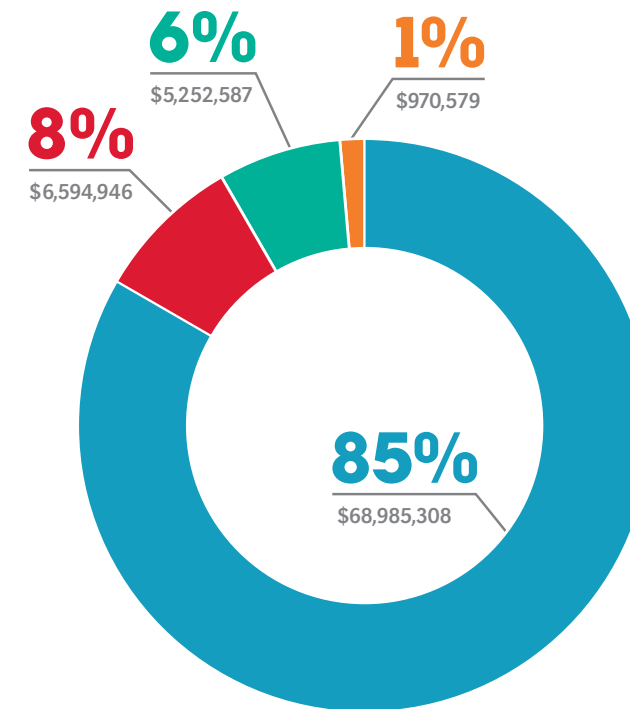
\$21.56

Return rate to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for every \$1 invested

Sources of Funding

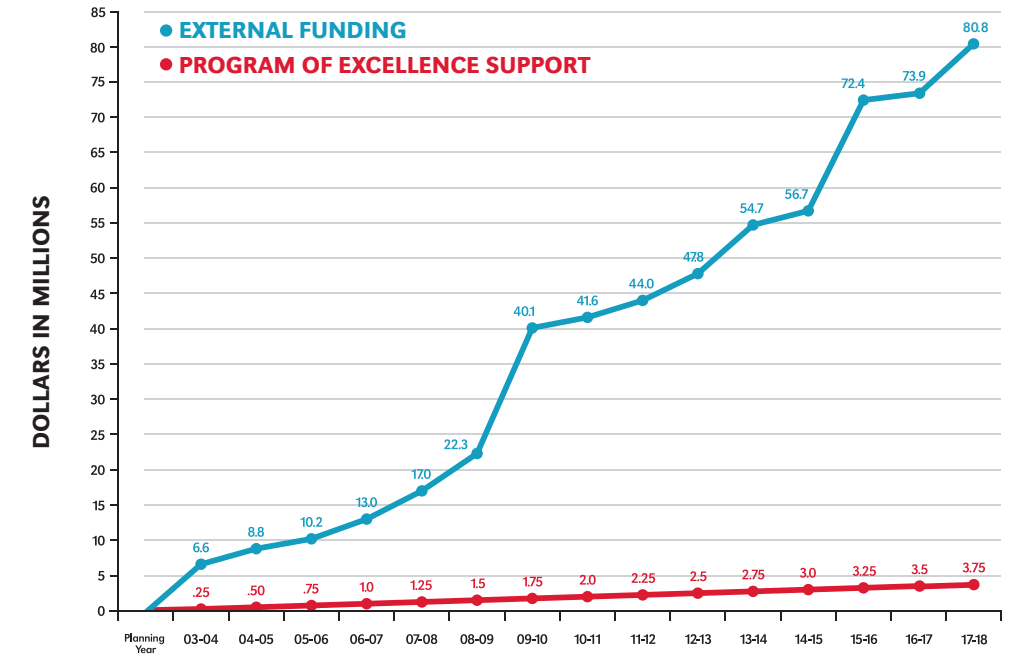
The chart below shows the cumulative dollar amounts and proportions of funding that CYFS researchers have garnered from federal, state, foundation and internal (i.e., University of Nebraska) sources.

- Federal (82 grants)**
 - State (36 grants)**
 - Foundation (55 grants)**
 - Internal (44 grants)**
- Percentages rounded to nearest 1%*



Cumulative External Grant Dollars and Program of Excellence Support

The line graph below depicts the center's cumulative external funding (i.e., federal, state and foundation) relative to Program of Excellence support from the University of Nebraska.



ACTIVE GRANTS & CONTRACTS

The following grants and contracts received new or ongoing funding during 2017–18.

Federal Awards (\$23,827,207)

Administration for Children and Families

Getting Ready 0–3 (GR03): Supporting the Development of Infants/Toddlers Through an Integrated Parent–Teacher Relationship-Based Approach
Pls: Lisa Knoche, Susan Sheridan

Go NAP SACC Online Tool and Evaluation
Pl: Dipti Dev

Thresholds II
Pls: Greg Welch, Helen Raikes, Julia Torquati

Young Children’s Use and Parent–Child Co-Use of Tablets: Experimental Research Investigating Mobile Technologies’ Effects on Children’s Self-Regulation
Pls: Jan Esteraich, Helen Raikes

Centers for Disease Control

NAP SACC Web Development and Analysis
Pl: Dipti Dev

Environmental Protection Agency

Evidence-Based Interactions Between Indoor Environmental Factors and Their Effects on K–12 Student Achievement
Pls: Lily Wang, James Bovaird, Josephine Lau, Clarence Waters

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

UNO-NASA Space Grant: WearTec
Pl: Gwen Nugent

National Institutes of Health

Estimating Mediation Effects in Prevention Studies (sub-contract)
Pl: Matt Fritz

National Science Foundation

Analysis of Effective Science Coaching: What, Why and How
Pls: Gwen Nugent, Gina Kunz, James Houston

Equity in Engineering: Understanding and Promoting All Elementary School Children’s Knowledge of and Motivation to Engage in Engineering
Pl: Lorey Wheeler

Maker Fridays: Engaging Rural and Under-Represented High School Students in Pre-Engineering Design and Creativity
Pl: Michelle Howell Smith

Nebraska STEM: Supporting Elementary Rural Teacher Leadership
Pls: Amanda Thomas, Guy Trainin, Wendy Smith

Nebraska Wearable Technologies
Pls: Bradley Barker, Gwen Nugent, Jennifer Keshwani, Carl Nelson, Neal Grandgenett

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Family Style Dining: An Approach to Improve Healthier Meal Choices in Preschoolers
Pls: Dipti Dev, Susan Sheridan, Greg Welch

U.S. Department of Education

A Randomized Trial of Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) with Latino Students: A Replication Study
Pls: Susan Sheridan, James Bovaird, Lorey Wheeler, Brandy Clarke

Early Learning Network Lead
Pls: Susan Sheridan, Lisa Knoche

Efficacy of the Getting Ready Intervention at Supporting Parental Engagement and Positive Outcomes for Preschool Children at Educational Risk
Pls: Susan Sheridan, Lisa Knoche, Carolyn Pope Edwards, James Bovaird

Efficacy of the START-Play Program for Infants with Neuromotor Disorders (sub-contract)
Pl: James Bovaird

Learning Frontiers: Pre-K to Grade 3
Pls: Susan Sheridan, Lisa Knoche, James Bovaird, Iheoma Iruka

Rural Ed Technical Paper
Pls: Susan Sheridan, James Bovaird

School Psychology Specialization in Concussion/Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI)
Pl: Scott Napolitano

School Psychology Specialization in Toddlers with Autism Spectrum Disorders
Pls: Edward Daly III, Therese Mathews

State Awards (\$1,080,901)

Nebraska Department of Education

Evaluate Education Improvement in Schools that Received SIG Funding (2018)
Pls: Leslie Hawley, Shavonna Holman

Getting Ready—Part C NDE
Pl: Lisa Knoche

Nebraska Multi-Tiered System of Support Implementation Support Team
Pl: Tanya Ihlo

Promoting Children’s Health, Growth and Development
Pl: Dipti Dev

South Dakota Department of Education

Getting Ready—South Dakota Part C
Pl: Lisa Knoche

Foundation/Other Awards (\$2,811,353)

4-H Common Measures
Funding Source: National 4-H Council
Pls: Leslie Hawley, Michelle Howell Smith

An Examination of Conjoint Behavioral Consultation’s Effects on Teacher–Student Interactions
Funding Source: Buffett Early Childhood Institute
Pls: Sonya Bhatia, Susan Sheridan

Assessing Home Food Environment and Diabetes Self-Management Among Adult Type 2 Diabetes Patients
Funding Source: UNL Layman Award
Pl: Weiwen Chai

Building Bridges Through Relationships: A High School Dropout Prevention Program
Funding Source: Woods Charitable Fund
Pls: Michael Scheel, Gina Kunz

Collaborative Capacity Building in Rural Nebraska Schools via Technology: Teachers and Parents as Partners
Funding Source: Rural Futures Institute
Pls: Amanda Witte, Susan Sheridan

Common Measures e-Learning
Funding Source: National 4-H Council
Pl: Seth Teager

Dental Wars: Arming Immigrants with the Tools to Combat Poor Dental Health and Stigma
Funding Source: UNL Layman Award
Pl: Cynthia Willis-Esqueda

Developing a Model for Quality of Life: Identifying Domains and Determinants for Rural Ethnic Minorities
Funding Source: Rural Futures Institute
Pls: Maria Rosario de Guzman, Rodrigo Cantarero, Soo-Young Hong, Yan Xia

Development and Preliminary Test of the Empowering Networks to Eliminate Trans Stigma (E-NETS) Intervention
Funding Source: UNL Layman Award
Pl: Elliot Tebbe

Development and Validation of the Inventário Dimensional de Avaliação do Desenvolvimento Infantil (IDADI; Dimensional Inventory for Child Development Assessment)
Funding Source: UNL-Brazil Pilot Impact Grant
Pls: Leslie Hawley (UNL), Denise Ruschel Bandeira (Brazil)

Development of a Mathematics Learning Task for Functional Neuroimaging
Funding Source: UNL Seed Grant
Pl: Carrie Clark

Early Childhood Plan Evaluation
Funding Source: W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Pls: Dawn Davis, Lisa Knoche, Helen Raikes

Early Steps to School Success
Funding Source: Save the Children Foundation
Pl: Helen Raikes

Enhancing Students with Math Difficulties Transition from Arithmetic to Algebra
Funding Source: UNL Layman Award
Pl: Min Namkung

Enhancing the 4-H Common Measures: An Evaluation Proposal
Funding Source: National 4-H Council
Pl: Leslie Hawley

Evaluation of the Psychometric Properties of the Teacher Efficacy for Promoting Partnership Measure
Funding Source: Buffett Early Childhood Institute
Pls: Amanda Moen, Susan Sheridan

Evaluation of the Psychometric Properties of the Teacher Efficacy for Promoting Partnership Measure
Funding Source: Society for the Study of School Psychology
Pls: Amanda Moen, Susan Sheridan

Examining Elementary Teachers’ Enactment of Digital Instructional Materials for Mathematics
Funding Source: UNL Layman Award
Pl: Amanda Thomas

Examining the Associations Among Rural Low-Income Immigrant Parents’ Health and Nutrition Literacy, Health- and Food-Related Parenting and Their Children’s Development
Funding Source: UNL Central Plains Research Data Center
Pl: Jeong-Kyun Choi

Healthy Aging
Funding Source: UNL Grants-in-Aid
Pl: Julie Tippens

Impact of Massage Therapy on Well-Being for Parents of Children Recovering from Traumatic Injury or Illness
Funding Source: The Massage Therapy Foundation
Pls: Natalie Williams, Paul Springer, Judy Burnfield

Math Early On II
Funding Source: Buffett Early Childhood Fund
Pls: Ruth Heaton, Victoria Molfese, Jennifer Leeper-Miller

Needs and Adaptation of Caregivers of Young Children with Congenital Zika Virus Syndrome in Northeast Brazil: A Mixed Methods Pilot Study
Funding Source: UNL-Brazil Pilot Impact Grant
Pls: Natalie Williams (UNL), Pompéia Villachan-Lyra (Brazil)

Preschool Science Talk in Action and Reflection (Pre-STAR)
Funding Source: UNL-Brazil Pilot Impact Grant
Pls: Soo-Young Hong (UNL), Gisela Wajskop (Brazil)

STEM Pathways in the Community College: An Examination of How Community Colleges Broaden or Restrict Institutional Capacity for the STEM Transfer Function
Funding Source: UNL Layman Award
Pl: Elvira Abrica

Supporting Early Childhood Development in Africa: Capacity-Building Partnership
Funding Source: Children’s Investment Fund Foundation
Pl: Natalie Koziol

Teachers and Parents as Partners-Vertical (TAPP-V): Supporting Students with ADHD Across Grade-Level Transitions
Funding Source: UNL Layman Award
Pl: Matthew Gormley

The Roles of Community Health Workers in Addressing Adolescent Maternal Mental Health in a Kenyan Refugee Camp
Funding Source: UNL Layman Award
Pl: Julie Tippens

Train the Coach Approach: Sustaining High-Quality Mathematical Learning in Early Childhood Settings
Funding Source: UNL Layman Award
Pl: Kelley Buchheister

Understanding Early Adolescents Coping with Peer Threat: Insecurity as a Risk Factor for Psychopathology
Funding Source: UNL Layman Award
Pl: Meredith Martin

Using Self-Regulation to Predict Preschoolers’ Disruptive Behavior Disorders
Funding Source: Society for the Study of School Psychology
Pls: Andrew White, Susan Sheridan

AFFILIATES & PERSONNEL

Faculty Affiliates

CYFS faculty affiliates make up a network of approximately 150 faculty who partner with the center in various ways and who make a significant contribution to Nebraska's research in social, behavioral and educational sciences.

Faculty affiliates are integral to the center's vibrant research culture and have opportunities to engage in valuable research exchanges that foster new ideas and spark interdisciplinary collaboration.

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