



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



CYFS Early Childhood **RESEARCH SUMMIT**

Creating Connections Among Research, Practice & Policy in Nebraska

April 28, 2026 | Nebraska Innovation Campus

Welcome

2026 CYFS Early Childhood Research Summit

Throughout today's Summit, a variety of early childhood findings from University of Nebraska-affiliated researchers and colleagues will highlight the pioneering and critical early childhood research conducted across the NU system. We will celebrate and advance the shared findings and collaboration among researchers, practitioners, policymakers, community partners and others whose innovation, creativity and commitment to early childhood research continues to have positive, meaningful impacts on children, families, and educators — locally, nationally and internationally.

Connecting research, practice and policy has never been more important. By turning ideas into action, we can ensure our work supports meaningful experiences for children in communities throughout Nebraska and beyond.

As sponsors of this event, we are excited to have you here today. We hope you will forge new partnerships and strengthen existing ones. Your perspectives and participation make a real impact and are helping to ensure that high-quality early childhood research continues to thrive in Nebraska.

Thank you for being part of today's event. Enjoy the day!



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



NEBRASKA ACADEMY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH

The Summit is presented by the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools (CYFS) in partnership with the Nebraska Academy for Early Childhood Research (NAECR).



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Special Thanks

Thank you to the many individuals who have offered their time and expertise at this year's Summit, including concurrent session facilitators, staff volunteers and graduate students.

Attendee Information



JOIN THE CONVERSATION

#ECSummit26 @UNLresearch
@UNL_CYFS @BuffettECI
@UNL_CEHS @earlyfutures



WIFI NETWORK: NU-Guest

USERNAME: April

PASSWORD: Innovate2026!

Attendee List



Scan the QR code
for a complete list of
attendees, or visit:

go.unl.edu/ecs-attendees

Agenda

8:30 - 9:00 a.m. | Registration North Entrance

9:00 - 9:15 a.m. | Opening & Welcome Banquet Hall

SUSAN SHERIDAN Director, Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families & Schools | University of Nebraska–Lincoln

JENNIFER NELSON Interim Vice Chancellor, Office of Research and Innovation | University of Nebraska–Lincoln

9:15 - 10:15 a.m. | Keynote Address Banquet Hall

AI and the Developing Child: Myths, Evidence and Open Questions

YING XU Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Education | Harvard University

10:30 - 11:15 a.m. | Concurrent Session 1

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12:30 - 1:30 p.m. | Luncheon Banquet Hall

Self-serve buffet lunch will be provided in the banquet hall, 2nd floor.

1:45 - 2:30 p.m. | Concurrent Session 3

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3:45 - 4:00 p.m. Closing Remarks Banquet Hall

JEFF REESE Dean, College of Education & Human Sciences | University of Nebraska–Lincoln

LISA KNOCHE Co-Director, Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families & Schools | University of Nebraska–Lincoln

4:00 - 5:00 p.m. Discovery Showcase & Reception Banquet Hall

The Discovery Showcase features research posters from University of Nebraska faculty and graduate students, as well as community partner displays. See page 18 for details.

Drinks and appetizers will be available in the banquet hall, 2nd floor.

Keynote Address

Banquet Hall | 9:15 - 10:15 a.m.



AI and the Developing Child: Myths, Evidence and Open Questions

Ying Xu will examine the role and impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on children's cognitive and social development. Drawing on emerging evidence, she will highlight how children interact with, perceive and learn from AI systems, including the ways they develop trust in "AI companions." The keynote will also consider open questions about whether generative AI tools shape children's curiosity, creativity and critical thinking. Xu will conclude with a discussion of how education and psychology researchers can strengthen their efforts to ensure AI is safe and beneficial for children.

YING XU
Assistant Professor
Graduate School of Education
Harvard University

Ying Xu, Ph.D., is a leading researcher studying the impacts of artificial intelligence on children's learning and development. Her work focuses on designing and evaluating AI systems that support cognitive development, academic achievement and social-emotional well-being in children and adolescents, with the goal of ensuring AI serves as a positive force for young people while mitigating its potential risks.

Xu collaborates with children, families, educators and community organizations to create media grounded in their values, practices, and linguistic and cultural strengths. Her current projects examine the design and effectiveness of conversational AI technologies as language partners and learning companions for children and how AI affects children's social interactions and development. She also explores human-AI collaborative approaches to engage education stakeholders in the development of AI tools tailored to their own needs and contexts. Her research is funded by the National Science Foundation, Schmidt Futures and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Xu's work has been published in leading academic journals across psychology, education and human-computer interaction, including *Child Development Perspectives*, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Child Development* and *Computers & Education*. She has earned numerous best paper awards and is recognized as an Early Career Interdisciplinary Scholar by the Society for Research in Child Development. Xu also partners with major organizations such as PBS Kids, GBH Education and the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop.

Session Types

Throughout the Summit, a wide range of presenters and content will ensure a rich learning experience. All concurrent sessions* are 45 minutes in length and include a 15-minute facilitated discussion.



RESEARCH EXCHANGE SESSION*

Individual researchers/teams will share their research findings. A facilitated discussion of applications to practice and policy will follow.



EARLY CHILDHOOD IGNITE SESSION*

Each session will include two different, thematically linked research presentations. Each researcher will have 10 minutes to share their findings.



PARTNER EXCHANGE SESSION*

NU partners will share their knowledge, experiences and perspectives in relation to early childhood.



DISCOVERY SHOWCASE 4:00-5:00 p.m.

The Discovery Showcase features research posters from University of Nebraska faculty and graduate students, as well as community partner displays.

Session 1



Room A1 | 10:30 - 11:15 a.m.

AI and the Developing Child: Myths, Evidence and Open Questions: Follow-up Discussion

Join keynote speaker Ying Xu for an interactive conversation exploring the role and impact of artificial intelligence on children's cognitive and social development.

YING XU

Assistant Professor
Graduate School of Education
Harvard University



Room A2 | 10:30 - 11:15 a.m.

Child Care Cost, Access and Child Development: Kidsights Data 2025 Findings

Nebraska is home to Kidsights Data, an initiative to generate population-level insights on young children birth to age 6 and their families and communities. Kidsights Data includes the Kidsights Measurement Tool, a validated parent-report tool measuring child development. This session will address recent results on child care access and cost, and their associations with child development. The team will place emphasis on communicating results and engaging with policymakers to apply results to policy decisions.

ABBIE RAIKES

Professor
Department of Health Promotion
and Behavior
University of Nebraska Medical Center

ERIN OWEN

Founder
Clarity Channels Communications

KATIE BASS

Director of Policy Research
Early Futures Partnership

JOLENE JOHNSON

*Director, Education and Child
Development*
Munroe-Meyer Institute
University of Nebraska Medical Center

LAURA FRITZ

*Project Manager, Education and
Child Development*
Munroe-Meyer Institute
University of Nebraska Medical Center



Room A3 | 10:30 - 11:15 a.m.

Fostering Educator Well-being and Relational Health Through CHIME

This session highlights CHIME, Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators, an eight-week professional development model implemented with educators in Early Head Start and Head Start programs. Aligned with workforce well-being priorities supported by the Administration for Children and Families, evaluation findings demonstrate significant reductions in workplace exhaustion and emotional reactivity, with sustained improvements in resilience and collegial climate at three-month follow-up. Findings underscore critical implications for workforce retention, program stability and policy investment in educator well-being.

HOLLY WILHITE

Associate Professor
Department of Child, Youth and
Family Studies
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

CARRIE CLARK

Associate Professor
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

JACI FOGED

Extension Educator
Nebraska Extension
University of Nebraska-Lincoln



Room B1 | 10:30 - 11:15 a.m.

Advancing Professional Development to Promote Teachers and Parents as Partners

Teachers and Parents as Partners (TAPP) is an evidence-based, individualized approach wherein a consultant collaborates with parents and teachers to promote students' emotional and behavioral health. However, TAPP is not widely available in early childhood settings. Virtual professional development for early childhood practitioners may expand TAPP's access and bolster outcomes for students in the early grades. This session will share preliminary results from an ongoing study and a descriptive case study, including practical lessons learned.

AMANDA WITTE

Research Associate Professor
Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

LOREY WHEELER

Research Professor
Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

EMMA BRUNKE

Family-School Partnership Coach
Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

SUSAN SHERIDAN

George Holmes University Professor, Director
Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

CHANTELLE NELSEN

School Specialist
Nebraska ESU 1



Room B2 | 10:30 - 11:15 a.m.

Practices to Support Children Involved with the Child Welfare System

Child welfare professionals support early childhood well-being through practices that promote placement stability, attachment and trauma recovery. Using pre-training and three-month follow-up survey data from an online training program, this study describes how frequently professionals report using trauma-informed, caregiver-focused, narrative support and placement practices. Findings identify which practices are routinely implemented versus more situational, offering workforce development insights to strengthen services that influence children's stability, relationships and emotional well-being in foster, adoptive and guardianship systems.

DAWN DAVIS

Research Assistant Professor
Center on Children, Families and the Law
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

ADITI POUDEL

Research Data Specialist
Center on Children, Families and the Law
University of Nebraska–Lincoln



Room B3 | 10:30 - 11:15 a.m.

Preschool Science Talk in Action and Reflection (PreSTAR) Rural Nebraska

The PreSTAR Rural Nebraska team will share strategies for engaging rural early childhood educators in a series of collaborative professional learning experiences focused on science- and engineering-related content knowledge and reflective practice through the cycle of inquiry. Preliminary findings will be shared on how educators' reflections related to children's science and engineering play and instructional practices changed over time.

SOO-YOUNG HONG

Associate Professor
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

LISA POPPE

Extension Educator
Nebraska Extension
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

LADONNA WERTH

Extension Educator
Nebraska Extension
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Session 2



Room A1 | 11:30 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

Using Collaborative Inquiry to Guide Early Childhood Teachers' Professional Development

The cycle of inquiry provides a useful framework for enhancing early childhood teachers' data use practices through professional development (PD). Presenters will describe how Educare Lincoln and evaluation partners implement inquiry cycles to co-develop PD to support teacher classroom instruction. The team will also discuss how data-driven methods helped shed light on teachers' strengths and challenges and informed the design of PD experiences tailored to areas of need that optimize classroom practices.

CLARIEBELLE GABAS

Research Assistant Professor

Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

PAIGE WERNICK

Graduate Research Assistant

Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

AMBER RITTENBURG

Coach

Educare Lincoln

AMY NAPOLI

Associate Professor, Extension Specialist

Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies
University of Nebraska–Lincoln



Room A2 | 11:30 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

Smart Start Backpack Initiative: Supporting the Transition to Kindergarten

This session presents insights from an evaluation of the Smart Start Backpack Program, a take-home initiative designed in collaboration between researchers and community partners to strengthen parent-child interactions and support kindergarten readiness. Using caregiver surveys and interviews, the study examined feasibility, family engagement, and perceived benefits and barriers to participation. Findings highlight the value of hands-on, flexible activities, and the importance of clear guidance and timing. Implications for designing family-centered transition-to-kindergarten supports will also be discussed.

KAILEY SNYDER

Assistant Professor

Department of Health and Kinesiology
University of Nebraska at Omaha

DANAE DINKEL

Professor

Department of Health and Kinesiology
University of Nebraska at Omaha

TONYA JOLLEY

Program Administrator

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

AMY SCHMIDTKE

Director of Educational Practice

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

Heat at Play: Thermal Portraits of Children's Everyday Environments

Rising temperatures are reshaping urban environments, with young children facing distinct and unequal risks. Presenters will share high-resolution drone and handheld thermal imaging to reveal how heat is experienced at the scale of children's movement in parks, streets and child care sites. Findings show how surface materials, canopy cover and neighborhood investment shape uneven thermal conditions. By visualizing children's lived heat exposure, this work reframes extreme heat as a design, justice and child development issue.

SALVADOR LINDQUIST

Assistant Professor

Department of Landscape Architecture
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

SARAH KARLE

Associate Professor

Department of Landscape Architecture
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

ANNE SCHUTTE

Associate Professor

Department of Psychology
University of Nebraska–Lincoln



Room A3 | 11:30 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

LENA Grow in Head Start: Boosting Conversational Turns and Literacy

Interactive talk between teachers and young children is a critical driver of early development. This study examines how implementing LENA Grow, an evidence-based coaching program, in Head Start classrooms impacts conversational turns, literacy behaviors, teacher well-being and TS Gold scores across children, families and teachers. Data collection is ongoing, but researchers anticipate increased conversational turns, improved literacy behaviors, greater confidence in supporting literacy, improved TS Gold scores and enhanced teacher well-being.

ALEXANDRA DARO

Director of Applied Research
Buffett Early Childhood Institute

JAMES DESJARLAIS

Research Specialist
Buffett Early Childhood Institute

PAULA THOMPSON

Associate Professor
Department of Teacher Education
University of Nebraska at Kearney

KATHERINE SUTTON

Senior Research Specialist
Buffett Early Childhood Institute



Room B1 | 11:30 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

Advancing Rural Nutrition and Health Through Early Childhood Workforce Capacity

This session describes an NIH-funded, cluster randomized controlled trial evaluating a Self-Determination Theory-informed coaching and feedback capacity-building model delivered through Nebraska Cooperative Extension to improve responsive feeding implementation in rural family child care homes (FCCH). The study examines effects on FCCH provider implementation capacity and child dietary intake. Findings will inform scalable workforce-based strategies to strengthen early childhood nutrition across rural public health systems.

DIPTI DEV

Betti and Richard Robinson Associate Professor
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies
University of Nebraska-Lincoln



Room B2 | 11:30 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

Who's in Preschool? Demographic Changes in U.S. Preschool Attendance

This session leverages large-scale, restricted-access data to provide new evidence on preschool attendance among U.S. children. Trends in preschool attendance over the last 25 years are documented, showing that income inequality in enrollment has declined only slightly. Detailed data is then used to examine inequality in attendance among the most recent groups of preschool-aged children. The session will conclude with implications of these findings for the potential returns of future preschool expansions.

BRENDEN TIMPE

Assistant Professor
Department of Economics
University of Nebraska-Lincoln



Room B3 | 11:30 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

Engaging Diverse Communities to Inform Early Childhood Teacher Preparation

The shortage of early childhood educators calls for innovation in teacher preparation. To address this challenge, the Responsive Equitable System for Preparing Early Childhood Teachers (RESPECT) Across Nebraska Project engaged diverse communities statewide to identify their strengths, valued experiences for young children, and desired educator competencies and dispositions. This presentation will describe how the team built relationships and collaborated with community researcher-partners to plan and conduct focus groups in a multiple case study design.

JULIA TORQUATI*Professor*

Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

MELANY SPIES*Assistant Professor*

Department of Teacher Education
University of Nebraska at Omaha

VIJI RAJESEKAR*Education Division Head*

Nebraska Indian Community College

SIMIN KAZEMI*Graduate Research Assistant*

Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

ALEXA YUNES-KOCH*RESPECT Across Nebraska**Coordinator*

Nebraska Department of Education



Room D | 11:30 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

Nebraska Early Childhood Data Coalition

The Nebraska Early Childhood Data Coalition (ECDC) serves as a collaborative forum for sharing knowledge, learning and building connections. The coalition promotes the innovative work happening across the state's early childhood landscape, shares data and resources, and fosters dialogue to support data-informed decision-making. In this session, presenters will discuss the coalition's current projects and activities, as well as share opportunities for involvement in advancing meaningful, accessible data to improve policies, investments and outcomes in Nebraska.

KATIE BASS*Director of Policy Research*

Early Futures Partnership

JARED STEVENS*Statistical Research Specialist*

Nebraska Department of Education

Session 3



Room A1 | 1:45 - 2:30 p.m.

Beyond Perception: How Accurate are Self Reports in Coaching?

Accurate, efficient documentation of coaching practices is essential to understanding how early childhood coaching is implemented. While self-report methods such as coaching logs are commonly used, the reliability of those methods needs further exploration. This session will examine the degree of match between coaches' self-reported practices and observer ratings, and how coaching characteristics predict the degree of match between self-reported and observed coaching practices.

LISA KNOCHE

Director, NAECR; Research Professor, Co-Director

Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

RACHEL SCHACHTER

Associate Professor

Department of Educational Psychology
University of Illinois Chicago

MINGQI LI

Postdoctoral Associate

Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

HYEONJIN YOON

Research Assistant Professor

Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

SUE BAINTER

Early Childhood Coach and Consultant

Nebraska Department of Education



Room A2 | 1:45 - 2:30 p.m.

Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce: The Leaky Bucket Problem

Using longitudinal data from NSWERS (2021-2024), this study finds Nebraska's public early childhood educator (ECE) workforce is not keeping pace with growing Pre-K enrollment. As the number of children served increased, the number of educators, full-time positions and average wages declined, while workforce exits rose. Framed as a "leaky bucket," low compensation and high turnover perpetuate workforce shortages. These findings call attention to the need for compensation reform and retention investments to sustain Nebraska's early childhood educator infrastructure.

JAY JEFFRIES

Postdoctoral Research Scientist

Department of Educational Psychology
University of Nebraska-Lincoln



Room A3 | 1:45 - 2:30 p.m.

What Becomes Possible Through Nebraska Extension Early Childhood Educators?

This session explores interdisciplinary, community-engaged research conducted with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and University of Nebraska at Kearney. Grounded in community-based participatory research and implementation science, Extension educators helped design, implement and study professional learning for early childhood educators. Findings across these programs suggest improved engagement, workforce sustainability and implementation quality, underscoring the importance of Extension educators in translating research into meaningful practice and strengthening early childhood systems serving young children and families.

LYNN DEVRIES

Extension Educator

Nebraska Extension
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

JACI FOGED

Extension Educator

Nebraska Extension
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

LADONNA WERTH

Extension Educator

Nebraska Extension
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

LISA POPPE

Extension Educator

Nebraska Extension
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

HOLLY WILHITE

Associate Professor

Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies
University of Nebraska-Lincoln



Room B1 | 1:45 - 2:30 p.m.

Early Childhood Legislation in Nebraska

Policy experts from First Five Nebraska will provide an update on the latest early childhood legislation and policy in Nebraska. The session will conclude with reflections on the intersection of research and policy and explore creating connections between the research and policy communities.

KATIE BASS*Director of Policy Research*

Early Futures Partnership

SARA HOWARD*Policy Advisor*

First Five Nebraska

MITCHELL CLARK*Policy Advisor*

First Five Nebraska

JEN GOETTEMOELLER WENDL*Policy Consultant*

First Five Nebraska



Room B2 | 1:45 - 2:30 p.m.

Cultural Engagement and Educational Outcomes Among American Indian/Alaska Native Children in Head Start

Cultural engagement with Native practices and language shapes early academic outcomes among American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) children in Head Start. Using latent class analysis of the 2019 AIAN Family and Child Experiences Survey national dataset, five distinct profiles of cultural engagement were identified. Children with higher levels of direct cultural transmission demonstrated stronger executive function, vocabulary and literacy scores. Findings are contextualized through key informant interviews with Native scholars and community members.

AMANDA PROKASKY*Senior Research Specialist*Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools
University of Nebraska–Lincoln**JANELLA KANG***Graduate Research Assistant*Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies
University of Nebraska–Lincoln**AMY ENCINGER***Assistant Professor*Department of Teacher Education
University of Wyoming**AMY LAPOINTE***PreK Head Start Director*

Educare Winnebago



Room B3 | 1:45 - 2:30 p.m.

SUNRISE Nebraska: Preschool Movement Behaviors in a Global Context

The SUNRISE study is an epidemiological investigation drawing on researchers from more than 60 low-, middle- and high-income countries to assess the movement behaviors of preschool-aged children according to World Health Organization guidelines. This session will highlight work between researchers at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, University of Nebraska at Kearney, and others from around the U.S. and the world.

JOHN P. RECH*Assistant Professor*Department of Kinesiology and Sport Sciences
University of Nebraska at Kearney**DANAE DINKEL***Associate Professor*Department of Health and Kinesiology
University of Nebraska at Omaha**KUMIYO KAI***Graduate Research Assistant*Department of Health and Kinesiology
University of Nebraska at Omaha



Room D | 1:45 - 2:30 p.m.

What Do We Know? What Do We Need? A Conversation on Children's Social and Emotional Development

This session will include a facilitated conversation on children's social and emotional development. Share your experiences, ask questions and bring your priorities to the table. Attendees will learn from one another across roles and contexts. Together, attendees will explore how to best support young children's social and emotional skills, and contribute to a research, practice and policy agenda in this critical area.

SAMI BRADLEY

Vice President of Early Childhood Mental Health

Rooted in Relationships

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

Session 4



Room A1 | 2:45 - 3:30 p.m.

Iterative Development of an Interactive, Family-Inclusive Socio-Emotional Assessment System for Preschool-Aged Children

This session will describe the development of a socio-emotional assessment system for children ages 3 to 5. Researchers will provide an overview of an iterative process for developing an instrument that addresses the needs of early childhood centers and families. The team will also share promising preliminary data to support the initial efficacy and acceptability of the tool.

CARRIE CLARK

Associate Professor

Department of Educational Psychology
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

JENNA FINCH

Assistant Professor

Department of Psychology
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

SOO-YOUNG HONG

Associate Professor

Department of Child, Youth and
Family Studies
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

JULIA TORQUATI

Associate Professor

Department of Child, Youth and
Family Studies
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

JENNIFER LEEPER-MILLER

*Master Teacher – Ruth Staples
Child Development Laboratory*

Department of Child, Youth and
Family Studies
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

JIABIN LYU

Graduate Research Assistant

Nebraska Center for Research on
Children, Youth, Families and Schools
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

AMANDA PROKASKY

Senior Research Specialist

Nebraska Center for Research on
Children, Youth, Families and Schools
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Connect. Feel. Belong.: Igniting Statewide Social and Emotional Development Conversations

Grounded in a socio-ecological and participatory framework, the Nurture Nebraska campaign promotes awareness of social and emotional development among children birth to age 5. The campaign concept was co-developed through community focus groups and expert panels. Campaign efforts in 2025 unfolded in two phases: organic user-generated storytelling followed by a statewide launch. Mixed-method evaluation, including web analytics and engagement metrics, reveals key awareness insights and adoption patterns.

CHANGMIN YAN

Associate Professor

Department of Journalism and Mass
Communications
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

JEMALYN GRIFFIN

Associate Professor of Practice

Department of Journalism and Mass
Communications
University of Nebraska–Lincoln



Room A2 | 2:45 - 3:30 p.m.

Burnout in Early Childhood Education: Relationships with Age, Role and Experience

Burnout is a significant challenge in early childhood education, affecting educators across roles and career stages. Using survey data from 594 Head Start educators across 19 grantees, this study examined how personal characteristics and well-being predict burnout. Findings indicate that job title, experience and age do not predict burnout; rather, mental health emerged as the strongest predictor, highlighting the need for well-being supports within Head Start programs.

ALEXANDRA DARO

Director of Applied Research

Buffett Early Childhood Institute

PAULA THOMPSON

Associate Professor

Department of Teacher Education
University of Nebraska at Kearney

KATE SUTTON

Senior Research Specialist

Buffett Early Childhood Institute



Room A3 | 2:45 - 3:30 p.m.

Knowledge Network for Early Childhood Workforce (KNEW) Project in Rural Nebraska

Researchers from the University of Nebraska at Kearney, Communities for Kids and Nebraska Extension will discuss the Knowledge Network for Early Childhood Workforce (KNEW) project. This congressionally funded community effort started in 2024 and brought together more than 15 rural communities with the goal of increasing recruitment and retention of early childhood educators in Nebraska. The session will highlight how communities came together to collaborate, research on social networks and professional development outcomes.

PHILIP LAI

Associate Professor
Department of Communication Disorders
University of Nebraska at Kearney

JACI FOGED

Extension Educator, Project Coordinator
Nebraska Extension
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

KARA NICKEL

Contracts and Special Projects Advisor
Early Futures Partnership – Communities for Kids



Room B1 | 2:45 - 3:30 p.m.

Impact of Write Sounds on Transcription and Word-Level Skills

Consistently low scores in reading and writing outcomes highlight the need for stronger foundational literacy instruction. This session presents findings from a quasi-experimental study examining the feasibility and promise of Write Sounds, an integrated handwriting, phonics and spelling intervention for students with word-level difficulties. Results demonstrate high implementation fidelity and large, significant effects on handwriting accuracy and contextual spelling, with growth across decoding outcomes — underscoring the implications for efficient, integrated literacy intervention in school settings.

PAM BAZIS

Assistant Professor
Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders
University of Nebraska–Lincoln



Room B2 | 2:45 - 3:30 p.m.

Child-Parent Psychotherapy Reimbursement Can Increase Access for Vulnerable Young Children

The Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) Reimbursement Project tested whether reimbursing clinicians for non-covered activities increased their capacity to take these cases. Three years of data reveal that reimbursements expand CPP services. Reimbursed clinicians received more referrals, completed more assessments, initiated more CPP cases and closed more cases to fidelity. Over time, differences widened. In the final year, reimbursed clinicians opened twice as many cases as non-reimbursed clinicians. Findings suggest expanding reimbursement policy to sustain the CPP workforce.

PAMELA CAUDILL JORDAN

Research Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology; Center on Children, Families and the Law
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

EMILY STARR

Program Evaluator
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies; Center on Children, Families and the Law
University of Nebraska–Lincoln



Room B3 | 2:45 - 3:30 p.m.

Play-Based Learning Across the Ages: Expanding the Role of Play in Education

Play-based learning, traditionally associated with early childhood education, is critical for fostering cognitive, social-emotional and academic skills across all educational levels. This case study explores how educators can integrate play-based pedagogies to enhance equity, engagement and innovation. Data from interviews, survey items and instructional artifacts reveal that play-based strategies improve critical thinking, collaboration and inclusivity. Findings advocate for systemic shifts in policy and practice, positioning play as a transformative tool for 21st-century learning.

AMBER M. O'SHEA*Assistant Professor*Department of Teacher Education
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Room D | 2:45 - 3:30 p.m.

2026 Kids Count: Data and Findings

Kids Count in Nebraska is a children's data and policy project led by Voices for Children in Nebraska. Key indicators measure children's well-being in five areas: health, education, economic stability, child welfare and juvenile justice. In this session, Voices for Children will share and discuss the latest data and findings from the 2026 Kids Count report.

JOSH SHIRK*Research Coordinator*

Voices for Children in Nebraska

Discovery Showcase



Banquet Hall | 4:00 - 5:00 p.m.

The Discovery Showcase features research posters from University of Nebraska faculty and graduate students, as well as community partner displays.

Research Posters

AI/Social Media/Technology

- 1) Benchmarking Developmentally-Appropriate AI-Generated First Grade Elementary Science Texts**
Azadeh Hassani, UNL; Fatemeh Ashrafabadi, UNL; Drishti Takoo, UNL; Guy Trainin, UNL
- 2) Teachers' AI Perception and Barriers in Ghanaian Basic Schools**
Boakye Williams Kwabena, UNL; Guy Trainin, UNL
- 3) Strategies for Integrating Instructional Technology into Nigeria's Early Childhood Care, Development, and Education (ECCDE) Programme: An Offline-First, Equity-Driven Implementation Framework**
Omolara Yetunde Oni, UNL; Guy Trainin, UNL

Early Learning

- 4) Learning Frontiers: Sustaining Early Learning Gains**
Jessica Rehtus, UNL; Susan Sheridan, UNL; Lisa Knoche, UNL; Amanda Witte, UNL
- 5) Qualitative Insights into Circle Time Practices in Preschool Classrooms**
Paige Wernick, UNL; Clariebelle Gabas, UNL; Rachel Schachter, University of Illinois
- 6) Brain Networks for Reading in Pre- and Beginning School-Aged Readers**
Peiting Tsai, UNL; Caden Anderjaska, UNL; Chen Liang, UNL; Yingying Wang, UNL
- 7) Dynamic Assessment of Preschoolers' Narrative Skills: A Pilot Study**
Ren Bowlin, UNL; Clariebelle Gabas, UNL
- 8) AAC Use in Math Instruction for Students with CCN**
Theresa Szydlik, UNL; Ciara Ousley, UNL
- 9) Home Emotional Climate and Preschoolers' Self-Evaluation Accuracy**
Yu He, UNL; Ali Shull, UNL; Carrie Clark, UNL
- 10) Connections for Kids: EC Educator Skill-Building for Today and Tomorrow**
Lisa Knoche, UNL; Soo-Young Hong, UNL; Holly Wilhite, UNL; Susan Sheridan, UNL; Tammi Hechtner Galvin, UNL; Christen Million, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation; Sami Bradley, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation; Katie Zabel, UNL; Jaci Foged, Nebraska Extension

- 11) LEAF: Advancing Child Well-being Through Nature-Rich Learning Environments**
Anne R. Schutte, UNL; Sarah Karle, UNL; Holly Wilhite, UNL; Julia Torquati, UNL; Matt Brooks, UNL
- 12) LEAF: Methods for Observing Play in Nature-Rich Learning Spaces**
Ivy Simone Auletti-Oliveras, UNL; Simin Kasemi Azghadi, UNL; Jessica Carter, UNL; Anne Schutte, UNL

Families/Parenting

- 13) Parents Under Pressure: Social Media's Impact on Well-being**
Ali Shull, UNL; Carrie Clark, UNL
- 14) From First Concern to Support: Parenting a Child with Disability**
Grace Faltin, UNL; Susan Loveall-Hague, UNL; Ciara Ousley, UNL; Grace Fowler, UNL
- 15) Marital Ambivalence, Conflict and Co-parenting in Children's Adjustment**
Jiabin Lyu, UNL; Patty Kuo, UNL; Weiman Xu, UNL
- 16) Parent Empowerment and Efficacy Differences by Child's Disability Status**
Kaela Di Giulio, UNO; Kamisha Duncan, UNO; Danae Dinkel, UNO; Michaela Schenkelberg, UNO
- 17) The Roles of Parent Motivation and Parenting for Children's Motivation**
Molly Griffin, UNL; Jenna Finch, UNL
- 18) Family Hardship, Staff Well-being and Family Engagement: Trauma Exposure Risk and Protective Factors**
Peter C. Dossen, UNL; NiKetut Wilmayani, UNL; Soo-Young Hong, UNL; Debra Buck, Educare Lincoln

Nutrition/Physical Development

- 19) Examining Preliminary Implementation Findings of Inclusive Play Programs**
Melisa Ontiveros, UNO; Elizabeth Henderson, UNO; Michaela Schenkelberg, UNO; Kailey Snyder, UNO
- 20) Perceived Feasibility of Implementing Young Athletes Program in Early Childhood Settings**
Kumiyo Kai, UNO; Danae Dinkel, UNO; Anna Burks, UNO; Jenny Dong, UNO

21) Investigating Parent-Provider Alignment of Feeding Practices for Children Aged 3 to 5 in Nebraska Family Child Care Homes: A Multi-Level Mixed Logistic Analysis of Cross-Sectional Survey Data

Aya Abu Alrub, UNL; Dipti Dev, UNL

22) Parent-Provider Feeding Practices and Associations with Child Weight Outcomes
Charlene Maria Pereira, UNL; Dipti Dev, UNL; Tirna Purkait, UNL

23) Relationship Between Fussiness, Parent Feeding Practices and Skin Carotenoid Scores
Rachel Nicole Augustine, UNL; Dipti Dev, UNL; Cara Ruggiero, Cambridge; Raynimol Thomas, UNL

24) A Critical Ethnography of Mealtimes in Tribally Affiliated Child Care Programs
Roopan Miriam George, UNL; Dipti Dev, UNL; Vanessa Hamilton, Nebraska Extension; Maeghan Murie-Mazariegos, Nebraska Indian Community College

Measurement/Methods

25) Picture-Based Brain-Computer Interfaces: Supporting Communication for Young Children
Austin Bubak, UNL; Kevin Pitt, UNL

26) Partnering with Tribal Programs and Communities to Advance Early Childhood Research
Michelle Sarche, UNMC

27) Effectiveness of Recruitment Strategies for Rural Childcare Providers in Research
Ashna Chauhan, UNL; Dipti Dev, UNL

28) Seeing Literacy Together: Data Walls as Bridges Between Families and Schools
Deborah Ajeboriogbon, UNL; Amy Napoli, UNL; Sebastian Marin Hine, UNL; Kalleigh Champagne, UNL

29) Statewide Early Childhood Data Pilot: Flexibility, Persistence, Partnership
Laura Fritz, UNMC; Abbie Raikes, UNMC; Jolene Johnson, UNMC

Workforce

30) Differing Effects of the Cultivating Healthy, Intentional, Mindful Educator (CHIME) Intervention on Emotion Regulation Based on Early Childhood Educators' Initial Self-Compassion and Mindfulness Levels
Dania Javaid, UNL; Carrie Clark, UNL; Holly Wilhite, UNL

31) Conceptualizing STEM and Inquiry in Early Childhood Teacher Education

Melany Spiehs, UNO; Debora Wisneski, UNO

32) Statewide Early Childhood Research-to-Practice Resources Availability and Usage
Taylyn E. Petsche, UNL; Jessica Rehtus, UNO; Amanda Witte, UNL

33) Statewide Early Childhood Professional Development: Services Accessed and Remaining Gaps
Amanda Witte, UNL; Amy Colwell Williams, Nebraska Dept. of Education

34) RESPECT: Advancing Educational Pathways for Nebraska's Early Childhood Educators
Julia Torquati, UNL; Simin Kasemi Azghadi, UNL; Victoria Johnson, UNL; Alexa Yunes-Koch, Nebraska Dept. of Education; Lisa Knoche, UNL

Community Partner Displays

- Early Futures Partnership
- Kindred Media
- Nebraska Academy for Early Childhood Research
- Nebraska Academy for Methodology, Analytics and Psychometrics
- Nebraska Association for Infant Mental Health
- Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools
- Nebraska Early Learning Connection
- Nebraska Extension
- Nebraska Head Start Association
- Nurture Nebraska

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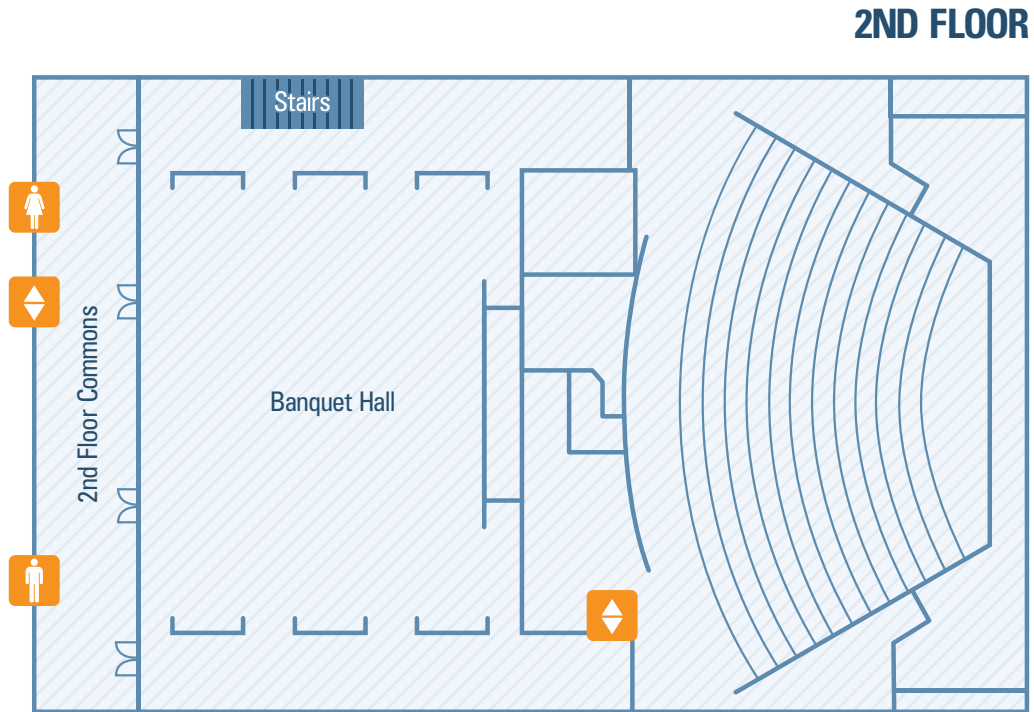
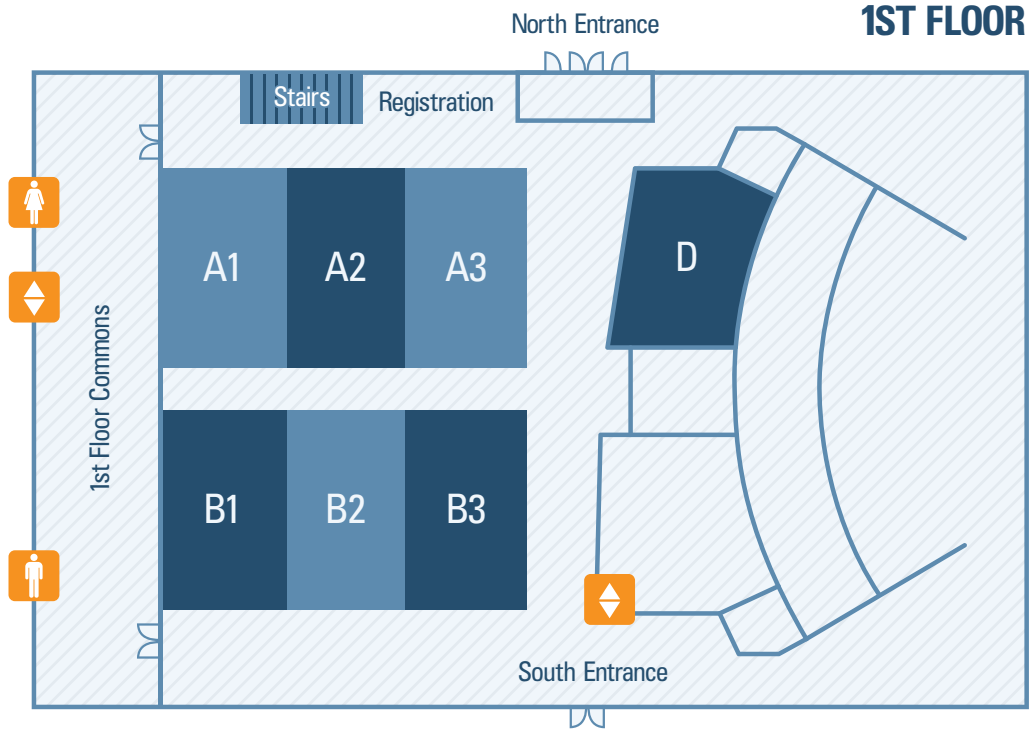
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Summit Map



LEGEND



Women's Bathroom



Men's Bathroom



Elevator



Stairs

