The historic times in which we continue to find ourselves have been challenging, to say the least. But with those challenges has come resilience, innovation, optimism — and opportunity.

As long as the demand for high-quality, interdisciplinary research continues, the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools will strive to translate findings into practice and advance work that addresses the social, behavioral and educational needs facing communities in Nebraska and beyond.

Despite the unusual circumstances of the past year and a half, we have continued to find new and innovative ways to collaborate with our partners in research, policy and practice. The center’s research continues to impact early childhood, racial equity, health and wellness, science and technology literacy, and communities, aligning with the priorities of the College of Education and Human Sciences and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

Projects featured in this report include studies to strengthen teacher-parent partnerships using distance technology; enhance coaching of early intervention personnel who work with toddlers and infants with disabilities; prevent dating violence and problem drinking among LGBTQ+ youth; and explore ways to help children, parents and teachers navigate the ongoing pandemic — locally and globally.

As we move forward through still-uncertain times, CYFS remains focused on its core mission — to impact lives through research that advances learning and development. And we are committed to increasing the impact of our work and solving challenges critical at home and abroad.

Susan M. Sheridan, Ph.D.
Director, Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families & Schools
Associate Dean for Research and Creative Activity, College of Education and Human Sciences
George Holmes University Professor of Educational Psychology

If you wish to support CYFS, please visit: cyfs.unl.edu/donate

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR
The University of Nebraska–Lincoln recently identified seven Grand Challenges – thematic areas in which to focus its expertise and resources – in its N2025 Strategic Plan. The Chancellor’s Office and the Office of Research and Economic Development have committed $40 million over four years to invest in strategic, goal-based solutions.

Meeting the Grand Challenges provides an exciting opportunity for our dedicated team of faculty, staff and students to come together, think boldly and leverage the strengths of UNL. The center is uniquely positioned to build upon existing strengths in research and scholarship; support collaborative efforts with our diverse partners in research, policy and practice; establish and grow new multidisciplinary teams; and support competitive programs and proposals aligned with UNL’s various Grand Challenge themes.

Learn more at:
unl.edu/chancellor/n2025-strategic-plan

The research projects featured in this report are housed in CYFS. Learn more about our research support services at cyfsgrant.unl.edu

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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.

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 & Learning
• Early Education & Development
• Psychosocial Development & Social-Emotional Learning
• Research & Evaluation Methods
• Rural Education & Communities

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“We’re always thinking about the best ways to be responsive to the needs of specific communities,” Sheridan said. “We are convinced that delivering TAPP online is critically important — not only in supporting practitioners as they learn to deliver TAPP, but also the students they serve. Right now, those students are at a higher risk than ever before, so timing is critical.”

The efficacy trial of TAPP Online included 30 rural school-based specialists, or consultants, in Nebraska and Colorado, and 240 students. Through the virtual professional development platform — modules consisting of PowerPoint slides, video examples, practice guides and meeting protocols — consultants learn about TAPP’s principles and procedures associated with the development of family-school partnerships.

As consultants learn TAPP, they are paired with coaches who have completed the training. The coaches and consultants collaborate to ensure TAPP services are being delivered as intended.

Sheridan noted that in many rural communities, consultants may be responsible for several students scattered among multiple schools. “They often have significant caseloads and are expected to do it all because they may be the only person in a small community with mental health training,” she said. “But because they already know the families, teachers and students, and have experience within their school system, TAPP Online will enable them to integrate TAPP in a much more fluid, seamless way.”

Sheridan is particularly optimistic about furthering TAPP in the context of COVID-19. “At the height of the pandemic, a lot of the services students were receiving in schools went dormant, because schools were closed,” she said. “In some areas, even when students returned to school, priorities shifted and many of their mental health needs were no longer being met.”

The ultimate goal, Sheridan said, is to provide direct benefits for rural practitioners — and indirectly help students, parents and teachers through partnerships.

“Of course, the real benefit will be the many other students, teachers and families that a trained TAPP consultant will be able to serve,” Sheridan said. “We expect as they learn and deliver TAPP and see its benefits, they will begin to use it much more broadly. It’s a matter of sustaining the intervention to benefit many others well into the future.”

The project is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences. Along with Sheridan, the project’s co-PIs are Lorey Wheeler, CYFS research associate professor, and Amanda Witte, CYFS research assistant professor.
While great efforts are made to improve children’s well-being in child care environments, far less attention is paid to caregivers’ well-being. Evidence shows compassion- and mindfulness-based programs and strategies enhance both caregiver and child well-being, which may reduce burnout, stress and depression — and lead to children receiving more sensitive and responsive care.

Holly Hatton-Bowers, assistant professor of child, youth and family studies, is collaborating internationally with researchers to adapt compassion- and mindfulness-based programs developed in the U.S. to support caregivers, young children and college students in Recife, Brazil.

The team aims to cultivate resilience, compassion and kindness among caregivers to improve well-being and increase capacity to deliver high-quality care to young children by adapting Nebraska Extension’s Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators (CHIME) program.

CHIME is an eight-week professional development program that provides education and guidance for practicing mindfulness and compassion-based strategies. It also provides time for caregivers to engage in reflective practice and use mindfulness with young children.

Engaging in mindfulness and reflective practice benefits the health and well-being of both providers and young children — including reduced stress, improved emotion regulation, better sleep quality, increased focus and attention, and enhanced relationships.

MINDFULNESS TRAINING AVAILABLE TO BRAZILIAN EDUCATORS THROUGH CHIME

Through the Nebraska-Brazil Early Childhood Partnership, Hatton-Bowers has established relationships with several Brazilian colleagues interested in using compassion- and mindfulness-based strategies in education and medical settings.

Researchers aim to identify whether CHIME’s strategies are acceptable to early childhood caregivers and primary school teachers in Recife, Brazil, an area with children and families dramatically impacted by the country’s 2015-16 Zika outbreak. They also hope to eventually create and evaluate a mindfulness program for college students attending the Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco who plan to work in education.

Hatton-Bowers’ collaborators at Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco include Pompéia Villachan-Lyra, and graduate student Ana Maria da Fonte Alves, who is also working on the project as a trained facilitator and helped translate the CHIME program into Portuguese.

In a recent survey of 337 early childhood teachers working in Recife as part of da Fonte Alves’ thesis, 19% of the teachers and their emotional health was poor or very poor, and 51% reported they were not dealing adequately with their stressors.

Hatton-Bowers began the CHIME professional development pilot in Brazil in fall 2021 after 55 early childhood teachers and caregivers expressed interest in participating in the all-virtual training program. Initially, da Fonte Alves will deliver CHIME to small groups of teachers.

As a former early childhood educator, Hatton-Bowers has long been aware of the importance of teachers leading by example.

“During early childhood, children are rapidly developing important social-emotional skills, and they need caring, attuned adults to help them understand adaptive, healthy ways to regulate emotions,” she said. “The intention of CHIME is to equip instructors and early childhood educators to use mindfulness- and compassion-based strategies to be more emotionally regulated.”

During early childhood, children are rapidly developing important social-emotional skills, and they need caring, attuned adults to help them understand adaptive, healthy ways to regulate emotions.

Children and their teacher, Elizinete Natália Queiroz de Araújo Souza, second from left, examine the garden at EMEI Ignacio in São Paulo, Brazil.

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During early childhood, children are rapidly developing important social-emotional skills, and they need caring, attuned adults to help them understand adaptive, healthy ways to regulate emotions.
For some young children, learning the basics of numeracy — and their parents and teachers — with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Parents and teachers will be asked to report how often they do numeracy activities, and children's numeracy skills will be assessed. Researchers will use video observations of parent-child interactions during those activities to examine both home and child care environments and their associations with children's numeracy development.

"Video observations help us better understand what numeracy activities look like — games, reading, cooking or other math concepts embedded in those activities," Chen said.

Not surprisingly, Chen said, studies show more frequent home numeracy activities better prepare children to begin school. However, she said, research generally focuses on one environment — either the family or child care setting.

"I’m looking at both contexts to better understand how each context supports those skills, and whether they are supported similarly or differently," Chen said.

She noted that general math skills include many concepts — numbers, patterns, shapes, spatial ability — and an early understanding of number concepts and strong numeracy skills are important for future academic success.

Chen aims to identify important aspects of early childhood numeracy environments, such as parental and teachers' early childhood numeracy knowledge and frequency of numeracy activities. Her study includes 120 preschool-aged children — and their parents and teachers — with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Much attention is paid to the work early childhood teachers do in the classroom. But their tasks away from their students are just as essential to children’s learning and development.

Unlike their K-12 counterparts, early childhood teachers lack dedicated time to address demands beyond the direct care of children. Without formalized supports, out-of-classroom time may be sacrificed or interrupted as unexpected issues arise throughout the day.

"I want to know the current state of non-contact time in early childhood education, and hopefully get some information out there to help inform decisions that support teachers," Hamel said.

With a projected shortage of almost 8,000 early childhood teachers across Nebraska, according to First Five Nebraska, recruitment and retention of educators is crucial. Ensuring supportive working conditions is key to retaining those much-needed early childhood teachers.

Using a publicly available National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) database, Hamel randomly selected 650 nationally accredited early childhood programs whose directors will receive requests for their teachers to complete her online survey.

The survey asks open-ended questions to get open-ended responses. One example: "Think about the last time you had non-contact time and tell me what you did."

"I can then follow up with a list of what other teachers did with their non-contact time, and ask them to check what they also did," she said.

Hamel’s findings could potentially improve working conditions for early childhood educators, which could bolster recruitment, retention and professionalization of the early childhood workforce.

Keting Chen, doctoral student in child, youth and family studies, is exploring how home and child care environments are associated with preschoolers’ numeracy skills — the ability to understand and work with numbers — and how parents and teachers can ensure those skills are where they need to be once the children enter school.

Chen’s work is designed to identify factors at home and in child care environments that predict children’s numeracy skills, and how the two settings jointly contribute to early learners’ number comprehension.

"Research indicates young children’s numeracy skills are very important in predicting later academic success," she said. "We have found significant, individual differences among students upon entry into kindergarten, and I’m interested to learn why these differences occur so early."

Chen aims to identify important aspects of early childhood numeracy environments, such as parents’ and teachers’ early childhood numeracy knowledge and frequency of numeracy activities. Her study includes 120 preschool-aged children and their parents and teachers — with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

The project is funded by a grant from the Buffett Early Child- hood Foundation. The project’s principal investigator is Keting Chen, associate professor of child, youth and family studies; and family studies; and Julia Torquati, professor of child, youth and family studies; and family studies; and Amy Napoli, associate professor of child, youth and family studies; and family studies; and Erin Hamel, principal investigator.

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ASSESSING NON-CONTACT TIME AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

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to help service providers ensure their learning experiences are optimal, and that they’re getting what they need,” said Co-PI Rachel Schachter, associate professor of child, youth and family studies.

The pilot implementation of the four-year project includes 10 site-based coaches, 40 early intervention personnel and 160 infants or toddlers with disabilities and their families, who participate in activities that will evaluate the CEI model.

The project uses multiple strategies to deliver coaching services — both in-person and virtual — In the United States, almost 400,000 infants and toddlers who are not developing typically receive services through the federal Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities.

Because these children and their families rely on early intervention services for optimal developmental outcomes, evidence-based solutions are crucial.

Researchers are exploring ways to enhance the services provided by state early intervention personnel who work directly with infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

The project is a collaboration among CYFS, the Nebraska Early Development Network, the Nebraska Department of Education and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

The team will support providers’ professional development by creating and evaluating a systematic, sustainable model to guide coaches who work with early intervention providers. Coaching in Early Intervention (CEI) launched in early 2021.

“We know what works in the field, but getting people to use what works is the hard part,” said Principal Investigator Lisa Knoche, director of the Nebraska Academy for Early Childhood Research and CYFS co-director. “That’s where the coaching framework comes in. We’re implementing a structure that helps early intervention professionals use evidence-based practices with families.”

That professional development, Knoche said, will ensure ongoing, high-quality services for children and their families — and help develop and retain coaches.

Using the CEI model, a master coach will support site-based coaches with one-on-one instruction, including instruction delivered virtually. This professional development includes evidence-based coaching practices, such as relationship-building, observation, planning and goal-setting, feedback, reflection and modeling, and will help site-based coaches tailor their coaching to individual providers’ needs.

Researchers will use the CEI model to identify and evaluate strategies to improve professional development for early intervention programs throughout Nebraska, and to ensure personnel in the field have a sustainable support system.

“Strong research-practice partnerships are born out of sustained, long-term relationships,” Knoche said. “You forge mutual trust and understand one another’s priorities and needs, and that paves the way for continued collaborations.”

The project is funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education. Along with Knoche and Schachter, the research team also includes Gwen Nugent, CYFS research professor, and Susan Sheridan, CYFS director.
FAMILY ADVERSITY LOWERS CHILDREN’S SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL FUNCTIONING

Strong social-emotional skills have been found to impact children’s development and later success.

Research also shows children exposed to adverse experiences — including maternal depression, poverty, parental substance use, physical abuse and neglect — are at risk for having lower social-emotional functioning compared to their peers.

Kelsey McCoy, doctoral candidate in clinical psychology, and David Hansen, professor of psychology, led a recent study to identify whether family risk factors predict rates of change in children’s social and emotional skills, and how classroom experiences — teacher efficacy, curricular adherence and classroom quality — may buffer or enhance those effects.

Findings revealed high rates of familial risk and adversity, with more than half the children having experienced seven or more family risk factors.

“We saw that these children who had increased exposure to adversity or increased familial risk exhibited lower social-emotional skills than their peers.”

Researchers collaborated with preschool teachers from three Head Start centers, who assessed the social-emotional functioning of more than 100 children enrolled. Teachers also completed surveys on their perceptions of their own efficacy and satisfaction in the classroom.

Data on familial risk were collected from clinical records, and additional information was collected through juvenile justice system public records.

After the original longitudinal data collection plan was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, researchers added a qualitative component consisting of semi-structured interviews with teachers focused on their perceptions of facilitators and barriers to social-emotional learning.

Teachers identified several barriers to social-emotional learning, including time constraints, limited parent engagement, language differences and lack of staff support. They also noted protective factors in supporting children exposed to adversity, such as structure and consistency, parent relationships and training.

McCoy will share her findings with Head Start administrators and staff to help enhance teacher training and inform practice changes.

The project is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families.

BOOSTING CHILDREN’S RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF SOCIOECONOMIC RISK

Research suggests preschool children with increased exposure to family adversity exhibit lower social-emotional skills than their peers.

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Hannah Kerby, principal investigator

Many studies will identify settings that put kids at risk for negative outcomes, but then stop there.

Research, Kerby said, is a crucial theme.

“Many studies will identify settings that put kids at risk for negative outcomes, but then stop there,” she said. “I want to go further by understanding what processes are already happening in kids’ lives, into which we can put efforts or intervention to boost their resilience in the face of disadvantaged environments.”

Kerby experienced drastic change during her own childhood in Omaha, when she moved from a low-income to a high-income neighborhood.

“It was pivotal and definitely influenced my development,” she said.

The project is funded by a grant from the Society for the Study of School Psychology Dissertation Grant Award program. Kerby’s doctoral advisor is Susan Sheridan, CYFS director.
For sexual minority youth, dating violence and problem drinking are frequently intertwined, often leading to depression and even suicide. Katie Edwards, associate professor, CYFS and educational psychology, and Heather Littleton, associate professor and director of research operations at the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience at the University of Colorado–Colorado Springs, are developing an online initiative for LGBTQ+ youth ages 15-18 to prevent dating violence and alcohol use.

The program is the first culturally adapted and affirming program designed specifically for sexual minority youth.

Research indicates strong evidence among LGBTQ+ youth that internalized minority stress—for example, feelings of shame about one’s sexual orientation and wishing it was different—and identity concealment, or reluctance to come out to others, increases risk for alcohol use and dating violence.

“Research shows traditional prevention programs that work for heterosexual youth don’t necessarily work for sexual minority youth,” Edwards said. “We want to create a program that will not only reduce dating violence and alcohol use, but also provide hope for the future and ultimately save lives.”

Building resilience among LGBTQ+ youth, Edwards said, relies on reducing minority stress while bolstering LGBTQ+ sense of community. That, along with acquiring skills to promote healthy dating relationships and making wise decisions, she said, could ultimately reduce rates of dating violence, problem drinking and suicidal thoughts.

“We have consistently found that minority stress is a robust predictor of numerous negative outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth,” Edwards said. “At the same time, we recognize the tremendous resilience LGBTQ+ youth have. This program will capitalize on youth’s strengths.”

The program includes eight 45-minute telehealth sessions led by LGBTQ+ facilitators, which will be developed with help from LGBTQ+ youth and experts in the field.

The program features games, videos, breakout rooms and other experiential activities—all designed to enable participants to develop skills to build resilience and reduce negative outcomes, such as dating violence and alcohol use.

There is also a voluntary social media support network to help build a sense of community among participants.

Youth also receive information about resources to help them learn about ways to safely get help and connect with LGBTQ+ communities.

Once finalized, the program will be rolled out to 200 youth nationwide. Participants will be recruited on social media, with advertisements targeting LGBTQ+ youth across the country, particularly in remote or rural areas.

“In rural communities, where LGBTQ+ resources are scarce, there is a dire need for programs that provide youth with resources and support,” Edwards said. “For some, it will be the first time connecting openly with LGBTQ+ youth and adults.”

Edwards said the program puts the LGBTQ+ community’s strength and resilience at the core of the program.

“We want to give youth hope for the future, so they know things will get better and that there are communities that will accept them,” she said. “Ultimately, if we find this program is working, we can expand it to reach countless LGBTQ+ youth across the country.”

The project is funded through the National Institutes of Health’s National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). Along with Edwards and Littleton, project collaborators at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln include Alex Farquhar-Leicester, doctoral student in counseling psychology; Jania Marshall, research associate; and Victoria Mauer, postdoctoral scholar. Clayton Neighbors at the University of Houston is a co-investigator.

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BRAZIL RESEARCH EMPOWERS VULNERABLE FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES AMID ONGOING COVID-19 CRISIS

Efforts to help vulnerable communities are most effective when they actively engage community members, agencies and other stakeholders in solving complex social problems.

In many parts of Brazil, communities must find their own ways to address the needs of children and families with limited resources. These needs have intensified since early 2020, as COVID-19 quickly spread throughout the country.

Cody Hollist, associate professor of child, youth and family studies, is working to improve educational outcomes for children and youth living in Cachoeirinha, a high-risk, low-resource suburb of Porto Alegre, Brazil. He is collaborating with Bruno Seibel, postdoctoral researcher of Pontificia Universidade Catolica do Rio Grande do Sul and the project’s principal investigator.

Using a community-based participatory research approach, Hollist and Paul Springer, associate dean of Porto Alegre, Brazil. He is collaborating with Bruno Seibel, postdoctoral researcher of Pontificia Universidade Catolica do Rio Grande do Sul and the project's principal investigator.

Researchers are working to identify the needs of relationships among families and community agencies, and their collective abilities and resources to address those needs – particularly, the mental health and self-efficacy of adolescents.

Before the pandemic, Hollist said, Cachoeirinha adolescents were more positive about the future.

“They reported having good friends and family who they could rely on,” he said. “This was a powerful sense of community, which was a protective factor for them. They generally had hope for the future.”

But after more than a year of the pandemic, with Brazil particularly hard hit, optimism has faded.

“Family solidarity, social support and relationships, self-efficacy and hope for the future have been hugely impacted by the pandemic,” Hollist said. “If a 15-year-old has no hope for future, their investment in education, avoiding drugs and staying out of trouble decline.”

Seibel said she is concerned about even greater problems emerging in the poor communities.

“In this neighborhood, we have a high rate of drug trafficking, with adolescents becoming involved as early as age 11 or 13,” she said. “I’m concerned there will be an increase in drug trafficking, as well as school dropout rates.”

Since early 2020, because of the pandemic, the team has conducted research by phone and through local medical clinics, police and schools — to improve outcomes for youth and families in vulnerable communities.

According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, side effects of sleep deprivation include lack of concentration, attention deficits, longer reaction times, distractibility, lack of coordination, poor decision-making and forgetfulness.

For farmers and ranchers who routinely work around machinery or livestock, any of these side effects can lead to injury – or worse.

Nebraska researchers are leading a project to collect objective sleep data from an agricultural worker population in Nebraska and the Midwest to investigate sleep quality among farmers and ranchers during peak and non-peak seasons.

Researchers aim to use findings to develop educational outreach and intervention programs to reduce risk of accident and injury.

The project is part of the ongoing Nebraska-Brazil Early Childhood Partnership, co-led by Hollist and Prokasky.

As anyone who has ever experienced insomnia knows, the lack of a good night’s sleep can make for a difficult morning.

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Nebraska researchers are leading a project to collect objective sleep data from an agricultural worker population in Nebraska and the Midwest to investigate sleep quality among farmers and ranchers during peak and non-peak seasons.

Researchers aim to use findings to develop educational outreach and intervention programs to reduce risk of accident and injury.

The project is part of the ongoing Nebraska-Brazil Early Childhood Partnership, co-led by Hollist and Prokasky.

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LITERACY A LIFELINE FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Each year, approximately 7 million U.S. students receive special education services. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 25% of these students have an intellectual or developmental disability (IDD), such as challenges with functioning, intelligence or conditions including Down syndrome or autism spectrum disorder. Although special education services are designed to help students succeed in the general curriculum and independent living, little is known about literacy development within this population.

Nebraska researchers Susan Loveall, assistant professor of special education and communication disorders, and Derek Rodgers, research assistant professor of special education and communication disorders, are developing a detailed literacy profile to identify strengths and weaknesses in reading, writing and cognition skills among students with IDD.

The study includes 50 students, ages 13-21, with IDD. Researchers are recruiting participants with the help of area school districts and groups representing children with autism, Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities.

No teachers will be surveyed or interviewed — only students with IDD. Students will complete tests to evaluate their reading, writing, cognition and vocabulary skills. Data will be collected online, and findings will provide a clearer picture of the unique literacy abilities of students with IDD.

"For so long, the thought was that people with IDD could not learn to read or write," Loveall said. "Of course, that’s wrong — they can. But so long, we’re behind so long, we’re behind." Loveall notes that traditionally has focused on teaching functional life skills so they can be independent.

"But you cannot be independent without reading and writing skills," he said. "You may be able to tie your shoes or make your coffee in the morning, but if you cannot read or communicate through writing, there’s a vast avenue of independence that’s inaccessible to you."

The project is funded by an Office of Research and Economic Development Faculty Seed Grant. The project is funded by an Office of Research and Economic Development COVID-19 Rapid Response Grant.

As the pandemic peaked in 2020, former President Donald Trump and some members of his administration, as well as members of Congress and the media, frequently referred to the virus as the “Chinese” or “Wuhan” virus.

Catalano and Wang examined how political rhetoric can shape policies, focusing on visual and verbal strategies used in U.S. media discourse to communicate about COVID-19, and how that communication influenced public opinion of the AAPI community.

The yearlong anti-China/Chinese discourse online — and the resulting conversations online — revealed more evidence of social media’s powerful influence on public opinion and the potential to stoke racist discourse online.

Theresa Catalano, associate professor of teaching, learning and teacher education, and Peiwen Wang, TLTE research and teaching assistant, analyzed the effects of such discourse regarding the coronavirus in a variety of news and social media sources, as well as public comments and conversations connected to these sources.

"We found that social media can be sites of resistance, but they are also sites where solidarity and unifying of racist thought can occur," Catalano said. Since finishing their study, Catalano and Wang have conducted several public presentations, including several for Lincoln Public Schools students and teachers.

"Many of the non-AAPI students in our classes were completely unaware that physical and verbal violence was happening as a result of COVID-19 and anti-Chinese rhetoric online, since it had never happened to them," Catalano said.

Catalano and Wang aim to use their findings to spread awareness about racism against the AAPI community — and to develop anti-racist curriculum for K-12 teachers.

The project is funded by the UNL Office of Research and Economic Development COVID-19 Rapid Response Grant.
With the world becoming more complex each day, the importance of civic knowledge and community engagement is on the rise—especially among younger generations.

Nebraska researchers are leading a project designed to provide civics, entrepreneurship and leadership education to underserved youth through an innovative learning program based on interactive online games and simulations.

The five-year project, Youth Arise, targets children living in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods. Participants in the pilot curriculum include at-risk seventh- and eighth-graders from Douglas and Scotts Bluff counties in Nebraska.

The curriculum eventually will be adapted for after-school programs and integrated into 4-H Extension programming.

The principal investigators are Maria de Guzman, chairperson of the Department of Textiles, Merchandising and Fashion Design, and Evan Choi, professor of social work at California Baptist University and former children and poverty Extension specialist in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies.

Kieu-Anh Do, project coordinator, worked with Nebraska Extension 4-H Scotts Bluff County to lead the first in-person cohort of 10 students through the course in July 2021 in Scottsbluff, Nebraska.

The students were members of the local FIRST Lego League, a global program sponsored by FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology), a non-profit designed to inspire young people’s interest and participation in science and technology, and Lego, the famed maker of toy blocks and kits.

“The students were very engaged, and their parents appreciate this program,” Choi said.

The Youth Arise curriculum is designed for a five-day summer camp program with a variety of interactive and educational activities, including field trips, site visits, documentary film viewing, team building, idea brainstorming and group discussions. The program’s graduates then visit the Nebraska State Capitol or a local legislative office to share their ideas with lawmakers and other stakeholders.

Participants use a game-based learning model designed to help them engage with topics and ideas through interaction and simulation, rather than the more conventional textbooks, classroom teaching and assignments. Two evidence-based curricula are used—iCivics and Lean LaunchPad.

iCivics is an online simulation tool that includes dozens of online games and other learning tools to promote citizenship and civic engagement. Lean LaunchPad is an experimental learning tool designed to improve entrepreneurial problem-solving skills.

A third curriculum, Youth Participatory Action Research, was recently added to give youth the skills to take action and advocate for change after they have gained civic knowledge.

After their baseline assessments, participants complete one-, three- and six-month follow-up assessments to measure program outcomes.

Along with enabling youth with the knowledge and skills they need to strengthen their communities, Youth Arise promotes STEM education and racial equity.

The project is funded by USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Along with Choi, de Guzman and Do, other research team members include Lane Hunsaker, assistant professor, textiles, merchandising and fashion design, and Gilbert Anaya, professor, Family, youth and Consumer Sciences.

The students were very engaged, and their parents appreciate this program.

YOUTH ARISE ENCOURAGES CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, ENTREPRENEURSHIP
A school’s external controls include federal, state achievement, graduation rates and equity in learning. that such measures have mixed effects on student and hold schools accountable — research indicates practices used to measure student performance — grading individual schools can be complicated. When it comes to measuring student outcomes, STUDY EXPLORES HOW SCHOOL school’s principal, can mediate the impact of external controls. Internal school controls, such as guidelines implemented by a school’s principal, can mediate the impact of external controls’ impact. To ensure every student succeeds, Kim said, it is crucial to know how accountability controls at multiple levels affect equitable learning in schools. Debate continues over whether such controls make sense with shifting policies. For example, after the No Child Left Behind Act promoted federal controls over teaching and learning, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 transferred significant authority back to states. “We are focused on equity measures instead of other achievements, such as graduation rates or academic scores, which have been measured in many previous studies,” Kim said. “Our main focus is on the opportunities students have to learn.” Edwards and Romann Herrington, cultural outreach manager at the Interpersonal Violence Research Laboratory, aim to develop and evaluate a communitywide, culturally grounded initiative to prevent violence and reduce health disparities among Native American LGBTQ2S youth. They will collaborate with community partners to recruit participants — 20 Native American LGBTQ2S youth (ages 14-17) and 20 adults (age 18 and older) with at least one sibling who is a Native American LGBTQ2S youth, all living on a South Dakota reservation. Pilot data will be collected through art-based activities with LGBTQ2S Native American youth, and via talking circles with the youth and adults. Martinez will work with four high school freshmen to design a mathematics youth participatory action research (YPAR) summer program for Lincoln youth. The 10-day summer program’s curriculum — co-authored by the youth and aimed at middle school-aged youth — will be enacted in partnership with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Lincoln/Lancaster County. YPAR is an approach that seeks to provide solutions to real issues impacting youth and their communities by investigating the root causes. Summer program participants will engage in rich multicultural mathematics while learning about issues in their school and community. Middle school students will be trained as researchers to investigate the issues they identify and to provide solutions to issues impacting their learning.
The graphic below highlights the total dollar amount of external and internal grants supported by CYFS since its inception in 2004.

**Sources of Funding**

The chart below shows the total dollar amount of grants supported by CYFS since its inception in 2004, and the proportion of funding through federal, state, foundation and internal (i.e., University of Nebraska) sources.

- Federal (115 grants)
- State (40 grants)
- Foundation (75 grants)
- Internal (65 grants)

Percentages rounded to nearest 1%

**Cumulative External Grant Dollars & Program of Excellence Support**

The line graph below depicts the total dollar amount of external funding (i.e., federal, state, and foundation) supported by CYFS, relative to Program of Excellence funding support from the University of Nebraska.

**Research Impact**

The figures below show indicators of cumulative research impact for CYFS.

- Total grants submitted: 792
- Total grants funded: 295
- Grant submission success rate (based on known decisions): 41%
- Return rate to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln for every $1 invested: $21.60

Internal grants funded

$1,347,515

External grants funded

$95,873,464
ACTIVE GRANTS & CONTRACTS

The following grants and contracts received new or ongoing funding during 2020-21.

Federal Awards

Administration for Children and Families

Creating Healthy, Vibrant, Whole Child Education Experiences through Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

PIs: Lorey Wheeler, Marc Goodrich

Funding Source: U.S. Department of Education

Getting Ready for School

Getting Ready Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Subaward Through Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

PIs: Marc Goodrich, Susan Sheridan

Getting Ready Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Subaward Through Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

PIs: Susan Sheridan, Lisa Knoche

Getting Ready for School

Help Me Grow Early Childhood Initiative (subaward through University of Nebraska)

PIs: Natalie Koziol, Marc Goodrich

Funding Source: University of Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services

Help Me Grow Nebraska

Help Me Grow Nebraska (subaward through The W.K. Kellogg Foundation)

PIs: Natalie Koziol, Lisa Knoche

Funding Source: W.K. Kellogg Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PI: Amanda Thomas

Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PI: Lorey Wheeler

Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PI: Susan Sheridan

Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PI: Jenna Finch

Funding Source: University of Nebraska-Lincoln

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PI: Dawn Davis

Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PI: Jeong-Kyun Choi

Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PIs: Edward Daly III, Therese Mathews

Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PIs: Maria Rosario de Guzman, Jeong-Kyun Choi

Funding Source: UNESCO

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PIs: Kimclaw, Peiwen Wang

Funding Source: UNL Office of Research and Economic Development, COVID-19 Rapid Response Grant Program

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PIs: Kenneth Nolen, Claudia Ryan, Maria Rosario de Guzman, Janet Patel

Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PIs: Kathleen Plain, Maria Rosario de Guzman

Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PIs: Jeong-Kyun Choi, Maria Rosario de Guzman

Funding Source: UNESCO

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PIs: Natalie Koziol, Marc Goodrich

Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PIs: Natalie Koziol, James Bovaird

Funding Source: National Science Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PIs: Amanda Thomas, Guy Trainin, Wendy Smith

Funding Source: University of Nebraska, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PIs: Amanda Witte

Funding Source: National Institutes of Health

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PIs: Edward Daly III, Therese Mathews

Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PIs: Surin Kim

Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

PIs: Elizabeth Green, Maria Rosario de Guzman

Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators and Families in Nebraska

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Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

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Funding Source: UNESCO

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Funding Source: UNESCO
to engage in valuable research exchanges, professional development, technical sciences. Research affiliates are actively engaged with CYFS and are integral to our interdisciplinary research community in the social, behavioral and educational sciences. Nebraskan Laboratory, Nebraska Academy for Early Childhood Research, University of Nebraska Medical Center, and the University of Nebraska system who make significant contributions to Nebraska’s support Programs for Early Learning Network-Lead, Nebraska Academy for Early Childhood Research, TAPP para Familias Latinas, INSIGHTS in Nebraska, Nebraska Academy for Methodology, James Bovaird, Research Faculty, Neva Hall, Professor Support Assistant, Rebecca Voigtlander, Grant Specialist, Braxton Lindhorst, Administrative Coordinator, Seth Teager, Communications & Media Manager, Dana Ludvik, Editor, Chuck Green, Writer, Kyleigh Skaggs, Designer & Photographer. Photography Credit: Craig Chandler (p. 23), Erin Hamel (p. 9), Chuck Green (p. 8, 13), Dana Ludvik (p. 6).