

## Early Childhood Education Community Engagement Network



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### **Vision Statement**

A network of UNCG early childhood professionals and community members weaving together policy, research, and practice to impact North Carolina, the Southeast, and beyond.

### **Mission Statement**

The Early Childhood Education Community Engagement Network (ECECEN) is an innovative model of early childhood research and education based on the principle of community and university collaborative engagement. Developed by faculty in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, the Network seeks to create and support opportunities for faculty, early childhood practitioners, community members, and families to collaborate with one another in order to influence policy and practice in the early childhood field. The focus of the Network is to use applied research, to change and enhance education, develop new training models, provide evidence to policymakers, and connect classroom and research with community partners to collaboratively test and develop innovative, state-of-the-art intervention practices. The Network will keep UNCG as a leader in early childhood education research and development in North Carolina and position the department for academic leadership through such efforts nationally.

## **Overview**

The Early Childhood Education Community Engagement Network broadly encompasses a variety of research, training, and leadership initiatives, with the early childhood community and its workforce conceptualized not simply as consumers, but also as partners. The Network focuses on Quality Enhancement, Leadership Development, Professional Development & Teacher Education, and Equity Access to Early Childhood Programs, with specific projects in these areas described below. All of the projects are heavily dependent on the Guilford County Community and, for some projects state and national early childhood practitioners and policy makers, as partners in the overall quest of improving the quality of early learning environments for young children and their teachers. Although the projects are described separately below, they are integrally related as the work among the early childhood faculty at UNCG is highly collaborative. Indeed, one of the reasons for the Network is to provide a cohesive structure that highlights the many connections across the various initiatives in order to create efficiency in the research and training missions of the Birth-Kindergarten Program. The policy focus of the Network is fundamental to its applied research emphasis and will be increasingly disseminated via electronic media. Below, some of the projects of the Network are highlighted.

### **1. Quality Enhancement**

#### **The North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project (NCRLAP)**

The North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project (NCRLAP) is a collaboration started in 1999 between the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) and the Department of Human Development and Family Studies within the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. NCRLAP's purpose is to conduct assessments for child care centers and family child care homes attempting to earn a higher star rating in the North Carolina Star Rated License system. The NC Star Rated License helps families to select child care by denoting whether programs have earned from one to five stars. The number of stars is determined by points earned in two components: Program Standards and Staff Education Standards. Program Standards points are awarded as programs meet basic licensing, enhanced standards, and ratio requirements. It is in this area that Environment Rating Scale assessments are used. Child care programs with higher

rating scale scores can earn more Program Standards points. The 43 staff members associated with NCRLAP support the completion of approximately 240 Environment Rating Scale assessments and reports per month or over 2800 assessments per year. NCRLAP also provides outreach training across the state and contributes to the knowledge of the field in the area of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems across the country. For additional information regarding the project please visit [www.ncrlap.org](http://www.ncrlap.org).

### **Measure Development Project—Race to the Top – Early Childhood Quality Improvement Pathway System (EQuIPS)**

Through the Measure Development Project, a valid and reliable program-level measure to evaluate early childhood program quality within a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) is being designed and tested. The focus of the measure is on children’s experiences in early education and care settings, what teachers offer to facilitate those experiences and how programs are designed and organized to enhance those experiences. This measure will: 1) integrate aspects of program quality not emphasized by any single measure in use by states; 2) include structural and process features at the program and classroom level that have been linked to positive child outcomes; and 3) capture a range or continuum of program quality. Central to the design is the ability to maintain efficiency and reliability and avoid redundancy within QRISs, thus the measure is intended to focus on aspects of quality not assessed by other regulatory agencies, build upon the foundation of licensing, and recognize the variety of ways in which programs can demonstrate quality. The measure is being developed through a University Consortium that includes researchers from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, the University of Delaware, and the University of Kentucky.

### **Education, Quality Improvement, and Professional Development (EQuIPD)**

Through six interconnected activities child care teachers, family child care providers and administrators in Guilford County will experience professional development and educational planning, peer coaching, curriculum development experiences, director leadership, evaluation of learning contexts for teachers, and quality enhancement for early care and education facilities. Faculty in the Birth through

Kindergarten program provide leadership to the project through advising and professional development, peer coaching, curriculum and leadership training, and consultation.

### **Effective Teaching and Classrooms**

Work continues using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) at the varying age levels, pre-k, toddler, and infant. Training and projects focus on both in-service and pre-service teachers. Discussions focus on using the CLASS for professional development and innovative methods for delivery professional development, feedback, and coaching.

### **Teacher Satisfaction Inventory and Contentment in Child Care**

Faculty in the BK Program in Human Development Studies have developed alternative measures to examine the many facets of child care quality including the satisfaction and well-being of teachers and the “happiness” of children. Fondly known as the “Happy Teacher” and the “Happy Child” scales, they are contributing interesting findings to the child care quality research base.

### **Early Learning and Development Standards**

Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) outline expectations for what children should know and be able to do before they enter kindergarten. Within the past decade every state in the country has developed and/or revised a set of ELDS for preschool-age children, and almost every state has developed ELDS for infants and toddlers. In partnership with the National Center for Children and Families at Teachers College, Columbia University, faculty from HDFS have completed five national studies to examine the content of states’ ELDS and how the standards are being used. Our faculty have also provided technical assistance to over half of the states, including North Carolina, to support their efforts to develop high quality ELDS, and are currently involved in analyses that will support the work of North Carolina and 9 additional states who have formed a Consortium to develop a common assessment that will be used across states.

## **Early Childhood Assessments**

HDFS faculty conduct policy research to better understand how assessments are being used in state-level early childhood programs to gauge children's progress and plan effective learning opportunities. Using results from this research, faculty have provided technical assistance to numerous states regarding their Kindergarten Entry Assessment policies, and are currently providing guidance for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's effort to develop and pilot a Kindergarten through Third Grade (K-3) formative assessment.

## **Quality of Outdoor Environments for Young Children**

High quality outdoor environments are important for the growth, development, and well-being of children and families. A series of research projects over the years by HDFS faculty emphasize the value of assessing outdoor learning environments for young children and using these results to make changes in these settings. Most recent work in this area is examining children's play in outdoor environments in relation to environmental affordance and design.

## **2. Leadership Development**

### **Evaluation of Cultural Competence Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC)**

This project was a collaborative venture designed to provide leadership for the evaluation component of a larger project housed at Winston Salem State University, the Cultural Competence Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC). The purpose of the overall project was to increase the competence of early childhood professionals to provide culturally and linguistically responsive family engagement, teaching, and assessments, as well as to promote culturally and linguistically responsive programs and state policies. Through a combination of on-line self-assessment surveys and individual interviews, data was collected to better understand how to facilitate learning and provide effective strategies to enhance the cultural competence of early childhood professionals.

### **3. Professional Development**

#### **Child Care Education Program (CCEP)**

The Child Care Education Program provides a laboratory school setting for university students enrolled in the Birth-Kindergarten and Early Care and Education options in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies. The program offers three campus locations where 82 children ages 3 months to 5 years of age are enrolled in six age appropriate classrooms. Children and families enrolled reflect the diversity of the surrounding community and include children with and without identified disabilities, varying socio-economic levels, family structures, and ethnicities. The program offers a high quality education setting for young children, a place for university students to gain practical experience in their profession, a resource for faculty research, and a model of best practices for the community. For additional information about CCEP, please visit <http://ccep.uncg.edu>

#### **Practicum Experience Project (PEP)**

The Practicum Experience Project (PEP) seeks to explore and understand specific components of the practicum experience for pre-service teachers in early care and education and their cooperating teachers. Specifically this project focuses on the development and exploration of a model as the foundation for teacher education that supports the development of highly effective teachers for young children. The aims of the project are (1) to collect data from early childhood education pre-service teachers in practicum classrooms about their perceptions of their relationships, comfort in the classroom, feelings of self-efficacy, communication around feedback, and support for teaching practices and (2) to collect data from cooperating teachers about their perceptions of relationships with practicum students and demographic information. Information gathered from this study will provide information to guide the development of effective practicum experiences for practicum students and support cooperating teachers in their mentoring and communication with students in our efforts to develop high quality teachers for young children.

### **Cooperating Teacher Collaboration and Development**

The Cooperating Teacher Collaboration and Development includes faculty from HDFS and SES focused on developing the knowledge base and mentoring skills of the cooperating teachers working with students in our BK/ECE program. This group has developed an orientation module for cooperating teachers and collected preliminary data on the usefulness of this module. The group also has distributed a needs assessment about the information topics that would be useful to cooperating teachers to have access to a module for further information.

### **4. Equity Access**

#### **The Center for Research on Hispanic Children and Families**

The Center for Research on Hispanic Children and Families is a joint endeavor of Child Trends, Abt Associates and several universities including UNCG, NYU, and the University of Maryland. The Center has received a 5-year federal grant to conduct, translate, and provide research-based information to U.S. government-funded programs supporting Hispanic families and children in three priority areas: poverty reduction and self-sufficiency, healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, and early care and education. UNCG faculty are leading the Center efforts focused on understanding and enhancing Hispanic families' access and utilization of early childhood program and services. Through a range of activities (including primary data collection; secondary data analyses; research, policy and practice oriented products; and, capacity building) projects will: 1) reveal points of connection and disconnection between characteristics of programs, providers, communities, and families; and 2) identify ways that these entities can work in concert to support the development of low-income, Hispanic children.