

# IMPRINTS

*evidence of our presence*



CYFS  nebraska  
center for  
research  
children youth families & schools

Annual Report  
2009-2010



# MESSAGE FROM THE CYFS DIRECTOR



The Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools comprises more than 100 faculty, staff and students from an array of orientations and disciplines. Collectively, we have organized and executed many research studies from the initial kernel of an idea to dissemination of findings. We have engaged partners from practice, policy and research communities to identify relevant questions, conceptualize needed projects, and uncover important answers. The past 12 months have been no exception. So what is it that binds us together? The answer is simple: people.

People have always been, and continue to be, at the center of everything of we do. Their well-being serves as the compass that directs our plans and pursuits, driving us toward the type of creative thinking that reveals answers to novel questions. With their welfare as our inspiration, we aspire to make an impact that will remain for years, decades, even lifetimes to come – an impact characterized by camaraderie and connections, comprehension and compassion, curiosity and commitment. We seek to leave lasting imprints – evidence of our presence – on the lives of our



community partners. In the process, those communities leave imprints just as enduring as our own, offering unique insights that enhance our perspective, our passion and our principles.

Thanks to their support, and yours, we look forward to another 12 months of tireless work on behalf of children, youth, families and schools. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy this glimpse at the imprints we've left during the past year's journey.



**Susan M. Sheridan, PhD**

George Holmes University Professor & Willa Cather Emeritus Professor of Educational Psychology  
Director, Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools  
Director, National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed)



## OUR MISSION

To advance the conduct of high-quality interdisciplinary research to promote the intellectual, behavioral, and social-emotional development and functioning of individuals across educational, familial, and community contexts. Central to this is enhancing our understanding of how these complex systems work dynamically to support the future of our nation.

## ABOUT CYFS

We create the context for researchers, in partnership with community stakeholders, to establish reliable findings; inform and influence the knowledge base; translate findings into evidence-based practices; and provide scientifically-grounded education, leadership and outreach. The infrastructure of CYFS supports the establishment of prevailing initiatives to impact the lives of children, youth, families and schools.



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# EARLY EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT







## EARLY EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Children are our future – and enriching early education and development is essential for leaving significant, meaningful imprints on their futures. CYFS embraces all facets of early development, from cognition and social-emotional well-being to language and behavior. Our faculty and student affiliates address both typical development and the progression of children who are at risk or have special needs.

Because children shape and are shaped by social and cultural systems, our research programs investigate how children function within homes, schools, peer groups and communities. CYFS researchers also examine the influence of the countless interactions and relationships born of membership in these systems.

Consistent with our focus on making differences in children's lives, CYFS is involved in applied research on early childhood education programs, child care services, social-behavioral interventions, family relationships, and family-caregiver partnerships. We position children for academic success by establishing strong connections between families and schools, while also striving to improve those schools by preparing and supporting their teachers.



# REACHING FOR THE SUMMIT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH



CYFS researchers have dedicated years to advancing the science of early childhood education and intervention. The inception of the CYFS Summit on Research in Early Childhood marked a major step forward in faculty affiliates' efforts to communicate that science to those who can use it.

Held in April, the inaugural one-day summit was launched for the purposes of disseminating cutting-edge findings, bridging the gap between research and practice, and establishing connections among the roughly 100 statewide researchers, practitioners and policymakers in attendance.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln President James Milliken provided opening remarks on NU's position as a leader in the early childhood field, followed by a keynote

address from The Pennsylvania State University's Dr. Karen Bierman. The Summit then featured 12 presentations from CYFS faculty affiliates, who discussed their investigations into early childhood learning and development, family engagement, and professional development for early childhood practitioners.

In the area of early childhood and development, researchers presented empirical work that spanned identifying and addressing challenges in early learning, accounting for rural and urban distinctions when implementing programs, and moving beyond traditional age guidelines for development. They also addressed the need for research on interactions among language, emotions and



The inaugural CYFS Summit on Research in Early Childhood provided a forum for researchers in early childhood and development, family engagement, and professional development.

behavior.

Family engagement investigators cited original research findings on the effectiveness of early learning programs and interventions that promote family members as children's first teachers. After acknowledging that they have begun to identify successful intervention practices, faculty stressed the importance of determining how interventions influence youth in various real-life settings and conditions.

Professional development researchers urged colleagues to shift their focus from training to include actual implementation among early childhood education coaches, teachers and parents. They advocated investigating the foundations of effective home visitation programs, developing

a model of practice, and communicating its purposes to policymakers. They also encouraged soliciting coaches' feedback and developing assessment tools.

The event concluded with a roundtable discussion centered on linking early childhood research, policy and practice, facilitated in part by College of Education and Human Sciences Dean Marjorie Kostelnik.

"The summit generated great discussion and ideas that will advance the work being conducted," said CYFS affiliate Dr. Brandy Clarke, "and with continued efforts, make Nebraska a leader in the area of early childhood research."





## BREAKING GROUND INDOORS, BLAZING TRAILS OUTDOORS

They may take different approaches and use different tools, but CYFS faculty affiliates working in early childhood education and development all seek the same end – brighter, healthier and happier children.

This multifaceted array of research is evident when comparing the ongoing studies of Drs. Julia Torquati and Soo-Young Hong. Whereas Torquati examines children's development and Hong aims to enhance their classrooms, each holds promise for breaking new ground in improving the lives of our nation's youngest citizens. Their efforts demonstrate that when it comes to leaving lasting imprints, it's best to explore every path.

## Mother Nature and Children

It is widely believed that urban sprawl and technological diffusion have diminished children's exposure to the outdoors. Indeed, recent research suggests that children ages 3 to 9 spend just 30 minutes per week playing outside.

With assistance from fellow CYFS affiliates, Dr. Julia Torquati is investigating the potential benefits of natural environments on children's attention, memory, self-regulation, socialization and communication. Along with other age groups, she will compare these effects in preschoolers who are developmentally typical or have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

The project blazes several new trails. Though previous studies have found numerous benefits of spending time outdoors, Torquati's is the first to measure physiological markers such as heart rate and respiration – thus providing a deeper understanding of nature's connection to cognition and behavior. The project also becomes the first to examine nature's impact on the social and communication skills of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, and could positively change the way schools relate to these students.

## The Science of Teaching Science

Despite repeated attempts to close the gap, U.S. children continue to lack the science understanding, vocabulary and problem-solving skills of their international peers. Studies show that many U.S. schools do not teach science concepts to young children, and researchers have yet to determine the best strategies for doing so.

Dr. Soo-Young Hong is tackling this issue by comparing the effectiveness of two instructional methods – one that emphasizes freedom to explore scientific concepts, and another that proposes adding more teacher guidance

alongside children's exploration. Hong's study concentrates on 4- and 5-year-olds but will have important implications for children from birth to age 8.

Hong's work also pushes boundaries methodologically and conceptually. Her study employs randomized trials, which are rare in science education research and may provide more confident results regarding which strategies work best for teaching science to young children.



“TWO APPROACHES TO TEACHING  
YOUNG CHILDREN SCIENCE  
CONCEPTS / VOCABULARY AND  
SCIENTIFIC PROBLEM-SOLVING  
SKILLS”

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:  
DR. SOO-YOUNG HONG, DEPARTMENT OF  
CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY STUDIES

TIMEFRAME: 2009 - 2011



“FRESH AIR AND SUNSHINE:  
THE SCIENCE UNDERPINNING  
THE BENEFITS OF NATURE FOR  
CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT”

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:  
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DR. SUSAN CHURCHILL  
DR. SOO-YOUNG HONG  
DR. MICHELLE RUPIPER

ADDITIONAL COLLABORATORS:  
DR. TERRY STENTZ  
DR. CAMILLA RICE  
DR. ROGER RISS

TIMEFRAME: 2010 - 2012



# ACADEMIC INTERVENTION AND LEARNING





## ACADEMIC INTERVENTION AND LEARNING

At CYFS, education research is more than just a proverbial two-way street – it's a dynamic intersection of people, processes and philosophies. In order to navigate it, we focus on investigating programs that address student learning, curriculum, teacher development and classroom environments. Our researchers thus employ a variety of methodological approaches that target the implementation and evaluation of a wide range of instructional and educational programs.

Center researchers seek to assist struggling students by developing reading, spelling and math interventions across the continuums of age, background and performance. Our researchers analyze the use of data in educational planning processes and investigate the mechanisms underlying effective intervention models. We work to expand the reach of the most successful interventions and examine students' responsiveness to them.

CYFS pays special attention to learning processes associated with literacy and numeracy, continually studying new ways to enhance these basic and complex skills among students. Our affiliates also design unique programs that demonstrate the connections between classroom learning and opportunities found well beyond school grounds – where our most enduring imprints can be found.



# PROMOTING READING FUNDAMENTALS

As any reading teacher can attest, literacy involves much more than just learning the alphabet and memorizing vocabulary. To become astute readers, young children must develop effective strategies for understanding the messages being conveyed on a page.

Recent research indicates that many students are struggling to do so, with 33% of U.S. fourth-graders and 25% of eighth-graders failing to read at age-appropriate levels. A CYFS-affiliated research team is addressing this problem by partnering with four other universities on a five-year, \$20 million consortium. Dr. Laura Justice heads the lead team from The Ohio State University, which is also joined by Arizona State University, the University of Kansas and Lancaster University (United Kingdom). The project is part of the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences \$100 million *Reading for Understanding Research Initiative*.

The consortium will strive to achieve two primary goals essential for helping prekindergarten through third-

grade students better understand what they read. The first is to identify which basic and high-level language skills contribute most to reading success and can be most easily shaped during children's formative years. The project also seeks to determine the viability and effectiveness of instructional strategies aimed at improving students' reading comprehension.

Accordingly, the consortium will develop and implement two sets of interventions: one for students in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, and the other for students in first through third grades. The former will provide teachers with weekly half-hour lessons embedded within read-aloud sessions, whereas the latter will consist of classroom practices overlaid upon existing language arts curricula.

The UNL team, led by CYFS faculty affiliate Dr. Tiffany Hogan and assisted by Dr. J. Ron Nelson, will administer a battery of reading comprehension tests to approximately 300 students across the targeted grades. The team will also collaborate with its partner schools to develop

*Reading comprehension is cyclical. If you improve children's reading skills early on, they'll experience success and want to read more – and if they read more, their comprehension and language skills continue to improve.*

~ Dr. Tiffany Hogan

educational materials and programs designed to improve comprehension, which will be implemented in classrooms during the project's second and third years. Lastly, the UNL team will evaluate the effectiveness of these endeavors by conducting pretest and posttest assessments of participating students throughout the project's final two years. These efforts will be directed by Dr. James Bovaird, Director of the CYFS Statistics and Research Methodology Unit.

By collaborating with national and international leaders in early literacy research and intervention, CYFS is set to instill its appreciation for reading in a generation of young children.

"Language skills are crucial for understanding what we read," Hogan said. "This grant represents the first concentrated effort to identify and improve young children's language skills to improve early reading comprehension – which will in turn lead to better future reading."



Dr. Tiffany Hogan (back row, fourth from right), Assistant Professor of Special Education and Communication Disorders, also directs the efforts of UNL's Link N Literacy Lab team (above)



# APPRECIATING ARTS IN THE CLASSROOM

Life has been known to imitate art – and CYFS has helped demonstrate that life in the classroom can do the same.

CYFS faculty affiliate Nancy Engen-Wedin has spearheaded Arts Integration in Education, a program that incorporates artistic expression into K-12 teaching practices. The project was founded on the philosophy that integrating arts into core subjects such as reading and math can enhance students' creativity, curiosity, confidence and social skills – all while engaging their minds and improving academic performance in those subject areas.

The program gives classroom teachers the opportunity to collaborate with “teaching artists” – artists seeking experience in classrooms – in order to develop ways

of combining visual arts, music, poetry, theater and dance with traditional lesson plans. Though the project typically aims to enhance language and literacy curricula, it has also tackled science, math and social studies content.

Teaching artists and their classroom teacher collaborators have brainstormed unique methods for assimilating arts into conventional classrooms. Teaching artists with backgrounds in theater and visual arts helped students translate a poem into dances, drawings and paintings – and discovered this facilitated collaboration even among students normally in conflict. Another teaching artist introduced music and storytelling that improved students' abilities to retain information they learned in class.

“We focus on a range of learning – knowing, doing,





**Participating classroom teachers learn to enhance their core curricula and engage their students through the integration of various art forms.**

valuing and creating – in the arts,” said Engen-Wedin, who also works with UNI’s Lied Center for Performing Arts. “It’s all active learning. The arts bring these unique instructional tools for teachers, encouraging them to move beyond forms and worksheets.”

Community school partners are located in Crete, Gering, Macy and Madison, Nebraska. Each is a rural community, and all house “minority-majority” schools – schools in which minority populations constitute the majority of the student body. Consequently, the project has also sought to foster a sense of cultural identity and reduce dropout rates among students at risk of struggling in school.

Dr. Gina Kunz, CYFS, has helped Engen-Wedin develop methods to evaluate the program’s impact

on teachers, teaching artists and students. Classroom observations, teacher comments and student focus groups have all confirmed the program’s effectiveness. The best indicators, however, may be the “culminating events” held at the end of each academic semester. These events showcase students’ work and give everyone involved the chance to reflect on their accomplishments – accomplishments that inspire Engen-Wedin.

“The students are producing amazing work,” she observed. “You can really see their progression. Their learning in the arts and other core subjects is obvious, and their active involvement in the learning process is contagious.”



# SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT





## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Promoting the social and emotional well-being of children is central to cultivating a society of healthy, well-adjusted citizens who are prepared to leave lasting imprints of their own. CYFS researchers seek to understand children's social-emotional strengths and challenges for the purposes of building social-emotional competencies and managing or preventing behavioral difficulties.

CYFS affiliates are particularly interested in how ecological systems such as families, schools and peer groups influence children's social skills and capabilities, feelings of worth and confidence, perceptions of their potential, and motivation for investing in their own futures. Research in this area often involves intervening across these systems to align beliefs, goals and strategies for enhancing the social-emotional welfare of youth.

Our investigations of interventions provide parents, educators and practitioners with the resources to assess and confront a spectrum of negative social-emotional expressions, including aggression, bullying, delinquency and substance abuse. Center affiliates also engage in research efforts to foster positive social and emotional skills across the developmental spectrum, from early childhood to adolescence and beyond.



# INTERNATIONAL TIES, GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES



CYFS has traditionally disseminated its research on children's social and emotional development locally, regionally and nationally. However, the Center has recently forged ahead with building global connections to enhance children's well-being on a much wider scale.

This progression was exemplified in April, when CYFS co-sponsored the 15th International Roundtable on School, Family, and Community Partnerships. Along with researchers from across the United States, the summit hosted scholars from Canada, Greece, Iceland, India, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Scotland, Spain and Taiwan. The Roundtable's lead organizer was Johns Hopkins University's Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships; other co-sponsors were Family-School-Community Partnerships SIG / AERA and the Harvard Family Research Project.

In addition to introducing CYFS to the international audience, Director Susan Sheridan and a group of postdoctoral and doctoral student affiliates presented original research on Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) – a model that promotes family-school interaction to improve students' social-emotional, behavioral and academic functioning.

Tara Sjuts and Michael Coutts presented the first paper of the symposium, "Collaborative Problem Solving Among Families and Schools: An Overview of Conjoint Behavioral Consultation." They described the theory underlying CBC, explained its implementation, and provided examples of the settings in which it has been applied. Dr. Kyongboon Kwon and Carrie Semke delved more deeply into the model with "An Efficacy Trial of a Home-School



Partnership Intervention,” discussing a CYFS study that assessed the effectiveness of CBC in kindergarten through third-grade classrooms. They cited study findings that demonstrated how CBC’s promotion of family-school cooperation benefits students. Dr. Elizabeth Moorman and Kathryn Woods concluded the symposium by referencing the same study in a paper titled “Collaborative Problem Solving Among Families and Schools: Findings for Parents and Teachers.” Moorman and Woods explained the positive impact of CBC on the two groups, particularly its capacity for establishing relationships and strengthening communication between them.

“It was a very good experience,” Sheridan said. “We learned about all the different global perspectives. We learned about the realities, the challenges, the similarities and

differences.”

This international roundtable came just two days after a CYFS Creating Connections Series presentation from Dr. Elizabeth Schaughency, a senior lecturer at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand. Schaughency provided insights into how sleeping habits and home environments influence New Zealand children’s school performance – and the associated social outcomes.

“It’s our goal to start thinking bigger and more broadly about the research that we’re conducting,” Sheridan noted. “It is important that we start talking to audiences well outside the realm to which we’ve been accustomed.”

These endeavors offer vast opportunities to explore new ideas, circulate research to fellow scholars, and improve the social and emotional welfare of children worldwide.



# TURNING GOOD BEHAVIOR INTO CHILD'S PLAY

Though faculty affiliates conduct the majority of research at CYFS, graduate and undergraduate students also contribute a great deal of original knowledge to the Center's focus on children's social, emotional and behavioral welfare. This is especially true of Chris Campbell, a CYFS Student Affiliate and doctoral student in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Clinical Psychology Training Program.

Campbell (*pictured below*) was awarded funding for his dissertation study from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. Through this project, he is directing an evaluation of the Teacher-Child Interaction Training (TCIT) program, which he co-created at UNL to improve the behavior and social skills of preschool children. The importance of these efforts is evident when considering that at least 10% of students from disadvantaged conditions who attend early childhood programs display some form of behavioral or social-emotional disorder.

Campbell's project is soliciting participation of six teachers, approximately 90 children and their parents at three preschool Head Start Centers in Nebraska. Campbell is gathering data from teacher- and parent-based assessments to determine the effectiveness of the TCIT program throughout its implementation and the year following its conclusion. He expects the findings to demonstrate TCIT's potential impact on research, practice and policy related to Head Start and many other early childhood intervention programs.

"The program should provide teachers with a variety of skills that can be used to strengthen positive teacher-child relationships," Campbell said. "I give much of the credit for the success of this project to the combined efforts and continuous support of so many wonderful individuals at CYFS!"





# STANDING UP TO SCHOOL BULLYING

Bullying among children and youth takes many forms, from spreading rumors and ostracizing peers to engaging in cyber-bullying and physical violence. Unfortunately, these behaviors are widespread in America's schools, and Nebraska's are no exception.

The impact of bullying goes much further than the immediate distress and injury it causes. Research has shown that students involved in bullying and victimization are at risk for failing or dropping out of school, internalizing problems, and engaging in criminal or gang-related activity.

CYFS recently completed its work with the Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) Mentoring Project, which was designed to reduce bullying in LPS by pairing students involved in bullying and victimization with individual mentors. The project was the result of collaboration among the Tom and Nancy Osborne-founded TeamMates Mentoring Program; Target Bullying, an intervention program established by CYFS faculty affiliate Dr. Susan Swearer; Lincoln Public Schools; and CYFS.

Swearer, who has conducted years of research on bullying, developed surveys and training sessions for mentors and their student mentees. Though her training sessions were held throughout all three years of the grant, this past year marked the introduction of both "Bullying 101" and "Bullying 201." The 101 training was designed to teach mentors about the many aspects of bullying and strategies for discussing it with their mentees. The 201 sessions brought mentors and mentees together to watch reenactments of common bullying scenarios and discuss how mentors, teachers and parents could assist mentees. Both mentors and mentees reported that the sessions improved their understanding of this prevalent problem.

CYFS Research Associate Professor Dr. Gwen Nugent partnered with the Center's Statistics and Research Methodology Unit to analyze the results of the project. The team examined student participants' self-reported bullying data – including its type, frequency, cause and severity – and also analyzed grades, attendance and disciplinary records. Together, the data have painted a comprehensive picture of the project's impact on student behavior, achievement, attitudes and perceptions over the course of its implementation. Nugent's team also reviewed data from mentors to gauge their opinions of bullying, their interactions with mentees, and their views on training sessions designed to improve those interactions. These results should provide many insights into the value of the project – and inform future efforts to examine how mentoring can improve the lives of students in Lincoln Public Schools.



# RURAL EDUCATION





## RURAL EDUCATION

More than 25% of U.S. schools reside in rural communities – and face the associated realities of distance, staff turnover and limited access to valuable resources. Three-fourths of Nebraska schools are located in rural districts and experience these same realities. CYFS’ National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed) focuses on assisting rural schools as they strive to access innovative programs and strategies that ensure their students receive high quality education in fundamental academic areas of reading and science.

CYFS and R<sup>2</sup>Ed researchers seek to identify, develop and validate methods for helping teachers deliver research-based instruction in rural classrooms. The Center is specifically focused on investigating how professional development opportunities influence teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and practices. We also explore the implementation of interventions and family-school partnerships aimed at improving students’ academic performance.

Leadership within CYFS and R<sup>2</sup>Ed invests heavily in developing and expanding its relationships with rural schools, constantly soliciting input that improves our understanding, enhances our ability to assist students, and ensures our imprints resonate throughout rural communities nationwide.



# ASSISTING READERS IN RURAL SCHOOLS



Reading is a key that unlocks many academic, professional and personal doors. In order to grasp that key, some students need a great deal of personalized guidance from their teachers – who in turn must learn how to provide it.

Response-to-intervention (RTI) is a tool that helps teachers use multiple sources of data to identify students with reading difficulties; select interventions for students according to differences in their reading performance; and implement those interventions in the classroom. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to provide this important service for rural teachers, whose schools are typically many

miles from the resources of an urban area.

Teachers and students in rural schools are thus the focus of Project READERS (Response to Effective Assessment-Driven Early Reading Support), which is directed by CYFS' National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed). This RTI-focused study compares the effectiveness of teacher professional development and coaching provided either on-site or through Web-based distance technology – an especially relevant consideration for isolated rural schools. Project READERS – which was created with the support of the Nebraska RTI Consortium and Lehigh University's Center for Research to Practice – also aims to determine how



**Project READERS  
will help rural  
schools determine  
how best to  
implement coaching  
intended to improve  
teachers' reading  
instruction.**

factors such as teacher experience, background training and school resources influence the impact of RTI professional development and coaching on teacher perceptions, knowledge and practices.

CYFS Research Assistant Professor Dr. Todd Glover, CYFS faculty affiliate Dr. Tanya Ihlo and Lehigh University's Dr. Edward Shapiro are heading the research team, which is soliciting the participation of 360 rural Nebraska teachers in kindergarten through third grade. The project will evaluate the impact of on-site versus distance professional development on teachers' planning processes and intervention delivery in the classroom, and their perceptions

of intervention practices and the use of student data. The team will assess the student effects via standardized reading achievement tests and progress on skill-based indicators of student reading performance.

"Project READERS is a large-scale investigation of ongoing support for rural teachers in the use of data to guide reading interventions that are based on student needs," Glover said. "This study will help determine which teacher professional development approach is optimal for promoting effective interventions that lead to positive reading outcomes for students in rural K-3 classrooms."



# LENDING HELPING HANDS TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

Rural schools are well-recognized for creating classroom environments that encourage healthy development among children and adolescents. At the same time, students attending rural schools face many of the same behavioral and learning challenges as their urban peers.

Unfortunately, rural schools sometimes lack their urban counterparts' access to services that assist students with behavioral challenges – thereby creating barriers to learning among those students. Addressing these concerns early on is important, as roughly half of kindergartners who demonstrate disruptive behaviors are placed into special education programs by the fourth grade.

With this in mind, Dr. Susan Sheridan and her colleagues have spent years investigating an approach known as Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC), which fosters teacher-parent collaboration to promote positive behavioral changes among students who struggle in the classroom and at home. CBC has demonstrated tremendous positive impacts on children, parents and teachers in urban schools, whose resources and infrastructure make adopting the program a straightforward proposition. However, the effectiveness of CBC in rural communities – which comprise roughly two-thirds of Nebraska's schools – is virtually unknown. Fortunately, that's about to change.

Drs. Sheridan, Todd Glover, Gina Kunz and James Bovaird are conducting a study to examine CBC's effects on early elementary (K-3) students in rural communities, where consultation services have traditionally been unavailable. The study will involve approximately 270 students who exhibit disruptive behavior in rural classrooms, along with their teachers and parents. Over a three-year period, CYFS researchers will use a variety of measures to assess changes in student behavior and academic performance, parental and teacher attitudes, and parent-teacher relationships.

Project Director Amanda Witte believes the study will give her team critical insights into the CBC approach – and help determine the course of its future in rural communities statewide and nationally.

"CYFS will not only forge new partnerships with families in rural communities," Witte said, "but also learn exactly how CBC can improve student learning in the diverse realities of rural schools. The results will prove invaluable as we work to truly understand what works for students of all backgrounds."





# CREATING RURAL RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

The CYFS-housed National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed) continues to promote the development of rural schools, teachers and families through its Creating Rural Connections Series.

The series provides researchers, practitioners and policymakers with firsthand opportunities to learn about the findings of cutting-edge rural research conducted both across the state and throughout the nation. In April, the series hosted leading expert Dr. Carolyn Denton, Associate Professor with the Children's Learning Institute at the University of Texas Health Science Center.

Denton shared her insights into school reading programs and instructional coaching, a form of professional development for teachers. She summarized several forms of instructional coaching before delving into her own co-authored model, Student-Focused Coaching. Denton observed that traditional models often encourage coaches to observe only teacher behavior in the classroom, casting the coach in the role of “expert” and leading to perceptions of judgment among teachers. She urged coaches to become collaborative problem-solvers who work with teachers to examine classroom interactions and model self-reflection techniques that lead to more productive communication with students.

In addition, Denton discussed the goals of the Student-Focused Coaching model and provided examples of the prevalent academic issues it is designed to address. She then described how coaches and teachers can collaborate to identify problems, sets goals, develop and implement solutions, and evaluate results.

Denton also reviewed the state of rural reading programs, noting that instructional coaching lacks a well-established research base to accompany its recently gained popularity and legislative support. She urged her audience to conduct and promote rigorous research on the effects of coaching interventions before concluding the presentation with a glimpse into one of her ongoing studies.

In enlightening both researchers and practitioners who work directly with rural teachers, Denton's presentation exemplified the potential of the Creating Rural Connections Series to simultaneously inform multiple audiences with an interest in relevant, practical research.



# RESEARCH AND EVALUATION METHODS



A hand is visible on the left side of the page, pointing towards the text. In the background, a chalkboard is partially visible with some mathematical equations written on it, including  $4 + 4A$  and  $A^8$ .

## RESEARCH AND EVALUATION METHODS

The wealth of data collected through CYFS research studies would be meaningless without the advanced statistical and methodological approaches available in the Statistics and Research Methodology (SRM) Unit. CYFS methodologists help researchers conceptualize research designs, conduct statistical analyses, and interpret results as a means of maximizing the impact of their work on children, youth, families and schools.

SRM personnel are experts in experimental, quasi-experimental and correlational designs, and are well versed in cross-sectional, longitudinal and correlational approaches to analyzing data. They help CYFS researchers conduct power and sample size analyses, control for confounding variables, improve the precision of measurement, refine data collection, account for missing data, select analytic techniques relevant to their research questions, and interpret findings for multiple audiences.

CYFS promotes the highest standards of research by sponsoring workshops and seminars that feature experts in quantitative analysis. When confronted with challenges lacking clear solutions, SRM explores the adaption and development of techniques that advance the state of its field.



# CLOSING THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAP



The academic achievement gap between less and more advantaged children is well-documented. That gap is especially prevalent in Nebraska, which has the highest U.S. proportion of impoverished African-American children and second-highest percentage of disadvantaged Native American children.

CYFS affiliates have embarked on a study that will inform Nebraska's efforts to enhance educational opportunities for children at risk of landing on the unfortunate side of that achievement gap. In collaboration with the Nebraska Department of Education, the research

team of Drs. Helen Raikes, Greg Welch and Lisa St. Clair is conducting methodological analyses of the groundbreaking Nebraska Student Staff Record System (NSSRS) to determine the best approaches for examining students' academic progress.

NSSRS is the first database to offer longitudinal data on the demographics, attendance and performance of every student in the state's public schools and pre-kindergarten programs. The CYFS affiliates will initially analyze the database to trace students' school attendance and movement across time and achievement levels. In doing so, they will



**CYFS researchers are analyzing a comprehensive database that provides insight into Nebraska's efforts to close the achievement gap between less and more advantaged students.**

pay particular attention to which methodologies are best at accounting for contextual factors – such as teacher, school and district characteristics – unrelated to student traits.

The researchers will also develop a list of student-related research questions and conduct exploratory investigations of the NSSRS in an attempt to answer them. Chief among these potential questions is how children in Nebraska's pre-kindergarten and early childhood education programs perform academically, relative to their peers, once they enter elementary school.

The team's efforts to identify effective methodologies,

generate research questions and explore the process of answering them could lead to important outcomes for Nebraska's educational future. Their study will not only help determine whether the state's investments are contributing to disadvantaged students' progress, but also assess whether specific initiatives are successful or need improvement.

This study serves as a prime example of the state's efforts to assist underserved students – and epitomizes the Center's ability to apply statistical advances for the purpose of improving Nebraska's schools.





## EDUCATING RESEARCHERS IN RANDOMIZED TRIALS

Randomized trials have become a gold standard of educational and behavioral intervention research, providing scholars and practitioners with vital knowledge about the effectiveness of intervention programs, services and practices.

As interventions have become a cornerstone of CYFS scholarship, the Center's Statistics and Research Methodology (SRM) Unit has hosted numerous national experts in randomized trial design, implementation and analysis through its *Research Methodology Series on Randomized Trials in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Following a 2009 inaugural address by Dr.

Peggy McCardle of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the series hosted Northwestern University's Dr. Larry Hedges and Vanderbilt University's Dr. David Cordray in April 2010.

After summarizing the history and rationale of randomized trials, Hedges discussed potential ethical issues related to the random selection and assignment utilized in many social and educational investigations. Along with providing an overview and examples of the experimental designs most frequently employed in large scale studies, Hedges demonstrated the sampling concerns that make social and educational experiments more challenging and complex than their laboratory-based counterparts. He also covered the statistical and practical issues associated with conducting trials in the behavioral sciences. Hedges concluded his presentation by comparing the pros and cons of experimental versus quasi-experimental designs.

Cordray's presentation centered on assessing two important aspects of randomized controlled trials: implementation fidelity and achieved relative strength. Cordray laid out several definitions of implementation fidelity, common sources and types of diminished fidelity, and the practical and statistical repercussions of failing to fulfill implementation standards. After explaining the calculations for implementation fidelity and achieved relative strength, Cordray delved into multiple examples of how achieved relative strength is used to analyze the causal effects of intervention programs. Cordray closed by summarizing how differences in methodological approaches influence the measures' roles and functions.

Thanks to the tools provided in these and related SRM presentations, CYFS researchers are increasingly prepared to evaluate and develop intervention programs that enhance the well-being of children and youth.

# MEANINGFUL MEASUREMENTS OF EARLY CHILD CARE



Decades of research support the notion that the quality of early child care and education programs influences children's intellectual, social and emotional development. However, this research has assumed that increases in quality automatically lead to uniform improvements in development.

CYFS affiliates are challenging this assumption by attempting to identify ranges of scores, or "thresholds," that display significantly stronger relationships between program quality and child outcomes. This would essentially establish meaningful and

accessible yardsticks for researchers, practitioners and policymakers seeking to understand how good – or how much improved – programs must be to achieve observable improvements in children's development.

To accomplish this objective, Drs. Julia Torquati, Helen Raikes and Greg Welch are utilizing nonparametric regression models to analyze data sets from two studies: Quality Interventions for Early Care and Education (QUINCE), and the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project (EHSREP). These data sets include multiple measures of both program quality and child development.

The faculty affiliates are also determining whether certain factors influence the location and size of the quality thresholds. These factors include the children's age, family income and ethnicity; the ethnicity of the teacher or child care provider; and the presence of an experimental intervention. The researchers are hypothesizing that the impact of child care quality increases from infancy through preschool age. Additionally, they are predicting that both high- and low-quality programs will affect low-income children more than their relatively advantaged peers. In order to measure the effects of ethnicity, the team is examining pilot data from the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium Quality Rating Systems (MWCCRC QRS).

Ultimately, identifying these thresholds and mediating factors could provide researchers and practitioners with more precise criteria for improving child care and education; allow state child care administrators to more wisely invest increasingly valuable funds; and help parents identify which factors matter most when seeking the best services for their young children.



# PUBLICATIONS

A primary goal of CYFS is to advance the scientific knowledge base and inform practice, policy and future research in areas related to children, youth, families and schools. Disseminating important findings generated via ongoing research is a seminal activity of CYFS affiliates. Select publications are listed below, with faculty and student affiliates in italics.

## EARLY EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

*Buhs, E. S., Welch, G., Burt, J., & Knoche, L. L.* (in press). Family engagement in literacy activities: Revised factor structure for The Familia – an instrument examining family support for early literacy development. *Early Child Development and Care*.

Diamond, K. E., & Hong, S. (in press). Young children's decisions to include peers with physical disabilities in play. *Journal of Early Intervention*.

*Knoche, L. L., Sheridan, S. M., Edwards, C. P., & Osborn, A. Q.* (2010). Implementation of a relationship-based school readiness intervention: A multidimensional approach to fidelity measurement for early childhood. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25, 299-313.

*Moorman, E. A., & Pomerantz, E. M.* (in press). Ability mindsets influence the quality of mothers' involvement in children's learning: An experimental investigation. *Developmental Psychology*.

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*Raikes, H., & Edwards, C. P.* (2009). *Extending the dance in infant and toddler caregiving: Enhancing attachment and relationship*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

*Sheridan, S. M., Knoche, L. L., Edwards, C. P., Bovaird, J. A., & Kupzyk, K. A.* (2010). Parent engagement and school readiness: Effects of the Getting Ready Intervention on preschool children's social-emotional competencies. *Early Education and Development*, 21, 125-156.

## ACADEMIC INTERVENTION AND LEARNING

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Elliott, S. N., Kratochwill, T. R., *McKevitt, B. C., & Malecki, C. K.* (2009). The effects and perceived consequences of testing accommodations on math and science performance assessments. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 24, 224-239.

*Glover, T. A., & Vaughn, S.* (Eds.). (2010). *The promise of Response to Intervention: Evaluating the current science and practice*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

*Hamann, E. T., Zúñiga, V., & Sánchez García, J.* (in press). Transnational students' perspectives on schooling in the United States and Mexico: The salience of school experience and country of birth. In E. Gozdzik & M. Ensor (Eds.), *Migrant children at the crossroads*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

*Heaton, R. M., Lewis, W. J., & Smith, W. M.* (2009). Building middle-level mathematics teachers' capacities as teachers and leaders: The Math in the Middle Institute Partnership. *The Journal of Mathematics and Sciences: Collaborative Explorations*, 11, 1-17.

*Hogan, T. P., Bowles, R., Catts, H. W., & Storkel, H. L.* (in press). The influence of neighborhood density and word frequency on phoneme awareness in 2nd and 4th grades. *Journal of Communication Disorders*.

*Nugent, G., Kunz, G., Rilett, L., & Jones, L.* (2010). Extending engineering education to K-12. *Technology Teacher*, 69, 14-19.

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## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

*Abbott, D. A.* (2010). Support services of victims of political violence and their families: A comparison between Israelis and Palestinians. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 13, 74-85.

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involvement for children with disruptive behaviors: The role of parenting stress and motivational beliefs. *Journal of School Psychology*, 48, 293-312.

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## RURAL EDUCATION

Dalla, R. L., DeLeón, J. G., Stuhmer, T., & León, M. (2010). Rural community longevity: Capitalizing on diversity for immigrant residential stability. *The Business Journal of Hispanic Research*, 4, 43-55.

Isernhagen, J. (2010). TeamMates: Providing emotional and academic support in rural communities. *The Rural Educator*. Available from <http://www.ruraleducator.net/current.htm>

## RESEARCH AND EVALUATION METHODS

Bovaird, J. A. (2010). Scales and surveys: The problem with assessing bullying behaviors. In S. R. Jimerson, S. M. Swearer, & D. L. Espelage (Eds.), *The handbook of bullying in schools: An international perspective* (pp. 277-292). New York, NY: Routledge.

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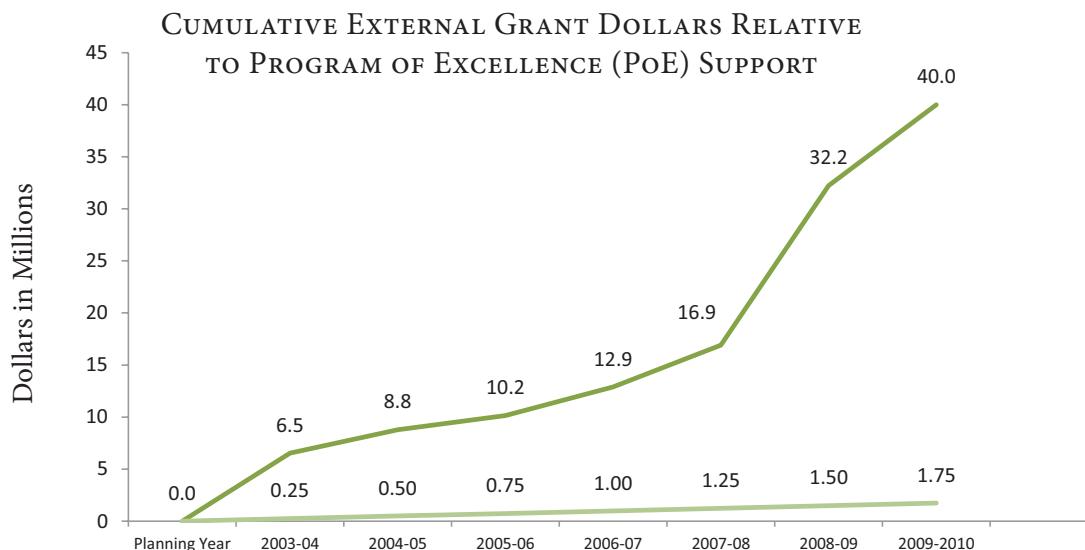


# LANDSCAPE OF SUPPORT: CUMULATIVE ACTIVITY

## CYFS SNAPSHOT OF CUMULATIVE GRANT ACTIVITY

Total PoE Funds to Date	\$1,750,000
Total Number of Grants Submitted through CYFS	182
Total Dollar Amount of Grants Submitted	\$157,180,391
Total Number of Grants Funded	81
"Hit Rate" of Funded Grants (based on known decisions)	48%
Total Dollar Amount of External Grants Funded	\$40,001,496
Total Dollar Amount of Internal Grants Funded	\$317,856
Total Dollar Amount of All Grants Funded	\$40,319,352
Percent of Grant Dollars from Federal Agencies	93%
Return Rate to UNL (based on external funds) for every \$1 invested	\$22.86

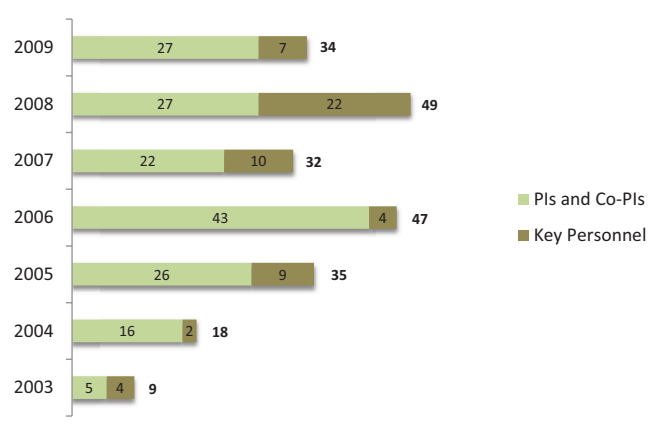
Support for the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools (CYFS) is generated primarily through Program of Excellence (PoE) funds and external grants. The information presented in the **"CYFS Snapshot of Cumulative Grant Activity"** table (*left*) highlights cumulative information pertinent to grants submitted, grants awarded, "hit rate," current and total dollar amounts awarded, and return to UNL.



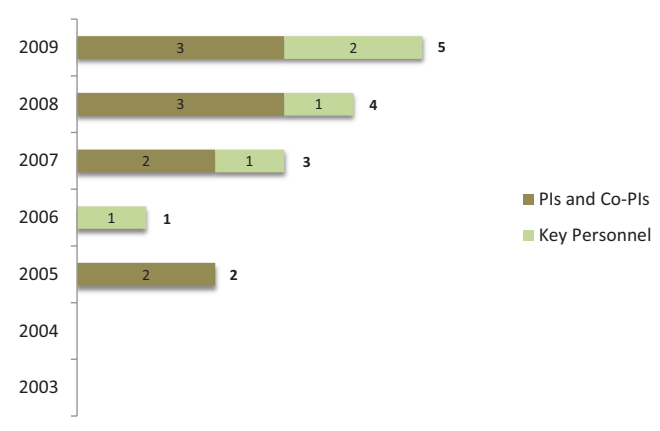
The **"Cumulative External Grant Dollars Relative to Program of Excellence (PoE) Support"** graph (*left*) depicts growth in external funds awarded to CYFS/ UNL relative to Program of Excellence support. The total dollars in external awards has increased 612% between 2003-04 and 2009-10, from \$6.53 million to just over \$40 million.

# LANDSCAPE OF SUPPORT: ANNUAL ACTIVITY

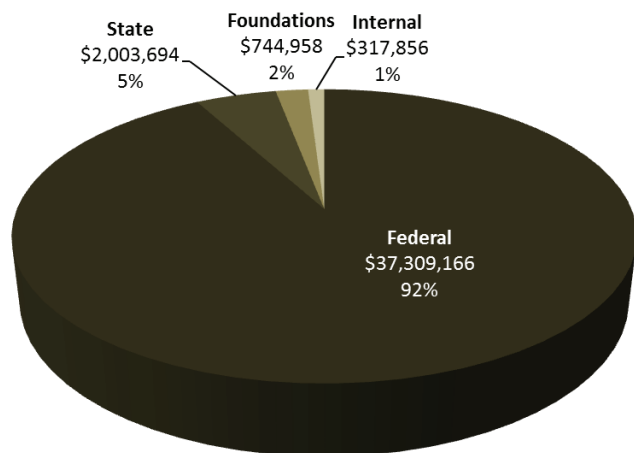
The following bar graph features the total number of **faculty** (as Principal Investigators, Co-Principal Investigators, and Key Personnel) who submitted grants each calendar year from 2003 through 2009. These faculty represent a diverse range of academic disciplines within the NU system. The number of faculty who submitted grants has nearly quadrupled since the Center's inception, from 9 in 2003 to 34 in 2009.



The following bar graph features the total number of **students** (as Principal Investigators, Co-Principal Investigators, and Key Personnel) who submitted grants each calendar year from 2003 through 2009. The first student grant submissions occurred in 2005, and the number of students who submitted grants through CYFS has more than doubled from 2005 to 2009.



## SOURCES OF FUNDING



The “**Sources of Funding**” chart (*left*) illustrates the dollar amounts and percentage of funding solicited from federal, state, foundation and internal sources since the Center's inception.



# CURRENTLY FUNDED GRANTS AND CONTRACTS

## FEDERAL AWARDS (\$29,664,627 CURRENTLY FUNDED)

### Administration for Children and Families

*Instruction and Emotional Quality of Parent-Child Book Reading and Early Head Start Children's Learning Outcomes*  
PIs: Keely Cline, Carolyn Pope Edwards

*The Role of Tribal Child Care Programs in Serving Children Birth to Five*  
PIs: Linda Willis, Carolyn Pope Edwards

### Institute of Museum & Library Sciences

*Evaluation: Healthy Families Play Outside*  
PI: Gwen Nugent

### National Institutes of Health

*Parent Engagement and Child Learning Birth to Five*  
PIs: Susan Sheridan, Carolyn Pope Edwards

*Parent Engagement and Child Learning Birth to Five – Diversity Supplement*  
PI: Susan Sheridan

### National Science Foundation

*Continuity Across Family and School Systems to Promote the Learning and Development of Children and Adolescents*  
PIs: Susan Sheridan, Gwen Nugent, Gina Kunz, James Bovaird

*Embedding and Validating Empirical Usage Intelligence in Learning Objects*  
PIs: Ashok Samal, Leen-Kiat Soh, Gwen Nugent

*Field-Based Inquiry Focused GeoScience*  
PIs: Richard Levy, David Harwood, Gwen Nugent, Gina Kunz

*Robotics and GPS/GIS in 4-H: Workplace Skills for the 21st Century*  
PIs: Bradley Barker, Viacheslav Adamchuk, Gwen Nugent

*Scale-Up: National Robotics in 4-H: Workforce Skills for the 21st Century*  
PIs: Bradley Barker, Viacheslav Adamchuk, Gwen Nugent, Neal Grandgenett, Bing Chen

### U.S. Department of Education

*A Randomized Trial of Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) in Rural Educational Settings: Efficacy for Elementary Students with Disruptive Behavior*  
PIs: Susan Sheridan, Todd Glover, Gina Kunz, James Bovaird

*Development of a Three-Tiered Model in Early Intervention to Address Language and Literacy Needs of Children at Risk*  
PIs: Susan Sheridan, Lisa Knoche, Judith Carta, Charles Greenwood

*Evaluation for LPS Mentor Project*  
PI: Gwen Nugent

*Evaluation of the Efficacy of CBC for Addressing Disruptive Behaviors of Children At-Risk for Academic Failure*  
PIs: Susan Sheridan, Todd Glover

*National Center for Research on Rural Education*  
PIs: Susan Sheridan, Todd Glover, Gwen Nugent, Gina Kunz, James Bovaird

*Postdoctoral Fellowship for Research on Consultation-Based Interventions for Students with Social and Behavioral Concerns*  
PIs: Susan Sheridan, Todd Glover, James Bovaird

*Project MPUP-EC: Mountain Prairie Upgrade Partnership – Early Childhood*  
PIs: Christine Marvin, Malinda Eccarius

*Rural Language and Literacy Connections*  
PIs: Lisa Knoche, Helen Raikes

*School Psychology Leadership Specialization in Response-to-Intervention Research and Systems Change*  
PIs: Edward Daly, Merilee McCurdy, Gina Kunz, Susan Sheridan

*The Future of School Psychology: Family-School Partnerships Dissemination Project*  
PI: Susan Sheridan

*Training School Psychologists in Response-to-Intervention Implementation and Systems Change*  
PIs: Merilee McCurdy, Edward Daly, Gina Kunz

### U.S. Department of Transportation

*Transportation Curriculum Development Using Technology Application in STEM*  
PIs: Laurence Rilett, Gina Kunz

## STATE AWARDS

(\$1,997,728 CURRENTLY FUNDED)

### **Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education**

***Continuation and Expansion of UNL's Comprehensive and High Quality Professional Development Math and Science Summer Technology Institute***

PIs: Laurence Rilett, Gina Kunz

***Distance Delivery of UNL's Comprehensive and High Quality Professional Development Math and Science Summer Technology Institute***

PIs: Laurence Rilett, Gina Kunz, Gwen Nugent

### **Nebraska Department of Education**

***Nebraska Early Childhood Deaf Education Professional Upgrade Partnership Continuation***

PI: Christine Marvin

***State-Wide Response-to-Intervention Consortium for Training and Evaluation***

PIs: Todd Glover, Lisa Kelly-Vance, Edward Daly, Merilee McCurdy

***Technology Enhanced Spanish Program***

PI: Lisa Knoche

## FOUNDATION/OTHER AWARDS (\$572,898

CURRENTLY FUNDED)

### ***ArtsReach and Partners in Education Program Evaluation II***

Funding Sources:

Dana Foundation

Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

LIED Center

Nebraska Arts Council

Nebraskans for the Arts

PI: Gina Kunz

### ***Building Bridges through Relationships: A High School Dropout Prevention Program***

Funding Source: Woods Charitable Fund

PIs: Michael Scheel, Gina Kunz

### ***Early Childhood Course Conversion***

Funding Source: Buffett Foundation

PI: Carolyn Pope Edwards

### ***National Forum on the Science of Early Childhood Intervention***

Funding Source: Harvard School of Public Health

PI: Helen Raikes

### ***Preparing Teachers to Train Parents in the use of Evidence-based Tutoring Strategies***

Funding Source: Wing Institute

PIs: Sara Kupzyk, Edward Daly

### ***Project TEAMS Adolescent Risk-Taking Behaviors and Outcomes: Reintegrating Juveniles into School Settings***

Funding Sources:

Building Strong Families Foundation

Cooper Foundation

Woods Charitable Fund

PI: Suzanne Kemp

### ***School Psychology Futures: Family School Partnership Project***

Funding Source: School Psychology Leadership Roundtable

PI: Susan Sheridan

### ***The Efficacy of Conjoint Behavioral Consultation as a Collaborative Approach to the Treatment of Childhood Obesity***

Funding Source: Society for Research in Child Development

PIs: Carrie Blevins Semke, Susan Sheridan

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Robotics Scale-Up  
Gwen Nugent, Faculty Supervisor



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