

# 2016-2017 ANNUAL REPORT



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





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Isam Ahmed, son of Istiaque Ali, CYFS  
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# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

At the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools, our mission is to impact lives through research that advances learning and development. We're able to conduct, support and share this research because of diverse collaborations — with research institutions and school districts, faculty and families, graduate students and classroom teachers.

Our faculty are conducting research on family-school partnerships with the participation of Latino families and elementary schools. They are studying the effectiveness of teacher coaching using video footage from middle school science teachers. And they are evaluating K-12 after-school programs through partnerships with Nebraska school districts.

We are equally committed to supporting research through comprehensive grant services, from proposal development to data analysis. This support extends to early career researchers who are using technology — such as virtual reality, tablets and MRI scanners — to answer persistent questions and devise new solutions. It includes Brazilian research partnerships that are exploring how to teach preschool science, help caregivers affected by the Zika virus and evaluate young children's development. And it involves multi-campus teams, whose research is yielding interdisciplinary perspectives on childhood obesity prevention and treatment.

These diverse collaborators motivate us to share research among many stakeholders: the methodologist who aims to learn a new technique, the parent who asks about technology use for young children, the policymaker whose decisions impact classrooms across the state. We want to share the story of research. It's a story made possible through collective contributions. It's a story that impacts lives.

Susan M. Sheridan



Susan M. Sheridan, PhD

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

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

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

## 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. It is a University of Nebraska Program of Excellence and is supported by federal, state, foundation and internal grants.

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

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



## CONDUCT



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*The research projects featured in this report are housed in CYFS. Learn more about our grant support services at [cyfsgrant.unl.edu](https://cyfsgrant.unl.edu)*



## STUDYING CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD ENGINEERING CAREERS

Teacher. Firefighter. Doctor. Astronaut. Many of these careers land on children's lists of what they want to be when they grow up. CYFS research assistant professor Lorey Wheeler would like to see another profession added: engineer.

With a \$1 million grant from the National Science Foundation, Wheeler is joining a team from Arizona State University to study how children's knowledge, stereotypes and achievement-related beliefs affect their interest in engineering.

"We're trying to engage children when they're young and developing ideas about who they might be in the future," said Wheeler, who is a co-principal investigator on the grant. "This project is a starting place to address occupational and educational disparities."

The team is starting their study with a survey of K-5 elementary school students and finishing with a pilot program that encourages a growth mindset.



The survey of 1,200 Latino and Caucasian students will ask about children's engineering knowledge, stereotypes and achievement-related beliefs — which the team will then analyze to uncover potential age, gender and ethnic differences. Parents and teachers will also submit surveys about their own achievement-related beliefs.

The team is then launching a growth-mindset pilot program and comparing it to a control group. Students in the growth-mindset program will receive feedback that promotes effort over innate ability. That feedback may be "You worked really hard and are showing that you can do it," rather than "You're so smart."

"We know that the messages we tell kids from an early age can shape their trajectory," said Wheeler. "Our project is trying to understand how those messages may affect whether children think about pursuing engineering as a career."

*The project's team includes Cindy Miller, research assistant professor at ASU; and Martin Riesling, professor at ASU.*

## TEAM EXPLORES COACHING STRATEGIES TO BENEFIT TEACHERS, STUDENTS



A CYFS research team is exploring how "coaches" — trained educators who provide ongoing feedback to teachers — can enhance classroom performance.

Funded by the National Science Foundation and led by CYFS research professor Gwen Nugent, the team aims to identify the most effective coaching strategies by pinpointing how and why they work.



*From left: Jim Houston, Gwen Nugent and Gina Kunz*

"The research in teacher coaching is relatively new, and we're finding out that it's effective," Nugent said. "However, coaching is expensive, because it's one-on-one or one-to-few. We want to maximize its effectiveness so that there's a higher return on investment for school districts."

To understand how coaching works, the team is analyzing video-recorded data from an initial study conducted through CYFS' National Center for Research on Rural Education. The study included 124 middle and high school teachers in schools across rural Nebraska — some who received ongoing coaching about science instruction and others who did not.

According to that study, teachers who received science coaching improved their classroom practice, knowledge and self-confidence, while their students showed better science practice skills and on-task engagement.

Yet the research team didn't know how coaches

were affecting these outcomes — a question they're now asking and aim to answer.

"One of the first things we realized is that we needed to document the strategies used by the coach," Nugent said. "We started making a list: How often does the coach talk? How often does the teacher talk? Does the coach elaborate on concepts?"

In addition to identifying various coaching strategies, Nugent said the team wants to understand which ones are used the most — and ultimately, which have the greatest impact on teacher and student outcomes.

"Our hope is to provide a broader perspective about coaching in general, regardless of subject matter, that will guide best practices," Nugent said.

*The team includes Nugent; Gina Kunz, CYFS research associate professor; and Jim Houston, CYFS project manager.*



## NEBRASKA-BRAZIL RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

From left: Natalie Williams, Natalie Koziol, Leslie Hawley and Soo-Young Hang

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln and the Maria Cecilia Souto Vidigal Foundation are supporting Nebraska and Brazilian researchers who are conducting joint studies. Launched in 2016, the research partnership aims to foster collaboration around priority research areas in early learning, ecology of development, program quality and professional development.

## STUDY AIMS TO SUPPORT BRAZILIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Identifying what is developmentally normal for young children — and what is not — can lead to earlier interventions and better outcomes. Two CYFS researchers are addressing this need for the world’s fifth most-populated country: Brazil.

Leslie Hawley, CYFS research assistant professor, and Natalie Koziol, CYFS postdoctoral scholar, are creating a screening tool to detect developmental delays in Brazilian children. They are collaborating with Denise Ruschel Bandeira, a professor at Brazil’s Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, as part of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln/Brazil Early Childhood Initiative.

“This project is fairly high stakes,” Hawley said. “Right now, in Brazil, there are no formal means of identifying kids with developmental delays. By creating a standard screening tool, we want to contribute to child development studies in Brazil and guide policy and economic decisions related to early childhood development, health, education and social assistance.”

To develop the screening tool, Brazilian

researchers are surveying mothers of 1,400 children birth to age 6. Participants include children with and without a formal diagnosis of developmental delays from diverse geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Researchers are gathering information about children’s cognitive and motor skills, communication and language, social-emotional development and adaptive behavior. The team is then segmenting that information into various age groups, for example, infants 4 to 6 months and 7 to 9 months — a process that will help them create developmental thresholds.

These thresholds, in turn, will help pediatricians determine if children are developing normally and whether they may need further tests or additional services.

“It’s a big endeavor to measure development across age groups and also pinpoint those children who are struggling,” Koziol said.



Leslie Hawley and Natalie Koziol

“We have to be careful on both ends of the spectrum. We don’t want to miss anyone who needs help, but unnecessarily flagging someone as developmentally delayed could cause undue stress.”

Hawley and Koziol are supporting the project’s methodology by refining the screening tool and ensuring it measures what the team wants it to. They are also providing expertise on developmental practices currently used in the United States — ideas Brazilian researchers can then adapt for their country’s context.

“We learn from each other,” Hawley said. “This kind of work helps us think through sampling and validity issues. We’re going back and forth to ensure that, together, this instrument is methodologically as good as it can be.”

# SUPPORTING CAREGIVERS AFFECTED BY ZIKA VIRUS

The mosquito-borne Zika virus has left hundreds of Brazilian families grappling with a new reality: caring for disabled infants and toddlers.

Natalie Williams, assistant professor of child, youth and family studies, is joining Brazilian researchers to explore how to support caregivers whose children have been affected by Congenital Zika Virus Syndrome, a neurological condition associated with cognitive and physical disabilities.

“When babies are born with major disabilities, families are often unprepared for the impact it will have on the entire family and how the family functions,” said Williams, CYFS faculty affiliate. “It can be very stressful, and sometimes families don’t have the resources to cope effectively.”

Williams is collaborating with Pompéia Villachan-Lyra, professor at Brazil’s Federal Rural University of Pernambuco, to identify strengths and key stressors for Brazilian families and early childhood educators affected by the Zika outbreak.



Natalie Williams

The team is first surveying 100 caregivers with infants and toddlers whose disabilities are related to the Zika virus. They are then identifying a high-risk group — caregivers with symptoms of anxiety or depression — and conducting interviews to learn about caregivers’ daily routines involving their child.

The team is also mapping family and community systems to better understand what is available as a source of support and how it’s being used.

“Our goal is to pinpoint specific areas for intervention, and we want to use an organic approach driven by people who are affected,” Williams said. “I think we have an opportunity to really impact these families and improve their

quality of life and their children’s quality of life.”

Williams is also considering how her team’s research could support early intervention programs in the United States, where she says caregiver support can be overlooked while trying to meet the needs of an ill or disabled child.

“I’m excited for the next steps so we can get to the intervention development and implementation phase,” Williams said. “We are hoping this is a first step in a long relationship with our colleagues in Brazil.”

*The study includes Williams; Villachan-Lyra; Christine Marvin, professor at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln; and Cody Hollist, associate professor at UNL.*

# EXAMINING STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE PRESCHOOL SCIENCE INSTRUCTION

A preschooler sends a toy car whizzing across a track and down a ramp. With a teacher’s guidance, this 4-year-old can also learn about force and motion: the science behind her play.

Soo-Young Hong, associate professor of child, youth and family studies, is exploring how a professional development program could help preschool teachers integrate science into their daily classroom activities.

Hong is conducting the study alongside Brazilian researchers as part of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln/Brazil Early Childhood Initiative. Four of the study’s preschool classrooms are in Lincoln, Nebraska, and four are in São Paulo, Brazil.

Participating teachers watch video recordings of their classroom interactions, reflect on opportunities to implement science lessons and receive additional training in early childhood science instruction. Teachers are encouraged to discuss science content and help children ‘think like a scientist’: ask questions, brainstorm, make and test hypotheses and draw conclusions.

The goal is for teachers to lead the process, said Hong, through the study’s cycle of

observation and reflection. Her research team provides training materials that suggest ways to connect children’s development with science teaching goals.

“Science requires a habit of thinking and problem-solving that is so important for little kids to develop,” said Hong, CYFS faculty affiliate. “It also affects children’s social skills and vocabulary development, which is important for later school success.”

According to Hong’s prior research, the most effective way to teach science concepts to young children involves a combination of children’s exploration and a teacher’s explicit guidance. However, in both the U.S. and Brazil, science concepts aren’t usually integrated in preschool classrooms — and when science activities are provided, children may be left alone to explore, Hong said.

“We want to empower teachers and give them the opportunity to talk about science,” Hong said. “Teachers don’t have to have all the answers. There are many resources available to dig into a science problem.”

Hong’s team aims to provide an additional resource for teachers: a simple form that will guide educators through the process of observation and reflection, also known as reflective practice. With the team’s international focus, Hong sees potential to use that resource on a broader scale.

“As I talk with my Brazilian colleagues, it’s exciting that we see similar things in our preschool classrooms, even though we’re in different countries,” Hong said. “I have hopes that we may also see similar trends in other parts of the world and use our reflective practice resource to promote teachers’ competence in working with children in science.”

Soo-Young Hong



# STUDY EXPLORES WELLBEING AMONG OLDER REFUGEES

Like many large cities, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, is a patchwork of prosperity and poverty. Nebraska researcher Julie Tippens is navigating this city's urban divide in search of refugee families from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Tippens is investigating how Congolese refugees, particularly older refugees, are faring in Tanzania's urban environments. Six out of ten refugees now live in cities, many without documentation, and the majority are still living in countries of asylum: the places they first arrived after fleeing violence and unrest in their home countries.

Less than one percent of these refugees will be resettled to a new country, like the United States.

"Older refugees tend to have even fewer options for resettlement," said Tippens, assistant professor of child, youth and family studies. "As we start to understand their living situations, it's important to look at interventions for countries like Tanzania, where refugees will likely be for the rest of their lives."

Tippens is building on her dissertation research, which assessed older refugees using a mental health survey from the World Health Organization. She found that refugees 50 and older experienced

much higher levels of distress, including problems sleeping and eating.

With funding from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Office of Research and Economic Development, Tippens surveyed and interviewed 50 Congolese refugees living in urban informal settlements. She asked about their stressors, the resources contributing to their resiliency, and how resources are distributed through social networks.

During these interviews, older refugees discussed why they felt distressed: isolation, loss of social support, not being able to find work, and loss of cultural influence and social roles. However, Tippens also found that older refugees with some sort of social role and respect were doing better in terms of overall wellbeing.

"Respect is tied to aging well," said Tippens, CYFS faculty affiliate. "I met a woman in her 80s who was the matriarch of the family. You could tell that she had really strong social support within the family, and she was definitely still in charge of things."

Tippens aims to use these perspectives to inform resettlement programs and policies in Tanzania as well as the United States. Fifty thousand

Congolese refugees will be resettled in the U.S. by 2020, and the Nebraska Refugee Resettlement Program has already begun receiving cases.

"I want to contribute to the evidence that refugees who are different ages cope differently, which I hope will have an eventual impact on how programs are designed," Tippens said. "My ultimate goal is to improve refugees' psychological and social wellbeing."



*Respect is tied to aging well.*

An urban informal settlement in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.





From left: Lorey Wheeler, co-investigator, and Brandy Clarke, principal investigator

## PARTNERING WITH PARENTS TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S HEALTH

A family partnership program developed by University of Nebraska researchers shows promise for addressing challenges related to early childhood obesity.

With an interdisciplinary team representing three Nebraska campuses, Brandy Clarke, assistant professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, led a pilot study for the program: Partners in Health: In it Together (PHIT).

*“Our ultimate goal is to improve children’s health, and we’re doing that by supporting families.”*

Through the PHIT program, parents, healthcare providers, and behavioral health consultants work together to solve problems and implement health strategies for young children who are overweight or obese.

“Parents really are the driving force in the PHIT program,” said Clarke, CYFS faculty affiliate. “They are the ones making decisions about how to plan for their child’s health, and they’re doing it with guidance and information from the consultant.”

The pilot study included children 3-5 years old and their families; some participated in PHIT and others did not. Families in the PHIT program received a series of six home visits from behavioral health consultants. These consultants supported parents in using a structured, problem-solving process to address children’s diet, activity levels and sleep.

Many participating families had limited incomes and resources, Clarke said. Behavioral health consultants worked with parents to address issues including access to safe playgrounds, grocery stores and transportation.

Researchers found that children who participated in PHIT had positive changes in body mass index — a common health screening tool — compared

to children in the control group. PHIT participants also spent less time doing sedentary activities and more time engaging in moderate to vigorous physical activity.

“Our ultimate goal is to improve children’s health, and we’re doing that by supporting families to create environments that promote healthy habits,” Clarke said. “Our initial results are promising, but we still have more to learn about how we can change early health trajectories long term.”

*The project’s key investigators include Clarke; Lorey Wheeler, CYFS research assistant professor; Susan Sheridan, CYFS director; Cristina Fernandez, pediatrician with Children’s Physicians at CHI Health Creighton University Medical Center; Jung-Min Lee, assistant professor at the University of Nebraska Omaha; and Terry Huang, professor at City University of New York.*

*The project is funded by the University of Nebraska, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Office of Research and Economic Development, and the Society for the Study of School Psychology.*



Cristina Fernandez with a patient at Children’s Physicians in north downtown Omaha, Nebraska. Fernandez is a co-investigator for the PHIT study.

# ENCOURAGING HEALTHY HABITS WITH VIRTUAL REALITY



Acadia Yan, daughter of Changmin Yan

Trees line the horizon under a bright, cloudless sky. It's a typical outdoor scene — except for the giant pineapple soaring overhead.

Kindergarteners playing the virtual reality game must make a decision: What is the name of the fruit they see?

With \$15 Google Cardboard glasses and an interdisciplinary research team, Changmin Yan, associate professor of advertising and public relations, is creating an immersive experience to encourage healthy habits for young children in rural communities — particularly those from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

*“Our team wants to address health disparities.”*

The project's virtual reality curriculum focuses on nutrition and physical activity, drawing from federal guidelines such as MyPlate. Children can choose among three nutrition games: identifying foods, categorizing them according to MyPlate, and identifying how much of each they should eat — referred to as “go, slow, and whoa” foods. They can also choose between two physical activity games.

“The issue we're trying to tackle, childhood obesity, is quite complicated,” said Yan, who directs the Center for Health Promotion and Translational Research at the College of Journalism and Mass Communications. “That's why we adopted a team science approach with experts from diverse disciplines. This makes us

better positioned to band together and solve problems collectively.”

The research team chose to use virtual reality based on two theories. The first says that kids learn best when they are active and in charge of their learning experiences.

The second theory suggests that if a person is transported into a narrative, they are more likely to get lost in the storyline and be engaged.

“Virtual reality is the latest tool that allows us to tap into full immersion with fewer distractions,” said Yan, CYFS faculty affiliate. “The more immersed kids are in our virtual reality game, the more likely they'll be engaged with the healthy values we're trying to teach.”

To adapt the game for rural populations, University of Nebraska at Kearney team members Megan Adkins and Matthew Bice engaged Kearney school districts and community organizations to better understand issues of rural access, affordability and sustainability.

These conversations led the team to swap devices: shifting from a more expensive virtual reality headset to the cheaper Google Cardboard glasses. The team also focused on simplifying



Changmin Yan with Google Cardboard glasses

the game, allowing users in rural communities to play without depleting their data plans.

“Our team wants to address health disparities,” Yan said. “To do that, we want to make our game as accessible as possible.”

*Funded by the University of Nebraska's Food for Health Collaboration Initiative, the study's investigators include Yan; Megan Adkins, associate professor at the University of Nebraska at Kearney; Matthew Bice, assistant professor at UNK; Rex Cammack, associate professor at the University of Nebraska Omaha; Lisa Franzen-Castle, associate professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Virginia Chaidez, assistant professor at UNL; Tonia Durden, clinical associate professor at Georgia State University; Iheoma Iruka, director of research and evaluation at the Buffett Early Childhood Institute; Lisa Knoche, CYFS research associate professor; Adam Wagler, assistant professor at UNL; and Dipti Dev, assistant professor at UNL.*



## STUDY EXPLORES HOW MOBILE TECHNOLOGY AFFECTS PRESCHOOLERS

Esteraich's study is exploring how mobile content and parent interaction affect children's self-regulation: their ability to control impulses, manage emotions and maintain focus and attention. She is comparing the use of different mobile content — educational apps versus children's choice, such as YouTube — while also comparing preschoolers who use the tablets with their parents and those who use them independently.

To study these differences, Esteraich is providing one group of preschoolers with an iPad and 24 high-quality educational apps. A second group will receive the same iPad and educational apps — but this group involves parents, who play daily, 15-minute games with their child. A third group of preschoolers is using their personal tablet and apps of their choice.

Esteraich is studying how much time children spend on the tablet, which apps they use and how long children and parents use the tablet together — information recorded by a background app designed by computer software engineers at the University of Nebraska Omaha.

Rama, 4, picks up a lime green tablet and, together with her mom and dad, swipes through her favorite educational app.

Through a study conducted by University of Nebraska-Lincoln doctoral student Jan Esteraich, Rama and her parents are one of 80 families providing insight into the effects of mobile technology on children's development.

Funded with a national dissertation grant from Head Start, Esteraich's study is being conducted

in three languages — English, Spanish and Arabic — with families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. These perspectives, she says, are underrepresented in existing mobile technology research.

"Teachers are asking questions about technology use for young children, and parents are asking even more questions," said Esteraich, doctoral student in child, youth and family studies. "There isn't a lot of experimental research on children's use of mobile media because it's so new.

"Typically, parents tell researchers how much time their child uses technology," said Esteraich, CYFS student affiliate. "I wanted to create a more reliable method of gathering data to see if I can get more accurate information on children's use of tablets."

Participating parents are also using a pre-installed app to record audio from one 15-minute play session with their child, adding a qualitative research component to Esteraich's study.

"The audio recordings will help me better understand how parents and children interact when using tablets together, and how that interaction may be affecting children's self-regulation — something numbers can't tell us," Esteraich said.

Outside the scope of quantitative and qualitative data, Rama's parents and preschool teachers have already noticed a difference.

Minutes after turning off the green tablet, Rama picks up a pad of paper and begins writing left to right, first the alphabet and then numbers — something her parents said she started doing after they introduced the tablet and used it together.

*Esteraich's doctoral advisor is Helen Raikes, Willa Cather professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and CYFS faculty affiliate.*

*Teachers are asking questions about technology use for young children, and parents are asking even more questions.*



Jan Esteraich

# ASSESSING TEACHERS' CONFIDENCE IN FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Teachers play a pivotal role in building relationships between families and schools. Amanda Moen, doctoral student in school psychology, has developed a measure that assesses how teachers rate their effectiveness in building these relationships.

Moen tested the measure, Teacher Efficacy for Promoting Partnerships (TEPP), by surveying 250 Head Start preschool teachers nationwide. In the survey, she asked them to rate their effectiveness in building family partnerships, such as speaking with parents about their child's strengths.

Moen found statistical evidence that TEPP produced consistent results and accurately measured how preschool teachers perceived their effectiveness in building family partnerships.



Amanda Moen

She also discovered that most teachers surveyed felt effective in their ability to promote partnerships with families. The Head Start program encourages family engagement, Moen said, which could explain why these teachers had high scores.

"The results make me excited to move forward with future research that uses TEPP to better understand how family-school partnerships develop over time and how teachers' beliefs affect these partnerships," said Moen, CYFS student affiliate.

Moen began studying family-school partnerships through her graduate assistantship with the CYFS Getting Ready project, an early childhood intervention that assesses the influence of family-school partnerships on young children's school

readiness. While working on this project, Moen realized there was no measure that reflected how teachers' beliefs affected these partnerships.

Moen worked with project staff and CYFS director Susan Sheridan to develop TEPP, which was first piloted through the Getting Ready project.

"I've wanted to create something like TEPP since my first year of graduate school," Moen said. "Ultimately, I think this measure will contribute to a greater understanding of the essential family-school relationships that are necessary for children's success."

*Moen's project is funded by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska and the Society for the Study of School Psychology. Sheridan is Moen's doctoral advisor.*

# TEAM EVALUATES RURAL NEBRASKA AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Brainstorm, develop, implement, modify — and repeat. As rural Nebraska school districts use this adaptable approach to create after-school programs, a CYFS research team is taking similar steps to evaluate their progress.

The team is joining a 30-month project, Expanded Learning Opportunity Design Challenge, which involves Auburn, Beatrice, Boone Central, Centura and Grand Island school districts. Teachers and

administrators from each district are developing after-school and summer programs for K-12 students, with a focus on integrating science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

"Compared to traditional evaluations, we're not coming in and collecting data and staying separate from the project," said Leslie Hawley, project evaluator and CYFS research assistant professor. "We see ourselves as part of the team, helping

improve programs along the way. We're working with school districts through all stages of this iterative process."

The CYFS team is traveling to each site, learning about the programs, asking questions and providing individualized feedback.

"It's fun to go and see how kids are interacting with different curricula and see how staff are responding," said Michelle Howell Smith, project evaluator and CYFS research assistant professor. "We want to balance consistency with flexibility, because at the end of the day, we want this project to be meaningful for these five communities."

All participating school districts will also contribute to an "electronic toolbox," a website featuring details about each team's approach to hiring and staffing, financing, program content and data collection and reporting. CYFS evaluators will contribute surveys, curriculum suggestions and structured evaluations.

At the end of the project, the toolbox will be available for all Nebraska school districts. It is a resource other districts can use to independently build, customize and evaluate their own programs, Hawley said.

"We want to see what works well in the field so that people in different Nebraska counties and schools can learn from the experiences of these five districts," Hawley said. "We want to build a good foundation. Our end goal is to create programs that are exciting for youth and sustainable for communities."

*The project is funded by the Nebraska Department of Education and coordinated by Beatrice Public Schools and Beyond School Bells, a public-private partnership with the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation. The CYFS evaluation team includes Hawley; Howell Smith; and graduate students Susan Pence and Jared Stevens. All evaluators are affiliated with CYFS' Nebraska Academy for Methodology, Analytics and Psychometrics.*



From left: Leslie Hawley, Susan Pence and Michelle Howell Smith

# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SCHOOLS, LATINO FAMILIES

April Stortvedt addresses her fifth grade class as they prepare for upcoming book presentations. Behind her, a laminated poster outlines her four classroom rules: Be respectful, be honest, be responsible and follow directions the first time.

According to Stortvedt, a CYFS research study has helped one of her students better abide by these classroom rules. Through the study, Teachers and Parents as Partners (TAPP) for Latino Families, Stortvedt collaborated with her student's parent to improve behavior at home and school.

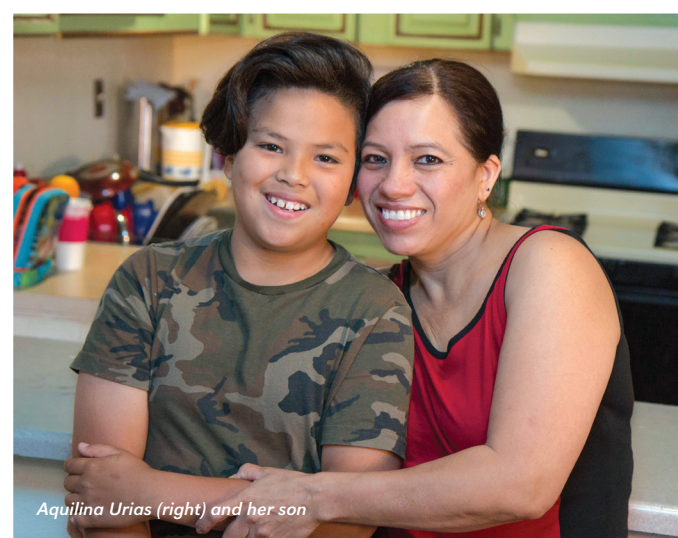
"I've noticed a lot of growth from my student who participated in TAPP," Stortvedt said. "He's much more respectful to me, and I feel like he cares a lot more about my perception of him and how he acts in my class."

TAPP is an evidence-based program developed by researchers at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, including CYFS director Susan Sheridan. It is a structured, problem-solving process that aims to strengthen collaboration between families and schools to improve students' social, behavioral and academic outcomes.

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, the current study focuses on building relationships between schools and Latino families; more than 90 K-5 classrooms in Nebraska and Colorado are expected to participate in the study's ongoing enrollment.

"We have a lot to learn about the unique realities, strengths and needs of our Latino students," said Sheridan, who is leading the study. "Latino students represent one of the fastest growing demographics in our country, and we want understand how to best create partnerships that are meaningful and lasting for these families."

Aquilina Urias is one of the parents who participated in the TAPP study. Her son was unfocused at school, she said, and didn't follow directions well at home. She worked with Stortvedt, her son's teacher, to implement a joint plan at home and school.



Aquilina Urias (right) and her son

According to Urias, the TAPP approach helped her son stay focused and also opened up new lines of communication.

"The teacher helped me a lot," Urias said. "My son understands now that he can communicate with his teacher. After TAPP, he is more disciplined and on task. He is going to be a better student, a better person."

*The study's research team includes Sheridan; Brandy Clarke, assistant professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center; Lorey Wheeler, CYFS research assistant professor; and Kristen Derr, CYFS project manager.*



April Stortvedt

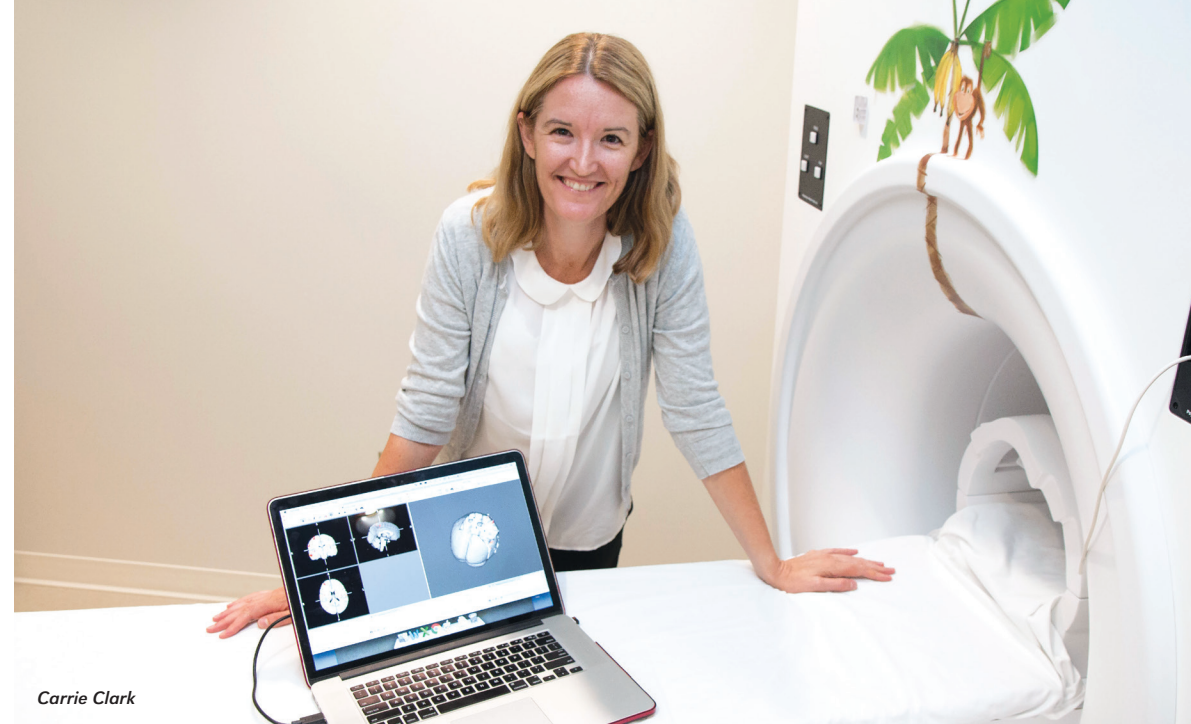
# EXPLORING HOW CHILDREN LEARN MATHEMATICS

What is 72 multiplied by 12? While fourth grade students will focus on arriving at the right answer, Nebraska researcher Carrie Clark wants to know what happens in the brain before they solve the problem.

Clark, assistant professor of educational psychology, is using functional MRI technology to capture brain activity while children learn mathematics. Funded by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Office of Research and Economic Development, she is exploring the relationship between children’s mathematics learning and executive function: the ability to maintain focus and behave in a goal-directed way.

Clark’s research is a new application of fMRI technology in the emerging field of educational neuroscience.

“We’ve used fMRI research to understand what areas of the brain are involved in particular functions, but I’m really interested in using fMRI to capture the dynamic process of learning and saying ‘This is what happens as a child learns,’” said Clark, CYFS faculty affiliate. “I’m excited to push the boundaries a little bit.”



Carrie Clark

To understand the learning process, Clark is first developing a mathematics task for children 8-10 years old. The task uses a decimal counting technique — something children wouldn’t have learned in school — that will require a learning curve. If the task is too easy, Clark said, she and her team won’t see changes in the brain. If it’s too difficult, children may give up entirely.

After developing and piloting the mathematics task, Clark is inviting children to complete the task in an MRI scanner, which will highlight changes in oxygenated blood flow to different parts of the brain. She aims to identify what parts of the brain are involved in mathematics learning and to what extent executive function is used.

Clark’s future goals are to explore brain changes among different populations of students — such as those who may struggle with mathematics — and understand their brain activity during the learning process. This research could eventually be a tool for educators, Clark said, who could tailor teaching strategies based on what will stimulate more brain change.

“If we can use an fMRI to look at learning processes, I think it will be more useful to educators,” Clark said. “I think we will be better positioned to teach in a way that is supporting learning for all kids.”

## LAYMAN AWARDS

CYFS provided grant proposal assistance to four faculty in the College of Education and Human Sciences who received 2016-17 Layman Awards. Funded by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Office of Research and Economic Development, the grant provides \$10,000 in seed money for untenured faculty and supports researchers in the pursuit of external funding. The following grants are housed in CYFS:



### ELVIRA ABRICA

Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Administration

*“STEM Pathways in the Community College: An Empirical Examination of How Community Colleges Broaden or Restrict the STEM Transfer Function”*

Higher education institutions are under pressure to increase participation and degree completion in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, particularly among historically underrepresented racial minority groups. However, underrepresented populations are more likely to enroll in community colleges than four-year universities. Abrica’s research explores the institutional factors at community colleges that affect students’ ability to transfer to four-year STEM programs. She aims to develop future interventions that create stronger pathways between community colleges and four-year STEM programs.

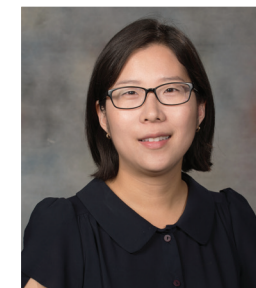


### MEREDITH MARTIN

Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Psychology

*“Understanding Early Adolescents Coping with Peer Threat: Insecurity as a Risk Factor for Psychopathology”*

Peer victimization is linked to anxiety, depression, criminal behavior, suicide, substance abuse and school dropout. Martin’s research explores how youth cope with victimization, how contextual characteristics shape their response and what demographics are most affected. She is developing and piloting two assessments of peer insecurity. Both will contribute to a better understanding of the Peer Social Defense Framework, developed in part by Martin, which asserts that safety and security are fundamental psychological goals motivating children’s responses to interpersonal threat.



### JESSICA NAMKUNG

Assistant Professor, Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders

*“Enhancing Students with Math Difficulties Transition from Arithmetic to Algebra”*

Students who struggle with learning mathematics show the most severe and persistent underachievement in algebra compared to their peers. Namkung’s research aims to refine, pilot test, and finalize a pre-algebra intervention for struggling middle school students. The 10-week intervention focuses on bridging the conceptual and procedural understanding of solving linear equations by using explicit instruction and physical objects.



### AMANDA THOMAS

Assistant Professor, Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

*“Examining Elementary Teachers’ Enactment of Digital Instructional Materials for Mathematics”*

Digital technology has potential to transform mathematics teaching and learning. To maximize this potential, teachers must select digital instructional materials that fit the curriculum and implement them in the classroom. Thomas’ research explores differences between how teachers plan to use these digital instructional materials and what actually happens in the classroom. She is also examining how teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and actions change after taking a course on technology use for elementary mathematics teaching.

# LANDSCAPE OF SUPPORT

## Snapshot of Cumulative CYFS Grant Activity

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

**\$73,901,240** External grants funded

**\$920,584**  
Internal grants funded

## Research Impact

The figures below show indicators of research impact for CYFS.

**504**  
Total grants submitted

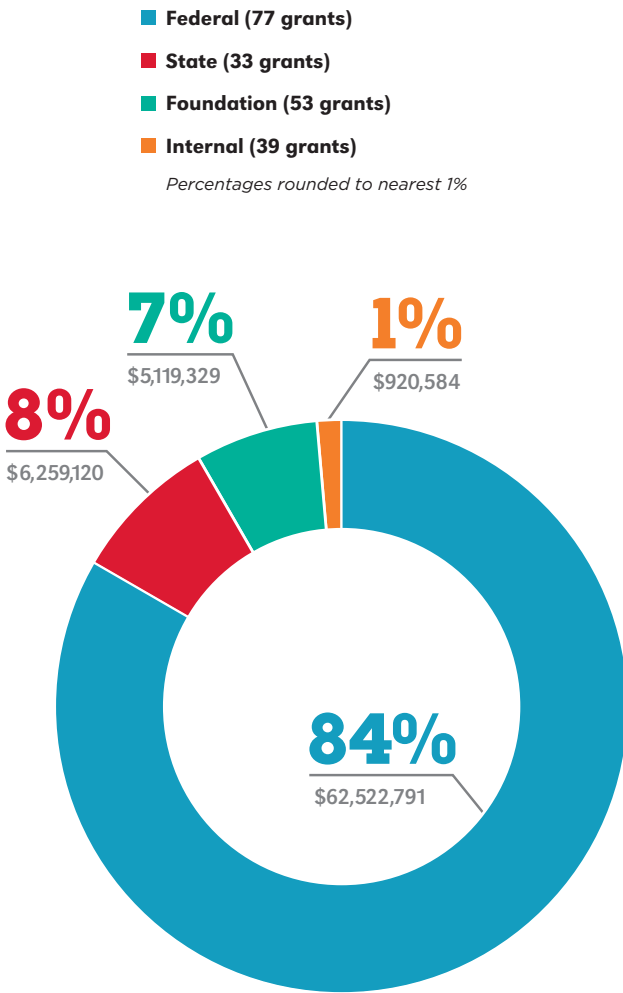
**202**  
Total grants funded

**42%**  
Hit rate of funded grants  
(based on known decisions)

**\$21<sup>.38</sup>**  
Return rate to the University  
of Nebraska–Lincoln for  
every \$1 invested

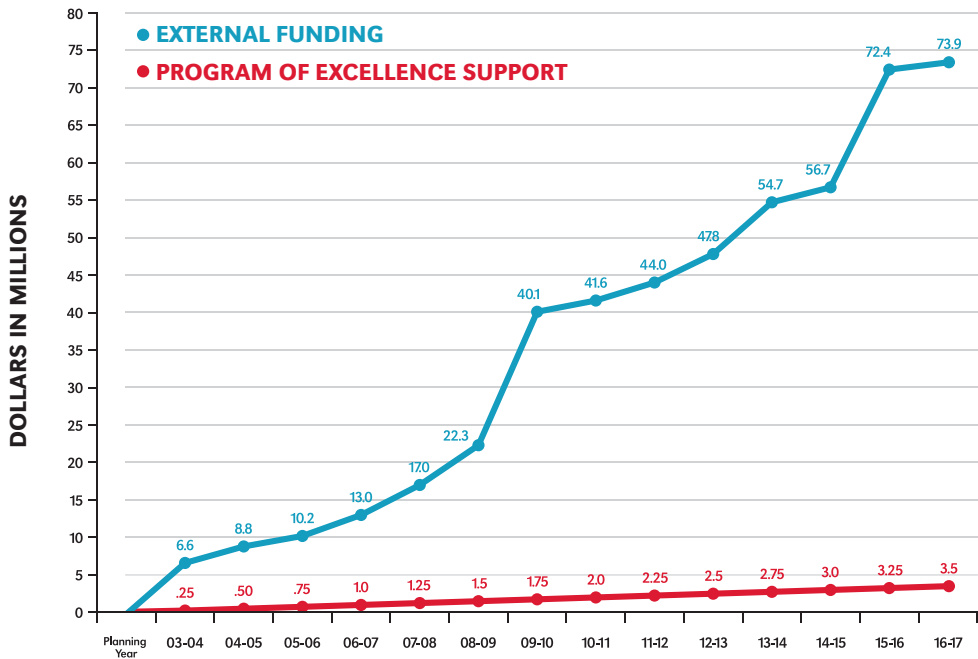
## Sources of Funding

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



## Cumulative External Grant Dollars vs. Program of Excellence Support

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



# ACTIVE GRANTS & CONTRACTS

**The following grants and contracts received new or ongoing funding during 2016–2017.**

## Federal Awards (\$24,151,912)

### Administration for Children and Families

*Early Head Start Home Visitors Identification of Risk for Maltreatment*  
Pls: Alayna Schreier, David Hansen, Mary Fran Flood

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

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

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

### Centers for Disease Control

*NAP SACC Web Development and Analysis*  
Pl: Dipti Dev

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

### National Institutes of Health

*Estimating Mediation Effects in Prevention Studies*  
Pl: Matt Fritz

*Stressors, Protective Factors, and Substance Use among Homeless Youth and Young Adults*  
Pls: Kimberly Tyler, Kristen Olson

### National Science Foundation

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

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

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

*Strategies: Action at a Distance*  
Pls: Daniel Claes, Jon Pedersen, Gregory Snow, Greg Welch

### U.S. Department of Agriculture

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

### U.S. Department of Education

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

*Early Learning Network Lead*  
Pls: Susan Sheridan, Lisa Knoche

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

*Efficacy of the START-Play Program for Infants with Neuromotor Disorders*  
Pl: James Bovaird

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

*Mountain Prairie Upgrade Partnership Itinerant (MPUP-I)*  
Pls: Malinda Eccarius, James Bovaird, Greg Welch

*Rural Ed Technical Paper*  
Pls: Susan Sheridan, James Bovaird

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

*School Psychology Specialization in Toddlers with Autism Spectrum Disorders*  
Pls: Gina Kunz, Therese Mathews

## State Awards (\$683,192)

### Nebraska Department of Education

*Child Care Market Rate Study*  
Pls: Greg Welch, Lisa Knoche

*Getting Ready—Part C NDE*  
Pl: Lisa Knoche

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

## Foundation/Other Awards (\$3,449,046)

*Afterschool Programming Return on Investments Studies: A Review of the Literature*  
Funding Source: Nebraska Children and Families Foundation  
Pls: Greg Welch, Gina Kunz

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

*BECI Superintendents Early Childhood Education Plan*  
Funding Source: Buffett Early Childhood Institute  
Pls: Dawn Davis, Lisa Knoche, Greg Welch

*Buffett Early Childhood Institute Database Development*  
Funding Source: Buffett Early Childhood Institute  
Pl: Lisa Knoche

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

*Closing the Health Gap: An Energy-Balance Approach to Bridging Early Childhood Obesity Disparities Among At-Risk Children in Rural and Urban Nebraska*  
Funding Source: UNL Food For Health  
Pl: Changmin Yan

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Exploring Student Engagement and Student Development in Caribbean Tertiary Education*  
Funding Source: ACPA—College Student Educators International  
Pl: Elizabeth Niehaus

*Exploring Student Engagement and Student Development in Caribbean Tertiary Education*  
Funding Source: NASPA Foundation  
Pl: Elizabeth Niehaus

*Feeding Practices of Families and Teachers with Latino Preschoolers in Colombia and U.S.: A Cross-Cultural Multiple Case Study*  
Funding Source: Society for Research in Child Development  
Pls: Elsa Escalante Barrios, Helen Raikes

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

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

*Implications of Insecure Parent–Child Attachment for Early Childhood Obesity Risk*  
Funding Source: UNL Office of Research and Economic Development  
Pls: Natalie Williams, David Hansen, Dipti Dev

*Learning to Teach in Urban Teacher Residencies: A Comparative Study*  
Funding Source: UNL Office of Research and Economic Development  
Pl: Lauren Gatti

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

*Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes: Finalization of Phase 1*  
Funding Source: Children’s Investment Fund  
Pls: Leslie Hawley, Natalie Koziol

*Mexican-Origin Youth’s Health-Risk Behavior: Interplay between Stress, Familial, Cultural, and Work Processes*  
Funding Source: UNL Layman Award  
Pl: Lorey Wheeler

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

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

*Research and Evaluation Consultant’s Services: Common Measures Continued Development*  
Funding Source: National 4-H Council  
Pls: Leslie Hawley, Michelle Howell Smith

*STEM Pathways in the Community College: An Examination of How Community Colleges Broaden or Restrict*

*Institutional Capacity for the STEM Transfer Function*  
Funding Source: UNL Layman Award  
Pl: Elvira Abrica

*The Development of a Positive Psychology Intervention to Promote the Well-Being of At-Risk High School Students*  
Funding Source: UNL Layman Award  
Pls: Michael Scheel, Gina Kunz, Greg Welch

*The Impacts of No Child Left Behind on School Leadership: An Empirical Examination Based on National SASS Data*  
Funding Source: UNL Layman Award  
Pl: Jiangang Xia

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

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

*Using Technology to Deliver Early Childhood Professional Development*  
Funding Source: Buffett Early Childhood Institute  
Pls: Jan Esteraich, Helen Raikes

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