



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INSTITUTE  
The University of Oklahoma-Tulsa

# Strategic Plan 2016-2026



The Early Childhood Education Institute (ECEI) is an applied research group focused on young children, birth to age 8, their families, and early care and education providers. Since 2006 we have conducted a variety of program evaluation projects and launched our own independent research aligned with our vision and mission.

**Our Vision:** Advancing Quality in Early Childhood through Research, Evaluation, and Community Collaboration

**Our Mission:** The Early Childhood Education Institute (ECEI) at OU-Tulsa strives to advance and support early childhood programming and policies by generating, disseminating, and applying meaningful research.

### **Our Core Values:**

**Integrity** - We are committed to doing what is right. We are honest and sincere in our relationships in order to build trust and foster collaboration. We practice discipline, consistency, and persistence in our work to ensure the quality of our research and associated activities.

**Responsibility** - We are independent professionals who hold ourselves and each other accountable.

**Excellence** - We go beyond what is expected, as individuals and as an organization.

**Respect** - We treat others with fairness, dignity, and compassion. We value the diversity of our team and the strengths of each member. We base our research on respect for children, their families, and the early childhood profession. We approach each person and situation with positive intent.

**Learning** - We are advocates for the continuous pursuit of knowledge both as contributors to the scientific field and as lifelong learners.

**Flexibility** - We adapt to the needs of our growing organization, our partners, and our employees.

## Looking Back, Looking Forward

The ECEI was founded in 2006 with one staff member and one evaluation project. Over the past ten years, our projects and staffing have increased exponentially as we build our research capacity. Currently, in 2016-17, we have ten different research projects and 30 full- and part-time staff and graduate assistants.

The list below highlights ECEI's current projects. The ECEI has maintained evaluation contracts with our two major community collaborators, Educare and CAP-Tulsa, since 2007. These relationships have matured over time and now include several studies within those partnerships examining a variety of research questions.

**Educare:** The ECEI partners with Tulsa Educare to investigate the characteristics and quality of their early childhood classrooms and practices and the development of children and families enrolled in their programs. Specific studies include:

- Educare Implementation Study
- Educare Randomized Control Trial
- Educare Follow-Up
- Bridging the Word Gap
- Data Utilization

**CAP-Tulsa:** The ECEI collaborates with CAP-Tulsa to evaluate the progress of children in their programs and study the quality of their early childhood classrooms, including those in the Oklahoma Early Childhood Program.

- OECP Classroom Observations
- CAP-Tulsa Evaluation, including child assessments and classroom observations

**Statewide Partnerships:** The ECEI has a number of other collaborators. They are listed below with a short description of our joint work.

- Georgetown University and Harvard University – School Experiences and Early Development (SEED) Study – following 700 three-year-olds in Tulsa through their early childhood and early school experiences.
- Little Dixie Head Start – classroom observations with feedback to inform teacher practice
- United Community Action Head Start – classroom observations with feedback to inform teacher practices

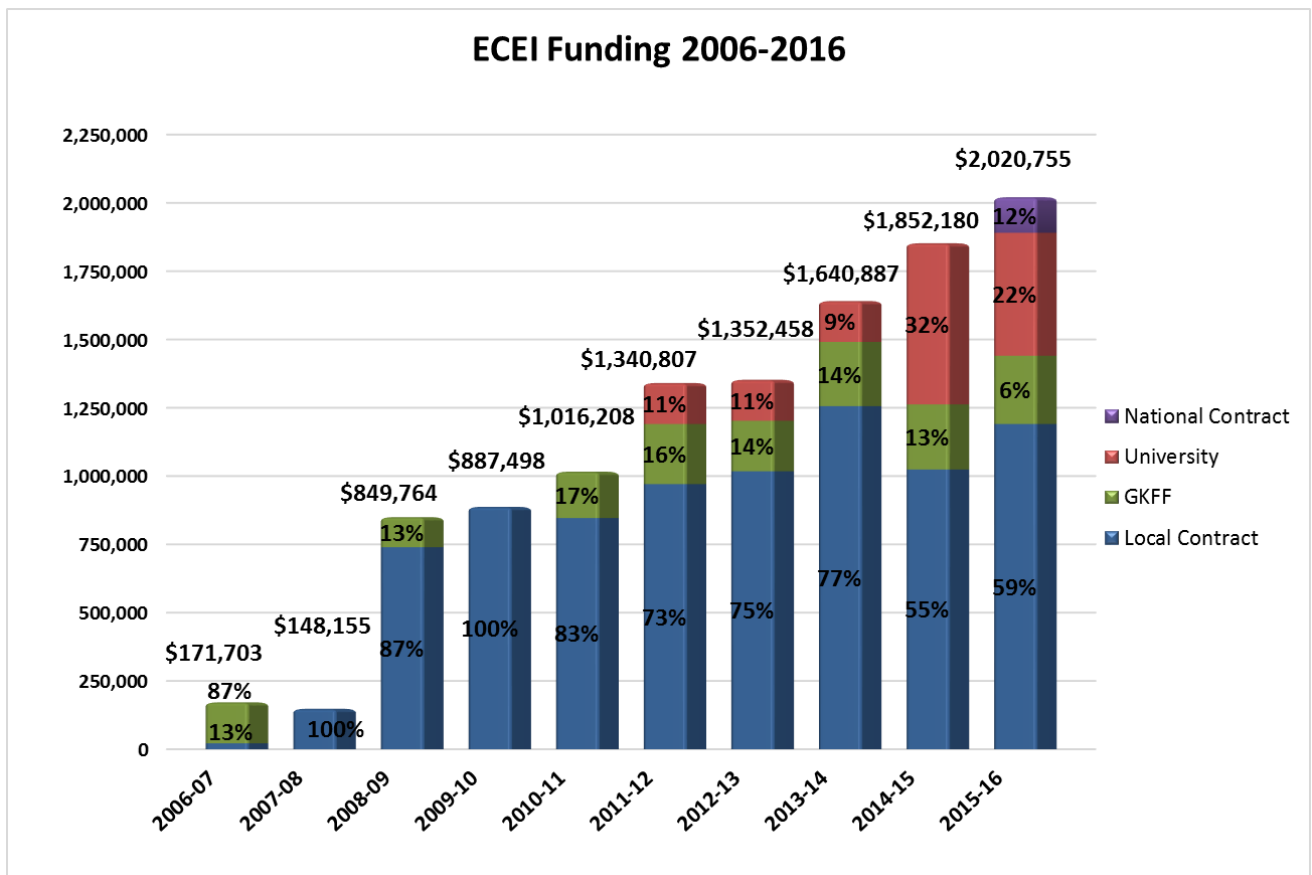
- OSU/CIRCA – Family Risk and Resilience
- OU Medicine – cortisol levels and classroom/teacher characteristics; child characteristics and classroom practices

**Federal Funding:** In addition to our contract research, 2016-17, we moved into the federal funding arena with two projects: a subcontract with Mathematica to develop training modules for a new infant-toddler classroom observation tool; and a Head Start Graduate Student Research Grant for one of our Project Directors and Ph.D. candidate, Emisha Pickens-Young.

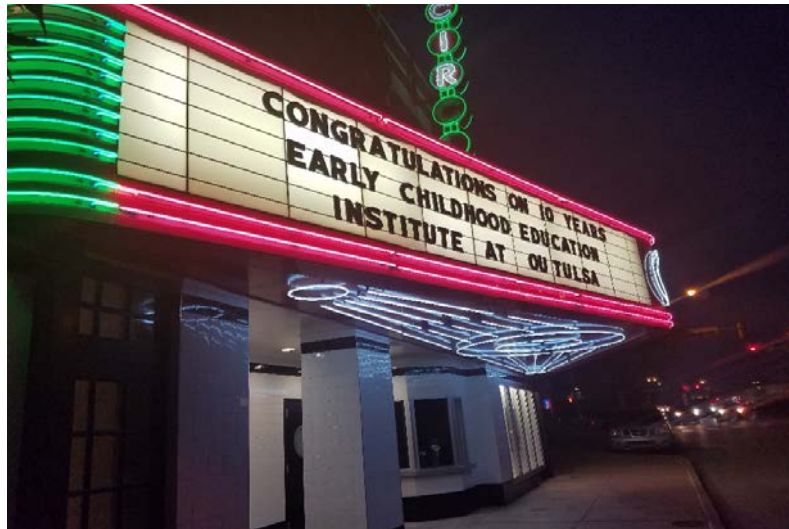
Our growth in projects is reflected in our growing budget over the past 10 years.

## Ten Years of Funding

The ECEI has experienced rapid growth over the past 10 years. The chart below shows growth in both amount and sources of funding. As can be seen, local evaluation contracts have been a stable foundation for our work. GKFF has consistently contributed funding to support our capacity to do community-collaborative research. In 2011 we were designated as a University Strategic Organization (USO) at OU and this designation brought funding to build our research capacity. In 2015 we secured our first national contract and look forward to adding more external funding over the next 10 years.



## Strategic Planning for ECEI's Second 10 Years



As we approached our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a research group, we engaged in our second major strategic planning effort. The result is the 10-year plan outlined below.

### **Our Foundational Purpose:**

In 2026, the ECEI will be a well-established research institute focusing on children birth to age 8 in group care settings with a credible track record, substantial portfolio of research, and diversified funding sources.

### **Our long-term goals, stated as measurable objectives, include:**

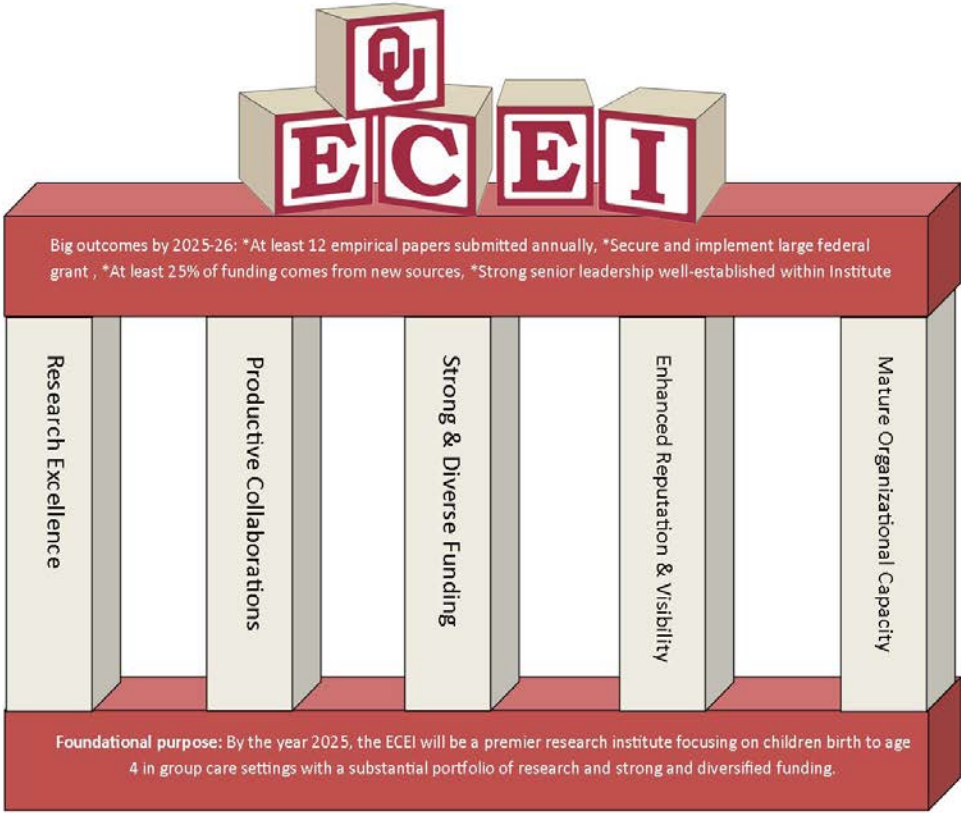
- Generating and contributing substantial new knowledge in terms of rigor, meaningfulness, and volume
- Expanding and diversifying our research funding to include multiple sources, both private and public
- Recruiting, retaining, and developing committed staff who demonstrate expertise in research and content knowledge in early childhood education and child development.



We have identified **five strategies** to accomplish these long-term goals and achieve our foundational purpose. These include:

- Research Excellence
- Productive Collaborations
- Strong and Diverse Funding
- Enhanced Reputation and Visibility
- Mature Organizational Capacity

The pillars below show these strategies and how they support achievement of our long-term goals and foundational purpose.



Benchmarks for each of these strategies are outlined on the following two pages.

### **Strategy One – Increase Research Enterprise and Excellence**

- Continued excellence in project management and data collection.
- Strengthen publication record and hone expertise aligned with ECEI’s specific lines of research.
- Pursue diverse and increasingly larger funding to support growing and deepening research agenda with the goal of applying for a larger federal grant (such as R01) by 2026.

### **Strategy Two – Productive Collaborations**

- Continue to work with local agency partners to maintain and extend evaluation and research collaborations.
- Invest in sustaining and growing interdisciplinary partnerships.
- Increase national-level partnerships for data collection and dissemination projects.
- Take the lead on a large federal grant involving research and community agency partners.

### **Strategy Three – Strong and Diverse Funding**

- Re-compete (in 2018) for additional years of USO funding to continue building research capacity.
- Secure additional University funding for Senior Researchers, helping boost capacity to vie for external funding.
- Build academic and research capacity by adding faculty in ECE.
- Build capacity to secure and successfully lead a large federal grant.

### **Strategy Four – Enhanced Reputation and Visibility**

- Hire a Dissemination Specialist to distribute ECEI’s research to multiple audiences including researchers, practitioners and policy makers.
- Develop and implement a marketing/outreach plan.
- Increase ECEI’s visibility through active participation in both refereed and invited presentations, panel discussions, advisory boards and similar professional opportunities at state, national, and international venues.

### **Strategy Five – Mature Organizational Capacity**

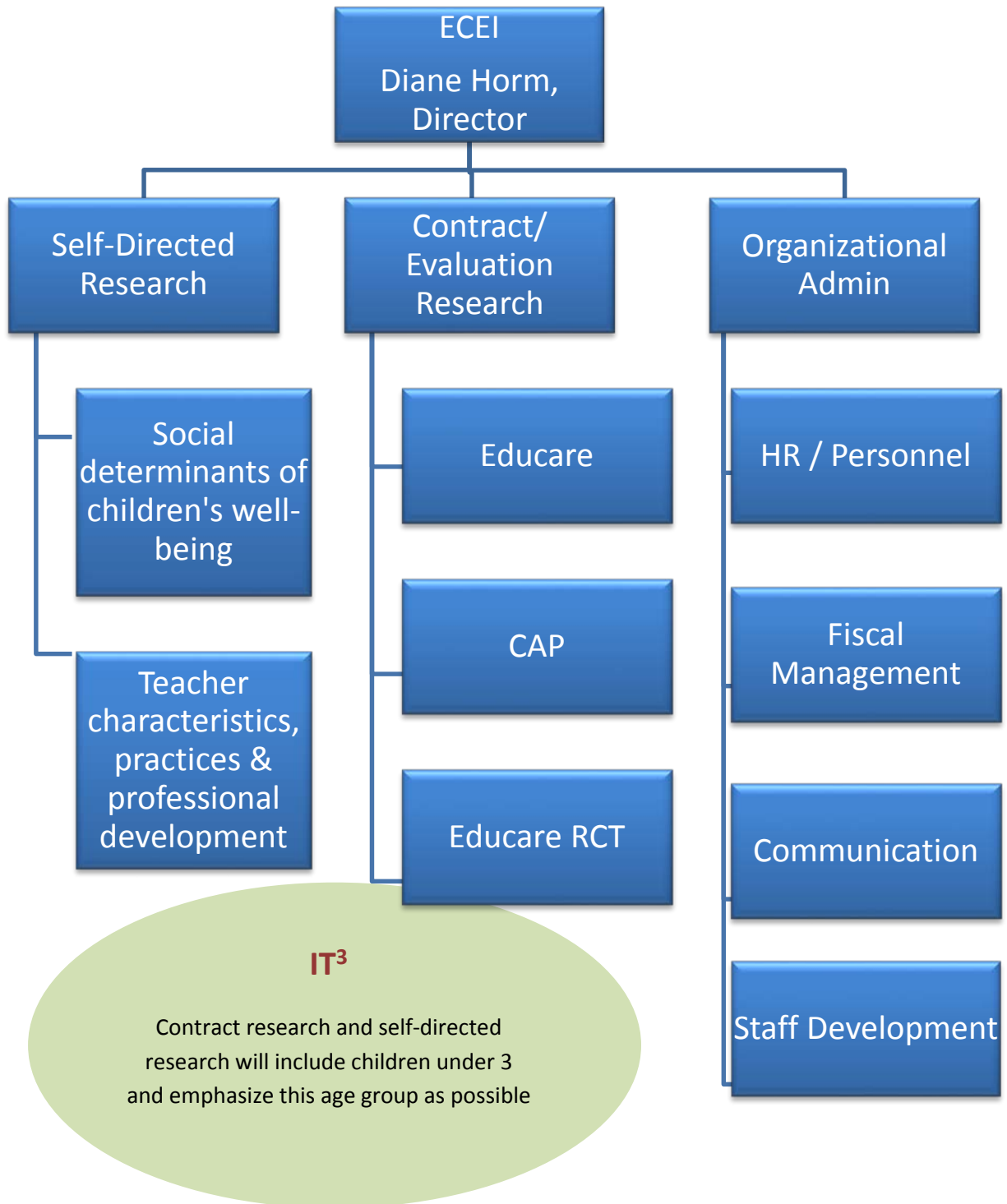
- Continue to implement ongoing individual and group professional development aligned with research goals.
- Secure funding to support several senior-level research positions:
  - Data Analyst



- Post-Doctoral Research Fellow
  - Senior Researchers who can lead research projects
- Increase participation of graduate students in ECEI's research to support development of their research expertise; develop Master's Degree program as feeder for ECE Ph.D. program and to meet community needs.
- Plan for leadership transition and eventual division of duties for ECEI Director and GKFF Chair position.

# 2016 Organizational Chart

A great organization is built by great people. The current organizational chart depicted here will change with continued growth.



The Organizational Chart on page 10 shows that over its first 10 years the ECEI has grown from implementing contract-funded research to answer the applied research questions of our community collaborators to include areas of self-directed research in line with the research interests of the ECEI's senior staff. The ECEI has developed a great capacity for high-quality data collection. This capacity has attracted local, state, and national collaborators.

However, to take the next steps forward in ECEI's second 10 years, the organization needs to enhance its capacity to lead research in the cutting-edge areas associated with the foci of ECEI's self-directed research. Specifically, the topic areas social determinants of children's well-being and teacher characteristics, practices, and professional development, especially when focused on the under-studied age group of infants and toddlers, represents areas of future growth for the ECEI to answer open, emerging, and important question in the field. A more detailed description of the ECEI's research agenda, with specific research questions and ECEI's publication record in these areas to date, is attached as an Appendix.

To realize future opportunity and achieve our 2026 strategic goals, the ECEI needs to add senior-level staff who have the capacity and vision to lead research projects. Specifically, research staff who can articulate relevant questions, design robust studies, apply advanced analysis techniques, and write manuscripts and grant proposals are needed to build on and take advantage of the strong data collection capacity developed from 2006-2016. This next step in ECEI's development requires the following resources:

- As a step in ECEI's succession planning, secure another Endowed Chair position and separate Dr. Horm's current responsibilities into a faculty line affiliated with the ECEI and a separate ECEI Director position.
- Additional ECE faculty who can lead lines of research aligned with ECEI's capacities and interests. To continue to build capacity, hire
  - Two faculty for the Norman Campus; one devoted to building the academic programs and one devoted to enhancing research. Currently the ECE faculty in Norman consists of two assistant professors who need support and mentoring. The recommended new hires should be at the Associate Professor level or above to provide leadership and mentoring.

- One faculty to join OU-Tulsa's program who has research interests and capabilities aligned with the ECEI's current and future work.
- Additional ECEI senior-level staff who can independently develop and lead research studies.
- Faculty or staff with current expertise in advance quantitative statistics and content knowledge in education, human development, or related area are needed on the OU-Tulsa Campus to staff advanced research courses for graduate students, to serve on doctoral committees, and to support peer researchers including those at the ECEI.
- Faculty or staff with expertise in wearable data tracking and analysis – could be Computer Science or Electrical and Computer Engineering (already working on medical wireless devices), and located on the Norman or Tulsa campuses.
- Communications staff who can disseminate ECEI's results to practitioners, policy, and lay audiences.
- Faculty in disciplines aligned with but outside ECE are needed to expand ECEI's emerging interdisciplinary research. Relevant faculty focused on young children and their families, birth through age 8, from the following disciplines would build OU's capacity in this area:
  - Neuroscience - perhaps in partnership with LIBR in Tulsa, or Psychology in Norman
  - Developmental Psychology with interest in poverty and child adversity
  - Social Work and Social Welfare
  - Speech and Language Development/Communication Disorders with interest in young children and dual language learning
  - Political Science (lower priority, but helpful if central interest is young children and families)
  - Economics (lower priority, but helpful if central interest is young children and families)
  - Sociology (lower priority, but helpful if central interest is young children and families)

We believe that the addition of both research staff and early childhood faculty lines will support the growth of the ECEI into our second decade, and further position OU to be a leading institution in the growing field of early childhood education programming, policy, and research.

# Appendix

## ECEI Research Agenda Updated February 2017

This document outlines the research agenda for the next several years in the two overarching areas of focus: **Social determinants of children’s well-being** and **Teacher characteristics, practices, and professional development**. The research agenda identifies research questions, topics of interest, related papers that are recently published or are in process, planned papers, and ideas regarding future data sources for additional studies within each area of focus.

### **Social Determinants of Children’s Well-being**

Children’s well-being encompasses development across domains, including but not limited to social emotional development, cognitive/pre-academic development, and executive functioning. Decades of research highlights the role of socioeconomic status in shaping children’s developmental trajectories, and the ECEI is joining efforts to examine which facets of poverty and adversity impact children’s well-being and how communities can best offset these risks.

#### Research Questions

**How do children’s experiences of poverty and/or adversity impact their development and well-being?**

- What is the prevalence of adversity experienced by children under 4 years of age?
- What are the physiological, social, and cognitive effects of young children’s experiences of poverty and adversity?
- What features of children’s families and experiences provide resilience in the face of adversity?

#### Selected Papers, Presentations and Manuscripts in Preparation

- Choi, J., Castle, S., Williamson, A., Young, E., Worley, L., Long, M., & Horm, D. (2016). Teacher-child interactions and the development of executive function in preschool-age children attending Head Start. *Early Education & Development, 27*, 1-19.
- Guss, S., Jones-Harden, B., Stein, A., Yazejian, N., Forestieri, N. (2016). Relationship of adversity to indicators of child well-being in a high quality early education context. *NHSA Dialog, 18* (4).
- Castle, S., Hays-Grudo, J., Miller-Cribbs, J., Guss, S. & Horm, D. (in preparation). Legacy of adversity: Relationship between parents' Adverse Childhood Experiences and children's social-emotional development in low-income families.
- Bosler, C., Hays-Grudo, J., Morris, A. S., Castle, S., Teague, T. K., Horm, D., Guss, S., & Miller-Cribbs, J. (In preparation.) Intergenerational transfer of stress: Associations between parents' Adverse Childhood Experiences and their children's salivary cortisol levels.

## Teacher Characteristics, Practices, and Professional Development

Early Care and Education settings are a key context in supporting children's development. The experiences children have in classrooms are shaped by teachers' characteristics, practices, and professional development.

### Research Questions

**How do teacher characteristics, practices, and professional development impact young children and their care and education settings?**

- What is the impact of teachers' professional knowledge, skills, beliefs, and attitudes on infants, toddlers, twos, and threes?
- What is the impact of teachers' current and past experiences of stress, adversity, and support on infants, toddlers, twos, and threes?
- What defines high-quality early care and education settings for infants, toddlers, twos, and threes?
- What aspects of professional development (e.g., content and techniques) impact teachers as well as their work with young children and families?



### Selected Papers, Presentations and Manuscripts in Preparation

Castle, S., Williamson, A. C., Young, E., Pearce, N., Laurin, D., & Stubblefield, J. (2016). Teacher-child interactions in Early Head Start classrooms: Associations with teacher characteristics. *Early Education & Development, 27*, 259-274.

Horm, D., File, N., Bryant, D., Burchinal, M., Raikes, H., Forestieri, N., Encinger, A., & Cobol Lewis, A. (under review). Associations between continuity of care in infant-toddler classrooms and child outcomes.

Goble, C. B., Horm, D., Atanasov, A. M., Williamson, A., & Choi, J. (2015). Knowledge and beliefs of early childhood education students at different levels of professional preparation. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 36*(3), 211-231.