

RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP

The ECEI partners with community, state, and national partners with a focus on applied research to enhance programs and systems for young children, their families, and early childhood professionals. We have partnered with the Community Action Project of Tulsa County (CAP Tulsa) since 2006.

“I believe our partnership with CAP Tulsa has been very important and mutually supportive over time,” noted former ECEI Director Diane Horm. “Since the inception of the ECEI, we have collaborated with CAP Tulsa on two on-going projects. For the first project, which started as the State Pilot Program to Enhance and Expand Infant/Toddler Services (SPP) and is now called the Oklahoma Early Childhood Program (OECF), we collaborated with CAP Tulsa to serve as the evaluation partner on their initial proposal to the State Department of Education to establish the program. This partnership continues today. The second project was serving as the Local

Evaluation Partner for CAP Tulsa's Head Start programs, starting with Tulsa Educare in 2007. The ECEI continues this partnership as well with the Child Achievement Research Partnership (CARP)."

Providing evaluation and research, the ECEI supports CAP's mission to help young children in lower-income families grow up and achieve economic success. CAP Tulsa is an Early Head Start/Head Start grantee, with ten early childhood program sites providing two-generation services, including home-based and family programs. ECEI's role is to supply data that CAP Tulsa uses to inform their programming.

Oklahoma Early Childhood Program (OECF) Evaluation

The Oklahoma State Legislature established Oklahoma Early Childhood Program (originally the SPP) in 2006 to improve the quality of early education and expand capacity to serve children from birth through age three and their families statewide. The ECEI partners with CAP Tulsa to evaluate and research the effectiveness of the program's goals which include enhancing childcare quality, elevating teacher qualifications, achieving pay equity for educators,

providing professional development, and supporting families' basic needs. The ECEI conducts classroom observations and teacher surveys to identify classroom and teacher characteristics that support children's learning and development. Approximately 25% of all OECP classrooms (including ~700 children) across the state are sampled in the evaluation.

This year's teacher survey was distributed to all teachers employed at an OECP-funded agency. Of the 435 responding teachers, 78% have been teaching for at least three years and 89% plan to stay in early childhood for at least five years. Over time, the OECP has increased the number of children experiencing high-quality caregiving and supportive interactions between children and teachers (Horm et al., 2009).

Read more about our OECP research:

- Horm, D., Goble, C., Boatright, M., Decker, C., Noble, N., & Norris, D. (2009). Oklahoma's Pilot Early Childhood Program Birth through Three Years: Description, evaluation, and policy implications. *National Head Start Association Dialog: A Research to Practice Journal for the Early Intervention Field*, 12(4), 360-373. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15240750903075248>

- Horm, D. M., Jeon, S., Vega Ruvalcaba, D., & Castle, S. (2024). Resilience: Supporting children's self-regulation in infant and toddler classrooms. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15:1271840. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1271840>

Child Achievement Research Partnership (CARP)

Through the Child Achievement Research Partnership (CARP), the ECEI works with CAP Tulsa to document understanding of children's growth and achievement during their time in the early childhood program. We examine instructional quality and children's development in the CAP Tulsa program longitudinally and situate the program's success in the context of other nationally representative early childhood programs. Since 2022, approximately 850 children and 350 teachers have participated in this study. Classroom observations and direct assessments of children's development and learning are conducted. Teachers also complete ratings on the behaviors of their students and an annual survey to understand their workplace experiences and perspectives.

CAP Tulsa serves a demographically diverse group of young children and families. Their sizeable group of Spanish-speaking families has enabled ECEI researchers interested in dual-language learning (DLL) in young children to use the CARP data to investigate research questions of interest to CAP Tulsa and the larger field. For example, a 2023 publication (Frechette et al.) reported findings that emphasize the importance of young dual-language children developing proficiency in both English and Spanish. The analysis of the CARP data examined how variations in DLL-language proficiency impacted development. The results suggested several benefits of being a proficient bilingual, including better social-emotional skills compared to monolingual peers. Proficient bilingual children also saw cognitive advantages when their executive functioning (EF) skills were high, regardless of the neighborhood environment risks they were exposed to, suggesting that proficient bilingual children may have more opportunities to grow their EF skills when switching between English and Spanish regardless of their neighborhood context. These findings have implications for families and teachers, reminding them that it's important to support dual-language learners to become proficient in both English and Spanish.

Read more about our CARP research:

- Frechette, L., Castle, S., Jeon, S., Horm, D., Martinez, I., Vega Ruvalcaba, D., & Schaefer, S. (2023). Effects of family and neighborhood vulnerability on dual language learner and monolingual children's preschool outcomes. *Frontiers in Education*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.955967>
- Kwon, K., Malek, A., Horm, D., & Castle, S. (2020). Turnover and retention of infant-toddler teachers: Reasons, consequences, and suggestions for improvement. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 115. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105061>
- Garcia, A.S., Jeon, S., Kwon, K.A., & Horm, D.M. (2024). Examining the interplay of teacher well-being, executive function, and adaptability in virtual instruction during COVID-19 disruptions. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, p.1399854. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1399854>



As the Project Director of both OECP and CARP projects, Denise Vega Ruvalcaba leads a highly trained team of research associates, implementing rigorous assessments used for applied research as well as implementation and continuous improvement efforts. Team members are pictured from left: Denise, Carey Herrera, Emily Condry, Hillary Bravo, Cara Kelly, (back row), Moira Clavijo, Leah Smith, Michelle Franchini, and Tony Ramirez Reyes.