



EARLY CHILDHOOD  
EDUCATION INSTITUTE  
*The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA - TULSA*



# 2020 Annual Report



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# From the Director



To say that 2020 was “unprecedented” is to state the obvious. We all shared the common experience of overcoming challenges associated with the pandemic, both large and small. During my 14 years with the ECEI at OU-Tulsa, I cannot identify another year during which the major stories impacting our country had similar major impacts on our work and research.

The COVID-19 pandemic was, and continues to be, a major factor. And if you thought that the shuttering of early education sites across the state would have a lasting impact on us, you are correct. However, it might not be the kind of impact you’d initially expect.

Yes, the pandemic did have negative outcomes that forced us to make some difficult decisions. But what I would like to highlight is how we used the pandemic and its associated challenges as opportunities to reevaluate, re-focus, and strengthen our capacity while positioning the ECEI researchers to be leaders in

our field moving forward.

First, the negative: We saw a 19 percent decrease in revenue in 2020, by far the largest drop we’ve seen since our inception in 2006. The bulk of that decrease in funding was from a temporary “pause” in one of our partnership data-collection contracts during the spring semester. Despite that temporary reduction, we were able to make it through the year without laying off any of our staff. Some of our part-time staff did opt to move on because of a reduction in available hours due to the lack of data collection, but those were voluntary and employee-initiated moves. We are proud that we were able to keep our core full-time staff and many valuable part-time staff members too on the ECEI payroll.

Fortunately, we were able to find ways to continue paying our staff and invest in professional development and activities to build the human capital and capacity of the ECEI.



Although all ECEI staff were working remotely and unable to conduct our typical classroom observations and child assessments, we reallocated work time to tackle several back-burner projects and to increase our knowledge base in several critical areas. And this is also another area where national events shaped our work.

During the summer, we joined many of our peers and partners in standing side-by-side with community members, especially those impacted by racism, and pledged to work toward rooting out systemic racism, bias, and injustice while promoting and creating a more equitable early childhood experience. Making the pledge was a natural next step for the ECEI, because we had already committed a focus on equity in both the content and process of our work in our refreshed strategic plan.

With attention rightly riveted on issues related to racial justice and with available work time, we were able to move beyond words and a group of ECEI staff created and delivered our own courses on race and diversity and focused on how we could incorporate these ideals — both in the content of our research and into the culture of the ECEI. While there is still progress to be made, we are definitely on the right path and the gift of time provided by the pandemic was productively used to build our knowledge base, individually and collectively.

When it became clear that the fall semester would not look like any other semester we've seen to date, our staff shifted into overdrive to make sure we had the technology and know-how to create innovative approaches to conduct child assessments and classroom observations. Our success in these endeavors has garnered interest from other groups who see the potential for remote child assessments and

classroom observations, even when things return to normal. For example, the ECEI sees potential for using these pandemic-born strategies to extend our data collection capacity to rural communities where previously the cost of data collection was prohibitive.

As we look back on the last year, we are gratified that we pulled together and used what could have been seen as daunting, defeating challenges as opportunities. Opportunities to challenge ourselves to adapt, develop innovative strategies to accomplish our work, and build our capacity as individuals and as a research group.

I do believe the past year has made us stronger. Not only have we achieved the things I showcased above, but most importantly we have learned that the ECEI has the ability to positively adapt and be nimble when faced with adversity. I want to take the opportunity to thank my ECEI colleagues for their creativity, persistence, grace, and good humor over the past year. I also want to thank our funders and collaborators who buoyed us — both in terms of funding and their spirit to seize the opportunity to partner and innovate and try new approaches.

Thank you all for your interest and support. As always, please let me know if you desire more information or have questions or suggestions. I am happy to meet for further discussion.

Onward,  
**Diane Horm**



# 2020 At a Glance

**Here's a quick look at our research, our staff, and some of the highlights from the past year.**

## 7

**JOURNAL ARTICLES  
PUBLISHED IN PEER-  
REVIEWED JOURNALS**

*We plan to increase that number to 15 published articles in 2021.*

### Our Research

Generating and disseminating high-quality, meaningful research is at the heart of our work as an applied research institute. Our team of researchers and data collectors focuses on young children, birth through age 8, and specializes in longitudinal studies, understanding early childhood settings and workforce characteristics, and using data to examine early childhood practice leading to improved child outcomes. We work in partnership with community agencies and researchers from affiliated fields to infuse multiple and interdisciplinary perspectives.

Our goal for the next year is to increase the number of published journal articles to 15 and for those studies to examine the experiences of diverse children and teachers to investigate the extent to which early childhood classrooms are supporting equitable outcomes for young children.



**DIVERSIFIED FUNDING**

*When we started out in 2006, funding came from a single foundation. Now, 71 percent of our funding comes from national and local contracts.*

**Our People**

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The ECEI staff consists of 39 full- and part-time employees, including two faculty members. We also have three affiliated faculty members, 13 fellows, and a 10-person advisory board. More than a quarter of our staff are bilingual and 10 have graduate degrees.

**Our Dissemination**

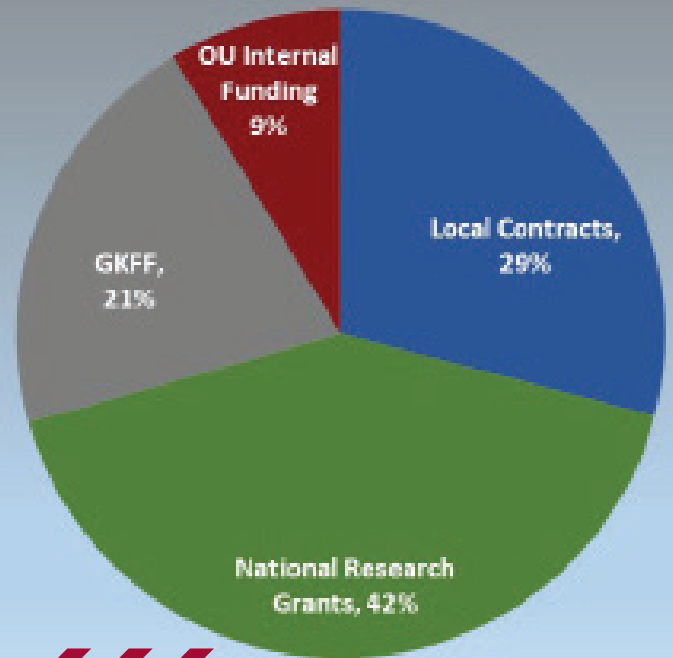
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Many conferences and professional meetings were postponed or moved to an online format. Despite this, we were still able to find ways to expand our reach and share our research with new audiences.

We partnered with the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness in order to launch Building Equitable Futures, a three-part childhood research and policy series focusing on pre-K studies, early childhood initiatives and ancillary services and supports for the early childhood workforce.

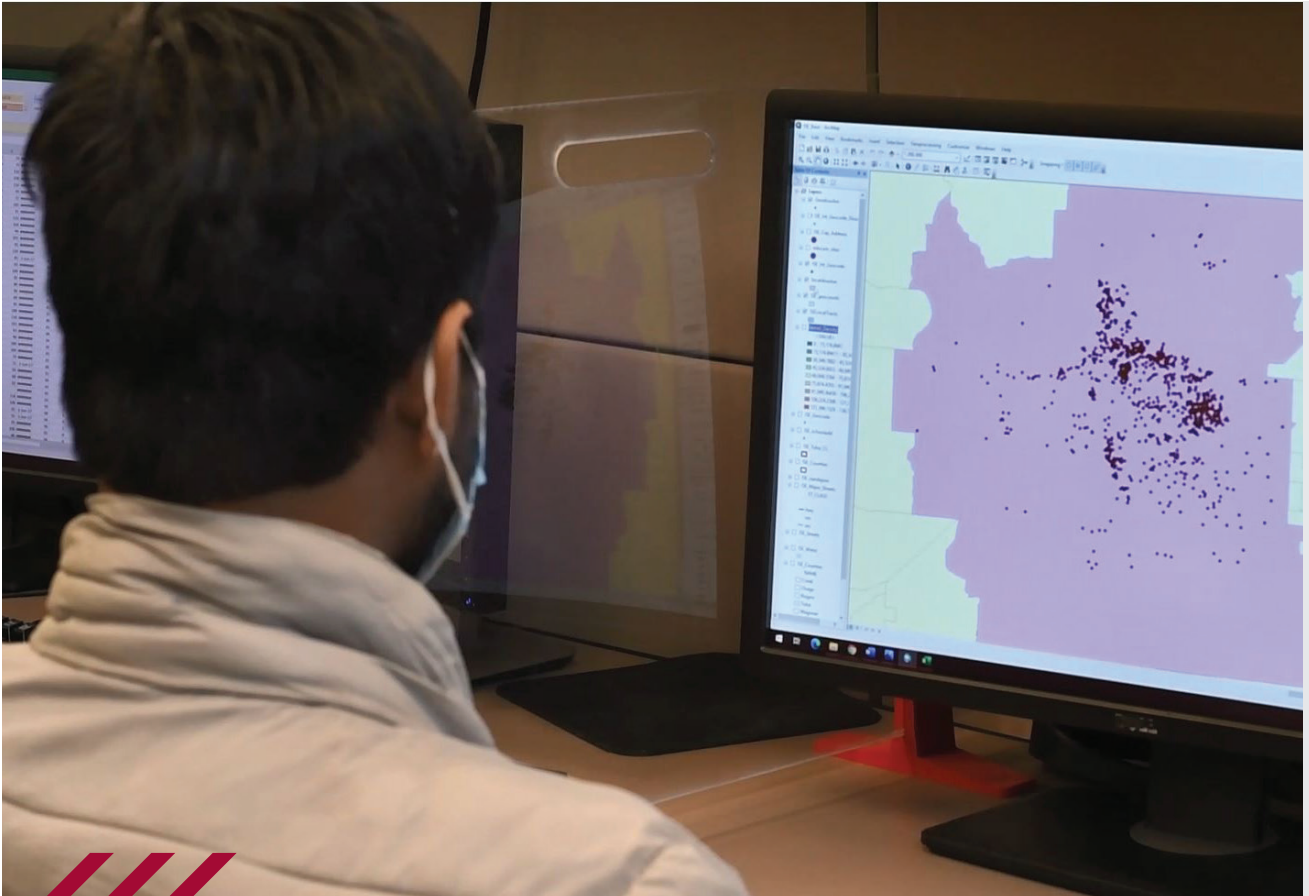
Our work and some of our staff were featured in several newspaper, radio, and television stories including the front page of the Tulsa World and cover of Tulsa Kids.

**ECEI Income 2020-2021**  
**Total Amount: \$1,794,869**



**19%**

**DECREASE IN OUR ANNUAL REVENUE BUT INSTITUTE WAS ABLE TO AVOID LAYING OFF STAFF**



## Research Papers

Reflecting the ebb and flow of publishing, last year we published seven papers and one book chapter. This is a slight drop from the two previous years.

In 2019 we published 11 papers and two book chapters while in 2018 we published nine papers, one book one book chapter, one invited journal article and one commissioned paper.

### Refereed Journal Articles

- Reframing High-Quality Public Preschool as a Vehicle for Narrowing Child Health Disparities based on Family Income.
- Teachers: Reasons, Consequences, and Suggestions for Improvement
- The moderating role of two learning related behaviors in preschool children's academic outcomes: Learning behavior and executive function.
- Positive parenting, effortful control, and developmental outcomes across early childhood
- Profiles of family engagement in Early Head Start: Associations with child outcomes and parenting skills.
- Language Intervention Research in Early Childhood Care and Education: A Systemic Survey of the Literature
- Turnover and Retention of Infant-Toddler
- The Educare Intervention: Outcomes at Age 3





# Our Research

*Our researchers published seven papers and one book chapter in peer-reviewed publications in 2020. Many of the conferences we would normally attend were canceled or moved to virtual formats.*

## Conferences and Presentations

Heading into 2020, our lead researchers and staff were poised to make a splash on the national stage with prominent slots slated in several major conferences. Then the pandemic hit, forcing several conferences to cancel while others moved to stripped down, virtual formats. We did however, maintain a significant showing at the NRCEC virtual conference.

### Conference Highlights

#### National Research Conference on Early Childhood

- Diane Horm presented a Master Lecture titled: "Infant-Toddler Group Care: Looking Forward, Looking Back."
- Our researchers and associated faculty produced 10 posters on topics such as collaborative research in early care and education, kindergarten achievement in Head Start graduates, and the role of self regulation.
- Staff and associated faculty participated in one symposium and two paper symposiums.





## SEED Study

The School Experiences and Early Development, or SEED, Study, a partnership between the ECEI and researchers at Georgetown University, is a longitudinal study following a diverse sample of children from low-income families from age 3 through 4th grade in an effort to understand the effects of attending pre-K programs on children’s learning, development, and health.

“The Tulsa SEED Study participants are currently in 2nd grade. The study continued data collection through the pandemic via teacher and parent surveys. In summer and fall of 2020 our team designed and piloted a remote assessment protocol that was conducted over Zoom. We ultimately suspended child assessment collection due to the increased demands on teachers’ time, but we learned a lot through the experience, and many research colleagues around the nation have gained insight from our process.”

**April Dericks,**  
*Project Director*

- May 2020 - Collected special surveys on the initial impacts of COVID on first-grade teachers and parents. These findings were shared with the community in a front-page article in the Tulsa World
- Summer 2020 - Successful development and pilot of remote child assessments. Lessons learned were shared in a round-table presentation at SRCD 2021



# Current Projects

*Our four major, ongoing research projects each took major steps forward, even with the changes brought on by the pandemic. Here's a look at some of the highlights from the past year.*

## Educare Implementation Study

The Educare Implementation Study, conducted in collaboration with researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, documents the features of Educare and how implementation of the model contributes to program quality and links to child and family outcomes. ECEI is the Local Evaluation Partner for Tulsa's Educare schools.

"This year was challenging due to not being able to approach our work in our typical way. We were able to get creative and find some new ways to partner with Tulsa Educare. While we were able to maintain some consistency over the year, we also found innovative ways to approach our work."

**Holly Neveu,**  
*Project Director*

- Digitized version of Family Assessment
- Classroom observations conducted via Zoom using Swivl robots
- Introduction of new teacher rated measure of early literacy for infants and toddlers



*“As a researcher, I benefit greatly from our interactions with local program partners whose teams are in the field working with children and families every day. Hearing these experiences helps me understand the nuances of our measures and data, allowing me to ask better questions and reach more effective conclusions and recommendations.”*

Sherri Castle, Assistant Director of Research

## Educare RCT and Follow-Up Studies

The ECEI, in partnership with the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and researchers across the country, is following a randomly-assigned group of children, some selected to attend Educare schools and others who were not, in an effort to determine whether children who attended Educare continue to benefit from the program as they advance through elementary school. We are funded to follow the children through third grade.

“Our project work looked very different this past year due to staff working from home and not having access to our study participants at their schools, which is where we would normally conduct our assessments. However, we were able to adjust successfully and even add a new cohort of children who were entering Kindergarten from Educare in the hopes of capturing how the pandemic affected their transition.”

**Melissa Acton,**  
Project Director

- Created COVID-safe protocols to allow for families to come to our campus to complete assessments and parent surveys in the fall
- Created remote versions of assessments to be added as an optional alternative to families for spring data collection
- Recruited a new cohort of Educare children who entered Kindergarten in the fall
- Moved all teacher surveys online



## CAP-Tulsa Research Partnership

We partner with CAP-Tulsa to evaluate and research several different components of their Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Our staff also evaluates Oklahoma's Early Childhood Program (OECF), which is a state-funded initiative led by CAP-Tulsa to support and expand high-quality early childhood programs for children 3 and younger.

- We were able to take a deeper dive into data analysis and data documentation
- Several our of our staff assisted with other projects

NOTE: Data Collection on the CAP project was suspended for most of the year

“The past year has looked a little different for our project. We couldn't do assessments or observations in the schools for most of 2020, but this gave us time to do tasks for our project that we wouldn't have had much time for otherwise. Our staff also took advantage of professional development opportunities to expand their understanding of diversity in research by participating in campus-wide opportunities such as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) events as well as ECEI-led study and shares, antiracist-workplace trainings, and equity sessions to gain a deeper understanding of how inequities play a role in the communities we research.”

**Lisa Eshenour,**  
*Project Director*



## Childhood in a Pandemic:

### Parent Stress, Resources, and Interactions During COVID-19

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The ECEI was awarded a COVID-19 Rapid Response Seed Grant to provide just-in-time adaptive interventions for families impacted by the pandemic.

The Institute is working with OU-Health Sciences Center to create an app that will provide quick daily assessments of families' most immediate needs and stressors and will also allow researchers to study the impacts of the pandemic on families.

The intervention resources will be curated by ECEI staff to ensure they are developmentally and culturally appropriate for the participating families.

- Both of these projects were competitively selected for funding by OU's Office of the Vice President for Research and Partnerships with the idea that the initial funding will serve as a foundation for federal grant proposals.
- These projects allowed the ECEI to forge new interdisciplinary collaborations and collect pilot data.



# New Awards

*We received two new grants for projects from the OU Office of the Vice President of Research and Partnerships.*

## Neighborhood Inequities and Executive Function

In the summer of 2020 we received funding for a study to address the glaring racial disparities in the country's science and engineering workforce by examining factors that shape children's academic and future career success.

Our research will focus on identifying neighborhood characteristics that are both predictive of children's early development and amendable to policy intervention to enhance equity.

By looking at how a child's neighborhood impacts their executive function – working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility – researchers hope to develop a better understanding of how to prioritize and allocate resources to ensure that vulnerable children and families can thrive in the classroom and in their communities.

“Neighborhood Inequities seed funding from OVPRP opened the doors for us to use our data in new and innovative ways. With the final goal in mind of understanding how low-income neighborhood environments affect children's development and academic success, we were able to merge data across several projects in the ECEI with national data including Census, National Neighborhood Data Archive (NaNDA), and the CDC Social Vulnerability Index.”

**Liz Frechette,**  
Postdoctoral Fellow

# Moving Forward

**As we look toward the future, we want to share our new goals, strategies, and plans for how we plan to get there.**

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## Our Goals

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At the onset of 2021, we announced to our staff two new overarching goals we are striving toward in the coming year. First, we want to increase the number of refereed journal articles published by our researchers and our affiliated faculty to 15 for the calendar year. Second, we want to increase the amount of grants we apply for throughout the year to \$5 million in an effort further increase investigator-initiated awards and diversify our funding and increase the number of researchers on our staff.

## Our Strategic Plan

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We refreshed our strategic plan to address our push to increase our profile and visibility on a national level, increase and diversify funding streams, and build organizational capacity and capabilities. This plan also included updated Mission and Vision statements to highlight our efforts to embrace, understand, and advance equity in early childhood







# Our Vision:

*To understand and advance equity in early childhood*

# Our Mission:

*To advance and support equity in early childhood by generating and disseminating high-quality, meaningful research*

## Our Research Agenda

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The overarching approach that we are taking with our research is that a child's zip code, skin color, or home language should not determine the likelihood of their academic and life success. While we embrace this statement, we understand that disparities exist and persist. Our plan is to address this pressing societal problem by pursuing four areas of research, each relating to equitable access, experiences, and impacts of experiences in early childhood.

## Our Research Priorities

- **Early childhood services and quality of care:** Investigate aspects of classrooms and experiences most important to children's development and examine precursors of best practice
- **Early childhood workforce characteristics and well-being:** Expand understanding of teacher well-being and its importance by identifying the scope and nature of the struggles, strengths, and supports of early childhood professionals
- **The intersection of early childhood care and health:** Explore links between children's developmental and health outcomes by leveraging available resources of clinical and biomarker data and expertise
- **Early childhood measurement development:** Develop and refine measures of children's development and experiences by building on data collection and measurement expertise



"I have been studying how both family and education contexts positively affect developmental outcomes of children in low-income families. Especially, I focus on family-teacher collaborative relationships to improve children's social emotional and academic skills during early childhood. My research is to find positive environmental impacts for economically disadvantaged children to advance equity in early childhood education."

**Shinyoung Jeon**  
Senior Research and Policy Expert



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