The Early Learning Network: *Research Informing Policy and Practice*

Caroline Ebanks, NCER, IES
Susan Sheridan & Lisa Knoche
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

The Early Learning Network is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences.

Why Research Networks?

- Grew out of year-long effort by the National Center for Education Research and the National Center for Special Education Research to solicit stakeholder input on our research programs

- Two major themes:
  - In a time of scarce resources, set research priorities
  - Encourage greater collaboration among researchers

Overview of Research Networks

Network objectives:

1. Focus resources and attention on education issues that are a high priority for the nation

2. Create a structure and process for researchers to share ideas, build new knowledge, strengthen their research and dissemination capacity

3. Advance the field's understanding of a problem or issue beyond what one research team can do on its own

Supporting Early Learning from Preschool through Early Elementary School Grades (Early Learning Network)

- The Early Learning Network will examine why many children—especially those from low-income households or other disadvantaged backgrounds—experience academic and social difficulties as they begin elementary school.

- Network members will focus on identifying malleable factors (such as state and local policies, instructional practices, parental support, and others) that are associated with early learning and achievement from preschool through the early elementary school grades.

- The Network's ultimate objective is to advance the field's understanding and implementation of policies and programs that support early learning and ongoing academic success.

The Early Learning Network intends to advance the understanding of *policies and practices* that narrow the achievement gap and *maintain early learning success* as children transition *from preschool to elementary school* and beyond.
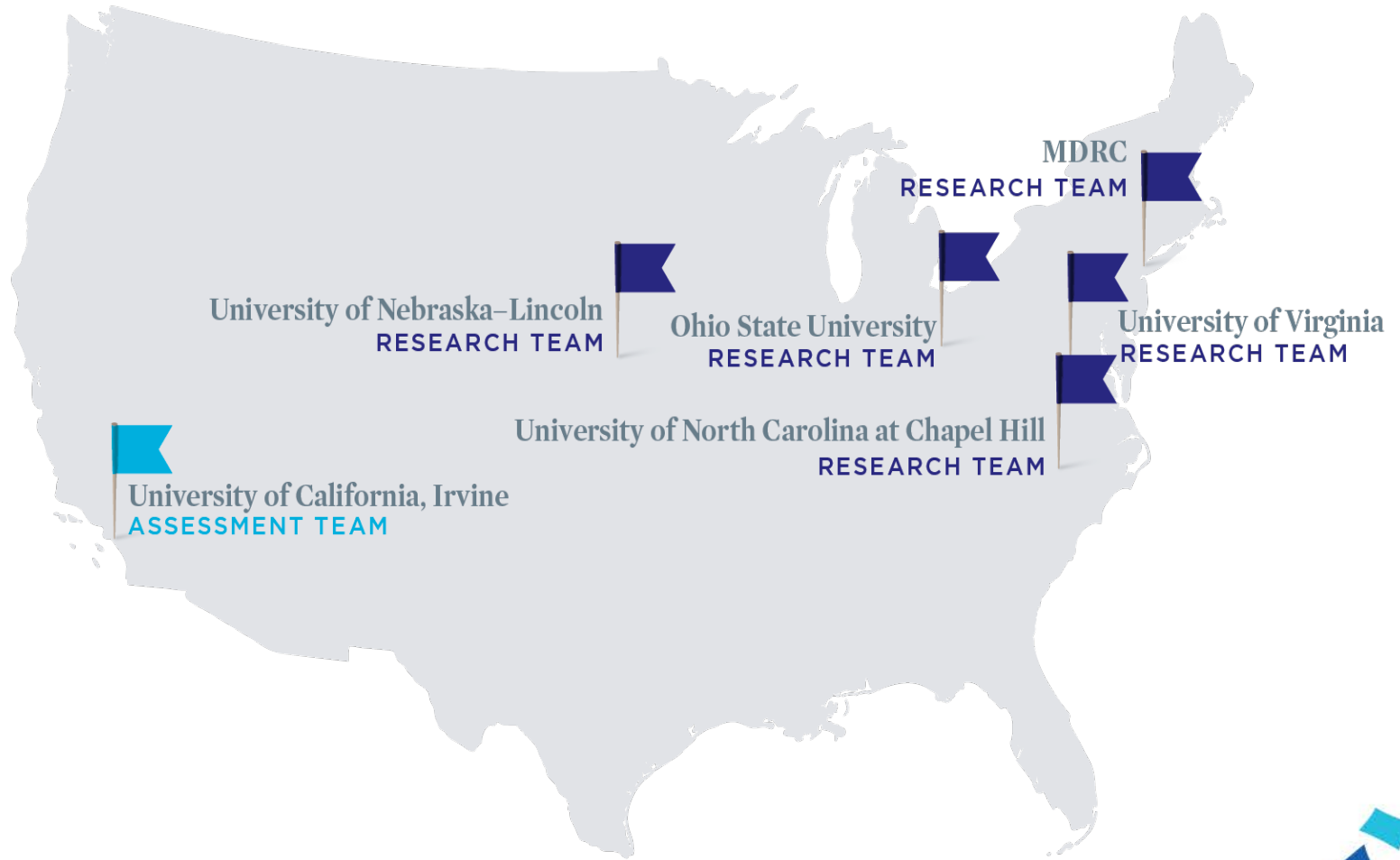
Collectively, Network researchers are examining *current policies and practices;* identifying *malleable factors* associated with early learning; documenting *student growth and development;* and developing *tools to assess early learning instruction, interactions and environments.*

Research and Assessment Teams

RESEARCH & ASSESSMENT TEAM MAP

University of Nebraska–Lincoln
RESEARCH TEAM

Ohio State University
RESEARCH TEAM

MDRC
RESEARCH TEAM

University of Virginia
RESEARCH TEAM

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
RESEARCH TEAM

University of California, Irvine
ASSESSMENT TEAM

Research Programs, Sites and Investigators

MDRC

- **Boston P-3: Identifying Malleable Factors for Promoting Student Success**
  - Boston Public Schools community-based PreK programs and early elementary schools
  - JoAnn Hsueh, Ph.D. (PI), Christina Weiland, Ed.D., Catherine Snow, Ph.D., Jason Sachs, Ph.D., Nonie Lesaux, Ph.D., Deborah Ball, Ph.D.

Research Programs, Sites and Investigators

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

- **Learning Frontiers: PreK to Grade 3**
  - Twelve geographically-dispersed school districts in Nebraska -- 10 rural, 2 urban
  - Susan Sheridan, Ph.D. (PI), Lisa Knoche, Ph.D., Iheoma Iruka, Ph.D., Mark DeKraai, Ph.D., James Bovaird, Ph.D., Amanda Witte, Ph.D.
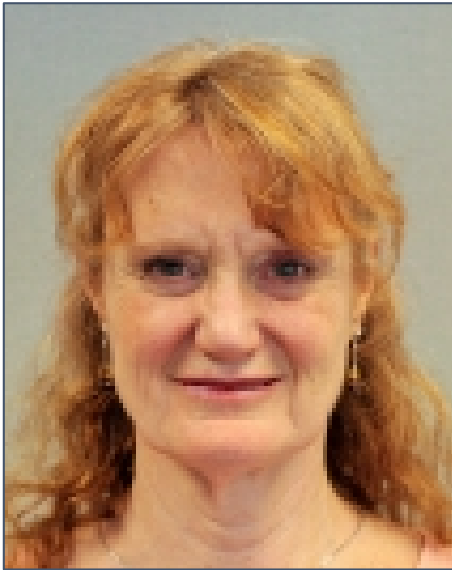
Research Programs, Sites and Investigators

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

- **Early Education in Rural North Carolina**
  - Six rural counties in North Carolina, three counties with a high and three with a low expenditure rate per publicly-funded PreK classroom
  - Margaret Burchinal, Ph.D. (PI), Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, Ph.D., Lora Vogel-Cohen, Ph.D., Ximena Franco, Ph.D., Claire Baker, Ph.D., Lynne Vernon-Feagans, Ph.D., Mary Bratsch-Hines, Ph.D.

Research Programs, Sites and Investigators

Ohio State University

- **Early Learning Ohio: Critical Contributions of Classroom Ecology to Children's Learning**
  - Columbus, Ohio
  - Laura Justice, Ph.D. (PI), Kelly Purtell, Ph.D., Jessica Logan, Ph.D., Tzu-Jung Lin, Ph.D., Hui Jiang, Ph.D., Jennifer Bostic

Research Programs, Sites and Investigators

University of Virginia

- **FP-3: Building an Effective PreK-3 Education System: Actionable Aspects of Policies, Programs, Schools and Classroom Processes that Promote Children's Learning in the Nation's 11th Largest School District**

- Fairfax County Public Schools in Northern Virginia

- Robert Pianta, Ph.D. (PI), Virginia Vitiello, Ph.D., Jessica Whittaker, Ph.D., Eric Ruzek, Ph.D., Marcia Kraft-Sayre, LCSW

Assessment Study, Site and Investigators

University of California, Irvine

Optimizing Learning Opportunities for Students' (OLOS) Early Learning Observation System

- Initial development in southern California PreK and early elementary schools, followed by studies with other members of the Early Learning Network to pilot-test and validate the OLOS Early Learning Observation System.

- Carol Connor, Ph.D. (PI), Deborah Lowe Vandell, Ph.D.

Research and Assessment Studies

Complementary Research Studies

- Descriptive study:
  - Identify systems-level policies and practices that support early learning

- Classroom observation study:
  - Identify teaching practices and other classroom-level malleable factors associated with children's school readiness and achievement in preschool and early elementary school

- Longitudinal study:
  - Identify malleable factors associated with early learning and school achievement over time from preschool through the early elementary school grades

Early Learning Assessment Team: Role and Responsibilities

- Develop and validate a classroom observation tool that can be used by practitioners to assess structural elements and process features of the classroom environment that are associated with child outcomes.

- The Assessment Team will be responsible for the measurement development work and selection of research site(s) and study sample(s) to pilot-test and validate the measure.
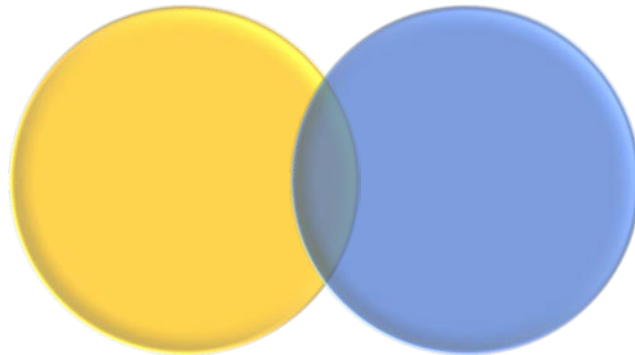
Collaborative Research

Collaborative Research: Shared Measurement Approach

- ✓ Child, family and teacher demographic characteristics

- ✓ Children's developmental outcomes

- ✓ Classroom environment and instructional practices

- ✓ Program/School/District characteristics

- ✓ Community factors

Collaborative Research: Shared Measurement Approach

- Child and family demographics
  - Race/ethnicity
  - Experiences prior to and during pre-K year
  - Family/household structure
  - Income
  - Education
  - Language

- Teacher demographics
  - Race/ethnicity
  - Education and experience
  - Language

Collaborative Research: Shared Measurement Approach

- Children's developmental outcomes, including:
  - Social behavioral skills
  - Math
  - Language
    - English, Spanish

Collaborative Research: Shared Measurement Approach

- Classroom environment and instructional practices
  - Instructional Support, Classroom Organization and Emotional Support via CLASS
  - Instructional resources and time allocations
  - Curriculum

Collaborative Research: Shared Measurement Approach

- Program/School/District characteristics
  - School and district size
  - % free or reduce priced lunch
  - District policies

Collaborative Research: Shared Measurement Approach

- Community factors
    - Population density
    - Geocode
    - Factors related to health of community
    - Early childhood policies

Collaborative Research: Shared Responsibilities with Assessment Team

Research Teams will:

- review and provide input on the Assessment Team's effort to develop or improve the classroom observation tool

- help the Assessment Team validate the tool

Collaborative Research: Supplemental Studies

- Research and dissemination activities jointly developed by Network members, approved by IES, and carried out by two or more teams

- Address questions, needs, or gaps that can only be addressed within the context of a Network

- Beyond the scope of individual project grants; reflect synergistic activities that have unique potential given composition and capacity of the Network

Extending Network Research: Early Career Enhancement Program

Create a cohesive and supportive experience for the next generation of scholars through:
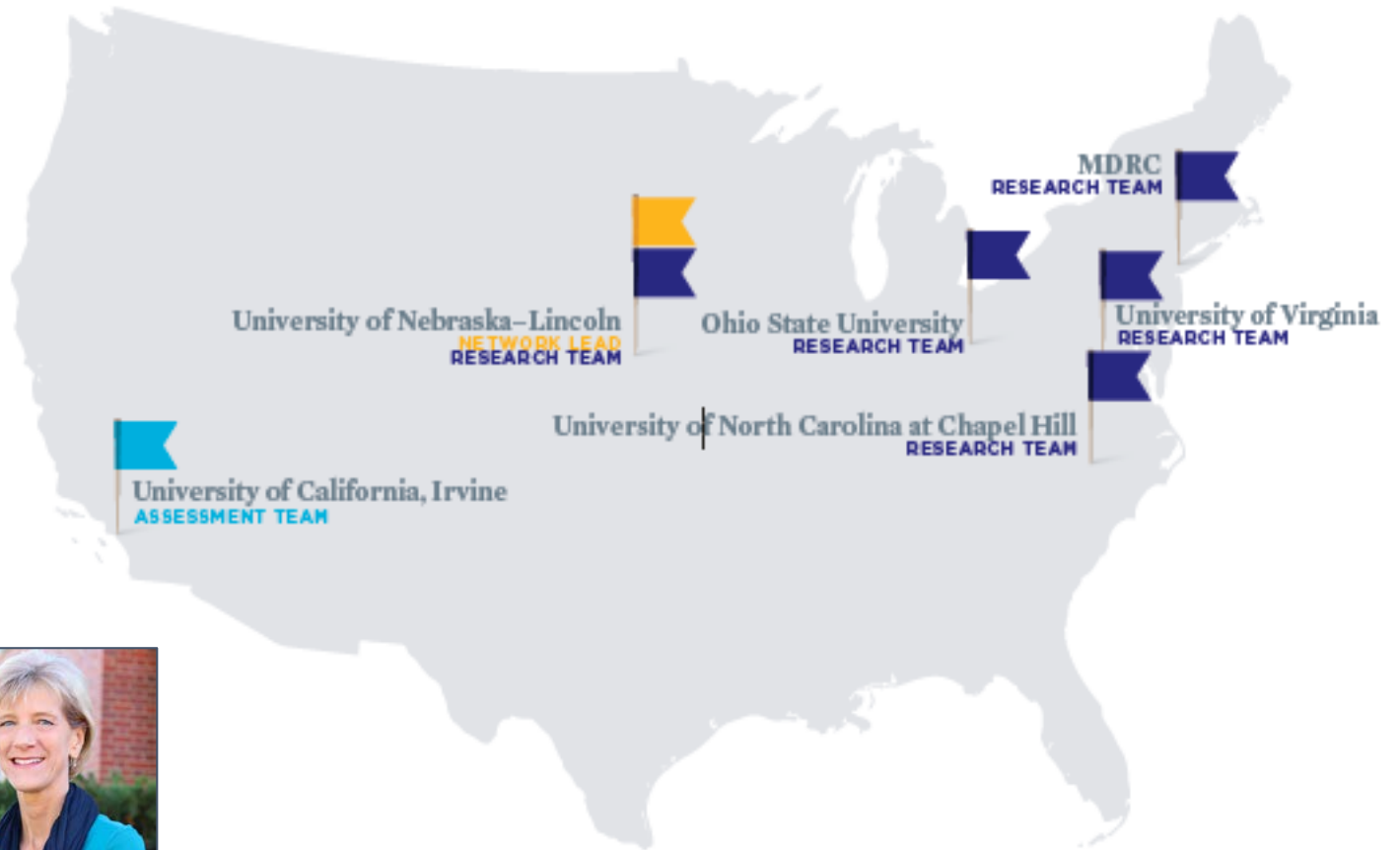
- individualized training, professional development opportunities and mentored support
- opportunities to establish practice- and policy-relevant research finding ways to ameliorate the achievement gap over time
- collaborations in the field of early childhood education research

Network Lead

NETWORK TEAM MAP

University of Nebraska–Lincoln
NETWORK LEAD
RESEARCH TEAM

Ohio State University
RESEARCH TEAM

MDRC
RESEARCH TEAM

University of Virginia
RESEARCH TEAM

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
RESEARCH TEAM

University of California, Irvine
ASSESSMENT TEAM

University of Nebraska–Lincoln
- Susan Sheridan, Ph.D. (PI), Lisa Knoche, Ph.D., Sommer Fousek

Network Lead

- Provide coordination and collaboration activities that extend the Network's impact and enhance its ability to close achievement gaps over time
- Create a variety of communication pathways that transfer Network findings and products to policy contexts and practice communities
- Provide technical assistance to Preschool Development Grantees in support of high-quality program evaluations

Leveraging the Investment: Network Coordination & Collaboration

- Leadership Council

- Member work groups

- Network meetings

- Collaboration around observation tool

- Synergistic activities

- Futuristic agenda-setting

Communication Pathways to Practice and Policy

- *Translate information* from the Network into meaningful practices for use by early childhood practitioners, including PDG grantees

- Network Website
    earlylearningnetwork.unl.edu

Welcome to the Early Learning Network

The Early Learning Network seeks to advance the understanding of policies and practices that narrow the achievement gap and maintain early learning success as children transition from preschool to elementary school and beyond.

LEARN MORE

NETWORK STUDIES

earlylearningnetwork.unl.edu

Communication Pathways to Impact Practice and Policy

- Print Communications
  - Scientific outlets
  - Practice outlets

- Digital Communications
  - Briefs
  - Working papers
  - E-newsletters/communications

- Social Media
  Twitter: @earlylearnnet

PDG: Technical Assistance and Support

- Provide research guidance and tools related to the *evaluation of programs and policies*
- Provide information related to the implementation of methods for *program improvement*

PDG: Technical Assistance and Support

- Support will be provided via:
  - ***In-person meetings*** for skill-building, sharing and action planning to facilitate effective and practical site-based evaluation;
  - Group-based ***distance-mediated conferences*** to provide opportunities for idea sharing and problem solving;
  - ***Web-based resources***, including information on applied measurement and evaluation, FAQs and toolkits;
  - ***Individualized support*** to PDG grantees for questions related to evaluation of programming and policies.

General Timeline

2016 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | 2021
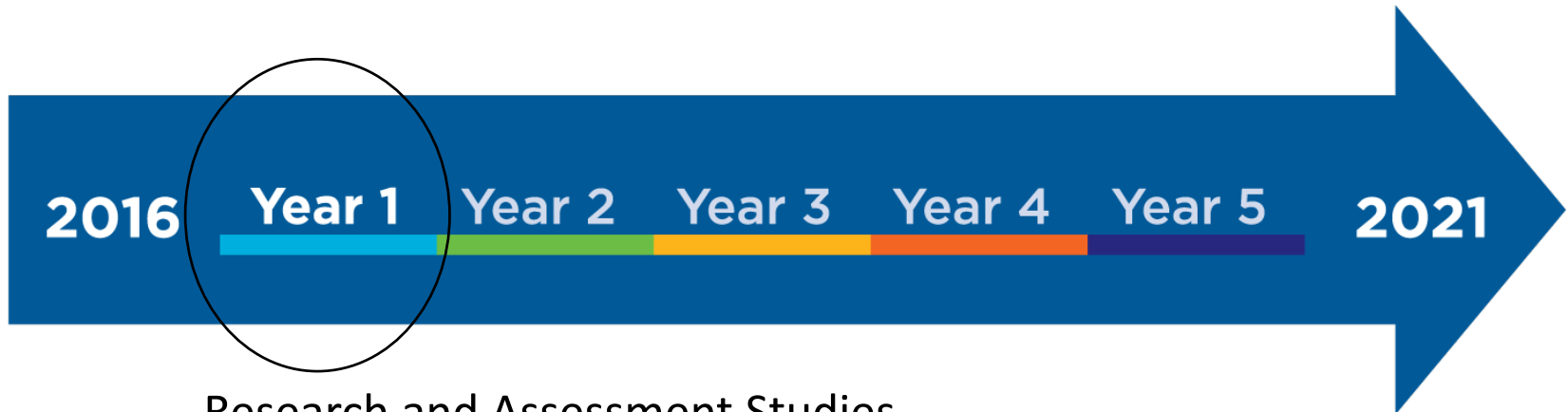
Research and Assessment Studies
Network Team Meetings
PDG Annual Meetings
PDG Supports
Website/Communications

Want to Learn More?

Optimizing Learning Opportunities for Students (OLOS) Observation System

- Carol Connor: Wednesday, Nov 16, 3:30 – 5:00 pm; Salon4/Ballroom

Affinity Group: ELN and PDG

- Susan Sheridan, Lisa Knoche, & Carol Connor: Thursday, Nov 17, 12:00 – 2:00 pm; Room TBA

Thank You

The Early Learning Network is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences.