



2020 IMPACT REPORT



FRANK PORTER GRAHAM
CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE



FPG projects reach across North Carolina

The UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute is engaged in each of North Carolina's 100 counties through research and evaluation, technical assistance, and implementation projects. Our work in the state, which included 16 county-specific and 9 statewide projects last year, focuses on improving child and family well-being, particularly for the most vulnerable North Carolinians. Four of FPG's statewide projects are described below.

The Impact Center at FPG's **Implementation Capacity for Triple P (ICTP)** projects are a collaborative effort to help communities in North Carolina and South Carolina successfully and sustainably implement the evidence-based Triple P – Positive Parenting Program system of interventions that support the health and well-being of local children, families, and communities.

Supporting Change and Reform in Preservice Teaching in North Carolina (SCRIPT-NC) aims to support community colleges in North Carolina to better prepare early childhood educators to meet the needs of each and every child in their communities. This project works to enhance coursework and practica experiences by incorporating evidence-based practices that support the inclusion of children with disabilities

and children from diverse backgrounds.

Staff at the **NC Early Intervention Technical Assistance and Professional Development Support (NC EI-TAPS)** project assist the NC Early Intervention Branch of the NC Division of Public Health with developing, enhancing, and scaling up statewide technical assistance and professional development support for its programs.

FirstSchool Support for Demonstration Classrooms provides leadership and professional development for the NC Department of Public Instruction's demonstration pre-k and kindergarten classrooms. Through site visits in demonstration classrooms, FirstSchool staff support demonstration site teachers as they develop their capacity to facilitate high-quality teacher and leader visits to their classrooms.

Letter from the Director

Dear supporters, donors,
and friends,

This year has been one of recommitment, momentum, and growth as the dedicated investigators and fellows of the UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute have continued the innovative work that builds on the Institute's legacy as one of the nation's foremost multidisciplinary centers devoted to the study of child development from conception onward.

In this year's report, you'll learn about the ways in which we're re-rooting ourselves in proven areas of excellence—such as early care and education—and branching out where we see outstanding needs. As we remain committed to improving children's health and educational outcomes, we're devoting more resources to translating research into policy, exploring the role of prevention science, and understanding how socioeconomic, racial, and educational disparities, as well as developmental differences, impact the trajectories of children into adulthood.

Under the guidance of our strategic plan, we've increased our capacity to move the important work of our researchers into evidence that encourages policymakers and stakeholders to make positive change. With Ron Seifer, PhD, associate director for research; Denni Fishbein, PhD, director of translational prevention research; and Sherika Hill, PhD, research and policy liaison, we're creating the foundation we need to facilitate translation of research findings to practices and policies that will enhance the life of every child.

Our FPG community is strong, and I'm proud of how we adapted to the virtual working environment of the COVID-19 pandemic and responded to the challenges of this event with wisdom and creativity. Our researchers, implementation and technical

assistance specialists, and partners recognized that this pandemic would bring uncertainty for children and families who find themselves navigating shifts and disruptions in the trusted routines, services, and schedules they rely on. We are proud of how nimbly they responded to the pressing needs around them, which you can read about in this report.

We also wish to recognize the continued impact of deep-seated systemic disparities and inequities fueled by institutionalized racism, hate, and intolerance on child development. As stated in our strategic plan, we are committed to enhancing the diversity of our workforce and our community, and instilling a culture of equity, respect, and tolerance at the Institute. We are also committed to eliminating disparities through all aspects of our work—across our research, evaluation, and practice arenas—and we will continue to work to inform policies that aim to eliminate such disparities.

Every child deserves to grow in a safe, nurturing, and stimulating environment, enriched with resources to help them achieve their full potential. This is our shared purpose. This is the mission of our work.

My warmest regards,



Aysenil Belger, PhD

*Director, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute
Professor, Department of Psychiatry*



Inclusion in early childhood sets the stage for living a full and inclusive life

FPG's **Tracey West, PhD**, advanced technical assistance specialist, chairs the **National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute**, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year with a virtual event August 31 to September 3. The 2020 conference includes sessions with world-class experts on the inclusion of young children with disabilities; trauma and resilience; working with children who exhibit challenging behavior; the importance of inclusion in STEM; and more.

For two decades this popular conference has been the premier educational opportunity for early childhood professionals to come together to learn, share, and problem-solve about inclusion for young children. The Inclusion Institute draws professionals from across the nation and around the world to learn about the latest research findings, models, and resources that guide inclusive policy, professional development, and practice, while developing collaborative relationships and cross-agency systems that support early childhood inclusion.

Bethany Van Delft Moffi, a comedian, storyteller, and parent advocate active in the special needs community, will deliver the keynote address: "The Importance of Stories in Family Engagement and Advocacy."

"Inclusion is the first step toward a society that not only accepts, but also celebrates, differences and acknowledges that everyone brings their own strengths and challenges to the table."

– Tracey West



Sleep helps infants develop their language and cognitive skills. **Data from 95 African American mother-child dyads revealed that infant sleep moderates the connection between maternal factors—education, depressive symptoms, and sleep disturbance—and infant cognition.** Specifically, the link between maternal education and infants' attention behavior was significant in infants with better regulated sleep, and not for infants with poorly regulated sleep. *Infancy*, January 2020



“My biggest goal in life is to make a difference in a child’s life and let them know that my classroom or office will always be a safe haven.”

– Dylan Brown

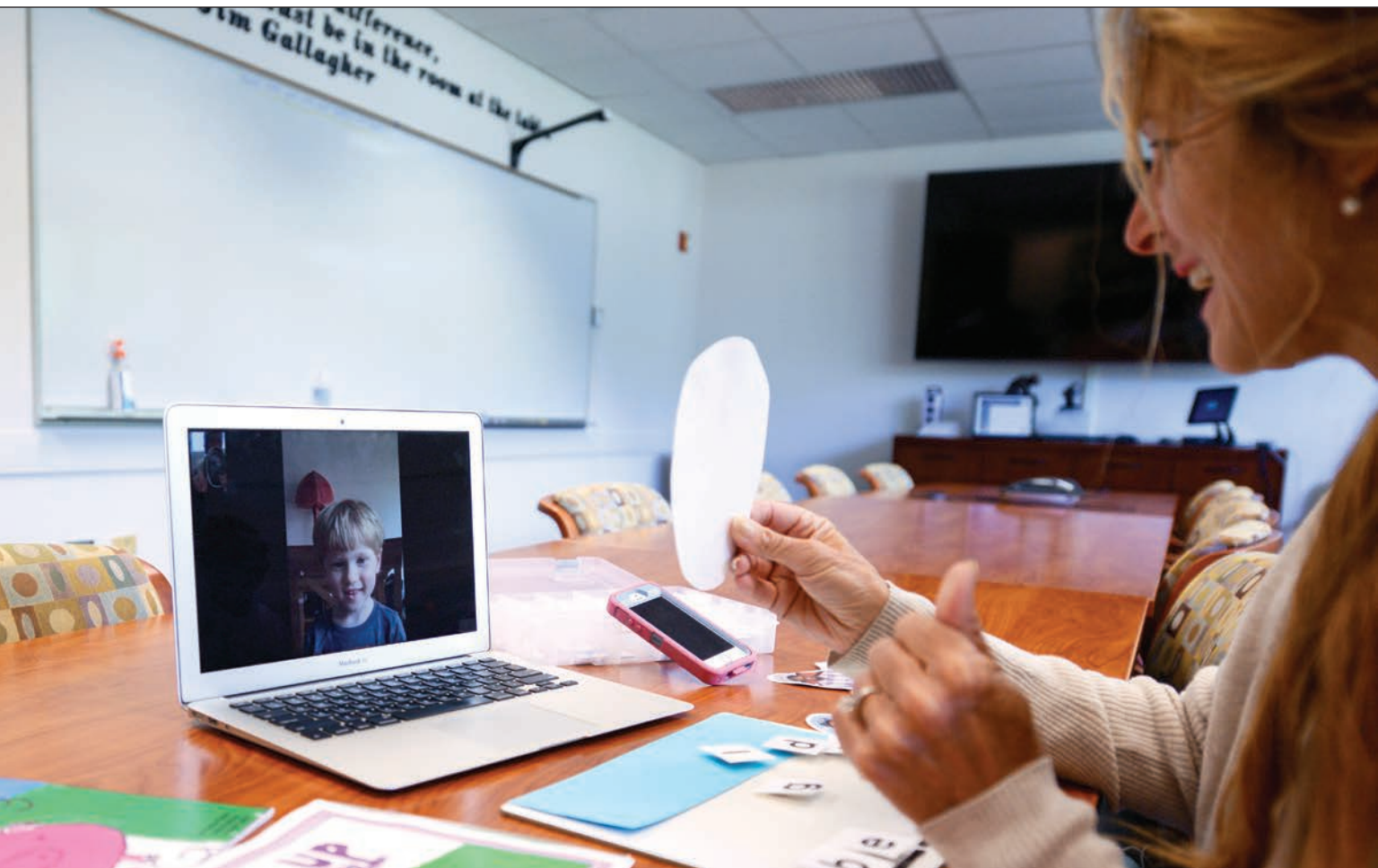
Research pathways for undergraduate students

Betsy Ayankoya, MEd, FPG’s equity, diversity, and inclusion officer, and **Wendy Morgan, PhD**, learning and development senior strategist, coordinated FPG’s virtual summer internship in research, practice, and policy, a program established to offer hands-on experience in child development to undergraduate students from North Carolina’s historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). **Dylan Brown**, a rising senior at Bennett College majoring in English with a minor in psychology, and **Briana Blakeney**, a rising senior at Fayetteville State University majoring in social work, were selected for the 10-week paid internship that offers students the opportunity to participate in meaningful, project-based work in pursuit of their professional interests and in preparation for their careers. This program invites the interns to imbue their work with their own experiences and perspectives as FPG works to create inclusive environments where all children can succeed.

Reading instruction that really works

Although schools in rural areas benefit from high-quality teacher professional development, they can't always access or afford it for their teachers. **Targeted Reading Instruction** (TRI, formerly called Targeted Reading Intervention) is a remote coaching program designed to help kindergarten through second-grade classroom teachers in rural schools provide instruction for students who need extra support in learning to read. TRI literacy coaches provide one-on-one ongoing support to teachers via inexpensive and

scalable webcam technology. **Lynne Vernon-Feagans, PhD**, helped develop the program, and **Mary Bratsch-Hines, PhD**, currently serves as TRI's principal investigator. Their research shows that TRI students make higher reading gains compared to their peers who do not receive TRI. Teachers build capacity by learning and using TRI's effective reading instructional strategies, developing skills to meet students' specific reading needs, and applying their learning to benefit all of their early readers.





With an abundance of research on autism spectrum disorder, finding out what works best, and for whom, can be overwhelming. FPG researchers—led by **Jessica Dykstra Steinbrenner, PhD**, and **Kara Hume, PhD**—completed an updated systematic review of literature related to interventions for individuals with autism spectrum disorder, uncovering new information on what practices produce positive outcomes for children and youth through age 22. The new report, **“Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder,”** also identifies gaps in the literature, including the need for more research on the experiences of young adults and underrepresented groups. Find the report at go.unc.edu/EBPreport.



Parents of toddlers with autism spectrum disorder value the supportive relationships formed with their interventionists. A study to gauge parent perceptions regarding the helpful and challenging components of parent-implemented interventions (PIIs) found considerable parent satisfaction with intervention experiences, particularly related to the use of videos taken of themselves and their children during intervention sessions. *Journal of Early Intervention*, March 2020

Responding to the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is a challenging time for everyone, especially for children, families, and caregivers who find themselves navigating shifts and disruptions in the trusted routines, services, and schedules they rely on. Since the pandemic's onset, FPG has actively responded to the needs of families, early childhood educators, special education professionals, and more by developing and offering evidence-based, user-friendly tools, resources, and information that provide the expert support our community needs most.

Links to these resources can be found at fpg.unc.edu/covid-19-resources.

Supporting children, families, and caregivers

Experts at FPG, the UNC School of Education, and the UNC School of Medicine's Department of Allied Health Sciences developed a free toolkit for families and caregivers supporting individuals with autism spectrum disorder. The toolkit is available in English, Polish, Swedish, Chinese Mandarin (simplified and traditional), Italian, Japanese, Arabic, Spanish, and Czech; a companion guide for adults with autism is also available. Find the toolkit at go.unc.edu/toolkit.

The STEM Innovation for Inclusion in Early Education (STEMIE) center curated a set of resources for families to help children understand COVID-19, teach children to wash their hands, and support children's STEM learning during activities and routines. The center also started a storybook

conversations series to support families in making adaptations during book reading to help young children learn STEM concepts through stories.

Mary Bratsch-Hines and Ximena Franco, advanced research scientists who are part of the federally funded Early Learning Network, contributed to blog posts that include simple tips for managing this unprecedented break from school. These blog posts, which are available in English and Spanish, include these topics:

- Helping young children feel secure when weird is the new 'normal'
- Staying in touch: Maintaining parent-teacher relationships from a distance
- How can I support my child's transition into kindergarten from home?

FPG Fellow and UNC Psychiatry Assistant Professor Karen Bluth provided simple self-compassion tips for teens coping with uncertainty. Tip sheets are available for download in English and Spanish, thanks to Ximena Franco.

Supporting educators and service systems

The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA) is a hub for IDEA programs serving children with disabilities ages 0-5, sharing the latest information on funding and guidance, telehealth practices, and talking to children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. As states began lifting restrictions on childcare centers, schools, and other public spaces, ECTA developed

On April 23, FPG Fellows Kara Hume and Laura Klinger presented **"Supporting Individuals with Autism During COVID-19"** to 329 people from across the nation. During the live webinar they discussed coronavirus resources developed at UNC and answered questions from participants.

a web page dedicated to the complex planning and preparation necessary following the initial wave of the pandemic.

The State Implementation and Scaling-Up of Evidence-Based Practices (SISEP) center provided guidance for school districts and schools so that they can apply the concepts of implementation science when selecting online learning practices.

Supporting Change and Reform in Preservice Teaching in North Carolina (SCRIPT-NC) conducted and archived a webinar, handouts, and

resources that community college faculty and instructors can use as they are being tasked with providing online instruction due to COVID-19.

Wendy Morgan and Julie Chin from FPG's instructional design team created two resources to aid technical assistance and professional development providers. The first provides strategies to shift from in-person support to an online format, and the second provides tips for writing low-burden needs assessment questions during this stressful time.

FPG's National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) and UNC School of Social Work's Jordan Institute for Families cohosted a free UNC Institute on Implementation Science virtual summer session. On June 18, 309 people from 7 countries attended **"Implementation Practice Skills and Competencies and Supporting Implementation During the COVID-19 Pandemic."**



The future is bright for CCHD trainees

FPG's predoctoral and postdoctoral trainees in the **Carolina Consortium on Human Development** (CCHD) T32 training program are the next leaders in child development. Funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, this program brings together trainees and a multidisciplinary group of developmental scientists who have academic appointments at UNC-Chapel Hill, Duke University, North Carolina State University, and UNC Greensboro. The program provides individualized training in developmental science, research apprenticeships for postdoctoral

trainees, professional development activities, training opportunities at professional conferences, and inter-institutional trainings and seminars at consortium institutions.

CCHD trainees (2019–2020 cohort pictured below) are mentored by consortium faculty with expertise in anthropology, behavioral genetics, behavioral neurobiology, clinical psychology, developmental psychology, developmental psychobiology, education, epidemiology, experimental psychology, internal medicine, nursing, pediatrics, psychiatry, public health, and sociology.



Using a co-creation approach in the delivery of technical assistance can be achieved and can produce positive outcomes.

A recent study revealed that in a co-creation setting, the technical assistance providers met the goals of achieving trust and mutual accountability, while successfully integrating implementation science concepts into ongoing regional work. These providers succeeded in delivering technical assistance that both observers and participants thought involved methods tailored to participants' settings and needs. *Evidence & Policy*, August 2019



Ronald Seifer, PhD,

joined FPG as associate director for research after more than 30 years at Brown University. At FPG, Seifer is building mentorship opportunities among scientists and helping the Institute gain an even greater level of national recognition for the impact of its research. He is interested in how family and school experiences integrate with biological processes, considering genetics, neurological functioning, and immune system functioning.





Science matters

This winter FPG sponsored two UNC Morehead Planetarium and Science Center **Science Cafés** at Top of the Hill restaurant's Back Bar, popular monthly events where UNC experts tie their research to topics in the news. **Sherika Hill, PhD**, (pictured at left) presented her research on adverse childhood experiences and adolescent mental health outcomes, which built on the earlier presentations of Roger Mills-Koonce, PhD, and Margaret Sheridan, PhD, who discussed the developmental impact of family separation, such as that experienced at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Megan Vinh, PhD, advanced technical assistance specialist, was elected president of the Executive Board for the **Division for Early Childhood** (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children, effective July 1, 2019. DEC promotes policies and advances

evidence-based practices that support families and enhance the optimal development of young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays and disabilities. Megan will transition to past president for the coming year.



Sandra L. Soliday Hong, PhD, was named as a representative of the **North Carolina B-3 Interagency Council** to the **State Board of Education Literacy Task Force**, an interdisciplinary group charged with helping reimagine teacher training and licensure that support K-3 reading instruction. In June, the task force made recommendations

to the Board on professional development, curriculum and instruction resources, and pre-service preparation and licensure. The task force is part of the Guiding Collaborative Framework for Action on Early Reading, which aims to redesign literacy instruction across the education system based on the science of reading.



More than 30 percent of children in the U.S. are learning two languages. A recent study conducted secondary data analyses of three studies of Spanish-English dual language learners of preschool age to learn more about changes over time in language and literacy skills in both Spanish and English. **Understanding the development of both languages for young dual language learners in early care and education is critical.**

Early Childhood Research Quarterly, November 2019

Anna Morgan, a 2020 graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill from Raleigh, N.C., has always been interested in what makes us human. At Carolina, she chose to major in psychology, where she quickly learned how research could lead to answers for her biggest questions about how human beings—especially those with special needs—navigate the world, and how she could be a part of improving the human experience for all. An internship at FPG evolved into a two-year paid role as a research assistant. In recognition of her commitment to investigating the tools children and adolescents need to live their best lives, Morgan received the inaugural **Barbara Davis Goldman Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Research**. The award acknowledges an outstanding undergraduate student who has participated in research activities at FPG.

“I’m interested in research that improves the lives of children with developmental disorders. By helping these children, we may be able to minimize their likelihood of developing depression or anxiety later on in life.”

Congratulations to our award winners



Abecedarian Award
Ann Sam



Joanne Erwich Roberts
Early Career Award
Jessica Amsbary



Barbara Davis
Goldman Award
Anna Morgan



Thelma Harms
Early Childhood
Education Award
**Margarita
Cañadas Perez**



James J. Gallagher
Dissertation Award
Jordan McNeill



Growing evidence supports the importance of mental state talk for children.

A recent study examined how ethnicity, income, and other characteristics impact ways European American and African American parents offer mental state talk to their 6-month-old infants. Parental sensitivity was positively associated with mental state talk in both groups, and in African American families, fathers' mental state talk contributed positively to mothers' mental state talk. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, March 2020



With depression, anxiety, and stress on the rise in our society, tapping into the proven benefits of mindfulness and self-compassion is more important than ever. **Karen Bluth, PhD**, and FPG now offer a variety of courses for individuals and families to promote emotional well-being and improved mental health. The research-

based courses use best practices in mindfulness and self-compassion to help pre-teens, teens, parents, educators, and all adults who traverse the lives of youth, with the ultimate goal of creating a community imbued with greater compassion for ourselves and others. Learn more at go.unc.edu/self-compassion.



To stay informed of our research and news throughout the year, visit us at fpg.unc.edu.

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FPG areas of work

Autism
Child Welfare
Developmental Science
Early Care and Education
Early Intervention
K-12 Education
Language and Literacy
Maternal and Child Health
Prevention Science
Racial Equity
Racial, Ethnic, and Linguistic Diversity
Social and Emotional Health
Special Education

