UNH to Establish Hub for Early Childhood Education Research

Thursday, February 22, 2024

DURHAM, N.H.—The Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire is establishing a first-in-the-state early care and education research consortium, made possible by a $1.5 million grant from the Couch Family Foundation.

The multi-year grant will enable the Carsey School to conduct new research on early childhood care and education policy and help to build and coordinate a consortium of researchers and practitioners across the Granite State.

“This is a pivotal project that will purposefully bring together the state’s early childhood experts and stakeholders and propel us toward a research agenda that can inform both policy and action for a more robust early childhood education system in the state,” said Jess Carson, research assistant professor.

The Carsey School-led consortium will include other research organizations like UNH’s Early Childhood Initiative to expand understanding beyond the challenges of access and affordability to what defines excellence in the early education classroom.

“High-quality early childhood education builds the foundation for life-long success,” said Kimberly Nesbitt, associate professor of human development and family studies and the lead investigator for the Early Childhood Initiative. “The early care and education system is like a three-legged stool supported by access, cost and quality. All three legs must be strong for it to work to truly support children and families.”

Over the next three years, the consortium will undertake a series of strategic projects targeted at building a high-quality body of research to assist state practitioners and policy makers in envisioning, planning, enacting and strengthening an early care and education system that’s stable, strong, accessible and fulfills family need and choice.

Research shows that the scarcity of quality affordable childcare for young children is a significant but solvable challenge in New Hampshire and across the country. Childcare costs are generally expensive for working families, there’s often not enough capacity to meet the need for care, and childcare staff are typically underpaid.

“This project is about leveraging deep relationships with the field and state partners to find answers to questions about improving early childhood education policy and practice in our state,” said Sara Vecchiotti, executive director of the Couch Family Foundation. “We believe that through this collaboration solutions can be identified and implemented.”
The consortium will ensure that original research specific to New Hampshire and other important information resources available through local, state, regional and national efforts are consolidated and made easily accessible in a centralized way for use by project partners and others.

For more information: Jess Carson, UNH Carsey School of Public Policy, jessica.carson@unh.edu (mailto:jessica.carson@unh.edu) and Sara Vecchiotti, Couch Family Foundation, sara@couchfoundation.org (mailto:sara@couchfoundation.org)

The Couch Family Foundation supports, and advocates for equitable early care and education, so that all New Hampshire’s children have equal opportunities to thrive. Informed by community-centric research, inspired by the relationships we build across the full spectrum of the state’s children’s early care and education sector, the Couch Family Foundation funds innovative, scalable community programs, and advocates for access now – and equity always.

The University of New Hampshire innovation and transforms lives in our state, nation, and world. More than 16,000 students from 49 states and 82 countries engage with an award-winning faculty in top-ranked programs in business, engineering, law, health and human services, liberal arts and the sciences across more than 200 programs of study. A Carnegie Classification R1 institution, UNH partners with NASA, NOAA, NSF and NIH, and received over $210 million in competitive external funding in FY23 to further explore and define the frontiers of land, sea, and space.

Media Contact
Robbin Ray ’82 (mailto:robbin.ray@unh.edu) | Communications and Public Affairs | 603-862-4864