



# Early Learning Network Forum Executive Summary

*Equitable and Effective Early Learning Opportunities:  
Research, Practice and Policy Considerations*

*December 13, 2022*

# Forum Overview

U.S. stakeholders joined Early Learning Network teams to co-create key takeaways and action steps for early childhood education practice, policy and research that have potential to narrow opportunity gaps and ensure early learning success.



On December 13, 2022, the Early Learning Network Forum, “Equitable and Effective Early Learning Opportunities: Research, Practice and Considerations,” was hosted in partnership with the Institute of Education Sciences. More than 100 stakeholders joined network members for the daylong virtual event, including practitioners, policymakers, researchers, state and federal partners, and others invested in early childhood education from across the country.

Participants heard the latest ELN findings and engaged in dialogue to determine how the network’s contributions to the early childhood knowledge base can be translated and applied to improve practice and policy with the goal to narrow opportunity gaps and ensure early learning success of children from prekindergarten (pre-K) to third grade, especially those from marginalized groups.

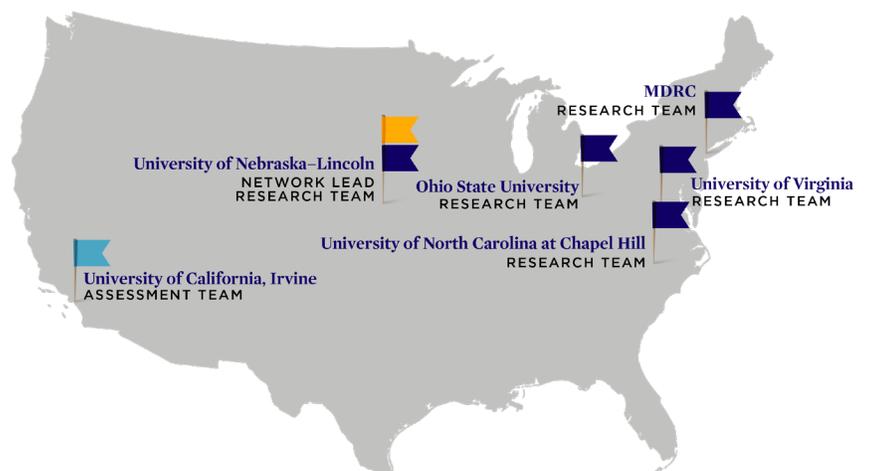
Based on what the network research suggested, as well as their own insights and experiences, participants offered potential actions to strengthen early childhood education systems; inform practice, policy and research focused on improving outcomes for all students; and ultimately, to help move the field forward.

“We know that when children have access to high-quality pre-K programs, they often experience a ‘boost’ in their learning and development. What has been most vexing, is understanding the best combination of ingredients — meaning, the most equitable and effective instruction, experiences, interactions and relationships in classrooms — to ensure all children are able to sustain the benefits of pre-K and continue on a positive trajectory.”

—Elizabeth Albro, Commissioner of Education Research, National Center for Education Research, Institute of Education Sciences

## Presenters included representatives from ELN’s five research teams and assessment team:

- MDRC
- University of Nebraska–Lincoln
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Ohio State University
- University of Virginia
- University of California, Irvine (Assessment Team)



# Forum Highlights

- Early Learning Network members shared findings from diverse studies conducted with schools in **Boston, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia and Southern California**.
- Findings were drawn from information gathered on **educational policy, classroom observation and longitudinal student data** (2016-2021) across pre-K to third grade.
- Participants watched a demonstration of **Optimizing Learning Opportunities for Students (OLOS)**, a new classroom **assessment tool** developed by the ELN assessment team and field-tested by network members.
- Early childhood experts facilitated panel discussions on the **research findings**, offered their **reflections** and provided space for **dialogue**.
- Participants engaged in small, **interactive breakout discussions** to determine how the network's contributions to the early childhood knowledge base can be **translated and applied** to their work.
- Together with network members, participants identified **key takeaways** and **action steps** to inform practice and policy, along with new directions for research.



## EARLY LEARNING NETWORK FORUM RESOURCES

Visit the forum website to learn more about the event and to explore resources, including videos, slides, impact area research briefs and more.

[earlylearningnetwork.unl.edu/forum](http://earlylearningnetwork.unl.edu/forum)

# Impact Areas

Early Learning Network research presentations focused on **four impact areas** that emerged as having potential to **close opportunity gaps** and ensure **equitable and effective learning opportunities** from pre-K to the early elementary grades and beyond:



Pre-K Participation



Classroom Experiences & Learning Opportunities



Relationships



Sustained High-Quality Experiences

# Takeaways & Action Steps

Early Learning Network teams integrated insights and information shared during the forum to generate a list of **key takeaways and action steps for practice, policy and research** for each impact area.

The takeaways and action steps are intended to be:

- **Inclusive of all children**, but especially relevant for children from marginalized groups (e.g., racially minoritized, dual language learners),
- **Culturally responsive** in application,
- **Relevant across varied geographic contexts**, and the
- **Shared responsibility** of all educational faculty, administrators and staff.

## WHAT IS HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING\*?

The practice of providing high-quality professional learning opportunities includes **customized training and coaching** for pre-service and in-service educators, administrators and educational support staff.



## PRE-K PARTICIPATION

### KEY TAKEAWAY

Pre-K programs and the early elementary grades should **prioritize instruction** in both **foundational skills** (e.g., counting, letter recognition) and **complex skills** (e.g., vocabulary, self-regulation) to promote lasting pre-K gains, particularly for students who are marginalized.

### ACTION STEPS

<i>Practice</i>	<i>Policy</i>	<i>Research</i>
Provide <b>high-quality professional learning* opportunities</b> to support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent use of <b>evidence-based and play-based</b> instructional activities.</li> <li>• Curricula that promote children's skills <b>across multiple domains</b> (e.g., academic, social-emotional).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate pre-K programs with K-3 through:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Joint <b>professional development</b>.</li> <li>› Delivery of <b>common and aligned</b> instructional programs and assessments.</li> <li>› Use of <b>common metrics</b> for classroom/program quality.</li> <li>› <b>Integrated data</b> systems to address fade out.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Improve <b>working conditions and compensation</b> for the early childhood workforce.</li> </ul>	Study policies to ensure children have <b>equitable access</b> to programming that includes <b>high-quality pre-K learning experiences</b> , particularly for students from marginalized populations.



## CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES & LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

### KEY TAKEAWAY

Children's opportunities and experiences in classrooms should include **culturally responsive, intentional and supportive interactions** focused on **social-emotional, cognitive and language development**.

### ACTION STEPS

<i>Practice</i>	<i>Policy</i>	<i>Research</i>
Provide <b>high-quality professional learning* opportunities</b> to support the implementation of <b>culturally responsive, intentional and supportive</b> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One-on-one, <b>formal and informal language exchanges</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Teacher-student and student-student</b> interactions.</li> <li>• Developmentally sequenced, <b>content-rich</b> instruction.</li> <li>• <b>Modeling/scaffolding</b>.</li> </ul>	Ensure <b>family voice</b> is included in decision-making structures and processes to enhance learning among all children, including those from marginalized groups.	Develop or improve <b>research-based</b> tools that are <b>culturally responsive</b> for <b>measuring individualized children's experiences, skills and outcomes</b> , including constructs related to learning, such as creativity, joy and multiple dialects.



## RELATIONSHIPS

### KEY TAKEAWAY

High-quality educational experiences should include educators' use of practices to:

- Engage and form **relationships with families**.
- Create and maintain positive interpersonal **connections with students**.
- Promote and support positive **peer relationships**.

### ACTION STEPS

<i>Practice</i>	<i>Policy</i>	<i>Research</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide <b>high-quality professional learning* opportunities</b> to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Engage and form <b>relationships with families</b>.</li> <li>› Create and maintain positive interpersonal <b>connections with students</b>.</li> <li>› Promote and support positive <b>peer relationships</b>.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Support the <b>pre-K to kindergarten transition</b> and later grade-level transitions.</li> </ul>	Build and modify current <b>structures/systems</b> (e.g., time, resources) to support <b>educators' skills</b> at forming, strengthening and maintaining <b>effective and meaningful relationships</b> with and among students and families across the pre-K to third grade continuum.	Identify existing and new research-based <b>practices and approaches</b> for building and maintaining <b>quality relationships</b> with and among students and families that can be applied <b>across contexts</b> (e.g., rural/urban, pre-K, early elementary).



## SUSTAINED HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENCES

### KEY TAKEAWAY

Educational experiences should include **consistency and continuity** of high-quality opportunities **across pre-K to third grade**, including alignment of experiences within the early elementary grades (K-3).

### ACTION STEPS

<i>Practice</i>	<i>Policy</i>	<i>Research</i>
Provide <b>high-quality professional learning* opportunities</b> to support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of <b>evidence-based, aligned curricula</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Continuity</b> of <b>instructional content</b> and <b>positive interactions</b> across pre-K to third grade.</li> </ul>	Invest in the use of <b>integrated data systems</b> to promote <b>alignment</b> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify <b>barriers and facilitators</b> to implementing <b>aligned educational experiences</b> in diverse pre-K to third grade systems from the perspectives of families, educators and administrators.</li> <li>• Develop and/or identify <b>evidence-based, culturally relevant</b> curricula, practices and assessments grounded in social-behavioral and academic content that promote <b>continuity in instruction</b> and teacher <b>practices</b> across pre-K to third grade.</li> </ul>

# Participants

A select group of more than 100 early childhood stakeholders from across the U.S. were invited to participate, including practitioners, policymakers, researchers and federal/state partners. These individuals represented a wide variety of geographic locations, including Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

[View full list of participants.](#)

# Presentations & Panels

## WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS

- Susan M. Sheridan, Principal Investigator, Early Learning Network Lead, University of Nebraska–Lincoln
- Elizabeth Albro, Commissioner of Education Research, National Center for Education Research, Institute of Education Sciences
- Caroline Ebanks, Team Lead for Early Childhood Research, National Center for Education Research, Institute of Education Sciences

[▶ WATCH OVERVIEW VIDEO](#)

## MORNING PRESENTATIONS & PANEL

### Impact Area Presentation: Pre-K Participation

**Presenter:** Mary Bratsch-Hines, Senior Manager for Research and Evaluation at the University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning

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### Impact Area Presentation: Classroom Experiences and Learning Opportunities

**Presenter:** Virginia Vitiello, Associate Research Professor, Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, University of Virginia

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### Panel: Pre-K Participation & Classroom Experiences and Learning Opportunities

**Moderator:** Nicole Patton-Terry, Olive & Manuel Bordas Professor of Education in the School of Teacher Education, Director of the Florida Center for Reading Research and Director of the Regional Education Lab—Southeast, Florida State University

#### Panelists:

- Tonia Durden, Clinical Professor and Birth through Five Program Coordinator, Georgia State University
- Shantel Meek, Founding Director and Professor of Practice, Children’s Equity Project, Arizona State University
- Jennie Patterson, National Programs Manager, National Black Child Development Institute

[▶ WATCH PANEL DISCUSSION](#)

## AFTERNOON PRESENTATIONS & PANEL

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### Impact Area Presentation: Relationships

**Presenter:** Lisa Knoche, Research Associate Professor, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

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### Impact Area Presentation: Sustained High-Quality Experiences

**Presenter:** Meghan McCormick, Senior Research Associate, Family Well-Being and Children’s Development, MDRC

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### Panel: Relationships & Sustained High-Quality Experiences

**Moderator:** Erika Gaylor, Principal Senior Researcher and Early Childhood Program Leader, SRI International

**Panelists:**

- Gracie Branch, Associate Executive Director for Professional Learning, National Association of Elementary School Principals
- Gloria Corral, President and Chief Executive Officer, Parent Institute for Quality Education
- Daniel Nowak, Second Grade Teacher, Omaha Public Schools
- Pamela Truelove-Walker, Senior Director, Early Learning and Early Education, Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education

[▶ WATCH PANEL DISCUSSION](#)

## OLOS PRESENTATION & PANEL

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### Presentation: Optimizing Learning Opportunities for Students (OLOS) – Classroom Assessment Tool

**Presenter:** Ashley Adams Sanabria, Assistant Professor of Speech Language and Director of the Language Impairment, Bilingual Reading and Observational Research Lab, San Diego State University

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### Panel: OLOS

**Moderator:** Deborah Lowe Vandell, Chancellor’s Professor of Education Emerita, School of Education, University of California, Irvine

**Panelists:**

- Ross Harold, Chief of Staff, Nursing Unit, Office of School Health, New York City Department of Education
- Sara Mickelson, Director of Early Childhood Initiatives, Harris County Office of County Administration, Texas
- Alissa Mwenelupembe, Senior Director, Early Learning Program Accreditation, National Association for the Education of Young Children
- Jason Sachs, Executive Director for Early Childhood, Boston Public Schools

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