



Overview

The Partnership for Early Education Research (PEER) is a research alliance among early childhood stakeholders in Connecticut that aims to conduct rigorous, collaborative, actionable research focused on children from birth through age 8. By pursuing questions developed collaboratively with its members, PEER aims to produce research that can inform early childhood education policy and practice at the local and state levels, increase access to high-quality early childhood education, and reduce disparities in educational outcomes. To ensure that its research is relevant and useful to local communities, PEER engages diverse stakeholders, including early childhood care and education teachers and providers, district and program administrators, state and local policymakers and advocates, and social science researchers.

Context

Access to high-quality early education has become a focus at the federal and state level in recent years. Along with this rise in attention has come important and pressing questions about early education such as how to assess its quality, how to track children's academic progress, and how to spur and gauge the improvement of classroom practices. The use of data and research evidence are key components to addressing these and other questions that have implications for decision-making around instructional practices and policy decisions.

Unfortunately, systems of education often do not have the capacity to formulate researchable questions, to collect and analyze data to address these questions, or to make changes in response to research findings. Research partnerships increase this capacity by connecting researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders for the purpose of building evidence to inform practice and policy. Partnerships such as the University of Chicago Consortium for School Research and the Research Alliance for New York City Schools have helped guide policy and practice through the production of research on topics including school leadership, teacher effectiveness, school climate, and graduation rates. The success of these models has demonstrated the effectiveness of partnerships for supporting student outcomes.

PEER's Role

PEER was created to build regional capacity for collaborative research that can inform early childhood education policy and practice in Connecticut, ultimately improving student outcomes in the state. Specifically, PEER's work can support local decision-making and state policy in areas such as funding, licensing, and credentialing for early education programs.

Partnership Structure

Like many other research-practice partnerships, PEER includes a local university partner (Yale University School of Medicine) and local school districts (Bridgeport, Norwalk, and Stamford), but PEER also includes a Connecticut Regional Educational Service Center (C.E.S.), a non-profit research institution (EDC), two state agencies (Connecticut State Department of Education and Connecticut Office of Early Childhood), and numerous early childhood education stakeholders. By engaging early childhood education administrators, practitioners, policy makers, advocates, and researchers, PEER can support the design of research that addresses the needs and interests of diverse stakeholders, including children, families, and educators.

PEER Progress

During its first year (2014-2015), PEER developed a network of early childhood education stakeholders in Bridgeport, Norwalk, and Stamford, and strengthened connections with the Connecticut Office of Early

Childhood and the Connecticut State Department of Education. PEER intends to extend this network to other Connecticut stakeholders and regions as the partnership continues to grow. For more information on PEER's members, please visit our Members page (<http://peer.yale.edu/members/>).

During its second year (2015-2016), PEER launched three research projects to address its initial research questions, which focus on understanding the experiences of preschool children in the southwest region of Connecticut and the factors that are associated with their readiness for kindergarten. In addition, PEER collaborated with its member organizations to develop a long-term research agenda (<http://peer.yale.edu/publications>) that will serve Connecticut communities and drive PEER's work over the years to come. These activities were funded by grant R305H140142 from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES).

In its third year (2016-2017), PEER launched a project focused on one area of the long-term research agenda—supporting dual language learners—with support from the Spencer Foundation's Research-Practice Partnership Program. At the same time, PEER worked to conclude the research projects launched in 2015-2016 with continued support from IES and published its first research briefs, also available at <http://peer.yale.edu/publications>.

During its fourth and fifth years (2017-2019), PEER continued its dual language learners project with ongoing support from the Spencer Foundation. PEER also launched new evaluation research projects in partnership with PEER member organizations, including the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood and the Connecticut State Department of Education.

Partnering to Support Dual Language Learners

The dual language learners (DLL)* portion of PEER's Five-Year Collaborative Research Agenda, supported by the Spencer Foundation, focuses on four projects:

1. Producing readily-accessible *practice and policy* briefs that summarize research on promising practices for assessing and instructing DLLs, as well as engaging the families of DLLs;
2. Building data capacity to improve understanding of existing DLL policy and supports within preschool and kindergarten settings in PEER communities—partner with district and major providers to survey teachers and administrators to learn about current policies, perceptions, and professional development around DLLs and engagement of DLL families;
3. Studying the link between DLL preschool and kindergarten policies/supports and child/family outcomes (e.g., child attendance, parent satisfaction, and family engagement)—partner with districts and major providers to survey DLL learner families; and,
4. Collaborating with practitioners to translate the findings from PEER's research into meaningful professional development experiences for early childhood educators.

* **Dual language learners** are young learners who are simultaneously learning English while learning a home language. These children may or may not qualify for English Language Learner services in the K-12 setting.

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