

Student Opportunities with Early Childhood Partnerships

Office of Child Development, School of Education

1. The Early Childhood Networked Improvement Community (EC NIC):

The EC NIC is co-directed by Drs. Larson and Jancart, operates year-round, and consists of individuals from a variety of Pitt schools, as well as other universities. EC NIC's purpose is to enhance early childhood (EC) education by bringing together educators, designers, practitioners, applied researchers, and students from various EC disciplines to: 1.) identify and understand current problems of practice, 2.) share knowledge and develop skills, 3.) support the development and implementation of innovation and improvement projects grounded in a continuous quality improvement (CQI) and participatory action research approach, and 4.) work collectively to understand outcomes.

Our work with students is designed to be collaborative and beneficial for everyone involved. We strive to provide strong experiences to students related to continuous quality improvement and program development. We aim for this support to inspire students and guide their individual capstone projects while also sparking ideas for future community collaboration, inquiry, and advocacy.

Prospective students should have basic interest in early childhood education, social-emotional development, applied research and program development, equity and inclusion, and creative problem-solving. EC NIC training will cover basic information on these areas if students are interested in learning more. Students who apply and are accepted into EC NIC will develop relationships with our interdisciplinary team and have the opportunity to develop, and present for approval, an innovation or improvement idea of their own, and/or work together with us on our current CQI and program development projects. Either option works well for completion of their capstone project requirements.

Each EC NIC project will require different skills and knowledge bases (e.g., students interested in supporting data analyses may benefit from some foundational knowledge in statistics), but all tasks will be structured to include training and ongoing support to ensure that students are learning and expanding their knowledge and skill base. EC NIC tasks that students can become trained and/or involved in, under close supervision, include 1.) project implementation, 2.) design and administration of surveys, 3.) literature reviews, 4.) design and administration of focus groups, 5.) data collection, 6.) data analysis, 7.) program development, 8.) poster presentations, 9.) writing outcome reports, articles and proposals, 10.) learning sessions within EC NIC (e.g., guest speakers), 11.) meetings with stakeholders, and 13.) needs assessments / empathy interviews.

The following list provides a brief synopsis of some of the current CQI projects:

1. **The Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Cohort** is a collaborative project co-constructed with a local EC program to instigate, support and sustain CQI efforts in the program. Each year we work with 4-6 early childhood professionals to support the development, implementation, testing and dissemination of their individual CQI project focused in the area of SEL.
2. **The Trauma Toolkit (TTK)** is a resource that was designed for EC educators to support their implementation of trauma-sensitive practices. Each year, additional topics and resources are added to the TTK.
3. **Mild Exclusionary Discipline Practices (MEDP)**: A significant number of preschoolers face expulsion, with Black children disproportionately affected. This project assesses EC educators' use of disciplinary practices and the impact of these practices on children's social-emotional (SE) development.
4. **HealthyCHILD(HC) Program Evaluation**: HC is a tiered model of support delivered by a mobile interdisciplinary team of consultants on site in EC classrooms to support EC educators in creating supportive environments, building positive relationships, promoting child SE competence and preventing and responding to challenging behavior. Each year, we collect and report information on EC educator practices, child SE competence and consultant activities to explore outcomes and improve implementation.
5. **Positive Caregiver Groups**: Each year HC consultants implement an evidence-based curriculum to promote positive parenting with a group of approximately 40 parents. We collect and report information on participation, parent stress, parenting practices and children's SE skills to explore outcomes and improve implementation.
6. **MindFEEL Minutes**: MindFEEL Minutes is a mindfulness-based curriculum that is implemented in EC classrooms. We collect information on acceptability and impact.

2. HealthyCHILD (HC) and HealthyInfants (HI):

HC and HI are a research-based, interagency partnership that provides consultation, support, and mentoring to early childhood educators, families, and communities. Delivered by a mobile interdisciplinary team, HC/HI operates in classrooms serving children from birth to five, helping educators and families create supportive environments, build positive relationships, promote social-emotional competence and prevent and effectively respond to challenging behavior. Using a collaborative problem-solving model, HC/HI strengthens educator and caregiver

capacity without requiring a diagnosis or providing direct therapy. A team of consultants offer graduated support, from prevention to intervention, and facilitate team-based strategies for children needing individualized attention.

Under the close supervision of an experienced HC consultant students will have the opportunity to be involved in the following activities:

- Support the implementation of tiered evidence-based supports
- Provide class-wide social emotional lessons, activities and resources
- Develop trusting, supportive relationships with early education professionals and parents to support their capacity to build children's social and emotional competence
- Provide culturally sensitive, strengths-based, developmental, behavioral and mental health consultation, psychoeducation, direct support & technical assistance for adults supporting young children
- Participate in interdisciplinary teaming and collaborative consultation & problem solving
- Collaborate with the team to design and demonstrate/model interventions that involve changes in the behaviors of caregivers (education professionals and parents), targeted strategies for the child, and resources to support the interventions and encourage nurturing, responsive relationships and social emotional learning
- Participate in group reflective practice/ case consultation roundtables with the HealthyCHILD team
- Provide professional development and education for early childhood professionals and parents

Qualifications:

- Graduate students enrolled in psychology, social work, or special education programs.
- Prior experience with young children (0-8 years), preferably children at developmental risk and/or with disabilities and social, emotional or behavioral challenges, in early education settings.
- Must be comfortable working with children age birth to 8 in the classroom setting. Reliable transportation required.
- Must be comfortable working with and collaborating with an interdisciplinary team (e.g., teachers, caregivers, education coaches, social workers, counselors, speech/language and early intervention therapists).

3. LEND Medium-Term Traineeship:

Are you interested in learning more about autism and neurodevelopmental disabilities, and early childhood intervention? Do you strive to be a leader in your field?

If so, don't miss this opportunity to earn a **Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) Medium-Term Trainee Certificate** from The LEND Center, a leadership education program of the University of Pittsburgh and UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh.

To earn the Medium-Term Trainee Certificate, you will need to complete the activities described below under the mentorship of Dr. Larson:

- Meet with Dr. Larson, your LEND mentor, a minimum of two times during the academic year, at the beginning and end.
- Accept your invitation to the LEND Course on Canvas and complete the contact form, and the NIRS form.
- Attend or watch the recording of a minimum of 4 Early Childhood Partnerships-Collaboration (ECP-C) webinars and complete the evaluation survey for each. ECP-C webinars are provided by EC faculty from Pitt, Virginia Commonwealth University, Children's National, and University of Connecticut.
- Watch a minimum of 3 webinars under the "Core MTT Content" Module and complete and submit a one-paragraph written reflection (all on LEND Course Canvas Page).
 - Options include:
 - History of Disability Rights (Dr. Guy Caruso webinar or Crip Camp)
 - Introduction to Disabilities (Dr. Amy Houtrow)
 - Health Equity for Children with Disabilities (Dr. Amy Houtrow)
 - Family Panel
 - Self-Advocate Panel
- Complete capstone project.
- Complete a reflection on your experience, learning and how you will apply your learning to your future professional work.

The LEND Center is funded by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) in the department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Check out the [LEND Pittsburgh website](#) for more information about LEND training.

Early Childhood Partnership Student Opportunities:

Students can apply to engage with Early Childhood Partnerships in any number of the following activities (*students may choose more than one*) using this [application link](#):

1. **Early Childhood Networked Improvement Community (EC NIC)* - minimum 100 hours/academic year.** Capstone project included in activities, if desired. LEND Medium-term Traineeship included in activities, if desired.
*Select this student opportunity (EC NIC) if you are a MAPS students.
2. **HealthyCHILD (HC) and HealthyInfants (HI) Internship - minimum 200 hours/academic year;** 2 mornings/week and 1 afternoon/week. Gain experience in infant/early childhood mental health consultation under the close supervision of an experienced HC/HI Consultant. Capstone projects are included in activities, if desired. LEND Medium-Term Traineeship included in activities, if desired. More information about HC/HI here: www.healthychildpitt.org
3. **LEND Medium-Term Traineeship - minimum 40 hours/academic year.** Gain knowledge in autism spectrum disorders, neurodevelopmental disabilities, and early intervention. Capstone project included in activities, if desired.

Next Steps:

- **We encourage you to apply as soon as possible, as spots are limited and applications are reviewed on a rolling basis.** Students from various Pitt Schools and other local universities are considered, and placements will be filled as strong candidates are identified.
- Once you have submitted all your application material, email Dr. Jancart, the Assistant Director of Early Childhood Partnerships, to schedule your interview at kjancart@pitt.edu.