Mission of the Center

An expanding body of research supports the importance of early intervention/education for young children with special needs and their families. The Communication and Early Childhood Research and Practice Center (CEC-RAP) is designed to promote interdisciplinary contributions to the field of early intervention/education for young children with disabilities, communication disorders, and/or multiple risks for learning. CEC-RAP focuses on the continued expansion of research, personnel preparation, and service delivery through collaboration with interrelated projects in the College of Communication of Information, College of Education, and the Autism Institute in the College of Medicine.

Goals of the Center

To be recognized as a major national source of research and personnel development in early intervention/education for children with developmental delays and disabilities, communication disorders or multiple risks, CEC-RAP will:

1. Have continuity, diversity and growth of funding sources from governmental and private sources for research and demonstration,
2. Offer funded personnel preparation programs for graduate students (master’s and doctoral) that will foster recruitment of the best scholars,
3. Invest in undergraduate research, leadership and service-learning opportunities that promote the future of the Center,
4. Foster interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration in early childhood policy and program development within an engaged community, and
5. Develop and maintain model programs for research and professional development.

Spotlight - Mobile Coaching

Early Intervention, Part C of IDEA, programs throughout the United States rapidly shifted to telepractice, or mobile coaching, in March and April of 2020 as a means to support families during the coronavirus pandemic. For early intervention (EI) providers, this shift brought opportunities and challenges inherent to coaching using internet or technology-based tools to support communication. This was a new concept to most EI providers! As they quickly pivoted to mobile coaching, the Center developed multiple videos on mobile coaching using providers and families from the IA-DMM project that were shared nationwide via the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA) and the US Department of Education. Larry Edelman, Juliann Woods and Jenny Sentjuens collaborated to illustrate the use of Family Guided Routines Based Intervention in practice using a variety of technology supported strategies ranging from laptop and desktop computers to iPads and cell phones. EI providers learned how to shift their coaching practices from working side by side with parents in the family’s home to communicating from their own homes as everyone stayed safe during the pandemic. Additional video examples and print resources (available on fgrbi.com) served as resources for webinars attended by more than 3500 providers and administrators over the course of the year to support EIs during this transition and beyond!
MORE Gesture Intervention Study - During 2019 & 2020, CEC-RAP partnered with the Big Bend Early Learning Coalition and local community childcare centers to support infant and toddler communication. Together with childcare teachers, we supported 4 infant-toddler teachers and 20 children to use early gestures to communicate. Gestures like pointing, reaching and showing are early ways that children begin to get their caregivers’ attention. When adults respond to those gestures by “translating” the gesture with words, children develop their receptive and expressive language skills. We used strategies like modeling gestures with single words, creating environmental arrangements and expanding on child gestures to help infants and toddlers accelerate their word learning while reading books, playing, eating meals, and playing outside. We had so much fun getting to know these amazing childcare teachers and children!

Learning Early Infant Feeding cues (LEIFc) - Infants and their caregivers’ earliest interactions take place during feeding routines. As caregivers notice and respond to an infant’s cues, they meet their baby’s nutritional needs while communicating and comforting them. Responding to a child’s hunger and fullness cues helps babies grow at a healthy pace while developing a strong attachment to her caregivers, but these cues are not always easy to spot, especially for first time mothers! The LEIFc project is a responsive feeding intervention that helps mothers who are experiencing poverty learn to notice and respond to these early cues to help her child reach a healthy weight and to develop strong early communication skills. The LEIFc project is a collaboration between the College of Nursing, CEC-RAP and the Center for Prevention and Early Intervention at FSU. This fall, families in Gadsden county's Early Head Start home visiting program will participate in the project with their trained home visitors who will coach them to respond to their baby’s earliest feeding cues. We are excited to partner to support our tiniest community members!

Developmental Disabilities Certificate (DD) The Developmental Disabilities Certificate continues to excel and expand! It has grown from five students to approximately 50 participating each semester! Interested students from Psychology, Child and Family Studies, Music Therapy, Communication Science and Disorders, Pre-professional training for Occupational and Physical Therapy, Education and more enroll in the 12-credit certificate program prior to their junior year. To complete the certificate, students must earn nine credits in approved interdisciplinary courses that engage students in learning about individuals with various types of developmental disabilities of all ages. They also complete a 45-hour community practicum offered various community-based settings ranging from early care and education, to adult supports and geriatric services. Students record their experiences in reflection logs weekly. The diversity of students involved, their career goals, and the experiences they share are truly inspiring.

The course changed from in-person practicum to on-line experiences during the pandemic. Dr. Romano skillfully revised the course to ensure students enrolled could complete their certificate requirements. The adaptations provided remote and individualized opportunities unique to student interests that extended critical thinking and reflection on equity issues for individuals with disabilities.
Distance Mentoring Model for Iowa’s Early ACCESS System

In 2019-2020 Iowa’s 17 Internal Coaches supported 52 Early Interventionists (EIs) across the state to use Family Guided Routines Based Intervention with families they serve in their local Part C programs. Across the year, Internal Coaches conducted a total of 109 coaching feedback sessions in which they coached EI providers in a trio! Each coaching session is an opportunity for small groups of providers to learn, problem-solve, reflect, and receive feedback on their practice from a supportive group of team members.

In the spring of 2020, Internal Coaches helped their providers make a rapid transition to mobile coaching during COVID-19. During this time, they expanded their own practice into mobile coaching models, and they helped their groups of trios continue to support families during a time of intense changes for caregivers and young children with disabilities.

Across the year, Internal Coaches also began to lead monthly, statewide provider webinars. Topics of monthly webinars included: What is FGRBI, Building Routines, Embedding the Family 5Q, and Intervention Strategies and were presented by internal coaches from Prairie Lakes, Des Moines Public Schools, Keystone, and Green Hills AEAs.

At the end of the 2019-2020 training cycle, IA-DMM has trained 10 Trainee Coaches, 7 Provider Coaches, and 4 Master Coaches.
Early intervention providers across the state are learning to adopt an evidence-based caregiver coaching approach to support infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families in Florida! Florida Embedded Practices and Intervention with Caregivers Early Steps Professional Development (FL-EPIC ESPD; COQXY) is a collaboration between the Early Steps Part C program in Florida, the Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Florida, and the Communication and Early Childhood Research and Practice Center. This year, we are expanding into Early Steps Programs in Big Bend, Gold Coast, and North Beaches. In 2020, Western Panhandle, Gulf Central, Southwest, and Southernmost Coast joined other FL-EPIC sites in North Dade, North Central, Northeastern, Space Coast and Treasure Coast, to promote the use of caregiver coaching practices in their regions! With ongoing support from UF and FSU, each program is staffed with coaches who support providers to implement FL-EPIC through a sequence of evidence-based professional development supports, including practice-based coaching. COVID 19 changed everyone’s lives, but it did not stop Florida programs from making gains in their use of caregiver coaching practices during virtual home visits and in-person sessions. By supporting providers to use effective caregiver coaching practices, we are building caregivers’ use of strategies that help their child grow and learn in their everyday routines and activities and improve social-emotional and other important outcomes for infants and toddlers across the state.
This project evaluates a peer-implemented professional development approach on the use of Family Guided Routines Based Intervention (FGRBI) and Caregiver Coaching by early intervention providers (EIs) in Part C of IDEA. When implementing FGRBI, EIs coach caregivers to embed evidence-based strategies with their child during family-identified routines and activities like getting dressed, playing on the floor before bedtime, playing chase with dad, and checking the mail to target functional developmental outcomes that are meaningful to the family. As the Early ACCESS program in Iowa aims to increase the use of FGRBI and EI’s fidelity of intervention delivery in a cost-effective manner, Area Education Agencies (AEAs) are training staff to become internal peer coaches that support others to use FGRBI.

This project examines whether the internal coaches’ use of a multicomponent, job-embedded professional development approach increases EIs’ implementation of specific caregiver coaching practices (SS-OO-PP-RR) and whether those coaching practices impact caregiver and child outcomes of infants and toddlers with communication delays in community-based programs. The evaluation is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (R324L180013). It is being conducted via a partnership between Florida State University’s Communication and Early Childhood Research and Practice (CEC-RAP) Center, the Iowa Department of Education (IDOE) – Early ACCESS (Part C) system, and Iowa AEAs who directly administer Part C services to Iowa’s children and families.

The multicomponent professional development approach includes online training materials on topics related to family guided practices, web-based video feedback via the TORSH Talent web platform, and twice-monthly coaching sessions with their internal peer coach. Participant EI providers measure their own fidelity of implementation, they receive comments on their videos from their coaches, and they participate in internal coach-led feedback sessions that aim to increase their use of FGRBI. The trained internal peer coaches use fidelity measures to ensure that coaching sessions are delivered to EI providers as intended.

In this evaluation, we use a multiple baseline, across participants single case experimental design. The intervention is replicated across three sites for a total of nine EI providers and 18 families. Data will be analyzed via visual analysis and confirmed with the between-case standardized mean difference effect size.

The study’s findings are relevant to Part C programs and professional development researchers who use an implementation science approach to explore, install, and scale interventions for use in community-based settings. Examining the degree to which internal agents like internal peer coaches can create change in EIs’ use of FGRBI will allow us to determine whether the approach has promise for increasing the use of FGRBI within Part C systems.
Florida Department of Education
Tuition Support Program

Background

Recruiting and retaining highly qualified SLPs to serve in public schools is a challenging priority for school districts nationwide (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2016) and especially in Florida.

- Growth profession - Speech-Language Pathology as a profession is projected to grow by 21% by 2024 (www.bls.gov).
- Competition - Recruitment and retention of school based SLPs is impacted by caseload size, paperwork burden, and salaries (ASHA, 2016).
- The Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS) of the Florida Department of Education (FL-DOE) promotes recruitment and retention of school-based SLPs through innovative tuition support partnerships.
- Ongoing partnership between FL-DOE and Florida State University (FSU) has allowed program to shift and reflect state priorities.

SLP Tuition Support Program

- Bachelor’s level SLPs can serve in Florida public schools for up to three years until they obtain full certification or licensure
- BEESS provides tuition reimbursement directly to the graduate student. Students commit to two years of service obligation per year of funding.
- FSU administers the program, provides mentoring to students, focusing on small and rural districts, and offers professional development on school-based content throughout the year.
- 40-50 students are funded annually.
- Students choose any accredited graduate program nationwide.

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<th>Institutes of Higher Education (IHE)</th>
<th>Funded students per IHE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Florida State University</td>
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Student Presentations


Garnet and Gold/ Honors Thesis

The Garnet and Gold Scholar Society facilitates involvement and recognizes the engaged, well-rounded undergraduate student who excels within and beyond the classroom in the areas of Leadership, Internship, Service, International, and Research. An undergraduate student who meets the criteria in three of the five areas and completes a Synthesis Reflection will qualify to graduate as a member of the Garnet and Gold Scholars Society.

Undergraduate Student Research Assistants

In 2019 and 2020, 17 undergraduate students joined CEC-RAP to gain experience with research at the Center. A variety of experiences were provided for the students including collecting video observations, coding video interactions, transcribing, data entry, data analysis, and helping to develop research training materials. Students learned the developmental sequence of gestures, how coaching strategies increase caregiver confidence, and how to embed intervention into various routines. Key to the research experiences are the lab meetings where students and faculty join together to discuss what everyone is doing, what the data tell us, what the next questions might be, and how the information can be used to improve the lives of children and families.

Service Learning

Many students use their volunteer hours to earn service learning credits through the Center for Leadership and Social Change.
2019 & 2020 Publications and Presentations

Presentations


Publications


On August 4th, 2019, Dr. Juliann Woods retired from teaching at Florida State University. She joined the SCSD program as a visiting professor to support the development of a technology supported distance learning program in 1999. During her 20 years of service, she directed and expanded the distance learning program to be fully online and established the BRIDGE prerequisite graduate program. She also served as the Director of the LL Schendel Speech and Hearing Clinic for six years, as the School Director for SCSD, and as the Associate Dean of Research for the College of Communication and Information. During this time, she founded the Communication and Early Childhood Research and Practice (CEC-RAP) Center to serve as laboratory for clinical research, practice and personnel preparation. Juliann enjoyed grant writing and developing project names using acronyms that described the program goals. Projects with names like TaCTICS, FGRBI, ASSET, L & L, Positive Beginnings, PDS, EPIC, KTTP, A+, FL-EPIC, PALS, and TRAIL were among a few of the catchy titles. She welcomed undergraduate students to the lab to gain insight into research and opportunities to explore early intervention and caregiver coaching. In her tenure, over 150 graduate students were funded on her personnel preparation projects to support children and families in low resource settings.

Upon her retirement, she was granted Emeritus Professor status and continues her work with children, families, and early intervention providers by collaborating with various state agencies on the implementation of FGRBI. She plans to return part time to work on a few of the alphabet projects after time with family in Iowa. In the Spring of 2020, a Family Guided Routines Based Intervention (FGRBI) website was launched with new and updated materials and videos. Covid-19 necessitated the development of resources to share insights and examples of how FGRBI can be implemented via tele-intervention. A Mobile Coaching page was added to the website to share these resources. To visit the new FGRBI website, please visit: http://fgrbi.com.

Congratulations Dr. Romano and Kat Cripe!

Mollie Romano assumed the position of Center Director upon Juliann's retirement. Mollie joined CEC-RAP as a research assistant in 2014 and became the assistant director in 2016. Katrina Cripe was promoted to the role of Center Coordinator in 2020. She continues her duties of technology and volunteer coordinator.