



Highlights of Our Work During 2014

- With the Colorado Department of Education, forged an ongoing partnership to develop a comprehensive state research agenda based on departmental strategic priorities and refine state research and data analysis processes
- Reached out to UNC faculty focused on researching education policy to create a network of EII Faculty Fellows to support each other's work and mentor students
- Supported Faculty Fellow Elysia Clemens in research on issues and challenges faced by students in foster care
- Supported Faculty Fellow Corey Pierce in ongoing research on techniques used by Colorado schools to identify academic needs of elementary school students
- Served as an advisor to the Colorado Education Initiative's project to work with stakeholders to improve school-business partnerships in STEM education
- Joined members of the Colorado legislature and CDE at a Kauffman Foundation conference on using education data to improve workforce development
- Converted EII's successful Internships in Education Research Methods into a credit-bearing doctoral-level course on techniques for conducting rigorous research
- Created a secure room on campus for conducting research using data covered by federal and state privacy protocols
- Continued our work to evaluate the effectiveness of a five-year, federally funded project to create early college high schools in several Denver public schools
- Began planning for a 2015 conference to bring together policy makers, educators, researchers, and foundations to discuss the value and challenges of basing policies on rigorous research
- Began exploring ways to help the broader public understand and use academic research

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A Brief Overview

In its third year of operation the Education Innovation Institute (EII) at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) focused on building capacity for the creation and use of rigorous causal research to inform education policy. Such research is designed to determine whether programs and policies actually *cause* improved academic achievement, instead of just being correlated with it, and its execution requires specialized skills. Investment in developing these skills is a worthwhile pursuit. The findings of such studies enable state and local policy makers to concentrate scarce resources on programs most likely to be effective and tailor programs to the students and schools most likely to benefit.



We devoted most of our effort to three areas: research, policy implementation, and the use of research by broader communities, including businesses and schools. The work with researchers included bringing together a cadre of UNC faculty who are dedicated to conducting rigorous research on policies and practices affecting K-12 schools, universities, and the quality of life of Colorado's children. The scholarship of these EII Faculty Fellows includes studying the impact of policies in such areas as special education, challenges for students in foster care, and tuition pressures on public universities. Read more about the Faculty Fellows [here](#).

A related undertaking has been to convert our successful EII Internships in Education Research Methods into a credit-bearing doctoral-level course on techniques for conducting rigorous research. Students who complete the course successfully and want to gain experience in practical applications can apply for a practicum and/or external internship to work with researchers, data managers, policy makers, or others whose work focuses on connecting research with policy.

Our work with policy implementers has included an ongoing partnership with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to set priorities for use of data collected by the agency. One piece of this project is to develop of a comprehensive research agenda to support the implementation and understanding of effective educational practices and policies, aligned with strategic priorities within the

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State of Colorado. Another piece will support the development of business rules and operational policy related to various levels of data requests received by CDE. A third element is to create a revolving internship for students trained in data management and security, as well as rigorous research methods, to help CDE manage departmental data and respond to requests for use of the data.

A central piece of our work with the broader community has been participation in the Colorado Education Initiative's Effective Employer Engagement in STEM Education project. This working group representing business, education, and nonprofit organizations was charged with defining attributes of - and measures to evaluate - quality public-private partnerships between schools and businesses. The goal is to produce research-based guidelines for creating school-business partnerships that yield measurable results for students and are satisfying for both educators and business participants. EII Executive Director Kristin Klopfenstein was brought in to help shape discussions and advise the group on designing a rigorous research project to identify correlations between attributes of employer engagement in education and outcomes for students.

History of the Education Innovation Institute

The General Assembly created EII in 2009 (SB 09-032) to leverage new and existing applied research to solve practical problems in education reform. It is located at the University of Northern Colorado, which has the state's largest educator preparation program. UNC secured non-state funding for the institute, which began operating in spring 2011. The primary work of the institute during its first few years has been to establish itself as a nonpartisan source of research-based recommendations on implementation of Colorado's many recent education reforms as well as on issues under consideration for future legislation. As a young, small organization EII often seeks to amplify its influence by collaborating with others, including established nonprofits, school districts, and faculty researchers. The institute also has participated in applications for major research grants and continues to seek other potential sources of public and private funding.