UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

EDUCATION INNOVATION INSTITUTE

2017 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY 10, 2018

History of the Education Innovation Institute

The General Assembly created the Education Innovation Institute (EII) at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) in 2009 (SB 09-032) to leverage new and existing applied research to solve practical problems in education reform. UNC secured non-state funding for the Institute, which began operating in spring 2011. EII seeks to amplify its influence by collaborating with other universities, state agencies, nonprofits, and, of course, school districts.

Change in Leadership and Expanded Focus

In August of 2017, Dr. Kristin Klopfenstein, the founding Executive Director of the Education Innovation Institute, resigned. Dr. Elysia Clemens was appointed to serve as the Executive Director. Clemens is a full professor in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences at UNC and has a proven track-record of partnering with state and local agencies and non-profits to conduct policy-relevant research and build the evidence-base to inform education practice. Clemens's curriculum vitae can be found on the Institute's website, linked here.

EII will continue its focus on causal evaluation of policies and practices. In addition, the Institute will expand its focus to develop innovative solutions to complex problems in education. In doing so, EII expects to launch two to three new programs of research that bring together interdisciplinary researcher and practitioner experts during the 2018 calendar year.

Highlights of EII's Work During 2017

- Completed STEM Mentors evaluation in partnership with Colorado Education Initiative.

- Completed Instructional Coaching and Blended Learning evaluation in partnership with Greeley-Evans School District 6.

- Continued an Institute for Education Sciences (U.S. Department of Education) funded researcher-practitioner partnership with Colorado Department of Education to study the relationship between mobility and educational outcomes for students in foster care. Visit the [Colorado Study of Students in Foster Care](#) website for findings.

- Served on the Governor's Cabinet Youth Education Task Force, which is charged with identifying promising legislative actions and practices to support education and workforce outcomes of youth involved with the child welfare system and youth corrections.

- Supported the development of a Pay for Success project proposal for 7th-10th grade Jefferson County Public Schools youth in foster care, prioritized for funding by the Governor's Office.

- Participated in Data Quality Campaign expert group on linking child welfare and education data, along with the Colorado Department of Education.

- Participated in an Education Commission of the States policy convening on improving postsecondary access for youth who have experienced foster care. The Colorado state team included representatives from Colorado Departments of Education, Higher Education, and Human Services.

- Served as a consultant for the American Bar Association's Legal Center for Foster Care and Education regarding communicating research and evaluation findings. Presented at the American Bar Association's Annual Conference on Children and the Law.

- Supported the conception of the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab at the University of Denver, along with partners from multiple Colorado universities and the governor's office (January focus group, June visit to Rhode Island Innovative Policy Lab).

- Continued work on i3 validation grant for Early College Expansion Project, including attending project director's meeting in Washington, D.C., in June 2017.

- Organized and participated in a panel at the Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness on defining "Business as Usual" in causal study designs.

- Supported writing a successfully-funded, 2-year Institute for Education Sciences partnership grant proposal with Colorado Department of Higher Education to evaluate concurrent enrollment in Colorado.

- Supported writing a National Science Foundation grant proposal with Colorado Education Initiative to increase underrepresented students' access to AP Computer Science courses.

- Led the submission of an Institute for Education Sciences grant proposal with Jefferson County Public Schools to develop and test the initial promise of an intervention to improve educational outcomes for highly mobile students (currently under review).

- Collaborated with Colorado Department of Human Services - Child Support Services to develop a pilot program intended to remove barriers to postsecondary education for parents and increase access to early childhood education (known as the "two-generation approach").

- Continued to maintain UNC's Secure Data Lab to support responsible use of protected data for research purposes.

A Brief Overview of 2017

In its sixth year of operation, EII continued to strengthen the vision portrayed in its founding statute (SB 09-032). Given the breadth of that vision, the mission of EII has been focused to "provide products, programs, and services that build the capacity of decision-makers in the educational system, including school leaders, researchers, and policymakers, to routinely generate and use meaningful evidence for effective resource allocation in the running and governing of schools."

EII's work in 2017 concentrated on the cultivation of researcher/practitioner partnerships for the creation and use of rigorous causal research to inform education policy from the school level to the national level. Causal research is designed to determine

whether programs and policies actually *cause* improved student outcomes instead of just being correlated with them. This distinction is important because policies that are enacted based on correlational evidence can have costly unintended consequences. The most common unintended consequence is that ineffective programs live on, diverting scarce resources away from productive uses.

In 2017, EII continued development of a sustainable model to provide training, technical assistance, and evaluation support for education stakeholders in Colorado and beyond who wish to rigorously evaluate their programs as part of continuous improvement processes. The gold standard of causal evaluation is the randomized control trial or RCT. Although RCTs have been used for decades to advance the practice of medicine, they are relatively new—though equally important—in the field of education. There are very real ethical and political barriers to using RCTs in schools; however, these concerns can and must be thoughtfully managed to move forward society's understanding about what works in education. EII provides hands-on support for schools as they encounter inevitable barriers in their efforts to improve student outcomes while maximizing the return on investment for taxpayers.

Building capacity through the **Evaluating What Works** *technical assistance program*

In 2017, EII enhanced its *Evaluating What Works* program, which conducts outreach to education leaders about the meaning and value of rigorous program evaluation, to include engaging online videos addressing common questions and concerns. The online videos provide brief, accessible explanations to questions about the fundamentals of rigorous program evaluation including: "What is Causality?"; "What About Ethics?"; "Deciding if an RCT is Appropriate"; "Developing a Research Question"; "Effective Stakeholder Communication"; and "Preparing so that Results will Drive Change." Like the rest of EII's work, the videos balance discussion of technical issues with the political and practical concerns of conducting high-quality evaluations in a school setting.

Building capacity through **Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships**

EII also partners with school districts and other education stakeholders to implement rigorous, low-cost program evaluations that are complex enough to require more involved expert assistance. While the *Evaluating What Works* program helps a school district to start on the path to rigorous causal evaluation, a researcher-practitioner partnership can potentially provide active assistance from start to finish. The goal is that such partnerships build the capacity of districts to conduct future evaluations independently or with minimal expert assistance. Researcher-practitioner partnerships are currently funded primarily by federal and private foundation dollars, but ideally, the costs of rigorous program evaluations--with or without support from higher education partners--will ultimately be incorporated into district operating budgets.

A good example of such a partnership occurred when EII partnered with the Greeley-Evans School District 6 to conduct a low-cost, rigorous evaluation of a blended learning program in six elementary schools. Blended learning is expected to improve students' academic growth and achievement in math by increasing personalization. Because the District cannot afford to implement the intervention district wide all at once, it selected six elementary schools that were ready and interested in implementing blended learning in the 2016-17 academic year. Since these schools were not randomly chosen from among all of the District's elementary schools, the comparison of student outcomes from these six schools to all other district schools would lead to correlational results, rather than causal (the gold standard). Therefore, the District elected to randomize at the grade level with half of the six schools implementing blended learning ("treatment") in grades K, 2, and 4 and the other half in grades 1, 3, and 5 starting in fall 2016. Accordingly, student outcomes in the treatment grades K, 2, and 4 can be compared to student outcomes in the control grades K, 2, and 4 to estimate the causal effect of the intervention. They followed the same approach for grades 1, 3, and 5. Greeley-Evans leveraged the fact that they couldn't afford to implement the intervention district wide all at once by randomly assigning who got it first rather than taking volunteers or selecting those schools they expected to be most likely to succeed.

As a result of this simple decision, they now have hard data to inform whether and how to further expand the program given the costs. Academic growth in math improved as a result of the blended learning model in schools where the leadership team was particularly focused on the initiative. In other schools, the effect on academic growth was mixed or non-significant. In regards to academic achievement, the findings suggest that the blended learning model has the potential to close math achievement gaps for students in the Free or Reduced Lunch and English Language Learner sub-groups. School districts similarly situated to Greeley-Evans can also use this information to inform their decisions to utilize the blended learning model.

EII's Publications During 2017

Clemens, E., Klopfenstein, K., Tis, M., Lalonde, T. (2017). Educational stability policy and the interplay between child welfare placements and school moves. *Children and Youth Services Review, 83*, 209-217.

Clemens, E., Hess, R., Strear, M., Rue, L., Rizzolo, S., Henninger, J. (2017). Promoting resilience in youth experiencing homelessness through implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. *Preventing School Failure, 0*, 1-11. DOI:doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2017.1387756

Clemens, E., Helm, H., Myers, K., Thomas, C., Tis, M. (2017). The voices of youth formerly in foster care: Perspectives on the educational attainment gap. *Children and Youth Services Review, 79*, 65-77.. DOI: dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.003

Stutey, D., Clemens, E. (2017). Hidden abuse within the home: Recognizing and responding to sibling abuse. In T. P. Remley, Jr., W. D. Rock, & R. M. Reed (Ed.), *Ethical and legal issues in school counseling (4th ed.)* (vol. 4th ed, pp. 180-198).

Clemens, E., Martinez, J., McNaught, K., Klopfenstein, K. (2017). Advocating for Educational Stability for Youth in Foster Care. *Child Law Practice, 36*(3), 57-60.