

Christina Stephens

National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)

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PRIMARY FIELDS OF INTEREST

Early Education & Development – Early Childhood Education Policy

Equitable Child Care Access – Dual Language Learners

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Human Development & Family Studies

2023

University of North Carolina Greensboro, Doctoral Minor in Educational Research Methodology

Dissertation: Patterns of family access to early care and education arrangements during preschool and implications for young children's kindergarten outcomes

Committee: Danielle Crosby (Chair), Kierra Sattler, Catherine Scott-Little, & Andrew Supple

M.S. Human Development and Family Studies

2019

University of Rhode Island

B.A. Psychology

2017

The Catholic University of America, Minors in Early Childhood Education & Spanish

ACADEMIC POSITIONS AND AFFILIATIONS

Assistant Research Professor

2025 – present

National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), Rutgers Graduate School of Education

Visiting Research Scholar

2025 – present

University of Virginia, Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning

Institute of Education Sciences Postdoctoral Fellow

2023 – 2025

University of Virginia, Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning

Virginia Education Science Training Program on English Language Learners (IES Grant #R305B210008); Mentor: Dr. Robert C. Pianta

Affiliate Researcher and Predoctoral Fellow

2022 – 2024

National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families; Early Care and Education Area

Mentors: Drs. Danielle Crosby & Julia Mendez (Co-PIs).

Graduate Research Assistant

2019 – 2023

University of North Carolina Greensboro

Department of Human Development and Family Studies; Mentor: Dr. Danielle Crosby

RESEARCH AND SHOLARSHIP

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

Published or In Press

- Stephens, C.,** Pianta, R. C., Whittaker, J. E., & Vitiello, V. E. (2025). Developmental Assets at Preschool Entry That Support Dual Language Learners' Academic Development Through the First Grade. *Early Education and Development*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2025.2484849>
- Stephens, C.,** Crosby, D. A., Sattler, K., Supple, A., & Scott-Little, C. (2025). Multidimensional Patterns of Early Care and Education Access Through a Family Centered Lens [Special Issue: Equitable Access to Early Care and Education in the United States]. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 70, 133-143. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2024.09.004>
- Stephens, C.,** Crosby, D. A., & Mendez Smith, J., (2024). Accessibility of the Early Care and Education Supply: Variation Within the Center-Based Provider Sector. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2024.107846>
- Stephens, C.,** Crosby, D. A., & Yaya-Bryson, D. & Reid, A. (2023). Supporting Spanish-English DLLs in Head Start: Peer Language Match, Instructional Language Match, and Emotional Support as Predictors of Approaches to Learning and Social Skills [Special Issue: Demographic (Mis)Match in Early Childhood Education]. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 63, 121-132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2022.11.005>
**This publication was selected for the 2023 UNGC HDFS Vira Kivett publication award*
- Navarro, J.L, **Stephens, C.,** Rodrigues, B.C., Walker, I., Cook, O., O'Toole, L., Hayes, N., & Tudge, J.R.H. (2022). Bored of the rings: Methodological and analytic approaches to operationalizing Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model in research practice. *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 14(2), 233-253. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12459>

Submitted or In-Progress

- Stephens, C.,** Pianta, R.C., Whittaker, J., & Vitiello, V. (under review, R&R - invited). Links Between Teachers' Occupational Burnout and Students' Academic, Social-Behavioral, and Executive Function Performance from Preschool through First Grade [Special Issue: Early Childhood Education Workforce Well-being]. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*.
- Stephens, C.,** Fares, I., Michie, M., Whittaker, J. E., & Bassok, D. (submitted). Child Care Search Experiences, Choices, and Satisfaction of Non-English-Speaking Families in the Virginia Subsidy System. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*.
- Burchinal, M., Pianta, R. C., Ansari, A., Bratsch-Hines, M., Cohen-Vogel, L., **Stephens, C.,** Peisner-Feinberg, Vitiello, V., Whittaker, J. (submitted). Pre-Kindergarten Classroom Experiences and Child Outcomes through First Grade. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*
- Stephens, C.,** Pianta, R.C., Whittaker, J., & Vitiello, V. (submitted). Variation in Academic Growth Across Children's Diverse Language Backgrounds and PK Attendance. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*
- Burchinal, M., **Stephens, C.,** Iruka, I. U., Pianta, R., Ansari, A., Whittaker, J., & Vitiello, V. (in preparation). Race/Ethnicity and Home Language, School Quality, and Child Outcomes in Prekindergarten to First Grade.

Whittaker, J. **Stephens C.**, DeCoster, J., Pianta, R., Vitiello, V. & Ramirez, E. (in preparation). Longitudinal Associations between Executive Function and Mathematics Skills in Young Children: Are there Differences for English Language Learners?

Policy Briefs/Research Reports

Stephens, C., Friedman-Krauss, A., Nores, M., & Kent, A. (in preparation). Licensed Center-Based Child Care in New Jersey: Full Report. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Stephens, C. Friedman-Krauss, A., Nores, M. & Kent, A. (in press - 2025). *Center-Based Child Care Lead Teachers in New Jersey: Full Report*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Friedman-Krauss, A. H., **Stephens, C.**, & Barnett, W. S. (2025). *Early Childhood Special Education Faculty in Higher Education. Research Report*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. <https://ecipc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Higher-Ed-ECSE-report-FINAL.pdf>

Pianta, R. C. & **Stephens, C.** (2025). Sustaining gains at the Pre-K to Kindergarten Transition. *State Education Standard*, 25(2). Journal of the National Association of State Boards of Education. <https://www.nasbe.org/sustaining-gains-at-the-pre-k-to-kindergarten-transition/>

Crosby, D. A., Mendez, J., **Stephens, C.**, & Adegbesan, I. (2024). *Perspectives from local CCDF program staff in four states on improving Latino families' access to child care subsidies*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families. DOI: 10.59377/584z4813v.

Crosby, D. A., **Stephens, C.** & Mendez, J. (2024). *New York Child Care Subsidy Staff Describe How Policy Implementation Influences Latino Families' Receipt of Subsidies*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families. <https://doi.org/10.59377/542o5154m>

Mendez, J., **Stephens, C.**, Jacome, A., & Crosby, D. A. (2024). *Informal and Formal Supports May Affect Hispanic Early Educators' Physical and Mental Well-Being*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59377/100s2482j>

Stephens, C., Mendez, J., & Crosby, D., A., (2024). *Practitioners in Texas' child care subsidy program describe how policy implementation impacts Hispanic families' receipt of subsidies*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families. DOI: 10.59377/722s5477o

Mendez, J., Crosby, D., & **Stephens, C.** (2024). *Nearly half of Hispanic children in households with low incomes used early care and education in 2019*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families. DOI: 10.59377/349u4419b

Crosby, D. A., **Stephens, C.**, & Mendez, J. (2023). *Many Hispanic Households with Low Income Access No-Cost or Low-Cost Care, Yet Nearly One in Four Face High Out-of-Pocket Costs*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families. <https://doi.org/10.59377/768o8919u>

Stephens, C., Crosby, D., & Mendez, J. (2023). *Early Care and Education Providers Vary in Their Availability and Flexibility to Meet Hispanic Families' Needs*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families. <https://doi.org/10.59377/658l3776v>

Crosby, D.A., Mendez, J.M., and **Stephens, C.** (2023). *Child Care Subsidy Staff Share Perspectives on Policy Implementation Practices and Effective Outreach with Latino Families in California*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families. <https://doi.org/10.59377/431x7190r>

- Crosby, D., Mendez, J. & **Stephens, C.** (2023). *Characteristics of the Early Childhood Workforce Serving Latino Children*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families. <https://doi.org/10.59377/564i2785e>
- Molina, A.P., Crosby, D., Mendez J. M., **Stephens, C.**, & Gonzalez, R. (2023). *Local Agency Staff in North Carolina's Child Care Subsidy Program Offer Perspectives on Engaging Hispanic Families During COVID-19*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families. <https://doi.org/10.59377/707b5266y>
- Lin, Y.C., Crosby, D., Mendez, J., & **Stephens, C.** (2022). *Child Care Subsidy Staff Share Perspectives on Administrative Burden Faced by Latino Applicants in North Carolina*. National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families. <https://www.hispanicresearchcenter.org/research-resources/child-care-subsidy-staff-share-perspectives-on-administrative-burden-faced-by-latino-applicants-in-north-carolina/>

Chapters

- Mendez Smith, J., Crosby, D., & **Stephens, C.** (2021). Equitable access to high-quality early care and education: opportunities to better serve young Hispanic children and their families. In L. Gennetian & M. Tienda (eds.): *Investing in Latino Youth. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science (AAPSS)*, 696(1), 80–105. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162211041942>
- Stephens, C.** & Helms, H. M. (2020). Early childcare support in low wage-earning families in the United States. In Stephen Sweet (Ed.) *Work and Family Encyclopedia*. Work and Family Researchers Network. <https://wfrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Early-Childcare-Supports-Stephens-and-Helms.pdf>

Presentations

*Indicates presenting role

- LoCasale-Crouch, J., Zhang, Y., **Stephens, C.**, Dean, M., Deeken, G., Taylor, M., Cubides Mateus, M., & Duyile, B. (2025). *Exploring the relationship between early childhood education and care quality and neighborhood resources in Virginia* [Poster]. Society for Prevention Research Annual Conference. Seattle, WA.
- Kent, A., Friedman-Krauss, A. **Stephens, C.** & Nores, M. (2025, May 1-3). Depression, Turnover and Workplace Supports and Stressors Among Child Care Lead Classroom Teachers. In Schlieber, M. (Chair): Early Childhood Teacher Well-Being in Preschool, Head Start, Special Education, and Child Care. [Symposium]. Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) 2023 Biennial Meeting. Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.
- Mendez Smith, J., Crosby, D., & **Stephens, C.** (2025, May 1-3). Local Program Subsidy Staff Perspectives on US Latino Families' Access to Child Care Subsidies. In Perez, N. (Chair): *One Size Does Not Fit All: Connecting Diverse Families with ECE that Meets Their Needs*. [Symposium]. Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) 2023 Biennial Meeting. Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.
- Crosby, D., Wrather, A., Jacome Ceron, A., Mendez Smith, J., Omondi, F., **Stephens, C.**, & Adegbesan, I. (2025, May 1-3). Childcare Subsidy Staff Perspectives on How Administrative and Implementation Practices Shape Access for Immigrant Families. In Ferreira van Leer, K. (Chair) *Including immigrant families in anti-poverty/social safety net programs: A multifaceted examination*. [Symposium]. Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) 2023 Biennial Meeting. Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.

- Stephens, C.***, Fares, I., Michie, M., Whittaker, J. E., & Bassok, D. (2025, May 1-3). Child Care Search Experiences, Choices, and Satisfaction of Non-English-Speaking Families in the Virginia Subsidy System [Poster]. Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) 2023 Biennial Meeting. Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.
- Stephens, C.***, Pianta, R. C., Whittaker, J. E., & Vitiello, V. E. (2025, May 1-3) Variation in Early Academic Growth Across Children's Diverse Linguistic Backgrounds and Educational Experiences. In Sutter, S. (Chair) *Holistic Approaches for Supporting Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Education Settings*. [Symposium]. Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) 2023 Biennial Meeting. Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.
- Stephens, C.***, Pianta, R. C., Whittaker, J. E., & Vitiello, V. E. (2025, January 7-8). Developmental Assets at Preschool Entry that Support Dual Language Learners' Academic Development through the First Grade [Poster]. Institute for Education Sciences (IES) Annual Principal Investigators Meeting. Arlington, Virginia. *Meeting cancelled due to inclement weather*.
- Stephens, C.***, Mendez, J., & Crosby, D. (2024, November 23-24). Texas Child Care Subsidy Staff Share Perspectives on Local Policy Implementation Practices That Impact Latine Families' Access. In Gennetian, L. (Chair) & **Stephens C.** (Organizer) *Multi-State Insights on Hispanic Families' Experiences Accessing Federal Child Care Subsidies* [Panel]. Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management (APPAM). National Harbor, Maryland, United States.
- Stephens, C.***, Pianta, R. C., Whittaker, J. E., & Vitiello, V. E. (2024, June 24-26). Developmental Assets at Preschool Entry that Support Dual Language Learners' Academic Development through the First Grade. In **Stephens, C.*** (Chair) *Supporting Dual Language Learners' Development During the Early Childhood Period: Identifying Children's Early Developmental Assets and Elements of Linguistically Responsive Classrooms* [Symposium]. Administration for Children and Families' National Research Conference on Early Childhood (NRCEC). Arlington, Virginia, United States.
- Stephens, C.***, Pianta, R. C., Whittaker, J. E., & Vitiello, V. E. (2024, June 24-26). Cumulative Implications of Exposures to Teachers' Symptoms of Burnout across Pre-K to First Grade for Students' Academic and Social-Behavioral Performance. In Mendez, J. (Chair) *The Current Landscape of the U.S. Early Care and Education Workforce: Well-Being, Working Conditions, and Impacts on Young Children* [Poster Symposium]. Administration for Children and Families' National Research Conference on Early Childhood (NRCEC). Arlington, Virginia, United States.
- Crosby, D., Mendez Smith, J., **Stephens, C.**, & Adegbesan, I. (2024, June 24-26). From Policy to Practice: Local CCDF Staff Share Perspectives on Implementation Practices that Shape Equitable Access to Child Care Subsidies for Families. In Schochet, O. (Chair) *Comparing Documented State Child Care Subsidy Policies with Providers' Subsidy-Related Experiences and On-the-Ground Practices of Local Subsidy Staff* [Symposium]. Administration for Children and Families' National Research Conference on Early Childhood (NRCEC). Arlington, Virginia, United States.
- Crosby, D. A., Wrather, A., Mendez Smith, J. **Stephens, C.**, Omondi, F. (2024, June 24-26). Reducing Administrative Burdens to Support More Equitable Access for Families Seeking Child Care Assistance: Perspectives from Local CCDF Agency Staff [Poster].

- Administration for Children and Families' National Research Conference on Early Childhood (NRCEC). Arlington, Virginia, United States.
- Stephens, C.M.***, Crosby, D. A., Sattler, K., Supple, A., & Scott-Little, C. (2024, April 11-14). Patterns of Children's Access to Early Care and Education Arrangements During Preschool Through a Multidimensional Family Centered Lens. In Ward-Seidel, A. (Chair) *Early Childhood Education (EC) Equity: Unpacking Racial Injustice in ECE Access, Readiness, Relationships, and Disparities* [Symposium]. American Educational Research Association (AERA) 2024 Annual Meeting. Philadelphia, PA, United States.
- Lutolli, A., **Stephens, C.**, & Sattler, K. (2024, January 10-14). *A Mediated Moderation Model: Is Child Care Access a Buffer for the Impact of Maternal Depression on Children's School Readiness Via Maternal Sensitivity & Cognitively Stimulating Parenting?* [Poster]. Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) 2024 Annual Conference. Washington, D.C., United States.
- Lutolli, A., **Stephens, C.**, & Sattler, K. (2023, November 9-11). *A Mediated Moderation Model: Is Child Care Access a Buffer for the Impact of Maternal Depression on Children's School Readiness Via Maternal Sensitivity & Cognitively Stimulating Parenting?* [Poster]. Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management (APPAM) Fall Research Conference. Atlanta, Georgia, United States.
- Stephens, C.M.***, (Invited Presentation – 2023, October 20). *Classroom Language & Emotional Support Contexts as Predictors of Approaches to Learning & Social Skills for Spanish-English Dual Language Learners in Head Start*. University of North Carolina Greensboro, Department of Human Development and Family Studies Colloquium Speaker Series.
- Stephens, C.M.***, Adegbesan, I., & Crosby, D.A. (2023, March 23-25). Latine Families' ECE Access During Covid-19: Californian Subsidy Staff Perspectives on Disruptions, Adaptations and Recommendations. In **C.M. Stephens*** & I. Adegbesan (Chairs) *Promoting Access to Social Supports and Resources Throughout COVID-19 for Latine Families with Young Children* [Symposium]. Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) 2023 Biennial Meeting. Salt Lake City, Utah, United States
- Stephens, C.M.*** (2023, March 23-25). *Accessibility of the Early Care and Education Supply: Variation Within the Center-Based Provider Sector* [Flash Talk Paper]. Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) 2023 Biennial Meeting. Salt Lake City, Utah, United States
- Ricks, T., Bayer, S., & **Stephens, C. M.*** (Invited Presentations - 2023, January 27, March 6 & 16). *Teacher Well-Being and Program Supports: Implications for Promoting High Quality and Social-Emotional Development in Preschool Environments*. Professional Development Sessions Provided to the Early Educator Support Office at East Carolina University. Greenville, North Carolina, United States & Virtual Presentations.
- Ricks, T., Bayer, S., & **Stephens, C. M.*** (2022, November 15-19). *Teacher Well-Being and Program Supports: Implications for Promoting High Quality and Social-Emotional Development in Preschool Environments* [Presentation Session]. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Annual Conference. Washington, D.C.
- Crosby, D., **Stephens, C.M.***, & Mendez Smith, J. (2022, June 27-29). The Prevalence of ECE Access-Promoting Features Among Center- and Home-Based Providers Serving Hispanic Children: National Insights from 2012 and 2019. In J. Mendez Smith (Chair) *Economic and Psychosocial Costs of ECE Instability for Low-Income Families* [Symposium].

Administration for Children and Families' National Research Conference on Early Childhood (ACF NRCEC). Virtual Conference.

Stephens, C. M.* (2022, June 27-29). *Patterns of Child Care Accessibility Within the Center-Based Early Care and Education Supply* [Poster]. Administration for Children and Families' National Research Conference on Early Childhood (ACF NRCEC). Virtual Conference.

Stephens, C. M.*, Yaya-Bryson, D., & Crosby, D.A. (2021, April 7-9). *Classroom Language and Emotional Support Contexts as Predictors of Social-Emotional Skills for Head Start DLLs* [Poster]. Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) 2021 Biennial Meeting. Virtual Conference.

Ricks, T., Chor Rodrigues, B., **Stephens, C. M.*** (2020, June 8). *The importance of teacher well-being in preservice training* [Virtual roundtable presentation]. National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators Conference, New Orleans, LA, United States

HONORS AND AWARDS

2024	2023 Outstanding Dissertation Award (\$1,500), UNCG Graduate School
2023	National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families (\$13,500). Summer quantitative analytic consultant, early care and education priority area.
2023	Vira Kivett Publication Award (\$1,500), UNCG HDFS Department
2022	Nell Wilborn Thayer Scholarship Fund (\$500) and Miriam Scott Mayo & Hazeleene Tate Scott Scholarship (\$590.55), UNCG
2022	National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families (\$9,018). Summer research assistantship, early care and education priority area.
2021	Mary Elizabeth Keister Scholarship (\$1,000) and Nell Wilborn Thayer Scholarship (\$857), UNCG
2021	National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families (\$1,300). Summer research assistantship, early care and education priority area.
2021	Independent Summer Research Grant (\$2,000). <i>Investigation of Scholarly Work on ECE Access and Preparation for Dissertation and Preliminary Exams</i> . Funded by UNCG Graduate School.
2020	Ellen Hickman Scholarship (\$2,000), UNCG
2020	National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families (\$1,200). Summer research assistant, early care and education priority area.
2020	Independent Summer Research Grant (\$1,200). <i>Classroom Language and Emotional Support Contexts as Predictors of Approaches to Learning and Social Skills for Spanish-English Dual Language Learners in Head Start</i> . Funded by UNCG Graduate School.
2019-2020	Minerva Excellence Fellowship and Scholars Program (\$24,000). Awarded by UNCG Graduate School in recognition of high-achieving doctoral students.
2019-2020	Moore Fellowship (\$3,000). Funded by UNCG Graduate School.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of North Carolina Greensboro

Fall 2022 Co-Instructor, Birth to Kindergarten Teaching Practicum I (HDFS 420). Virtual, synchronous class of 20 undergraduate students.

Fall 2020 Co-Instructor, Leadership in Early Education (HDFS 470). Virtual, synchronous class of 25 upper-level undergraduate students.

Spring 2020 Teaching Assistant, Families and Close Relationships (HDFS 212). In-person class converted to online due to COVID-19, 130 undergraduate students.

University of Rhode Island

Spring 2019 Teaching Assistant, Research in Human Development and Family Studies (HDF 202). In-person class, enrollment of 25 undergraduate students.

Fall 2018, 17 Teaching Assistant, Family and Community Health (HDF 357). In-person class of 100 undergraduate students.

Fall 2018 Teaching Assistant, Live Span Development (HDF 200). In-person class of 20 undergraduate students.

Fall 2018 Teaching Assistant, Adolescent Growth and Development (HDF 310). In-person class of 20 undergraduate students.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS AND SERVICE

Editorial Roles

Co-Guest Editor, *Education Sciences* 2024/2025
Special Issue Strengths and Assets of the Early Childhood Workforce

Journal Reviewer

Early Childhood Research Quarterly, Early Education and Development

Conference Reviewer

National Research Conference on Early Childhood 2024
Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting 2023, 2025

Departmental and University Service

2019-2022 Chair & Member, Mentoring Committee, HDFS Department at UNCG
2019-2023 Minerva Scholars Program, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Professional Organization Service

2024-Present Research Collaborative Member, Child Care and Early Education Policy Research Consortium (CCEEPRC)
2023-Present Member, American Education Research Association
2020-Present Member, Society for Research in Child Development

STATISTICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE

Analytic Software

Proficient in Stata, Mplus, SPSS, Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM), REDCap.

Secondary Datasets

- ◆ National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE; 2012, 2019)
- ◆ Head Start Child and Family Experiences Survey (FACES; 2009, 2014)
- ◆ Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort (ECLS-B; 2007).