

# Christina Stephens

National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)

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## PRIMARY FIELDS OF INTEREST

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Early Education & Development – Early Childhood Education Policy

Equitable Child Care Access – Dual Language Learners

## EDUCATION

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**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

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**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

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### Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

#### *Published or In Press*

- Stephens, C.,** Pianta, R.C., Whittaker, J., & Vitiello, V. (In press). Preschool Entry Assets that Support Dual Language Learners' Academic Development from Preschool through First Grade. *Early Education and Development*.
- 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 UCG 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. (R&R - invited). Cumulative Implications of Exposures to Teachers' Symptoms of Burnout across Pre-K to First Grade for Students' Academic and Social-Behavioral Performance [Special Issue: Early Childhood Education Workforce Well-being]. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*.
- Burchinal, M., **Stephens, C.,** Iruka, I. U., Pianta, R., Ansari, A., Whittaker, J., & Vitiello, V. (R&R). Race/Ethnicity and Home Language, School Quality, and Child Outcomes in Prekindergarten to First Grade. *Developmental Psychology*
- Burchinal, M., Pianta, R. C., Ansari, A., Bratsch-Hines, M., Cohen-Vogel, L., **Stephens, C.,** Peisner-Feinberg, Vitiello, V., Whittaker, J. (in preparation). Pre-Kindergarten Classroom Experiences and Child Outcomes through First Grade.
- Stephens, C.,** Fares, I., Michie, M., Whittaker, J. E., & Bassok, D. (in preparation). Child Care Search Experiences, Choices, and Satisfaction of Non-English-Speaking Families in the Virginia Subsidy System.
- Stephens, C.,** Pianta, R.C., Whittaker, J., & Vitiello, V. (in preparation). Variation in Academic Growth Across Children's Diverse Language Backgrounds and Early Child Care Attendance.
- 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

- Pianta, R. C. & **Stephens, C.** (Submitted – invited). Transitions across the Pre-K and Kindergarten Years: What We Know and Implications for State Policy. In *State Education Standard*. The Journal of the National Association of State Boards of Education.
- 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

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., Wrathner, 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 Presentation]. 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 Presentation]. 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 Paper]. 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 at the 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 for the 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 presentation at 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 presentation at the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) 2021 Biennial Meeting. Virtual Conference.
- Stephens, C. M.\***, & Spivak, A. L. (Conference cancelled due to COVID-19). *Racial/ethnic classroom dynamics in the learning environment and mathematics achievement of elementary students*. Poster presentation at the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) Special Topic Conference: Construction of the 'Other': Development, Consequences, and Applied Implications of Prejudice and Discrimination. Rio Grande, PR, United States.
- 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

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- 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). *Investigation of Scholarly Work on ECE Access and Preparation for Dissertation and Preliminary Exams*. 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). *Classroom Language and Emotional Support Contexts as Predictors of Approaches to Learning and Social Skills for Spanish-English Dual Language Learners in Head Start*. 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

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### 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**

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### **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* 2023  
*Early Education and Development* 2024

### **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**

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### **Analytic Software**

*Proficient in* Stata, Mplus, SPSS, Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM), and REDCap  
(data collection platform).  
*Familiarity with* Dedoose (Qualitative analysis software), Tableau (Geographic  
visualization platform).

### **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).