

STRATEGIC PLAN 2016–2021



Addressing Education and Social Policy
Challenges with Rigorous, Relevant
Research

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

This document represents the first strategic planning exercise for the Center for Research in Education and Social Policy (CRESP) as the University of Delaware (UD) works to write a new chapter in its history. CRESP contributes to the University's mission and is committed to the children, adults, and communities that we serve through rigorous research that is policy-relevant and practice-informed. The principles and priorities in this document reflect our dedication to Delaware, community partnerships, diversity, and policy informed by cutting-edge science.

Founded in 2013, the vision for CRESP is to demonstrate that rigorous research and evaluation can be applied to social problems, and by doing so, policy makers are better informed about the impact of programs and policies. We are committed to employing a range of methodological approaches to understand and describe how meaningful impacts are achieved. CRESP serves as a pioneer-ing example of how a university-based research center can be structured to integrate teaching, research, scholarship, and engagement.

We are dedicated to conducting new and cutting edge research that marries these rigorous and innovative research methods with on-the-ground expertise that will ensure findings are action-able and relevant. We understand that to make this vision a reality, we will need to continue to drive forward and forge deep bonds between community practitioners, students, and faculty.

Over the next five years this work will be driven by a strong staff of researchers, policymakers, community advocates, and educators. Furthermore, we seek to create a collaborative space where UD students in the College of Education and Human Development and across the University will come together to learn how best to serve key stakeholders.

I look forward to the next five years of partnership and innovation. I am confident that CRESP and our partners will advance education and social policy efforts so that every child and adult have the opportunities they need to thrive and grow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'H. May', is positioned above the printed name.

HENRY MAY, PHD

Director, Center for Research in Education and Social Policy

Associate Professor in the College of Education and Human Development

CENTER OVERVIEW

Facilitating Policy-Informed Research and Research-Informed Policy

Poverty, educational achievement, and chronic disease prevention are intertwined in a complex social web that challenges communities and policymakers alike. Attempts to implement sustainable, life-changing programs are relatively common, but efforts to confirm their impacts using high-quality research methods are infrequent.

CRESP's mission, values, and scientific priorities seek to inform program and policy development across local, state, and federal levels. Thus, to ensure development, we will work alongside program professionals, academic leaders, and students to foster engagement in high-quality, practice-driven research and evaluation.

FACULTY AFFILIATES

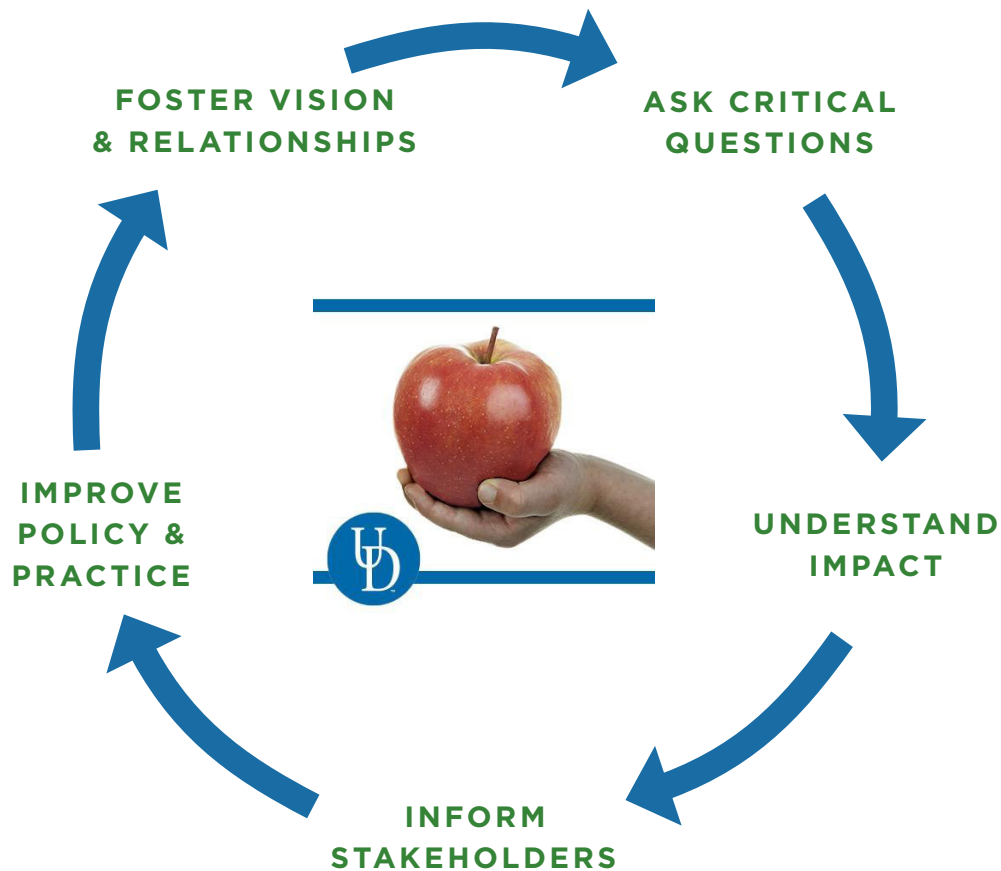
We partner with faculty affiliates across the University of Delaware on a range of evaluation projects and research efforts. Affiliates have expertise in diverse areas and provide content and methodological expertise to support a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to research.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The Center works with a range of community partners and organizations outside of the University and across the realms of public health and education. These partners play a key collaborative role in defining fundamental aspects of the research including where we work, the questions we ask, who participates in the research, and who benefits from the research. Partners are instrumental in ensuring that the work we do is relevant, timely, and useful.



OUR MODEL AT A GLANCE



The CRESPI model reflects our commitment to collaboration by integrating the discipline of the research cycle with the power of relationship-building. Together we ask critical questions about the need, nature, and impact of programs and policies intended to improve health, education, and community well-being. In response, we engage in applied, cutting-edge social science.

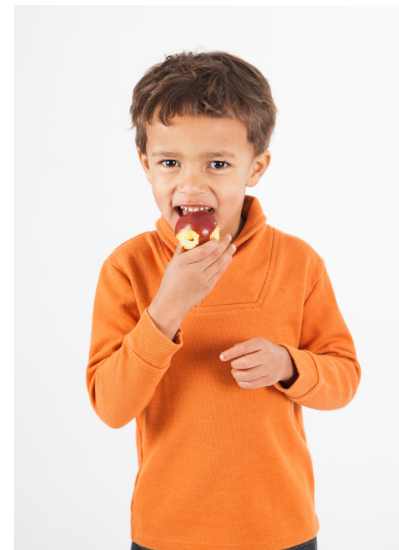
RIGOROUS RESEARCH METHODS FOR REAL-WORLD SETTINGS

RESEARCH EXPERTISE

Rigorous, high-quality research is at the core of our mission, and our experienced staff engages in a variety of methods to understand how, why, and if programs or policies are effective. We conduct both qualitative and quantitative research and maintain staff expertise in:

- applied policy research investigating public health and educational innovations and interventions;
- program evaluation;
- quantitative analyses of large administrative, state, regional, and national databases;
- qualitative methods to promote knowledge of important, but difficult-to-measure characteristics of programs and collaborative partnerships;
- randomized controlled field trials;
- longitudinal studies of changes over time that combine data from disparate sources;
- application of statistical methods from economics, engineering, and other disciplines to social programs and policies.

CRESP researchers are trained in evaluation methodology, randomized field experiments, natural experiments, qualitative methods, statistical analysis, and survey research.



CRESP: RESEARCH WITH IMPACT

SCIENTIFIC PRIORITIES

CRESP will emphasize its work in these four priority areas over the next five years. Our work will:

- 1 Improve student achievement and reduce gaps in K-16 educational settings;
- 2 Improve understanding of how to increase consumption of healthy foods;
- 3 Identify and address health disparities, especially among children;
- 4 Advance understanding of the connections between education, social policy, and health.



RESEARCH PRIORITIES

#1: IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND REDUCE GAPS IN K-16 SETTINGS

Education may be the single most important factor in determining the future quality of life for our nation's children.

The Census Bureau reports that adults with a bachelor's degree or higher earned an average \$81,761 in 2011. Those with high school degrees or GEDs earned an average \$40,634, while the average wages for workers who didn't finish ninth grade was \$26,545.

Today, schools and teachers are pressed for the time, space, and resources needed to help all students achieve, and policy makers are at odds as to how to achieve maximum educational benefits for all students. In educational settings across our nation, efforts to improve educational attainment for all children and narrow achievement gaps for children with disabilities and living in families with low incomes are widespread, yet more information is needed about what policies and interventions are most effective at closing those gaps.

The right mix of administrative structures, school safety, teacher pay and evaluation, student testing requirements, curriculum, and instructional approaches are under constant debate in school systems, universities, and legislatures.

Maintaining a strong focus and investment in K-16 education provides a great opportunity for positive change and growth.

CRESP will leverage significant opportunities to apply learning from local and national studies to guide more effective and efficient use of taxpayer resources at the policy level.

Emphasizing educational policy research capabilities as a significant strength and core asset will increase collaborative opportunities within UD and attract external funding.

STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS

- 1. Maximize local and regional partnerships to conduct applied scientific research on pressing educational problems.*
- 2. Understand how research is translated into practice to enhance the performance and well-being of our nation's children.*
- 3. Present findings locally, nationally, and internationally to practitioners, policymakers, and researchers alike.*

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

#2: IMPROVE UNDERSTANDING OF HOW TO INCREASE CONSUMPTION OF HEALTHY FOODS

Understanding how, when, and why healthy food retail can work to improve health is a key priority for CRESP. Policy efforts to improve access to affordable and nutritious foods abound, although research about “what works and why” is still in its beginning stages.

Efforts to increase consumption of healthy food through healthy food marketing offer a timely and important opportunity to influence policy with practice-based research. At the same time, the funding community has also demonstrated interest in and commitment to fostering greater understanding of feasible, in-store interventions for retailers.

Healthy Food Retail is a distinctly identified priority of the USDA, CDC, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and countless others. It also represents a cross-cutting, interdisciplinary area of policy research where CRESP can make a measurable difference in the lives of many children and families in the state and beyond.



RESEARCH PRIORITIES

#3: IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS HEALTH DISPARITIES, ESPECIALLY AMONG CHILDREN

National and global disparities in health are well documented, though the best mechanisms to mitigate such disparities are not clear. The role of race, ethnicity, sex, sexual and gender identity, age, disability, socioeconomic status, and geography of residence are important indicators of an individual's ability to maintain good health and reduce disease risk, yet the mechanisms by which these factors ultimately influence health are not well understood.

CRESP's innovative interdisciplinary approach to research is well positioned to investigate a range of programs and policies that seek to diminish the impact that disparities play in health outcomes across settings in the U.S. and abroad. Of critical interest is not only understanding where disparities are documented, but also uncovering how and which approaches best eliminate the inequities that result.

While we seek to understand the nature and extent of the impact that disparities have on health and academic achievement, CRESP seeks to advance our collective knowledge of why such disparities exist and to understand what mechanisms are most promising as ways to reduce their impact. Defining these mechanisms, and utilizing and refining existing theory, will serve as a foundation for our work in the next five years.



STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS

1. *Participate in local working groups that seek to understand and address disparities in Delaware.*
2. *Engage in national research-to-practice efforts to reduce disparities.*
3. *Establish research funding to understand causal relationships between programs and educational and health outcomes.*
4. *Publish findings in multiple formats for multiple audiences.*

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

#4: ADVANCE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN EDUCATION, SOCIAL POLICY, AND HEALTH

For many years, educators and health practitioners alike have recognized the connection between children's health, their ability to learn, and their overall well-being.

Our nation, however, is at a place where chronic disease burdens challenge our health care system, our educational system struggles to supply all children with adequately resourced schools, and the burdens of chronic disease. To best address these complex challenges, experts in education and experts in public health and child development are encouraged to find common ground in policy, research, and advocacy.

CRESP is uniquely well positioned to nurture and develop this work. The Center is built upon a foundation of partnership across research disciplines in education and social policy. This cutting-edge perspective positions CRESP to generate meaningful answers to our state's and our nation's most pressing and complex questions.

Over the next five years, we will foster new understandings about the connections between education and social policy. As research proposals are developed and data is collected and analyzed, we will consciously seek to understand the extent to which education and health are interdependent.



STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS

1. *Identify educational outlets and activities where connections to health and social policy are possible, logical, and appropriate.*
2. *Seek funding to study the intersection between health, education, families, and social policies.*
3. *Engage students from diverse academic disciplines.*

RESEARCH DISSEMINATION: INFORMING THE POLICY TO PRACTICE & PRACTICE TO POLICY TRANSLATION

CRESP recognizes that efforts to enhance and increase its educational outreach and communications efforts are critical to ensuring that research findings and approaches advance the field. As such, the following strategies will be implemented:

- 1 CRESP will share research learnings in accessible formats to reach across sectors in order to inform the public, educators, researchers, healthcare providers, policymakers, and industry scientists;
- 2 CRESP will maintain a social media presence, including an active Twitter feed;
- 3 CRESP will engage in research to investigate the best methods of communication, information sharing, and knowledge utilization;
- 4 CRESP leaders and scientists will increasingly attend to national and global health policy dialogue to promote and support the use of research to inform policy and practice.



THE WAY FORWARD

We are optimistic about the many ways in which CRESP will enhance the University of Delaware's ability to advance its mission as a community-engaged, research institution. CRESP's strategic plan will set the Center on an important path forward to expand and strengthen research in the College of Education and Human Development. The strategies outlined serve to broaden our outreach, magnify our contribution to education and public health policy, and build organizational capabilities needed to sustain this work.

As we publish this plan in 2016 we recognize that many new policy and educational conversations, programs, and needs are on the horizon. Implementation and future revisions of the Farm Bill, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and other influential state and local policy efforts will continue to inform the dialogue and research at CRESP.

Implementing this Strategic Plan over the coming years is the number one priority of CRESP leadership. At the same time, we recognize that any strategic plan is a living document that will need to evolve. CRESP, while maintaining focus on the goals outlined here, will work to respond to stakeholders and needs in our priority areas as they arise. We will continue to explore new ways to increase and maintain an innovative research edge.

We welcome your input and inquiries.



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