

Summer 2023
Newsletter

FRIENDS PROJECT

Social Development Lab
University at Buffalo, SUNY

Dear Families, Teachers, and Directors,
I hope you all had a great summer! This year was exciting for the FRIENDS project as we completed the fourth year and were back in schools for the full academic year for the first time! We were also able to travel to a scientific conference and present some of our initial FRIENDS project findings at the meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) in Salt Lake City, Utah. Some of our initial findings on executive functioning, or the ability to plan, control, and regulate behavior, were recently accepted for publication and are shared below. Although we are thrilled to be back in schools for preschool-based collection, we cannot thank all our participating families enough for continuing to use remote data collection procedures during the kindergarten phase of our project. This reduces school disruptions and time away from the classroom in kindergarten. We know that Zoom interviews and completing our questionnaires are time consuming and we are so grateful for families' and teachers' dedication to the project! We also thank all the families who collected saliva and/or nails at home for us during kindergarten! You are doing a great job and are producing useable and high-quality samples!

We sincerely appreciate school directors and teachers going above and beyond to recruit new preschool families at your centers and assisting us with our data collection efforts at your schools. We could not do this project without all of your help and willingness to participate!

Take care,
Dr. Jamie Ostrov
Director, UB Social Development Lab

Contact the Social Development Lab

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FRIENDS YEAR FOUR SUMMARY

Children Participating: 264

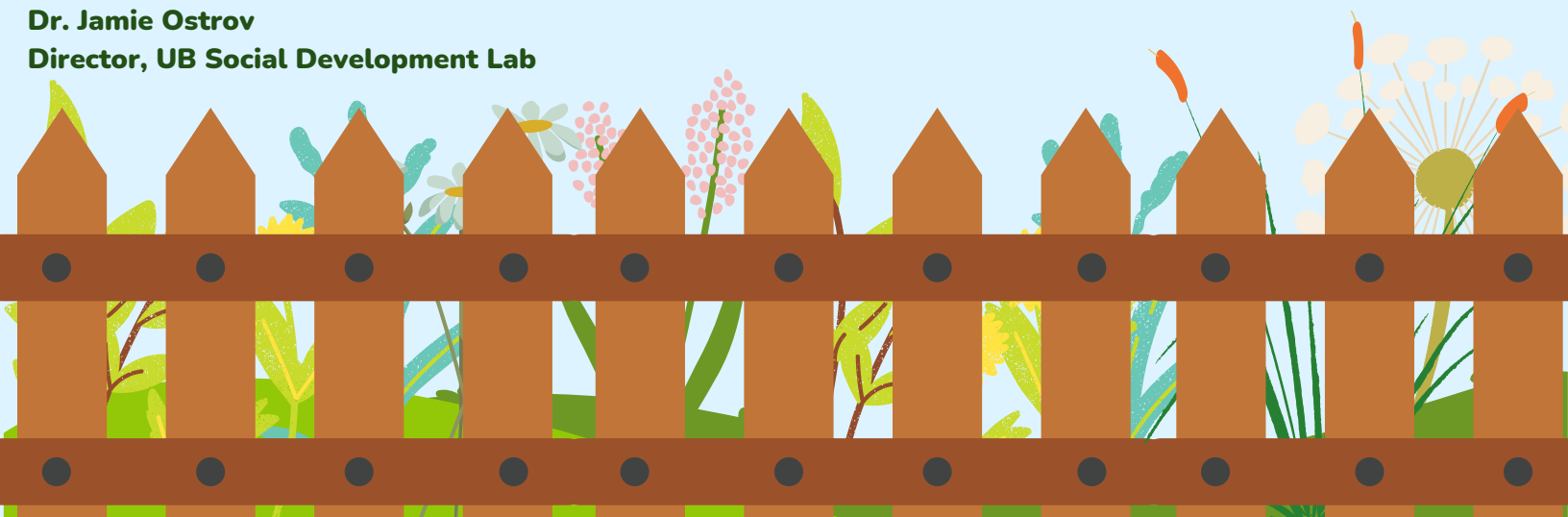
Preschools Participating: 17

Kindergartens Participating: 47

Saliva Samples Collected: 1,245

Nail Samples Collected: 316

Hair Samples Collected: 126



Preliminary Findings

The FRIENDS project has collected data throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and members of the lab are exploring how COVID-19 may have impacted children's social development and academic readiness. Previous student and postdoctoral fellow at Penn State, Kristin Perry, published a paper demonstrating that children who entered kindergarten immediately after the COVID-19 lockdown showed lower levels of self-regulation and cognitive functioning. Doctoral candidate Gretchen Perhamus presented findings at an international conference that suggest the pandemic negatively influenced academic readiness, and that this impact was more prominent for children from lower socioeconomic (index of household income, occupation, and education) backgrounds.

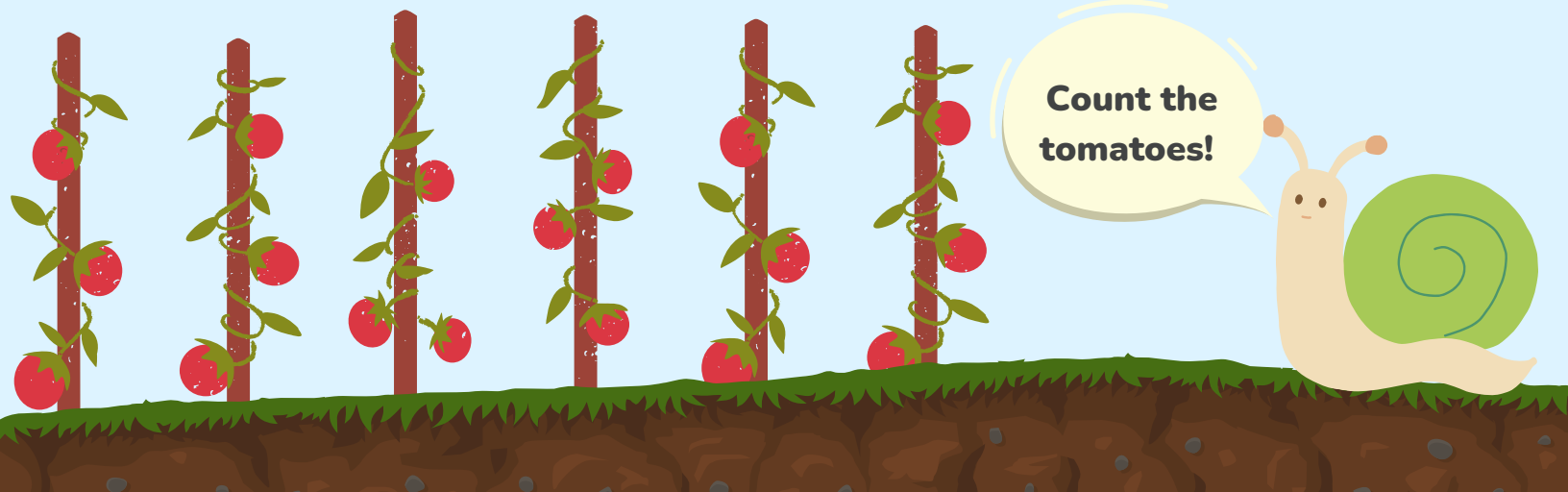
The FRIENDS Project is interested in how children's biology and context, such as household chaos, impact their peer relations in kindergarten. Doctoral candidate Bri Memba presented findings at an international conference that suggested children who experience unpredictability in the home show lower levels of aggression in kindergarten if their parents use more positive parenting. In contrast, children who experience unpredictability in the home and whose parents use less positive parenting have higher levels of aggression in kindergarten. Gretchen presented a second talk at an international conference during which she shared that higher levels of stress arousal predicted higher levels of teacher reported aggression in preschool. These findings demonstrate how children's biology and context may relate to their social behavior.



**Thank you for continuing to help
support the success of the
FRIENDS project!**

What's Next for FRIENDS

We will begin recruiting our 5th cohort of preschoolers for the FRIENDS Project this fall! If you know a child entering their final year of preschool at one of our participating schools, we would greatly appreciate if you share your support for the project! We will also be following up with families from cohort 4 this winter for their final kindergarten timepoint. During this timepoint, we ask your child's kindergarten teacher to complete a survey similar to the one their preschool teacher completed. If you have your child's school name, teacher name, teacher email and phone number, you may email it to us at devlab@buffalo.edu or click here: [K-info link](#).



Lab Updates

- **The Social Development Lab will begin a new project this fall, The Early Childhood Friendship Project. You may learn more about it [on our website](#).**
- **Bri Memba** passed her dissertation defense and was runner-up for the Bugelski Psychology Dissertation Award, presented a talk at SRCD, and has begun her Clinical Psychology Doctoral Internship at University of Chicago Medicine (UCM).
- **Gretchen Perhamus** received the SUNY GREAT (Graduate Research Empowering and Accelerating Talent) Award to further support her excellence in research and professional development, and presented two talks at SRCD.
- **Katy Gardner** will be attending UB's Clinical Psych graduate program this fall under the mentorship of Dr. Ostrov, and presented a poster at SRCD about her independent project on the interactive role of physiological reactivity on internalizing behavior in early childhood.
- **Sarah Lucas** presented a poster at SRCD on the effects of self-regulation and salivary alpha amylase (i.e., an enzyme that measures the nervous system) on aggression and bullying in preschool.
- **Kristin Tymchak** has been promoted to a new role as Project Coordinator of The Early Childhood Friendship Project (ECFP-3) in the lab.
- **Margaret "Maggie" Azu** will be joining us as a PhD. student in Clinical Psychology this fall and most recently worked at the Yale Child Study Center.
- We are also welcoming 3 new staff to the lab: **Olivia Bell** (Buffalo State University), **Claire Shroder** (SUNY Geneseo), and **Julianne Zajdel** (West Virginia University).

Research Assistant Graduates

- **Ava O'Hara, Hayley Feibel, and Faith Gallivan** graduated from UB. Hayley will be attending UB's School Psychology MA program this fall, and will continue to work in Dr. Ostrov's lab on The FRIENDS Project. Ava will also be attending UB's School Psychology MA program this fall.
- **Olivia Bell** graduated from Buffalo State University, presented a poster at SRCD, and has joined us as a Research Tech on The FRIENDS Project.

Lab Publications

Ostrov, J. M., Murray-Close, D., Perry, K. J., Perhamus, G., Memba, G., Rice, D., & Nowalis, S. (2023). Parenting and adjustment problems among preschoolers during COVID-19. Preregistered (09/2020) *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 32, 93- 109. doi: 10.1007/s10826-022-02439-2; PMID: 36157198

Perry, K. J., Perhamus, G. R., Lent, M. C., Murray-Close, D., & Ostrov, J. M. (in press). The COVID-19 Pandemic and Measurement of Preschoolers' Executive Functions. *Psychological Assessment*.

Principal Investigators

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Dr. Dianna Murray-Close (MPI)
Professor, University of Vermont



Research Technicians

Katy Gardner
Sarah Lucas
Kristin Tymchak
Olivia Bell



Undergraduate Research Assistants

Jenny McCarthy, Zoe Morrissey, Amy Maslin (Head RA)

Graduate Students

Gretchen Perhamus (FRIENDS
Project Director)
Gabriela Memba
(PEERS2K Project Director)

