Recipient: Kaila Carson, Pursuing her B.S. in Elementary Education with a Dual Certification in Special Education, Honors College

Title: “Bridging the Achievement Gap Through Family-Professional Partnerships: Project RAFT”

Advisor: Dr. Shana Haines, UVM College of Education and Social Services

Abstract: A significant achievement gap exists in our current educational system between children who are from refugee families and children who are not. This achievement gap can be largely attributed to the lack of partnership within familial and professional relationships. This study seeks to understand the results of using the tool, "Project RAFT," to improve family-professional relationships within the child's education. Project RAFT is an acronym for Relationships Among Families and Teachers, as this tool is designed to designate time between the student’s families and teachers to discuss and set goals for students in addition to building a closer relationship between the two parties. This study will use a qualitative approach to gather data from interviews with participants to analyze the effectiveness of the implementation of this tool. This case study includes one family with a student who is not officially on an IEP yet but is still struggling gravely with their schoolwork. This study is still in progress, however, our anticipated results are that the family will emphasize how difficult it is to be in communication with the child’s teachers. The implications of this study have the potential to be monumental as these results can be expanded and this tool can be shared with a plethora of other general educators, special educators, and families experiencing similar difficulties.

Recipient: Maria Horton, pursuing an Ed.D in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Title: Factors Influencing the Identification and Classification of Lower Elementary Students with Emotional Disturbance: Implications for Schools

Advisor: Dr. Tammy Kolbe, UVM College of Education and Social Services

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that account for the significant variation in rates of emotional disturbance among Vermont school districts. In Vermont, the statewide percentage of special education students identified as emotionally disturbed is 18%, the highest in the nation and almost three times greater than the national average. Among districts, the percentage ranges from a low of 4.6% to a high of 34% (Kolbe & Killeen, 2017). Differences in identification rates between school districts might reflect differences in the actual incidence in the community, outside of districts’ control. It also may be the case that differences exist due to state and local policies, practices and resources. A key goal for this study will be to understand whether and to what extent inter-district variability is due to population-based factors, largely outside educators’ control, or other factors that might be influenced by policy. Specifically, the study will be guided by the following questions:

1. What is the extent of variation in prevalence in children identified with emotional disturbance across Vermont school districts?

2. Are there differences in demographic and community characteristics between districts with comparatively high and low percentages of students identified with emotional disturbance?

3. To what extent do policy malleable factors (e.g., policies, practices, and resources) differentiate high and low prevalence districts?