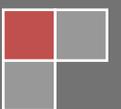


2013

# CEC's Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Education Sciences Reform Act



Council for  
Exceptional  
Children



## **Mission**

The Council for Exceptional Children is an international community of professionals who are the voice and vision of special and gifted education. CEC's mission is to improve, through excellence and advocacy, the education and quality of life for children and youth with exceptionalities and to enhance engagement of their families.

## **Vision**

The Council for Exceptional Children is a premier education organization, internationally renowned for its expertise and leadership, working collaboratively with strategic partners to ensure that children and youth with exceptionalities are valued and full participating members of society. As a diverse and vibrant professional community, CEC is a trusted voice in shaping education practice and policy.



2900 Crystal Dr  
Suite 1000  
Arlington, VA 22202  
[www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)



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## Introduction

The developmental, academic, and lifelong success of the nation’s 10 million children and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents relies on innovative research and development. Educators and parents alike depend on the availability of research-based strategies to support the early intervention and special education needs of children and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents.

*“The developmental, academic, and lifelong success of the nation’s 10 million children and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents relies on innovative research and development.”*

In the four decades since the enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and its right-to-education mandate, the experiences, expectations, and accomplishments of children and youth with disabilities have improved dramatically. Despite these gains, extensive achievement and opportunity gaps remain.

Additionally, existing research reveals large gaps at the top levels of achievement on state assessments and the National Assessment of Educational Progress between students from low income or minority backgrounds and their more advantaged or Caucasian peers, a phenomenon called the *excellence gap*. While federally-funded research has supported the development of assessment instruments and best teaching practices for students with gifts and talents, there are still many unanswered questions when addressing the needs of high-ability learners, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### **Examining the Federal Role in Education Research**

CEC believes in a strong federal role for education research, especially research in special and gifted education. The federal government has a unique responsibility and opportunity to foster innovative research in topic areas of national importance while also identifying gaps in existing research and focusing on populations who are typically underrepresented in research agendas.

For too long, research focusing on children and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents has remained on the periphery of the education research agenda, though parents, educators and policymakers continue to seek answers to support the development and education of all children. Federal support for special and gifted education research has led directly to the development of best practices that foster academic, developmental, and behavioral growth for children and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents. Without direct federal leadership and investments, the momentum and support for special and gifted education research cannot be sustained.

Congress reaffirmed the important role of research in the education and development of our nation’s students when it required the use of scientifically-based interventions and strategies in the 2001 Elementary and Secondary

Education Act/No Child Left Behind Act. The National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) within the Institute for Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, provides the nation's more than 400,000 special educators with tools to meet these requirements and improve outcomes for children and youth with disabilities.

Unfortunately, in 2011 Congress voted to eliminate the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act which supported research and development of best practices in gifted education with a focus on student populations traditionally underrepresented in gifted education programs. In its 22-year history, the Javits Act has resulted in the creation of gifted education identification tools, instructional strategies, and professional development that have enabled educators to identify and serve thousands of students who otherwise would have been left without the gifted education interventions needed to succeed. As the sole federal program dedicated to examining ways to identify and support high-ability learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, research funded under the Javits Act has demonstrated that not only are there high levels of talent and ability in every population, but that gifted education strategies can improve achievement for all students.

### ***Investing in Research that Improves Outcomes for Children and Youth with Disabilities***

Since its inception in 2004, NCSER has supported more than 250 research projects totaling over \$450 million, thereby providing the special education community with a better understanding of how children with disabilities learn, the effectiveness of strategies and interventions, and how to assess their knowledge and skills.

NCSER funded grants have supported improved outcomes for children and youth with disabilities and have built a solid knowledge base in many areas including:

- Early intervention and early childhood special education.
- Mathematics, reading, writing, and language development.
- Behavioral interventions.
- Teacher quality.
- Transition to post-secondary education and career, independent living, and community inclusion.
- Technology.

The reauthorization of the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) represents the first opportunity to reflect on the successful implementation of the Institute for Education Sciences, and specifically review the NCSER which became a Center within IES after the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Prior to IDEA 2004, the Office of Special Education Programs, within the U.S. Department of Education, had the responsibility for overseeing the special education research agenda. While the move to IES has been largely positive, it has not come without challenges which must be addressed through statutory changes.

#### **CEC's ESRA Guiding Principles**

ESRA must support high standards for special and gifted education research to lead to the identification of research-based practices that address the developmental, academic, and behavioral needs of children and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents through:

- Strengthening the national center for special education research.
- Providing relevant research to bridge the research-to-practice gap.
- Explicitly recognizing special/gifted education throughout the structure of the institute for education sciences.
- Supporting the vitality of the institute for education sciences by fostering strong, consistent leadership.

## *CEC's Recommendations*

### *Strengthening the National Center for Special Education Research*

*The National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) has the primary responsibility for implementing a comprehensive, federal special education research agenda which addresses the needs of children and youth from birth through young adulthood who have varying disabilities and/or developmental delays. Special educators and parents of children with disabilities alike rely on high-quality research to inform implementation of interventions and practices. It is, therefore, vital that NCSER maintain the highest standards for quality of scientific inquiry and a peer review process that ensures grant applications are reviewed by individuals with relevant special education expertise. Therefore, the following changes must be made to ESRA:*

**CEC Recommends that Congress** strengthen the mission of the National Center for Special Education Research by emphasizing the importance of promoting quality and integrity of scientific inquiry and supporting findings that provide the basis for improving academic and lifelong learning, similar to that which is outlined in the mission of the National Center for Education Research.

**CEC Recommends that Congress** require the Director of the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) to receive input from the Commissioners of the National Center for Special Education Research and the National Center for Education Research in the development and revision of peer-review standards and standards for conduct and evaluation of all research supported by IES.

**CEC Recommends that Congress** require the Commissioner of the National Center for Special Education Research (in addition to the Commissioner of the National Center for Education Research, as currently required), to develop procedures to be used in evaluating grant applications as part of the peer review process. These procedures must require that evaluations of special education grant applications are conducted by peer reviewers who have relevant expertise in special education.

### *Providing Relevant Research to Bridge the Research-to-Practice Gap*

*More than 400,000 special and gifted educators provide academic, developmental, behavioral, and functional support to more than ten million children and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents in our nation. From birth through young adulthood, special and gifted educators work with families, teachers, related service personnel, and school leaders to address the individual needs of children and youth with disabilities and/or disabilities. Special/gifted educators rely on relevant and timely research to address the challenges they confront daily. To ensure that the special education research agenda is targeting current and emerging needs for knowledge across age levels and disability types, routine public stakeholder input must be sought and collaboration between the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services must take place. Furthermore, IES must play a leadership role in efforts to ensure an adequate supply of future special/gifted education researchers who are committed to building and carrying out the special /gifted education research agenda. Therefore, the following changes must be made to ESRA:*

**CEC Recommends that Congress** ensure adequate public opportunities for stakeholder input into the development of the research plan proposed by the Commissioner of the National Center for Special Education Research.

**CEC Recommends that Congress** require greater collaboration between the National Center for Special Education Research and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), particularly to identify gaps in the research and knowledge base that support effective special education practice; to develop a research agenda that is reflective of the needs of the field; and to disseminate research through OSER's established networks.

**CEC Recommends that Congress** recognize the important role of stakeholders in creating a responsive and relevant research agenda by requiring members of the public with relevant expertise to serve on the standing committees of the National Board for Education Sciences.

**CEC Recommends that Congress** direct IES to examine the special/gifted education researcher pipeline, with special attention to whether resources or other opportunities may be needed to ensure that the nation will have an adequate supply of highly trained scientists committed to continuing the research advances achieved to date in the education of children with youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents.

**CEC Recommends that Congress** require the collection of data essential to understanding the characteristics of the gifted and talented student population, availability of gifted education programs and other information needed to improve educational opportunities for students with gifts and talents.

### ***Explicitly Recognizing Special/Gifted Education throughout the Structure of the Institute for Education Sciences***

*In 2002, when the Education Sciences Reform Act was signed into law establishing the Institute of Education Sciences, it did not include authority for research related to the education of children and youth with disabilities. At that time, the federal special education research program was authorized by a different law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and administered by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in the U.S. Department of Education. When IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, it moved the special education research authority to ESRA, created a new administrative unit within IES, the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSE), and transferred responsibility for the special education research program to NCSE. Many of the core provisions within ESRA must be updated to recognize special education and children and youth with disabilities, particularly in the IES mission, definitions, priorities, membership of the National Board for Education Sciences, and explanation of achievement gaps. Furthermore, changes must be made within IES to explicitly address the needs of students with gifts and talents. Therefore, the following changes must be made to ESRA:*

**CEC Recommends that Congress** revise the mission, definitions, functions, and priorities of the Institute for Education Sciences to strengthen the inclusion of special/gifted education, thereby recognizing the discipline's focus on developmental, academic, behavioral, and functional/transition outcomes of children and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents from birth through adulthood.

**CEC Recommends that Congress** ensure that high-quality research methodologies utilized in special education, such as single-subject design, are permitted within research standards and requirements within IES.

**CEC Recommends that Congress** include disability in its list of populations that should not be discriminated against throughout the statute, including in its mission and duties.

**CEC Recommends that Congress** increase the number of voting members of the National Board for Education Sciences who have expertise in special education to reflect the addition of the National Center for Special Education in 2004 and ensure that individuals with expertise in gifted education are represented on the Board.

**CEC Recommends that Congress** expand the limited focus of 'achievement gaps' to include gaps in academic performance between ESEA subgroups – such as students with disabilities and others; and gaps at the top levels of achievement, to gain a fuller picture of the educational needs throughout the country.

## ***Supporting the Vitality of IES by Fostering Strong, Consistent Leadership***

*A robust and fully operational Institute for Education Sciences is necessary to adequately address the many research questions which exist in the education community. Its effectiveness depends in part on its ability to attract experienced, knowledgeable researchers to fill the roles of Director, Commissioner, and members of the National Board for Education Sciences. For five of the eight years since its creation, the National Center for Special Education operated with only a temporary Commissioner which resulted in leadership challenges. Some provisions in ESRA related to IES administration have presented barriers that have deterred many qualified candidates from taking on leadership roles, and the National Board for Education Sciences has operated without full representation in recent years due to delays in Senate confirmation and statutory requirements as to when a member's term commences. Therefore, the following changes must be made to ESRA:*

**CEC Recommends that Congress** increase the pay scale for the IES Director and Commissioners to adequately compete with similar public/private sector opportunities to enable IES to attract top talent within the education research field.

**CEC Recommends that Congress** strengthen the authority of the IES research centers to secure methodological and substantive expertise on a permanent, temporary, or contractual basis as needed to most effectively carry out their mission.

**CEC Recommends that Congress** clarify that the term of members of the National Board for Education Sciences commences from the time of confirmation by the Senate, rather than from the time they are nominated, to avoid abbreviated terms of Board members.