

FOCUS on Research

Newsletter of the



In This Issue

- President's Message
- CEC-DR Public Policy Updates
- CEC-DR Diversity Committee Spotlight
- Free DR Webinar Series
- Student Spotlight: Learning Interest Survey Results

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President's Message

Miles to Go: DR's Intentional Priorities in DEI Research from Design to Dissemination

Audrey Sorrells, PhD
Texas Christian University

A Look Back

At least some of the challenges faced in special education, such as the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students, the gap between research and practice, and inequitable educational opportunities, can be explained in part by a research gap, or, in other words, a failure to conduct the different types of research best suited for addressing the complicated issues faced in schools (Klingner & Boardman, 2011).

The field has witnessed laudable advances in special education research, policy, and practice for individuals with disabilities and families. In fewer than 50 years since the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; formerly, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975), students with disabilities have increased chances for early identification and intervention, access to the general education curriculum and evidence-based practices by effective teachers in least restrictive environments, and improved secondary and postsecondary outcomes. These achievements in

knowledge and resultant outcomes for many students with disabilities are undeniable and commendable. Yet, I am reminded of the moving stanza of Robert Frost's poem: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep / But I have promises to keep / And miles to go before I sleep." Many of us will agree that we have made great strides, and there are many of you reading this message who have contributed to those monumental achievements in knowledge generation and implementation. But our work and our voices, both individually and collectively, are needed to keep moving the field forward.

Many of us will likely agree that numerous students with disabilities who are culturally, racially, and linguistically (CRL) diverse experience intractable systemic inequities daily. Although not fully understood or empirically investigated, factors such as one's culture and language are influential sociocultural factors in student learning and behavior and are best studied and understood in context (Sorrells & Dennis, 2022). This means researchers should purposefully consider racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors (background knowledge and experi-

(continues on page 2)

President's Message (continued from page 1)

ences) among myriad factors that students bring from their homes and communities (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2022; Klingner, Sorrells, & Barrera, 2007; National Center on Response to Intervention, April 2010) that can improve practice and student outcomes. Special education researchers and practitioners have done—and continue to do—a lot, **and** we have miles to go. This is especially the case for many DR members who are doing good work through their intentional priorities to embed diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in their research. I highlight two ways we are doing this.

1. Elevate research by scholars from underrepresented groups.

A DR DEI objective under Goal 2 is to ***elevate research by scholars from underrepresented groups***. You may already be tuned into the Diversity Committee's, ***DiveIn: A Podcast about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Special Education Research***. The podcast, spearheaded by Federico R. Waitoller, showcases the contributions and perspectives of diverse scholars and scholars who are engaged in DEI and related research. In the October 2023 podcast, Federico is joined by LaRon Scott, William Hunter, and Jonté C. Taylor in a candid conversation about using hip-hop pedagogy in special education research to improve student learning and engagement. They revisit tensions that emerge from using culturally sustaining pedagogy with more traditional forms of special education research. Be sure to listen to ***past episodes*** with leading researchers Beth Harry (past and future research on disproportionality, August 2023); Mildred Boveda and Subina Annamma (positionality and identity markers, July 2023); Christopher Cormier (diversifying the special education teaching force, June 2023); and Alfredo J. Artiles (the future of education research at IES, May 2023). Let us know if you would like to nominate a researcher to be interviewed or would like to suggest a topical conversation for future episodes.

2. Intentionally prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusivity in research from design to dissemination

A second DR objective under Goal 2 is to ***intentionally prioritize DEI in their research***. CEC-DR representa-

tives and guest editors Jessica Toste, Betsy Talbott, and Michelle Cummings recently published a special issue of *Exceptional Children*, titled *Special Issue Preview: Introducing the Next Generation of Quality Indicators for Research in Special Education*. Toste, Talbott, and Cummings write that the special issue was designed to update and advance quality indicators for research in special education, advancing work originally published in 2005. They contend, "Then, as now, special education research has been characterized by a 'long and cherished tradition' of diverse research methods" (Toste, Talbott, & Cumming, 2023). Toste et al. provide guidance for researchers who are conducting research that will continue to move the field of special education forward. They focus on quality indicators of traditional designs, such as group-design research, single-case design research, and qualitative research, but add new methods or new emphasis on designs such as secondary data analysis, systematic literature reviews, mixed-methods research (MMR), and evidence-based assessment. Toste and colleagues suggest that singularly and collectively we may view "these seven articles [as a] foreshadow [of] how research methods will continue to evolve over the next decade, particularly in deepening understanding of equity and open-science practices." The special issues editors express their hope that the articles encourage ongoing dialogue and critical discussions about the ways scholars conduct, report, and review research in special education. As the earlier 2005 special issue provided guidance for researchers to engage in and critique higher quality research in the field of special education, this newest work nearly two decades later holds substantive promise for improved quality for research for the next generation of scholarship. Thank you, Jessica, Betsy, and Michelle, for an outstanding contribution to the field.

In closing, the field of research in special education is leading the way to improved equitable outcomes for diverse groups of students with disabilities. Let us know what you are doing or nominate work to report to the larger community of researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and leaders. I look forward to hearing from you.

References

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 *et seq.* (1997).
- Klingner, J. K., & Boardman, A. G. (2011). Addressing the "research gap" in special education through mixed methods. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 34, 208–218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0731948711417559>

(continues on page 3)

President's Message (continued from page 2)

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- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2022). *The future of education research at IES: Advancing an equity-oriented science*. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26428>.
- National Center on Response to Intervention. (2010, June). *What is response to intervention (RTI)?* U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, National Center on Response to Intervention.
- Sorrells, A. M., & Dennis, M. S. (2022). Special issue: Equity and opportunity in intervention: Intervention in context. *Learning Disabilities Quarterly*, 45(1).
- Toste, J. R., Talbott, E., & Cumming, M. M. (2023). Special issue preview: Introducing the next generation of quality indicators for research in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 89(4), 357–358. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00144029231174106>. ■



CEC-DR Public Policy Updates



Elizabeth Talbott, PhD
William & Mary University
Chair of Public Policy Committee
and CEC-DR CAN coordinator

Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) Reauthorization

Did you know that the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) is the law that established the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) in 2002? The law has advanced education research but is way behind the times. For example, the current law does not include authority for research advancing the education of children and youth with disabilities, nor does it reflect updated priorities under the Every Student Succeeds Act.

In April of 2023, Senators Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Bill Cassidy (R-LA), who serve as co-chairs of the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, invited members of education communities around the country to provide input on ESRA

reauthorization. CEC-DR and its partners, along with Friends of IES, all submitted letters. This summer and fall, CEC-DR representatives met with staff members from the U.S. Senate HELP committee to help inform reauthorization. This is what we learned:

- U.S. Senate HELP committee co-chairs received more than 500 comments in support of reauthorization, which included a letter from DR President Audrey Sorrells, Past President Wendy Oakes, and Public Policy Chair Elizabeth Talbott.
- U.S. Senate HELP committee staffers from both sides of the aisle read all of the comments, including those recommending line-by-line changes to the law.
- U.S. Senate HELP committee staffers from both sides of the aisle are very knowledgeable about education research and active in moving reauthorization forward.

Stay tuned for updates about ESRA reauthorization, which will need to pass the U.S. Senate before heading to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Friends of IES

CEC-DR is an active member of *Friends of IES*, which advocates for increases in IES funding. The Friends of IES coalition is led by Felice Levine, executive director of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Elizabeth Talbott attended AERA's Consortium of University and Research Institutions (CURI) fall 2023 policy conference to engage in current efforts to increase IES funding. The goal of CEC-DR is to increase funding for the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) to \$70 million.

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Did you know that the founding of the NCES dates back to 1867, when the U.S. Department of Education was authorized under federal law? The NCES is an invaluable resource for researchers, policymakers, and school leaders. For example, as youth in the U.S. experience

(continues on page 4)

DR Public Policy Updates (continued from page 3)

significant declines in reading and math (according to the [Nation's Report Card](#)), the NCES has stepped up to provide access to process data summarizing youth performance. That way, researchers, policymakers, and national, state, and school district leaders can see where the students they serve are struggling and intensify assessment and intervention plans to change their trajectories. IES even has a grant competition to fund this work! You can read more about the NCES effort [here](#), which includes research to understand the math performance of youth with autism.

Spotlight on Research Matters

This month, we highlight the work of Michael Kennedy and his team in our [Research Matters](#) series. You too can contribute your research story to Research Matters, and we will share it with members of Congress.

Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA)—A CEC-DR member benefit

Did you know that CEC-DR is a member of COSSA? As a DR member, you can sign up for news alerts from [COSSA](#). Keep an eye out for a “Why Social Science?” article on the COSSA website featuring special education research! ■

special education research and gave advice to researchers engaging in DEI issues for students with disabilities. Listen to our episodes and subscribe to our podcast via [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), or on our [website](#).

Also, episode 5 of *DiveIn* is out, and you can find it [here](#). In this episode, I talk to Drs. LaRon Scott, William Hunter, and Jonté C. Taylor about their book, *The Mixtape Volume 1: Culturally Sustaining Practices Within MTSS*. We discuss how to use hip-hop pedagogy in special education research to improve student learning and engagement. ■

Student Spotlight: Learning Interest Survey Results



Cassidi L. Richmond
University of Virginia



Katie S. Lane
University of Connecticut



Emily B. Hardeman
University of Texas at Austin

CEC-DR Diversity Committee Spotlight



Federico Waitoller, PhD
University of Illinois at Chicago

What if you could reflect on and improve your research skills so that you can account for the wide range of cultural, racial, linguistic, and gender diversity that characterizes the communities we aim to serve? In the *DiveIn* podcast, we help you with that and much more as we discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues in special education research. In our previous episode, Beth Harry talked about the evolution of how special education research has addressed issues of DEI over time. Beth Harry shared her experiences and perspectives on DEI in

DR currently includes about 200 graduate student members whose collective voice is represented by four students who serve on the division's executive board. Based on many great conversations we, the student representatives, had with fellow DR student members at this year's CEC convention, we decided to look for ways to make DR membership more valuable to students. To accomplish this, we created a survey to find topics DR students would like to learn more about. We sent the survey to DR student members this past June and received responses from about 20% of the student membership.

(continues on page 6)

Free DR Webinar Series – Fall 2023

The Next Generation of Quality Indicators in Special Education Research



THE NEXT GENERATION OF QUALITY INDICATORS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION RESEARCH

CEC's Division for Research (CEC-DR) recently collaborated with *Exceptional Children* to release a new special issue on advancing quality indicators for research in special education (Volume 89, Issue 4). **Through this 8-part webinar series, join author teams for a presentation and Q&A about each of the quality indicators articles.** Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioning will be available for all scheduled webinars.

Fridays from 12:00–1:00pm ET / 9:00–10:00am PT

SEPTEMBER 22, 2023

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Jessica Toste, Elizabeth Talbott, & Michelle Cumming
(Note: CART captioning not provided on this date)

SEPTEMBER 29, 2023

SINGLE-CASE DESIGN RESEARCH

Jennifer Ledford, Joseph Lambert, James Pustejovsky,
Kathleen Zimmerman, Nicole Hollins, & Erin Barton

OCTOBER 20, 2023

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Joy Banks, Taucia González, Carlyn Mueller, Mariana Pacheco, LaRon Scott, & Audrey Trainor

OCTOBER 27, 2023

MIXED-METHODS RESEARCH

Melinda Leko, John Hitchcock, Hailey Love, David Houchins, & Maureen Conroy

NOVEMBER 10, 2023

SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEWS

Michelle Cumming, Elizabeth Bettini, & Jason Chow

NOVEMBER 17, 2023

EVIDENCE-BASED ASSESSMENT

Elizabeth Talbott, Andres De Los Reyes, Devin Kearns,
Jeannette Mancilla-Martinez, & Mo Wang

DECEMBER 1, 2023

GROUP DESIGN RESEARCH

Jessica Toste, Jessica Logan, Karrie Shogren,
& Brian Boyd

DECEMBER 8, 2023

SECONDARY DATA ANALYSES

Allison Lombardi, Graham Rifenbark, & Ashley Taconet

REGISTER: tinyurl.com/QualityIndicatorsCECDR



Amber Ray at amberray@illinois.edu | Jessica Toste at jrtoste@austin.utexas.edu

All of the articles in this special issue are open access and available for free. You can download them by finding the article on the journal's website or using this [direct link](#). ■

Student Spotlight (continued from page 4)

While we are working on ways to provide learning opportunities on the identified topics, we thought sharing the survey results might be helpful for students and their mentors alike. We hope student readers will find assurance in shared interests with others and faculty readers could consider these topics of interest when instructing and advising graduate students. For each of the survey questions detailed below, students were able to select all applicable responses.

Practical Skills

One of the survey questions asked, “What practical skills would you like to learn more about?” A majority of student responders indicated they wanted to learn about the journal article submission and review process. The next most selected skills included using analysis software (e.g., R, SAS, Stata) and improving technical writing. After those top three answers, a moderate number of students selected creating and revising your CV and developing a survey in Qualtrics. Perhaps there was less of a need for job search guidance thanks to events hosted by DR in October and November of 2020 on The Academic Job Search. The second installment in the series of six webinars, “How Do I Prepare My Application Materials?” provided a walkthrough of the structure of a CV with several samples. A recording of this webinar is available on the Division for Research-CEC [YouTube channel](#).

Study Designs

“What types of study designs would you be interested in learning about?” was the second survey question. An overwhelming majority of students indicated interest in mixed-methods research. Roughly half of respondents were interested in learning about SMART design, quasi-experimental designs, and single-case designs. We are excited to see that many students are interested in learning more about different study designs, especially given the recent release of next generation quality indicators in *Exceptional Children* ([Volume 89, Issue 4](#)), which was coordinated by DR leaders. Articles in the 2023 special issue provide guidance for special education researchers who strive to conduct high-quality research to advance the field. This issue is currently available open access,

and authors are presenting on the quality indicators in a series of free webinars hosted by DR this fall with the opportunity for Q&A. Stay tuned for information about how to access recordings of these webinars if you missed them live.

Research Processes

Another survey question asked students, “What parts of the research process would you like to learn more about?” The most frequently selected response was grant writing, followed closely by alternative avenues of dissemination and research–practice partnerships. While not an extensive discussion of research dissemination options, the Open Science Brief on DR’s [website](#) provides information about open access options. The brief gathers content relating to open science practices from DR newsletters, including *Focus on Research*, and information from DR members. About half of the students who responded also indicated they wanted to learn more about setting up databases and considerations in data analysis.

Career Experiences and Trajectories

The last survey question asked, “Who would you be interested in connecting with to learn more about career experiences and trajectories?” For this question, a vast majority of students selected early career faculty at Research 1 (R1) designated institutions. While not a real-time conversation, DR hosted a webinar series in the spring of 2021 on “The Road to Tenure (Pre-Tenure).” This series includes several DR faculty members sharing their tenure experiences such as timelines, research planning, and pre-tenure milestones. Recordings of all four webinars in the series are available on the Division for Research-CEC [YouTube channel](#). Students also responded that they were interested in connecting with early career faculty at Research 2 (R2) designated institutions, senior doctoral students, non-profit employees, post-doctoral researchers, tenured faculty at R1 institutions, industry researchers, and government employees. While we coordinate learning opportunities around these topics, we encourage our fellow student members to lean into the diverse DR community to learn more about these career paths through gatherings at the annual convention and virtual events throughout the year. ■