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Special Education Research & Development: Supporting Educational Excellence for Children & Youth with Disabilities

SUMMARY

- 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 evidence-based strategies to support early intervention and special education needs of students with disabilities.
- The National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER), one of four centers within the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, is the primary provider of special education research throughout the country, having funded grants in over 30 states.
- In 2011, funding for NCSER was slashed by 30% – \$20 million – which has resulted in 75% fewer research projects being initiated in 2014. This dramatic decline in new research unfortunately comes at a time when the special education field needs a better understanding of how children with disabilities learn.
- The *Strengthening Education Through Research Act* (H.R. 4366), the reauthorization of the *Education Sciences Reform Act*, passed the House of Representatives in May 2014 and included many CEC-supported provisions, such as ensuring that all peer reviewers have relevant expertise. While H.R. 4366 prioritizes funding for special education research, CEC has significant concerns that the authorization levels remain far too low.

Special Education Research: Driving Innovation

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 depend on and parents expect there to be an abundance of evidence-based strategies to support the early intervention and special education needs of students with disabilities and/or gifts and talents.

In the four decades since the enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the experiences, expectations and accomplishments of students with disabilities have improved dramatically. Despite these gains, extensive achievement and opportunity gaps remain. Special educators rely on evidence-based practices to address these challenges and continued access to timely and relevant research is critical to improving academic and lifelong outcomes for students with disabilities.

National Center for Special Education

Since its inception in 2004, the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) within the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences has supported more than 260 research projects in more than 30 states, totaling over \$440 million.

In 2011, NCSER's budget was cut by 30%, to \$49.9 million. As a result, new research has nearly stalled with 75% fewer projects awarded in 2014. As the primary provider of special education research for schools across the nation, a sustained, depleted investment in NCSER will negatively impact access to evidence-based strategies for students with disabilities.

Instead, a far greater investment of at least \$70.1 million, the FY 2010 level, is needed for NCSER.

Reauthorizing the Education Sciences Reform Act

A reauthorized *Education Sciences Reform Act* (ESRA) must support research that leads to the identification of evidence-based practices addressing the developmental, academic and behavioral needs of children 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 of Education Sciences
- Supporting the Vitality of the Institute of Education Sciences by Fostering Strong, Consistent Leadership



The National Center for Special Education Research supports research impacting over six million infants, toddlers, and students with disabilities and their families in the following areas:

- Early intervention and early childhood special education;
- Mathematics, reading, writing, and language development;
- Behavioral interventions;
- Autism;
- Transition strategies to post-secondary education and career;
- Teacher quality; and
- Technology.

Strengthening Education Through Research Act (SETRA) (H.R. 4366):

- Prioritizing special education research funding within the Institute of Education Sciences.
- Emphasizing the elimination of the achievement gap between students with and without disabilities.
- Increasing dissemination and collaboration with the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).
- Increasing the pipeline of early career special education researchers.
- Ensuring peer reviewers have expertise in areas relevant to grant applications.

While SETRA does prioritize funding for NCSER, the actual funding levels authorized by the bill remain too low for NCSER to fulfill its mission. Any reauthorization of SETRA must include funding levels that enable NCSER to grow and thrive. SETRA passed the House in May 2014.