Driving Innovation, Improving Outcomes: 
Special Education Research Raises Expectations for Individuals with Disabilities 
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Speaker Biographies

Margaret J. McLaughlin, CEC President

Margaret J. McLaughlin, Ph.D., is Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education, College of Education, and Professor, Department of Special Education, at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Dr. McLaughlin has been involved in special education all of her professional career. She began as a teacher of students with serious emotional and behavior disorders and also taught students with learning disabilities.

After earning a Ph.D. at the University of Virginia, Dr. McLaughlin held positions at what was formerly the U.S. Office of Education and at the University of Washington. She has been involved with the study of special education policies and has directed a number of projects and national research centers related to special education policy.

Dr. McLaughlin has been studying the impact of educational reform on special education since the late 1980s. She has consulted with numerous international and national agencies and organizations, as well as with federal and state departments of education and local education agencies. She also has served on or co-chaired four National Academy of Sciences Committees that have addressed topics of students with disabilities and standards, assessment accommodations, finance reform, and the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education.

She currently serves as President of the Council for Exceptional Children and is a member of the Professional Advisory Board of the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD).

George Sugai, Professor at University of Connecticut

Professor Sugai received his M.Ed. in 1974 and Ph.D. in 1980 at the University of Washington. His primary areas of interests are positive behavior support, systems change, teacher training, emotional and behavioral disorders, social skills instruction, behavioral consultation, behavioral assessment procedures, and strategies for effective school-wide, classroom, and individual behavior management.

Currently at the University of Connecticut, Dr. Sugai is Neag Endowed Chair in Behavior Disorders and professor with tenure. He teaches key graduate level special education courses in applied behavior analysis, emotional or behavioral disorders, behavioral consultation, social skills instruction, and classroom/behavior management. He also is Director of the Center for Behavioral Education and Research in the Neag School of Education, which focuses on research and outreach activities related to promoting effective academic and social behavior supports. Sugai has been nominated for university recognition for his teaching and he is a popular presenter at local, national, and international conferences.
As Project Director or Co-Director of major training or research grants totaling over $25 million, Dr. Sugai has ample experience in the implementation, operation, and supervision of grant-related projects. Dr. Sugai has a noteworthy publication record in refereed journals. He has published over 100 articles, numerous monographs, and three college textbooks on effective teaching practices and applied behavior analysis. Dr. Sugai's research has emphasized effective applications of applied behavior analysis principles and PBS procedures to problems found in educational contexts. The subject populations for these research areas includes students with severe challenging behavior, students with at-risk behaviors, and students described as having severely challenging behaviors.

Dr. Sugai is currently co-director (with Rob Horner at the University of Oregon and Tim Lewis at the University of Missouri) of the national Center on Positive behavioral Interventions and Supports. The Center has been established by the Office of Special Education Programs, US Department of Education to give schools capacity-building information and technical assistance for identifying, adapting, and sustaining effective school-wide disciplinary practices. The Center has two foci: (a) broad dissemination to schools, families, and communities about a technology of school-wide positive behavioral support exists, and (b) demonstrations at the level of individual students, schools, districts, and states that school-wide positive behavioral support is feasible and effective.

Erik Carter, Professor at Vanderbilt University

Erik Carter, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt University and a Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Member. His research focuses on evidence-based services and supports for youth and adults with intellectual disabilities, autism, and multiple disabilities.

Erik has directed major research grants from the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute on Education Sciences and the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services totaling more than $5 million. One recently completed project focused centrally on strategies for engaging communities in novel ways to improve the employment outcomes of youth with disabilities. He has published over 80 peer-reviewed articles and chapters addressing topics such as inclusion, self-determination, peer relationships, and supports for people with significant disabilities.

Erik was the recipient of the Distinguished Early Career Research Award from the Council for Exceptional Children and the Early Career Award from the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. He serves on seven leading editorial boards, is an Associate Editor of the American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, and is Co-Editor of Remedial and Special Education.

Hannah F. Ehrli, Pre-K Autism Teacher, Orlando, Florida

Hannah F. Ehrli is a National Board Certified teacher who has been teaching in the field of special education for 10 years. She is described by her nominators as a passionate leader, collaborator, and learner whose positive energy and knowledge of curriculum and strategies has earned the respect of her students, their parents, and her colleagues.

Ehrli is currently teaching a Pre-K class for students with Autism in a pilot program at Dr. Phillip's High school, which allows for collaboration with high school students. Prior to the pilot program, Ehrli provided services to children with a variety of disabilities at Dr. Phillips Elementary School in Orange County Public Schools (OCPS). She is also pursuing her doctoral degree full time at the University of Central Florida.