
Special Education Research Funding

Background

The federal government carries out education research, pre-K through postsecondary, through the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education. Since its creation in 2002, IES has consisted of the National Center for Education Research, National Center for Education Statistics, and the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act amended the Education Sciences Reform Act to officially establish the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) within IES, moving the special education research function away from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and into the Institute for Education Sciences.

This controversial shift of responsibility was met with resistance from the special education community as many – including CEC – feared that inclusion in IES might mean a dwindling of resources, uncertainty regarding the future of field-initiated research, lack of emphasis on small sub-populations, and a possible disconnect between implementation of IDEA programs and the research that would reinforce implementation. While some of these issues have not come to bear, CEC continues to be vigilant to ensure that special education research maintains its unique identity while integrating it into the larger research agenda of the U.S. Department of Education.

The mission of NCSER, under the direction of a Commissioner, is to:

- Sponsor research to expand knowledge and understanding of the needs of infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities in order to improve their developmental, educational and transitional outcomes;
- Sponsor research to improve services provided under IDEA;
- Evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of IDEA.

Since 2005, funding for NCSER has shrunk from \$83.1 million to \$49.9 million, a reduction of more than 30%. In fact, in fiscal year 2011, Congress cut funding for special education research by \$20 million. In his fiscal year 2013 budget proposal, President Obama has sought to maintain this cut and keep funding at \$49.9 million.

Since its inception, NCSER has funded over 200 research projects that have been invaluable to the special education field. Special education research provides the foundation of evidence on which effective policies, practices, personnel training, and systems are based. Indeed, many strategies used by both special and general educators – such as positive behavioral interventions and supports – were developed through NCSER grants.

CEC Recommended Congressional Action

At a minimum, CEC calls on Congress to restore funding for the National Center for Special Education Research to its fiscal year 2010 level of \$71.1 million. To fully address the research needs of the special education field, a much greater investment is essential. Currently, special education research and development comprises only 2% of the total Individuals with Disabilities with Education Act budget, a fraction of the industry standard for R&D.

Educational outcomes for students with disabilities continue to be far below expectations. In fact, the dropout rate for students with disabilities is 23%, more than twice that of students without disabilities. Moreover, only 11% of students with disabilities scored “proficient” or above in 4th grade reading and only 16% scored “proficient” in 4th grade math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

To meet the challenges our nation currently faces, children must achieve at their highest possible level and enter the workforce ready to succeed. The research activities funded by NCSER are one essential way the special education field and research work to meet these goals.