
**IES Funding Opportunities Webinar:
National Center for Special Education Research: Overview
U.S. Department of Education
Institute of Education Sciences**

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Slide 1

Welcome to the Webinar on the National Center for Special Education Research, which we'll refer to as NCSER.

I am Debbie Speece, Commissioner of NCSER, and I'm joined by Jackie Buckley, Research Scientist.

Slide 2

This is our outline for today. We intend to cover briefly the background and history of IES and NCSER, provide updates on our activities over the past few months, review the current status of our investment, touch on a few findings that have been generated by our investigators, and discuss our initiatives for 2013.

Slide 3

First, we'll talk about the IES organizational structure.

Slide 4

IES was created through the Education Sciences Reform Act in 2002. Dr. John Easton is the Director of IES.

There are four centers, each headed by a Commissioner. Jack Buckley is the NCES Commissioner, Rebecca Maynard heads the National Center for Education Evaluation or NCEE, Elizabeth Albro is the Acting Commissioner for the National Center for Education Research or NCER, and NCSER will be the topic today.

NCSER joined IES through the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) in 2004, and we began awarding grants in 2006.

Slide 5

Next, we'll move to NCSER's mission and statutory duties.

Slide 6

As you can see, there are three aspects to NCSER's mission: We sponsor research to expand knowledge; we sponsor research to improve services; and we evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of IDEA in coordination with NCEE.

Slide 7

Embedded in our mission are 18 statutory duties. A few are listed on the next two slides and include identifying scientifically based educational practices, improving the alignment, compatibility and development of valid and reliable assessments, examining and improving secondary and postsecondary education and transitional outcomes.

Slide 8

Continuing, you can see here, examine and incorporate universal design concepts, all the way through examining the special needs of limited English proficient children with disabilities.

So, you can see NCSER has a long list of duties to take care of, and as we go through, you can see how we're doing in that regard.

Slide 9

Next, we'll discuss our recent goals and activities.

Slide 10

I began my appointment at NCSER at the end of last August and at that time developed several goals to focus our work. At that time, we wanted to identify pressing researchable issues,

increase the number of funded grants, and improve communication with the field. I'm going to talk to you about each one of the goals next.

Slide 11

So, our first goal was to identify pressing researchable issues. We created and participated in a number of activities to take the pulse of the special education community and the critical issues that could be addressed by our research.

And on this slide, you can see some of the things that we've taken part in. Last fall, we organized a technical work group of senior researchers across disability areas and developmental levels to get an idea what they thought the most important ideas were that we should be thinking about.

Joan McLaughlin, our Deputy Commissioner and I, participated in a similar event at the Pacific Coast Research Conference. We've had a number of activities with the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). In February, Melody Musgrove of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and I together with Deb Ziegler at CEC gathered a group of special education researchers from Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Virginia, to talk to us about what they saw as the issues that we should be thinking about from their perspective as teachers.

We also participated for the Council for Exceptional Children Division Meetings last April at the annual conference, and we also participated in an American Educational Research Association (AERA) Invited Panel On Policy and Research, which was also last April, and Alexa Posny, Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, participated, as well.

Slide 12

A second goal that we developed was to increase the number of funded grants that NCSER awarded. As a center, NCSER is relatively young. We are moving in the right direction regarding funding.

In March, we announced, the awards from the first round of the Fiscal Year 2012 competition. In that round, we funded 28 grants, which is higher than any previous round in NCSER's history. Of these grants, we funded 10 Development and Innovation projects, which we call Goal 2, and eight Efficacy and Replication projects, which are Goal 3 projects. I'll discuss the importance of this ratio when we present our overall investments, but keep in mind 10 Development, 8 Efficacy.

Now, our awards for our second round of our Fiscal Year 2012 competition will be announced in July.

Slide 13

This figure shows the number of applications received and funded since 2007, and our main research competition.

Across these five years, you'll see that our median percentage funded is 11 percent. We thought you also might be interested in the number of grants funded each year. The median number of grants funded across these years is 33, and in particular, in 2007, we funded 38 grants; 2008, we funded 18; 2009, we funded 33; 2010, 33; and in 2011, we funded 39.

So far in Fiscal Year 2012, we have funded 28 grants. So, our numbers will increase when we announce the Fiscal Year '12 second round of awards.

Slide 14

Our third goal was to improve communication with the field. We have targeted our efforts both within the government and on the broader community.

Within government, we meet regularly with Assistant Secretary Alexa Posny, as well as Melody Musgrove, who is the Director of the Office of Special Education Programs, and Charlie Lakin, who's the Director of the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

With respect to the broader community, we've had a number of activities with the Council for Exceptional Children that I mentioned in the previous slide.

In addition, we've met with the AERA. We've met with their policy forum here in the District of Columbia.

We met with HECSE, and that stands for the Higher Education Consortium for Special Education, and NASDSE, which is the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, and CCD, which stands for the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities.

So, these are just a few of the groups that we've met with, and additionally, we've met with other groups as they come to Washington, and we invite you to come to our office if your travels bring you here.

Slide 15

So, next step, we want to give you the current status of NCSER investments since 2006.

Slide 16

In this slide, you can see that we have four major research and research training programs, and I want to note that all of these slides are only going to be from 2011, and we'll update our slides when our second round of awards is announced in July 2012.

So, we have four primary programs, and you can see that our major investment is our Special Education Research Program where we've invested \$333 million.

We also sponsor research and development centers. We develop centers to target a particular problem that we believe needs a great deal of intensive attention, and we have funded four of these to date and they tend to be \$10 million for 5 years each.

We also have a Post-Doctoral Research Training Program, a relatively recent program. We've made ten awards to date.

And we also have a Small Business Innovation and Research, or SBIR competition, and we just started--we just had our own RFA for SBIR in 2011. We're currently reviewing 2012 applications. And SBIR might be of interest to you if you're an entrepreneur or if you have an idea about developing a product that might be of use to children, youth, families, or teachers concerned with disabilities. We invite you to investigate this on our website. They tend to be very exciting projects, a lot of technology applications and that kind of thing; so, very creative ideas.

IES also accepts unsolicited awards. So, if you have an idea that doesn't fit within our structure, we would invite you to take a look at this announcement on our website. You can see we don't do a whole lot of these, but you can make the case and these are initially reviewed in-house, and if it looks like a good idea, we'll invite a full proposal.

Slide 17

Just a word about our research and development centers, because after this point, our investment in R&D centers doesn't figure into our investments described in the remaining slides.

Right now, we have four R&D centers that are listed on this slide, along with their start dates.

We competed four more centers in the second-round competition in 2012. There is competition for two different family centers, one for children with emotional behavior disorders, and one for families of students with autism.

A third center that was competed was for secondary students with autism.

And the fourth that was competed was reading for deaf and hard of hearing children. So, again, these will be announced late spring, early summer.

Slide 18

So, now, the next set of slides refer to our main special education research competition that we hold twice a year, and you'll also see it when you look up this information on our website that it goes by the CFDA Number 84.324A; "324" means NCSER.

Just for reference, "305" references our sister center, the National Center for Education Research, or NCER.

Slide 19

So, for our discretionary grant competitions, we organize the applications in terms of five goals and 11 topics. We'll briefly discuss the goals and topics in the event you're not familiar with this structure.

Slide 20

For Fiscal Year 2013, we have five research goals. They have stayed the same for several years.

Both NCER and NCSER incorporate these five goals in our Requests for Applications.

Exploration or Goal 1 is concerned with questions about what variables are associated with what student outcomes.

Development and Innovation, which is also known as Goal 2, addresses questions about what interventions, programs, policies have promise of being effective, and the emphasis here is really on the development of new ideas or the refinement of ideas that need further investigation.

Goal 3 is for Efficacy and Replication projects, and asks the question, what interventions work under controlled conditions? Here, we want investigators to use the most rigorous designs possible and what sometimes is called "hot house" conditions.

Then, the fourth goal is Effectiveness, and here the question is, what interventions work under routine conditions?

And then, our fifth goal is Measurement, and the questions here surround the validity of assessments and the goal applies to existing measures and new measures for both practice and research use.

Slide 21

With respect to topics, you can see the list in front of you; it is quite extensive. We now have 11 topics in the current RFA for NCSER.

The two topics that have asterisks at the end were added in 2012. So, that would be Families of Children with Disabilities and Technology for Special Education.

So, as we go on through the slides, we will not be presenting any data on these two topics as they're new, but again, we'll update those.

And these--I just want to say that these topics are the current ones. We add and subtract as the research landscape changes, and we also listen in all of the meetings that we've had in DC and across the country soliciting ideas not only on the research ideas, but what topics might be useful in our work.

Slide 22

Now, regarding the five goals by which we structure our grants. This slide illustrates our investments by these goals. The Special Education Research Program has allocated about half of our resources to Development and Innovation, and about a quarter of our resources to Efficacy and Replication projects.

It is important to note that these percentages are largely driven by the field and represents the goals that investigators are pursuing.

You may remember in a previous slide that, in our last round of awards, NCSER funded 10 Development and 8 Efficacy grants which suggest that promising interventions are now moving toward being tested under rigorous research designs.

Slide 23

Now, this slide's a little busy, but we put it up here so you could see the topics down the left-hand column by goals across the top, to see, within our topics, where is most of the work going on. As suggested in the last slide, most of our topics have a preponderance of work in Goal 2, which is Development and Innovation.

There is an interesting anomaly in autism in that we have more work there, in Goal 3, Efficacy and Replication, than we do in Goal 2.

The Early Intervention and Early Learning in Special Education portfolio has a balance of Goal 2 and Goal 3 work. As NCSER matures, we expect to fund more Goal 4 work, which is Effectiveness, which is what interventions, programs, and policies work under routine conditions.

Slide 24

And this slide provides an idea of how our funding is distributed across our nine topics, and again, families and Ed Tech are not yet represented.

At this point, the portfolios in Early Intervention and Early Learning in Special Education and Social and Behavioral Outcomes to Improve Academic Learning receive the most funding. There are many reasons for this distribution. We regularly review our portfolios to identify gaps and our program officers are working to boost grant applications across topic areas.

I'd point out, and you can see on the graph, that the Autism topic entered RFA in 2007 and Cognition and Student Learning began in 2009.

So, again, we don't put preference over one topic over another. It is investigator-driven. So, if you see a gap here you'd like to fill, we certainly would invite your application.

Slide 25

Because NCSER has responsibility for research from birth through high school, we also examine our projects by the developmental level of the sample, as described by the investigators.

You can see here that the investments are roughly equal, but there is a need to increase attention to adolescents with disabilities, as well as to children birth to three years of age.

So, you can see that more of our work is at the elementary school level, and primarily concentrated in K through 3, although that's not shown on the slide.

And then, you see early childhood, although that's a large portfolio for us. You can see that there's a need for more research in birth through three, with infants and toddlers with disabilities.

NCSER funds research targeted at children with disabilities or who are at risk for developing disabilities.

Slide 26

This slide shows that over half of our projects focus on children with identified disabilities, while 38 percent of our projects include at-risk and/or children identified with disabilities.

If you would decide to apply for a research grant from NCSER, we'd really like you to pay attention to the definition we give to at risk for disability. It's very important that you connect the risk factor--empirically connect the risk factor with the later development of the disability. So, general characteristics of the population like children in poverty, are more likely to have disabilities or children who do not speak English as their first language may be more at risk, those kind of broad, demographic statements are not enough to reach our definitional threshold of at risk for disability.

Slide 27

This slide provides a more detailed view of funding by category of disability. Not all individual disability categories are represented. These data are based on investigator sample descriptions.

You can see that the first bar on the left, behavior disorders, receives the largest amount of funding, and learning disabilities, which is represented primarily by the second bar and the fifth bar also receive a good deal of funding.

And again, we present this information for your information. I don't have anything specific to say about it except this is the lay of the land right now.

I also want to point out that none of these data include investments in centers.

Slide 28

Next, let's go to some findings that have emerged from the work that we've funded.

Slide 29

An important question is, what have we learned from our investments? The examples that follow were selected to represent the breadth of our portfolio across developmental and disability categories.

In doing so, there is always a danger, as a lot of good work is not covered. I just want to emphasize that these projects are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive.

Slide 30

So, for example, under the exploration goal in which the question is, "what goes with what?" there are two projects that I'd like to talk about.

The first is by Tim Sass at Georgia State who analyzed the secondary data analysis of a large Florida dataset and linked up teacher qualifications with children's reading performance.

And one of the major findings is that pre-service teacher preparation in special education is uniquely and positively related to children's reading performance.

A second exploration project was conducted by Paul Morgan at Penn State, and he looked at the ECLS-K dataset, K through 5, and he concluded that early and persistent mathematics difficulty robustly predicts children's math growth over five years of schooling.

And you might be thinking, well, who's surprised by that? I think the implication is that we've given a lot of attention to reading, and rightly so, and Dr. Morgan's work shows that we should likely spend more time on mathematics and the trajectory of children who have early mathematics difficulties.

Slide 31

Erik Carter at Vanderbilt developed a summer employment program that showed promise of increasing community-based work experiences for use with intellectual disabilities. If you're familiar with the post-school outcomes for young adults with disabilities, you can likely see that this work has implications for furthering or improving that outcome for young adults.

A second Development and Innovation project was conducted by Rollanda O'Connor at the University of California Riverside, and this work developed a kindergarten literacy intervention and found that targeted intervention versus a comprehensive intervention yielded better student outcomes for children at risk of disability at the end of second grade, especially if an intervention was implemented in kindergarten rather than a year later in first grade.

Another important finding from this study is that children who have English as their second language compared to English-only children appear to benefit the most from this intervention two years after the intervention ended.

So, the whole issue of children who don't have English as their first language and that intersection with disability is one that really deserves a lot more work, and we're pleased that Dr. O'Connor is looking into that.

Slide 32

Moving on to a couple studies under our Goal 3 or Efficacy and Replication goals--and again, the idea here is what works under the most controlled conditions, multiple investigators have demonstrated that children with intellectual disabilities can improve their reading skills using instructional techniques that are effective for typically developing youngsters. And here, I cite Diane Browder's work at University of North Carolina, Charlotte, but several others—Jill Allor and Patricia Mathes, for example, have been involved in similar kind of work. And of course, the idea here, the importance of this, is that we need to set the bar higher for children with intellectual disabilities. So, we can do much better than functional sight words. It takes longer, and can be more intense, but it can work.

Our second finding is from a Goal 3 project by Phil Strain at the University of Colorado-Denver. He's found that preschoolers with autism who are in classrooms implementing a peer-based communication program had better outcomes than children in control classrooms.

And importantly, these outcomes were broad: cognition, language, social skills, autism symptom severity, were all in favor of the children who received the treatment. Dr. Strain is currently doing a follow-up study with these children to determine the extent to which these results were maintained.

Slide 33

Another Goal 3 project that also has Goal 4 implications called "First Step to Success," and was conducted by Hill Walker at Oregon. First Step to Success is a program for students with emotional disturbance, has positive effects on external behavior, and potentially positive effects on emotional internal behavior, social outcomes, and ratings of academic performance.

Also, this program meets evidence standards as reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse. As I had indicated, First Step was also evaluated in a Goal 4 Effectiveness study, in which the intent was to determine what works under routine conditions.

The Effectiveness study was conducted in 48 elementary schools and five geographically diverse settings across the United States, and the outcomes are similar to the Goal 3 study of, although the effect sizes were smaller, which is essentially what we expect when we move from efficacy to effectiveness.

Slide 34

Now, I want to spend just a few minutes talking about projects that are currently underway, and I also want point out that abstracts for all of our projects, whether they're completed or underway, can be found on our website, and I'll provide those URLs at the end of this session.

So, Rohanna Buchanan at the Oregon Social Learning Center is doing a very interesting project to develop an intervention to assist middle school youth with emotional disturbance and their transition from alternative school placements to their general education home school.

A second project is being conducted by Dana Suskind at the University of Chicago. She's developing a multimedia intervention to assist the hearing parents of deaf toddlers, and their children's rehabilitation. And importantly, she's targeting low SES families as she finds that middle and high SES families tend to do this rehabilitation quite well. It's also of interest to note that Dr. Suskind is a physician who does cochlear implant surgery. We're not quite sure where she finds time to do this research but we're happy that she does.

And then, finally, I want to mention a project by Cara Laitusis from ETS. She's developing a computer-based test delivery platform to increase the accessibility of state tests for students with visual impairment.

And again, all of these projects and their abstracts can be found on our website.

Slide 35

Next, we're going to move to new opportunities and future directions.

Slide 36

IES has a commitment to capacity building and sponsors methodology training for researchers and again, we'll provide you with these URLs.

I just want to point out that we sponsor summer institutes on single-case experimental design, randomized control trials, and quasi experimental designs.

The deadlines for both single-case and RCTs have passed. I'm not sure about quasi experimental designs. But these institutes routinely get very high marks with respect to thoroughness; nationally regarded methodologists do the presentations. So, to the extent that you have need of further training in these areas, we encourage you to apply.

Slide 37

NCSE's new initiatives for Fiscal Year 2013.

In March, we announced two new initiatives. The first initiative is under our research training program and is called "Early Career Development and Mentoring Program." This program is designed for investigators in the early stages of their careers and provides funds for training and research. It's designed as a bridge between post-doc or doctoral work and transition into the professorate.

Investigators must designate a mentor who will assist in their further development as a researcher. Dr. Amy Sussman is the Program Officer for this opportunity, and we would encourage you to read the RFA and direct your questions to Amy.

The second initiative, Accelerating the Academic Achievement of Students with Learning Disabilities, and we're calling it the A3 initiative. This initiative is targeted at developing and rigorously testing reading and math interventions for children with the most intractable learning problems. Investigators are required to select a three-grade span between grades 3 and grade 8 to situate their work.

We intend to award three grants under the A3 initiative, and we hope that this initiative will lead to a more articulated science of intensive intervention.

Dr. Kristen Lauer is the Project Officer for this initiative.

Slide 38

Now, a few more details about the Fiscal Year 2013 dates and deadlines.

This slide has the current deadlines for applications for both NCER and NCSER. I want to encourage you to submit a Letter of Intent if you plan to submit a grant any time for Fiscal Year 13. Even if you miss the Letter of Intent due date, we would still encourage you to let the relevant program officer know that you intend to be submitting.

These letters give us important information to help determine the composition of the peer review panels, and obviously if you're applying and have a specialized area, we want to make sure that we have the necessary expertise on the grant review panel.

The programs on this slide that had the 305 designation are NCER programs, and I want to point out that, in 2013, NCSER, our center, is not competing our post-doctoral competition under our training RFA. We're only doing the early career development and mentoring, but we would point out that it's possible to include special education--a post-doc special education application in 305B, which is called the research training program. It just can't be an exclusive focus on special education, but that, as part of an interdisciplinary post-doctoral program, would be welcome. And again, the RFA will give you details on these requirements.

I also wanted to point out, at the bottom of the slide, 305H mentions researcher/practitioner partnerships. This might also be of interest to special education researchers as it is seed money

for researchers and practitioners to work together to identify an important problem of mutual interest and to conduct initial data collection and analysis activities. The idea here is to push relevance of our work and hopefully it will lead to a grant application in our typical major research program.

Slide 39

This might be the most important slide: For further information on our RFAs, you see the URL at the top and you'll see links to all of the RFAs that I've talked about and plenty more.

And after you've taken a look at the RFAs, we strongly encourage you to contact the program officer for the topic for which you intend to apply. So, in our case, we have 11 topics. When you look at the RFA, we have a program officer associated with each topic. So, that's the person you should contact.

If it turns out that you contacted the wrong person, we'll help you get to the right place. So, please, don't hesitate to call us. It's an important part of what we do and we take it very seriously.

And then, you can see two other URLs at the bottom, one specific to NCER and one specific to NCSER.

Slide 40

And if that wasn't enough, here's another URL that shows--that will show you all the webinars that we're providing this year; it's quite a list. Between NCER and NCSER I think we're doing 28 webinars across centers, and they cover a variety of topics from basic overview on the application process to workshops for each of the five goals to writing workshops for early career researchers. We also give overviews of our research training programs, and overviews of NCSER funding opportunities, as well.

So, we would encourage you to take a look at these. I think you'll get a lot of important information. The basic overview would be really important if you're just new to IES and need to get a sense of what's going on to recognize that these are complicated--it takes a great deal of study to get a handle on the ins and outs of our RFAs.

Slide 41

And so, finally, we invite your questions now or at any time regarding the National Center for Special Education Research. You see my email and Jackie's email. Jackie is also the lead on our social and behavioral outcomes topic, and is expert in that.

And then, you have our general website, which will take you to our homepage where we put our highlights, new information that is coming out. So, we'd encourage you to check that often. We'd also encourage you to sign up for our Newsflashes. If you go to the IES main page, and that's the website that's been on every slide, you will see, in the very bottom of the main page, you'll see "Newsflash." If you click on that, you'll have a lot of choices for which Newsflashes you want to sign up for. So, certainly, we would encourage you to sign up for the NCSEER Newsflash, as RFAs are announced, as our awards are announced, new initiatives, you'll be in the know as soon as they're announced.

So, now, we have some time for questions if you want to type your questions and we'll go ahead and answer them.

We'll wait another minute before we sign off.

Question: *Would you elaborate on the Development and Innovation goal?*

Answer: *Dr. Speece: The idea behind--I'm going to ask Jackie to fill in what I might miss here, but the idea behind the Development and Innovation goal is to provide funds for folks to develop what we call interventions. By that, we mean interventions, programs, policies, that there is a need in the field for. So, you have to be able to say there's an identified need for X and be able to justify it.*

Most of the money, most of the time, is spent on development. So, if you have a three-year grant, we would expect you to spend two years in development and only one year in providing evidence of initial promise.

Within this Development and Innovation goal, we expect you to design an iterative process in which you test out your ideas on a smaller scale, step back, make revisions, implement it again, and do this as many times as necessary until you get your program at a point where you can look at it for initial promise.

Dr. Buckley: Absolutely. This is Jackie.

So, in thinking about the goal structure that we have, that Development and Innovation grant really is to develop a new intervention or refine an existing intervention, and the majority of the work that you do is around the development of that intervention. As Dr. Speece mentioned, program, practice, policy--we have a broad definition of intervention. So, in the development process, you have to collect feasibility and usability data. Do schools like it, can teachers use it? Is this something that would be feasible in a school setting? And then, you need to collect pilot data indicating the promise of the intervention to improve student outcomes.

And so, once you--thinking about the goal structure, again- once you would have that fully developed intervention, then we would expect you would move into the Efficacy and Replication grant, and then test it for efficacy.

I did a webinar on the Development and Innovation goal a couple of weeks ago, and those slides and information should be posted shortly if they're not posted yet on the Web.

I don't believe we're doing another Development and Innovation goal webinar for this fiscal year, another live one, but all that information will be available on the Web, and certainly feel free to contact any program officer with questions, and we can go into much more detail about the Development and Innovation goal.

Dr. Speece: Okay. We'll wait for one more minute. All right. Well, thank you very much for joining us. We're going to repeat this webinar in June. This webinar will also be posted and transcribed. So, again, if you have any questions, please let us know. We're here to serve you, and we're looking forward to working with you. Thanks again for joining us.