

## FEATURE ARTICLE

by Donald Compton, Louis Danielson, and Rebecca Zumeta

# Federal Investments in Research and Dissemination on Intensive Intervention Respond to an Urgent National Need

Over the last 15 years, important strides have been made in the development of academic and behavioral assessments and interventions for at-risk students, yet there is a wide and persistent achievement gap between students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities. Based on 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data, over two-thirds of U.S. fourth-graders with disabilities read below the level NAEP defines as basic (NCES, 2013). Almost half scored below basic in math, and these trends persist at seventh and eleventh grades. Also, the second National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS-2) reported that one-third of students with disabilities has had a disciplinary problem at school (Wagner et al., 2003), one-fourth drop out of high school without graduating, and four in five are either unemployed or work in low-paying (minimum wage) jobs as young adults (Wagner et al., 2005). These national data paint a stark picture of poor academic and behavior outcomes for students with disabilities. Additionally and unfortunately, these poor outcomes persist through the elementary, middle, and high school years and contribute to a lack of career and college readiness for most youth with disabilities.

At the same time, research reflects reason for optimism. The proportion of students determined to be at high risk for disability or school failure decreases when they receive more intensive support, and students who receive intervention show significant improvements compared to students who receive instruction typically provided by their schools. Yet, a number of students



show limited or no progress, despite receiving generally effective supplemental intervention (National Center on Intensive Intervention, 2013). And, although some form of response to intervention (RTI) is being employed as a

school reform strategy in at least 47 states (Berkeley et al., 2009), most efforts emphasize improving core instruction and targeted interventions, but do little to address the unique learning and behavioral needs of many students with disabilities. Taken together, these challenges underscore a need to further develop and disseminate a science of *intensive intervention* for students with disabilities who have not responded to generally effective instruction and intervention approaches. This need is particularly urgent for students in late elementary school and higher, where deficits are often very difficult to remediate (Wanzek et al., 2013).

Two recent complementary federal investments hold important promise for helping to address these pervasive challenges. These investments are the *National Center on Intensive Intervention* and the *Accelerating the Academic Achievement of Students with Learning Disabilities Research Initiative*. Notably, these investments stem from separate departments within the Department of Education, the Office of Special Education Program (OSEP) and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), reflecting broad interest in addressing the critical needs of this population.

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## Federal Investments in Research and Dissemination...

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### Investment in Technical Assistance & Dissemination

First, the *National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII)* was established in the fall of 2011 to help disseminate existing research and support implementation of intensive intervention for students with severe and persistent academic and behavioral challenges. OSEP awarded the Center to the American Institutes for Research (AIR), in collaboration with intensive intervention experts from Vanderbilt University, University of Texas, Instructional Research Group, and Lehigh University. NCII's approach to intensive intervention is grounded in the concept of *data-based individualization (DBI)*, a systematic method for using assessment data to determine when and how to intensify intervention in reading, mathematics, and behavior. The origins of the NCII approach are in a program of research conducted at the University of Minnesota (Deno & Mirkin, 1977), funded in the 1970s by the U.S. Office of Education, and expanded upon by others (Capizzi & Fuchs, 2005; Fuchs, Deno, & Mirkin, 1984; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hamlett, 1989) over the last 40 years. DBI relies on the systematic and frequent collection and analysis of student-level data, modification of intervention components when those data indicate inadequate response, and use of teachers' clinical experience and judgment to individualize intervention.

NCII has developed and is implementing a comprehensive, integrated program of technical assistance to support implementation of DBI. The Center's Concept Paper describes the DBI framework in greater detail and provides case examples in academics and behavior (<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/resource/data-based-individualization-framework-intensive-intervention>). In addition, NCII is extending the work of the National Center on Response to Intervention by updating the academic intervention and progress monitoring tools charts, and by adding charts that review behavioral interventions and progress monitoring tools. To further support the technical assistance the Center provides to districts and schools, NCII has developed a multi-module DBI Training Series, sample adapted intervention activities, coaching materials to support implementation, a series of webinars, and "Ask the Expert" video clips. Many of these products are available for download free of charge on the Center's website ([www.intensiveintervention.org](http://www.intensiveintervention.org)), and additional materials are added regularly.

### Research Support for Intensive Intervention

As an important and complementary next federal investment, IES funded the *Accelerating the Academic Achievement of Students with Learning Disabilities Research Initiative (A3)* in 2013. The purpose of this project is to develop and evaluate the efficacy of math and reading interventions for students with learning disabilities in grades 3-5. The five-year grant will enable a team of researchers at Vanderbilt University (Doug Fuchs, Lynn Fuchs, Donald Compton, Mark Lipsey, Kristopher Preacher, and Melanie Schuele) to study instructional programs targeting students with

the most severe learning disabilities in grades 3-5. In designing the program of research for the new center, the team relied on the new Common Core State Standards to determine the critical competencies the center's new interventions will focus on for students in grades 3, 4, and 5. The new instructional programs developed at the center will help educators address challenges such as how to assist students in progressing to more complex subject matter and how to transfer learning between different intellectual tasks. The team will also create strategies to help students transfer that newly acquired knowledge between activities. The A3 center launched in September of 2013 and over its 5-year span will identify 2,000 to 3,000 students from Nashville schools to participate. The team will collect data from students randomized into different groups—several in intensive learning interventions that target different suspected mechanisms of reading comprehension and understanding fractions, decimals, and algebra and a control group who will not receive the interventions.

Taken together, these federal investments reflect a growing recognition of the need for intensive interventions for students with severe and persistent learning and behavioral needs, many of whom have disabilities. In addition, their concurrent funding cycles present a critical opportunity for coordination of research and dissemination activities. As these two projects progress, we anticipate opportunities to collaborate on learning events, and use both implementation and research findings to inform and enrich future work.

### Teaching Math for Transfer

In part because they have trouble categorizing problems that share defining structural features and similar solution procedures into problem-types, or schemas, students with learning disabilities have greater difficulty transferring what they have learned to new tasks than do typical learners. When solving word problems, for example, students often have difficulties with problems that differ in terms of superficial features (e.g., irrelevant information, new cover story, vocabulary), but these differences do not alter the underlying mathematical structure or the problem-solution method. To address the challenges of solving novel problems, the Vanderbilt A3 team will focus on teaching for transfer.

"The base of our program—which targets, in part, word-problem solving related to proportional thinking and fractions—teaches problem types to develop students' schemas," Lynn Fuchs, co-PI, says. "First, tutors explicitly teach the defining features of a problem type (e.g., part-whole proportion) and model the solution method for solving a problem within that problem-type. Lessons always address the conceptual underpinnings and key features of the problem-type, the algebraic equation used to represent the defining features of the problem-type, and step-by-step procedures for solving that problem-type. During this instructional phase, problems vary only in terms of superficial cover stories, so the defining structural features of the problem-type are clear to students. In addition, we strategically contrast proportion word problems and

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fractions comparison word problems to strengthen students’ skill in identifying problem types.”

Once students have mastered identifying and solving a problem type with varying cover stories, the team will introduce more challenging superficial—or transfer—features systematically. In this instruction, tutors explain how superficial features can make a word problem seem unfamiliar without modifying the problem-type or problem-solution method. Tutors continue to emphasize the core structural features of the problem type over superficial features, such as irrelevant information. Examining a number of novel problems for defining structural features allows students to identify the problem-type.

The example below illustrates a problem with and without transfer features.

<b>PROBLEM TYPES</b>	
<b>Proportion</b>	<b>Proportion with Transfer Feature</b> <i>(Different Question)</i>
<p>Angel and Gerardo went on a 24-mile bike ride. By lunchtime, they rode <math>\frac{5}{8}</math> of the total distance. How many miles did they ride by lunchtime?</p> <p><b>Solution strategy:</b></p> <p>Miles ridden <math>\frac{5}{8} = \frac{x}{24}</math> Miles ridden Total distance</p>	<p>Angel and Gerardo went on a 24-mile bike ride. By lunchtime, they rode <math>\frac{5}{8}</math> of the total distance. <b>How many miles do they have left to ride after lunchtime?</b></p> <p><b>Solution strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Use a proportion to solve for miles ridden and subtract answer from 24 to get miles left</li> <li>2) Use a proportion to solve for miles left (using <math>\frac{3}{8}</math> as a ratio)</li> </ol>
<b>Compare</b>	<b>Compare with Transfer Feature</b> <i>(Irrelevant Information)</i>
<p>At a summer cookout, James grilled burgers for his friends. Five-twelfths of his friends asked for beef burgers. One-fourth of his friends wanted veggie burgers. Which type of burger did James make the fewest of, beef or veggie?</p>	<p>At a summer cookout, James grilled <b>36</b> burgers for his friends. Five-twelfths of his friends asked for beef burgers. One-fourth of his friends wanted veggie burgers. Which type of burger did James make fewer of, beef or veggie?</p>

## Developing new methods to assess data

Professor Kristopher Preacher deals in quantitative methods. His research involves creating, refining, and evaluating statistical methods for studying complex data. This can involve simulation research, analytical tasks, and computer programming. In his work with the new A3 center, he will have the uncommon opportunity to apply some of these methods to school-based mediation.

Preacher, assistant professor in Peabody’s Department of Psychology and Human Development, will create innovative models that combine recent advances in statistical methodology, including a model to assess mediation in cross-classified data. Cross-classification measures changes in one variable when other variables are accounted for. To test the new interventions the center team will develop, such models will be necessary.

“What I find exciting is that this series of studies will yield data that combine several challenges,” Preacher, assistant professor in Peabody’s Department of Psychology and Human Development, says. “For instance, the data are hierarchically organized—they come from students who are ‘nested’ within larger groups. That is, they may be pulled from different classrooms. Traditional statistical models are not designed to cope with multilevel data like that. Not only are the data hierarchically nested, but students are clustered both from classrooms and from tutoring groups, and such cross-classified data present additional hurdles. This project also requires handling these data in the context of mediation analyses, which give us insight into not only whether interventions work, but also how they work. For example, if the interventions improve comprehension, do they do so by boosting executive function or by boosting vocabulary knowledge?”

*“What I find exciting is that this series of studies will yield data that combine several challenges,”*

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## JEANETTE FLEISCHNER CAREER LEADERSHIP AWARD

### Two Outstanding Recipients

The Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD) board is pleased to announce two outstanding recipients of this year's Jeanette Fleischner Career Leadership Award, **Dr. Charlie Hughes**, of Pennsylvania State University, and **Dr. Christine Espin**, of Leiden University in the Netherlands. In addition to his distinguished career as a researcher in the area of learning disabilities, Dr. Hughes is a former DLD president, executive director, and editor



of *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice (LDRP)*. Dr. Espin, the current co-editor of *LDRP*, is a leading researcher in the area of instructionally relevant assessment and curriculum-based measurement for elementary and adolescent students with and at-risk for learning disabilities. We congratulate Drs. Hughes and Espin on their outstanding accomplishments, and thank them for their service to the field. 📖

## President's Farewell, Summer 2014

by Erica Lembke

**Greetings** and hope you have had a relaxing summer and are ready for a new academic year! Thank you so much for the opportunity to serve as president for the **Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD)** for the past year! I have to say that while the year has flown by and I feel like I never get everything done that I would like, I am so excited to pass the proverbial torch or crown to my colleague **David Chard** from Southern Methodist University. Our board looks forward to continuing the great work we have begun and we are also looking forward to new ideas and planning. All of this will result in greater services and opportunities for YOU, our DLD members.

At the annual CEC convention this year, we celebrated the life and work of one of our colleagues whom we lost this year, **Dr. Janette Klingner**. We were so touched by the wonderful expressions of sympathy and the great stories that many of you shared about your collaboration, work, and relationships (both personal and professional) with Janette. We miss her daily input, but we know her work and her impact will live on in the work that goes on in schools and higher education. We are pleased that Janette will be further celebrated through named sessions to highlight some of her work at the CEC 2015 conference in San Diego. We hope you will join us there!

As a division, we were busy this year with supporting a state conference in Idaho in October and participating with other Learning Disabilities organization in events like the **National Center on Learning Disabilities (NCLD)** roundtable to discuss Response to Intervention and identification and the **National Joint Commission on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD)** meetings. These are important ways that we continue to promote advocacy for students with LD. Members of the board are well positioned to serve as vocal members of discussions where the needs of students with LD are discussed.

In addition, we published two position papers on English Learners with Learning Disabilities and Intensive Interventions for Students with LD in the RTI era (<http://teachingld.org/pages/position-papers>). These were a culmination of Dr. Klingner's efforts to release more information on these topics and we thank her and her co-authors for their work in these areas. In addition to a showcase session devoted to discussing these topics at CEC 2014, the papers will also be published in *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice (LDRP)*. Remember that *LDRP* is one of your member benefits so be sure to take full advantage of the information in each issue, as the published manuscripts are targeted for students with learning needs.



Erica Lembke

One of our key goals this year was to continue to determine where Learning Disabilities "fits" in this era of RTI. At times, it feels like students with LD are lost in the shuffle of Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention groups, yellow and red data, and provision of services. It is important for us all to remember that students with LD have unique needs and characteristics that can be best addressed through high-quality special education services, delivered teachers who have specifically been trained in research-based practices for students with LD.

As RTI initiatives continue to develop and expand in schools across the country, remember that one of the best places you can access high-quality, research-based practices for students with academic needs is on the [TeachingLD.org](http://TeachingLD.org) site. This means that if you are a general education classroom teacher, you should be a member of DLD. If you are a reading coach or specialist, you should be a member of DLD. If you are a Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventionist, you should be a member of DLD. Membership in DLD provides access to resources that you cannot get anywhere else. I'm confident these resources will impact your teaching, your pre-service teacher preparation, and your research in a positive way!

DLD continues to set an example as the most diversified organization for learning disabilities (LD), with:

- Support for our members who are practitioners as they teach students with learning disabilities through provision of information on evidence-based teaching practices, updates on policy changes, and providing state grants for technical assistance and/or conferences
- Support for our members who are teacher-trainers by providing current information on policies in LD and special education and on the most effective teaching methods for pre-service teachers
- Support for our members who are researchers by continuing to provide updates regarding current policy decisions and research findings in areas critical to LD

I'm pleased that so many of our board members will continue on the board, and we have also added two dynamic new members, **Linda Mason** (vice president) from the University of North Carolina, and **Jeanne Wanzek** (secretary) from Florida State University. They replace our outgoing colleagues **Janette Klingner** (past president) and **Kristin Sayeski** (secretary), whose contributions to the board were invaluable.

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Please take a look at our website if you haven't been there for a while ([TeachingLD.org](http://TeachingLD.org)) and sign in to get your members-only benefits. Updates are frequently posted there.

I am so excited for what is yet to come for our organization and continued collaboration with other CEC divisions, in addition to teachers, parents, and researchers.

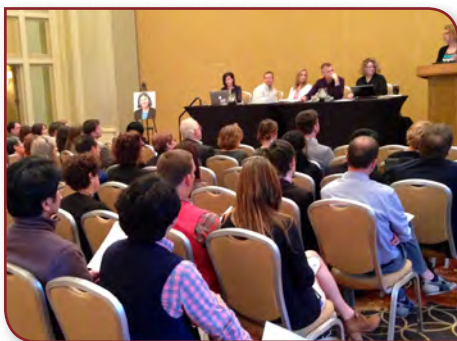
I feel fortunate to be working with such smart, pragmatic, forward-thinking individuals. It's because of you and your

membership that organizations like DLD continue to prosper, so we sincerely appreciate your involvement!

Together with you, we will continue to focus on and advance the field of Learning Disabilities! Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your president! As always, I would love to hear from you at [PastPres@TeachingLD.org](mailto:PastPres@TeachingLD.org).

Sincerely,  
*Erica Lembke*

## Highlights from the CEC 2014 Convention and Expo • Philadelphia, PA



*2014 Business Meeting*



*Tom Scruggs and Margo Mastropieri*



*DLD Showcase Panelists*



*Kimberly McDuffie Landrum*



*Cake for Tom Scruggs and Margo Mastropieri*



*Tom Scruggs and Margo Mastropieri*



*Doug Fuchs*



*Rollanda O'Connor and John Lloyd*



*John Hosp and Linda Mason*

# U.S. Department of Education “Reminds” Charters That Federal Civil Rights Laws Apply

by David Bateman

With the proliferation of charter schools across the United States, and the often unaddressed needs of students with disabilities, the U.S. Department of Education sought to clarify responsibilities of these schools.

In a “dear colleague” letter, Catherine Lhamon, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education, wrote to remind charter schools that federal civil rights laws, regulations, and guidance apply just as they do to traditional public schools.

Lhamon encouraged all charter school officials and staff to know and understand federal civil rights laws, such as: (a) Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, or national origin); (b) Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (prohibiting discrimination based on sex); and (c) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with disabilities Act of 1990 (prohibiting discrimination based on disability).




David Bateman

Highlighted in her letter were key areas for charter schools, including:

- Nondiscrimination in admissions
- Free appropriate public education for students with disabilities
- Affirmative steps for English language learners
- Nondiscrimination in discipline

Importantly, Lhamon notes that more information on the rights of students with disabilities in charter schools will be provided in joint guidance by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

Although CEC supports the notion that public charter schools may be an approach to education reform, there have also been reports of significant concerns that students with disabilities are underrepresented in charter schools. Legislation passed by the House of Representatives earlier this month included key CEC recommendations to strengthen requirements for charter schools in addressing the needs of students with disabilities, many of which align directly to *CEC’s Policy on Children With Exceptionalities in Charter Schools*.

Currently, 42 states and the District of Columbia have charter school laws that oversee 6,004 charter schools serving approximately 2.3 million students in 2012-2013. 

## MASON, WANZEK ELECTED TO DLD BOARD


by John Wills Lloyd

On behalf of the late **Janette Klingner**, past president of the **Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD)**, I am pleased to report that Professors **Linda Mason** and **Jeanne Wanzek** won election as vice president and secretary of DLD, respectively. Both began their terms in office July 1, 2014.

“I am sure that I speak for all the members of the executive board when I say that we welcome Linda and Jeanne,” President **Erica Lembke** said. “DLD was fortunate to have an outstanding slate of candidates for office, with many members volunteering to serve the organization. We appreciate everyone’s contributions.”

As a member of the presidential succession, **Professor Mason** will serve terms as vice president (2014-15), president-elect (2015-16), president (2016-17), and past president (2017-18). She is a professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a fellow at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development

Institute. After teaching elementary school students with learning disabilities for 7 years, Professor Mason received a doctoral degree from the University of Maryland. She has previously served DLD by being a member of the editorial board of *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice (LDR&P)* and contributing to TeachingLD.

**Jeanne Wanzek**, who is an associate professor at Florida State University, will serve as secretary for 2014-15 and 2015-16. Professor Wanzek, who is also affiliated with the Florida Center for Reading Research, is a former elementary school teacher as well as a special educator who worked with students with learning disabilities and emotional and behavioral disorders. She completed her Ph.D. at the University of Texas at Austin, is also a member of the *LDR&P* editorial board, and recently co-authored one of DLD’s position papers that is available on [TeachingLD.org](http://TeachingLD.org). 

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