

## FEATURE ARTICLE

# Transition to Postsecondary Education for Students With Learning Disabilities

By Dr. Raymond Witte, Miami University

### Overview

The following article provides a brief overview of the major transition issues and effective practices for students with Learning Disabilities as they shift to postsecondary educational settings. Leaving high school to enter college represents an unparalleled educational conversion for all students including those with special learning needs. For that reason, school professionals along with parents and students themselves must be knowledgeable and skilled in this transformation process.



Dr. Raymond Witte

### Transition Planning

Students with special learning needs continue to seek out postsecondary instruction and in particular approximately one quarter of all students with Learning Disabilities move on to college (Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Stodden, Conway, & Chang, 2003; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005) with the majority of students being served at two-year institutions (NCES, 2011). Planning for the college transition typically occurs at the middle and high school levels but should actually start at the elementary level. Adhering to the highest academic standards and meeting the same or comparable learning outcomes as their non-identified peers provides students with special learning needs a more successful transition experience (Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010;

Williams-Diehm & Benz, 2008). In truth, college preparation and readiness begins at kindergarten and continues with every grade.

Students with Learning Disabilities who enter college often present unique constellations of skills, needs, and necessary instructional supports (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003; Sparks & Lovett, 2009) which can create challenging learning experiences and potential obstacles in the classroom. Concomitant with these academic challenges and stressors are the personal and psychological issues that can coexist such as general anxiety, social isolationism, and even depressive conditions (Vogel & Reder, 1998). Along with student variables, the learning setting at the postsecondary level varies considerably from the K-12 environment as is demonstrated in Table 1. A unique characteristic of the college setting is the movement away from a group/team-centered approach to an individual student approach. All contact and responsibility regarding the transition process and subsequent instructional/learning delivery falls directly onto the student who must advocate for him or herself (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). Given this reality, every student needs to take advantage of every opportunity during their K-12 experience to develop their self-reliance and advocacy skills.

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**Transition to Postsecondary Education for Students With Learning Disabilities**

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**Table 1**

*Educational Differences Between High School and College Settings for Students With Disabilities*

**High School Setting**

Smaller classroom enrollments (e.g., 25 students or less) are common

The IEP is recognized as the primary factor in a student’s instructional delivery

Support/school team reviews a student’s academic process and contributes to educational decisions

Academic standards guide classroom instruction

A strong support network has typically been developed by the time a student reaches high school

In-class work time to complete assignments and/or review previous work is not uncommon

**College Setting**

Individual courses and academic programs drive instruction; individualized instruction plan is rare

Each individual student reviews and pursues his or her own academic decisions

Professional standards and requirements guide individual programs of study

Individual one-on-one professor-student contact time may be limited and graduate students may be responsible for providing out-of-class support

Larger classroom enrollments are common especially for large lecture formatted classes

High expectations for out-of-classroom work, reading, and general preparation

In-class work time is rare and the pace and coverage of materials varies with each professor

A support network (e.g. friends, college resources) must be reestablished

**Academic and Personal Preparation**

The demands of college require that every student be as prepared as possible in areas of academics as well as functional life skills. Therefore, in addition to being strong (at grade level or higher) in foundational academic domain areas such as reading, math, and writing it is also important for students to be able to exercise effective learning support skills (e.g., effective note taking, review procedures, study preparation, time management) as well as personal health management practices (e.g., adequate sleep, exercise, friend and family support).

The focus of a college preparatory program typically starts in middle school and proceeds through the high school years. Researchers (Brinckerhoff, 1996; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003) have identified basic transition goals for the high school years (Table 2, page 3).

At the end of the secondary transition process, a summary of performance (SOP) is mandated and must be completed in the student’s final year prior to graduation. Within that report the student’s academic achievement and general functional skills along with required classroom accommodations

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and modifications that have been provided are documented (Floyd, 2012). This document serves as a critical “instructional connector” between these two educational settings. University personnel rely on this information during the transition process.

**Table 2**

## *Transition Goals and Actions During the High School Years*

### **Freshman/Sophomore**

- Disability awareness
- Legal rights
- Selection of college preparatory courses
- Career exploration

### **Junior/Senior**

- Exploration of postsecondary options
- School visitations
- Formal test preparation (e.g., ACT)
- Testing accommodations (if appropriate)
- Summary of Performance (SOP)

### **All High School Years**

- Functional independence
- Personal planning
- Self-determination (goal-setting)
- Self-advocacy

college for all individuals with disabilities (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). That includes individuals who have been served through special education (IDEA) as well as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

In the confirmation of a learning disability, the three most common identification approaches include the antiquated aptitude-achievement discrepancy method, response to intervention (RTI), and low achievement performance (Sparks & Lovett, 2009). Major limitations with the aptitude-achievement discrepancy model are acknowledged and low achievement alone is not considered adequate for a learning disability determination (Francis et al., 2005; Machek & Nelson, 2007; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002). The Response to Intervention (RTI) model, which is designed to provide and evaluate the effectiveness of direct academic skills intervention, continues to be recognized as an effective model of learning disability identification (Fletcher, Denton, & Francis, 2005).

Consequently, non-ability, intervention-based reports are becoming more common at the postsecondary level, which provide confirmation of effective learning interventions and classroom accommodations that can be directly integrated into the college classroom. Despite these instructional advantages, the specific academic intervention focus (e.g., mathematical reasoning) consistent with RTI does not always align well with the broader postsecondary curriculum goals and outcomes (Sparks & Lovett, 2009).

It is important to recognize that a standard psycho-educational evaluation (consisting of results from both ability and achievement measures) can still serve as a formal verification document of a student’s disability in college (Sparks & Lovett, 2009). With this approach, a disability is typically recognized and substantiated as a significant discrepancy between an individual’s capacity to learn (as measured through an ability or intelligence measure) and his or her actual performance level in a respective achievement area such as reading or math. If this evaluation method is accepted, many college admissions/disabilities offices require that the evaluation be current (within one year prior to the student’s arrival on campus).

Regardless of the identification approach that is used, it is important to recognize that in addition to the documentation of the disability itself, the impact of the condition or disability on the student’s life and personal functioning must be demonstrated. The disabilities coordinator, who serves as the official university contact person that receives, reviews, and identifies potential accommodations in the classroom, will carefully review the generated report. What is reported (and

## **Qualifying for University Services**

Every college student with special learning needs must disclose the nature of their disability, provide documentation of that disability, as well as advocate for all necessary and appropriate classroom accommodations. IDEA does not extend to the postsecondary setting, however students are covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As civil rights legislation, ADA guarantees equal opportunity for employment and equal access to all programs, including

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what is not reported) is important in regards to the potential services and accommodations that can and will be considered. This information is then provided to a student with special learning needs. Key areas that are typically covered within a report include the identification of the disability or condition itself, how it was determined, current functional limitations of the student, needed recommendations for accommodations, assistive services and devices, compensatory learning strategies, as well as needed support services.

All college students must provide disclosure of their condition or disability as well as act on their own behalf in seeking out classroom accommodations (Floyd, 2012). Identified students are expected to meet the same program and degree requirements as their non-identified peers. Therefore, the focus for postsecondary institutions is to provide accommodations throughout the campus, including the classroom, to ensure that students are not discriminated against because of their disability. Accommodations are often involved in course delivery (e.g., tape recording classes, note takers, obtaining instructor's outlines or lecture notes), classroom support materials (e.g., taped textbooks), and in course requirements themselves (e.g., extra time to complete tests, alternative tests). Due to the adult status of college students, all business (e.g., disability confirmation, disclosure, advocacy) is conducted directly with the student and only the student.

## Effective Transition

As with any transition, success is predicated on constructing and executing a well-designed plan. As part of any comprehensive transition plan, many actions and decisions should take place during the middle and high school years and include some of the following:

- A college bound transition plan needs to exist within a student's IEP no later than middle school (college plans/actions can precede this). Transition plans are required by the age of 16 under IDEA and a statement of transition is required by the age of 14. In addition, a SOP is required for all identified students and must be present during the final year of high school. This document should be shared with the college disabilities coordinator, preferably at least a semester before admittance into college (Floyd, 2012).
- The guidance counselor should be a part of the student support team in order to ensure that the transition plan and the student's schedule is focused on selecting appropriate college preparatory courses and obtaining the necessary number of credits in all core areas (e.g., English, math, science, foreign language). The acquisition and refinement of learning support skills (e.g., study skills, note-taking, testing skills/preparation, self-assessment/progress monitoring, problem solving skills) should be promoted throughout the middle and high school years.
- Support options such as private tutoring should be considered (if needed) along with taking or retaking classes, if appropriate, during summer school. A lighter academic load (with fewer core subject courses and more electives) during the academic year can be helpful. This approach can be particularly helpful for athletes with special learning needs given the training and participation time demands placed upon them during their playing season(s).
- Possessing an updated academic profile during the senior year of high school is important. Up-to-date academic performance data, along with current accommodations and their effectiveness are important sources of information that can be used in the provision of potential services at the postsecondary level.
- Searching out and selecting potential colleges and universities is important. This can start as early as the freshman year and should involve actual on-site visitation if at all possible. Researching an institution and getting an idea of its "track record" in supporting students with special learning needs is important. Identifying an institution's learning assistance services and meeting with appropriate service personnel can go a long way in determining whether this school is a good fit. Calling and setting up an appointment is recommended, as drop-in meetings can be cumbersome and limited. Getting questions answered early help in the decision making process. Differences in resources will likely exist among schools and it is important to be aware of those potential differences.
- If a student enters college and is 18 years of age or older then all contact information is directed to the student. Parent involvement can only happen if consent by the student is provided. Given this reality, during the middle and high school years it is important for every student with a learning disability to be given responsibility for attending scheduled school meetings, for reviewing their schedules, and in general overseeing the process of their secondary education.
- Transcripts provided to the university should contain a complete listing of courses taken in core academic areas, credits earned, as well as any special aspects to those classes (e.g., advanced placement courses taken with AP credit received, skill remediation courses).
- Prior to enrolling at a college or university, students with

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Learning Disabilities need to be fully informed regarding their rights, protections, and procedural safeguards afforded to them through the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In addition, students must be aware that college professors will vary considerably in their knowledge of this legislation and the accommodations (e.g., effective implementation, attitude toward accommodations) that may be subsequently established for an identified student (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Landmark, & Reber, 2009).

- As mentioned earlier, students with special needs must self-disclose, which means they must formally indicate to a designated university official (e.g. disabilities coordinator) that they have a disability in order to be considered eligible for services at the postsecondary level. A disclosure letter signed by the student along with a professional evaluation is typically presented as evidence of the request and qualification.
- Every university or college by law should have a designated disabilities coordinator who serves as the official contact person for identified students and helps to coordinate and oversee rendered services. Once accepted, the disabilities coordinator becomes an important resource and contact person. This is typically the individual to contact whenever academic issues or concerns arise.
- College-supported learning and counseling services are usually available on most campuses. Students from time to time may need to talk to someone about the pressures, stressors, as well as seek general support as they pursue their academic studies.
- Postsecondary institutions (both 2 and 4 year institutions) typically require a formal evaluation and report along with the necessary documentation of a learning disability. However, differences in admission criteria may exist among institutions. For example, some 2-year colleges may have an “open door” admissions policy with few academic requirements. In addition, developmental courses centered on skill preparation and review may be available and needed in order to adequately raise student skill levels. These courses are sometimes necessary to take if a student graduated from a high school with limited skills in certain core content areas (e.g., reading or math). Admissions criteria should always be identified and carefully reviewed for any institution that is considered.

## Summary

Transition is an inevitable part of the educational career of every student. With early and continuous planning and

periodic monitoring of progress, a successful transition can be experienced at the postsecondary level for students with Learning Disabilities. However, the breadth and depth of preparation is important given the continuous demands of the college setting. Landmark et al., (2010) states that, “transition is a results-oriented process” and for that reason every student with a learning disability must be as academically prepared and organizationally competent as they can be (p. 173). Proficiency in basic areas including academics, learning strategies and academic planning, as well as personal and mental health management are essential for success at the postsecondary level. 🏆

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## DLD Session at CEC to Honor Janette Klingner

*Tribute to Janette Klingner: The Contribution of Collaborative Strategic Reading to Reading Comprehension Research*

To honor and celebrate **Janette Klingner's** vision for conducting high quality intervention research on reading comprehension for struggling readers, students with disabilities, and English learners, this symposium offers a look at Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) over time. Twenty years of research on CSR has demonstrated reading comprehension gains for diverse students in mixed-ability classrooms. CSR combines before, during, and after reading strategies with student-led cooperative learning group work to support access to grade level content area text.

**Presentations will describe:** (a) the history of Collaborative Strategic Reading; (b) findings from studies in language arts, social studies, and science in grades 4-8, highlighting the positive outcomes of CSR for students with Learning Disabilities, students with Autism, and English learners; and (c) a district partnership to integrate CSR into middle school classrooms. Participants will see video examples of effective CSR instruction and will be provided with access to classroom materials and lesson plans.



### Presenters Include:

**Alison Gould Boardman** (Leader), Assistant Research Professor, *University of Colorado Boulder*

**Sharon Vaughn** (discussant), Professor, Executive Director, *The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk*

**Brooke Moore**, Research Associate, *University of Colorado Boulder*

**Amy Boelé**, Assistant Professor, *University of Colorado Denver*

**Colleen Reutebuch**, Senior Project Manager, *University of Texas at Austin*

### Two Special Sessions!

Thursday, April 9, 2015  
from 2:15 PM to 3:15 PM  
to be held in San Diego, California, at the Convention Center Room 033A and Friday, April 10, Room 033C  
from 2:15 PM to 3:15 PM



By Jeanne Wanzek, DLD Secretary

The DLD board was busy in 2014 working on several initiatives and activities to fulfill the organization's purpose of promoting high-quality education and research for persons with Learning Disabilities. New officers began their terms on the DLD Executive Board July 1, 2014. David Chard moved into the presidency, replacing Erica Lembke, who is now serving as past president. Laurie deBettencourt serves as president-elect, and Linda Mason is our new vice president. I, Jeanne Wanzek have started as secretary and Margaret (Peggy) Weiss continues as our treasurer. Michael Faggella-Luby, William (Bill) Therrien, David Bateman, Bryan Cook, Rebecca Zumeta, and Diane Rodriguez serve as the DLD committee chairs. Miriam Ortiz is our new student representative, and John Lloyd continues as our executive director.



surrounding implementation, provide practical examples for improving instruction, and share resources to help educators make adaptations to promote engagement and intensive intervention for students with LD.

At the 2014 business meeting held at the CEC convention, we honored Janette Klingner for her service to DLD as well as her tireless work on behalf of students with Learning Disabilities and the field of special education. A resolution in Janette's honor was read and presented in the CEC Representative Assembly as well. Janette was an outstanding scholar and leader in our field and will be missed, though her impact on our field will continue.

We also presented several well-deserved awards at the 2014 business meeting. Dr. Freeman-Green (Illinois State University; PhD from UNC-Charlotte) was presented with the Doctoral Research Award for her dissertation, *"Effects of the Solve Strategy for Students with Learning Disabilities"*. Lee Swanson, Cathy Lussier, and Michael Orosco were presented with the Kirk Award for their outstanding contribution to the literature on Learning Disabilities with the article, *"Effects of Cognitive Strategy Intervention and Cognitive Moderators on Word Problem Solving in Children at Risk for Problem Solving Difficulties"*. Don Deshler and Kristen McMaster presented the Fleischner Leadership Award to recipients, Charles Hughes (Penn State University) and Christine Espin (University of Leiden, Netherlands) honoring their work in advancing the field of Learning Disabilities. At the DLD reception, we also honored the long-standing work of Tom Scruggs and Margo Mastropieri.

## 2014 Accomplishments

At the 2014 Council for Exceptional Children annual meeting, DLD sponsored a showcase session called "Take a Stance! Division for Learning Disabilities Position Statements". The panel of authors for the position statements includes: Erica Lembke, Jeanne Wanzek, Bryan Cook, Rebecca Zumeta, and Diane Rodriguez. They all shared their views on the two new position statements: 1) What special education should be for English language learners with LD, and 2) Which intensive interventions should be used for students with LD. These statements were also published in 2014 *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, Volume 29, Issue 3. Past president Janette Klingner provided significant leadership in preparing each of these position statements.

During the DLD reception at the CEC convention, we also enjoyed a wide range of presentations at the student poster session. Advancing students showcased their high-quality research relevant to the field of Learning Disabilities. It is our hope that you will be able to join us for the 2015 student poster session held in conjunction with the annual DLD reception during the CEC convention on April 9, 2015 in San Diego, CA.

We are also excited about the upcoming DLD sponsored showcase session for the 2015 CEC convention in San Diego, CA: *"Do This Not That: Unraveling Common Instructional Myths for Students with LD"*. Stephen Ciullo, Devin Kearns, Chris Lemons, Rebecca Zumeta, and Diane Rodriguez will present the session on April 9 from 2:15-3:15. They will describe common myths and instructional mistakes

surrounding implementation, provide practical examples for improving instruction, and share resources to help educators make adaptations to promote engagement and intensive intervention for students with LD.

In the fall of 2014, DLD sponsored a webinar series on co-teaching. Laurie deBettencourt and Peggy Weiss addressed the practical issues of implementing evidence-based practices regarding co-teaching in real world classrooms at both the elementary and secondary levels. If you were unable to join us for the webinars, they are available for purchase through CEC.

A new *Current Practice Alert* was also published. Tim and Kim Landrum examined the concept of learning styles in *"Learning Styles (Recommendation: Use Caution)"*, noting the research underlying the application of learning style-based instruction is limited in many ways and generally demonstrates no benefit for students.

We are looking forward to a successful 2015. If you would like to be more involved with DLD activities, please don't hesitate to contact myself or any of the other officers, committee chairs, or editors (see <http://TeachingLD.org/officers> for a list). 🍷

## Outstanding Doctoral Research Award Winner

The Division for Learning Disabilities' Research Committee is pleased to announce the winner of the **2015 Outstanding Doctoral Research Award: Jessica M. Namkung**, who received her PhD in Special Education from Vanderbilt University in 2014 (Lynn Fuchs, Chair) and is currently an Assistant Professor at the University at Albany. Dr. Namkung's study, *Cognitive Predictors of Calculations and Number Line Estimation with Whole Numbers and Fractions* (see abstract below), was selected from a field of excellent applicants as the most outstanding doctoral-level research in the field of Learning Disabilities. Dr. Namkung will receive a \$500 cash award, \$500 toward travel to the CEC conference in San Diego to receive her award, a free one-year membership in CEC and DLD, an opportunity to present the research at the CEC Annual Convention, and an invitation to submit the research in the division journal, *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*. **Congratulations Dr. Namkung!**



### Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to examine the cognitive predictors of calculations and number line estimation with whole numbers and fractions. At-risk 4th-grade students (N = 139) were assessed on 7 domain-general abilities and incoming calculation skills at the start of 4th grade. Then, they were assessed on whole-number and fraction calculation and number line estimation measures at the end of 4th grade. Structural equation modeling and path analysis indicated that processing speed, attentive behavior, and incoming calculation skill were significant predictors of whole-number calculations whereas language, in addition to processing speed and attentive behavior, significantly predicted fraction calculations. For number line estimation, nonverbal reasoning significantly predicted both whole-number and fraction outcome, with numerical working memory predicting whole-number number line estimation and language predicting fraction number line estimation. Findings are discussed in terms of distinctions between whole-number and fraction development and between calculations and number line learning.

## DLD Membership Report | JANUARY 2015



DLD's approximately 3,000 members are active professionals interested in improving the lives of individuals with Learning Disabilities, their families, and the professionals who work with them. Our membership includes teachers, district and state administrators, researchers and teacher educators in universities and colleges, and a variety of other private and public organizations. DLD works because of YOU!

Visit DLD at the 2015 CEC Convention in San Diego! Stop by the DLD membership table in the Expo to learn more about taking advantage of your membership benefits, to meet DLD board members and current members, and to introduce a colleague to DLD. If you are not a member of DLD, it is a great opportunity to find out how DLD can benefit you!

Interested in starting a new state DLD subdivision? Building your membership? Organizing a conference? To learn more, email [Members@TeachingLD.org](mailto:Members@TeachingLD.org) or call Michael Faggella-Luby at 817-257-4355.



## The Consumer Reports of Intensive Interventions for Reading, Mathematics, and Behavior

In the second decade of the 21st Century there is certainly no shortage of information available on the Internet. In fact, rather than quantity of information being a significant problem, it appears that finding high quality information that can be trusted is the bigger challenge. Fortunately, teachers and school administrators now have access to a wealth of high-quality information regarding different approaches to providing intensive intervention for school-aged children.

The National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII) ([www.intensiveintervention.org](http://www.intensiveintervention.org)) provides technical assistance to districts and schools to support implementation of data-based individualization in reading, mathematics, and behavior for students with severe and persistent learning or behavioral needs. The Center is housed at the American Institutes for Research and works in conjunction with leading experts in the field. It is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and is part of OSEP's Technical Assistance and Dissemination Network (TA&D).

There are a number of different supports provided by NCII to assist school personnel in getting started with intensive intervention. Tool charts review commercially available interventions and



progress monitoring tools that may be used to support intensive intervention in academics or behavior. Reviews are based on a standard process for evaluating the scientific rigor of each commercially available intervention or tool. The Center also hosts a series of webinars on various topics related to intensive intervention, and posts short video clips featuring experts in the field addressing frequently asked questions. Additional resources on the website provide implementation and instructional supports, including a series of training modules, materials to support team meetings, tools for monitoring implementation fidelity sample lesson plans, activities, and a series of documents illustrating standards-aligned instruction across levels of a multi-tiered system. NCII emails a quarterly newsletter to ensure that educators stay up to date with the latest information (sign up at <http://www.intensiveintervention.org/>).

In summary, educators facing the daunting task of making tough decisions about educational programming for students with severe and persistent learning or behavioral needs now have access to resources. At [www.intensiveintervention.org](http://www.intensiveintervention.org) you will find information on intensive intervention and data-based individualization that has been evaluated by leading experts in the field. 🍌

### JOIN US FOR THE CEC 2015 Convention and Expo, April 8-11, 2015 in San Diego, CA

What's the #1 reason you can't miss CEC 2015? Your students! As educators, you do whatever it takes every day for your students to grow, succeed and live happy lives. CEC 2015 is the one place where you'll learn hundreds of ways to help your students.

**Register online!** Or, download the registration form:  
<http://ceconvention.org/register/>

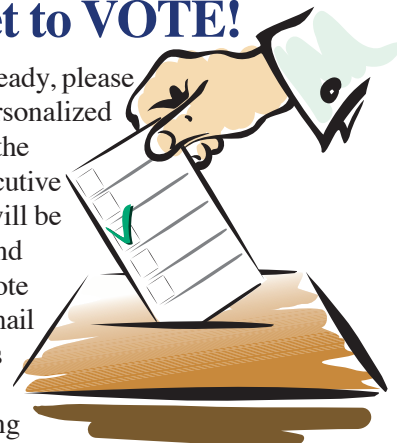
If you have already registered for CEC 2015 and want to add a Convention Workshop to your registration, please call 1-888-232-7733 and Customer Service will assist you!



Hilton San Diego Bayfront,  
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### Don't Forget to VOTE!

If you haven't seen one already, please watch your e-mail for a personalized invitation to participate in the election of DLD's new executive board members. DLDers will be electing a Vice President and Treasurer this year. Your vote counts! Make sure your e-mail address on file with CEC is up to date, because that is the one to which your voting directions will be sent. For more information about voting, please contact [elections@teachingld.org](mailto:elections@teachingld.org).



#### Nominees for Vice President:

Alison Boardman

Stephanie Al Otaiba

#### Nominees for Treasurer:

Michael Hebert

Margaret (Peggy) Weiss

See our website for full bios on the nominees: [TeachingLD.org](http://TeachingLD.org)

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