

January 14, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

It has been a difficult year personally and professionally. On top of concerns for our health in a pandemic, stay-at-home orders and social distancing have kept us from friends, colleagues, and even some family members at a time when we could most use their support. Changes to in-person schooling have affected our research and challenged us as parents. Despite these unprecedented difficulties, I am inspired by the field's efforts to adapt and continue serving America's students. All of us in NCSER send our sincere wish for a better 2021 – one that is safe, healthy, and supportive of the work we do to help students with disabilities.

In the past several years, the annual Principal Investigator's (PI) Meeting has been a highlight of the year for me – being able to see you, engage with you, and hear about your research. During these meetings I used the opportunity to talk with you about what is happening in IES and NCSER. While this letter is a poor replacement for an in-person update, I want you to have information about NCSER's funding, grants, and other activities.

COVID-19 Flexibilities

First, the obvious—COVID-19 has been very disruptive to many of your research projects. IES has worked very hard to offer flexibilities where we can, (for example, hibernating grants until schools are open, changing the order of grant activities) and we will make every effort to continue working with you to meet the objectives of your grants.

For some of you, the disruptions to your research plans were significant, and it will be challenging to recover the losses that were incurred. There is currently no plan for any supplemental funds from Congress to support COVID-related losses to research. NCSER is allowed to consider supplemental funding for those most impacted, but funding has to come from our annual appropriation. This means supplemental funds will be competing with continuation costs, new awards, and other funding requirements (such as costs for peer review) for our limited yearly budget. Therefore, supplements will be tough to come by. That said, you should certainly continue to talk with your program officers about your activities, any changes you need to make to your research plans, potential grant flexibilities available to you, and the need for a supplement.

Presidential Transition

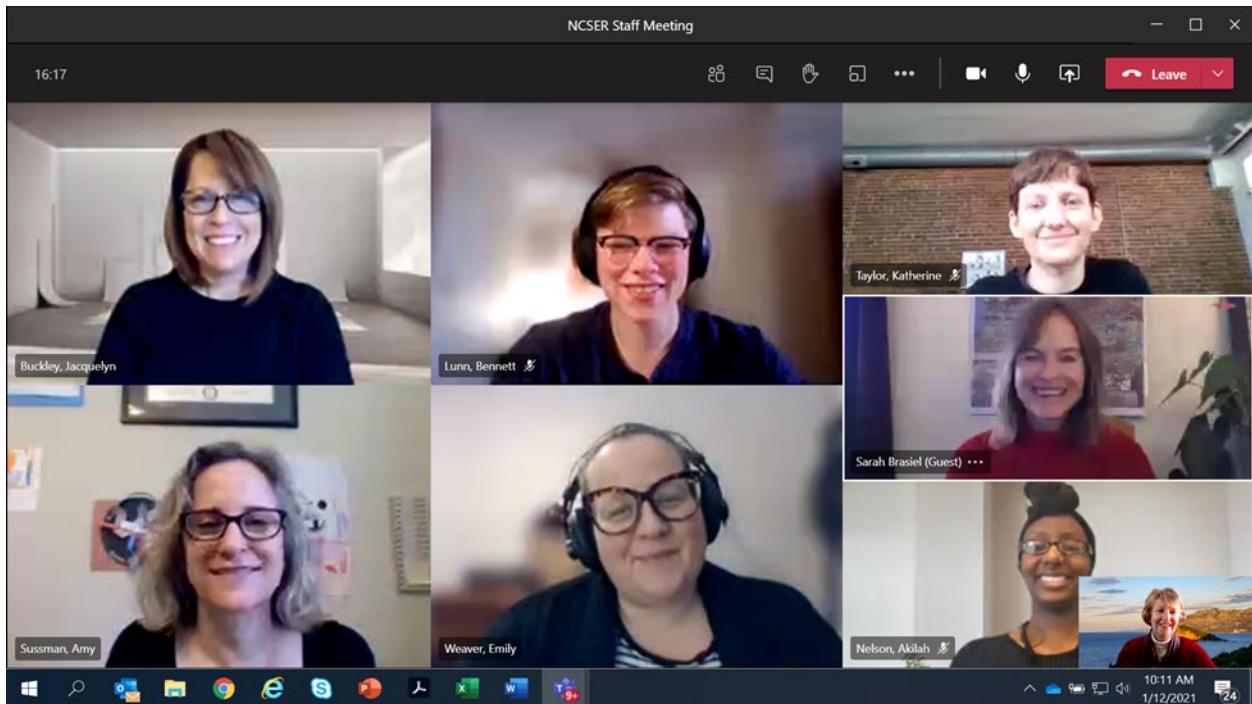
IES has been engaged with the transition team for the Biden administration, and NCSER staff have prepared responses to wide-ranging questions from the team, including what we have learned from NCSER-funded research. We anticipate that in the next few months we will continue to field questions as new staff come on board at the Department and they learn about IES and the role we play.

As you may know, IES Director Mark Schneider is serving under a 6-year term. This term is prescribed by law (the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, Sec. 114). Since this is the case, even though the rest of the Department's "political appointees" are turning over as part of the agency-wide transition to the incoming Biden Administration, IES will have consistency in our leadership through this time. And while

on the topic of the Director, I encourage you to read Mark's [blogs](#), as he often provides information on upcoming competitions and activities related to the Research Centers.

NCSER Staff

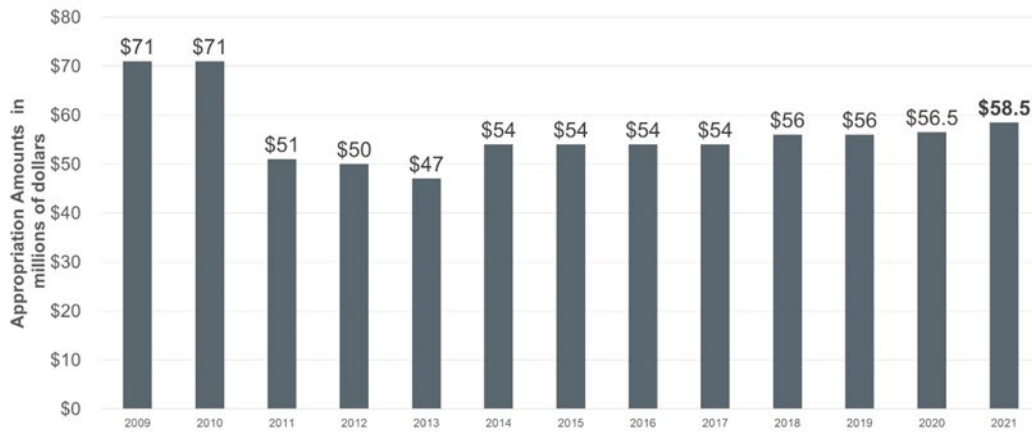
Thanks to all of you who have offered your kind words of support throughout this year. The NCSER team has strived to thoughtfully address issues that have come up and ensure that we keep our grant activities on track. One of the bright spots this year for us has been our ability to hire two new staff members in NCSER, Emily Weaver and Akilah Nelson. Emily comes to us from Vanderbilt where she received her doctorate in special education and was teaching and working on research before moving to DC. Akilah holds her doctorate in developmental psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Most recently, she worked in the research and evaluation office of the Prince George's County school district in Maryland and served as a policy fellow in HHS before that. They join Jackie Buckley, Amy Sussman, Katie Taylor, and Sarah Brasiel as Program Officers. We are also fortunate to have Bennett Lunn, a Truman-Albright Fellow, working with NCSER and the National Center for Education Research (NCER) this year.



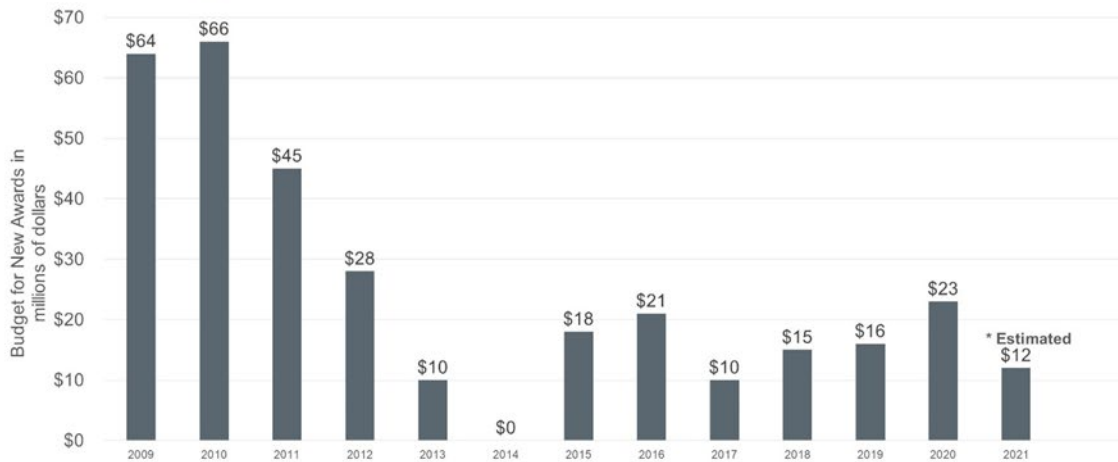
NCSER Funding

The graphs below show NCSER's funding from fiscal year 2009 to fiscal year 2021, and the amount of that funding that is available for new awards.

NCSER Funding FY 2009-2021



Funding Available for New Awards



What We Have Funded

Since 2006 we have funded 496 grants for a total of approximately \$919 million.

In FY 2020 we competed three research programs and awarded 41 grants, investing \$77 million.

For our standard Special Education Research Grant Program, we awarded 28 grants totaling approximately \$56 million. For our Research Training Programs in Special Education, we awarded 9 grants totaling approximately \$5.5 million. For the Research Grants Focused on Systematic Replication in Special Education program, we awarded 4 grants totaling close to \$15 million. More details are provided in the table below.

Program – FY2020 Awards	Total Award Amount	Number of Awards
84.324A Standard Research Program		
Autism Spectrum Disorders	\$9,399,374.00	4
Cognition and Student Learning in Special Education	\$4,699,491.00	2
Early Intervention and Early Learning in Special Education	\$12,190,036.00	6
Professional Development for Educators and School-Based Service Providers	\$4,199,755.00	3
Reading, Writing, and Language Development	\$10,563,023.00	5
Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education	\$3,289,913.00	1
Social and Behavioral Outcomes to Support Learning	\$8,597,819.00	4
Special Education Policy, Finance, and Systems	\$600,000.00	1
Special Topic - Career and Technical Education for Students with Disabilities	\$2,773,319.00	2
Subtotal	\$56,312,730.00	28
84.324B Training Programs in Special Education		
Early Career Development and Mentoring	\$2,475,559.00	5
Methods Training Using Single-Case Designs	\$700,000.00	1
Postdoctoral Research Training Program	\$2,271,028.00	3
Subtotal	\$5,446,587.00	9
84.324R Systematic Replication		
Systematic Replication in Special Education	\$14,788,992.00	4
Subtotal	\$14,788,992.00	4
Grand Total	\$76,548,309.00	41

The project types for the awards are as follows:

Project Type	Number of Awards	Total Award Amount
84.324A Standard Research Program		
Development and Innovation	12	\$16,770,198.00
Efficacy Replication	3	\$10,789,062.00
Exploration	5	\$5,397,786.00
Initial Efficacy and Follow-up	10	\$32,747,028.00
Measurement	1	\$1,397,718.00
84.324B Training Programs in Special Education		
Training	9	\$5,446,587.00
84.324R Systematic Replication		
Effectiveness Replication	1	\$3,999,930.00
Grand Total	41	\$76,548,309.00

Competitions in FY 2021

As you probably know we are in the midst of our FY 2021 competition cycle, with four RFAs:

- [Special Education Research \(84.324A\)](#)
- [Research Training Programs in Special Education \(84.324B\)](#)
- [Research Grants Focused on NAEP Process Data for Learners with Disabilities \(84.324P\)](#)
- [Research Grants Focused on Systematic Replication \(84.324R\)](#)

Peer review panels will be held in February for these competitions.

In addition, there is a [Small Business Innovation Research \(SBIR\) competition](#) focused on special education this year. The due date for proposals for SBIR is January 21, 2021.

Our planning for competitions to be released in FY 2022 is ongoing.

2020 NCSER Activities

In anticipation of the 20th Anniversary of IES in 2022 (it will only be NCSER's 16th anniversary), we have a number of activities underway to help position ourselves to do high quality work in the next 10 years and beyond. Among them are the following:

- IES awarded a contract to **the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM)** to identify the ways in which IES can best advance education research and statistics to

improve learner outcomes. For the NCSER and NCER, the review will focus on critical problems or issues on which new research is needed; how best to organize the RFAs to reflect these problems/issues; new methods or approaches for conducting research that should be encouraged and why; and new and different types of research training investments that are needed. We anticipate a report within a year, in time to inform the research competitions released in FY 2022.

- In a project called “[What We Have Learned in 20 Years of IES Randomized Trials](#)” (or the “Twenty Year Study” for short), Larry Hedges and Beth Tipton from Northwestern are looking at what we have learned from the funding of randomized trials to evaluate the efficacy and effectiveness of education interventions, products, services, or policies. At the study level, they will summarize direct and indirect contributions to practice, fundamental knowledge and understanding of education, human capital for education research, and impact on methodology. This work will involve interviews with a sample of PIs, so I encourage those of you who hear from the study team to please make the time to talk to them.

Other items that might be of interest include:

- NCSER and NCER are both funding a [grant](#) to further develop **EdInstruments**, an open-source library of education-relevant measurement tools recently launched by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University. During the project, the EdInstruments team led by Susanna Loeb will expand and refine the catalogue of instruments included in the repository in six domains: middle grades mathematics, social skills, early elementary reading, teaching practices, civics, and school climate. They will convene six working group meetings of academic experts in each of these areas to critique the components and organization of the library, highlight the psychometric properties of instruments that cover topic areas of interest, and propose improvements needed for certain instruments to be more useful to researchers and practitioners. The panel on middle grades math is underway.
- I also want to mention 3 **practice guides** that are being written through the What Works Clearinghouse in the National Center for Education Evaluation (NCEE). The panel membership and the research being reviewed reflects NCSER’s investment over the years. The guides include
 - *Assisting Students Struggling with Mathematics: Intervention in the Elementary Grades*; Lynn Fuchs is the Chair
 - *Promoting Social and Behavioral Success for Learning in Elementary Grades*; Catherine Bradshaw is the Chair
 - *Assisting Students Struggling with Reading in Grades 4-8*; Sharon Vaughn is the Chair
- Last month, NCER held a technical working group meeting with a multidisciplinary group of 15 experts on **diversity, equity, and inclusion** to discuss strategies IES could take to increase representation among the institutions and researchers submitting applications and receiving awards across its grant programs. We received valuable feedback on ways to reduce barriers to participation in IES research, how to improve outreach, and how to increase research capacity. We will be working to implement recommendations in accordance with the [IES Diversity](#)

[Statement](#) to ensure that our work incorporates diverse perspectives and is free of racial, cultural, gender, or regional bias.

- IES continues to encourage and, in some cases, require (FY 2020 Exploration, Initial Efficacy, and Systematic Replication grants) **pre-registering studies** through the IES [Standards for Excellence in Education Research](#) and our RFAs. There are several options for preregistration, including but not limited to, the [Registry of Efficacy and Effectiveness Studies](#) and the [Open Science Framework](#). If you haven't already done so, we'd encourage you to pre-register your study – the earlier in the study you register, the better!
- NCSER has been working with the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) to help translate the research we fund in ways that are helpful for practitioners. We started with **professional development webinars**, recommending some of our researchers who could provide evidence-based strategies for school staff. Sarah Powell kicked off this collaboration with a webinar entitled *How to Design and Deliver Effective Math Intervention*. Kent McIntosh recently presented *An Equity-focused PBIS Approach for Increasing Racial Equity in School Discipline*. Registration for both webinars were well above numbers CEC has seen in the past and the subsequent feedback has been quite good. These webinars can be viewed at the [CEC website](#).

I want to close by thanking you all for the support last year and for all of you who stepped up to serve on peer review panels, participate in working groups, and work to get your research in the hands of practitioners who can use it. I was so incredibly impressed to see how many of you developed materials and offered tips for best practices when COVID-19 hit, when teachers and parents were desperate for information. Your passion for what you do and your concern for students with disabilities was never more evident. I will miss our now annual custom of cheering for special education research at the end of my PI presentation, but please do it virtually! And please reach out if you are so inclined: joan.mclaughlin@ed.gov.

Take care and stay safe,

Joan

Joan E. McLaughlin, PhD
Commissioner
National Center for Special Education Research