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*Focusing on individuals with autism, intellectual disability, and related disabilities*

## Teachers' Corner

### Moving Past the Present, the Future Must Be Bright: A Journey of Special Education for DEIJ



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#### History of IDEA

While multiple landmark legislative decisions have defined the laws of special education, the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), frequently referred to as P.L. 94-142, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), are often referred to as the foundation for special education today. Prior to 1975, special education existed in only a few locations across the country. In 1975, Congress passed P.L. 94-142, special education legislation that provided:

1. Guidance to states for individualized, appropriate, free and public education access for ALL children;
2. Financial assistance for special education and related services;
3. Procedural safeguards or protections;
4. Guidelines around integration into the least restrictive environment (LRE); and

5. Appropriate testing and evaluation materials and procedures.

Changes to EAHCA have occurred during reauthorization periods, but they also continue to take place in response to litigation and activism by disabled individuals and their parents. Most notably, in 1990 EAHCA was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This changed the identification and terminology of the law, but the basic principles remained the same, e.g., LRE, IEP, and FAPE. Under IDEA, (a) students must be identified within at least one of the 13 categories of disability, (b) that the disability interferes with their access to education, and (c) that they must receive special education services (IDEA, 2004).

Despite the nature and intent of the legislation, these laws do not guarantee that all students are educated in the general education classroom, have access to the general education curriculum, or that *disproportionality* (i.e., when there is a difference between the proportion of a given demographic group identified for special education in general or within specific categories) is dismantled. Originally noted by Dunn's (1968) seminal article, patterns of disproportionality in special education have persisted for decades (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2004). Disproportionality exists when assessment, instruction, and disciplinary procedures are not responsive to the individual needs of diverse students which in turn limits access to the general education curriculum and creates more restrictive placements for students (Skiba et al., 2011). For example, students who are male and Black tend to be overrepresented in high-incidence disability categories (i.e., categories with large numbers of identified students relative to other disability categories). Native Alaskan and Native American students are overrepresented in the category of specific learning disability (SLD). Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students tend to be underrepresented in the gifted and talented category, whereas Asian and Pacific Islander students are underrepresented in almost every category (Hosp & Reschly, 2004).

#### Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD)

Founded in 1922, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the largest international professional organization dedicated to improving the success of youth with disabilities. CEC played a major role in bringing the EAHCA law to fruition, as well as advocating for addressing disproportionality in special education. Founded as a **Special Interest Division** of CEC, the

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### Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities

(DADD) is an organization composed of people committed to enhancing the quality of life of youth and adults with intellectual disability and/or other developmental disabilities, and autistic individuals. DADD seeks to promote and disseminate research-based practices (e.g., practices that have been subjected to scrutiny under high-quality experimental conditions), but we also recognize that *intersectionality*, (i.e., another way to view disproportionality; a framework used to understand how multiple overlapping social identities impact and oppress certain populations; Crenshaw, 1991) has not been consistently addressed in teacher education programs (Gay, 2002). In other words, race, ethnicity, and disability all coexist and intersect as they relate to the PreK–12 environment and special education (Boveda & Aronson, 2019), and unless special education practitioners are purposefully being taught to identify, analyze, and incorporate their students' holistic identities, experiences, and needs into their daily practices, they may not be equipped to fully support their students. The impact of intersectionality can be addressed through culturally-sustaining, evidence-based instructional practices (Boveda & Aronson, 2019; Whitford & Carrero, 2019). In the following sections, we offer tools aligned with these instructional practices that practitioners can embed within the school environment and in clinical settings.

### Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Across the United States (US), students of color (i.e., Black, Hispanic/Latine, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American) have experienced a deep-rooted history of institutionalized racism that has led to inequitable access to education, and ultimately disparate educational outcomes (Hugh-Pennie et al., 2022). Although student demographics in US schools are becoming much more diverse, the teacher workforce does not share this diversity. Implementing *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (CSP) allows teachers to bridge these socio-cultural gaps and provide equitable educational experiences. CSP focuses on the cultural and linguistic identities, knowledge, and experiences of diverse persons; rather students, family/caregivers, and/or communities. This strength-based approach affirms that culture is a fluid collection of beliefs and practices that varies across socio-cultural identities and can use these funds of knowledge to enrich the experiences of all involved. Adopting CSP helps practitioners highlight and validate their students' and clients' identities and engage the communities they represent. Research has shown that when embedding CSP, student performance in attendance, engagement, and academic success has increased (Paris & Alim, 2017).

### Using Culturally Sustaining Practices in Schools

Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) may look very different from classroom to classroom due to the focus on the students' identities and backgrounds that are embedded into the school environment. However, several common elements can be seen

when using CSP, such as incorporating student and intergenerational community agency and inputs; supporting positive relationships with the land and the people; centering dynamic communities and their languages, practices, and knowledge; and providing structured opportunities to contend with internalized oppressions and stigmas (IES, n.d.). Across educational agencies, individual classrooms, and schoolwide programs, CSP can be embedded with ongoing Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Integrated Multi-tiered Systems of Support (I-MTSS) practices, and the use of cultural informants.

*Universal Design for Learning* (UDL) is an educational framework that differentiates the ways students engage with material, the ways practitioners represent knowledge, and the actions and expressions students use to showcase that knowledge. When practitioners adopt CSP with UDL, students have designed and curated opportunities to access knowledge and showcase their understanding in a way that is meaningful to them (Griending et al., 2023). Through embedding CSP with UDL, practitioners create a “crosswalk” (Kieran & Anderson, 2019) that promotes strategies such as culturally mediated instruction, student centered instruction, learning with a context of culture, reshaping the curriculum, seeing teachers as facilitators of knowledge, and communicating high expectations. For example, instead of using the traditional poems in the language arts curriculum, have students analyze their favorite songs and look for literary devices. Instead of doing basic addition fact sheets, students could create grocery budgets for their local food store and go with their guardian to see math strategies in daily living.

Another common educational framework is Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) for academic growth (i.e. Response to Intervention, RTI) and behavior interventions (i.e. Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, PBIS). Educational environments that combine the academic growth and behavioral interventions into a single Integrated-MTSS or I-MTSS and then infuse this with CSP have shown great success across research (Brown et al., n.d.; Freeman-Green et al., 2021; Hoover & Soltero-González, 2018). Embedding CSP into I-MTSS creates an equitable environment for all learners and fosters inclusivity. This combination will look different as practitioners work within the various tiers of an I-MTSS model embedded with CSP. For example, within Tier 1, practitioners can select materials and curriculum that includes multiple representations and diverse voices and reflect how current classroom policies and procedures may marginalize certain populations within the school. In small groups or Tier 2, students can share elements of their culture and family history for writing prompts or enrichment activities. For Tier 3 individualized instruction, practitioners can focus on using student and family centered approaches for assessments, instruction, and evaluations. Through combining CSP and I-MTSS, practitioners can implement specialized interventions that are culturally responsive, sustaining, and intersectional (Griending et al., 2023).

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One way practitioners can incorporate CSP without using existing educational frameworks is the use of cultural informants. A *cultural informant* is an individual who is knowledgeable of the nuance and practices of their own culture AND can communicate these practices effectively to those outside of their culture (Fuller et al., 2024). Cultural informants provide real life accounts from diverse voices that have historically been silenced or underrepresented in educational curriculum and policy. Through concepts like storytelling and counter-storytelling (a key tenet of Critical Race Theory), cultural informants can be incorporated into classroom discussions, invited as guest speakers to see diverse perspectives, or used as resources for programing and implementation.

### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for Applied Behavior Analysis**

Despite the growing diversity among students, teachers are still largely white, and primarily [cisgender] female. These statistics also extend to Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) professionals (Hugh-Pennie et al., 2022). Nearly 72% of Board-Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) are white.

ABA is not a single intervention, but rather a range of practices and procedures such as discrete trial teaching, pivotal response training, reinforcement, and verbal behavior training (Anderson, 2023). For many autistic students and their families, ABA has been the first recommendation to address student support needs (Anderson, 2023). ABA, however, has also been deemed incompatible with some autistic self-advocates' goals for interventions because, according to Anderson (2023) it (a) is historically rooted in a deficit orientation of "fixing" the autistic person and (b) causes psychological and/or physical harm (i.e., trauma).

Despite the contentious history of ABA, behavior analysts have contributed to the science of teaching and have the capacity to support classroom-based pedagogy (Hugh-Pennie et al., 2022) through the implementation of culturally responsive, ethical, strengths-based practices, grounded in principles of behavior. Coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings, *culturally relevant pedagogy* (CRP) is a conceptual framework that highlights specific behaviors that effective teachers implement to support Black students in the classroom (Hugh-Pennie et al., 2022). Behavior analysts, educators, and related service providers can engage support behavior using strategies that are grounded in cultural competence, sociopolitical awareness, and designed to ensure academic excellence. Behavior analysts, educators, and related service providers who provide behavioral support for students with disabilities can:

- Demonstrate *cultural competence* by helping students understand their cultural history and background, and by engaging in classroom instruction that intentionally reflects elements of students' cultures.
- Help students develop their *sociopolitical awareness* (or critical consciousness), which is the ability to critique the world and make connections to the bigger picture.

As students develop this skill, they can begin to challenge and shift social norms that often facilitate and sustain disparities. Educators can facilitate this process by incorporating social issues into classroom lessons and guiding students through critical self (Hugh-Pennie et al., 2022).

- Strive for their students' *academic excellence* by ensuring that multiply marginalized students have access to the "culture of power." In other words, professionals must help students understand how their knowledge of the dominant culture can impact academic access and outcomes (Hugh-Pennie et al., 2022).

### **Summary**

ABA has a contentious past and currently still faces critique, but culturally relevant pedagogy can be applied to the principles of behavior to provide supports for disabled students and honor students' cultural backgrounds and experiences. Furthermore, educational professionals who utilize CSP within the classroom can increase student engagement and offer diverse perspectives not usually presented in traditional curriculum. Professionals in these spaces must be committed to implementing evidence-based practices that are ethical, socially valid for individuals with disabilities, and rooted in culturally sustaining pedagogy. To do this, professionals must continue to educate themselves on ways to embed CSP into classroom and behavioral practices and seek diversity and inclusion in policy and practice. Using these practices promotes a brighter future for diverse students within special education, and society as a whole. ■

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## President's Message: A Year in Review

Liz Harkins



As my term as president concludes, I'm filled with gratitude for the opportunity to serve our community. This past year has been marked by significant progress and a renewed commitment to our mission.

### Strengthening Our Foundation

To strengthen our organization's strategic direction, we undertook a comprehensive assessment that included team-building exercises, Visioning Labs, a SWOT analysis, and internal audits. This process enhanced collaboration among our leadership team and equipped us to make informed decisions and drive innovation, while navigating a rapidly changing landscape.

### Charting Our Course

Building on these insights, we've refined our mission, vision, and values. We've also developed a comprehensive financial plan and a strategic plan to guide our future endeavors. These strategic initiatives will ensure our organization's long-term sus-

tainability and impact. Stay tuned for exciting updates about these!

### Fostering a Culture of Excellence and Inclusion

We've implemented strategies to empower our leaders and prioritize DEIJ initiatives through a system of SMART goals and accountability. We're actively working to increase our social justice initiatives and advocacy, particularly for our 2025 conference. Updates to come!

### A Heartfelt Thank You

I want to express my sincere gratitude to our members and Board of Directors for your support and dedication. Your contributions have been invaluable to our success. I'd like to extend a special thanks to members of the Executive Board. I am very grateful for your expertise, dedication, and positive attitudes.

- **Kevin Ayres:** Your efforts to promote safety and inclusivity at the conference have been significant.
- **Bree Jimenez:** Your tireless dedication and innovative ideas have propelled us forward.

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## Evidence-based Practices

### Strategies Supporting the Retention of Special Education Teachers of Color Serving Students with Extensive Support Needs



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Teacher turnover is a pressing concern in special education (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019), including the turnover of special education teachers (SETs) of color who serve students with extensive support needs (i.e., intellectual disability, developmental delay, and autism; Layden et al., 2022). High turnover makes it harder for schools to provide consistent, targeted support for these students, including students of color with disabilities. Turnover disrupts the continuity of care and relationship between SETs and students. This leaves limited time for new staff to build relationships and understand the diverse needs of students, which may delay progress. Gaps in services from turnover further affect the quality of education these students receive, impeding their academic and emotional growth.

SETs serving students with extensive support needs possess specialized skills, such as understanding neurological and developmental disorders and using evidence-based instructional interventions like assistive technology, life skills training, and communication support that is crucial for this student group. Specialized instructional adaptations are essential to meet each student's unique needs. For example, lessons must be tailored and differentiated to ensure accessibility, which requires careful planning and specialized knowledge of curricula. In addition, students with extensive support needs thrive on consistency. Therefore, turnover can lead to heightened anxiety and behavioral issues, which can hinder their progress.

Research by Layden et al. (2022) and Scott et al. (2024) highlighted factors such as job satisfaction, administrative backing, and collegial and paraprofessional support to reduce the turnover of SETs serving students with extensive support needs. These findings suggested that without this crucial support, many SETs serving students with extensive support needs may voluntarily leave the profession, causing disruption in students' continuum of services. Their findings also highlighted differences in turnover between SETs serving students with extensive support needs, based on each SET's race and ethnicity.

Specifically, the researchers found that SETs of color serving students with extensive support needs were 35.7% more likely to intend to leave the profession compared to their white colleagues, setting the stage for better understanding the degree of support needs based on each SET's race and ethnicity.

#### SETs of Color Serving Students with Extensive Support Needs

Researchers have found that the presence of same race teachers has positive implications for student of color achievement (Egalite et al., 2015; Redding, 2019) and discipline outcomes (Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Redding, 2019). Findings have also revealed that SETs of color are motivated to stay in the profession to foster diversity and improve academic and adult outcomes for students with disabilities, including students of color with disabilities (Scott et al., 2021). However, SETs of color report contending with additional layers of burdens in schools when compared to their white colleagues, including facing racial microaggressions and isolation in school spaces that do not reflect their racial and ethnic composition (Scott et al., 2021). Despite these barriers, their contributions are essential to the academic success of all students, including students of color with extensive support needs. For students with extensive support needs, teachers who reflect their cultural backgrounds can be transformative, offering personalized, inclusive, and culturally responsive learning experiences.

While SETs serving students with extensive support needs broadly leave the field for similar reasons of white SETs described earlier in this article, SETs of color face additional challenges that require targeted supports and practices to retain these teachers. SETs of color report feeling a lack of belonging within their schools and report feeling more valued for provid-

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ing culturally relevant support to students than for their intellectual contributions (Cormier et al., 2022). This devaluing of SETs of color strengths may also contribute to their turnover (Scott, 2020) and requires an ongoing system of support designed to reduce the racialized burden on these teachers, who, as noted previously, are value added educators dedicated to serving the needs of students with extensive support needs.

### Retaining SETs for Extensive Support Needs

In the previous section, we described the importance of a diverse SET workforce to serve the unique needs of students with extensive support needs. We explained why it is critically important that the field focuses on retaining these teachers. Moving forward, we offer actionable strategies grounded in research as retention strategies for SETs of color serving students with

extensive support needs. Researchers have consistently recognized the need to offer a collection of social, cultural, and mental health supports as well as equity focused professional learning, compensation, and targeted support programs for both teachers of color and SETs (e.g., Ellis-Robinson et al., 2024; Layden et al., 2022; McGrew et al., 2023; Scott & Alexander, 2019; Scott et al., 2024; Scott & Proffitt, 2021). Table 1 details many of these strategies and examples in which schools could implement immediately.

### Conclusion

While not exhaustive, we argue that schools can easily adopt one or more of these strategies to better understand the unique needs of SETs of color serving students with extensive support needs and ultimately create positive school culture with the types of norms, values, and integrity grounded in diversity and inclusion that will support the retention of these teach-

**Table 1. Strategies to Retain Teachers Serving Students with Extensive Support Needs**

Strategy	Examples
Collective Social Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create space for relationship-building across diverse groups in schools.</li><li>• Develop affinity groups based on common interests and create a “safe” space for special educators serving students with extensive support needs.</li></ul>
Culturally Responsive Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure curricula includes instructional materials and resources from racially diverse authors.</li><li>• Respect and incorporate customs, heritages, and traditions of people of color.</li></ul>
Reduce the Racialized Burden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure all teachers in schools are trained to apply culturally responsive pedagogy, practice, and classroom management for all students, including students of color with disabilities, so this burden does not inequitably fall on the shoulders of SETs of color.</li><li>• Implement training to address bias in school culture, policy, and practice.</li></ul>
Culturally Responsive Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Design professional learning opportunities tailored to the specific needs of teachers serving students with extensive support needs.</li><li>• Ensure all school staff have access to professional learning opportunities including teachers serving students with extensive support needs.</li></ul>
Hire Other Teachers of Color	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recruit and retain additional teachers of color, including paraeducators, to support students with extensive support needs. This could include developing pathway programs that target teachers of color, offering financial incentives, and creating partnerships with Minority Serving Institutions, amongst other strategies.</li><li>• Foster a diverse team to prevent isolation of SETs of color.</li></ul>
Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop mentoring programs for SETs of color serving students with extensive support needs.</li><li>• Continually evaluate these programs to ensure effectiveness and responsiveness to needs.</li></ul>
Equity-focused Admin Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School leaders should embrace school-wide social justice values.</li><li>• School leaders should receive training on ways to best support the unique needs of teachers serving students with extensive support needs.</li></ul>
Culture Climate Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use job satisfaction surveys and cultural climate surveys to evaluate racial discrimination and burnout.</li><li>• Evaluate the well-being of teachers serving students with extensive support needs.</li></ul>
Equity in Compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examine pay scales to ensure competitive compensation for teachers serving students with extensive support needs.</li><li>• Increase financial support opportunities for these teachers.</li></ul>

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ers. It is critical to the success of addressing the turnover of SETs of color serving students with extensive support needs that schools take seriously the call of action to support these educators. Doing so will result in a well-prepared and diverse group of teachers ready and willing to serve our most vulnerable students in schools. ■

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- **Jordan Shurr:** Your unwavering commitment to our mission has guided us through challenges and triumphs.
- **Angi Stone-MacDonald:** Your keen analytical skills and creative talents have been invaluable.
- **Lynn Stansberry Brusnahan:** Your careful stewardship of our finances has ensured our organization's stability.
- **Leah Wood:** Your visionary leadership laid the foundation for our organization's future.

### Looking Ahead

As I transition to the role of past president, I'm committed to a more equitable and inclusive future. I aim to:

- Strengthen our governance and accountability to improve transparency and trust.

- Implement our new Strategic Plan to drive innovation and impact.
- Share our updated mission, vision, and values to inspire and guide our work.
- Promote DEIJ education to empower our members and promote a more inclusive community.
- Prioritize the needs and perspectives of minoritized communities to foster intersectional equity.

I invite everyone to join me in shaping this future. Share your ideas and get involved! Your contributions are essential to our success. I look forward to another year of growth, innovation, and impact. ■

**Liz Harkins (she/her)**  
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## DADD's Diversity Committee is **WORKING** Towards a More Inclusive Organization



**Sarah K. Cox**  
Michigan State University



**Jamie N. Pearson**  
North Carolina State University

The DADD Diversity Committee seeks to advocate for intersectional rights and safety for (a) autistic individuals and individuals with intellectual disabilities and/or developmental disabilities, and (b) the professionals who work with them. The Committee supports intersectional contributions to the field and commits to educating others on the importance of multiple perspectives of intersectionality in special education. We are excited to collaborate on this contribution to the *DADD Express* as the incoming Diversity Committee chair (Dr. Sarah Cox) and outgoing Diversity Committee chair (Dr. Jamie Pearson). We look to highlight our accomplishments from the past three years and outline our plans to continue our efforts towards diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) within DADD.

### Highlighting Accomplishments

Three years ago, when Dr. Jamie Pearson ran for DADD Member at Large and chair of the Diversity Committee, she aimed to move the Diversity Committee forward by doing the **WORK**.

#### **W – Widen**

*We look to widen our efforts to engage in equitable and inclusive practices within our organization.* To strengthen our equity and inclusion practices within DADD, the Diversity Committee established two new Board affiliate positions to serve as DEIJ liaisons. The DEIJ liaisons are responsible for partnering with the Diversity chair and the DADD Executive Board to (a) help meet DADD's mission to be a more diverse and inclusive organization, (b) assist with committee initiatives, ensuring DEIJ principles are infused across all committees, and (c) share perspectives and priorities with DADD committees and the Student Representative. We are thrilled to continue working with our current DEI liaisons, Kayla Malone and Guofeng Shen, through the end of 2025.

#### **O – Offer**

*We offer recommendations to advance culturally responsive curriculum, policies, and practices within DADD.* The Diversity Committee has continued to offer our Community Chat series, which are one-hour webinars that offer strategies and approaches for inclusive and culturally responsive instruction and supports for autistic individuals, and those with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. We welcome readers to view our previous Diversity Committee Community Chats on our [YouTube page](#).

#### **R – Recruit and Retain**

*We strive to recruit and retain more DADD members of color, including students, in partnership with the Membership chair.* Over the past few years, the Diversity Committee has worked to engage more racially and ethnically minoritized groups in DADD. Our current Diversity Committee members have been instrumental in inviting and welcoming underrepresented individuals to DADD and to our Diversity Committee. We have initiated partnerships with organizations such as the Black Empowerment in AutisM (BEAM) Network to better reach underserved autistic individuals and their families. You can learn more about BEAM [here](#).

#### **K – Keep**

*We keep the voices of individuals with autism, intellectual disability and/or developmental disabilities at the forefront of the work that we do.* Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Diversity Committee maintains our commitment to centering, honoring, and amplifying the voices of neurodivergent individuals and those with disabilities at the forefront of the work we do. We are grateful for the perspectives and expertise of the self-advocates who are members of our Diversity Committee. The voices and

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perspectives of neurodivergent and disabled self-advocates in DADD have helped to propel the work of our Diversity Committee.

We also recognize the accessibility limitations of our conferences. As we transition our Diversity Committee leadership to Dr. Cox, we are excited to expand on the WORK of the committee in three critical areas: (a) **INCREASE** access at conferences and meetings, (b) **NOTICE** how practices and policies impact an individual's sense of belonging and (c) **GATHER** data to better understand the impact of our ongoing efforts to increase access and belonging for historically marginalized groups. In this way, Dr. Cox hopes to continue the excellent WORK established by Dr. Pearson, by **WORKING** to advocate for intersectional rights and safety for individuals with autism, intellectual disability, and/or developmental disabilities, as well as those who work with them.

## **WORK(ING)**

### **I – Increase**

*We aim to increase access at conferences and meetings.* With the upcoming annual DADD conference, we also wanted to use this entry to the *DADD Express* to highlight recommendations from the DEIJ membership (as discussed during meetings) that could increase accessibility in larger group meetings. We must acknowledge that the practical decision to complete the previously signed contract requiring us to host the conference in Florida has reduced access for many of our members. In the future, we hope to continue to collaborate with the DADD Board and the larger membership to explore alternative locations where attendees are legally and safely able to attend. For this year, we plan to provide a virtual attendance option for our DEIJ membership meeting at the DADD conference. We hope this will provide an opportunity for more of our members to actively participate while we collaboratively set goals for our committee.

For in-person events, wearing nametags on lanyards is a common practice. These visual cues can help attendees indicate to others how they wish to be addressed, and promote a feeling of inclusion (Martin et al., 2020). For example, if a person has changed their preferred name, they can print their name on the tag to let others know what they would like to be called, affirming a sense of belonging. Additionally, pronouns should not be assumed ([www.pronouns.org](http://www.pronouns.org)), and nametags can be used to indicate participant preferences. Organizations can purchase commercially available stickers and leave them at the sign-in table for participants to self-select. Features to consider include color coding, shape differences, readability of font, and the pronoun options (e.g., she/her, he/him, they/them, ze/hir, a fill-in the blank option). If purchasing stickers is not an option, meeting planners could utilize alternative meth-

ods to include member-selected pronouns. For example, when obtaining enrollment information, participants could provide the identifying information they want to be included on their nametag. Requiring participants to share their pronouns is discouraged (e.g., Included Health, 2021; <https://pronouns.org/asking>), as it may put that person in an uncomfortable position. Therefore, whichever option is used to promote inclusion in the form of proper name and pronoun use, we encourage organizations/conference hosts to create an environment where all attendees are encouraged self-identify and honor the self-identification of others. Creating such an environment can help individuals show and feel respect in an inclusive environment (Included Health, 2021).

### **N – Notice**

*We will notice how practices and policies impact an individual's sense of belonging.* Conferences can be a great place to socially and intellectually connect with others who have selected to attend the same event. For many participants, especially those who are neurodivergent, conferences can also be overwhelming at times. We encourage all conference attendees to take stock of their own capacity to engage in environments that may require more/less social interaction and/or critical reflection and take the time and space necessary for their own well-being. Presenters can support these efforts by promoting authentic engagement during their sessions. This could include using advanced organizers to prepare audience members for what's to come, thereby reducing cognitive load and allowing participants an opportunity to fortify themselves. Presenters could also decrease cognitive demand by providing electronic copies of relevant material through the conference platform to make it easier for participants. Knowing they will have access to materials during and after the presentation will help many participants engage with that material during the session. Finally, presenters can utilize technology to facilitate multiple modes of expressive (e.g., written text, spoken language, augmented or alternative forms of language) and receptive (e.g., reading, listening) communication. This could include live transcripts through PowerPoint, a pre-printed list of important vocabulary words, and allotted time for processing and self-reflection with a visual timer. Consideration of the social and cognitive well-being of conference attendees is a necessity to ensure an inclusive environment where diverse minds can thrive.

### **G – Gather**

*We will gather data to better understand the impact of our ongoing efforts to increase access and belonging for historically marginalized groups.* We believe understanding who we are and are not serving [effectively] is a critical next step in improving our DEIJ efforts within DADD. To that end, the Diversity Committee will continue to partner with the DADD Membership Chair

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and DADD leadership to develop clear procedures to gather and analyze membership demographics. We believe these data will help us better understand barriers to representation within DADD and help lead to actionable next steps that will best serve DADD members from historically marginalized groups.

Finally, we are committed to WORKING together with our DADD members, DADD Diversity Committee members, DEIJ liaisons, and DADD Board leadership to ensure that DADD is a more diverse and inclusive organization that reflects our commitment to inclusion and justice and one where every single DADD member feels a sense of belonging. ■

## References

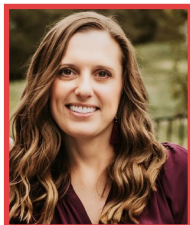
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## Editors' Note



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*Radford University*

We hope you enjoyed this issue of *DADD Express*. As a community, we are committed to presenting content that supports individuals with ASD, ID, and DD, and diversity, equity, inclu-

sion, and justice (DEIJ). We encourage our readership to contact us with content ideas and submission inquiries.

Interested in submitting to *DADD Express*? We are always excited to hear from our community and our members! We are open to any topic related to individuals with ASD, ID, and DD and those who support these individuals. Upcoming issues of *DADD Express* are particularly interested in individuals with ASD, ID, and DD and the following topics:

- Culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy
- Transition planning/postsecondary transition
- Building and sustaining strong relationships with para-professionals
- Meeting student needs in rural areas
- Using coaching to improve practice

Please submit potential manuscripts to us at [alhorn1@radford.edu](mailto:alhorn1@radford.edu) or [slayden@odu.edu](mailto:slayden@odu.edu). ■

**DADD Website:**  
<http://www.daddcec.com/>