



## Teachers' Corner

### Helping Students with Autism Move Beyond Screen Time: Strategies to Build Engagement and Play



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Excessive screen use has become a growing concern for educators and families of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Tablets, phones, and computers can offer structure and comfort—especially through predictable visuals and repetitive feedback—but extended use often comes at the expense of social interaction, imaginative play, and regulation skills (Sadeghi & Pouretamad, 2021; Westby, 2021). Many children with ASD display distress when devices are removed, creating challenges for teachers seeking to broaden engagement and participation in school routines.

Although digital tools can support learning, the key is balance. Research has linked prolonged screen exposure to reduced language growth, limited social reciprocity, and increased attention and emotional difficulties among young children, with these effects more pronounced in students with ASD (Ophir et al., 2023). Educators are uniquely positioned to help students and their families find this balance by introducing structured, evidence-based strategies that replace passive screen time with motivating, developmentally beneficial alternatives. When teachers collaborate with caregivers to extend these strategies into the home, children experience consistent expectations and opportunities to practice self-regulation, communication, and play across settings.

#### Reducing or Fading Excessive Screen Use

Supporting students with autism in reducing screen time requires patience, planning, and empathy. Educators often see that devices meet genuine needs for comfort, sensory regulation, or predictability, making abrupt restriction counterproductive. The goal is not to eliminate technology but to teach balance—helping students shift toward flexible, social, and creative engagement while maintaining a sense of security.

**Use structure and predictability.** Helping students with autism reduce screen time begins with clear routines. Abruptly removing devices can trigger frustration or even self-injury, while a gradual, planned approach supported by positive reinforcement allows smoother transitions. Visual cues such as countdown timers, picture schedules, and “first/then” prompts—*first puzzle, then iPad*—help students anticipate change and feel secure (Hume et al., 2012; Leaf et al., 2016).

**Table 1. Reducing or Fading Excessive Screen Use**

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Strategy	Description	Example in Practice	Intended Outcome
Use structure and predictability	Provide clear routines and visual cues to help children anticipate transitions	“First puzzle, then iPad”; countdown timers; picture schedules	Reduces frustration and anxiety, supports smoother transitions
Observe patterns of use	Identify when and why screens are used most often to inform planning	Note device use during downtime, transitions, or high-stress moments	Helps plan realistic, gradual reductions without abrupt restriction
Gradual fading	Slowly reduce screen access while pairing with preferred activities	Shorten tablet time by 5–10 minutes daily while introducing drawing or blocks	Promotes flexibility and tolerance for reduced screen use
Collaborate with families	Share visual cues, transition scripts, and strategies for home use	Parents mirror classroom “first/then” cues at home	Consistency across settings supports generalization of new routines
Track engagement and affect	Monitor child’s emotional state, attention, and independence during transitions	Record observations of distress or successful engagement	Guides adjustments and identifies effective strategies

**Observe patterns before changing routines.** Before making adjustments, educators should note when and why screens are used most often. Many students turn to devices during downtime or transitions when predictability is low. Recognizing these moments makes it easier to plan realistic changes. The goal is not abrupt restriction, but structured limits paired with equally engaging alternatives. As shown in Table 1: Reducing or Fading Excessive Screen Use, pairing gradual reduction with motivating replacement activities can result in smoother transitions and fewer behavioral challenges.

**Collaborate with families.** Parents frequently rely on screens to calm their child or manage household routines. Coordinating strategies across home and school promotes consistency and generalization. Educators can share the same visual supports and transition scripts used in the classroom so parents can mirror them at home (Radesky et al., 2020). Using identical “first/then” cues across settings helps children understand expectations and builds confidence with new routines.

**Address the function of screen use.** For many students, screen time serves an important sensory or regulatory purpose. Removing them without alternatives can increase distress. Identifying this function helps teachers and families introduce effective alternatives—such as short movement breaks, deep-pressure activities, or preferred non-digital items—that meet the same need. Instead of focusing solely on reinforcement, educators can help students replace regulation, offering strategies such as:

- Short movement breaks or access to sensory paths
- Deep-pressure or proprioceptive activities (e.g., wall push-ups, chair squeezes)
- Access to quiet or low-stimulation spaces
- Music or rhythmic movement opportunities

Tracking engagement, emotional state, and tolerance during transitions helps monitor progress. Over time, gradual fading supported by consistent reinforcement fosters flexibility and self-regulation while maintaining a sense of safety and success (Frauenberger et al., 2016).

## Replacing Screen Use with Engagement and Play

Simply reducing access to devices is rarely enough—students need engaging, meaningful activities that meet the same needs in other ways. When teachers and families plan enjoyable alternatives that offer predictability, sensory feedback, or social connection, children are more likely to participate and less likely to protest the loss of screen time.

**Identify what motivates the child.** Successful transitions away from screens depend on offering activities that are genuinely motivating for the child. Selecting effective replacements begins with understanding what the child finds rewarding. Short preference assessments—through observation, structured choice, or simple student interviews—can reveal which toys, materials, or social interactions the student seeks most (Fisher et al., 1992; Hagogian et al., 2004). For example, a student drawn

to bright visuals or rhythmic sounds may be especially engaged by drawing, musical instruments, or light-up sensory items.

Once motivating alternatives are identified, these items can be intentionally paired with screen transitions. For example, a child might experience “first tablet, then drawing,” or “tablet finished—now drums.” The goal is not only to remove screen time but to replace it with developmentally rich, engaging activities that foster communication, imitation, and play skills. Common examples of preferred non-digital alternatives include:

- Building materials: blocks, LEGO® sets, or other construction toys
- Art supplies: drawing, painting, or craft stations
- Music and movement: instruments, rhythm activities, or dance
- Sensory tools: fidgets, playdough, weighted items, or light-up toys

As summarized in Table 2: Engaging Alternatives to Screen Use, these activities should be immediately accessible, varied, and closely matched to the child’s genuine interests, ensuring that screen-free options are appealing and sustainable.

**Embed structured, adult-supported play.** *Guided play*—where adults model turn-taking, imitation, or simple problem-solving—has been shown to strengthen communication and adaptive skills in children with autism (Ingersoll & Schreibman, 2006; Kasari et al., 2006). Educators can integrate these interactions naturally throughout the day: sharing building blocks, drawing together, or leading brief cooperative games. These experiences replace solitary device time with shared, reciprocal moments that build both competence and confidence.

**Involve peers and families.** Opportunities for peer interaction help students generalize skills beyond adult-mediated settings. Peer-mediated strategies are another powerful option. Pairing students for brief, structured play tasks (e.g., rolling a ball, completing a puzzle together, or cooperative building) provides natural reinforcement and increases generalization of social behaviors across settings (Odom et al., 2010). Success depends on scaffolding interactions—offering visual cues, turn-taking prompts, and adult support to ensure positive experiences. Collaboration with families extends these benefits at home; teachers can suggest specific activities, visuals, or short play routines that mirror school-based approaches, promoting consistency and success across environments (Radesky et al., 2020).

**Monitor and adapt.** Children’s interests evolve, and so should their engagement plans. Regularly observe which activities sustain attention or reduce frustration and adjust as needed. Rotating materials or offering brief choices maintains novelty and motivation (Piazza et al., 1996). Over time, this flexible approach allows students to shift naturally toward richer, more social forms of play while maintaining the sense of regulation that screens once provided.

## Conclusion

Helping students with autism move beyond excessive screen time is not about restriction, but redirection. When educators

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**Table 2. Engaging Alternatives to Screen Use**

Type of Activity	Examples	Purpose / Benefit
Building materials	Blocks, LEGO® sets, construction toys	Supports fine motor skills, problem-solving, and imaginative play
Art supplies	Drawing, painting, craft stations	Encourages creativity, sensory exploration, and expression
Music and movement	Instruments, rhythm activities, dance	Provides sensory feedback, self-regulation, and social engagement
Sensory tools	Fidgets, playdough, weighted items, light-up toys	Supports sensory regulation and emotional calming
Structured, adult-supported play	Guided turn-taking, imitation, simple problem-solving games	Strengthens communication, adaptive skills, and confidence
Peer-mediated play	Cooperative tasks like rolling a ball or completing a puzzle together	Encourages social reciprocity and skill generalization across settings

and families work together to plan predictable transitions and offer motivating, hands-on alternatives, children gain opportunities to connect, communicate, and play. Gradual fading of device use, paired with structured, social activities, supports regulation and engagement across settings. By approaching screen-time management as a shared, relationship-centered effort, teachers can help students build the foundation for lifelong learning and participation. ■

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## Evidence-based Practices

### Using AI to Enhance Communication and Engagement Opportunities Through the UDL Framework



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#### Introduction: Why Focus on Communication

“Unhindered communication is the key prerequisite to quality education” (Zdravkova et al., 2022, p. 2). Artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer just a possibility as a formative educational tool—it is already part of schools and classrooms, with the potential to transform learning, expand opportunities for students with disabilities, and reduce teacher workloads (Kim, 2025). Teachers using AI weekly for tasks like creating materials report saving nearly six hours a week, which they reinvest into giving more personalized feedback, individualized lessons, family communication, and a better work-life balance (Gallup-Walton Family Foundation, 2025).

At the same time, another survey showed that special educator participants reported spending significant hours outside their contract time on job tasks, with many logging over 15 additional hours weekly (Jacobsen, 2025), underscoring the need for supports that reduce workload while strengthening evidence-based instructional practices (EBIPs). Communication is a natural focus for this work because it is foundational to autonomy, relationships, inclusion, and participation (Walker et al., 2022; Zdravkova et al., 2022). Students have the right to appropriate communication aids supported by EBIPs, such as augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices or picture supports to express needs, wants, and ideas (Peckham-Hardin et al., 2018). For many students with autism and intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), this requires strategies like social stories, modeling, visual schedules, systematic and explicit instruction, assistive technology (AT), and choice-making opportunities (Browder et al., 2014). While effective, these supports take time to create. AI offers teachers quick, adaptable tools to draft and individualize communication materials, aligning to EBIPs and through the lens of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to provide students with multiple ways to engage, represent ideas, and express themselves.

#### Integrating AI into Current Instructional Practices Through the Lens of Universal Design for Learning

AI is not meant as a replacement for teaching but as a collaborative tool to help teachers quickly create communication supports such as visuals, sentence starters, social story scripts, or multiple-choice options (Ayers, 2025). While virtual reality (VR) and robotics show promising results for teaching communication, they are often not accessible in school, so in this article, I will focus on free (as of this publication), easy-to-use AI tools. As the saying goes, “You don’t have to reinvent the wheel,” and through the lens of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), AI can support teachers in offering multiple means of expression, representation, and engagement (Digital Learning Institute, n.d.). For example, text-to-speech or speech-to-text tools (e.g., Speechify, Natural Readers) align with representation; MagicSchool, Freckle, and ChatGPT can generate individualized supports to enhance engagement; and platforms such as WaveVideo, TinyWow, and Recraft allow students to express knowledge in creative ways (Saborío-Taylor & Rojas-Ramírez, 2024). Importantly, teachers remain the decision-makers, using AI to enhance—not replace—EBIPs and an inclusive learning environment.

#### Practical Classroom Strategies for Teachers

##### Strategy 1: AI-Generated Social Story Scripts

Social stories are widely used tools for teaching communication and social skills to students with IDD, but creating individualized stories can be time-consuming (Bozkurt & Vuran, 2014). AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, MagicSchool) can help teachers quickly draft scripts for common situations (e.g., greeting peers, asking for help, joining a game, or walking in the hallway) that can then be tailored to student needs. Teachers can also use AI to generate accompanying visuals or augmentative and AAC device word lists, giving students multiple ways to engage and respond. AI reduces preparation time while allowing

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teachers to focus on adapting stories for their students, embedding communication training, and supporting inclusion through multiple means of engagement and expression. To ensure effectiveness, teachers should still follow best practices, such as

- Identify target behavior and criteria before drafting (Sam, 2016);
- Structure stories with a title, beginning-end-middle, and use a 2:1 ratio of descriptive to directive sentences (Gray, 2018);
- Match language to student level;
- Use positive first- or third-person statements, WH-questions, and visuals when possible (Como et al., 2024; Wright et al., 2016);
- Monitor progress and revise as needed; and
- Pre-teach key vocabulary using EBIPs.

Consider students' mode of communication to provide them with opportunities to engage, read along, and promote vocabulary and comprehension skills. Using AI to help create word lists for AAC devices can help reduce preparation time. The district- or school-assigned speech–language pathologist (SLP) should be able to provide support when implementing instruction with AAC devices.

### Strategy 2: AI for Visual Schedule Supports

Consistent routines are key for classroom management, and AI can save teachers time by suggesting and creating visuals for schedules, calendars, or routines. For example, a teacher might prompt ChatGPT to “create a list of five visual prompts with short labels for getting ready to go home” and then pair the text with the appropriate visuals. These AI drafts should always be individualized for the specific student, not used as a one-size-fits-all. To ensure quality, review AI suggestions against best practices: select visuals that are age-appropriate and as realistic as possible, paired with text to promote reading, and arrange from left to right for horizontal readers or top to bottom for vertical readers (Lentini & Fox, n.d.; Turner, n.d.). Addition-

**Table 1. Using AI to Enhance Instructional Supports Through the Lens of UDL**

UDL Principle	AI Strategy Example
Multiple Means of Representation	AI provides simplified text, picture-based supports, or translations.
Multiple Means of Engagement	AI generates interest-based conversation starters, role-play scenarios, or calming scripts.
Multiple Means of Action & Expression	AI creates sentence frames, AAC-compatible vocabulary, or differentiated writing supports.
Remember to modify or adapt the AI generated product to fit your individualized students' needs.	

ally, when students benefit from tactile/concrete objects for communication, adapt the AI prompt accordingly (e.g., “List five concrete objects for visual supports for going home.”). AI-generated visuals reduce prep time and give teachers flexible tools to support student communication and engagement.

### Strategy 3: AI for Choice-Making

Making choices is a fundamental communication right and supports both classroom management and student autonomy. AI tools (e.g., MagicSchool, TeacherTool.AI) can quickly generate or expand on choice board options or lessons, comprehension checks, reinforcers, or core word use. Additionally, AI can recommend images to pair with each activity. To implement effectively, follow best practices, such as

- Begin with only two or three options and expand choices as the student progresses;
- Ensure boards are always accessible; and
- Include student interests to maintain engagement.

When used this way, AI-created choice boards align with UDL by offering multiple means of representation and expression while reducing prep time.

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**Table 2. Example of a Social Story Script Using ChatGPT**

Step 1: Type in a Simple Prompt to ChatGPT	Step 2: Review the AI Output	Step 3: Modify Draft as Needed	Step 4: Adapt for Your Students
“Create a social story script for teaching a student about respecting personal space.”	“Sometimes I want to stand close to my friends. It is important to remember that everyone has a personal space bubble. Personal space means there should be some room between me and another person. When I stand too close, my friends might feel uncomfortable. When I give people space, they feel safe and happy. If I’m not sure, I can look at their face or ask, “Is it okay if I sit here?” Respecting personal space helps me be a good friend.”	Notice that the social story created by ChatGPT does not contain all components of an effective social story (e.g., does not address all the WH-questions), giving a good example of why critiquing and modifying the output is necessary for teachers to do. Remember, ChatGPT is providing a draft, not the final product.	Some things to consider when modifying or adapting a social story script include (a) Pair the script with visuals or icons for non-readers; (b) Shorten or expand the lines depending on student needs; (c) Practice through role-play with peers or staff; and (d) Provide ChatGPT with more context for more targeted outputs, such as the age or grade-level of the students you would like it to be geared towards.

(Evidence-based Practices, continued from page 5)

## Final Considerations for Teachers

AI can save time and expand access to communication supports, but teachers remain the decision makers. Always protect student privacy by avoiding identifiable information and reviewing AI outputs for accuracy, cultural relevance, and clarity before classroom use. AI should complement—not replace—evidence-based strategies such as modeling, reinforcement, and individualized and explicit instruction. When starting out, begin small: try one AI-generated script, schedule, or visual, and then revise as needed to ensure quality. Keeping materials short and consistent helps prevent AI from overproducing or overwhelming students. Above all, use AI through a UDL lens to ensure students have multiple ways to connect, communicate, and participate in inclusive classrooms. ■

**Table 3. Free Teacher-Friendly AI Tools and Uses**

Free Teacher-Friendly AI Tool	Uses
Speechify	Text-to-Speech
MagicSchool	Creating choice boards, individualized supports, lesson plans
Diffit	Creating visuals/texts at different levels.
ChatGPT	Creating communication supports
Canva Magic Write	Creating visuals
TeacherTool.AI	Creating choice boards
NotebookLM	Summarizing documents; creating podcasts, videos, and mind maps.
AI for Education	Provides a free curated prompt library for different educational contests and tasks that can be copied and pasted into chatbot tools, such as ChatGPT
Brisk Prompt Library	Provides a free curated prompt library for different educational contests and tasks that can be copied and pasted into chatbot tools, such as ChatGPT

**Note.** AI tools are constantly changing, which means that their uses and abilities may be different, they may change in price, or they may no longer be active.

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## President's Message

### Angi Stone-MacDonald, PhD



I am honored to introduce myself and to serve as president of the Division for Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD) for 2026. It is a privilege to step into this role and to work alongside such a dedicated, thoughtful, and committed community of professionals.

As we begin this year together, I want to reflect on the strength and momentum of our organization. DADD continues to be a space where professional learning, connection, and community flourish. Our recent gathering in Long Beach, California welcomed more than 700 attendees. It was a powerful reminder of what we can accomplish when we come together with shared purpose, curiosity, and care. That energy will continue to guide our work throughout the year ahead.

Over the past several years, DADD has engaged in meaningful reflection and dialogue with our Board and membership. This work resulted in newly adopted mission, vision, and values that will guide us moving forward. At the core of this direction is a shared commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable professional community; one that supports growth, advances research, and improves educational and life outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities, including autistic individuals and individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Our vision is ambitious and intentional. We are committed to building a culture grounded in diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, accessibility, and belonging. We aim to empower educational professionals with the confidence, skills, and support they need to lead effectively. We seek to connect members with resources and knowledge that translate research into meaningful, positive outcomes. These commitments shape our priorities, our initiatives, and how we engage with one another across the year.

Our values clarify what we stand for. We believe that all people can learn and exercise agency in their lives. We believe that equitable and effective education is a right, not a privilege.

We affirm that justice, inclusion, and accessibility are central to quality of life and must be actively demonstrated and defended. We believe education must be informed by evidence and research-based practices, and that educators who are informed, supported, and valued are essential to success. These values guide not only what we do, but how we show up for one another.

It is also important to acknowledge the broader context in which we do this work. These are challenging and unsettling times for education, for special education, and for many historically marginalized communities, including immigrant communities, the LGBTQIA+ community, communities of color, and individuals who live at the intersections of multiple identities. The challenges are real, and the stakes are high. Yet our responsibility remains clear. We must persist. We must advocate. We must continue to fight for what is right for the individuals, families, and communities we serve. DADD is not simply a professional organization; it is a collective voice committed to equity, dignity, and opportunity.

Throughout this year, I encourage you to remain curious, to be fully present, and to allow yourself to be challenged. Embrace complexity. Sit with uncertainty. Engage with ideas that stretch your thinking and invite growth. We have a lot of resources to support you and your growth about strategies and research-based practices to improve outcomes.

Thank you for entrusting me with this role. I look forward to the year ahead and am confident that, together, we will continue to make a meaningful impact in the lives of autistic individuals, people with developmental disabilities, educators, families, and other stakeholders. If this message resonates with you, I invite you to connect with our committee chairs to become more involved.

Thank you for the expertise, care, and commitment you bring to this field and to DADD. Your work matters, and it makes a difference every day. ■

Angi Stone-MacDonald, PhD  
DADD President

## DADD CAN Brief: Current Special Education Policy & Legislation Update

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Following two well-attended sessions at the 2026 Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD) conference featuring CEC Executive Director Chad Rummel, I am inviting colleagues, families, self-advocates, practitioners, and partners to join me in forming a DADD Advocacy Committee focused on special education policy, implementation integrity, and coordinated action. The proposed DADD Advocacy Committee will serve as a mechanism to translate these federal signals into coordinated action. Committee work will prioritize

- (1) rapid, plain-language briefs on federal developments;
- (2) strategic outreach during appropriations and oversight cycles; and
- (3) dissemination of disability-informed guidance that centers implementation integrity (e.g., evaluation timelines, service delivery, and evidence-based instruction) focused on students with autism and DD.

To participate, please email [cancoordinator@daddcec.com](mailto:cancoordinator@daddcec.com) with your name, state, role (e.g., educator/administrator, related service provider, faculty, family member, self-advocate, student), and your top one to two advocacy priorities.

### Spring 2026 Washington Happenings

Federal policy developments this spring underscore a central message for the field: statutory protections under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) depend on both adequate funding and stable administrative capacity. In early February 2026, FY 2026 education spending package was signed into law, preserving core special education investments and rejecting earlier proposals that would have eliminated or restructured key IDEA programs (CEC, 2026a).

The congressional direction is positioned to advocate that education funding should remain within the U.S. Department of Education, that staffing capacity must be sufficient to carry out duties in federal education laws, and that funds must be distributed in a timely manner, paired with regular briefings to Congress regarding any movement of programs across agencies (CEC, 2026a). Appropriations details reinforce these policy signals. The joint explanatory statement accompanying the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2026 provides line-item funding levels relevant to special education, including sustained support for early intervention and IDEA national activities (capacity-building) such as personnel preparation, technical assistance and dissemination, state personnel development, parent information centers, and educational technology/media/materials (U.S. House of Representatives, 2026).

These investments matter because they underpin the workforce pipeline, implementation supports, and family-facing infrastructure that help states and districts meet IDEA obligations with fidelity—especially in rural and under-resourced contexts where shortages and service gaps are persistent.

A second, closely related policy thread is the continued elevation of science of reading and structured literacy in federal education discussions. A bipartisan House appropriations subcommittee held a hearing highlighting federal investments that support literacy, including research, educator preparation, and formula funding streams such as IDEA. The hearing summary notes emphasize the federal role in strengthening reading outcomes and the variability in how teacher preparation programs equip educators to teach reading, issues that have direct implications for students with disabilities who require explicit, systematic instruction aligned with IEP goals (CEC, 2026b). Related remarks from the House Appropriations Subcommittee Chair also framed childhood literacy as a national priority and positioned the hearing as an early-year focus for the subcommittee's work (U.S. House Committee on Appropriations, 2026).

In combination, these developments point to a practical advocacy agenda for Spring 2026:

- (a) sustain and strengthen IDEA investments across early childhood through school-age services;
- (b) protect and reinforce federal administrative capacity (particularly within the Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP]), that supports monitoring, guidance, and timely implementation supports; and
- (c) ensure that science-of-reading momentum translates into disability-inclusive literacy policy and practice, including access to intensive intervention, progress monitoring, and evidence-based instructional routines.

Please feel free to reach out with any advocacy questions, and thank you for considering joining the DADD Advocacy Committee. ■

### TAKE ACTION!

- **Join the DADD Advocacy Committee:**  
Email [cancoordinator@daddcec.com](mailto:cancoordinator@daddcec.com)
- **Act now through CEC's Legislative Action Center:**  
Use the link to send an advocacy message in minutes:  
[Legislative Action Center | Council for Exceptional Children](#)
- **Share this brief:** Forward to one colleague/family network to grow coordinated advocacy.

### References

Council for Exceptional Children. (2026, February 6). Education funding bill signed into law, one third of the way through the fiscal year. *Special Education TODAY*. <https://exceptionalchildren.org/blog/education-funding-bill-signed-law-one-third-way-through-fiscal-year>

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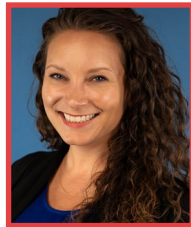
Council for Exceptional Children. (2026, February 13). House appropriations subcommittee lifts up science of reading. *Special Education TODAY*. <https://exceptionalchildren.org/blog/house-appropriations-subcommittee-lifts-science-reading>

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U.S. House of Representatives. (2026, January 19). Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2026: Joint explanatory statement (JES) [PDF]. <https://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20260119/DEF%20LHHS%20HS%20THUD%20-%20JES%20-%20Division%20B%20-%20LHHS%20-%2019-2026%20-%20Reduced%20File%20Size.pdf>

## Editor's Note

**Kelly B. Kearney, EdD, BCBA-D**  
Editor, DADD Express



Dear DADD Colleagues,

Welcome to the spring 2026 issue of *DADD Express*! In this issue, you will find articles that reflect our ongoing goal of translating evidence-based practices into actionable guidance that can be readily implemented by the community. This is highlighted in our *Teacher's Corner* and *EBP Brief* articles. Additionally, this issue features highlights from DADD's 27th Annual Conference on Autism, Intellectual Disability, & Developmental Disabilities in Long Beach, California. We hope to see you at DADD's 28th Annual Conference, January 6–9, 2027, in Phoenix, Arizona.

### Call for Submissions

We invite you to contribute to the next issue of *DADD Express*! Your expertise and innovation are central to the strength and

impact of this newsletter. We are currently seeking submissions that provide practical, evidence-based guidance to support and inform our community. As practitioners, researchers, and advocates, your experiences are vital to the continued advancement of our field. By sharing your lessons learned, successes, and insights, you help enrich our collective knowledge base and advance our shared mission of improving outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities. This newsletter thrives because of dedicated members like you.

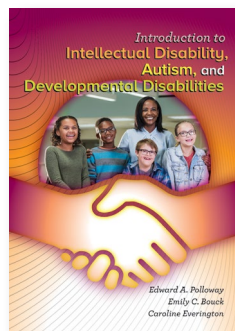
Thank you for your ongoing commitment to DADD's mission and for considering *DADD Express* as a platform for sharing your valuable expertise with our community.

To submit a manuscript or learn more about our submission guidelines, please contact us at [express@daddcec.com](mailto:express@daddcec.com). We look forward to featuring your contributions in upcoming issues. ■

**Kelly B. Kearney, EdD, BCBA-D**  
Editor, *DADD Express*

## Introduction to Intellectual Disability, Autism, and Developmental Disabilities

Edward A. Polloway  
Emily C. Bouck  
Caroline Everington



This foundational text presents a comprehensive introduction to intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, and other developmental disabilities, focusing on characteristics, evidence-based practices, and supports across the lifespan.

Designed for educators, service providers, and future professionals, the book integrates research, policy, and practice to help strengthen outcomes and inform instruction in diverse educational and human service settings.

Get your copy now! [Click here](#) to purchase. ■

## 2026 DADD Conference Highlights

This past January, just over 730 attendees, presenters, and exhibitors participated in DADD's 27th Annual Conference on Autism, Intellectual Disability, & Developmental Disabilities in Long Beach, California—a new attendance record!

### Highlights from the Four-Day Conference

#### Focused Training

Eight pre-conference and four post-conference workshops were held, including topics such as curricular access research, transition supports, policy, and more.

#### Opening General Session

Dr. Robert Pennington presented the opening keynote presentation, *Two Pathways Towards Educating Students with Extensive Support Needs*, discussing how the ways we design and deliver education can either limit or expand opportunities for students with extensive support needs (ESN).



Photo 1. Opening General Session

#### Closing General Session

The closing session featured a moderated panel of students with disabilities, highlighting inclusive college pathways at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), California State University, Northridge (CSUN), and California State University, Long Beach (CSULB). Dr. Jovan Jacobs and Chris Coyle moderated as university professors and administrators sharing a brief overview of their inclusive college programs, followed students who shared about their lived experiences. This session focused on student voice and perspective, while inviting educational professionals to re-focus on students' needs, goals, and aspirations.



Photo 2. Closing General Session

#### Lecture & Poster Presentations

308 lecture, roundtable, and poster presentations were on the program!

#### New Social Activities

We held our first ever DADD awards presentation and dance party, hosted by the fabulous **DJ B Diamond** as well as several dinner party mixers—attendees signed up to join a group for dinner and to meet new friends.

#### Conference Exhibitors & Sponsors

Thank you to our conference sponsors, Attainment (Platinum Sponsor); Anderson Center for Autism (Gold Sponsor); ACE ABA Software (Silver Sponsor); and Stages Learning (Bronze Sponsor).

And thanks to our exhibitors: Cosworth Publishing, Division on Career Transition and Development; Los Angeles County Office of Education; CalABLE program; Rhonda Weiss Center for Accessible IDEA Data/AEM; Exceptional Lives; Friends on the Block; Safety-Care by QBS; The College Experience at Russell Sage College; Dolly Gray Book Award; Guardian Pharmacy of Southern California; Pharmacy Alternatives; DADD Membership; Village; Sora; New York Life; California CEC; Speech Kingdom LLC; Gibbon; Axiom Learning; and Kibu.

#### DADD Membership Outreach

Division members participated both in-person and virtually in the Annual General Business Meeting, Division Award Presentations, and Division Committee Meetings. Additionally, Ruby Humphris, DADD's Student Representative, hosted a highly successful Student Roundtable Networking Event!

#### Student Poster Presentation Award Recipients:

Congratulations to:

- **Alvina Chavez**, Texas A&M; *Teaching to Tip: Real-World Finance Skills for Transition With IDD*, tied 2nd place
- **Lora Murphy**, University of Arkansas; *Collaborative Experiences of Individualized Education Program Team Members as a Result of Student Involvement*, tied 2nd place
- **Jessica Nico**, University of New Mexico; *Reimagining Echolalia Through Cascading Coaching: Supporting NDBA Use with Autistic Children*. 1st place

#### Save the Date!

Please mark your calendars for DADD's 28th Annual Conference, January 6–9, 2027, in Phoenix, Arizona. The Call for Proposals will be shared soon at <https://daddcec.com/dadd-events>.

For additional information on DADD's conferences, please contact Ashley Anderson, DADD Conference Coordinator, at [confcoord@daddcec.com](mailto:confcoord@daddcec.com). ■

## ETADD Call for Submissions

ETADD co-editors Emily Bouck and Ginevra Courtade are excited to remind DADD members about Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities Editorial Policy (ETADD), the official journal of the division.

- ETADD publishes multiple types of manuscripts: research manuscripts [group, single case, qualitative, quasi-experimental, survey]; conceptual/position; systematic reviews of the literature; and (new) translation of research to practice manuscripts. We are always seeking high-quality submissions for these areas and encourage DADD members to consider ETADD as you submit manuscripts!
- Check out the ETADD article guidelines on the DADD website at <https://daddcec.com/publications/etadd>.
- Please remember all ETADD submissions are done through our Sage ScholarOne site at <https://mc04.manuscriptcentral.com/etadd>.
- Should you have any questions about the submission process or the appropriateness of your manuscript, please reach out to Emily ([ebouck@daddcec.com](mailto:ebouck@daddcec.com)) or Ginevra ([gcourtade@daddcec.com](mailto:gcourtade@daddcec.com)). We are always happy to talk with new or returning ETADD authors! ■