

Press Release: Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities Announces 2026 Early Career Research Award Recipient

(For Immediate Release)

January 5, 2026

The Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD) is pleased to announce Dr. Ciara Ousley as the 2026 Early Career Research Award recipient. This award honors individuals who demonstrate exceptional promise in research related to students with autism, intellectual disability, and other developmental disabilities at the early stages of their careers.

Dr. Ciara Ousley is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, a Research Affiliate with the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools, and Director of the Social Communication for Autism and Developmental Disabilities (SCADD) Lab. She earned her Ph.D. from Pennsylvania State University and has rapidly established an impactful research program focused on improving social communication outcomes for young children with autism and other developmental disabilities. Her work centers on children with limited or no vocal speech who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), integrating naturalistic developmental behavioral interventions with family- and sibling-centered approaches that are feasible, meaningful, and responsive to lived experiences.

Dr. Susan Sheridan, George Holmes University Professor at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, emphasized Dr. Ousley's early-career trajectory, noting, *"She has tremendous potential, and few others in our college and Center have made such meaningful strides this early in their career. Her work is highly significant, and she has already demonstrated the skills, collaborations, and productivity to ensure long-term success."* Colleagues also highlighted the practical and relational impact of her research, pointing to her innovative studies on AAC and sibling dynamics, her success in securing competitive funding, and her leadership of the SCADD Lab, where she mentors undergraduate and graduate students.

This distinguished award is presented by DADD, a special interest association within the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), the largest international professional organization dedicated to supporting students with disabilities. Since 1963, DADD has been a leading voice in educating students with autism, intellectual disability, and other developmental disabilities, contributing to research dissemination, developing professional practice standards, and fostering robust professional networking.

The award ceremony is scheduled for January 16, 2026, at DADD's annual conference in Long Beach, CA. For further information, please contact DeVoshia Mason Martin, DADD Awards Chair, at awardschair@daddcec.com. Additional details about the Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities can be found at <http://www.daddcec.com/>.