

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

**REQUEST TO ESTABLISH A NEW CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA  
CENTER FOR DISABILITY STUDIES IN LITERACY, LANGUAGE, AND LEARNING**

**Action Requested:** Consider approval of the request by the University of Northern Iowa to establish a Center for Disability Studies in Literacy, Language, and Learning in the College of Education.

**Executive Summary:** The proposed Center will explore, promote, and support the literacy and communication development of children with significant disabilities through effective, education-based practices. Federal policy requires that all children, including those with the most complex developmental needs, have access to evidence-based literacy programs.

This proposal was reviewed by the Board Office and the Council of Provosts and is recommended for approval. Creation of the Center requires Board of Regents approval, as stated in the Board of Regents Policy Manual §6.08, because the Center will necessitate an annual institutional commitment  $\geq$  \$250,000. This request addresses the Board of Regents Strategic Plan priorities (2.0) to “provide needed service and promote economic growth” and (3.0) to “discover new knowledge through research, scholarship, and creative activities.”

**Background:**

- ◇ **Description of Center.** The proposed Center will be a collaborative venture drawing together families of children with significant developmental and sensory disabilities; professional education personnel, including those in early childhood, Head Start, and general and special education; community and regional stakeholders; national experts; and faculty from UNI’s Departments of Special Education, Communication Science and Disorders, and other relevant research fields.
- ◇ **Need for Center.** Data gathered and reported by the U.S. Department of Education show that the majority of children with significant developmental and sensory disabilities continue to face educational segregation and exclusion from critical literacy and language learning opportunities. The proposed Center will play a significant role in meeting national objectives for students’ literacy and communication.
- ◇ **Center focus areas.** The proposed Center will have four areas of focus:
  - 📖 *Professional development at the preservice and postgraduate levels.* The proposed Center will develop model demonstration learning sites, curricular materials, courses, and resources to promote highly qualified teachers and therapists.
  - 📖 *Family support.* The proposed Center will create resources to support families’ promotion of literacy and language development in their children with significant developmental and sensory disabilities.
  - 📖 *Policy.* The proposed Center will develop materials, such as white papers and research reports, to inform policy makers who can direct resources to promote full citizenship for all children.

 *Scholarship.* The proposed Center will engage in cutting-edge research in the areas of literacy development, language therapies, and effective methods of instruction encompassing technologies that bring together children with and without disabilities under the guidance of highly qualified educators and therapists. In addition, the proposed Center will play a key role in communicating national efforts that explore and document effective education-based methods and therapies.

- ◇ Relationship to College's Strategic Plan. The proposed Center will complement the University's strategic plan commitment to student learning and excellence in teaching; high-quality teaching and learning environments and socially responsible contributions to the state of Iowa, the nation, and the world; and excellence in teaching and learning, research, scholarship, creative work, and service.

The proposed Center will promote the preparation of highly qualified educators. Educators-in-preparation, graduate students, and faculty will have access to cutting-edge scholarship, educational technologies, and model demonstration educational sites generated by the proposed Center's personnel. Competitive grants and Foundation funds will be used for assistantships and undergraduate and graduate student research.

- ◇ Relationship to Iowa Department of Education. In 2006, the Iowa Department of Education implemented a six-year plan<sup>1</sup> to improve the delivery of special education services and support to Iowa's children and families. The plan is in response to federal concerns regarding access to general education settings and curricula for Iowa children with developmental disabilities. Through the development of model demonstration sites and dissemination of materials, the proposed Center will play an integral role in promoting the state's efforts to increase inclusive opportunities for all children. The optimal development of literacy, language, and communication skills is central to full and valued citizenship for individuals with disabilities.

- ◇ Relationship to other UNI centers. The proposed Center will work closely with other centers at the University. The Roy Eblen Speech and Hearing Clinic in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders provides services to individuals with all types of communication disorders. Clinic faculty will be core faculty members in the proposed Center. Knowledge generated by the proposed Center related to literacy and communication will enhance the Clinic's services. The Regents' Center for Early Developmental Education in the College of Education emphasizes innovative scholarship, teacher preparation, and curriculum development focused on children birth through age eight. Core faculty of the proposed Center serve on the Regents' Center advisory board and will collaborate with the proposed Center to improve the education and development of all children.

The proposed Center will generate knowledge, educational technologies, and materials that will support the preparation of pre- and in-service teachers in the areas of literacy, communication, instructional technology, early childhood, special education, educational psychology, assessment, and curriculum development. Through the proposed Center's development of model demonstration sites, field-based teacher preparation experiences and student teaching environments will be enhanced.

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<sup>1</sup> Revised in February 2008.

- ◇ Relationship to other Iowa centers. The Iowa Center for Assistive Technology Education and Research and the Center for Disability and Development at the University of Iowa do not provide direct school-based services and scholarship. The proposed Center will focus on educational and school-based opportunities for students with disabilities, including scholarship related to teaching and learning, family advocacy related to school and education issues, and policy directed at improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities.
- ◇ Unique features of the University of Northern Iowa. The proposed Center will bring together faculty with unique expertise in literacy, developmental disabilities, communication, applied and action research in classrooms, U.S. Department of Education grant writing skills, and a commitment to improving the school lives of all children. UNI has a tradition of leadership in education and special education. The proposed Center will be located at the Price Laboratory School, recently established as the Research and Development School for the state of Iowa. In collaboration with school personnel, the core faculty of the proposed Center will further develop and expand understanding of effective practices to promote the optimal learning of highly diverse student populations.
- ◇ Required Resources. The proposed Center will be located at the Price Laboratory School; minimum modifications will be needed. Extensive equipment needs for the proposed Center, such as computers, printers, and educational technologies related to literacy and students with developmental disabilities, will be covered by external grant dollars. Personnel will include five core faculty and graduate students supported by external funds and the Graduate College.
- ◇ Expected need. The needs of the proposed Center are expected to continue indefinitely. Core faculty will continue to obtain competitive funds to sustain the proposed Center. Justification for continuing the proposed Center will include the following – sustained opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students; state and national needs are being addressed; and benefits to the institution outweigh the costs.
- ◇ Costs and funding sources. The cost of the proposed Center is expected to be \$813,000 during the first year, increasing to \$1,028,701 during the seventh year. External funds will be used to cover the costs of the proposed Center.