



# CONNECTOR

ANYA EVMENOVA, EDITOR

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## President's Message

*Joel Mittler, Ed.D.*

As you read this, I hope you are all having a wonderful summer and gearing up for a return to your respective schools. Summer is a time for some recovery of spirit and strength and also provides us an opportunity to contemplate our professional efforts.

It has been a difficult year for the field of special education. Congress did not reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (formerly known as NCLB) and it failed to stop the financial sequester from cutting funding. They also failed to provide adequate funding through the normal yearly appropriation process. The Federal Department of Education did provide waivers for the impossible to reach NCLB 2014 that required 100% proficiency in reading and mathematics, but in doing so insisted that states include a teacher evaluation system that will be based in part on student test scores. At the same time, the Common Core has been introduced which will put additional pressures on our children and their teachers, to be followed by new tests to measure that achievement. In addition, there has been growing criticism of the teacher preparation process. Lastly, our states and local governments are still recovering from the economic collapse of a few years ago, while struggling to adequately fund our schools. It seems as if we will need more than one summer to regain our optimism.

Yet, I am proud to tell you that I believe that we, in TAM, should be optimistic. I see research in technology use in special education continuing across the country. For last Spring's CEC Conference, held in San Antonio, TX, we had well over 100 technology-involved

proposals reviewed while there were probably a few hundred more technology related proposals that were reviewed by other divisions. I believe these numbers will be repeated for next year's conference to be held in Philadelphia, PA. Last winter's Assistive Technology Industry Association Conference (which has TAM as a partner) was quite well attended and displayed a rich program of technology-based presentations. I am certain that the several other national and state assistive technology focused conferences were similarly successful. Thus, it is clear that despite the pessimism generated by the politics at the national and state levels, our field is surely flourishing.

And we, in TAM, are pleased to be part of that optimism. Our Board works with energy and enthusiasm to continue to serve our members. Our JSET journal still attracts wonderful submissions and maintains its very high standards. Our publications and products continue to bring the latest ideas, practical and timely, to the field. Our newsletter, the Connector, continues to be produced to stay in touch with you, our members. And we continue to try to produce products that will help you whether you are in a k-12 classroom, an administration office, or a college classroom. I encourage all of you to visit our website (<http://www.tamcec.org/>) to see all of our products that you may want to consider.

Thus, I hope all of you are getting your needed rest and replenishment. And as you head back to your classes, I thank you for support and hope you keep TAM in mind to help you be the best special educator you can be. Contact me at [jmittler@liu.edu](mailto:jmittler@liu.edu).

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## Interview with the Authors

# Interview with Lynne Mainzer and Sue Stein

Anya Evmenova

Dr. Lynne Mainzer and Mrs. Sue Stein are working in the Center for Technology in Education at Johns Hopkins School of Education. Dr. Mainzer leads the professional development and implementation of Boundless Learning, a specialized learning system for building inclusive learning environments for all learners. She has led several federally funded projects focused on the use of technology and software development for students with various abilities and needs. Ms. Stein has designed multiple professional development programs and has led the implementation and national dissemination of various technology tools developed by the Center for Technology. Dr. Mainzer and Ms. Stein are the chairs of the Professional Development Committee at the Technology and Media Division (TAM) at CEC.

*Tell us about the upcoming Professional Development opportunities from TAM.*

TAM is collaborating with the Johns Hopkins University Center for Technology in Education to produce a series called: *GRAB & GO TECH TIPS* for practitioners. This engaging series includes a number of relevant topics, strategies, and tools to help special and general educators support students with disabilities to access and succeed in general education curriculum. In this series, TAM members will learn how to use specific online planning tools, “apps” for inclusive practices, protocols for instruction and progress monitoring, and a wide-range of practical technologies available today that can boost universal access. The topics and authors of the Grab & Go series are as follows:

- Grab and Go: 7 Tech Tools to Boost Student Performance (by Maureen Jones, Lynne Mainzer, & Sue Stein)

- Grab and Go: Using Web 2.0 Tools to Engage Students in Learning (by Linda Carling and Kristen Thompson)
- Grab and Go: Apps for All-Considering Apps for Students in Inclusive Classrooms (by Melinda Ault and Margaret Bausch)
- Grab and Go: Technology Ideas You Can Use Now! (by Brenda Heiman)

*How do you envision TAM members using it?*

Since information is delivered as a pre-recorded webinar, teachers are

able to view and listen to the presentation at their convenience. Moreover, Information Briefs accompany each presentation, providing teachers an “at-a-glance” resource that summarizes key information and tips. Information Briefs can be used for quick reference during the school day—an authentic, reliable job-embedded tool!

*Do you have any advice for TAM members who want to use this product to conduct their own professional development activities?*

These user-friendly resources can be used to augment professional learning

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## CAN Report

# The Summer Blues!

Joel Mittler, Ed.D., TAM CAN Coordinator

Summer used to be an exciting time for discussion about Special Education and the Gifted and Talented students public policy in Washington. Every year, Congress would address funding through the “normal” appropriations process, with the Fiscal Year starting on the following October 1. In addition, during many summers, there would be some reauthorization bill up for consideration, whether it be the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (formerly known as NCLB) or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or the Rehabilitation Act or the Higher Education Act or a variety of other federal bills that impact the lives of the children we care about. And each summer the CEC CAN meeting would be held and CEC CAN members from around the country would go up to “the hill” and meet with members of Congress or their staff to advocate for CEC’s positions. Then as the summer turned into the fall, we would watch and see how the final bills would turn out, whether it was for money or in other policy areas.


Well, the good old days seem to be gone. After the Congress failed to stop the \$630 million in cuts to special education/early intervention funding imposed through the sequestration process earlier this year, we still await some indication of appropriation amounts for the next Fiscal Year with the strong possibility that the Senate, which seems to want to establish their funding based on the levels before sequestration, and the House, which indicates that it wants to use the sequestration amounts as the new “normal”, will not be able to agree at all. Similar strong disagreements appear in ESEA reauthorization efforts where House Republicans have already passed a bill in Committee that has been rejected by House Democrats

while Senate Democrats have proposed a bill that has been strongly criticized by Senate Republicans. Issues such as testing, Common Core, teacher evaluation, school choice, funding, and state/federal control represent major differences both between the parties and even within each party.

While CEC is working as hard as it can to represent the interests of students with exceptionalities, they have a much more difficult task than ever. In fact, in part due to the inability to see any real outcomes, CEC cancelled this year’s CAN meeting, though CAN members are still staying involved through webinars and Action Alerts. Yet, CEC was able to get some of its ideas for ESEA reauthorization into the Senate’s version of the bill, known as *Strengthening America’s Schools Act of 2013* (SASA), which passed the Senate Education Committee on a Democratically supported partisan vote. That said, it is hard to see how the full Senate will support it if the Senate Republicans object, or how a very different House bill can ever be reconciled, if they even get that far. Most commentators do not see a reauthorization this year.

On a positive note (and one that may be of particular interest to some TAM members), the Department of Education addressed the issue that there are currently 30,000 students who have visual impairments and are served by IDEA, with many concerned that Braille instruction is becoming harder to access. In answer to this concern, the U.S. Department of Education wrote to every state to “reaffirm the importance of Braille instruction as a literacy tool for blind and visually impaired students, to clarify the circumstances in which Braille instruction should be provided,

and to reiterate the scope of an evaluation required to guide decisions of IEP Teams in this area.” The Department made it clear that an IEP team of a student with a visual impairment must consider each child’s need for Braille instruction on an individual basis in order to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and to have access to the general education curriculum.

So as you rest, relax, and/or prepare for the new school year, know that CEC is working as hard as it can on these public policy matters, but the overall atmosphere in our nation’s capitol is making it hard to be optimistic. Yet, I know that TAM members will accept that reality and do what they need to do on behalf of the students they care about. TAM members wouldn’t do any less. 

## TAM on Facebook

TAM members who are Facebook users are welcome to search Facebook for Technology and Media Division of the Council for Exceptional Children. Please request to join the group!

## TAM CONNECTOR

**TAM Connector** is published 4 times a year by the Technology & Media Division of the Council for Exceptional Children. Email all news items to Anya Evmenova ([aevmenov@gmu.edu](mailto:aevmenov@gmu.edu)). Change of address should be sent to Anna Henderson at the Council for Exceptional Children, 2900 Crystal Drive, Suite 1000, Arlington, VA 22202-3557.

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# Share a Story: Students with Big ideas

*Santina Brown, Assistive Technology Resource Teacher, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS)*


How do you get reluctant writers to write? Many of us who work with students with disabilities struggle with this every day. For students with learning disabilities many parts of the school day are difficult, but writing is often what they struggle with the most. As an assistive technology resource teacher, every year I am asked to work with students on writing. What have I learned? Convince these students that if they learn to use technology they only ever have to write things ONCE. It's a big selling point and I get my students to buy in every year with that simple promise.

This year I had the privilege of working with three phenomenal 5th grade teachers. Dacia Kacala, Kristine Parker, and Kathy Tribbie invited me into their classrooms to co-teach a writing block using the digital graphic organizer Draft:Builder 6. In all three classes we started with students who had a hard time coming up with ideas, were reluctant to put them on paper and pretty much refused to edit their work. We

introduced a template called "The Big Idea Template" and the promise that once they write a sentence they will never, ever have to write it again.

The students learned to brainstorm three "Big Ideas". Using Draft:Builder, they went to the "Outline View" and typed one or two words for each "Big Idea" and detail. Then they moved to the "Notes View" where the real writing took place. For each Big Idea or detail they opened a New Note, wrote one sentence for that idea, and then would "Write, Check, Listen". We used this mnemonic to teach them to write the sentence, check the sentence (spelling, punctuation) and then listen to the sentence with the text to speech feature. This simple mnemonic is really where the magic happens. They learned that if they edit and revise one sentence at a time, at the end of the "Notes" section they are essentially done. Finally, the students moved to the "Draft View" and pulled each sentence over into paragraph form. This feature allowed

them to build paragraphs without re-writing anything.

For students who need to "see" how far along in the process they are, this tool is excellent. They know exactly how much they have done and how much is left. For students who need auditory support or word prediction, these tools are seamlessly built in. Over the course of the seven months that I worked with these students we saw hesitant, shy writers become confident and proud of their work. Students, who in September would rather leave the room than watch you read their work, were eager to share their stories. After introducing the word prediction component to one student, he looked at me with tears in his eyes and said, "Why didn't anyone show this to me before?" Being able to give students with disabilities the tools that allow them to share their stories is an amazing experience. These kids have so much to share and with the right tools they learned how powerful their voices can be. 

## Interview with the Authors (continued from Page 2)

activities for general educators, special educators, AT specialists, and parents related to universal design for learning (UDL) and inclusive practices. They may be used as content for face-to-face study groups or online discussion forums. Special education administrators may choose to purchase the series and disseminate them to special and general educators, particularly those in co-teaching partnerships, over the school year.

*What do you think makes TAM's Grab and Go Tech Tips series different from other professional development activities in the same area?*

The series is designed for the special and general education teachers who are "on-the-go!" Whether through the media-enhanced presentation or the information briefs, the content is presented in order for it to be easily "grabbed," or understood, so teachers can utilize the tools in their instruction without further professional development. Also, having printed information briefs aligned with the presentations puts essential follow-up content directly into the hands of the teacher so they can refer to it daily.

*Based on your personal experience, why do you think it's important to continue to learn about*

*assistive technology advances through such professional development opportunities like TAM's Grab and Go Tech Tips series?*

This type of professional development requires little time outside the typical school day, making it a practical, job-embedded approach. Hopefully, this initial Grab & Go series is the first of many. Now that the format and striking design are in place, additional content relative to AT, universal access, and inclusive practices can be disseminated in subsequent Grab & Go series publications at a reasonably low cost way to a broad audience. 