$14.9 million
ED research funding at Vanderbilt in FY 2016

Peabody is one of the nation’s foremost colleges of education. It has been consistently ranked among the top five graduate schools of education by U.S. News & World Report.

The Institute of Education Sciences
The Institute of Education Sciences (IES), part of ED, is tasked with providing “rigorous and relevant evidence on which to ground education practice and policy and sharing this information broadly.” Researchers from Peabody College of education and human development often depend on funds from IES to conduct breakthrough research on critical local, state, and federal education policies.

IES supports national R&D centers that are intended to contribute significantly to solving education problems in the United States by engaging in research, development, evaluations, and national leadership activities aimed at improving the education system and, ultimately, student achievement. Each center conducts supplemental research within its broad topic area and provides national leadership in advancing evidence-based practice and policy within its topic area. Peabody currently is home to two such IES centers highlighted below. Prior National Research Centers located at Peabody include the National Center on Performance Incentives, which was awarded a five-year, $10.8 million grant in 2006, and the National Center on School Choice, which was awarded a five-year, $9.9 million grant in 2004.

National Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools
The National Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools (NCSU)—a collaborative partnership among research universities, education support providers, and two larger urban districts—is a seven-year, $13.6 million grant awarded in 2010. As a national research and development center on scaling up effective schools, NCSU focuses on identifying the combination of essential components and the programs, practices, processes, and policies that make some high schools in large urban districts particularly effective with low-income students, minority students, and English language learners. Then the center works with teachers and school and district leaders to develop processes to share these practices with less-effective schools in the district. By engaging practitioners in continuous improvement research, NCSU aims to ensure effective practices are implemented with depth, have local ownership and commitment, and are sustained over time.

Accelerated Academic Achievement (A3) Research Center
The National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER, a part of IES) awarded a team of Peabody professors $10 million to develop instructional programs to improve the academic achievement of children with serious learning disabilities in grades 3, 4, and 5. The five-year grant, awarded in 2013, established the National Center on Accelerating the Academic Achievement of Students with Learning Disabilities, which has enabled the Peabody researchers to develop and rigorously evaluate intensive reading and mathematics programs for teachers to use in classrooms. The reading program focuses on reading comprehension skills in informational (social studies, science) texts. The mathematics program addresses fractions, algebra, and decimals. This research will help define for educators what is meant by “intensive” intervention and what instruction is necessary to ensure the academic success of students with serious learning problems.

National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER)
Vanderbilt is a top recipient of funding from NCSER. Highlights of NCSER-funded research at Vanderbilt include:
• A Peabody professor received a four-year, $3.5 million grant from NCSER to evaluate the efficacy of an early social-communication and language intervention on toddlers with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Social communication skills are particularly important for this population, because a deficit in this area constitutes a core characteristic of ASD.

Professor of Special Education Erik Carter speaks at a Capitol Hill briefing titled, “Transitioning to Adult Productivity: Supporting Secondary Students with Disabilities in Successful Movement to College and Career.” Carter’s research received funding from NCSER. (American Educational Research Association)
• A Peabody professor is leading an intervention trial at Tennesse state as part of a four-year, $3.5 million grant from NCSE to examine and compare two variations of the Tools for Teachers intervention and discover how well teachers sustain their use of embedded instruction practices.

• With a four-year, $3.5 million grant from NCSE, a Peabody professor is evaluating the efficacy of the Voyager Passport reading program for improving reading outcomes for students with reading difficulties or disabilities.

• Studies show that preschool-age children are expelled for behavior problems at three times the rate of school-age children. With support from NCSE, a Peabody professor participated in the development and evaluation of the Pyramid Model, a positive behavior support approach for developing young children’s social-emotional competence in the classroom, and preventing and addressing challenging behaviors. Researchers hope that promoting social-emotional competence through the Pyramid Model may prevent problem behavior and corresponding expulsions of young children.

Tennessee voluntary pre-K evaluation

With the support of a five-year, $6 million grant from ED, the Peabody Research Institute (PRI) partnered with the Tennessee Department of Education in 2009 to commence the first scientifically rigorous statewide evaluation of the effectiveness of the Tennessee Voluntary Pre-K (VPK) Program. The findings show that children attending VPK made greater gains on a range of early achievement measures than peers who did not attend pre-K and were rated by their kindergarten teachers as better prepared for kindergarten. However, by the end of kindergarten, the children who did not attend VPK had caught up and there were no longer significant differences between the two groups. By the end of second grade and continuing in third, the children who attended TN-VPK were not performing as well on many achievement measures as the children who did not attend VPK. These findings have stimulated extensive conversations among experts in education and public policy regarding how to sustain the gains VPK attendees demonstrated in kindergarten. The PRI researchers are analyzing the effects of poverty and the classroom teaching in grades 1 to 3 as possible contributing factors to the flat-lined effects.

Peabody researcher wins presidential early career award

Vanderbilt researcher Christopher J. Lemons was among the recipients of the 2016 Presidential Early Career Awards for Scientists and Engineers, the highest honor bestowed by the United States government on science and engineering professionals in the early stages of their independent research careers. His research focuses on enhancing reading interventions for students with learning and intellectual disabilities, including Down syndrome; improving special educators’ abilities to use data to adapt and intensify academic interventions for students with severe and persistent learning needs; and integrating peer-mediated instruction as a method to improve academic outcomes of students.

Using teacher evaluation data for instructional improvement

Supported by a $5 million grant from IES, education researchers at Peabody are working with the Tennessee Department of Education and colleagues at other institutions to study how state school systems can best use teacher evaluation data to drive instructional improvement. The researchers have spent several years developing an approach that uses detailed Tennessee teacher evaluation data to improve instructional practice. The resulting Instructional Partnership Initiative uses data to recommend partnerships between teachers with strengths in particular areas of practice and teachers who have room to grow in those same areas. In the new study, researchers will implement a statewide randomized experiment in schools in Tennessee to evaluate the initiative’s effectiveness.

Training special education leaders

Peabody received a five-year, $7.5 million grant from ED’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to develop a national center focused on training special education leaders to provide intensive intervention to students with disabilities who have intense service needs due to persistent and severe academic and behavioral difficulties. Peabody also received six five-year, $1.2 million training grants from OSEP to support 131 master’s and 11 doctoral students.

Evaluating the effectiveness of school turnaround effort

With funding from IES, Vanderbilt researchers are part of a multi-institutional team evaluating North Carolina’s reconfigured school turnaround approach that began in winter 2016. The project is designed to provide evaluative feedback about school transformation processes and impacts. The goal is to help state and local educators make effective decisions regarding resource allocations and service models, while also sharing findings nationally to inform others of effective school reform programs that improve the performance of students, schools, and districts.