

**Subject:** Happy New Year from your CAN Pals!  
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**From:** College Autism Network  
**To:** brittany@collegeautismnetwork.org



# College Autism Network News and Notes

*January 2026*

## INTRODUCING CAN'S NEW ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR



We're excited to announce an addition to our leadership team! Dr. Tonya Paulette, an experienced higher education professional, will join CAN as its first Associate Director on January 5. Tonya is a school psychologist with over two decades of experience supporting neurodiverse students in several educational settings. While at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Tonya served as Director of Student Accessibility Services where she launched a

## Newsletter Highlights

Introducing CAN's New  
Associate Director

Spotlight! Summit Quality in  
a Virtual Package

CANVAS Call January 23

Are you on a CAN List? You  
Should Be

SANDI: Driver's Ed for  
Autistic Adults

Great Podcast for Working  
with Anxious Students

Landmark Online ND  
Courses

Marquette and West  
Chester Get Some Good  
Press



program supporting autistic students, and that's what led her to a membership in CAN, including a presentation in the earliest days of our Summit.

Tonya has an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from UT-RGV, a Master's in Psychology from Stephen F. Austin State University, and a B.S. in Psychology from Texas A&M University. As you might guess from that bio, Tonya lives in Texas and will be working from home, supporting CAN's programming and professional development efforts and several other important projects. Welcome back to CAN, Tonya!

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## SUMMIT SPOTLIGHT COMING TO A ZOOM SCREEN IN FRONT OF YOU



Maybe you wanted to go to the College Autism Summit in November, but couldn't make it. Or maybe you went to the Summit but were frustrated that you had to choose between sessions and missed some you wish you'd attended. Or maybe the Summit isn't part of your schedule, but its content is, or could be, part of your professional development efforts.

If any of those are true, mark your calendars for [Summit Spotlight: Insights and Innovations](#). We have selected ten well-attended, well-reviewed sessions from this past Summit and created a schedule we hope makes sense. For five consecutive weeks, we'll provide outstanding content—two 30-minute sessions plus a 30-minute discussion with the presenters, for 90 minutes of excellent content that will fit into your work day. Beginning Thursday, February 12, we'll gather at 3 pm ET. We'll hear from two presenters whose Summit sessions are connected to a theme, and then have a chance to talk with the presenters and each other, wrapping up at 4:30 pm ET.

The Summit Spotlight is *free* for anyone who attended the

Summit in Pittsburgh. If you weren't there, but are a member of CAN, the ridiculously low price for five weeks of learning is \$50. If you're not a member, it's \$125. All sessions will be recorded and available asynchronously if you can't make one of these weeks (February 12, 19, 26, March 5 and 12). If you attended this past Summit in Pittsburgh, watch for an email with a registration code, or [contact Lee](#) if you don't receive that email.

We're excited to offer this opportunity and hope you'll join us. Please visit our [registration site](#) for a list of sessions and presenters and to sign up.

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## JANUARY CANVAS CALL, FRIDAY, JANUARY 23 AT 1 PM ET



Join the CANVAS (CAN Virtual Association of Scholars) for our first research presentation of 2026: Friday, January 23 at 1pm EST. Our presenters will be Dr. Hyejung Kim (Associate Professor, Binghamton University) and Dr. Mack Ottens (Career & Outcomes Data Analyst, Binghamton University, sharing their work, *What Drives STEM Pathways for Autistic Students? The Role of Context, Self-Efficacy, and Outcome Expectations*).

This study examines the STEM pathways of autistic students using the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009, focusing on contextual support, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations within social cognitive theory. Despite lower college attendance rates, autistic students showed a strong inclination toward STEM majors. Those who enrolled in college demonstrated higher STEM self-efficacy and more positive expectations, though both declined in mathematics by 11th grade. Self-efficacy strongly predicted STEM choices for autistic students, alongside race and gender, while proximal context was an added

factor for non-autistic students. Findings offer insights to strengthen supports for autistic learners pursuing STEM. [Sign up to attend here.](#) Here's the [meeting link.](#)

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## ARE YOU ON OUR CAN LISTS?



CAN connects its members with each other via two different Google groups. The first is our Program Leaders Listserv, where practitioners who lead (or work within) autism programs or initiatives consult with each other, hear about upcoming CAN events, and learn about interesting resources. The CANVAS listserv supports our CAN Virtual Association of Scholars. It's how we advertise our monthly CANVAS meetings, learn from one another, and introduce scholars and researchers to our community. You can be on both lists if you'd like. If you're not already on a list and would like to join, please email [Lee for the Program Leaders list](#) and [Brett for the CANVAS list](#). These lists are open to non-CAN members, but please consider joining CAN if you are able to help support our work.

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## MEET SANDI: FOR AUTISTIC LEARNERS HOPING TO DEVELOP DRIVING SKILLS



(Simulator for Advanced Neurodiverse Driving Instruction)

"SANDI" is a driving simulator that supports autistic learners on their journey toward independence by providing a structured, sensory-considerate driving practice environment. Because driving directly affects access to

education, internships, employment, and social participation, SANDI helps widen opportunities for students as they plan their academic and career paths. Research from Vanderbilt University shows that SANDI improves reaction time, decision-making, situational awareness, and readiness for on-road instruction. With SANDI, learners can gain confidence and skill before ever getting into a car—making the road to independence safer, more accessible, and more achievable.

Do you know an autistic student or young adult who wants to learn to drive? Please share SANDI with them and help expand their path to independence. Learn more at <https://sandi.website>

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## GREAT PODCAST FOR THOSE WHO WORK WITH ANXIOUS STUDENTS



One of the best podcasts out there is [Hidden Brain](#), and this particular episode, from 2022, [“A Better Way to Worry”](#) will be very useful to counselors, advisors, program leaders and others who work with students whose anxiety presents challenges for them in academic and employment situations. Give a listen and use some of these valuable tools in your own work.

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## LANDMARK COLLEGE NEURODIVERSITY CERTIFICATE—APPLY BY JAN. 19



The new year is a great time to take an 8-week online course in “Social and Emotional Supports for Autistic Students” or to start Landmark College’s highly regarded, graduate-level online certificate in Learning Differences and Neurodiversity with a choice of three specializations:

- Autism on Campus and Online
- Executive Function
- Postsecondary Disability Services

January 19 is the next application deadline if you’re interested in any of the following courses, each running February 6 - April 5:

- Understanding and Supporting Diverse Learners
- Social and Emotional Supports for Autistic Students
- Student Engagement, Self-Regulation, and Motivation
- Understanding Disability Documentation, Accommodations, and Legal Compliance

For details, visit the [certificate website](#) or contact Carol Beninati, Certificate Program Coordinator, at [institute@landmark.edu](mailto:institute@landmark.edu) or 802-387-1662.

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## MARQUETTE AND WEST CHESTER GET SOME GOOD PRESS



We are always excited when one of our member programs gets **some attention** from the media--local or national, especially when that attention mentions...US! Cheers,

Marquette and director Emily Raclaw. We're happy to see you getting noticed in such a prominent way. And to Cherie Fishbaugh at West Chester University in Pennsylvania--yay team! What a [great story](#) about D-Cap and a terrific employment partner.

## MEMBERSHIP OPTION FOR CAN COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN NEED



If you have lost your position or your program has lost its funding due to the current political climate, we've got you covered. You can join or renew your CAN membership for just \$25 for the coming year. We want to keep you connected to the CAN community!

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*This newsletter is published monthly by the [College Autism Network](#), an independent 501(c)3 organization supporting the success of autistic college students and the professionals who work with them. Want to share an article? Feature an upcoming event? Post a job opportunity in autism support services? Our monthly newsletter reaches over 3000 self-advocates and professionals. Send it [to Lee](#) and we'll share it.*

*Was someone nice enough to forward this newsletter to you? We're happy to add you to our mailing list to receive it directly. [Send us a note.](#)*

*If you appreciate our work, please consider [joining CAN](#) to receive additional information and discounts on some of our resources and to support our work. Individual and organizational memberships are available.*

*The [College Autism Network](#) is supported by the [Frist Center for Autism and Innovation](#) at Vanderbilt University.*

College Autism Network | 19 Ocean View Ave | Mystic, CT 06355 US

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