

CEC's Policy on Educators with Disabilities

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) supports educators with disabilities including faculty, teacher candidates, and teachers in classrooms, schools, and institutions of higher education. Within the CEC membership, members embody a wide range of disabilities including learning, sensory, physical, and emotional areas. CEC recognizes the unique gifts, talents, and insights that educators with disabilities bring to the field of education. CEC believes that educators with disabilities possess strengths that emanate from first-hand experience managing disabilities during their education and employment. These strengths are utilized daily when working with students. Personal experience with disability often places educators with disabilities in a unique position to understand and effectively teach children and youth while providing a role model of success. Other strengths of educators with disabilities include their compassion and empathy for students and families as a result of their own experiences, enabling them to build stronger rapport and partnerships through mutual understanding.

Many educators with disabilities have learned resiliency, overcoming adversity to succeed academically. However, without appropriate support this is often an individual struggle. CEC believes that schools must provide a safe, welcoming, and accepting environment not only for students with disabilities, but also for educators with disabilities. Schools must embrace individual differences at all levels and provide educators with disabilities the flexibility to utilize their strengths while providing appropriate supports to help them overcome specific challenges.

Educators who choose to disclose their disabilities may serve as role models for students and their families. Unfortunately, many educators do not disclose their disabilities because of fear of discrimination and rejection. Failure to disclose prevents both the opportunity for appropriate support and the chance to serve as a role model. Success for educators with disabilities is enhanced by disclosure, availability of mentors and support groups, and procedures to ensure adherence to federal nondiscrimination law. Supporting the success of educators with disabilities enhances and expands the workforce capacity to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Educators with disabilities offer a unique and powerful set of experiences and insights into the needs of the children, youth, and families they serve. Supporting educators with disabilities facilitates the recruitment and retention of talented people who effectively serve children, youth, and their families. Without appropriate support, we risk losing the unique expertise, knowledge, and skills they contribute to our schools. Therefore, CEC calls for the provision of strategic supports during recruitment, hiring, practice, and evaluation for educators with disabilities across all educational environments.

It is the policy of CEC that the following criteria with respect to educators with disabilities be adhered to:

Disclosure, Privacy, and Self-Advocacy

- CEC affirms that disclosing one's disability is a personal choice.
- CEC recognizes that a safe, welcoming, and accepting environment supports disclosure.
- CEC recognizes that all legal protections must be in place to safeguard and support individuals who choose to disclose their disabilities.
- CEC affirms the rights of educators with disabilities to advocate for their needs.

Self-Identity

- CEC positively portrays educators with disabilities in all publications and promotional materials.
- CEC recruits qualified individuals with disabilities to the organization and the field.
- CEC recognizes that educators with disabilities offer unique and powerful insights based on their personal experiences.
- CEC acknowledges that educators with disabilities can serve as role models, helping students with disabilities form positive self-identities.

Supports and Accommodations

- CEC recognizes that with proper supports and accommodations educators with disabilities can perform tasks with high levels of success.
- CEC affirms that local education agencies and institutions of higher education must provide supports and accommodations to educators with disabilities based on the needs of the individual and disability documentation.
- CEC recognizes that resources and guidance must be available to educators with disabilities to support their success.
- CEC promotes all legal safeguards and procedures required to provide supports and accommodations for educators with disabilities.

Legal Responsibilities

- CEC informs its members and stakeholders of existing laws and policies regarding the legal rights of and responsibility to educators with disabilities.
- CEC recommends employers develop guidelines for implementing legal responsibilities for disclosure, privacy, self-advocacy, supports, and accommodations for educators with disabilities.
- CEC proactively supports its members with disabilities and other educators with disabilities through such means as networking opportunities, information, professional development materials, case stories, research, and mentoring programs.
- CEC works with partner organizations to promote a positive understanding of educators with disabilities and the legal responsibilities toward their success.

To access CEC's Policy on Educators with Disabilities online, go to www.cec.sped.org>Policy & Advocacy>CEC Professional Policies. For further information, contact Deborah A. Ziegler, Director, Policy and Advocacy Services, Council for Exceptional Children at 703-264-9406 or debz@cec.sped.org. To contact the CEC offices: (P) 703-620-3660; (Toll free) 866-915-5000; (TTY) 866-915-5000; (F) 703-264-9494.

Date Adopted

Approved by the Council for Exceptional Children Board of Directors February 26, 2016.