



BEN HICKS
Director of Special Education
Charlevoix-Emmet Intermediate
School District
Charlevoix, Michigan, USA



REMEMBER TO VOTE!
Oct. 11 -26, 2021

Learn what inspired Ben to apply for the Board of Directors.

[Watch the video.](#) [Read the transcript.](#)

Biographical Information:

My professional career began in a position in my hometown working as a resource room teacher in a middle school environment. At the end of that school year, I moved to northern Michigan and took a position as a resource room teacher at Gaylord High School. I spent 8 years in that role working with students of varying disabilities, co-teaching within a variety of math courses, teaching my own courses, and coaching a variety of sports. While teaching I pursued a Master's degree in special education and an Education Specialist degree in special education administration. Once I completed my degree program, I began applying for supervisor positions in the region and was hired by our neighboring intermediate school district as a Special Education Supervisor. In that position I was responsible for supervision of the self-contained classrooms that were operated by the ISD and for all of the itinerant staff working in our local public schools. Five years later, the Director of Special Education in our ISD retired and I was promoted to that position. I've taken a broader role within our organization with oversight of special education programming at all levels, coordination of services with local districts, general supervision system development and monitoring, MTSS coordination, and collaboration with many local agencies.

Early in my administrative career I became involved in several aspects of MAASE (Michigan's CASE division), including workgroups, chairing communities of practice and serving for 6 years on the board of directors. I also found value in engaging with Michigan CEC and began volunteering at their annual conference before being elected to the board and eventually moving through the 4-year presidential succession. I finished my term with both boards this past fall and now have time to dedicate to the board of CEC, should I be elected.

Candidate Statements:

Describe how your leadership experiences, professional or volunteer, have had an impact on fostering change.

When I reflect on my leadership experiences, for me they began well before I was in a leadership position. Although I'm not always outspoken, I have the ability to listen well, ask important questions, and plan around the best ideas, whether they're mine or from others on the team. When I was teaching in the classroom and part of a department with multiple special education teachers, we worked closely with our general education counterparts. I'm proud of the work that we developed that put students on a path to increased success and improved outcomes and the collaboration that we achieved.

After moving into an administrative role, I've learned the value of shared leadership and lean heavily on the expertise of those around me. Our profession is too broad for any one person to be expected to have all of the answers. I've successfully incorporated the thoughts of many into a shared vision which has resulted in the placement of students into more appropriate and productive settings. With the use of effective listening, facilitation and comprehensive professional learning, we've shifted the mindset of educators in our area to be more inclusive of students with disabilities and to engage in meaningful practices that benefit all students.

My volunteer experiences with our state's two primary special education organizations, MAASE and MCEC, have allowed me to learn from other leaders and to provide influence in new ways. I feel that I've played a part in positively impacting both organizations, including how resources and learning are provided for members of both organizations.

People who apply to a Board of Directors usually stress their communication and collaboration skills. Describe up to three additional skills you would bring to the board and how you believe they would be beneficial.

Communication and collaboration are necessary skills for an effective board member, and I feel confident in my abilities in those areas. In addition, I have found the skills of inquisition (which require curiosity and good listening skills) and adaptability to be extremely valuable in my leadership roles. I've come to strongly believe that the most influential person in a group is the person with the best question. Good inquiry can spark thinking, redirect focus on things that matter the most, and can take the place of over-advocacy. Asking the questions like 'why are we doing this' and 'why are we doing this this way?' often help groups focus and align around a common purpose.

In addition, being adaptive, especially in these uncertain times, is essential for individuals, groups and organizations to be successful. This is an exciting time to be part of organizations that can reflect on the impact of the pandemic and capitalize on the learning that we gained from providing education in new ways.

Describe up to three major achievements and/or experiences that will help you be successful on the board and why.

I believe my experience as a teacher will provide me with some of the most meaningful background needed to be successful on the board. Our organization is ultimately providing educators with the tools and knowledge they need to successfully support students, and I can reflect on my time in the classroom to identify needs that I had and how CEC supported me.

Additionally, I've just completed multiple terms with the Michigan CEC board of directors, including advancement through the presidential line, and am finishing my time with the Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education where I have been a board member for the past 6 years. The experiences on these boards have provided me with insight into governance, board functions and roles, communication with membership, advocacy, decision-making, and collaboration that have prepared me for a role with future governance opportunities, including the CEC board of directors.

Professional Position and Education:

Primary Professional Position: Director of Special Education

Highest Degree: Ed. S., Saginaw Valley State University, Special Education Directorship, 2015

CEC Membership Information:

Years of CEC Membership: 8 years

Division Membership(s): Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE)

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