



Sacha Cartagena

Researcher, American Institutes for
Research, Remote Employee
Deltona, Florida, USA



REMEMBER TO VOTE!
Oct. 3 – Oct. 19, 2022

Learn directly from Sacha what inspired her to apply for the Board of Directors.

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Biographical Information:

Sacha Cartagena, Ph.D., is a Researcher in the Learning Supports program at the American Institutes for Research (AIR). In this role, Dr. Cartagena supports projects related to Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and High-Leverage Practices for inclusive settings (HLPs). Her primary responsibilities include providing professional development, coaching, micro-credential development, and research services to local and state education agencies. Additionally, Dr. Cartagena serves as the internal evaluator and learning management system (LMS) coordinator for the PROGRESS Center, a national center funded by the Office of Special Education and Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Cartagena earned her Ph.D. in Special Education at the University of Central Florida where her dissertation work focused on implementing the UDL framework to enhance an asynchronous online module on functional behavior assessment for preservice teachers.

Prior to her doctoral studies, Dr. Cartagena served as a special education teacher for students with significant cognitive disabilities in Title 1 schools. She holds certifications and endorsements in Special Education (K-12), Elementary Education (K-6), Reading (K-12), and English for Speakers of Other Languages (K-12).

Dr. Cartagena is an active member of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and currently serves as the Member At Large for the CEC Division of International Special Education and Services (DISES). Dr. Cartagena also serves as an ad hoc journal reviewer for the CEC Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD) journal, *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities* (ETADD). Previously, she served as President of the Volusia CEC Chapter, Student Advisor for the University of Central Florida CEC Chapter, and the Conference Coordinator of Florida CEC.

Candidate Statements:

What makes CEC’s mission meaningful to you? (Limit 150 words)

I have dedicated my life to the education of students with disabilities. My personal and professional goals are wholly aligned to CEC’s mission of advocacy, professional development, promoting diversity and inclusion, and building supportive educator communities. Professionally, I advance professional practice by providing educator learning opportunities and research services for state and local education agencies on topics related to the inclusion of students with disabilities. Personally, I remain active in advocacy

efforts at the state and national level. My aim is to bridge the gap between research, practice, and policy. My background of teaching students with significant cognitive disabilities informs my positionality and disposition favoring a more inclusive world, one in which educators feel supported and students receive high-quality inclusive education.

Provide three specific examples of how your leadership experiences, including professional and volunteer, have had an impact on fostering change or moving an organization/entity forward. (Limit 300 words)

1. I had the honor and privilege and serving as the President of the Volusia Council for Exceptional Children, a local professional unit. The previous President of this chapter had resigned, and I stepped in at a time when the board needed reorganization and a new vision. Over the course of 3 years, we grew our local membership and participation, reinstated the districtwide annual awards ceremony for special educators, and fundraised to provide transition scholarships for graduating students with disabilities. Today the Volusia CEC is still thriving as one of the few active local chapters left in the state of Florida.

2. During my time as a doctoral scholar, I served as the Program Coordinator for a series of learning sessions for parents of young children with Down's Syndrome. At the start of the year, I had followed the structure outlined by the previous Program Coordinator. Several months in, parents shared that they felt the program was not specific to their needs and they wanted time to collaborate and learn from each other. I restructured the entire program from a presenter-led format to a learner-led format. Parents engaged in small group discussions, selected topics for sessions, and shared strategies that were working for them. At the end of the year, parents shared that felt they learned more that year than in previous years.

3. During my time as a classroom teacher of students with significant cognitive disabilities, I advocated strongly for my students to be included in general education activities such as the 3rd grade field trip to Sea World. When administration and general educators needed some convincing to allow my students on the field trip, I reminded them that my students have a right to access general education. Because we were a Title 1 school, fundraising was needed to cover costs. Together with colleagues, we sold hotdogs, chips, and drinks to faculty members during lunch time for a month to raise the necessary funds. The end result was a successful field trip and an opportunity for my students to practice life skills and learn about science in a theme park.

Describe an idea you have to help CEC achieve one of the strategic plan goals, and explain how your knowledge, skills, and expertise will be applied to this idea. (Limit 250 words)

CEC's first strategic goal is to "develop and support an effective and diverse workforce of special education professionals". My experience in educator preparation within higher education and now as a researcher and technical assistance provider enables me to support CEC in this strategic goal. Specific ideas for supporting this strategic goal include incentivizing members and non-members to participate in CEC professional learning opportunities. This can be done through partnerships with state and local education agencies to CEC professional learning will count as credits towards professional licensure requirements. Furthermore, I will seek feedback from membership as well as local and state agencies to ensure we are offering professional learning opportunities that are meeting the current needs of the field. Additionally, I am experienced in working with learning management systems as well as microcredential and asynchronous module development. As a National CEC Board Member, I will use my expertise to ensure high-quality, relevant, and engaging learning for our professional community.

The final CEC strategic goal is to “establish CEC as a globally recognized leader in the field of special education”. I regularly endeavor to establish networks within international educational communities and would work to use these professional connections to establish partnerships and promote CEC as a global leader in the area of special education. Potential avenues for collaboration include designing and implementation of research related to inclusive and special education, development of professional development resources, or collaboration on policy initiatives and recommendations.

What methods do you suggest would assist CEC to recruit more diverse members into volunteer and leadership positions, especially within units and divisions? (Limit 250 words)

Ideas for targeted recruitment of diverse members should first include conducting a diversity climate survey to determine the extent that CEC is meeting the needs of current diverse members and solicit ideas for recruiting diverse members. Furthermore, CEC should consider partnering with minority serving institutions (i.e., HBCUs, HSIs, etc.) to offer professional learning opportunities for pre-service and in-service teachers and fortify the pipeline of diverse educators in the field. Furthermore, recruitment of diverse members is a grassroots membership effort. Divisions and other units establish a sense of connection, community, and belonging. Supporting the growth and sustainability of strong state and local units ensures added value to current and future CEC members. Local units have the potential for multiple social gatherings and local event planning to reach their immediate community that are otherwise not feasible on a national scale. Ideas for supporting state and local units include offering mentoring, training, and support sessions for these local leaders. These sessions can provide local leaders with time to collaborate on successful strategies to build their units and offer a safe space to encourage and support unit leaders who are struggling. Additionally, local units can share ideas and logistical pointers for successful recruitment, professional learning, or local advocacy events. Furthermore, the expertise that divisions offer should be utilized to the highest extent possible. Because CEC divisions each specialize in specific populations within special education, divisions can collaborate with the national level help develop and disseminate professional learning to targeted populations of educators and administrators.

Professional Position and Education:

Primary Professional Position: Researcher, American Institutes for Research, Remote Employee

Highest Degree: Ph.D., Exceptional Student Education (Special Education), University of Central Florida, 2021

CEC Membership Information:

Years of CEC Membership: 7 years

Division Membership(s):

Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD)

Division of International Special Education and Services (DISES)

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