

**Ben Tillotson**

Special Education Teacher/Transition  
Specialist, SCORE,  
Salt Lake City (UT) School District  
West Valley City, Utah, USA



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**Oct. 3 – Oct. 19, 2022**

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

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

**Biographical Information:**

Benjamin Tillotson received his M.Ed. from the University of Utah in Special Education - Severe Disabilities. Ben recently started his 11th year as a special education teacher and 13th year working in the special education classroom. Ben has previously worked at a high school as a paraprofessional and as a teacher at an elementary school. He currently co-teaches at the SCORE Transition Academy in Salt Lake City School District that he co-developed 7 years ago, a job that he loves. SCORE is a community-based program helping adult students with significant support needs to develop self-advocacy, employment, and recreational skills.

Ben formerly served on the board and as president of Utah CEC and has enjoyed serving the past three years on the board at the national level. In partnership with the Utah Council for Citizen Diplomacy (UCCD), Ben has hosted groups from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Europe as part of the U.S. Department of State's, International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). Ben previously worked for Global Education Allies (GEA) leading groups of educators on international professional development tours in Europe, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and one national tour in Southern Utah. On these tours, participants learn teaching strategies and how their unique cultural, political, and economical systems impact education.

In 2021, Ben received the Outstanding Alumni Award from the University of Utah's Special Education Department for his work in transition and with pre-service teachers. In his spare time Ben loves to travel, rock climb, hike, camp, play music, make art, and spend time with his family.

**Candidate Statements:****What makes CEC's mission meaningful to you? (Limit 150 words)**

As a special education teacher, it has been difficult to find a community that understands my experiences and needs. I attend professional developments and district required trainings that offer nothing related to my area of content. It is also frustrating to be in conversations among educational colleagues where no one knows much of anything about what I do. It can leave a teacher feeling unsupported and alone.

Within CEC's mission, I see a community where I am supported, one where I can grow in, and a place I can contribute to. I am continually provided with resources, training, and connections within CEC. Not only that, but CEC wants to help elevate my field and to ensure my success and my colleagues.

**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. For the past 6 years I have worked as a teacher at SCORE, a transition program for adults ages 18-22 with significant support needs. Together with my colleague, we designed and created the SCORE program to be community based and inclusive. Our three objectives at SCORE are to 1) support our students to access and contribute to their communities, 2) support families to support their students, and 3) support and educate our community in being more inclusive. Our program has grown, and we have partnered with state entities and been a part of state grants to increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities within the state of Utah.

2. When I first joined the Utah CEC Board of Directors, we did not have a functional website. While serving in communications, I was able to create and manage our unit website with regular updates. We also garnered resources from throughout the state to be shared with the membership. While serving in the Utah CEC Presidency, I directed many tasks that helped us become a more professional organization within the state. Some of these included, hiring a graphic artist who would manage our conference and professional development fliers, registering as a 501(c)(3), increasing financial oversight, and supporting student chapters.

3. I have been a cooperating teacher off and on for the University of Utah and Westminster College's preservice educator programs since 2014. During this time, I have mentored seven student teachers in the special education severe disabilities programs. These students have gone on to work in all grade levels and multiple states. Some are now also cooperating teachers for other universities.

**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)**

Goal 1:

First, I do believe we need to elevate the field of Special Education and promote the "Why" of what we do. We often hear polarizing narratives of the insurmountable barriers to education or the "superhuman" educators who sacrifice everything for their students. I would propose we continue some of the work Dani has done in highlighting educators and build upon that work by focusing on why we love our job as special educators and when we feel successful or have made a difference. Secondly, the devaluation of disability within our society is also a barrier to special education teacher attraction. Partnering with disability groups and helping to support disability pride would be a great step forward. If we are unwilling to listen to and take feedback from the disability community, then we don't have a right to educate or advocate for them. As the 'clientele' of special educators, disabled voices are vital to improving our practice.

Third, the field of education can be overly bureaucratic or formal and lacks authenticity and relatability for new teachers leading them to feel overwhelmed and helpless in their jobs. Supporting educators as they navigate these systems while also removing barriers within CEC would assist with attraction and usefulness.

As a classroom teacher and pre-service teacher mentor, I have received feedback about the experiences and barriers pre-service teachers face, as well as the struggles of current teachers and what factors are motivating them to leave.

**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)**

The first step would be to appear diverse. We want prospective members to see within CEC a place that they are accepted and valued. We want to ensure that we are also recruiting diverse members into all areas and aspects of CEC and not just enlisting them to be advocates for diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is unfair to place the burden of this work solely on their shoulders. I would suggest targeting our recruiting efforts within diverse communities at the high school and college level. We have started to offer a BIPOC scholarship, but I would suggest offering other types of scholarships for other areas of diversity, such as those working in low-incidence disabilities or classroom educators. I would suggest positioning ourselves within schools through advertisements and partnerships in ways that demonstrate we support the work of our members. Lastly, I believe what we offer practitioners in their membership should also change. I would suggest finding ways to provide more accessible and easier to digest resources as opposed to lengthy technical journal articles. Is it possible to partner with other corporations to offer discounts to resources teachers frequently use and access? We want them to clearly know what they are getting with their membership and why it is valuable.

#### **Professional Position and Education:**

##### **Primary Professional Position:**

Special Education Teacher/Transition Specialist, SCORE, Salt Lake City School District, Utah, USA

##### **Highest Degree:**

M.Ed., Special Education - Severe Disabilities, University of Utah, 2013

#### **CEC Membership Information:**

**Years of CEC Membership:** 11 years

##### **Division Membership(s):**

Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD)

Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT)

Division of International Special Education and Services (DISES)

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