



John Wright

Assistant Professor

School of Teacher Education

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA



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Oct. 3 – Oct. 19, 2022

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

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

Biographical Information:

Dr. John Wright is an assistant professor of special education and interdisciplinary early childhood education (IECE) at Western Kentucky University (WKU). He received his PhD in Special Education from Vanderbilt University in 2019 and is a BCBA-D. Prior to this, he spent 13 years as an early childhood/early elementary teacher and administrator. He is finishing his final year on the CEC Yes I Can Committee and also serves on the DEC Publications and Products Advisory Committee. John coordinates the dual-certification undergraduate and graduate programs in IECE at WKU. His teaching primarily focuses on inclusive instructional practices, social & emotional learning, and early childhood special education. His current line of research pairs young children with disabilities with neurotypical peers in learning robotics and coding, and he has a particular interest in video modeling. When not teaching, John spends time with his husband and their two sons. He collects books (that he thinks he's going to read), but evidently, he just likes being in proximity to lots of books (without the possibility of reading them all). He's a very amateur artist. He became a grandfather last year, and he thinks his granddaughter is the absolute best kid ever.

Candidate Statements:

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

Equity, access, and opportunity are my North Star as an educator and human being. CEC's mission statement is nuanced and lays a clear path forward for addressing these ideas in support of individuals with disabilities. The advocacy portion of the mission means we help provide voice for individuals with disabilities in an educational context that is constantly evolving. This is a building block of equity. The advancing portion of the CEC mission highlights the hard work we are willing to do to improve the ways we educate individuals with disabilities. Promoting diversity in all its forms is the love language of special educators. Building community shows that we value the space and responsibilities we share as professionals striving to make high quality lives for the students and families we serve. I am a service-oriented leader, and frankly, every part of the CEC mission resonates deeply with me.

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)

As an elementary school administrator of an inclusive, PK-5 campus, I advocated for and piloted a program for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) for our entire school. Long before SEL was a fixture in most schools, our campus valued SEL as a fundamental component of comprehensive and inclusive programming for elementary-aged students. I led our campus and community through the commitment and buy-in process for all stakeholders, through the district needs assessment process, and through the implementation of the pilot program. Our campus demonstrated the powerful impact of SEL on ALL students, including those with disabilities. That pilot program was eventually scaled up to the whole district.

As an assistant professor in a teacher preparation program, I led my colleagues across specialties and departments through the process of examining how the language in our student-facing documents matters. When requiring our students to use a lesson plan template across the various programs of study, we edited and corrected language that was rooted in marginalized terms. For example, instead of having students confronted with the phrase "IEP student" on a template, we corrected the phrasing to include "student receiving special education services." On the surface, these seemed like small items, but when examined across the many required documents, there were a significant number of occurrences of marginalized language. This examination opened up a larger dialog the importance of inclusive language with respect to all historically marginalized groups.

My family is transracial, built through adoption. My husband and I parent two amazing kids, both with disabilities. As a frequent volunteer in public schools, representation matters. I advocate for changes in policies and procedures that align with this idea. Example: a parent information form might indicate "mother/father" instead of "parent/guardian." I work to educate how this small change makes a big difference.

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)

Prior to becoming a teacher nearly two decades ago, I worked in marketing. So, the strategic goal of Establish CEC as a globally recognized leader in the field of special education resonates with the part of me that understands how organizational communication and community relationships help articulate the values of the organization and its membership.

One of the objectives connected to the above-mentioned goal is: Showcase and celebrate the diversity and expertise of CEC members. Identifying innovative ways to connect to our community and showcase our passions and talent would not only build goodwill among members, but also educate the greater community about the specifics of our work. Having social media "takeovers" from members can pull back the curtain on the diversity of work our members do. I imagine curating the experiences of self-advocates, paraprofessionals, teachers, etc. around the country in a series of Instagram posts, for instance. Other platforms could showcase "50 days of CEC" by spotlighting a CEC member in each state. Also, along the lines of "StoryCorp" (one of National Public Radio's ongoing series), I could imagine setting up a similar booth at our national conference to archive and share the experiences of our membership. Wouldn't it be awesome to partner with NPR to do this?

How can I help with this? I have an MBA and experience creating marketing programs for non-profits. I enjoy a good project. I'm a collaborative teammate and value the process of bringing everyone's voice to the table.

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)

In my role in a teacher preparation program, my main teaching and advising responsibilities are in a dual certification early childhood/early childhood special education program. We struggle with a lack of diversity in our programs. This concern is likely paralleled in CEC. First and foremost, I believe that we need to listen to the voices of historically marginalized groups. The experiences and ideas from these groups should guide the direction of recruitment. Intentional and transparent outreach is paramount. Next, a grassroots effort to identify local talent and leaders would help diversify our ranks. This would likely need to be an internal education program. If members understood that they can and should be a sort of talent agent in their sphere of influence, we might be able to move the diversity needle within CEC. I could imagine seeing a great poster at a state conference or listening to a practitioner ask questions in a webinar and reach out to that person with a specific suggestion to get involved with CEC. It sometimes takes just one person to recognize the volunteer or leadership potential in someone to make a difference. Finally, I would want to reach out to other advocacy organizations and non-profits (perhaps consortiums) to share successes and challenges associated with expanding diversity in membership and leadership.

Professional Position and Education:

Primary Professional Position:

Assistant Professor
School of Teacher Education
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

Highest Degree:

PhD, Special Education, Vanderbilt University, 2019

CEC Membership Information:

Years of CEC Membership: 5 years

Division Membership(s):

Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD)
Division for Early Childhood (DEC)

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