



Wendy Otheim, Ed. S.
Director of Special Services,
Brandon Valley School District
Hartford, South Dakota, USA



What inspired you to apply for the Board of Directors? Learn directly from Wendy!

[Access the video.](#)

Biographical Information:

Wendy Otheim, Ed.S., brings over 35 years of dedicated experience to the field of education. She holds degrees in elementary education, special education, and administration from Northern State University and the University of South Dakota. Currently, Wendy serves as the Director of Special Services for the Brandon Valley School District in South Dakota, a role she has also held in two other school districts. Her career includes extensive experience in special education, general education, and English Learner classrooms. Wendy's involvement on the West Central School District school board sparked her interest in educational administration. Additionally, she contributes to the field as an adjunct assistant professor in special education at Augustana University.

Wendy served on the South Dakota CASE executive board for over eight years, as treasurer, president-elect, president, and past president. Service on boards included the national CASE executive board, and the School Administrators of South Dakota (SASD) executive board. Wendy served on CEC's Leadership Development Committee and on the Delegate Assembly and Legislative committees through SASD. Wendy was awarded the Outstanding Administrator of Special Education for SASD/SDCASE (2018-2019) and the CASE Outstanding Administrator of Special Education (2019).

Personally, Wendy became passionate about special education through being a sister to an awesome guy named Art, who had Down Syndrome. Watching her parents advocate for him served as an example, along with getting to know the wonderful teachers Art had through the years. Wendy enjoys time with family, spending time outdoors and loves the role of grandma. She is extremely proud of her three adult children, who are all members of the Air National Guard.

Candidate Statements:

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

I grew up with a brother with Down Syndrome, who had few educational opportunities in the 1960's. I witnessed the advocacy of my parents and educators through the years. As a classroom teacher for 21 years, I served students of various ages, abilities, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. I understand the struggle of special education professionals in meeting the needs of all students. In my role as a special education administrator, I have served students, staff, and parents, with a variety of needs and situations.

Encouraging professional development, best practices, inclusivity, and connections in the field is a daily goal of mine. In addition, my service on various committees and boards, as well as having a leadership role with CASE, has given me a wealth of leadership and advocacy experiences to bring to the table. Supporting education professionals through my experiences and passion directly lines up with the mission of CEC.

There is such a great range of individual backgrounds and experiences that cannot be easily conveyed by answering simple demographic questions. Given [CEC's view of diversity](#), what facets of your life provide a context for the various experiences and perspectives you bring to discussions and your work? (Limit 150 words.)

I have had experiences throughout my life that have provided me with a greater awareness and a mindset of acceptance and advocacy for diversity, equity and inclusion. My friends, family, classmates, colleagues, and students have blessed my life and career because of the diverse backgrounds and experiences that they bring. I taught in an elementary school for 14 years, which had a large EL population. I earned my English Language Learner endorsement while at that school and taught EL students in my general education classes and I became an EL teacher who provided direct instruction. My current role includes being the EL coordinator for the district, and I continue to advocate for students from all backgrounds at every level in the district. I strive to meet the needs of students, staff and parents from all walks of life, and promote acceptance and inclusion.

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)

I impacted fostering change in a variety of areas, one being special education leadership. In my role as president of South Dakota CASE, I initiated a new special education director mentorship program. Through this, a new director partners with an experienced director to help them navigate the challenging world of administration. This provides the new director a “go-to” person for questions and concerns and provides that level of support that is often lacking in these positions. These partnerships are within a close physical proximity with similar school district dynamics, to encourage face to face communication and effective collaboration. The program helps build knowledge, skills, and confidence in both the mentor and mentee.

I implemented the addition of a northeast location for a monthly regional special education director meeting to encourage more collaboration in that area of the state. There were two locations previously, in the west and southeast. This third location allowed more in-person involvement.

I helped develop a special education administrator “strand” during the state Special Education Conference. This provided administrator-specific professional development, focusing on areas such as leadership development, budgeting, legislative involvement, and special education law. Through this, we have had an increase in directors getting more involved in local and state policy and legislative action. By building each other up professionally, we become stronger advocates for those we serve.

My ability to foster change expanded with a term on the national CASE Executive Committee as a member at large and served as a member of the CEC Leadership Development Committee for two years. I currently work with the state CASE membership and technology committees, promoting membership support and public outreach. Collaborative work at the state and national level has an incredible impact and I value being a part of this.

CEC Membership Information:

Years of CEC Membership: 13 years

Division Membership(s):

Council of Administrators of Special Education

South Dakota Subdivision of the Council of Administrators of Special Education

