



CEC 2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION Candidate Biography

Biographical Information:

Dr. Wendy Gonzales is a committed educator, scholar, and advocate with over two decades of experience in special education. Before transitioning to higher education, she spent 12 years as a bilingual special education teacher in urban school settings, where she worked to ensure access and equity for multilingual learners and students with disabilities. Her classroom experience continues to inform her work as a faculty member in the Department of Special Education at Northeastern Illinois University, where she teaches courses on inclusive practices, assessment, and instructional technology. Dr. Gonzales holds a Ph.D. in Special Education and focuses her teaching and research on culturally responsive pedagogy, equitable IEP practices, and effective strategies for preparing diverse teacher candidates.

Her professional service includes years of leadership with the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), where she served on the Leadership Development Committee, and held officer roles in various subdivisions in Illinois. She credits CEC with shaping her professional identity—from an unsure Ph.D. student at her first conference, to a national leader helping move the work of the organization forward. She is passionate about creating those same pathways for new and emerging members, ensuring they have opportunities to grow, contribute, and lead.

Wendy Gonzales, Ph.D.



**Associate Professor, Special
Education, Northeastern
Illinois University
Berwyn, IL USA**

Candidate Statements:

**What is the most important reason, or what motivated/inspired you, to apply for the Board of Directors?
(Limit 150 words)**

Since becoming a member of the Council for Exceptional Children, I have seen firsthand the value and impact of this organization in shaping the field of special education. My involvement deepened when I joined the Leadership Development Committee, where I gained insight into the inner workings of CEC and the many ways it advocates for students with exceptionalities, their families, and the educators who support them. This experience confirmed what I had already believed: CEC is a powerful force for change. Today, the need for advocacy is more urgent than ever. As a Board member, I hope to contribute to the ongoing efforts to support equity, inclusion, and high-quality education for all students. I am committed to using my voice, experience, and leadership to help CEC continue to grow its impact and to ensure that the needs of our field remain front and center in national conversations.

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

CEC's mission is deeply meaningful to me because it aligns with the values that have shaped my career in both K–12 education and higher education. I have always seen myself as an advocate for students and families, beginning as an undergraduate and continuing through my professional training, where I came to understand disability not as a barrier to learning, but as a call to adapt our systems to ensure access and success. As a first-generation scholar, I recognize the importance of centering advocacy in diversity, equity, and inclusion. I've also learned that partnerships with families and students are essential to promoting these values. CEC has provided a vital professional network, practical resources, and scholarly insights that have helped me grow as an educator and scholar. Its mission continues to support my efforts to improve outcomes for individuals with disabilities and to empower the professionals who serve them.

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.)

As a first-generation Latina and the youngest daughter of Mexican parents, my lived experiences shape how I view diversity, equity, and inclusion. Spanish was my first language, and growing up bilingual taught me the value of cultural identity. As a K–12 teacher for 12 years, I worked with mostly Latino families, many of whom faced barriers in accessing appropriate services for their children with disabilities. I often saw families discouraged from using their home language, which deepened my commitment to advocate for culturally affirming practices. Now, as a teacher educator, I prepare future teachers to meet the needs of diverse classrooms through inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive teaching. My background allows me to bring an intersectional perspective to CEC's work, ensuring that we center the voices of those often left out of the conversation and stay grounded in the real experiences of students, families, and educators.

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)

Across my professional and volunteer roles, I have consistently worked to foster collaboration, amplify voices, and lead through change. As co-chair of the Faculty Assembly Leadership Team at Northeastern Illinois University, I helped guide the College of Education through a challenging restructuring process. Our charge was to support the Dean in condensing six departments into four while ensuring faculty voices remained central to the conversation. We hosted multiple forums for open dialogue, facilitated cross-departmental collaboration, and advocated for transparency by pressing the Dean for clear communication. While the transition was difficult, our efforts helped reduce uncertainty and built a foundation for future innovation.

In October 2021, I partnered with members of Illinois CEC to relaunch the Illinois Division for Diverse Exceptional Learners (IDDEL). I led efforts to recruit a new board, hosting informational sessions and engaging directly with members. When leadership gaps emerged during elections, we personally reached out to members to fill roles and kept the organization moving forward despite challenges. While we are still searching for a president-elect, our continued momentum reflects the resilience and dedication of our team.

As co-chair of CEC's Leadership Development Committee (LDC), I supported a diverse group in making thoughtful decisions about the future of leadership in the organization. Reaching consensus in a large

group is not always easy, but by fostering a culture of respect and inclusion, we ensured all voices were valued. This allowed the committee to move forward with clarity and shared purpose.

In each of these roles, I have demonstrated a commitment to inclusive leadership and the belief that sustainable change happens when people feel heard, supported, and empowered to contribute. These experiences have strengthened my resolve to serve at the national level and continue advancing the mission of CEC.

Membership Information:

Years of CEC Membership: 11

Division Membership(s):

Division for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Exceptional Learners (DDEL)

Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD)

Teacher Education Division (TED)

