

Florida Professor Recognized with Lifetime Achievement Award

Arlington, Va., February XX, 2026 – Dr. Mary Brownell, Distinguished Professor Emerita at the University of Florida, received the 2026 Special Education Lifetime Achievement Award from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). This award recognizes a CEC member who has made continued, sustained, and impactful contributions to the field of special education and positive outcomes to special education and children and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents.

Mary was a Professor of Special Education at the UF School of Special Education, School, Psychology, and Early Childhood Studies. She was the founder and former Director of the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform (CEEDAR Center). Her career started in 1981, serving as a teacher in Justin, Texas. Throughout the years, Dr. Brownell has served in a variety of roles, both in the classroom, and in higher education. She has contributed to many publications on topics like high-leverage practices, teacher preparation and professional development for teachers of students with disabilities, special educator effectiveness, and special educator shortages.

Mary Brownell has been honored for her contributions to the field of special education by organizations like CEC's Division for Learning Disabilities, the School of Education of the University of Kansas, the University of Florida, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, CEC's Division for Research, CEC's Teacher Education Division, the American Journal of Educational Research, the Association of Colleges and Schools of Education in State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, and the American Educational Research Association.

"She is passionate about fostering networks, mentorship, and collaboration, without concern for one's background, academic pedigree, or grant success," shares Dr. LaRon Scott from the University of Virginia. "She consistently asks, "How can I help?"—a reflection of her selfless leadership and dedication to empowering others to tackle the most pressing challenges in the field."

Colleagues credit Dr. Brownell with a lasting impact on the field of special education through both her influential research and her deep commitment to mentoring future scholars. Her work has shaped teacher preparation nationwide, and the doctoral students she has mentored now serve as leaders advancing the sustainability and quality of educator preparation programs. Peers describe her research as extensive, far-reaching, and foundational to their own scholarship.

"Dr. Brownell has also demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the mentorship and training of the next generation of scholars," writes Professor Bonnie S Billingsley of Virginia Tech.

Dr. Brownell will be recognized this March, along with other CEC Professional Award recipients at the CEC Convention & Expo in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the largest international professional organization dedicated to high-quality education that is inclusive and equitable for individuals with disabilities. Learn more about CEC at <https://exceptionalchildren.org/>.