

Utah Professor Recognized with Outstanding Leadership Award

Arlington, Va., March 3, 2026 – Shirley Dawson, Professor Emeritus at Weber State University, received the 2026 Outstanding Leadership Award from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). This award honors a CEC member who has provided exemplary leadership to the organization at the unit, division and/or national/international levels over an extended period. The nominee’s achievements and contributions have resulted in advancing CEC’s leadership in the field and its work to improve positive outcomes for children and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents.

Dr. Shirley Dawson served as a professor and the director of the Teacher Assistant Pathway to Teaching program at Weber State University. She has been an active CEC member since 1997, participating in several divisions throughout this time, like the Teacher Education Division and the Division on Career Development and Transition.

Dawson currently serves as the chair of the Utah CEC Legislative Committee and CAN Coordinator. She also served as the chapter advisor for the Student Council for Exceptional Children at Weber State University. She is committed to member engagement and professional development, having secured funding to support student travel to CEC’s Conventions and Special Education Legislative Summit.

“Her influence is felt across Utah and beyond, and her dedication to improving outcomes for children and youth with disabilities is unparalleled,” shares Shamy Polychronis, PhD, of the University of Utah.

She has also championed CEC’s standards. When the Utah State Board of Education proposed removing CEC’s Teacher Preparation Standards, Dr. Dawson mobilized a statewide response, coordinating public comment and ultimately influencing the board to reverse its decision.

“Even now I continue to see her leadership in action as I work alongside her current students in practicum and student teaching roles,” shares Megan Tingey, one of Dr. Dawson’s former students. “While she often calls her students ‘wonderful,’ it is Dr. Dawson herself who truly embodies what it means to be an outstanding professor and leader.”

Dawson 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/>.