



CEC 2026 BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION Candidate Biography

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Dr. Claire E. Hughes is Professor of Gifted, Special, and Twice-Exceptional Education at Cleveland State University, where she prepares future educators and educational leaders. Throughout her career, she has worked as a classroom teacher, district administrator, university professor, researcher, consultant, and academic leader in the United States and abroad. Her work has taken her from local schools to international collaborations, including as a two-time Fulbright Scholar, always with a focus on helping educators better understand and support individuals with exceptionalities. Her current scholarship explores twice-exceptional education, educator preparation, and the opportunities and challenges artificial intelligence presents for teaching and learning.

Claire's commitment to exceptional children is both professional and personal. As the parent of two twice-exceptional young adult children, she has experienced firsthand the joys, frustrations, and triumphs that families encounter while navigating educational systems. Those experiences continue to shape her belief that the strongest educational outcomes occur when educators, families, and communities work together with high expectations and a strengths-based mindset.

Within CEC, Claire has found professional opportunities, lifelong friendships, mentors, and collaborators. She sees one of the organization's greatest strengths as bringing together professionals with diverse expertise around a shared purpose: improving the lives of individuals with exceptionalities. In addition to Division work participation in TAG, TED, DISES, ISET and DLL, she has participated actively in CEC's Special Education Legislative Summit (SELS), working with colleagues across the organization to advocate with policymakers on issues affecting children, families, and educators. Whether mentoring new professionals, collaborating across divisions, advocating, or learning from colleagues worldwide, she values collaboration, connection, and the exchange of ideas.

Claire Hughes, Ph.D.



**Professor of Special, Gifted and
Twice-Exceptional Education
Cleveland State University**

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION (cont'd)

Outside of work, Claire enjoys traveling, photography, and exploring history and culture. She believes that curiosity is one of the greatest gifts educators can nurture—in themselves and in the students they serve.

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

Why do you want to run for the CEC Board of Directors and what is a goal that you have for the organization?

I am running for the CEC Board of Directors because I am passionate about collaboration and engagement to promote the strengths of all students. Throughout my career in gifted, special, and twice-exceptional education, I have seen how transformative it can be when educators, families, and professionals come together around a shared commitment to developing student potential. I believe strongly that advocacy is most powerful when it is rooted in connection and collective action. To paraphrase Kait Brennan, “I don’t know if we can move the needle, but it’s not going to move if we don’t come together.” That belief reflects why I want to serve on the Board. At a time when education faces increasing challenges and division, CEC has the opportunity to strengthen both our profession and our impact by helping members feel connected, valued, and engaged. One of my goals for CEC is to help more members find their “people” within the organization. Division work has been one of the most meaningful parts of my professional journey because it transformed a large organization into a community of colleagues, mentors, collaborators, and friends. Too often, members see CEC as too large to navigate or wonder where they fit. I want to strengthen pathways for engagement and advocacy through local relationships, mentorship, and collaboration across divisions and units. I believe we build stronger advocacy not only at policy tables, but also at coffee tables—through authentic conversations, shared purpose, and meaningful connection.

What leadership experiences within CEC (student and/or local chapter, state/provincial unit, special interest divisions or state/provincial subdivision, CEC international committee/workgroup) have prepared you to lead in this capacity?

My numerous leadership experiences within CEC have prepared me to contribute at the governance level through collaboration across divisions, strategic planning, accreditation and standards work, and advocacy at local, state, national, and international levels. I have been an active member of CEC since 1990 and have served in leadership roles requiring visioning, relationship building, and collaboration across diverse stakeholder groups. I am completing my term as President of The Association for the Gifted (TAG), following service as President-Elect, Legislative Liaison, Representative Assembly member, and Member-at-Large. Prior to TAG leadership, I served on the

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS (cont'd)

board of the Teacher Education Division (TED) and on the Professional Development Committee for the Division for Leaders and Legacy (DLL). I also participated in a cross-divisional AI-focused grant initiative involving TAG, TED, and ISET, experiences that reinforced the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing emerging issues in education. Beyond divisions, I have served as a CEC Accreditation Commission Commissioner for five years, helping co-develop accreditation processes and policies, and participated in the development of national gifted education teacher standards. Since 2019, I have participated in the Special Education Legislative Summit (SELS), where I added my voice to others advocating directly with policymakers. Recently, I have been involved in the Dean's Compact of Ohio to communicate across fields. These experiences strengthened my belief that organized engagement is the key to CEC's success in advocating for children and individuals with exceptionalities. When divisions, members, and leaders come together with shared purpose, CEC's collective voice creates meaningful impact.

Board members must engage in strategic thinking, advocacy, and collective decision-making. Describe a time you influenced change related to special education, equity, or inclusion. What was your role, and what did you learn from the experience?

One meaningful experience influencing change related to inclusion and equity was my involvement in the national effort to develop an operational definition for twice-exceptional learners. At the time, the field lacked shared language across gifted education, special education, psychology, and advocacy organizations, creating barriers to identification, services, and collaboration for students with both strengths and disabilities. As part of the 2017 twice-exceptional summit, I helped bring together representatives from organizations including the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), and the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), along with researchers, special educators, gifted educators, general educators, advocates, and twice-exceptional individuals. My role involved facilitating collaboration across groups that often approached students from different philosophical and professional perspectives. The process required strategic thinking, active listening, and relationship building. While participants shared a commitment to supporting students, they did not always agree on terminology, priorities, or approaches. Through dialogue, and a little humor, we developed a shared operational definition that created common language across organizations and disciplines. In 2022, CEC-TAG formally adopted an expanded version of the definition that intentionally incorporated cultural and sociological diversity, strengthening the focus on equity and representation. This experience reinforced for me that meaningful change happens when people work across silos and focus on shared goals rather than differences. I learned that governance and advocacy are most effective when they create space for diverse perspectives while maintaining a clear focus on improving outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities.

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS (cont'd)

CEC is committed to diversity, equity, inclusivity, and accessibility. Discuss your commitment to DEIA.

My commitment to diversity, equity, inclusivity, and accessibility is rooted in a strengths-based view of human capability. Throughout my career in gifted, special, and twice-exceptional education, I have worked to challenge systems that define students primarily through deficits rather than recognizing the complexity of their strengths, identities, cultures, and needs. Differences are not deficits. Much of my scholarship, teaching, and advocacy has focused on students who are often overlooked within educational systems, including twice-exceptional learners, neurodiverse students, culturally and linguistically diverse learners, and students whose strengths may be masked by disability, poverty, language, or circumstance. I believe equity requires more than access; it requires opportunities for students to develop their abilities, see themselves represented, and receive support without lowering expectations. As artificial intelligence rapidly changes education and society, DEIA work becomes even more important. AI has the potential to either widen inequities or create new pathways for accessibility, personalization, and talent development. I believe CEC has an important role in ensuring that all learners—not only those who fit traditional definitions of success—have opportunities to thrive. This means intentionally designing systems that recognize diverse ways of thinking, learning, communicating, and demonstrating ability. My commitment to DEIA is reflected in both practice and leadership through international collaborations, advocacy, teacher preparation, and efforts to build more inclusive definitions and frameworks within the field. Meaningful inclusion happens when diverse voices are not only invited to the table, but are empowered to shape decisions, policies, and the future direction of our profession.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Years of CEC Membership: 27

Division Membership(s):

Division of International Special Education & Services (DISES)

The Association of the Gifted (TAG)

Teacher Education Division (TED)

Division of Leaders and Legacy (DLL)

Innovations in Special Education Technology Division (ISET)