

Untitled - June 9, 2025

Jamie Nelson Welcome to the TED and CEC collaboration podcast, where we dive deep into the intersection of education, policy, advocacy and action. Join us as we uncover the latest resources, initiatives and strategies designed to propel forward the world of special education. We're here to explore the dynamic landscape of advocacy in education, and empower and amplify the voices of educators. Whether you're a seasoned advocate, a passionate educator, or simply curious about learning more, this podcast is your guide to understanding and driving positive change in special education. Let's embark on this journey together as we navigate the critical conversations shaping the future of learning and teaching.

Speaker The Ted Policy Committee was invited to do a special feature in the Journal of Special Education Preparation. Today, I am joined by the four leading authors to kick us off. Can each of you briefly introduce yourself and your article in the key issue or question and address related to special education policy and or advocacy? Caitlin, would you get us started today? Yeah. Hi. Thanks so much for having us. I'm Caitlin Chris. I'm an assistant professor of special education at Georgia Southern University. I am a Ted policy committee. I am also the Georgia CDC Can coordinator. So I'm super excited to be here today. We had, um, our article was specifically about, um, exploring how education educator preparation programs can engage in advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels. We really dug into strategies that educator prep programs and also teachers, anybody in education can, um, be active advocates at local levels with school districts, um, through state legislation and working with state partners, but also at the federal level, we kind of did it through a really unique way where we looked at a case study. Um, one of our co-authors, um, took students and had a great experience with her undergraduate students and took them through an advocacy event at the local, state and federal level. And so we kind of worked through the article, kind of explaining it in that way. So, um, I'm really proud of what we talked about, and I hope it provided a lot of really great strategies that readers can kind of dig into advocacy and policy. Hi. Um, I'll go next. My name is Emily Frake. I'm a postdoc at Baylor University. I did my doctoral work in a joint program at Cal State, LA and UCLA, and now I'm here at Baylor doing some work around disability and faith communities, and our, uh, article was entitled Empowering Our Future Integrating Advocacy into Special Education coursework. And we really just wanted to provide just really practical, tangible, hands on, um, information about how teacher prep professors can integrate advocacy and weave in advocacy into any course. So we, uh, yeah, just went about and talked about a model course, provided some assignments, uh, that they could riff off of, provided some, uh, rubrics and different things. So we hope that there's just a really practical application of our article. Awesome. I'll go next. I am Doctor Catherine Hoerter. I'm an associate professor at Texas Women's University. Um, and our article focused on more of an introduction to special education policy, and we really stuck with that policy and law. Um, and, and it's hard not to dabble into the advocacy, but it was really that kind of jumping off point. And so, um, how do we take law and how does that law become policy? And then what do those laws and policy look like at the different levels? So going from federal to state to local, um, and so really just kind of foundational while it was focused at higher ed faculty, honestly, I think anybody, um, could kind of use the article as a, as a kind of beginning point. And to wrap things up, I'm Danielle Waterfield, a PhD candidate at the University of Virginia, and our article was titled From Classrooms to Capitol Hill Special Education, Doctoral Students and Advocacy and Policy. And it's about exactly what it sounds like. That really pivotal role that special education doctoral students play in advocacy and policy work, both before they enter their program, when they're in the field as practitioners or SLPs or whatever they were prior, and bringing those experiences with them into their program to really leverage that in policy and advocacy work. We kind of walked doctoral students through, uh, getting used to the policy and advocacy landscape because there's so much terminology and different organizations doing different work. Um, so provided a lot of resources in our articles, as well as suggestions for how to kind of navigate that landscape, both within the institutions they're doing their programs in and outside of the institutions. So networking with those different organizations or getting involved in different ways outside of the scope of their programs. Thank you for really just providing that big context, big picture overview of each article. And, um, we'll link in the show notes. There are podcast episodes for each of the articles. Um, so that'll be great for folks who maybe haven't had a chance to read those articles, to listen in, um, and get that in a different format. So we'll, we'll post those in the show notes as well. But you all talked a little bit about that, that bridge between research and practice. Right. So that practical application of what is really happening, um, in our preparation programs or in the research settings, and how do we apply that to the practical settings and especially within our special education setting. So, um, any of you, whoever's willing to

jump in, can you talk a little bit about that, like how did your article really help bridge that gap? Yeah, I'm happy to jump in. Um, so advocacy can be scary. It can be this big, intimidating task, this big, scary task that a lot of people are afraid to kind of like, dip their toes in. And however, advocate advocacy can be something as simple as staying informed and crafting your own message. Um, storytelling is one of the pieces we talk a lot about in our article, Empowering Educators, Crafting Your Own Story, and being a really great Storyteller about what's happening in the schools that you're in. As an educator prep program, you have a really unique perspective of what's happening in schools, what our pre-service teachers and in-service teachers are facing, um, what's going on in classrooms with students and sometimes just learning how to craft your own message to neighbors, to family members, to community members, people within your local organizations, those sharing those messages and sharing what's happening is also advocacy that gets you a little bit more comfortable. And then you can start having these this, these conversations with policymakers or your state or federal members of Congress. People often associate these advocacy as these big collaborative tasks, such as visits to Washington, D.C., which is important, but those can be very impactful. However, sometimes these small conversations are just a quiet conversation or one call to your local office. Can actually sharing a personal story can actually make an enormous difference? I love that, I love the the simplicity, because I do agree that in so many conversations that we have across different communities and with different folks I hear often, I don't know what to do and I don't know how to do it or I don't know enough about it. I don't know the law, I don't know policy. And so that's, I think, where people feel hung up, right? Because they're like, well, I don't I don't know what to do when I go to Capitol Hill. I've never talked to anyone that way. So I think those simple things that people do know how to do is to talk about their own experience or to share that story. So would anybody else like to jump in and share a little bit about your article? Yeah, well, I'll jump in. It's not quite what my article is about, but I'll tie a piece of that in here too. But as Caitlin. Yeah, it's Caitlin was talking. Um, I often think about when I teach my advocate my undergraduates how to advocate. Right. And they're like, you know, Caitlin said, like, do I have to go to Capitol Hill? And do I need to talk to whoever? And I'm like, no, it can be something as simple as advocating for our students in the classroom or advocating at an IEP meeting. Um, and it can be really low stakes. Um, and they don't even realize they're doing it right. And then that builds into something bigger, into those things that Caitlin was just talking about. So kind of reminded me of that. But then, Jamie, you also were talking about, you know, I don't know the law. I don't know these things. But honestly, those of us in special ed, even undergrads, through doc students, through faculty, we know the law more than we think. And I think that's where our article comes in. Like, what is Ida? What is 504? What are those things? Um, maybe you don't know the in-depth pieces of them, but you know, the general idea if you're in special ed, right? And so that was really our kind of point was to bring it back and say, here are those foundational points. Maybe I do need a little bit, read a little bit more or gain a little bit more knowledge about something to do, you know, go on Capitol Hill. But it it can range from that kind of small to we know more than we think we know sometimes at least within special ed right outside of it. That might look a little different. Absolutely. Well, I think, Emily, you kind of mentioned too, in your article that piece of what could a model course and assignments look like? So I love that each of these articles took shape in a different way. So um, that intro to policy, what is it? How do I model a course after it? What would it look like? Um, from that local to federal level. And then Danielle, from that, you know, doctoral lens, you know, so every article really has that different ability to, to support various communities as they read. So I very much appreciate that the Ted Policy Committee really ran with that and found those areas to focus on. So my next question really is like, what was your inspiration? So when you think about this topic of policy and advocacy, was there a moment or an experience that you've had that really sparked your interest in this work? So I can start on this one. Um, I think for me is I had the opportunity to teach a course, um, in a special ed area at my university. Prior to me leaving, they had never had an undergraduate special education course, and so I was like, well, I see a need, I'm going to fill it. And advocacy is something that's just really important to me. It's always been important to me, not even in special Ed, but just like outside. Um, and so I the course wasn't about special ed or sorry, it wasn't about advocacy. It was definitely about special ed. It was about inclusive education. And throughout that, I just found myself, um, at first kind of not knowing, uh, but then later realizing, like, oh, there's advocacy elements in every assignment. And the final assignment and almost every, um, lecture or, or thing I put out, um, for them to read or whatever. And so, um, I felt like once we had the opportunity to do this special issue like this course, I was only able to teach it once. I taught it my very last quarter at UCLA. And so, um, I was like, oh, man. Like, I developed this course. I spent all this time great reviews from students, really high quality work. And, uh, unfortunately, like, where does it go now? Right. And so I just thought that this special issue was like, the perfect time to kind of share some of the things I had done. So hopefully educator, teacher, um,

preparation educators can see that it's not that hard actually to weave in advocacy work, advocacy instruction in a content course. Right? Like even in a math course or, um, I don't know, an AI course or whatever. Like whatever you're teaching, you can leave an advocacy. Um, and so I think just especially right in these times, um, it's really important that we advocate and our field has always been built on advocacy. Special ed, the course special ed is advocacy. We wouldn't even have kids in classrooms right now if it wasn't for advocacy. So I think it's really important that we teach these skills to future educators. And that has to start. Well, honestly, it has to start way before they get to us. Um, in the university. But if they get to us, then we need to be able to help them and support them so that they can be effective advocates. I agree. Like coming from, you know, being in practice myself and I think most of us that are, you know, in this podcast episode were at one time in the classroom as special education teachers, um, seeing some of the policies that perhaps were, you know, kind of like these lofty things maybe not being implemented in the way that we wanted them to be, um, or that they should have been by law. And seeing those impacts on our students kind of just struck at the core for me. Um, you know, I taught in a rural school district initially, uh, in special education, and then I did a 180 and pivoted to inner city New Orleans schools. And throughout that, it was very interesting to just kind of see the myriad of implementation of policy and then the like corresponding either like high advocacy or lack of advocacy efforts and how that drove the needle. And like that was a big driving factor for me to pursue a PhD in special education anyway. Um, so getting to write about it in this article, it was just kind of a little bit of a full circle moment. And also hearing some of my peers who are also still in their doctoral programs, especially with the current state of affairs, trying to figure out how they can get more engaged and really have, like, that purposeful integration of policy and advocacy in their work that Emily was talking about. Um, so that we can continue to advocate for our students and their families and other stakeholders in this disability space that need that support, um, and deserve it. Many of you talked about that, that role of advocacy and policy in teacher prep programs. And really the articles all speak to that. In past interviews and conversations, I've heard a lot of people talk about as they entered higher education, there was a really big realization that that was a missing piece. So missing an undergraduate programs in master's programs, doctoral programs that sometimes people weren't getting any advocacy at all. And if they were, it was in those really higher level spaces. Um, so just thinking about that, what role do you think teacher prep programs should play in developing future educators as advocates? Uh, well, I think a major role, I think probably all of us on this call would probably agree with that. Um, and the reason I say that is one, again, our field doesn't exist without advocates, right? It was court cases is why our kids are in school now. Um, so how can we leave behind the core of this field and forget about advocacy? And I think, uh, second of all, I really as my my later years as a special educator, I really saw my job as an advocate at that point. Like, I knew how to instruct. I knew the curriculum. I, you know, I knew all the evidence based practices. Um, but at this point, really, the majority of my job was trying to convince other teachers or parents or admin that my students were worthy and capable and deserved by law to be in a general ed classroom and receiving curriculum that was, uh, standards based and aligned to what their peers were getting. And so I really saw my last few years in the classroom as an advocate. Um, and I worked at a great school in a great district. Um, so I, I can't even imagine what some other teachers are dealing with. Um, and I think now, uh, being a teacher has been really politicized. Um, and so we don't have as many people coming through our teacher prep programs, and we need to make this job as attractive as possible. Um, and I think we do that by advocating for better teacher pay, um, for more prep periods or whatever it is. But I just think, yeah, it has to be crucial. Um, and especially with these big changes we see happening in the federal government, um, we know the FY 26 budget just got released, um, and has some pretty drastic cuts for our, um, profession. And so, yeah, we need to advocate not just for the current, but also for the future. I really love what you said there, Emily, about, um, we it's almost like we have a responsibility, um, as practitioners and as teacher educators. We are very uniquely positioned, as, you know, education prep programs, that we have an area of expertise that our legislators, our congressmen and women do not have our members of Congress do not have. Even some of our local board school boards, you know, the voting members of our local boards don't necessarily have an area of expertise in which we do. And I do believe that it is part of our responsibility to teach our pre-service teachers. Teach our doctoral students embed this in our courses. Because we have this experience, we're regularly interacting with students in schools. We see education from a pre-service perspective, from an in-service perspective, and from a research perspective. And I do think that there is a responsibility. I feel as though from my experience, I think a lot of us folks in in myself too, included in some of these, some of our education programs is people are oftentimes confusing advocacy with politics. And yes, while they do go hand in hand, it's not choosing one side. It's not necessarily such a polarizing topic. The beauty of special education is, is it

touches everybody across all, all aisles, across everywhere. Um, you know, there is I'd be hard pressed to find, um, an influential member of Congress or any member of Congress who is not touched by an individual with disability or a teacher or having a teacher in their family. Um, and so this is an issue that, you know, crosses all party lines. And I think it's so absolutely significantly important. And it's our responsibility as experts in the field to support and uplift our teachers and to embed it into our programming. I don't think I could have said that any better between the two of you. I so appreciate that. And, you know, just get goosebumps hearing you both talk about that, because I think that is such an important part of what we do in our, in our teacher prep is really that that responsibility to what's best for our students, our profession, for the field as a whole. And so, um, I think, Caitlyn, you touched on it a little bit. I was getting ready to ask a little bit about those people. How do we how do we help the people who are so hung up on politics? Because that's where I find in our teacher prep program. And I'm in a small, you know, rural community, um, that that's where our students really get hung up. They want to be advocates. They care about kids. They're passionate. And then you visit the capital, and all of a sudden it's party lines. And there's kind of that, I don't know, the the discrepancy between what they want and maybe what they believe or have believed in the past to be true, that a party that they align with potentially, you know, um, and so I just wonder, like, what advice do you have for young people as they start to navigate this process of maybe I was raised a certain way and now my beliefs are changing, and am I going to upset my family, or does this change who I am? You know, so like, I think kids really kids, they're young adults, but they wrestle with a lot of that. They have a hard time navigating for themselves who they are developing into. So what do you what do you say to someone who's really navigating that process? That's a huge question, Jamie, but they don't all answer at once. I think we can try to break it apart a little bit. So something that we talked about in the doc student article is the £0.04 framework by Jane West. And, um, just I'm not going to, you know, break that entirely down. But the four P's are processes, politics, policies and people. And so within this framework there, you know, politics and policies are separated into different buckets. But she also makes the argument that you can't really entirely remove politics from policies. Um, so I think just knowing that in terms of like that inherent nature of how things work structurally, um, so folks can kind of like remark a little bit back on that and be more, I guess, objective in the sense of like, this is how this works rather than subjective. When you start to bring in more of like the personal opinions that might bleed into those party lines you're talking about. And I think kind of centering on the people, P is probably what's the most important, because going back to like the storytelling that Caitlin was talking about, or we even emphasized it a little bit in and hours to around like, you know, there are different families and different stakeholders that have these experiences where the ones that they get to go and ultimately share those experiences. Um, when we are in those meetings with, uh, our different representatives or Congress people, if we're able to do that. Um, and I think, you know, if it's a more macro meeting like that to kind of push those experiences more into the national spotlight, or if it's just talking to your neighbors or people in your community, um, focusing on the people aspect, I think first helps us, regardless of perhaps where your personal beliefs fall, because it really is at the end of the day, part of, you know, the people in our community, in our country that we really have to consider, um, when it comes to that. And I hope that that's responding somewhat to that huge question. But yeah, absolutely. Great reminder, too, about Jane West's work. Right. I think we can all agree that that's a great resource. And to remember those those four P's is excellent. Anyone else want to chime in? I'll try. Absolutely hesitant there. Um, I'm just thinking about, you know, taught an intro to Sped class this last semester and just, um, with how things were unfolding at the time, um, made it particularly challenging to teach some things. And so I often would remind my students that we're in a bipartisan situation. Right. Like, that's what special ed is, right? The heart of it is getting our students what they need, right. And so it's kind of more so like maybe, I don't know, fact finding is the right way. But here here's what's happening right here is like read about it. What do you think about it? Um, and sometimes we would even end kind of class that way. Like, here's the facts. Here's the news article, um, and trying to get those from, you know, just the facts, I guess I keep saying that word now, but but what is that? And then you interpret that. What's that decision and who is supporting that? So I'm not saying you should support this side or that side. It's what policy or what policy do you think is best for our kids, right. For our future your future students? Um, and kind of let them figure that out. So while that doesn't really help them discover who they are, right, like I can't that's it's a hard time in many, many ways for at least our undergraduate students. Um, but, you know, kind of fact finding missions. Go read a little bit more about that. Who's saying this? Who is saying that? Um, and even, you know, allowing them to ask questions out of classroom time, right? So we're not getting into those muddy waters during classroom times and sticking to the content, but just giving those those guiding, prompting questions and kind of outside of class time. Um, now, kind of like Danielle, I

don't know if I answered the question anymore if I just started babbling. Well, I, you know, I think there's probably no right or wrong answer to some of these questions. You know, it's I think for them, for students, you know, we always talk about that discovery of who are they and what kind of educator do they want to be, what kind of person do they want to be? And I think for us still in this space, we're exploring that ourselves sometimes, right. Like, who are we in this in this new context? And how do I how do I show up in this space and those kinds of things? So I think, you know, Catherine, you made a great point, though I had the same experience teaching an intro to Sped class this last spring. And it was, you know, everything is unfolding in real time. And every single day there's a new update or new information. And so it really was for me, you know, beginning class a lot of times with, all right, I want you to take a couple minutes and see what's in the news today, what is important to the work that you will do. And so I think fact finding is a great way to, to, to frame that because students then have to make some, some determinations based on what they see and what they know and, um, start to challenge themselves and others and that sort of thing. So that it's a good segue into this next question I'm going to ask here. And it's just what other barriers do you see? So, you know, we we've talked a lot about like, we can we can teach, uh, advocacy skills and we can teach policy and information in our courses. But what are some of these barriers? So whether that is in the research aspect for some of you who have had maybe funding cuts, um, and really stopping projects that you're working on or in practice or just teacher prep, like what are some things that are happening right now? Yeah, I think, um, you know, I'm a postdoc. I'm about to go back on the job market, um, this upcoming cycle. And so I think, um, just friends from my cohort or other folks in a similar position, the concern around advocating or advocating too loud right now is that it's going to impact your ability to get a job. Um, so I think, like at the very, the very, like, selfish level. Right. Like that is, um, that is a barrier for me and some of, um, my friends and I'm sure folks, other folks in this position, but I think it's also, um, people who have been, you know, assistant professors or have tenure, um, they're concerned about losing their positions as well. Um, even though they've been at their other universities for a while. So I think that's a big barrier. And I think to just, um, I've been following like the Trump administration versus Harvard thing pretty closely. And I think, you know, that's, uh, that's an example of what could happen. Right? If you, um, I never want to say you can advocate too loud because I just don't think that's possible. But, um, if some people perceive it as you advocating too much or doing research that's, uh, to this or to that. And so, um, I don't know, I think, I think it's for some people, it's do their personal beliefs and their morals, uh, how how are they weighing that against, um, job security and job safety? And I, I honestly don't think there's, like, a wrong answer here. There's people that need to feed their families and literally cannot afford to be fired, um, or to lose their job or to lose their grant funding or whatever. Um, and there's some folks that are like, yeah, I know the consequences, and I'm willing to take those and they might be in a totally different situation. So I think the the barriers here are are really real. And they impact real people and they have consequences, um, not only for the advocacy that we choose to do or how we do it. Um, but also for, you know, our profession and the next generation and what we're teaching, um, our teachers right now and what we can and can't teach our, our future teachers and all of that. And I feel like I could talk about this for a while, but I will stop and pass it off to somebody else. I was I definitely agree with all of that too, Emily. But I was also going to say, like so one of the guest editors on, um, this issue was, uh, Ted policy advisor Doctor Kate Brennan, and, um, she was talking about in a recent meeting with, um, our committee about how there's just so much information that's coming out. It's kind of like, you know, drinking from a fire hose. And unfortunately, you know, whether you're somebody who's a researcher at, um, you know, an R1 institution or if you're a special education teacher who's in schools for, you know, ten plus hours a day or whatever that looks like, just with the sheer amount of information. There's like a disparity in terms of like the amount of time that you can actually process all of this information, and probably also the access to resources that you would need to really kind of go through some of that fact finding and being a little bit more thorough. So I think just from a practical standpoint with how much is actually happening, um, Daley has made it hard. And so people then kind of have to prioritize around perhaps some of the issues that they would want to advocate a little bit more, rather than kind of doing it on a more holistic level, if that makes sense. Um, and I think that, you know, any effort is helpful and good in the sense of you advocating for what matters to you, but it just might make things look perhaps not as like, I guess, blanket advocacy these days just because of how much is happening. Yeah, I agree. And I think what you guys shared, I think is incredibly important. There is such a hesitation to get involved. And even in our article, um, our specific article, we talked about how a professor took a group of students to the state. And that takes a lot of time to put that together, to do that initiative, to find funding to support that. And if you don't necessarily have support from your institution, um, to do advocacy efforts like that to be allowed advocate, that can be really challenging. One thing that we do talk

about in our article is actually partnering with your legislative office within your university and sharing some of the things that you're doing. Um, because they can actually be a great ally and a great resource for you, and maybe get you connected with folks who are aligned with what you're trying to do, or get you a seat at the table of some of these conversations. But that can also be incredibly intimidating if you don't have that partnership. Um, so I think a lot of people are just very hesitant to kind of dip their toes into this. Um, despite we all know that it's incredibly important and wildly impactful. But I've, I've noticed even, you know, similar to what Danielle said, it's just we're processing information so quickly and everything is changing. You know, I read the emails every day. I'm processing this. I mean, I myself even had to step away from a couple of weeks, you know, we were constantly in meetings and I had to just not attend anything for a couple of weeks to kind of regroup myself back into the actual work and then dip back into advocacy. And that's okay, too. Um, you know, just make sure you're going back to it. And I want to, you know, acknowledge and recognize that one of the major barriers here is just burnout. Um, and being discouraged. And I think, um, I feel like, I mean, this will really sell people to me, but I feel like three out of four Friday nights, I'm, you know, at home writing emails to my legislators got really great social life. So, um, that, you know, and it feels like, uh, nothing's happening in my state. I'm in Texas right now. Um, and, you know, we've had vouchers come through, like, it feels like everything that I have, um, been writing about and talking to my legislators about, I was in DC a few months ago. Um, it feels like my work has amounted to nothing. Um. And I know that's not true. I know that's not true. It just hasn't amounted to policy change. But we have to remember that when you call and you email every time you do that, a staffer is taking note. And at the end of the day, these people, they work for you, right? These elected officials work for you. And so enough people are calling and saying, look, I'm not going to vote for you if you, um, decide to pass this bill on, on vouchers. Uh, then they might change their stance because they want to be reelected. So, um, I think we just have to remember, uh, that this work, it's not that it's not going anywhere. It's just that it's moving slow, and that's okay. There's a time and place for everything. Um, but I just wanted to acknowledge that it can be discouraging, especially if you're in a county or a state that you feel like isn't really listening to your voice, um, or even at a university that you feel like isn't listening to your voice. But, uh, there is work being done, and we have community, right? Like this Ted policy Group has been a really great community for me and for others so that we can continue to do the work and kind of share any frustrations that we have as well with each other. Yeah, I'll just jump in real quick and say, I agree with everything that everybody said. I think the barrier part is really hard. And, um, Emily just made me think, you know, because I'm in Texas too, as you know, and it's it can be disheartening. But I was thinking this and then you said it, so I just want to reinforce it. I feel really lucky personally that I am at a university that supports me. Um, hopefully that can continue, um, in the general state that we're in, not just the physical state. Um, but like that we have this group, right, that this Josep special issue came out, um, and that there are so many people doing this work. And that's what kind of brings me back to it, with what both Danielle and Caitlin said about the burnout. And like, just so much information and, um, that, that there's a community of us working towards this and kind of bringing that into at least the positive piece of it. Right. That keeps me going. I think that's a great point, because we've all probably experienced that at some point. You know, I always joke that I don't think I've ever voted for someone who's actually been elected. So like, that's not true. Maybe a couple, but you know, every time even, you know, those votes, it's like, no matter who I feel so strongly and passionately about, I don't, you know, I never see the fruit of that labor for the campaign I volunteered for or the doors I knocked or the, you know, phone calls I made. Um, and so, you know, Emily, when you talk about that, that burnout and Caitlin, you know, having to take that step away, um, I think it's important to remind ourselves of that, you know, that it's okay to take a little break here and there when we need to take that break and then come back, you know. And, Catherine, great point too, of like, find that community of people who care about something like you care about it. And I am so thankful that we have this group of people and, you know, Kate Brennan just bringing us all of the the facts, right? So she's bringing us the facts every few days. It feels like at this point, you know, we're getting that a lot. We're knowing all of the happenings. And so having that piece where we know what's happening really from that apolitical view, you know, she's just sending us the facts and what is happening. So it's nice to be able to read that without the, um, the outside media influence, you know, to get that. So if you don't attend the virtual Washington update or you don't read them, here's a little plug to be able to do that, you know, sign up and attend because that's so important. But, um, my next question is really the flip side. So we talked about barriers and all the challenges. Now if you could wave a magic wand and you could change one thing. So whether it's how policies He's created, how we implement that policy, the funding, how it's studied. What would you change and why would you change that? Again, with the big questions. No. Um, I think something that we were all kind of touching on

in the last one would be something that I would change, which is just the amount of time that it takes for something to happen and, you know, actually trickle down, um, and impact those who really need those resources or support, um, there's a long standing joke of like whether things move slower, um, in academia versus politics. So, you know, take that as you will and you can decide which one moves faster. Um, quite honestly, I wish both did. Uh, so, yeah. Um, so I think that's what I would, I would say and then also just like the implementation of it because it can be so challenging, especially, you know, if you while I agree with what Catherine was saying, um, towards the beginning of this episode of like, we actually probably do know more about special education policy and law than we think we do. It still takes time for you to be familiar with those things, and then actually be able to implement them in an authentic and compliant way. Um, and also modify things that you need to to meet the individual needs of the students or families that you are serving, either as a teacher, administrator, school board member, whatever. Um, so I think, you know, again, that time and then also just really helping with implementation overall. I would like to support what Danielle said. Definitely about time. Um, but I also want to talk about partnerships. So with the respect of time, it's it's been very eye opening for me. And I've learned a lot from these conversations with Kate and with the policy committee. It's, you know, when you call your, um, local representative or national representative, you might have 5 to 10 minutes with the staffer in that office. And while that is the most essential and most important conversation you're going to have that day, that might be one of 20 that that staffer is having with other constituents about their issues affecting them. And so time is incredibly important. Time with staffers, time with our elected officials, time with our local board members. That is something that I would love to wave my wand and get a little bit more of, but also with partnerships. I think us developing these partnerships with local schools, developing partnerships with your elected officials, um, I think researchers and, um, education prep, you know, programs, I think have a lot of great insight. We've got a lot of great perspective because we see how policy is implemented across multiple school districts. We see how it looks across an entire country, across an entire state, because we're not necessarily always in the weeds in K-12 school. We're not in the classroom all day, every day, but we're in multiple classrooms. So that is one thing that I would love to see, um, kind of improve is a lot of these partnerships and a lot of this collaboration that education prep programs can also have with local school districts, where the actual implementation of these policies are playing out. Um, because I do think that a strengthened partnership could help a lot, and it helps a lot with the educator pipeline. Um, and so that's where a lot of my conversations right now with advocacy are kind of shifting towards is how can we strengthen our partnerships together with our magic wand? Um, I think Katelyn said this probably way more eloquently than I ever could, but I would use my magic wand. Fun question. By the way, Jamie, um, I think that if you're going to write special ed policy or if you're going to write education Policy. You got to have a teacher to co-sign your bill like that. Is that's. Yes. My big idea. Um, yeah. I think I would also love to see, um, whether it's. Gosh, I keep coming back to vouchers because that's top of mind, but like, I voucher policy. School lunch policy. Snap with whatever. Um, if you're, you know, considering changes to. These programs whether it's eliminating them or, you know, increasing funding for them. I'd love to have a legislator, uh, just walk in the shoes of a family who benefits from these. And just sees. Okay, who who is benefiting from this policy? And is it the people that I thought were benefiting or who I thought were going to benefit? And in what ways is this changing this family's life? Um, or in what ways is this policy actually really not working for the people we intended it to work for? Um, so I, I'd love for the actual people making the policy just to be a little bit more entrenched with the, um, the families who benefit from them or who don't benefit from them, and then as well as the teachers who are in the classrooms and know their students and their context better than any of us and certainly better than policymakers. I'll jump into with my magic wand that you have given me, which I would really actually love to have and agree with what everybody else has already said. So I would do that. But also, I kind of come back to this idea that, like special education policies are good for all students. And, you know, a lot of us, you know, we're all for inclusion and that maybe seeing that this these policies aren't really they are for this subgroup, but they're for all students. And I just would like for policy makers, all the people to see that, you know, that that our goal is to help everybody. And it's really not kind of like sometimes it feels like an us against them. Right? Like special Ed against Gen Ed or, um, even though we've done so much work to maybe not do some of that, I just would like to see it, like more of an inclusive, um, um, focus on many of the things that like gesturing as if you could see me, um, that everybody else has, has already said, yeah. And what great advice. I think they're, you know, considering time and partnerships and co-signing bills and inclusion, I think those are all things we can all get behind. And coming back to really that initial message of sharing our stories, I think that's how we do that. You know, we share our stories. And like Danielle said, we've all been in the classroom. We've all had an experience worth sharing. And so, um, you know, when I

call my Congress people and I talk to their staffers, That's usually like, you know, Caitlin said, that's going to be my one. My one five minute pitch that I'm going to share is like, here's this story, here's this kid, here's the situation, here's here's what I've experienced and why I, you know, care so deeply about this topic. So I love all of the magic wands, and I wish I could actually gift them to you to make all these amazing, wonderful changes. But as our time starts to wrap up today, have a two part ending question for each of you. Something I want you to consider is, number one, what advice do you have for someone trying to just get started with policy or advocacy work and what's next for you? So two part question advice and what's next. So whoever would like to kick us off there. I will, I will I would love to. Um so one I think my biggest piece of advice and if you're listening to this podcast now, you're already doing some of it, um, read, Listen. Be informed. Um, I, you know, was always kind of a interested in policy and advocacy, but I didn't really dip into it too much. I also realized later I went back and, um, got my doctorate because I didn't like some of the policies that I was seeing in K-12, and I didn't understand it at the time that that was advocacy. Um, but my introduction kind of into this work was I just went I walked into a session with Jane West at CDC like 5 or 6 years ago and was just inspired. I just listened to her speak. I listened to what she had to say, and it just empowered me to get involved. And so I showed up to the Ted Policy Committee meeting at the next time I showed up to cells. It was a virtual visit. Um, and I just signed up. I had zero experience. I did not have a script. I had no idea what I was doing, and I had a ten minute conversation with one of the senators in Ohio, and it changed the trajectory of kind of what I focus on and I it. Every one of these experiences. So get into the work, show up, raise your hand, jump on a committee, show up to the things that we're getting emails about with CDC that this you know, this session is happening on a Tuesday at 7:00. Come learn, show up, turn your camera off and just attend. Listen, read the policy emails. Educate yourself because something will spark you. Something will drive you and say, hey, wait a minute, I can do that. I can share my story or wait, I have something I was impacted by this grant that's funding was cut, and here's how it impacted, um, the work that I'm doing in the classrooms. And so show up, educate yourself. What's next for me is I'm constantly thinking about our future. And while we're here doing the work. We've got doctoral students, postdocs, um, associate. Assistant faculty sitting here in the room, instructors and our virtual. You know, meeting here. We also need to think about our future students. And so. The next thing that I'm going to be working on is really, really pushing a lot more advocacy, making our pre-service teachers advocates, um, teaching them, empowering them to continue this work because they are the ones that are going to be leading our future educators. And then hopefully turning their students into future educators. And so I think it's so important that we continue to trickle this work down into the classroom. Um, so that is where I'm headed. Um, and I can't wait to hear about everybody else. Caitlin, I'm almost done. But I like, want to go back even more now and just take classes with you. Um, let's do it together. Um, no, but I, I agree with everything you're saying in terms of just, like, really being informed, especially for like a doctoral student lens. I think that it can be kind of hard sometimes to navigate like, okay, well, where are the resources within my program versus where are resources or experiences elsewhere? And you'll also get this general advice as a doc student to just read widely. Anyway, um, but I think that's really good information for folks. Um, even if you're not in a doctoral program to stay informed and read widely. Um, and I also think in terms of like, what's next for my work personally, but then also like a really great opportunity. Uh, Kaitlin just touched on it. Next month, in July 2025, is a special education legislative summit or cells. Um, and that's where, uh, Ceci and case, um, partner up. They have, uh, state teams from every state. Hopefully it seems like this year that go and advocate on the Hill for, um, special education, advocacy and policy issues. Um, and it's just a really great opportunity to get to know other people in your state and across the country that have similar interests that you care about. Um, so whether you're a doctoral student, a teacher, um, you know, a family member of a person with a disability, it's a really great opportunity to just engage directly, um, in our nation's capital and advocacy work. So I'd highly recommend checking that out for anybody who's interested. And I am also similar to Emily going to be on the job market this cycle too. So as I'm, you know, going through these interviews, um, hopefully and navigating that space, I'm going to be really thinking about, you know, how am I going to be able to continue the advocacy work and the position that I'm about to take, because it is important to what Caitlin was saying of like impacting future students, future educators, and just really making sure that, you know, the American education system is inclusive of people with different abilities because we we have that across things, whether it's, you know, necessarily a popular opinion right now or not. I would say, um, for doc students who want to get involved, just do it, just get involved. Um, and there I think the, the biggest barrier for me, um, in trying to get involved was, uh, financial barrier. Right. Like, the cells is awesome, but there is a price tag, um, to going to cells. And so, um, I don't know if this is lucky or unlucky, but I started my PhD program fall of 2019, so the cells for the next two years was virtual, um, and free. So I

attended my, uh, first cells in 2021. Um, and it was totally free and I, I had I mean, it was great. It was fantastic. Um, and it was something that I had wanted to do for a while, but finally had the opportunity. But I think, um, you know, it's you can join our TEDx policy committee at any time. Um, you know, you need to be a member of CEC and a member of TEDx, and hopefully you are. And they just have this, like really special membership offer and whatnot. Um, it's a pretty low cost to be able to be part of this, um, amazing community. And then, yeah, join the TEDx, uh, policy committee for free. Um, I bought Jane's book online. Another shout out to Jane West. Um, and I just kind of soaked up everything I could, um, and I, I'll plug the hexi short course that, um, at the time, um, our TEDx policy advisor, Kate Brennan, was, um, co-leading with Sarah Negro and, um, who are both fantastic. Um, and so I was able to do that and I was and I mean, that's in DC. It's just a fantastic opportunity to learn about policy and to be able to actually go to Capitol Hill and speak with staffers and representatives and, and whatnot. Um, and that that happens every year in January ish. Um, and so, yeah, I knew that that was coming. And so I made sure that if I got in that I would financially be able to go. Um, so I think, again, like the biggest barrier for me was finances. And if you are someone who's interested, there are low cost ways to get involved in policy. And of course, it's always free to email your senator or your representative, um, or your local school board or whatever. And yeah, what's next for me? Danielle kind of, um, shared. Yeah, I'll be on the job market as well this coming cycle. But, um, I'm still here at Baylor. We're going to be doing some actually really great advocacy research coming out. Um, and I yeah, I will never stop advocating. I don't think I'll ever lose an interest in policy. It's all really exciting for me. Um, and I think this is a really important and consequential moment in our nation's history and in the history of special education. I do think we'll look back on this moment and it'll be written about in textbooks. So I will, uh, continue to advocate as as loud and proud as I can and, um, hopefully. Yeah, doing some of that work here, um, within my staff at Baylor too, as well. So that's been really exciting to introduce myself to some of this work. All right. I guess that leaves me, which is hard because I think everybody has given some really great advice and things that I would say. But as I'm thinking about like doctoral students and new faculty on top of what everybody else has already said, um, I just encourage you to remember most of us started as teachers and we've always been advocates. Right. And I think that's the hard thing is to sometimes change your brain into going, can I be an advocate? Well, you are an advocate, right? The things we do for our special ed students or or all of our students, not always just special ed students. Um, you're already doing that advocacy work. You're just taking it to the next level. So remember, you can keep it simple. And, um, I'll plug this wasn't planned. This specific issue of this, uh, of Josep read it. Um, but particularly I probably should, like, pump my own article. But the empowering our future article that, uh, Emily and Danielle and Lisa wrote, um, has a really nice ten, like, ten things you can do. Um, and they're really simple, and they're some of the things that we've already said. But read that and, you know, you can skim it and just at least get to that point with like, what should I do? Where do I get started? Um, so that was really, you know, nicely done. Next steps for me, um, is stay involved, right? Um, do some of the things I've already been doing, but I really want to. I think Caitlin might have mentioned this too, is think about working with my undergraduate students or new teachers, um, and how we can help them advocate in the current environment that we're in, um, to help our, you know, our K-12 students, which is, I think, at the heart of all of this. Thank you all so much. I think that is a great way to wrap up and just reiterate that this issue of Josep is such a powerful issue, especially for those looking to get started in this work. For people who are trying to prepare a new course, maybe like Emily has done, or continue the work that you all have been doing. So thank you so much for joining me today and sharing all of your expertise and perspectives.

Jamie Nelson Thank you for tuning in to this episode of the TED and CEC collaboration podcast. We hope you found our discussion enlightening and inspiring. Remember, change begins with awareness, and advocacy is the catalyst for progress in education. Keep exploring, keep advocating, and keep pushing boundaries to create a brighter future for exceptional learners everywhere. Join us next time as we continue our journey of discovery and action in education. Until then, stay informed, stay engaged, and keep advocating for what matters most. We want to take a moment to express our gratitude to the incredible individuals who have contributed to the TED and CEC collaboration podcast, first and foremost. A big thank you to the TED organization and CEC for their collaboration and support in making this podcast possible. Your commitment to special education, advocacy and policy is truly inspiring. We also extend our heartfelt appreciation to our guests for sharing their expertise, insights, and passion for education with us. Your perspectives have enriched our conversations and inspired action. A special thanks to our production team. Danielle A. Waterfield, University of Virginia, Caitlin Criss, Georgia Southern University, Nancy Welsh Young, PhD, Alison Kearly, University of Alabama, and Jamie Nelson, William Penn University, for their dedication

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