

TED & CEC Collaboration Podcast Episode 5: Function of the DOE

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 and education and empower and amplify the voices of educators. Whether you're a seasoned advocate or a passionate educator, or maybe just 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.

Jamie Nelson Thank you for joining us for Episode five of the TED and CEC Collaboration Podcast. I'm your host, Jamie Nelson. In today's episode, we explore the function of the U.S. Department of Education with our guest, Emily Frake. Dr. Emily A. Frake, recently earned her Ph.D. in special education at a joint program with California State University, Los Angeles and University of California, Los Angeles. She is currently working as a postdoctoral researcher at the Baylor Center for Developmental Disabilities at Baylor University. Prior to pursuing her doctoral degree, Dr. Frake taught for eight years as an inclusive special educator in Los Angeles. Her research interests include inclusive postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities, as well as matters relating to disability culture, rights, justice and advocacy.

Unknown All right, Emily, welcome. We're really excited to have you on our podcast today to be able to share valuable information with our listeners regarding the function of the U.S. Department of Education. So let's start just jumping in with some of your background. Can you share with us just a little bit about your background and how it intersects with special education advocacy? Sure. Well, thank you for having me, first of all. My personal and professional background. So I think I just grew up just knowing what advocacy looked like because my mom was just a huge advocate for her brother who has an intellectual disability. So I've just seen advocacy not so much in the school system, but I've I've seen what that looks like through her example, through her modeling that. And then I think just growing up, I had a really keen sense of right and wrong. Justice and equity matter a lot to me. Those are some of my core values as an individual. And so when it was time to get a job, I became a special ed teacher. And in Los Angeles and we are LAUSD is the second largest school district in the nation and super underfunded, super under-resourced. So I had to do a lot of advocating for my students just at the school level. And I think from there my advocacy abilities and skills just kind of grew. And I've yeah, I've not made a job or a career out of it, but it's something that is important to me that I'll continue to be doing. That's amazing. I love the the personal connection from the beginning, you know. So I think some folks enter the profession and that's when they find that passion. You know, they see a child or a colleague or just something within the profession that needs kind of that champion. And I think that seeing that from such a young age within your family dynamic is really powerful. And like you said, just growing up with those kind of beliefs about equity and justice, it can just really lend itself to a career path, really, that can just empower you and and the ability to power, empower other educators to do that type of work. So that's amazing. You talked a little bit about being in the L.A. school district. And so, you know, certainly we want to acknowledge the the wildfires that are happening there and just hope that everyone who is there is safe. And we're just want to extend our our thoughts to those folks. But I assume that while you're in L.A., you were you were really serving a diverse population. So not only was probably your district and school underfunded, but then you were serving kind of a population of students who had very different needs. Can you speak about that just a little bit, maybe just to give us some background on kind of what what was required of you in that role? Yeah, absolutely. So I worked at a charter and there's a little misconception about charters, charters or public schools. We were considered what's called an option three charter in Los Angeles Unified, which is a charter that does not turn away any students. And I was really proud that our school did not do that. I know charters sometimes get a bad rap for doing that, and rightfully so. Some do turn away kids with disabilities. We did not. So I was our special ed team grew, which is great. We ended up I think by the time I left, we had six or seven full time special ed staff at a k-8 school, which is a really great ratio compared to a lot of schools in our district. But my charter specifically was in the MacArthur Park area of L.A., which is in general just a low income area. And the majority of our students were Latino Latin acts, and the majority of them received free and reduced lunch. So we were considered a Title One School. And yeah, because we allowed any student to join our school, I was serving students who had, you know, Down's syndrome to ADHD, learning disabilities,

dyslexia to students who were labeled as having an emotional disorder. So we yeah, I mean, the advocacy really on my end was getting kids what they needed. And I am really a big advocate for inclusion, inclusion in the general education classroom. Just for a variety of reasons, right? Like kids need to be with their peers. They learn so much from each other. And I think assuming that they only learn from the adults around them is a mistake. So that was my big push was to get kids fully included in their classrooms and then just to get them the resources that they need. And a lot of times those resources cost money. And again, that is not something that we funding was not something we had a lot of we didn't have a lot of money. So I feel like those were my big my big pushes in the district. And then some of the folks in the district got wind of what we were doing. A lot of times students who are in schools that are in low income neighborhoods or students who are not white, essentially, they don't really get the opportunity for inclusion. It's mostly segregated classrooms. So the fact that we were doing it and I think we were doing it pretty well was a big deal in the district. So me and my team were able to present at the district, which is a big deal, to be able to get invited to Los Angeles Unified to present there. And then we were also able to present at conferences throughout the state of California. So that was just how our advocacy came about. It was really just born out of, hey, these are we know, we know our kids and we know what they need. And just because our kids are Latin, X or get free lunch doesn't mean that they shouldn't have access to inclusive educational environments. Absolutely. I think your your point about, you know, serving such a diverse population and students who might be part of, you know, multiple communities and have that intersection of disability and diversity, I think we, you know, talk a little bit about those pieces throughout the podcast. For those who have listened before. And so I think today as we kind of jump in. You mentioned those resources available for students, right? So we want to talk today about the function of the U.S. Department of Education. So for our listeners, I think it's important to kind of outline first and foremost like what is the function of the Department of Education? And you mentioned kind of both, you know, general education services and then special education services. So how do we provide those services and resources for all students? And can you speak to that just a little bit? Absolutely. I'm so glad we're talking about this because I feel like there's a lot of misinformation out there, out there about the Department of Education. So one thing department the Department of Education does not do is set a national curriculum. So I just want to make that clear. A lot of education curriculum and what is taught in schools that happens at the state and local levels. The Department of Ed does not determines that. So let's just get that clear. Thank you for laying that on the line right away. Yeah. Yeah. I feel like that's the biggest piece of misinformation out there right now. But what it does is the the Department of Ed actually does a whole heck of a lot are. And they are really behind the scenes a lot of the time. As a special ed teacher, I don't know that I ever was like thinks department of Ed like I don't I didn't really realize what they were doing. But when one of their primary functions is that they provide a ton of funding to schools across the nation. So if you went to college and you received a Pell Grant. Thanks, Department of Ed. If you work at a school that receives Title One funding, that's from the Department of Ed. If you work at a rural school, a lot of that funding comes from the Department of Ed. And of course, in special education, the funding that we need for IDA is disbursed by the Department of ED. They also do a ton of grants. So some of these things like you, you're not necessarily like applying in a competitive environment for like the Title one funding or IDA funding, right? Those are formula grants, but stuff like the 3 2 5 K or to 3 2 5 D grants that come out of the Office of Special Education Programs, which is housed in the Department of ED. Those are grants that help colleges and universities across the nation to recruit special ed teacher candidates or other folks, that speech pathologist, other folks that do related services and give funding so that these folks can go to school most of the time tuition free, so that we can build up our workforce in special. ED So yeah, that those are just some of the funding streams that the Department of Ed gives us, which are great, but they also collect information on schools and teaching every year except specifically gives an annual report to Congress. And in that report they talk about teacher shortages. So all this data that we have around special education, teacher shortages, a lot of that is due to the Department of Ed collecting this data for us. This is where we see suspension data and how many students are served under each category an idea. Some of the other things they do is they really just serve as a resource. They give a ton of guidance. So this comes in Dear Colleagues letters. This comes in just formal guidance that they send out technical assistance centers. But the guidance so for example, there's some that came out a few weeks ago, maybe, I don't know, two weeks ago about how do we build and sustain inclusive educational practices. They've had guidance come out about assistive technology, about seclusion and restraint. So what are the best practices informed by research? Dr. partment gathers all this information and just sends it out for free. And this great little packet pdf and so you can use stuff that you've learned in these guidance packets. You can use it tomorrow at your school or you can use it to advocate for what you need. So

that's another huge resource. And finally, I'll just talk about that. They fund technical assistance centers. So one of my favorite is the Iris Center out of Vanderbilt. I, during my special ed program, did a lot of modules run the Iris Center and I'm sure many others did as well. So they found that they found the Cedar Center, they found the Thai center UDL right came out of the CAS Center. So there's just a lot of support that the Department of Ed gives teachers gen ed, special ed, administrators, whoever that I just don't think we all know about because we don't have to know that they they are the ones kind of doing this, but they do a lot for us. And I feel like, yeah, they're they're maybe underappreciated a little bit, particularly in today's climate. Absolutely. And I think that point of the various resources that are out there and available is so important. I know we use a lot of those modules and our undergraduate programs and just thinking about practicing teachers, you know, who maybe are in a general education classroom or even someone who just maybe feels underprepared or just has questions about different areas of interest or how to support a student. Those resources are so valuable for folks to be able to seek out and to be able to do for free, essentially. I know this Theater Center's modules have been great with explicit instruction, so as they continue to focus more on that explicit instruction, I think that that is just such a great resource and thank you for for bringing that up and just kind of outlining those big kind of overarching ideas that fall under the Department of Ed. And you talked a little bit about IDA and the funding coming from the Department of Education. And so kind of as we transition into this new administration, we know the new secretary of education has not yet been confirmed, but we know that's coming soon. Are you anticipating a large change in the dynamic, in the function of the department's priorities and then particularly regarding special education? That is a great question. I'm not really sure what to anticipate. I think a lot of people might feel similarly. And I'm I'm not a policy analyst, so this is not my full time job, but just in what I've read and what I've understood. We can we can expect some changes. The president has some very clear opinions on education and the Department of Education. But how the Department of Ed kind of determines their priorities. It is through the secretary of education, which, as you mentioned, has not been confirmed yet with the president's input. So we've seen some things like Title nine protections. Those have bounced back and forth, back and forth through the past four administrations because of the differing views of the secretary of education through each of these administrations. So I'm sure we can expect, again, probably some changes to Title nine protections, just like we saw in the last Trump administration. Some of those protections for folks were removed. I'm sure we can expect that again. But in the Department of Ed, we have political appointees and then we have lifers. So my mentor in the Department of Ed, Dr. Larry Wexler, he's a lifer. He was there for many, many, many administrations, whereas political appointees like the secretary of education, the assistant secretary, deputy secretary, they all are political appointees. So as the administration changes, those positions are turned over to whoever the president wants to appoint. Of course, with congressional approval. So those political appointees do get a lot of say in not how the department runs, but in what those priorities are. So we know that the president has indicated that he wants to maybe eliminate the Department of Ed. I don't think that's going to happen. That is that would take a lot for that to happen. He has nominated a secretary of education, so I don't actually see that happening. But things like school vouchers. Right. He's indicated that he is very pro school vouchers. That type of stuff is something that that could impact the department's priority. So we we will just have to wait and see. But we already know that some of the executive orders that Biden put in place during his. Presidential administration that tried to give access to underrepresented students. A lot of those have been blocked already through executive orders from Trump's administration, this new administration. So, you know, blocking funding to minority serving institutions, agencies, HBCU's, stuff like that. So yeah, I feel like that's a little bit of a non-answer, but we do have to kind of just wait and see what this administration does. Yeah, absolutely. You know, as I listened to you talk, it made me think of a couple other things and just the first one being, you know, we did a podcast. I don't know if it was our last episode or the episode prior, but we talked a little bit about vocabulary and special education, and we talk a lot about diversity, equity, inclusion. And sometimes I think there is such a nuance in the definition of those words depending on context. So we've seen a big push, you know, in state institutions not being able to continue to have those offices. And we know that that is a large concern. How do we kind of anticipate that impacting special education, even just kind of terminology and how that language is used within the special education world? Yeah, that's going to be incredibly interesting because I've already mentioned several times that my a lot of my work is an inclusive special education. And when I talk about inclusion, I'm talking about students with disabilities being educated in the general education classroom alongside their peers, getting all the supports and services they need. When we talk about DTI, the eye for inclusion, a lot of times doesn't. It's not aligned to the way that inclusion we see like used as special education terminology. Same thing with the word transition. That's something we're looking at at my institution

right now is we have a transition clinic, but we're looking at changing the language around that because when we mean transition, we mean, you know, students who are aging out of the public school system, primarily students with intellectual and developmental disabilities who need jobs, they need meaningful employment, and we're supporting them through this transition. But that word has come to be associated primarily with folks who are transitioning because they're transgender. And we know that because DTI has been effectively blocked in the US through these executive orders and in federal offices, departments, that that word can maybe turn people off to what we're doing. And we don't want that. We need as much support as possible. So we're looking at renaming things here. So I am concerned. I think one of the things that doesn't get mentioned in DTA conversations a lot is disability. Disability is part of diversity. A quarter of Americans have a disability and special educators are students have disabilities. This population we work with has disabilities. So when we talk about getting rid of DTI, we're talking about getting rid of opportunities for our students and for us as educators as well. Another thing that's particularly close to my heart is I do a lot of research and I'm just very invested in inclusive postsecondary education programs. So having adults with intellectual disabilities get the college experience just like their neurotypical peers, a lot of those programs are housed in DTI departments and universities. So I'm also like, where are they going to go? And this has implications for new programs that are like, Well, I guess we can't house it in our DTI center or out of that department because we could get our funding cut or this could come back on us and potentially bad way. So I'm concerned. I personally believe that diversity just makes us better. There's research around that and diverse teams and how well they perform. And I love the work I do and I love our kids. I'm a person with a disability, so I feel like this has an impact on me personally as well. And yeah, I, I'm hoping that we can get some advocacy going around this because I am concerned about the long term effects on what this does for people's just feelings of belonging, mental health and feelings of safety and the country they live in. Such a great point. Thank you for just being so open and honest. I think it's important for folks to hear our stories and about ourselves and about our students and the experiences we have, because it's easy to politicize and, you know, take a position on terms or issues. But just to be able to humanize this experience is really important. You've talked a little bit about idea. And, you know, as that being such a cornerstone of special education, do you anticipate that there could be large changes under idea? Do you think that it would be something that would be that the administration is going to want to do is change any of that legislation. Well, I sure hope not. I think in recent years, people have been asking, why hasn't Edina been reauthorized? The last reauthorization was in 2004. You know, it's literally 20 years later, like, why haven't we reauthorized it, updated it? And a lot of advocates, special education advocates are like, we do not want to do that because. Right. This takes this is a congressional matter. And a lot of folks are afraid that by opening up Edina, by allowing conversation on this act, on this huge, huge like it has huge implications for students and educators around the country. By opening it up, we're actually opening it up to take away protections from our students. So I think most most advocates in this space are really hoping that over the next four years it doesn't get brought up in conversation because we're just not sure where the conversation can go. And the last thing we want is to open something up and then for it to have negative consequences for our students with disabilities. As far as I understand and the reading and listening I've been doing, I haven't heard anything about the potential to open this back up. This is something that's, you know, through the last Trump administration was not on conversation. And so I'm I'm not anticipating it. But you never know what can happen in the next four years. You spoke a little bit about the previous administration and the different priorities under each secretary and under each new administration. Do you have any insight as to what some of those priorities might be during this new administration? Yes. So one is this idea that we needed to return education back to the states. Again, a little bit of misinformation out there. Education is a state function. Most of the educational laws and codes or whatever are coming from your local legislators in your district or your school boards or in your state. So the Department of Ed does not make decisions about what should be taught in schools, as we discussed earlier. So I'm not totally sure when the president says like, let's return education back to the states, that the state that the state level. So I'm not totally sure what that means, but I know that that that has been a talking point for him, for his administration. Also, school vouchers, that's been a huge thing. This idea of like letting parents have more say in their children's education in terms of the curriculum, in terms of school vouchers, those sorts of things have been discussed. So I imagine we'll see something about school vouchers pretty soon, if not, you know, within the next year or so. But those are those are the major priorities I've heard about. I you know, education was not really at the crux of of this political cycle, I would say particularly special education. So I haven't heard a whole lot, but we are returning education back to the states, giving parents more input and say over their children's education and vouchers School vouchers have been the big three. They're speaking

a little bit about parents and the control really already being at the state level. What is the department's role in kind of collaborating with state and local agencies or with parents and advocates to make those decisions? Are there are there other folks at the table when some of those priorities are determined? Great question. Yeah. I mean, I think the department doesn't do a lot of direct collaboration. Right, with parents. You can certainly talk to your local legislators, your senators, your congresspeople, and they can pass that information along. But the way that the department primarily collaborates is by getting request for proposals. Right? They send those out, they get proposals and they give a lot of money. And the department just kind of says like, hey, you know, we think that, you know what's best. You're the experts. You're the researchers. You're on the ground, you're in the classroom. We're going to give you the money to to do this. And I think that's honestly the biggest way that they collaborated is by giving us the funding and trusting us to know what's best for our students in terms of like parent and advocate involvement My recommendation is starting at the local level. That's where we can make the most impact. That's where I personally feel like I've made the most impact. And you can you can help shape federal education policies by talking to your local, local legislators, by getting involved with your local school board. That is what's most going to help your student. But again, it's always you know, I'm writing these letters to my congresspeople right now about the potential confirmation of the secretary of education and how I feel about that. And that's something you can always do as well. But building relationships is, I think, the best way to just start getting involved in this work. I'm not sure if that answered your question, Jamie. That's okay. Well, I just wanted to kind of go back to one thing you said, you know, sure talks about that work at the local level. And I think so many times folks think that their voice doesn't matter and that they can't make this big impressionable change or difference. And I think it's just really critical to reiterate that a lot of times those big changes do happen kind of at those local meetings, you know, with your school board members, with district administration. Just going back to what you said earlier about your opportunities to present professional development in your own school district. You know, so being that person who is willing to do the work and to advocate and to share their stories and and what is impactful for kids is so valuable because it may one day itself well too. That right. Like you could go do some PD at your local district, you could talk to your school board and maybe that catches on within your state and you share it with your state reps. And I think that that is just such an important point to underscore that we have to continue doing that work at the local level. So I just very much appreciate you mentioning that. And I just want to encourage folks to to not be afraid to do the small things because the small things end up being the big things. I think so. Absolutely. And I, I recently read that I was reading about banned books. And in Florida, there is, you know, so many banned books or whatever. And the majority of them were banned because one woman made complaints. And I was like, wow, one woman can get these books banned. Like, Well, what can we do if she got all these books banned in Florida? Like, what can we do to support students with education or with special education services? And what can we do to support our educators and to ensure that our students are getting rigorous and effective quality, high quality education? So, yeah, one person can make a difference positively or negatively. So it is really important that we're getting involved locally as well as at the state level and nationally. This is maybe just a little bit off topic, but speaking about the advocacy work at the local level, at the state level, are you currently in your work at a university? Correct. Correct. Is your university incorporating some of that work within your programs for future educators? So or in practice educators who are in another degree program? Is that something that you guys are working on too? I think as teachers sometimes, you know, when we're out in the field, we don't know that our voice matters quite so much. And so we're just wondering how that looks at an undergraduate or graduate level to think about how we incorporate advocacy more into our programs. Yeah. I can't speak to that directly here at Baylor. I'm not currently teaching, so I'm more on the research side, but I like it. I work at the Baylor Center for Developmental Disabilities and, you know, we get interns that are master's level students. And yeah, we're we're advocating right where we're doing the work. We've got a hill day coming up. We have a Lend program here. So we've got a Hill Day coming up. We're taking the one fellows to talk to the Texas state legislature. So I think it's starting to become more of a common thing in teacher prep programs, but I can't for sure say what what Baylor's doing in their program. Sure. Thank you. So just thinking about have a long term vision for improving outcomes for education, specifically for students with disabilities. I guess kind of a two piece question here. What do you think the new administration's long term vision would be? And we've kind of talked about this a little bit, but then from your perspective, what do you how do you envision that that long term, that long term goal really for the department? Yeah. There wasn't totally a law about students with disabilities on the campaign trail, and from what I've seen so far. One thing I am personally concerned about are vouchers. The president has made clear that he supports vouchers. A lot of folks around the president support vouchers. My concern around

vouchers is you would think, well, that doesn't have anything to do with special ed, like, you know, where to what? Why is that a concern? But there is an impact, right? The public funds are being used to fund these vouchers. And so when public. And we know the Department of Ed doesn't have a giant budget as compared to some of the other things Congress funds and is potentially looking at a big cut. But the money that they do have, if it goes to fund vouchers, where is it not going? And I think that's the bigger question. And is it is it going to impact students with disabilities? Probably. Is idea funding potentially going to get cut? I don't know. But there's the potential for that. So and then there's the potential for funding being cut for any other student in a public school. So you might think, you know, a voucher that doesn't have really anything to do with me, but the money has to come from somewhere. And if it's going to support vouchers, then it's probably being taken out of other pockets for real education, special education or any other sort of program that the Department of Ed funds. So that's one thing that I'm thinking about. There's also this conversation around merit pay. And as a special ed teacher, you know, formally, I do worry about merit pay. We know that merit pay leads to more competitiveness among teachers. But collaboration is really what we need to succeed, especially as a special education teacher. It can feel a little lonely sometimes, even as an inclusive, special ed teacher. I was co teaching with a bunch of different teachers, but sometimes it did feel a little lonely, you know, being at school at 6 p.m., 7 p.m. writing IEPs because I was teaching all day. And so I do worry merit pay, right? If we enforce that, is it going to lead to less collaboration? But collaboration is is what makes education great. If you've got something that you can share, that's going to be great for my student. Great. And then I'm going to be able to share something with you. It's just kind of sharing the workload a little bit and it's making things better. So I do kind of worry about that as well, especially if it's based on test scores. Are we just going to be teaching to the test? Are we going to be forcing students who would? You know, potentially opt out of testing. Their parents would opt them out of testing or we will be forcing them to take the test now. I don't know. And how much can standardized tests really tell us? That's a whole different conversation. But those are yeah, those are a bit about my concerns, but I haven't seen anything about improving outcomes for students with disabilities specifically. I think the President believes that returning educational power to the states, whatever that might mean, will improve outcomes for all children. But I haven't seen any specifics on that. So you talked a lot about the vouchers. And I'm in Iowa. So for those who might not be aware, Iowa passed a voucher program last year. They're calling them educational savings accounts because no one wants to use the word vouchers. But we're seeing some some districts here in the state who are having the lowest enrollment that they've had in years. And, you know, now two years in a row facing massive budget cuts because of families opting to send their children to private schools in the area. And then those private schools, you know, just increasing tuition because now families have, you know, some access to funds, which then continues to make access to private education unavailable to lots of families. Because even with the voucher and the increase in the tuition costs, families are not able for that choice. Students who are being turned away based on disability, that sort of thing. And I just saw a projection recently. I've seen two different numbers come out. One, they anticipated the voucher bill in Iowa will cost up to \$44 million next year of taxpayer money. And then the other number I saw was it could be up to \$1 billion. So I don't know where those projections are coming from. But, you know, you talked a little bit about that and how that impacts students. Can you talk a little bit about as far as private institutions receiving voucher money, the student population that they may or may not serve for folks who maybe don't understand kind of the implications for can they turn students away? Do they have to accept everyone? They're getting state money, but who do they serve? Can you talk about that a little bit? They can serve whoever they want. And I think that's that's part of the issue, is that there's not, you know, private schools. It's private up until, you know, vouchers that had been primarily private money. And so they can they can do what they want. And because of that, there is no idea in private schools, there is no special ed protections or IEPs, anything like that. So, you know, there's been a big push to particularly around Catholic schools to include students with disabilities, but they don't have to nobody has to include a student with a disability. So you could be like, yeah, my kid has dyslexia and there's this great private school down the road. I want a voucher. Well, that's cool. Can one turn your kid away? And two, doesn't have to provide them any services that are currently in their IEP. So, I mean, that is one of the major impacts on on students as well is that these vouchers, they're not you know, they say that they're for everyone. But in reality, when we look at who receives the vouchers, it is not students of color, low income students. It's not students with disabilities. It's primarily students who are already at the school, but not always, but primarily students who are already at the school who have now just found an alternative. Alternative way to pay for it. Yeah. Now. Thank you for speaking to that. I think it's important that folks understand really what that means. Right. Just kind of as we start to close up today in just what I think about kind of a call to action for our listeners. And so what advice

would you have for advocates, for educators, families to continue to do this work and really think about contacting the department or supporting that work to make sure that all students needs are being met? Absolutely. This is so important. And I think right now some folks are feeling discouraged. And I just yeah, I just want to remind folks that everyone gets discouraged. It's wherever you are on the spectrum, right. There's a there's a fight one way or the other. If you're, you know, fighting for environmental justice or racial justice or whatever, we all get discouraged at some point. And so it's important to find your people to become part of organizations, even if you have a really, really small role or what you feel is a small role. Just showing up to meetings helps other people and it helps you. And we we stay accountable. I think of it kind of like workout classes. Like if I tell myself like, yeah, I'm going to go home and, you know, workout after work, I do not do it. But if I like sign up for a class and it's like a commitment and I have it on my calendar, I actually go. So I feel like the same can be said for advocacy, right? We need to if we do this work alone, it can be really lonely. But if we team up and we find other folks who have common interests and whatever it may be, you know, you might really support vouchers. Then you team up with someone who also supports vouchers and see what you can do. Build an organization, but most importantly, start local. That again is where you can get a lot done just with your local school board. Make relationships with folks that are representative of you around your local community, whether that's, you know, a district person or if you have a congressperson in your city or whatever. Just try and build those relationships. Here in Texas, you can open something called a constituent case, and once you ask an elected official to open a constituent case, things just seem to move quicker than if you just send an email being like, Hey, can you look into this? Or even if you visit and say, Hey, can you look into this? So like there's special phrasing sometimes. So the special words constituent case, it's kind of a fast track lane, so to speak. So the creating relationships is just huge. But in addition, a lot of organizations or coalitions will have hill days where you go to either, you know, your State Hill or D.C. and you advocate in a PAC for something that you really believe in. And then there's always letters, emails, faxes. I know a lot of people don't have fax machines anymore, but there are there's you know, there's some websites that will do it for you. Even on the Estes website, there's a policy action center and you can just go ahead and type in your name and where you live. And they will send an automated message to your Congress, folks, you know, with this already well-thought out email about different issues, I think when I sent recently it was about ID funding. But yeah, so CDC has those and I'm sure a lot of your favorite advocacy organizations have those as well. But at the end of the day, you just you fight for what's important to you and your students and you can't win every battle, but you can sure as heck try that. Absolutely. I think that's a great way to wrap this up. Great ending quote there. So I just I just want to thank you again for joining me today and being willing to share your story and your experience and insights with the Department of Ed. Do you have any final thoughts for our listeners? Anything else you'd like to share today? Now. I think that's it. Maybe just utilize what the Department of Ed has to go look for that assistive technology guidance or a guidance. They've really got guidance on a lot of things. They just put out something about, I think, a dear colleague letter around retaining teachers, which we know is a huge issue, particularly in special education. So I would just say, hey, we've got these resources, right? We've got the taxpayer dollars pay for them, go ahead and use them. So spend some time doing that and good luck. Awesome. Thanks again, Emily. We really appreciate it. Yeah, no problem. Thanks for having me.

Jamie Nelson In the last section of today's podcast, we'll go over the latest Washington Update blog post from education policy advisor Dr. Kait Brennan and other important updates. Today, we'll be summarizing the January 15th, 2025 Washington Update blog post. The link to the full post can be found in the show notes. This is the final Washington update before the presidential inauguration and subsequent change in administration on January 20th. There is a lot going on in D.C. to prepare for this transition. So let's dive in. First Chair Tim Walberg, a Republican from Michigan and ranking member Bobby Scott, a Democrat from Virginia, announced updates to the House Education and Workforce Committees, Subcommittee Leadership and membership for the 119th Congress. These updates include new leadership roles and assignments for both parties. A list of key appointments can be found in the January 15th, 2025. Washington Update Blog Post. Next, the confirmation hearing for Linda McMahon, President elect Trump's pick for secretary of education has not yet occurred due to a delay in paperwork from the transition team. However, McMahon, who previously led the Small Business Administration under Trump, has started meeting with committee members and Senate leadership. Finally, President Biden has honored nearly 400 of the nation's brightest minds with the Presidential Early Career Award for scientists and engineers, the highest recognition the U.S. government bestows on early career scientists and engineers. Very excitingly award recipients included at TED members Dr. Liz Bettini and Dr. Jenny Root for their outstanding work. Congratulations to them both. As always, you can find a link to the latest Washington update and past updates in the show notes or on the TED

website. Want more Washington Update? Join Dr. Kait Brennan and TED Policy Committee Chair Dr. Lucky Mason Williams on Zoom on the fourth Thursday of every month for their virtual Washington update to hear the latest policy happenings. The link to register can be found in the show notes or on the TED website. The latest advocacy brief from the TED Policy Committee on the Federal Appropriations Process for special education funding and faculty involvement is now available. Please check the show notes for a link to this handy resource. One last thing. The TED Policy Committee has a session at the 2025 CEC Convention and Expo in Baltimore, Maryland, on Friday, March 14th from 9:15 to 10:15 a.m. titled "TED Showcase: Navigating Policy and Its Implications for Special Education Research and Teacher Preparation." The TED Showcase session will bring together a panel of experts to explore the intersection of policy, special education, research and teacher preparation. It will highlight TED's work in policy, recent policy changes and translating policy into innovation and teacher preparation and research to better serve students with disabilities. More details on this showcase to come as the convention nears. So stay tuned and see you in Baltimore.

Jamie Nelson Thank you for tuning in to this episode of the TED and CEC Collaboration Podcast. We hope you found the discussion enlightening and inspiring. Remember, change begins with awareness, and advocacy is the catalyst for progress and 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, in action and education. And 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 a heartfelt appreciation to our guests for sharing their expertise, insights and passion for education. Your perspectives have enriched our conversations and inspired action. A special thank you to our production team. Danielle A. Waterfield, University of Virginia, Caitlin Criss, Georgia Southern University, Nancy Welsh Young, Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities, and Jamie Nelson, William Penn University, for their dedication and hard work from behind the scenes, researching topics to editing episodes, your contributions ensure that each podcast is informative and engaging. Additionally, we want to acknowledge the contribution of the production equipment and software provided by William Penn University. Without the tools and technology that enable us to record and distribute this podcast, none of this would be possible. And finally, we want to express our gratitude to you, our listeners. Thank you for tuning in, for your support and for being advocates for positive change and education. Remember, the work doesn't end here. Let's continue to collaborate, innovate, and advocate for a brighter future and education.