

## TED & CEC Collaboration Podcast Episode 4 (Vocabulary)

**Jamie Nelson** Welcome to the TED and CDC Collaboration Podcast, where we dove 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 four of the TED and CEC Collaboration Podcast. I'm your host, Jamie Nelson. In today's episode, we are joined by experts Mitch Yell and Lysandra Cook to discuss special education policy and vocabulary. Mitchell L. Yell Ph.D., is the Fred and Francis Lester Palmetto, chair of teacher education and a professor in special education at the University of South Carolina. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. His professional interests include special education, law, IEP development and progress monitoring. Dr. Yell has published 142 Journal Articles eight textbooks, 36 book chapters, and has conducted numerous workshops on various aspects of special education, law, IEP, development and progress monitoring. His textbook Special Education in the Law is in its sixth edition. Dr. Yell also serves as a state level due process review officer in South Carolina. He is currently serving as a special education expert for the U.S. Department of Justice on two cases of discrimination against students with disabilities brought under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Prior to working in higher education, Dr. Yell was a special education teacher in Minnesota for 14 years. Lysandra Cook, Ph.D., is a professor in the Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Special Education at the University of Virginia, where she also serves as the special education program coordinator. She earned her Ph.D. in special education from Kent State University. Dr. Cook's professional interests include evidence-based practices, teacher preparation, and the importance of authentic representation of disability in the media. She has published numerous journal articles, book chapters and other publications on topics such as evidence-based practices, teacher education and classroom management. Dr. Cook has presented her research at national and international conferences and has been involved in several federally funded grants. Prior to her current position, she held faculty roles at the University of Hawaii and Kent State University. Dr. Cook has received multiple awards for her teaching, including the Curry Faculty Council Excellence in Teaching Award and the University of Hawaii Chancellor's Citation for Meritorious Teaching. Before entering academia, she worked as a special education teacher in California.

**Unknown** All right. Welcome, Lysandra and Mitch. We're just really excited to have you both on the TED and CDC collaboration podcast. Joining us today to speak a little bit about some of the shifts that have been happening and the policies regarding special education. So we're excited to be learning alongside both of you today, learning from you and learning about what we can do to support policy change and implement these changes within our programs and also boots on the ground, kind of how we can go out and do this policy work. So we're going to start with some introductions. So should you maybe start us up and share a little bit about who you are in the experience you can bring to the conversation today? Certainly. Thank you. Start out. I'm originally from Minnesota, not too far from you in Iowa. Yeah, yeah. I was a special ed teacher for 14 years and, you know, came up in school district in Minnesota. And my wife and I decided, well, let's try this higher ed thing. Interestingly enough, I had I been a teacher for 14 years and applied to a law school and a PHC program in both in Minnesota, got accepted to both and had to decide what which way to direction to go. And I chose to go to the University of Minnesota and stayed with Frank Wood and Stan Dino in special education. And I was glad I did and. After completing my Ph.D., we decided to look for a position in higher education. And interestingly enough, Lysandra, I first won. The first place I looked at was a lady in Manila and eventually chose to go to the University of South Carolina, where I'm I was intending probably to stay for good two or three years and then head back to Minnesota. And and a couple of years ago, I received my 30 year badge, so at the university. So I've been here for quite a while. Also, I was in graduation. Yes. As I'm a father of three children, two of them did do have disabilities. So I have sat on that side of the IEP table as well as on the teacher side and administrative side. In addition to be a professor, I'm also a state review officer in South Carolina. We have what's called a two tier state where we're all familiar with due process hearings in most states, hearings when they're appealed, we'll go to court in South Carolina. We're one of seven states where

they go to a state where you officer and that's what I do now, too. So I review a number of cases and it's essentially just looking at the due process hearing, read the reading, the transcripts of the case, reading the decision of the hearing officer and deciding if they've applied the law correctly. And so I've been doing that now for probably about 15 years. And the last three years I've also worked for the Department of Justice in 88 discrimination suits against school districts for discriminating against youngsters with disabilities. So that's kind of my background. And and of course, my interest in law and policy goes way back to when I was in Minnesota. But I must say, too, I've I've been at the last special education legislative summits on the cells, and we were talking about Lucky a little while ago, and those are fabulous opportunities to really make a difference on the ground. So that's my background. Yeah. I'm excited to get into some of our questions today and is hear your perspective and you know, based on those experiences that you've had, just kind of that advice you might give to those of us who are just kind of getting started with this work. You know, I feel like sometimes it's hard to get started because you don't know where to start. And and it feels like you have to just kind of jump in and and just kind of do the work as you go. So that's that's exciting to hear about all of those different things that you can bring to the table. So Lucy, Andrea, would you mind sharing a little bit about your background and experience? Yeah, and it's quite different. And I grew up in Northern California and in first grade I was kicked out of school for poor behavior. I was selected mute and my mother was not legal at the time. She was here in America without papers. And she also had I grew up in a commune called The Magic People. So it was a very different experience and it was only through becoming this national educator and going to college. I'm first generation American, first generation college student and fell into special ed and then only in. Understanding my students and reading their files and learning about the system. I realize now. No, it was 1974, so or 75. So maybe I give the school district the pass, but like there was a lot of things that the school district didn't do for me. And I find it very interesting because of the way I look and the way I cut my maybe academic potential. I was given a lot of second, third and 15 chances that a lot of people aren't because they don't look the way that I look. And I think the longer I've been in special ed, the more I realize that. So I grew up in Northern California. I went to UC Santa Barbara and during a I was going to be a kindergarten teacher. And so I had to do an undergrad in a different major because California at the time wouldn't get your license as a as a undergrad. And so I did child development and one of my classes my senior year, the professor's like, you've been working at this children's center for the last four years. You know, they asked, Why don't you take a risk and do something you think you don't want to do and just try it? And right next to us was a Devereaux Foundation, where a residential treatment facility. And I quit my job and I volunteered at Debbie Rowe. And, of course, and so I didn't go running when the principal said what to do if somebody grabs your hair. I stayed and within like three days had like a job. I ended up working there for four years, being an emergency hired teacher and really learning backwards of what we would would recommend. And then did go to UC Santa Barbara. I finished my her my book, my general lab license, special ed license and Masters and I met my husband who's two also we met at Doc Brown. And so my husband, Dr. Ryan Cook and I met three years ago at work and we still work together now as professor. So it was a path. I stayed in the classroom longer, I didn't public school. And let me tell you that after we'd been in a residential school, some of the behaviors and things that happen in public school, you're more shocked by the adults than the kids. And what that was the first time where I saw a school administrator illustrator that was supposed to be supporting our kids come running and happy that she could expel one of our kids. She finally found this way to expel this kid. And I was just like. At that point it. One of the reasons that I went into higher ed was as a teacher, I felt so. Vulnerable and at the whims of the administration and whether they were doing it by the letter of the law or not. It felt so wrong for that, that the way it and the whole system failed. Some of the kids that I know is working in Santa Barbara, California, at the time, and all of my students, about one were black or brown. And it was just really, really frustrating to see as a teacher that I went to all of my hands, made the Kent State where he had his first position in higher ed. And I got my degree there and. Then we went to the university away for 13 years where I developed an inclusive undergraduate teacher program, where we Cotai, all our nurses and actually general and faculty understood special ed and I felt really good about that and arrived at the University of Virginia. And we have excellent programs, but we have very little. Collaboration across programs. It's, um, but it's, it's definitely a little bit less. But I also have access to amazing undergrads and masters students across grounds. And I have got students from our Batten school who like to go to cells and to get into special ed leadership. And I think that on that level, at getting more people than just our future teachers and future administrators to understand special ed and disability I think is has been really monumental and really fun to do so. That's amazing. Thank you for sharing such a personal story that led you to where you are now. I also like to share it because now that I'm a full professor at a place like UVA, I have

the privilege to be able to share things that might have been really seemingly shameful and still having an emotional disorder. I have a diagnosis of PTSD because of my childhood, and I feel like being able to share that is so important for both myself and also when I was a teacher in Santa Barbara, being able to share that my dad was in jail and I didn't know had helped those kids understand that someone might be on the onset to understand what they've been through. So, yes, I do care it, but I share from a position of being secure in my privilege. Yeah, well, and I think that's an important lens, too. And it's also one of those things that's a beautiful thing to be able to speak your truth and your lived experience because others can learn so much from that. So it's that piece of we we assign or assume shame for these things that someone has arbitrarily said should be shameful. Right. But who decides that? Who decides what is shameful? And so to be able to share that and empower others to be able to just learn from a different lens or to think about a perspective different from their own or a lived experience separate from their own is really powerful. So really appreciate that. We're going to just kind of jump into some questions here. So the focus of this episode of our podcast, like I said, is really trying to understand policy and just what the recent changes and legislation across the country are. We're noticing some shifts, substantial shifts in some states. So the first question I have is, just over time, how have special education policies evolved with respect to diversity, equity and inclusion? And the reason we talked about those terms is because there is a really big disparity, I think, and what those terms mean in special education. So Mitch, would you want to maybe start us off and talk a little bit about those policies and that evolution over time? Now? Certainly. I would say sum of all these all these terms are constantly changing. And, you know, they mean different things to different people. I mean, really, the whole question of education policy and diversity and equality, equity and inclusion, I think I mean, it goes back to 1973, really goes back to 1964 in Title six of the Civil Rights Act, which said, you know, there are certain people that do not have the rights that other people do. They are being discriminated against. And of course, the Civil Rights Act, Title six, really prohibited discrimination based on race. And then then comes along 1973 Section five of for other rehabilitation acts said, well, you know, these kids with disabilities are being discriminated against, too. They are. And as a result of that law, they became a protected class. So in a sense, it's not new. And then you think of, you know, Title nine or the education amendments had to protect persons based on sex. And ADA. And so it's been with us a long time. These civil rights laws essentially confer personal rights to be freed from discrimination. But has it really happened on the ground? Horribly not. I mean, just a few years ago now. And let me go to a little on my experience in doing these 88 cases. Clearly both of the ads. I did two of them in Florida, for example. Both of them had to do with schools. Excluding youngsters with disabilities informally, you know, saying things like. Oh, Mom, your child is having a problem today. Could you come and pick them up? But don't worry, you won't be a suspension in, in effect, to suspending the child informally. And I think that's that's a common occurrence. We found both the school districts we worked with were discriminated against youngsters in this way. And clearly, it's mostly English language learners, children of different of differing races, different economics of a background that are being excluded. In fact, I think it was two years ago, there was a book written and you can still find it by the National Disability Rights Network called Out from the Shadows Informal Removal of children with Disabilities from Public Schools. And that is unfortunately going on all the time. So where kids have rights, are they really receiving these rights and often. Absolutely. This is not the case. There's not the case. And it's it's so hard. It's one of the reasons I don't actually like to teach the Spotlight class at the university, because students are constantly coming and saying, hey, this is the seat legal. And you're like, it sure sounds like it's illegal. I bet that that that what Mitch just said about Hey, Mom, come pick up your kid. Every one of our seminars, students are saying, and this is what happens. Is this okay? This kid is not getting instruction, but it's also not getting documented. And so then Chow is where is the compliance? And I think it's so similar in one of my elective classes, inclusion, school and community. It's just not even an education course. We read this first person narrative called The Isolation of Being Deaf in prison. And it is this case of a deaf black man in Georgia who was I was with. A blind man. They're both in prison and sign language is on a communication and he's taken into court with his hands handcuffed behind his back. He's not able to access that like. And I use that only to just be so extreme to let the students know. Yeah, they're constantly like, Well, is there a law for that? I'm like, There is, but. Who is monitoring for the most marginalized people? Who is out there saying, this is what happens, especially when like I know in Hawaii, working with some of the families that were new to America and not understanding the educational system and not understanding the roles and what rights that they had. And doesn't matter if you give them about triplicate of their rights on the back of the form that they can't read anyway. It's just it's constantly you're getting these flights where yes we're meeting the the be absolute letter and you know some like compliance driven we're checking off all the right boxes but

it's actually then I. Really authentically giving providing the services because. They're not you know, they're doing it unofficially. So, you know, I think about that with that interpretation of the law, you know, and then you even mentioned. Parents rights booklets, you know, and we give it out on the packet that looks like a small book. So we think about that access for parents even. Do they have access to be able to read that document, to understand that document, to interpret the law in the way which it was intended? So I think that those are some of those big roadblocks that we have with with policy kind of holistically. What do you think? And either of you are, you know, are welcome to speak to this, but what are some of the biggest changes regarding policy that you think need to happen? So kind of talks about these things are in place, but who's monitoring them? How are we making sure that they are happening? So where do you think we need to go with this work? Do you want to start over? But I do want to say, like having been in a state like when I was in Hawaii because of the consent decree. Felix Consent decree and, and, and so many issues. They had so many levels of bureaucracy and it still didn't like they, they kept thinking that if we put another level of compliance and then we're going to catch that. But. It didn't work. It got so onerous that then. The teachers were spending so much extra time or the case managers doing all this complained servants that they didn't have the time to actually do the interfacing with the children and the family and that. And so I'm so low that I suggest any extra level of compliance monitoring, but. Listening to family. I mean, I know that's what you're trying to do. And like I'm right now on the Cedar Virginia team and the Cedar Center is where all the ages and the state and Department of Education and the local education agencies getting asked to meet and talk together. And I think it's so important, but I don't know that. I have an easy answer for this sort of meaning. I don't. There's probably not an easy answer. If there was, we'd solve all the problems. Now, there are not easy answers. I mean. Clearly the law says what should be done in, you know, the office of Special Ed Programs issues, policy statements and and in an attempt to improve things. But unfortunately, it really comes down to what's what's going on on the ground. And and I think. You know, I mean, when I think about. Albums. One of the things I think about is with the almost ten cases 25 years old, though, and that was to youngster to youngsters at the time, put in a institution and living most of their lives there. And they didn't belong there. And, you know, the Supreme Court said, well, you know, unjustified segregation of people with disabilities is a form of discrimination, violates the ADA. Is this still happening? The probably is. It's it's so difficult to deal with. And and I think Lysander is exactly right on just adding more compliance. I don't know if that's the answer because we're drowning. So many teachers are drowning in compliance things the way they are now. It is a difficult question. Well, it does feel nearly impossible to ask teachers to do anything more than they're already doing. But I think, you know, much like you said. The law already is there. The policy's already written. So if we are really focused on. Understanding and interpreting that. So as you know, institutions of higher ed and teacher programs, you know, we're doing hopefully our due diligence with preparing our our future teachers to know and understand what what those laws and policies are. And, you know, historical cases that have impacted these policies and laws and the legislation, but also teaching them how to be advocates, I think is so important, which is one of the reasons why we've we've tried to expand our reach with our policy briefs from Todd and through this podcast and just share how we can get more people to to join us in that effort to really advocate for our students with disabilities and people with disabilities. And General, just think about how we create more inclusive spaces, which kind of takes me to this next question of, you know, we've had these terms and education and primarily special education for a really long time of diversity equity and inclusion and then also transition, right? So they are central to our conversations and education all the time. So could you talk first just about the context of those words, specifically related to education and special education? And then why have they become so divisive and so controversial? And how do they maybe impact current policy? It's really loaded. But yeah, there's a lot of layers there. We might have to pull it back one at a time, right? So maybe let's start with those terms and like what they mean in special education. So I would say that. Well, as I was saying before, the whole question of diversity. Well, that that was taken care of supposedly in the law long ago and and equity was taken care of. Inclusion is a little bit of a of a problem in special education because sometimes it is interpreted as all kids have to be in one setting. And so that's been a very controversial issue. But I think a lot of the. Political and social context to these questions, why they're why they become all of a sudden loaded terms, really. It's political more than anything. It's it's a you know, I have a I have a good friend who is not going to Florida anymore because she was given a list of words she cannot say in her in their talks. And of course, d i diversity, equity and conditions are not they're verboten words in Florida. And so I think a lot of times it's this political overlay that's really made this a real difficult issue, even more difficult than it is. Absolutely. It was such I was so hopeful in 2020 that. We were going to have this broader conversation about diversity, equity and inclusion and the way that kind of social justice movement was moving and that actually

disability was going to get. Included in that in a positive way. And we were going to oh, look, like now we're going to talk about marginalization. We can also talk about how about the intersectionality and the fact that 70% of the men in jail in America have disability. It's like that is an issue that is beyond a child but is an issue. And then and now all of a sudden it's like, are we also going to get. Well, because of the political climate, we are getting some of that. Like if half of the country can think about electing a man that is going to mock someone, whether or not that specific reporter had spastic movements or not, and she says, Oh, I wasn't mocking him. I'm like, You were mocking disability and people didn't care about that. Like that to me is. We're assigning. And in that context, where at the at the cross-state convening for the Cedar Center, we had to talk to some of our partners in some states where they had to remove these terms from their syllabi in order to get them. Next. And it's like diversity. The idea that we all like people are different from each other. We need to address that and make sure that no subgroup, I mean, all of the federal centers, all of the ways that we can check for bias meet means we have to understand how things are different so we can see if any subgroup is not getting it. You know, we need to be able to talk about these terms and inclusion in the big deal is a little bit different than inclusion in terms of least restrictive setting or how, you know, and that is a special ed issue of inclusion but like the bigger idea as. Everybody being able to be. Cool as humans just shouldn't be so controversial. Mm hmm. It. Yeah. I think we've had, you know, some conversations regarding that we've had even in our, our TED groups, you know, some folks from states where the efforts are, you know, kind of. Or I say under attack, you know, because that's what it feels like. Yes. In those states, they're not even able to come to CSI or TED because DCI is states in mission statement. Statement. Yeah. So, you know, they're also talking about in states across the nation where, you know, those are those things are are coming forth through legislation that public funding at state institutions and things like that. People are not going to be able to attend conferences or, you know, match your your friend, who, you know, obviously is at this point choosing to not go to Florida. But, you know, well, we not be able to present at conferences and these states with these terms and our presentations. So. That was kind of the the conversation around the the reason that we wanted to put this podcast out was because I believe there was a state and I'm not going to be able to speak to which one, but the word transition was under attack from the state government because because of gender affirming care. Yeah. So legislators were, you know, things were happening. I can't speak to the court case, but but this came up. It just kind of sparked my memory with a conversation about this. You know, people just don't understand sometimes the vocabulary that we're using in special education. So that word transition, they didn't understand. That meant we were helping students transition from school to employment school to living school to post-secondary opportunity, or even that transition between elementary to middle school to high school, that sort of thing. So I think that that conversation has become really political, and I think that's hard for folks because people who have, you know, come from historically Republican states or backgrounds feel that. I don't know, dedication to this party that that may not exist in the way it once did. And so we're we're kind of seeing now kind of that polarization of while you have to be this or that, and how do we come back to that place where it's not about this party or that party, it's about what's best for our students, what's best for our population, what's best for the people out of this group, or how do we create this inclusive space. And so just kind of thinking about that, like, how do we think about some of these broader political and social movements? And how do we how do we really position ourselves in a way that we can advocate and help people understand what it is we're trying to do in in the world of special education while still navigating these these party politics, you know, party politics. Well. I could say one of the legends at TEDx, Dr. Jane Wells, also is a. What would she say if you're not at the table, you're maybe on the menu. Yeah, yeah. I've been telling my friends that and it's lovely. And she had a she just sort a book advocating for the common good, I think it was called. Excellent, excellent book. And I think what she really talks about is very important. We have to get involved. You know, I mean, think of right now there is a person running in North Carolina for the Department of Education on the Republican side who is seps world crazy. I mean, if you think if you looked at how. Some of the worst conspiracy theories you could think of. She's an advocate of them on and after that because it could have a horrendous effect on education in in North Carolina. I mean, and you look at big states like Texas and Florida, they have a huge effect on how the publishing industry and education. And all of a sudden they're saying, well, we have to scrub history. We can't talk about discrimination. We got to remove it all. You're going to see, I think, bigger publishing companies saying, oh, well, if we want to sell our books there, we have to do that. So we're going to I think we're seeing we could be seeing a real scrubbing of of our history with regards to diversity and equity and issues like that And that's that's very frightening. It's very frightening. We have I have been I am speaking at our local school boards, parents information, special ed meetings. And it bothers me to no end that in the state in in Virginia one of the ways that they the chairman equity is is decreasing the

problem the. Probability of poor outcomes based on your, you know, your zip code or your socioeconomic status. And it says in the code disability. But this specific superintendent says special capacities because he can't even say the word disability. And I'm like, if we cannot say disability, then how can we convince everybody, including you? But it is a natural part of the human condition and that these people that have disabilities are just equally as important and can do. You know, we want to help them to be their best selves, just like we want to help every other student. And it just blows me away. And also, if you have not seen the new film, A Trace, the movie on Hulu, I highly recommend it. It is mostly about the marriage penalty for disabled people, get married and then losing benefits but that the people that they got to do it Patrice is so compelling and just a lovely person and these really fall into their story. But one my in this class was using it. One of the students was working at all the reviews and there are people there that are saying, Oh, that's not penalty. Most people that get benefits would be so happy and not be greedy. And I was like, What did you think that make? And so there is that that pressure like if you get any benefits, that's it that's agreed from the government. And I've had the parents tell me when I was in Hawaii that the worst thing that ever happened to education was the Felix consent decree, because it's ruined it and now schools have to pay so much money and attention. Special ed and those kids should just figure it out themselves. And I'm like. Maybe it's because something happens, compliance or you hear it, but it's not. We don't as a country have the mindset that. Still it is actually part of the human condition in that like, yes, it's okay. Sometimes you need more support here and I need more support here. But like if we care about each other, we want everybody to have a basic level of education and the law says a basic level of access to all of these things that we all get. And it just blows me away that. At that comment about transition I'd make. Sometimes it just when they complain about things, you're just like, that's just showing your ignorance and that you don't understand that what condition is in the law that you're complaining about. But. That we're so concerned about. Especially. I saw that that. Pretty small government is the one that is so worried about what you're doing in the bathroom. I'm going to. And what you're. Yeah. 19. Do say, you know, Jane really puts her finger on when she says we have to be involved. We do. We have to be involved at the local level. We have to be involved at the state level and even at the federal level. But it really takes. It takes. Inaction is our enemy that we really have to be out and and working for the to improve kids you know, special education for everyone. And I do believe, I think really November 5th, I think this country is on a knife set. And I think it could go the wrong way and. So that's really frightening. No, I've been wearing all the majored in human history. It's like, yeah, I want to see, you know, like, just because I do think one of the things that we are in danger of is not not only just our teachers and our leaders that we're training, but I have really been focusing on the disabled students that I have at UVA because I have been seeing how these are successful students and they feel really marginalized and shameful. Like when you get in your beginning of the course survey, I am so sorry, I have dyslexia, I'm going to need this. I might take longer and I'm like, No, I want you to be able to be like, This is what I need. And my policies are hopefully this way. And I'm telling you, I'm intentionally set it up so that you're getting what you need. But if you ever need anything else, let me know, because I want you as a disabled person to understand what you should have so that you can then be even a bigger advocate. And especially when I have students that are like going to be hedge fund managers and like all these other places, I'm like, I want you. To embrace. You don't have to have a big D disability identity if you don't want to, but embrace the idea that there's nothing wrong with you, that you are a human and deserve equal access so that you can take that with you. But yeah, being going, I mean, that's the only reason I got all that. Anytime I'm invited at a local level, I'll go. And even when I'm not invited because that's. It's important and you can't just ignore it. You have to keep going and keep going. And also why I like sharing my own story, because I think sometimes they have a different idea of what that said kid that got kicked out of school looks like. And I'm like, you know what? They are not. It's not that they're just bad people. I think it's not at all. That's not what's going on. And with effective intervention. With effective supports. Everybody has so much more potential. And that's what we need to make sure that they get what is legally awarded to them already, that they actually get it. And that's the hard part. I think that's such an important point to make about our students. If they don't know how to advocate for themselves, it might be really difficult to understand who you are as an educator. You know, if they have a disability or if there's just not that component of who you are that they don't know and they can't identify, then it makes it really hard to to put yourself out there and be vulnerable and to continue to do that work. And I think, you know, much like you said it, we have to be involved at every level. And so if our students can learn to advocate for themselves here in our institutions, with their professors, with their coaches, or with the dean, if they need to go, you know talk to the dean about having a plan in place or accommodations that they can receive, you know, those pieces. I think are really important. And then, you know, they have the little bit of that lens and then we can push them

out into what are, you know, local spaces where you can go out and learn how to advocate for others. And maybe it's based on your own experience or an experience in that classroom and getting involved with those local elections. You know, I've told students a lot about you have to be involved with your local school board elections, you know, those kinds of things, especially those people are. They're there to work for you and represent you and your interests and of what you think is best for your local schools and to develop relationships with those people and at the state level and the federal level. And Kate Brennan was on, I think, our first episode. She and Lucky did our first episode. And, you know, she just she made some really great points talking about how. A lot of times at the end of the day, if we can sit down with someone face to face over a cup of coffee and really humanize that experience or share a personal story because we all either are someone or know someone or love someone who has a disability. And so there is that connection that we can have and we can share that and come to just that common ground of we have maybe not necessarily the same or similar experience, but somewhat of a shared experience with that. And so I think a lot of times it is that ignorance or that misunderstanding about what we're trying to do in their field. And, you know, we didn't put the term indoctrination on here, but maybe we should have because that's pretty big in higher ed, right? But that's not what we're trying to do. And I think that's the piece where we're trying to help our students just have this really this broad lens of how to create a world that is is a better place for our students and for people and to kind of have that greater impact for the greater good. So, Lucinda, you talked a little bit about that intersectionality a little bit earlier. And and kind of you know, I just I think about that with our students who maybe experience that, whether it's, you know, that multiple layers of race being part of marginalized communities, you know, socioeconomic status, disability. Like, what are we I think what are some of your thoughts or ideas of how we approach that and how we can create support systems for students who have these intersecting identities in our school districts? It sounds like you're doing some of that work. What do you speak to that a little bit? Mostly so far on the individual level because I don't know what it is about. Maybe it is because special programs with deer attract some students that that have more intersectionality. But trying to understand it. And also I think what I really appreciated from when I thought we were having a big 2020 social justice movement idea is all of us kind of even examining our own identity as especially those of us that hadn't done that before. It's because we hadn't we didn't need to like we had already had access. We think everything's fine because it's working. The system is working for me and I had come into it with such a disability lens because I'd seen so many white kids it not working for them because of the disability and because of other kind of components around that. But I, I think as a society we need to start to look at it at such a bigger level. But in terms of. Sometimes I'm not sure if our at the Cedar meeting we're learning about the new state accountability from the office of. I can't remember what office but the ones that do all the compliance and they were trying to explain I don't think that they're metrics catch it like you see you're going to be in the disability bucket or you're going to be in the black market or you're going to be in the second language bucket. Like you don't get to be in multiple buckets at the same time. And so you could like you could be a failing student but like your school that the way that they described it, I was just like you'd you can't be in multiple buckets or like your score can only count for one. And so then do you as the principal, get to pick what bucket that kid gets and what the score that I don't know. And I'm not sure how that that answer is. I think some of the compliance things are very much like not as flexible as those personal interactions. And so I don't know which is more compliance focused way rather than treating every individual as individual and the way that they would like to be treated. I think instead of the way that they want to be treated, I should treat you the way you want to be treated. That it's even a concept that some of our students, though, get their way. I mean, similar to. How many times do we talk about it and students still put up the new student teachers still put make active listening looks like this and thing like what about. For the kids. I don't want to give you eye contact. And I have college students that he has four different screens going on at once, but he is totally paying attention to me and I'm like, Nicholas, I believe you because you are so engaged in this conversation. My brain doesn't work like that, but I believe you and trust you that your brain does as long as you can do the work that I need you to do. And I don't think that that. Acceptance and trust. Is pervasive in our society and. The fact that everything around special ed the way that we do or even disability is. So you have to prove it like my son has a disability, hasn't worked for a year. We're paying for him because the process of getting him on disability and then also rethinking, we're working our behinds off to get him to not be able to to be able to have a job. And now he is and it's getting there. But because of his physical limitations, it can be really difficult. And the scene he was on. I i i fsp way back in the day and where we were living in Ohio, they're like, Ah, well, we can only offer him full day preschool. And I'm like, You only need speech. And they're like, We have full day preschool. And I'm like, He doesn't have any behaviors and I really don't want him to be an old age. And both

my husband and I, especially the professors, had been specially teachers and we still were just like, We'll pay for it for private insurance. You do whatever you want and we'll take care of it and. That is just. Indicative of how many people like even with all the knowledge and all the things you're still figuring out at the individual level because the system is too onerous. And too hard, too hard to move. And I would say to one thing you both hit on is we have to teach our students to advocate for themselves that, you know, we're so used to working in schools and our affirmative Childline duties that we're going looking well once say once they're over the age of idea they can we can't go looking for them. They have to advocate for themselves. So that's another big thing to. Yeah. Yes. I think. Very true. Yeah, I there's there's so much to policy, you know, and I, that was when we were kind of brainstorming the ideas for, for some of these sessions, we were just really thinking about like, what is it that's coming up so often right now and so many of these pieces with, you know, vocabulary and special education. And in this idea of that intersectionality that folks are experiencing and, you know, that point of, you know, having to essentially claim one identity on these state accountability tests, you know, how exclusionary is that to think about? I don't get to I don't get to be who I am. I have to be this thing. And so that what in Hawaii it doesn't you you part you you click the Asian Pacific Islanders. But we are at a shortage of Filipino. We are an uber of Japanese. And like then you're not seeing like in Hawaii. It was just like so ridiculous that one category you're like, but actually we have plenty of Japanese students, we don't have it and it just doesn't get caught because it's under one bucket and you're like, okay. And then also bur in a place like Hawaii where people have a lot of cultural pride, there were a lot of people that are like, I don't want to click that one bucket because that doesn't express who I am culturally or and what I feel about myself. And, you know, they think like, oh, you people on the mainland pushed us all together and we don't actually have our own identities. And I'm sure that is the case across others. And I can't even imagine what it must feel like at some of the like schools for indigenous schools or Native American schools, where people have that broader group of people that just don't feel like the system is built or it to understand them or to include them in a bucket that's not. Too big for my personal identity to fit into. Well, one of the things that we're, I guess, experiencing somewhat at our institution is, you know, like I was telling you before we got started, we're a really small institution, so and we're in rural southeast Iowa. And so many of our students, while we have a really diverse student body on campus, I think we're at least like 50% nonwhite. We had just very limited diversity in our education students and education faculty as well. But it's really hard to get people faculty wise to want to come to southeast Iowa. You know, we don't we don't have a metropolis anywhere close to to us. You know, our our capital is about an hour and 15 minutes away. And that's a probably one of our bigger cities in our biggest city in the state. And so that's difficult. And then for our students, you know, we might have pretty high diversity in our our intro to education classes like that first experience. And by the time students are being recommended for licensure, that really dwindles. You know, we're losing those students probably a very large possibility because they don't see themselves represented within our division. They don't see themselves as, you know, part of the community we've built. And, you know, we've continued to try to, you know, brainstorm ways on how do we create supports so that we can continue to have more diversity within our student population in our department, because we know that we need our our students to go out and influence their future students and have that diversity in the field. So we're kind of seeing some of that, too, where it's just, ah, a really big challenge to help our students stick through this and have the support that they need, not only with, you know, potential disability, but also race and and those kinds of things. And so there's just there's so much to consider. And so and I know our time is winding down here, but. I'd like to just kind of as we start to wrap up, I'd like you both to have an opportunity to just share any last thoughts or advice that you might have. And this could be either for both working and higher ed right now in teacher prep programs or graduate programs, doctoral programs or just practicing teachers. We know hopefully we're reaching kind of all audiences, hoping to reach all audiences. But what advice do you have for folks who are just wanting to get into this policy work but they don't know where to start or they don't know how to do it? I would say if you think about what was it that Nike used to, what was their old saying, just do it. I think they're saying, yeah, just have to get involved. It can be uncomfortable, but you have to get involved. It has to be at the local level. I mean, where we we can really make changes in our local districts and our school boards, as Lysander was talking about and in the state. I mean, Dash, one of the things that sells suit we always talk about, and I don't think it's probably done as much as it should, but that the lessons we learned from cells we need to take into our states and into working with our congressmen, contact and people. So we just have to get involved as much as we can. And I would say, you know, one of the great things we can do is, is you see see used here, use firm, go through, do sells, you know, really get involved and just bring it up, bring it to all levels. Upside. Great advice. Yeah, it is. It is. And you have to start. I mean, I don't know how long ago they're like. Globally, but act locally.



You have to be at that local level and get to understand the politics, the players, the people. And I know, at least in my state involvement, we're sort of waiting for the next election to open. I'm sure there's a lot of states that are doing that, too, because of these giant policy shifts that happened. Yeah, but getting involved, knowing who your representatives are, who going to the school board meetings, just knowing or if you have a special education advocacy like being part of that team and meeting with those people and listening to those families. I mean, there is nothing more like that fills you up and makes you believe that you're doing the right job is like meeting the families and seeing the impacts of things that happen. And I mean, thankfully, if you look back like the some we didn't talk about but family involvement and then like even in all of the new dyslexia laws and and the science of reading all of that, a lot of that came from the families pushing. And and I think that's so important our families being aware of it, so connecting with the families, but also just connecting politically at that level and including some of this in all of your classes like across your licensure, just continuing that professionalism. Part of it is yes to you is how you show up as a professional. But for us part of our professionalism is advocacy for the field and for and the work that we're doing. And you have to believe in it and you have to live it. And I mean, I often are aware. The shirt I'm wearing right now says behavior is communication, which it is. But the other day I was wearing a disability is not a dirty word. And people come up to me at the supermarket and ask about it and talk about it. And I think that it's just important. Similar. I'm also a yoga teacher and I believe that you have to live. Your yoga life is not just on the mat. And I think that's the same with special ed. You're you know, you have to live in alignment with your values and continue to do that and that. And if we keep doing that and are vocal and and just stop. Me being nice. I think that's when I was a special educator as I was so nice to general educators until they let me. And now I like, you know, we have to just be more vocal and more. To. Live in alignment with our values. So. And with our laws. Yeah. Yes. That isn't because our boss actually are pretty aligned with my values. Yeah, exactly. Yes. Yes. I think that's such incredible advice from both of you and just thinking about. So much of I think what holds people back is the fear of the unknown and am I going to do something wrong or will I misspeak or will I, you know, will I just look like an idiot? You know, sometimes people are just like, I don't want to look stupid in front of lawmakers or in front of my colleagues or my classmates or whoever. And I think part of that is becoming vulnerable and willing to just step into that space. And even if it's the first time just to listen, and then maybe the next time it's to have a conversation and then building kind of that that skill set to learn how to advocate and and building it through the programs, I do think is so important because there are so many other professions where advocacy is part of their programs. And I think sometimes. And I guess I can only speak to our institution, but, you know, kind of feel like maybe that piece is missing. And so we've done a lot of work recently, just trying to make sure that we're building those pieces in and working with our our local organizations to try to create partnerships with school districts so our students can get out and have those conversations. And at the state level and taking our students to the Capitol and speaking with legislators so that just those little things I do think are really important. So I really appreciate both of you taking time out of your busy schedules to join me. This was it was such a great conversation. And I think just the tip of the iceberg. You know, like I think we're just really skimming the surface and hoping that this episode will maybe spark conversations within divisions and departments and for folks to just start maybe having these conversations with their students. So, again, I appreciate you so much and I hope you both have a great rest of your day. Thank you. You, too. Thank you so much.

**Jamie Nelson** A special thanks to Mitch and Lysandra for sharing their expertise with us regarding special education, policy and vocabulary. Stick around as we break down the terms diversity, equity, inclusion and transition in special education.

**Jamie Nelson** In this episode, we've discussed important vocabulary terms and special CEC's policy and research, including diversity, equity, inclusion and transition. In this section, we will break down these terms even further and share some IDEA research and resources for each. First, we will break down the term diversity. In special education policy, diversity refers to recognizing and addressing the wide range of differences among students, including their abilities, cultures, languages, races and socioeconomic backgrounds. It emphasizes inclusive education, culturally and linguistically responsive practices, and addressing disproportionality such as the overrepresentation of certain racial groups in special education. Federal laws like IDEA and Section 504 mandate that all students, regardless of background, receive equitable access to education and services. Diversity also calls for cultural competence among educators to ensure effective support for students from diverse backgrounds. And it requires schools to provide accommodations that address both disability and IDEA needs for IDEA language learners. To learn more

about diversity in special education visit. See CEC's web page on cultural diversity. You can find the link in the show notes. Next, we will break down the term equity in special education policy. Equity means ensuring that students with disabilities receive the individualized support and resources they need to access the same educational opportunities as their non-disabled peers. Unlike equality, which treats all students the same, equity focuses on addressing each student's unique needs through tools like the Individualized Education Program or IEP and fair distribution of resources. It aims to eliminate disparities in areas such as identification, placement and discipline, especially for students from marginalized backgrounds. Legal frameworks like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Idea and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act mandate equitable access to education for students with disabilities, ensuring they are not excluded from general education unless necessary. Equity in special education also involves culturally responsive practices and continuous efforts to address systemic barriers to learning. To learn more about equity in special education, read the IDEA Data Centers Equity requirements in the idea pdf linked in the show notes. Next, we discuss the term inclusion in the context of special education policy. Inclusion refers to their practice of educating students with disabilities in general education in classrooms alongside their peers to the greatest extent possible. The goal of inclusion is to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the same academic curriculum, social experiences and extracurricular opportunities as other students, while receiving appropriate supports and services to meet their individualized needs. There are some related key terms and concepts to inclusion that are important to know. First, under the Individuals with Disabilities Act, students with disabilities are entitled to be educated in the least restrictive environment. Or already this means that they should be placed in general education settings whenever appropriate with this necessary supports. Relatedly, the Individualized Education Program, or IEP, which is the federally mandated plan for special education supports and services under Edina, plays a central role in determining how inclusion is implemented. A student's IEP denotes their least restrictive environment. Finally, students with disabilities may be fully included, meaning they spend the entire school day in the general education classroom and receive all their special education services within that environment or partially included. Meaning students with disabilities spend part of their day in the general education classroom and part in a separate, specialized setting, depending on their individual needs. Overall inclusion reflects a fundamental belief that all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, should be members of a shared learning community. It is a cornerstone of special education policy that promotes equal opportunities for students with disabilities while respecting their unique needs. To learn more about inclusion, visit the Iris Center of Peabody College of Education at Vanderbilt University's Module on Inclusive Education. You can find the link in the show notes. The last term we discussed today is transition in special education policy and practice. Transition refers to the process of preparing students with disabilities for life after they exit the K-12 school system. Per IDEA planning for transition begins no later than age 16. However, the transition planning process can happen as early as 14 years old, depending on the state in which the student lives. This planning process is included in the student's individualized education program, or IEP, including setting post-secondary goals based on the student's interests, strengths and needs, as well as the services and activities required to achieve those goals. Some examples of services to support transition are vocational training, post-secondary education counseling and life skills training. These goals and services are intended to support students transitioning from school to adult life. Overall transition services aim to help students with disabilities develop the skills and knowledge they need to achieve their goals and become as independent as possible in adulthood To learn more about transition. The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition provides guides, resources and toolkits for educators and families. You can find a link to this website in the show notes.

**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 will review news related to Congress and government funding, an updated FAFSA and the new resources and information for educators and policymakers from the September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024 Washington Update. First, it seems congressional leaders have reached an agreement to keep the government funded through December 20<sup>th</sup>. Avoiding a potential shutdown. The bipartisan compromise on this bill includes more than \$200 million for the Secret Service to increase security for presidential candidates and former presidents ahead of Election Day and also replenish FEMA's disaster fund, but not provide specific extra funding for disaster relief. Next, the Department of Education looks to reassure higher education leaders that the FAFSA will be fully functional by the December 1st deadline following last year's issues with delays and technical glitches. Secretary of Education Dr. Miguel Cardona acknowledged last year's frustrations, but emphasized improvements, including stakeholder sessions and the recruitment of IT professionals. Additionally, 500,000 more students will be

eligible for Pell Grants due to the FAFSA overhaul. Lastly, there are new resources for educators, which include reports from the Government Accountability Office on the disproportionality of rates of discipline of black girls in public schools. A report by the Senate Joint Economic Committee on the need to renovate school buildings nationwide and a brief by the 1 Million Teachers of Color campaign, highlighting key insights from 30 educators across 15 states to address the lack of diversity across the field of education. You can find the link to the latest Washington update and past updates in the show notes. 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 the virtual Washington update. To hear the latest policy happenings. The link to register can be found in the show notes. A few last updates. It's not too late to join us on November 5th through eighth in Pittsburgh for CEC's Teacher Education Division 2024 conference. For more information on the conference and to register online, visit the TED Conference website found in the show notes. Did you know that we are only 24 days away from the presidential election on November 5th? As a reminder, voters who cannot or do not want to vote in-person can cast mail in or drop off ballots through absentee voting or vote by mail programs. For more information about absentee voting and early voting, please use the link in the show notes to [USA.gov](https://www.usa.gov).

**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 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 and 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 a 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 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 behind the scenes, from 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 in education. Remember, the work doesn't end here. Let's continue to collaborate, innovate and advocate for a brighter future in education.