As the leader of a nonprofit preschool for children with special needs in New York City, I am proud to be part of a vibrant community of staff, parents, board members, family, and friends. Our nation is in the grips of a teacher shortage crisis. This problem disproportionately affects the bilingual, special education, low-income, inner-city children whom it is my mission to serve. Well-trained and supported staff guide children to success – and when children succeed, parents feel more confident and secure, and better equipped to handle the realities of raising a child with special needs. Investment in public education and teacher salaries is an investment in the future of our communities. I am ready to devote my time and energy to being part of a bigger solution. CEC has the voice, reputation and power to effect the change we need, and I would like to be part of that mission.

Program Design: Figuring out how regulations work for children and families requires a realistic and creative vision. Out of the box thinking is required to attract and retain the next generation of teachers.

Building schools: Working with the NYC Department of Buildings on three different school renovation projects has provided me with grit, a sense of humor, and how to be acknowledged without being bothersome.

Workforce Development: Working with families and staff from low-income communities has reinforced my belief that all people want to be treated with dignity and respect. With the right training and support, all of the teachers we need are already in our communities, just waiting for the opportunity to fulfill their calling. Advocacy in education is the ability to pick battles big enough to matter, and small enough to win. Being part of something bigger than yourself can bring about the change you want to see.

How would you explain the value of CEC membership to a potential member? (Limit 150 words.)

“When you want to go fast, go alone, when you want to go far, go together” This African proverb explains the essence and importance of being part of an organization like CEC. Children in special education have the greatest leaps to make and require the energy of the group to propel them forward. Advocacy does not just happen. It is a planned response to an acknowledged problem. Solutions do not just appear. They are the result of thoughtful and mindful decisions. CEC has been at the forefront of advocacy and solutions since 1922. Public education is in crisis. Being part of an organization that supports and advocates these values will help us attract and retain the best minds for teachers. The power of our
profession is in our collective voice. Working alone, you can be a great teacher; working together, we can safeguard the future and quality of public education.

**Leadership:**

What are your leadership experiences (local, state, provincial, and/or national/international levels) in both professional and volunteer organizations? Please include position description and dates. (Limit 250 words.)

Over the past 35 years, I have advocated to ensure that preschoolers with developmental delays have access to high-quality early childhood education services. As the Executive Director of the Kennedy Children’s Center, a New York City special education preschool with locations in East Harlem and the Bronx, I have been able to realize my dream of being part of a school within a community that cares for children, families, and staff in a holistic and respectful manner. Having entered the field in the late 1980’s, I have always valued program development. Whether my time was spent designing a home-based infant program for a small startup agency in 1987, developing an integrated preschool program for a large nonprofit in 1995, or renovating and building space for a school to exist (I have done this three times!), advocating for those services is at the core of my professional soul. As an adjunct professor at NYU from 2003 to 2012, I learned how teacher training integrates with workforce development as the core components of successful early childhood special education programs. As a member of my local school board from 2003-2006, I learned about the power of budgets and politics. My leadership journey has allowed me numerous opportunities to present at local, state and international conferences, lobby government officials in New York State and most recently, in 2017, to serve as a member of the Early Learning Blue Ribbon Panel for the Board of Regents in New York State.

What are your three most important characteristics that will help you to be successful as a board member and why? (Limit 150 words)

Respect, passion, and collaboration are at the core of my values. It is my responsibility to manage staff and programs, ensure compliance, and keep the program vibrant and forward facing. I understand how nonprofit programs must collaborate with public funders and regulatory agencies in a manner that benefits children and families. Communicating my passion for these ideas to our board members must be specific, objective, and factual and completed with respect for the time and knowledge our board members provide. Organizing thoughts and agendas is a task that brings order from information so ideas are understood. I have learned how to listen to understand, not just respond to what I hear. I am an avid student and enjoy being challenged to consider new ideas. I am a teacher, a parent, a leader, and a citizen. I wear each hat with pride and respect each perspective.

**Professional Position(s) and Education:**

**Primary Professional Position:**

Executive Director  
Kennedy Children's Center  
New York, New York, USA
Secondary Professional Position (if applicable):

N/A

Education:

BA, Boston University, Elementary Education, Early Childhood Education and Special Education, 1982
MA, New York University, Education of Children with Emotional Disturbance, 1983
SAS, Brooklyn College, Advanced Certification in School Administration, 1988
Certificate in Business Excellence, Columbia University, Non Profit Management, 2018

Optional Candidate Statement:

What else about yourself or your experiences would you like CEC members to know? (Limit 150 words.)

"If you think education is expensive, try ignorance." I remember seeing this on a bumper sticker in the early 1980’s. Sadly, the necessity of citizens to pay for public education is an argument that has stood the test of time. I have learned that advocacy and education go hand in hand. As the leader of a nonprofit school for preschool children with special needs in New York City, the quality of education is on my mind everyday as I work with a dedicated staff who are talented, creative, underappreciated, and underpaid. Children are the most genuine people I know. I am fortunate to spend every day imagining their future. It is our civic responsibility to care about who will teach our children and to show respect to teachers by compensating them appropriately for their work. Our society depends on our actions, our voices, and our choices.

Diversity and Demographic Information:

CEC defines diversity to include race, ethnicity, culture, language, age, (dis)abilities, family status/composition, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious and spiritual values, geographic location, and country of origin. There is such a great range of individual backgrounds and experiences that cannot be easily conveyed by answering simple demographic questions.

Given this definition, how do you describe your own diversity? (Limit 150 words.)

“What are you?” is a refrain and echo from my childhood. I was raised in an Italian neighborhood. I was “Jewish” but not my parents were not religious, so I knew only a few others like me. My parents divorced in 1967, ahead of the national trend. I did not understand the term “broken home” as my parents were very much whole - just not together. The sense of being different helped me to develop a righteous sense of cheering for the underdog. I saved the stray dogs and injured birds. I cringed when classmates made fun of other children who were slow, sloppy, or weird. I learned early on that being different is just part of being human and as long as you are kind, you can answer the question “what are you?”

Age Group: 50-59
CEC Membership Information:

Years of CEC Membership: 30 years

Division Membership(s):

Division for Early Childhood (DEC)

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Sept. 18 – Oct. 16, 2019