

## **History of the Florida Council for Exceptional Children**

**By Dr. Landis M. Stetler**

On April 5, 1946, at the annual Florida Education Association meeting, held in Tampa, Florida, the Florida Federation Council for Exceptional children was founded. The name given to the group at that time was Exceptional Child Department of the Florida Education Association.

At this event there were seven persons present and they elected the following officers: Chairman, Marjorie Crick, Palm Beach County; and Secretary, Francis Huggins.

In the spring of 1948, the name of the organization was changed to the Florida Association for Services to Exceptional children. At this same meeting a tentative constitution was adopted.

In 1953, there were 99 members attending the annual business meeting. This meeting was the first meeting to be held independent of the FEA.

At this fall meeting, the Florida Association was dissolved and the State Federation of International Council for Exceptional children was formed.

From this 1953 meeting until 1970, there continued to be two meetings a year, one with FEA and one a CEC annual business meeting.

In 1954 and 1955, the Federation meetings were held in conjunction with the Nemours Conference. In 1957, it was held during the Southeastern Conference of the International Council for Exceptional Children. By 1961, the annual business meeting had an attending membership of 148. This meeting was held in Orlando, Florida.

Annual meetings were held every year with the exception of 1960 and 1962. In 1971, the international meeting was held in Miami Beach, so no separate meeting was held.

A list of the Florida CEC Presidents is included at the end of this document.

There were many early leaders who went on to gain recognition at the national level. Our first three presidents, Crick, Godfrey, and Sutter were among our national leaders for many years.

Four, Gretchen Everhart, Doris Sanders, Margaret Lewis, and Paul B. Stephens have had schools named after them. Recently Jack Lamb was added to this list.

Florida was really a "national powerhouse" during 1975-76 when Florida provided leadership to four key national organizations:

Jack Lamb, President of national CASE

Wendy Cullar, President of National Association of State Directors of Special Education

Dorothy Sisk, President of the National Gifted Group

Marion Smith, President of National Association of Retarded Citizens (NARC)

Some individual honors:

Pearl Lewis, through her connections with CEC, married Godfrey Stevens, former national president and for many years was a leader in the field.

Charles High, the state consultant for many years, left in 1960 to become director in the Denver School System. He has since retired. Interestingly, his niece, Jennifer Jones, was a teacher of varying Exceptionalities in Escambia County and a member of the State Advisory Committee.

Carolyn King, who was president in 1961-62, is probably the person who really got Florida CEC off the ground as a well-organized and structured organization. Carolyn was a speech therapist in Duval County and up until that time there were a limited number of meetings of the executive council so it was pretty much a one-man show. She was the one who brought a functioning board into perspective and impressed the Council for Exceptional Children in Washington so much she was invited to join their staff and served in Washington for many years.

Phyllis Zando, another Duval County resident and past president, collected the boxes of minutes, programs, etc., and organized it into the Federation Archives presently stored in Tallahassee.

Jean Sanzone and Bob Harris, both of Pinellas County, were teachers at the time they served as president and were on the executive board for many years. They certainly are to be commended for their work in the organization. They were the first ones to get the proclamation established, they were responsible for much of the historical material that was pulled together over the years and write-ups of the activities within the organization. They also initiated the leadership conference idea.

Sheffield Nasser was a highly regarded nationally recognized special educator who came to Sarasota County as ESE Director and later went to Nashville, Tennessee, where he was director for many years before his death. Marshall Nelson, 1965-66, left Florida to head up a national program for the retarded in the Lutheran church office in St. Louis.

Tommy Russell, was director of the program in Bay county and left to join the faculty at the University of Alabama, where he trained administrators; one of the best known in Florida being Dr. Howard Hinsley, superintendent of Pinellas County Schools. Several others have served in the Florida Department of Education as interns over the years. Dr. Russell was also a mentor to Susan Avery and all three of them were presidents of Florida CEC.

Bob Black left as director in St. Lucie to become director of special education in the South Carolina State Department of Education and later served as president of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

Four of the presidents have moved up to higher level positions. Bob Kreager and Howard Hinsley became superintendents. Bob Connors moved up to assistant superintendent.

Florida roots in DOE as Bureau Chief, Andrew Oseroff, moved to a high level position in the College of Education at Florida State.

Dr. Hinsley and Dr. Lamb have been noted as presidents of CASE. Although not a state CEC president, our history must include recognition of Dr. Wendy Cullar, who took a year's leave of absence from the

Florida DOE to serve as the top special educator in Washington as Director of the Special Education Program Office in the U.S. DOE.

Fred Miller was the first Florida Student CEC president while a student at the University of Miami. He later served as FCEC President as well.

Jack Lamb and Diane Johnson won national election to become Governors-at-Large of CEC. In addition, Diane was elected as vice-president in 1992, the first person from Florida to hold this office. She became president of CEC for the 1995-96 year when the national convention was held in Orlando.

At the 1991 State Conference, Florida celebrated 50 years of exceptional student education in Florida, the first laws being passed in 1941. Over the years, many other officers and executive board members contributed to the cause to bring the Federation to its present level of excellence.

Florida has had 10 teachers receive the Clarissa Hug Award as the CEC Teacher of the Year:

Beth Langley (Pinellas) 1988	Matty Roddriguez-Walling (Dade) 1994
Brenda Robbins Rice (Leon) 1995	Karen Voytecki (Pinellas) 2001
Carol-Dinsdale (Pinellas) 2005	Gayle Solis Zavala (Palm Beach) 2009
Donald R. DeVito (Alachua) 2011	Hannah Ehrli (Orange) 2012
Helen Pastore (Sarasota) 2015	Sara Klug (Pinellas) 2016

CEC Student of the Year award recipients include: Sherrie Campbell, Florida Atlantic University 1994; Kimberly Zgonc, University of Central Florida 2005; Sara Aronon, University of Central Florida 2008; Cheryl White-Lindsey Florida International University 2010.

Eleanor Guetzloe, University of South Florida received the CEC Outstanding Contributor Award for 1994. Jack Lamb received the same award in 1997. Jack was elected to as a School Board Member in Hillsborough County and served for many years. Bill Heller has also received this award and after a career in North Carolina and the US Department of Education returned to Florida and has provided leadership at the USF St. Pete Campus, and was also elected to serve a term in the Florida House of Representatives.

Matty Rodriguez-Walling, as the 1994 Clarissa Hug recipient, captured the eye of the national office and was appointed to co-chair the CEC Commission on Conditions of Teaching and Learning which was a major CEC initiative to identify teacher concerns. This document was the basis for a new national study by CEC.

In 2004-2005, Dr. Suzanne Martin, a professor at the University of Central Florida, served as CEC President. Dr. Dan Exell, University of Central Florida, Cocoa, received the Susan B. Gorin Award 2005. Dr. Raul Escarpio of Miami Dade College received this award in 2014. In 2011, Matty Rodriguez Walling (Dade) and Pamela DeLoach (Hillsborough) were elected to serve three-year terms on the CEC board of directors.

On October 26, 2016, Florida lost its most ardent supporter and icon, Dr. Landis Stetler, after a battle with Parkinson's Disease. Dr. Stetler was the primary source for this FCEC history compilation. Dr. Stetler set the standard for leadership and professional participation with his work in both establishing

exceptional education programs and services in the state of Florida, and for his commitment to CEC. His legacy is memorialized with FCEC's most prestigious award that bears his name.

Diana Morales (Dade) was elected to the CEC Board of Directors in 2018. Jennifer Lesh (Palm Beach) was elected to the Board in 2016, and in 2019, Jennifer became the first CEC President selected under the revised structure adopted by CEC at the annual conference held in Tampa in February 2017. She is the 2nd person from Florida to serve as CEC President, serving in 2020.

The Tampa conference in 2017 was the 3rd national conference to be held in Florida, and Orlando was selected as the host for the 2022 conference, which will be the one marking CEC's 100th anniversary as an organization.

Rosalind Hall (Bradford) was elected to the CEC Board in 2019. Kareem Thompson (Palm Beach) was elected to the CEC Board in 2020

#### Florida CEC Presidents

##### Year/Name/County

1946-47 Marjorie Crick Palm Beach

1947-48 Thelma Godfrey Duval

1948--49 Laura Sutter Dade

1949-50 Christine Mortz Hillsborough

1950-51 Gretchen Everhart Leon

1951-52 Thayer Barhhart

1952-53

1953-54 Pearl Lewis Duval

1954-55 Ida Mae Davidson Hillsborough

1955-56 Charles High DOE

1956-57 Mable Wunderlick Polk

1957-58 Julia Wickersham Duval

1958-59 Marjorie Crick Palm Beach

1959-60 Robert Kreager Lee

1960-61 Veda Byrd Hillsborough

1961-62 Carolyn King Duval

1962-63 William McEntee Brevard

1963-64 Jean Sanzone Pinellas

1964-65 Sheff Nasser Sarasota  
1965-66 Marshall Nelson Escambia  
1966-67 Robert Harris Pinellas  
1967-68 Tommy Russell Bay  
1968-69 Ann Poythress Orange  
1969-70 Peter Paraskeva Dade  
1970-71 Phyliss Zando Duval  
1972-73 Bob Black St. Lucie  
1973-74 Jack Lamb Hillsborough  
1974-75 Doris Sanders Polk  
1975-76 Leola Dalberg Dade  
1976-77 Andrew Oseroff Leon (FSU)  
1977-78 Howard Hinsley Brevard  
1978-79 Fred Miller Volusia  
1979-80 Robert Connors Leon  
1980-81 Joan Coates Polk  
1982 Ron Bobay Brevard  
1982-83 Max Gerstman Sarasota  
1983-84 Diane Johnson Leon  
1984-85 Roxanne Barr Dade  
1985-86 Diane Gillespie Duval  
1986-87 Nancy Givens Pinellas  
1987-88 Ann Bleakly Leon  
1988-89 Bettye Weir Orange  
1989-90 Susan Avery Pinellas  
1990-91 Jim Forristal Hillsborough  
1991-92 Teri Shenberg Dade  
1992-93 Elaine Cutler Pinellas  
1993-94 Michael Churton Orange (UCF)

1994-95 Linda Benware Pinellas  
1994-95 Bill Delp Sarasota  
1995-96 Jan Schorr Volusia  
1996-97 Ray Peetz Sarasota  
1997-98 Matty Rodriguez- Walling Dade  
1998-99 Lee Sherry Pinellas  
1999-2000 Wynne Tye Hillsborough  
2000-01 Paul Summa Pinellas  
2001-02 Linda Phillips Pinellas  
2002-03 Diana Morales Dade  
2003-04 Florence Taber-Brown Dade  
2004-05 Michael Byrne Orange  
2005-06 Kathy Moeder-Christensen Duval  
2006-07 Dan Ezell Brevard (UCF)  
2007-08 June Logue Bay  
2008-09 Janet Raney Volusia  
2009-10 Liz Cramer Miami-Dade (FIU)  
2010-11 Paula Evans Sarasota  
2011-12 Holley Boyette Pasco  
2011-12 Paula Evans Sarasota  
2012-13 Kimberly Pawling Orange  
2013-14 Jennifer Lesh Palm Beach  
2014-15 Heidi D'Ambrosio Pinellas  
2015-16 Kelly Grillo Flagler  
2016-17 Kareem Thompson Palm Beach  
2017-18 Fartun Mohammed Palm Beach  
2018-19 John Miller Palm Beach  
2018-19 Julie Bush Pinellas  
2019-20 Christy Fulater Leon

2020-21 Karen Ramlackhan Pinellas (USF)

2021-22 Jacqua Hunte Palm Beach