

The Role and History of HICEC: Empowering Exceptional Children and Youth

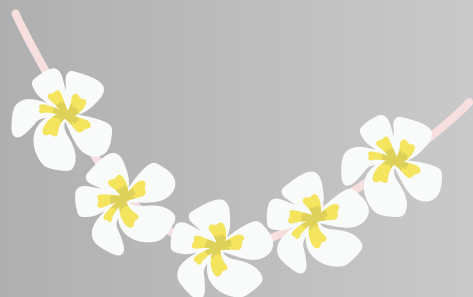
Dr. Gloria Niles

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Aloha, members of the Hawai'i State Unit of the Council for Exceptional Children (HI CEC). As your immediate past president, I am honored to contribute to our newsletter and shed light on the crucial role of state units within the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). In this article, we will explore the historical perspective of HI CEC and the invaluable contributions we can make in the field of special education. Additionally, I will conclude with a call to action, urging all CEC members in Hawai'i to be actively engaged in HI CEC for the benefit of our exceptional children and youth and the betterment of our community.

The Role of State Units in CEC

State units are the backbone of CEC, serving as the local and regional arms of this renowned, international organization. Each state unit plays an instrumental role in advancing CEC's mission to improve the lives of individuals with exceptionalities. By focusing on the unique needs and challenges faced by educators, professionals, and families in a specific state, the state units ensure that the principles and practices of special education are tailored to local contexts.



Advocacy and Policy Influence

One of the primary functions of state units is advocacy. HI CEC advocates for the rights and needs of exceptional children and their families in Hawai'i. Members of HI CEC have participated in the CEC Special Education Legislative Summit each year and meet with our congressional delegation to advocate for IDEA and special education needs in Hawai'i. From partnerships with our congressional delegation in Washington D.C., to our state and county elected representatives, HI CEC advocates for inclusive policies, increased funding, and improved service for individuals with disabilities. Our collective voice can have a significant impact on shaping the landscape of special education in Hawai'i.

Professional Development

HI CEC partners with CEC to provide invaluable professional development opportunities for educators, administrators, and other professionals working in the field of special education. We organize webinars, workshops, and seminars to focus on high leverage practices, the latest research, and innovative, culturally responsive practices for serving exceptional students in our local communities. By fostering professional growth, we ensure that Hawai'i's educators are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Networking and Collaboration

State units like HI CEC facilitate networking and collaboration among professionals and families within the special education community. We provide a platform for individuals to connect, share experiences, and learn from one another. These strong partnerships often lead to collaborations that enhance the quality of special education services across our islands. By fostering a sense of community, we ensure that no one feels isolated in their efforts to support our students with exceptional needs in Hawai'i.

Community Engagement

HI CEC is deeply committed to engaging with the local community and forming partnerships with other local organizations. With a strong network of actively engaged members, we can organize events, activities, and awareness campaigns to promote understanding and inclusion. By fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance for individuals with exceptionalities, HI CEC strives to create a more inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Historical Perspective of HI CEC

Now, let's take a brief journey through the history of HI CEC, highlighting some of our key milestones and accomplishments that have shaped the landscape of special education in Hawai'i.

Founding Years

HI CEC existed for several years with a mission of advocating for exceptional children and promoting the highest standards in special education. In the early years, our members were passionate educators, parents, and professionals who came together to address the unique challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in Hawai'i. However, there was a brief pause in the existence of the state unit between 2013 and 2016, due to declining membership and leadership interest primarily being higher education professionals in the field of special education. HI CEC was missing the voice and vision of special education teachers serving Hawai'i's students with exceptionalities and their families.

In 2016, the state unit in Hawai'i was officially reinstated by a group of dedicated and passionate special educators representing both higher education as well as enthusiastic special educators in the Hawai'i Department of Education, and even a few parents of students with exceptional needs. In 2022, a group of passionate special educators known as the Speducator Project joined forces with HI CEC to leverage the benefits of being affiliated with CEC, and expanding the impact on special education here in Hawai'i through HI CEC.

Call to Action: Be an Actively Engaged Member of HI CEC

As members of CEC, you have a unique opportunity to make a difference in the lives of exceptional children and their families in Hawai'i. Being an actively engaged member of HI CEC not only benefits the exceptional children and youth we serve but also enriches your own professional and personal growth. Here are some ways you can become more involved and contribute to our mission:

Attend and Participate in Events

HI CEC organizes events, conferences, and workshops. Attend these gatherings to stay updated on the latest trends and research in the field of special education. Share your knowledge and expertise with fellow members, and actively participate in discussions and workshops to enhance your skills.

Volunteer Your Time and Expertise

Consider volunteering your time and expertise to support HI CEC's initiatives and advocacy efforts. Whether you are contributing to a committee, helping with event planning, or providing your professional insights, your involvement can make a significant impact.

Advocate for Exceptional Children and Youth

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Network and Collaborate

Connect with fellow members, educators, professionals, and families within HI CEC's network. Collaborate on projects, share resources, and build relationships that can help improve the quality of special education services in Hawai'i.



Stay Informed and Educated

Stay informed about the latest developments in special education by regularly checking HI CEC's newsletter, webinars, and social media channels. Education is a continuous journey, and staying informed is essential to providing the best possible support to exceptional children.

The Hawai'i State Unit of the Council for Exceptional Children (HI CEC) plays a crucial role in advancing the rights and well-being of exceptional children and youth in our beautiful state. Our historical journey is marked by advocacy, collaboration, and a commitment to inclusive education. As members of HI CEC, you have the power to be actively engaged in our mission and make a lasting impact on the lives of exceptional children and their families here in Hawai'i.

I encourage each and every member of HI CEC to embrace your role as an advocate, educator, and supporter of exceptional children. By working together, we can continue to create a more inclusive and accepting Hawai'i where all individuals, regardless of their exceptionalities, have the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential. Thank you for your dedication to the cause and let us move forward with renewed energy and enthusiasm to empower exceptional children and youth across our state.

About Dr. Gloria Niles

Dr. Gloria Niles is an internationally recognized thought leader in neurodivergent and technology-enhanced learning. As a former Chiropractic Neurologist, Special Educator, and higher education faculty member, Dr. Niles is passionate about elevating inclusive, strength-focused, personalized learning experiences through technology-enhanced digital learning. Dr. Niles currently serves as the Director of Online Learning for the University of Hawai'i System, facilitating the planning and direction of the university's online and distance learning programs, including all related institutional strategies for online and distance delivery of instruction, and drives the implementation of policies, procedures, and systems necessary to execute the University's vision and strategies for the statewide UH system composed of 60,000 students, faculty and staff on six islands. Dr. Niles has served as a leader for Hawai'i CEC since 2016, and she also served for four years as an inaugural member of the CEC Leadership Development Committee. You can contact her via email at gniles@hawaii.edu.