

Christina Peters  
CEC Reflection

I had the honor of being one of the 2018 recipients of the James “Sarge” Kennedy Memorial Scholarship. Receiving the scholarship gave me the opportunity to attend the national CEC Conference in Tampa. Anyone who has attended the conference can attest to how remarkable, and costly, it is. Students who, like me, are future educators of exceptional children do not have the financial resources to attend the conference without some assistance.

The conference was an amazing experience! I gained an incredible amount of knowledge and expanded my professional network. I attended over twenty sessions, and learned so much that it was almost overwhelming. I took the opportunity to step outside of my comfort zone – I wanted to learn about the different CEC divisions, so I attended various gatherings and introduced myself to strangers. The result is that I ended up joining three divisions while at the conference! I made connections with international educators, as well as gaining two veteran educators as my mentors.

I would like to highlight a few of my experiences that were very motivational. There were two wonderful keynote speakers. The first was Marcia Tate, who reminded us of the importance of engaging all the senses when learning. Second was Ron Suskind, journalist and father to a child with autism. His family’s story was inspiring, and a reminder that we are our best selves when we are helping others. Also inspiring were the “Yes, I Can” awardees. Each recipient of the award was incredibly brave to come on stage and share their story with the crowd. Those students serve as a reminder to educators to set the bar high for our students. All students can accomplish great things when they are given support and taught the value of their own self-worth.

There were a few sessions that were my favorites. First, I am very excited about the work that is being done regarding student-led IEPs. I met several teachers and researchers who are working on this. There are so many amazing things that happen when students get involved in their educational and life decisions. First, there is more family involvement. Second, it can reinvigorate educators around the IEP process. Third, it makes the IEP process less contentious. And, most importantly, it builds student's self-esteem and gives them agency in their lives. As a mother of three children with special needs, I am very enthusiastic about implementing student-led IEPs, and I plan to base my graduate work on the topic.

Other favorites included a session about which teaching vocabulary and a session about mindfulness in the classroom. I attended a session on helping students with ADHD, which was led by a Canadian educator. Her perspective and ideas were fresh, and I am looking forward to implementing her suggestions both at home and in the classroom. As a former attorney, I enjoyed Deborah Ziegler's, "What's Happening in Special Education?" session, as well as hearing the buzz that the *Andrew F.* decision has created. Luckily, my credential program at Sac State has given me a solid foundation for both understanding, and joining in on, the plethora of topics covered in the many sessions.

I would like to conclude by giving a very special "thank you" to Dr. Rachael Gonzales. She introduced my class to the CEC on the first day that we met. Without her, it would have been many years before I took the leap to join CEC, let alone attend the national conference. Thank you, Dr. Gonzales, for educating future teachers and for encouraging us to be active members of our profession!