

FROM *the guest*

## EDITORS

## Introduction to the Special Issue on Policy and Advocacy in the Journal of Special Education Preparation

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We are not in a “business as usual” moment—not for special education, and certainly not for those of us working alongside the educators and faculty preparing the next generation of special education professionals. This special issue comes at a time of deep uncertainty—and, frankly, substantial and real threats to the systems we have spent decades building. Since January, federal policymakers, at the urging of President Trump, have taken deliberate steps to dismantle key federal agencies. The U.S. Department of Education has been a primary target. The very infrastructure that supports education research, teacher preparation, civil rights enforcement, and data transparency has been slashed or, in some cases, eliminated altogether. On March 20, 2025, President Trump signed an Executive Order directing Secretary Linda McMahon to “take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education and return authority over education to the states and local communities” (Executive Order No. 14147, 2025, sec. 2). Since then, the anxiety within the special education community has been palpable—and with good reason.

For more than a century, families, educators, and advocates have fought for the rights of students with disabilities to access a free and appropriate public education. That advocacy has driven real, measurable progress, from simply gaining entry into classrooms to ensuring access to highly qualified teachers using evidence-based practices. So when the federal system that underpins these rights is placed on the chopping block, we are right to ask: What comes next? Will the Office of Special Education Programs still exist? Will federal funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) survive? Will students with disabilities be protected under civil rights law—or not?

These questions are not abstract. They are urgent, deeply personal, and pressing. But we also know this: in moments like this, advocacy does not get paused. It gets louder. It gets smarter. It gets more strategic.

That is why this special issue is so timely. Within these pages, you will hear from faculty members across the country who are stepping into this moment by offering tools, strategies, and expertise to help strengthen the systems that support children with disabilities, their families, and the professionals who serve them. Some contributions reflect hard-earned wisdom; others offer fresh takes and bold ideas. All are rooted in a belief that the future of special education depends on all of us showing up and speaking out.

Each article takes a slightly different approach, but they are tied together by shared values: a commitment to policy as a lever for justice, a deep respect for the history of the field, and a recognition that educator preparation must include meaningful advocacy training. Whether it is embedding policy in coursework, mentoring doctoral students into advocacy roles, building relationships with school boards and legislators, or leveraging social media to amplify real stories—these strategies remind us that advocacy is not a one-time event. It is a way of doing the work.

Faculty play a critical role in shaping this future, not just as teachers but as policy

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actors, mentors, and community connectors. The scholars in this issue are doing just that, and in doing so, are modeling what it looks like to prepare teachers who are not just ready to enter classrooms, but ready to lead. This issue provides strategic, actionable tools to help amplify the voices of those too often left out of policy conversations and to empower all of us, across roles and systems, to be more intentional and effective in advocating for meaningful change.

We are deeply grateful to Dr. Andy Markelz for inviting us to co-lead this special issue and to the incredible faculty members of the Teacher Education Division (TED) Policy Committee who shared their time, insight, and heart with us. Your work is deeply needed—and exactly what this moment calls for.

## REFERENCES

Executive Order No. 14147, 3 C.F.R. (2025).  
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C. § 1400.