

Leah Sanders
Candidate Statement
Board Officer Position: Secretary
Term: 2025-2027

My vision for CAAEYC is to continue promoting holistic child development, the empowerment of educators, engaging families and communities, emphasizing diversity and inclusion, and fostering life-long learning. Being in touch with the changes and needs of our field will strengthen our ability to best serve California.

Professionalism has been an important attribute of my work since the start of my career. It is a commitment to acting with high integrity, accountability, reliability, and respect. This standard has been the key to success in my career and education. I have held various jobs over the years including selling newspaper subscriptions, barista, fine dining service, secretary, summer camp director, naturalist, early childhood educator, site director, and now a family childcare provider. These experiences have shaped the person I am today and have built a rich and diverse skill set. As an early childhood educator, I recognized the importance of participating in a professional organization. With the encouragement of my child development professor, I joined our local A.E.Y.C. chapter. This experience early in my career was an enormous contribution to the development as a child care professional. Being deeply connected in our community allowed for rich engagement with leaders from our local resource and referral agency, Eureka City Council, the board of supervisors, preschool program directors, and fellow educators. I have built a professional reputation through these interactions due to my engagement in advocacy and support of early childhood educators, children and their families.

One of my proudest leadership experiences was in 2014, when I wrote a grant to increase live music in my community's preschool classrooms. First5 Humboldt awarded my grant application and I purchased 10 ukulele sets that included a case, tuner, strap, music stand, and the elements to build a music sheet collection for each educator. I advertised to my early childhood educator community and awarded these sets on a first-come-first-serve basis. As recipients of these music sets, the educators were required to join the Preschool Ukulele Group. This learning group met monthly and practiced new songs to share with their students. I provided professional development documentation that supported these educators in building hours necessary for Child Development Permits with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. I felt immense pride in gathering my colleagues and creating space to play and sing together. I am connected to many of these members and know that ukuleles are still strumming in preschool classrooms across Humboldt County.

Regarding diversity and inclusion, one experience that comes to mind is my time as the mentor teacher and director at Children's Cottage Preschool. We had three employees who were deaf and used ASL as their form of communication. Jenny, Heather, and Ian were all friends and had gotten positions at all three school sites. Upon hiring, the owner and I worked to ensure that these staff members had interpreters at all meetings, when we were together as a large group, or at an event. As a staff, we worked together to become more fluent in ASL. We communicated in ASL when we were speaking to each other so that our deaf coworkers felt included in our conversations even if they were not actively engaging. We also used ASL with the students and they quickly picked up on the ability to communicate with their deaf teachers. We sang songs in ASL, led circle time in ASL, and used ASL throughout the day. I observed a beautiful moment between a student and teacher that I still hold close. The child excitedly entered the classroom in the morning and immediately approached Teacher Jenny. The child signed, "Good Morning, Teacher Jenny! I love you!". I saw the surprise and happiness shared between them, along with the child's parent who also stood by observing. The parent shared that the child had been asking how to sign these greetings and that they had been practicing the night before. We all were deeply touched at how beautiful this moment was as it was a testament to the environment that we had intentionally created.

Over my career I have been building a rich skill set. I have worked in various types of childhood education environments which has given me a diverse perspective of our field. Being able to continue my work in advocating for fellow educators, children, and families at the state level would bring my career to new heights. Living in a rural community, I have a deep perspective of our needs and would be in the position to advocate for other rural areas of our state. I am sure that the passion that I have for our work will strengthen and reinforce the CAAEYC Executive Committee. Having experience in completing secretarial duties such as transcribing minutes, creating agendas, and being organized will support a smooth transition into the Secretary position on the State Board.