

TED Advocacy

Useful resources to help support advocacy work



Attending Special Education Legislative Summit (SELS)

TED members advocate for a policy agenda that is centered on best practices as they relate to the professional development of pre-service and in-service teachers and other educators who work with individuals with exceptionalities. To get the job done, TED offers a number of resources and opportunities for engagement in advocacy work- from learning more to spreading awareness to making the pitch! In this Advocacy Brief, we provide information and tips about attending SELS!

SELS Special Edition
Advocacy Brief
Summer 2024



Information about SELS



What is SELS?

The Special Education Legislative Summit (SELS) is an annual joint activity organized by the Council for Exceptional Children and the Council of Administrators of Special Education. During the 3-day working event, attendees spend 3 days in Washington DC learning about key legislative issues and the policy priorities of the organization. The event culminates with attendees advocating for change by visiting with their elected Members of Congress.



What should I expect during SELS?

During SELS, participants spend the majority of time with other residents of their home state. At the same time, the number of people who attend SELS from individual states is highly variable, with some states having groups of 15+ (typically Michigan & Florida have the strongest showing).



What are the policy priorities for SELS 2024?

- Appropriations: advocating for IDEA to receive the funding necessary to provide a free appropriate public education.
- Mental health: increasing support for mental health services to allow for safe and healthy school environments.
- Educator shortages: ensuring a comprehensive workforce pipeline to attract, prepare, and retain qualified special education teachers.



How should I prepare for SELS?

Leading up to SELS, the assigned "state lead" often contacts participants for information about their representative in the House based on their **home address**, which may be different from their work address. For many states, the state lead will use this information to coordinate an appointment for you (and other available members of your state) with the Representative's office, as well as with your state Senators (usually you meet with a staff member, rather than your actual Representative or Senator).

5 Important ways to prepare for SELS

1

Washington Updates

In advance, make sure to read the Washington Updates (emailed weekly) and to attend the Virtual Washington Updates with Dr. Kaitlyn Brennan, the TED Policy Liaison (learn more at TED Policy and Advocacy Portal: <https://tedcec.org/policy-and-advocacy-portal>). This will help you to hear more about what's going on in Washington.

2

Podcasts

Get ready for advocacy by listening to the TED CEC Collaboration Podcast! Each episode provides background and ideas about how to get involved in policy and advocacy work. Available on Spotify, Apple, and the TED website!

3

Research your Reps

Do a bit of research on their federal representatives to see how well they align with the CEC Policy Agenda (use <https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member> to find your members!). Examining Congress members' websites and checking their voting record can provide information about how well they represent you!

4

Experiences

Think about the concerns you see in your community related to the implementation of IDEA- what stories can you bring to draw attention to the needs of students with disabilities?

5

Travel Funding

Apply for one of the TED sponsorships to attend SELS! Each year, TED sponsors a limited number of members to attend SELS. Be on the lookout for the application announcement in late winter (typically February/March)! The sponsorships provide \$1000 to help defray the cost of attendance and can help pay for the hotel, air travel, registration, etc.



Part One

Participants need to be **fully** available during SELS- plan to be there for the welcome and introductions on Day 1 and to stay through the reflections and final thoughts session on Day 3. The SELS website will provide the full schedule.

Throughout the first half of SELS, participants engage in activities to help learn more about the key issues CEC plans to advocate for during the Hill visits. This may include guest speakers, panels, and other activities to help learn about the current state of federal policies on key topics, such as teacher shortages and mental health in schools. Additionally, time is provided for state teams to discuss how the issue impacts their local community, developing talking points to convey CEC's message that they deliver during visits to their Representatives' and Senators' offices on Capitol Hill as part of the event.

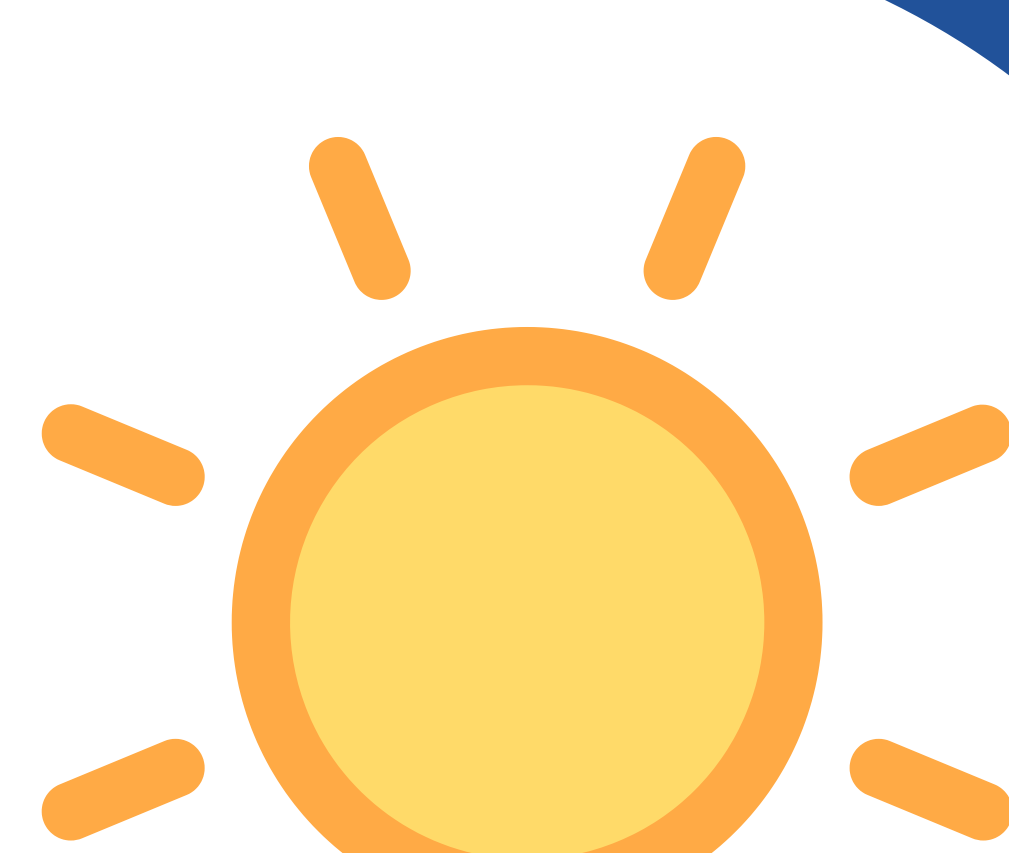


Part Two

The second half of SELS includes visits to Congressional offices to meet with Senators, Representatives, or (more likely) their staff members who oversee education-related issues. At these meetings, participants share the CEC policy agenda and the stories of how these policies impact meeting the goals of IDEA. Often, multiple people from the state team attend the meetings in Congressional offices, however, the individual who votes for the Congress member is usually the one who leads!

Each state team will have a different schedule, but be prepared for a very full day of meetings! For many states, this involves a lot of walking. Keep in mind a few important things:

- Congressional offices have formal dress codes, this is an occasion to "suit up" and dress more formally.
- Congressional members and their staffers cannot accept gifts, but you should be prepared to hand them your business card or the SELS materials (provided at the event) in a university-branded folder.
- You may also want to come prepared with pictures of your students, teacher candidates, or other professionals to help illustrate your points.



SELS occurs in July in DC- there's a good chance it'll be over 90 degrees. Unfortunately, this weather and business attire don't usually go well together. We'll all be melting together! Keep in mind that this is what the staffers need to do all summer long!