

SECA 2026 President Elect Candidates

What are some of the future opportunities for SECA that excite you?

Marla Pankratz, OK



I am excited about SECA's opportunity to be a leading Southern voice in workforce innovation and advocacy.

Across our region, we are navigating teacher shortages, childcare sustainability challenges, and policy shifts impacting Birth–8 systems. SECA can serve as a convener — bringing together practitioners, higher education, policymakers, and families to advocate for quality.

I am also excited about continuing SECA's strong identity as a welcoming organization committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. In our Southern states, this

commitment matters deeply. Belonging must be more than language — it must be demonstrated through representation, programming, and leadership development.

Finally, I see opportunity to expand digital engagement. Year-round virtual institutes, leadership spotlights, and research conversations connected to Dimensions of Early Childhood can amplify SECA's impact beyond the annual conference.

Connie Stout O'Dell, WV



As shared in ways to increase memberships, I feel that exploring the possibility of co-conferences with state affiliates and/or offering one-day SECA sponsored events in regionally located states could spread SECA's awareness and mission. SECA takes great pride in offering its annual conferences and professionals come from many states to take part in these conferences. Phenomenal keynote speakers and exhibitors are also a part of these annual conferences. Members expect this professional development and as president of SECA, I would make every effort to be present and welcoming to all those who have attended. Networking is vital for the success of any association as is securing sponsors for conference events. The SECA Board of Directors is important in this networking and securing of sponsors and this includes the president. This excites me.

Another area in SECA that excites me is growing our college student groups. Students are our future leaders and we need to do all that we can to attract our younger demographic to conferences, professional development, and membership. SECA has a strong group of leaders who work tirelessly to host special events for student groups at conferences and this definitely needs to continue. Offering additional professional development, possibly pod-casts or expert interviews that are posted on social media, for student members could be an additional membership benefit for not only students but all membership as a whole. I realize this is membership and growth, but this truly excites me to see what value this could be.

We'll periodically publish candidates bios, articles, videos on the SECA website at www.seca.info/presidentelect.

Candidates are listed in alphabetical order.

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