

Convention Program Chair Welcome



Welcome to Philadelphia and to the 2026 CEL Annual Convention! Whether you lead from a state agency, a school district, a department, a classroom, or somewhere in between, I hope you feel at home during our time together.

I joined my state education agency in the summer of 2018 as the Director of Secondary English Language Arts. I was delighted to learn that I was encouraged to attend one national conference annually as part of my job. I knew I would attend the NCTE Annual Convention, but at the time, I did not know anything about the Conference on English Leadership. When I arrived in Houston for NCTE 2018, I met Nicholas Emmanuele who told me to subscribe to *English Leadership Quarterly*, which would make me an automatic member of CEL. I have since attended and presented at five CEL Conventions in Baltimore, Anaheim, Columbus, Boston, and Denver.

As I began to dream up the theme for CEL's 2026 Annual Convention, I reflected on my role serving secondary English language arts teachers. Throughout the years, teachers had asked for resources and ideas to support their adolescent students who had trouble reading. Like many other states, my state provided statewide support for elementary teachers to be trained in best practices for teaching foundational literacy skills. I realized it was time that I stepped up to provide a similar mechanism for secondary teachers, so I wrote a proposal for such a program.

Meanwhile, I thought about the initiatives and goals shared by my Office of Standards and Learning and the nearby Office of Literacy Policy and Programs. We rarely collaborated on shared projects and seemed to be operating in separate silos. I wondered if we could be more effective if we worked together to address similar challenges. Instead of addressing this question in my state alone, I decided to transform it into the 2026 theme for CEL's Annual Convention: "Integrated Leadership: Bridging Literacy and English." My hope is that this Convention gives us the space to examine the silos we work within, identify where our goals overlap, and imagine what becomes possible when we work across those boundaries.

The logo for this Convention features an illustration of the Walt Whitman Bridge that connects our host city of Philadelphia to Gloucester City, New Jersey. To close my

welcome, I'll draw our attention to the closing lines of Whitman's poem "O Me! O Life!," which provide an answer to the speaker's litany of existential questions:

That you are here—that life exists and identity,
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.

May the contributions to our respective fields be richer because of our time here, together.



Cheers and welcome to Philly,

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