

2025 **CEL Annual Convention** November 23–25 | Denver, CO

ABUNDANCE #CEL25



Who reads program notes anyway?

In addition to my primary role as a high school English teacher and department chair, I direct a play each year at work. I love writing the director's note that appears in the program, providing some **context** for the play, sharing the **learning** the cast engaged with, and **acknowledging** those who contributed beyond the stage. I'm never sure how many attendees of high school shows read the program, but when I attend shows, I always open up to the director's and dramaturg's notes. If you are reading this note (and Matthew's note), thank you!

Context: Gatherings, conferences, and convenings bring me such joy. I am an extrovert, and I love connecting with others. I often tell the story of following my grandfather around the Cheektowaga Polish American Arts Festival outside of Buffalo, New York, when I was a child. He would check in with the vendors, bands, custodial staff, and committee members—with me in tow. I had not realized, at the time, that I was involved in a trajectory of leadership and learning. I was honored when Emily Meixner (CEL Past Chair) asked me to support program chairs Katie Cubano (CEL23) and Mary Luckritz (CEL24) in the past few years, and I have had a blast working with Matthew Helmers in preparation for this year's Convention.

Learning: Each time I revisit a task, I try to learn something new. In our school productions, I find a new aspect of theater to focus on for myself and for my students, with past topics including consent, puppetry, and stage combat. This past year with CEL, I have worked to build sustainability and distributive leadership across our systems. I have learned (unintentionally) that it can be easy to get lost in the organizational structures of systems. Matthew's abundance of joy has found its way into all aspects of this Convention and reminded me to stay grounded in the learning itself (not just the planning for learning). I am so excited to learn from Sarah M. Zerwin, Ashley Howell Bunn, Marissa Morrow, and Jennifer Wolf, the presenters of each concurrent session, and the discussions shared between and beyond sessions. It is my hope that each of you discovers some new learning over the next couple of days, whether it be personal or professional.

Acknowledgments: Community and coalitions serve as centers for encouragement and development. Heading out into the world (or into work) alone cannot be sustainable or joyful: we need one another. I send my gratitude to our entire [CEL Executive Committee](#), especially our associate chair Cathline Tanis and our past chair Emily Meixner, who are insightful, critical, and joyous collaborators. Special thanks go out to the NCTE staff, who coordinate finances, operations, and details: Kristen Ritchie (Director of Affiliated Groups),

Matt Burruss (Director of Events), Allie Ciaramella (Director of Communications), and Lori Bianchini (Program Manager). Matthew Helmers (2025 Program Chair) is a visionary leader who always sees the good in others and builds them up every step of the way.

Convening together is a privilege, and we hope you each connect with new colleagues, bolster your knowledge and skills, find time to breathe and reflect, and revel in abundance. We thank each of you who are presenting and attending, as it is you who each make CEL a distinguished professional organization.

Mr. Nicholas A. Emmanuele (he/him/his)

CEL Chair

English Teacher and Department Chair, McDowell Intermediate High School (Erie, PA)