



Join us from September 4-6, 2024, at the JW Marriott Desert Ridge in Phoenix. Check out this highlight of national speakers and exciting topics for this year's conference.

Keynote Speakers

Valerie C. Williams

Valerie C. Williams serves as the director in the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) within the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services at the US Department of Education. In this role, she is responsible for overseeing the administration of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which authorizes formula grants to states under IDEA Part B and to lead agencies for the infants and families program under IDEA Part C. IDEA also authorizes discretionary grants under IDEA Part D to institutions of higher education and to other non-profit organizations to support grants for state personnel development, technical assistance and dissemination, technology, and parent training and information centers.



Williams has decades of experience, which includes supporting state-level special education leaders by overseeing federal government public policy activities, federal regulatory affairs, public relations, and key initiatives to promote equity and to guide positive systemic change, thereby improving outcomes for students with disabilities. She also served as the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Public Policy Fellow on the US Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee, advancing disability policy and civil rights. Prior to that, she managed the budgeting and finances for numerous multi-million-dollar programs within the Departments of the Navy and the Air Force and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Williams was born in White Sands, New Mexico, and raised in Prince George's County, Maryland. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Economy of Industrial Societies from the University of California at Berkeley and a Master of Arts in Public Management from Johns Hopkins University. She has a unique perspective, having worked with members of Congress and staff on Capitol Hill, with advocacy organizations, supporting state special education leaders, and most importantly, being the parent of a son with Down syndrome.

Erik Carter

Erik Carter, PhD, is Luther Sweet Endowed Chair in Disabilities at Baylor University. A former teacher, his research and writing focus on principle-driven and research-based strategies for promoting full participation, relationships, and valued roles for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He serves as Executive Director of the Baylor Center for Developmental Disabilities, which works to promote the flourishing of people with disabilities, their families, and the communities that embrace them. He has published more than 300 articles and chapters, along with seven books.



Perry Zirkel

Perry A. Zirkel is a university professor emeritus of education and law at Lehigh University, where he formerly was dean of the College of Education and subsequently held the Iacocca Chair in Education for its five-year term. He has a PhD in Educational Administration, a JD from the University of Connecticut, and a Master of Laws degree from Yale University. He has done presentations in every state in the US. He has also written more than 1,700 publications on various aspects of school law, emphasizing legal issues in special education. He writes a regular column for *Exceptionality* journal and did so previously for *NASP's Communiqué*, *Phi Delta Kappan*, *Teaching Exceptional Children*, and *NAESP's Principal* magazine. Past president of the Education Law Association and co-chair of the Pennsylvania special education appeals panel from 1990 to 2007, he is the author of the CEC monograph *The Legal Meaning of Specific Learning Disability*; the more recently published books *A Digest of Supreme Court Decisions Affecting Education and Student Teaching and the Law*; and the two-volume reference *Section 504, the ADA and the Schools*. In 2012, he received the Research into Practice Award from the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Excellence in Research Award from AERA's Division A (Administration, Organization & Leadership). In 2013, he received the University Council for Educational Administration's Edwin Bridges Award for significant contributions to the preparation and development of school leaders. In 2016, he received the Education Law Association's Steven S. Goldberg Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Education Law. In 2017, he received the Council for Exceptional Children's Special Education Research Award. In 2021, he received the President's Award for Excellence from the National Association of School Psychologists. He co-directed the one-week Lehigh Special Education Law Symposium from 2003 to 2022. Finally, he provides a monthly special education legal update and shares his publications via the Perry Zirkel website.

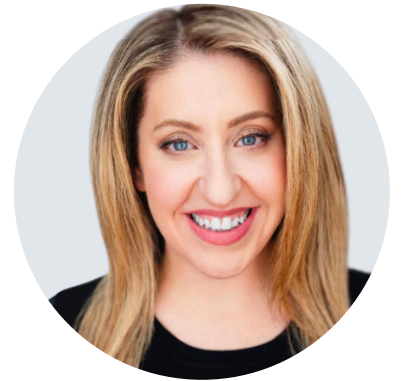


 **A full conference agenda will be posted online during the summer.**

Stay up-to-date on the IDEA Conference website for announcements about additional national speakers and exciting events. Please send questions to the IDEA Conference inbox.

Pamela Schuller

Pamela Rae Schuller was once diagnosed with the most severe documented case of Tourette syndrome in the country, coupled with a touch of obsessive-compulsive disorder and a whole lot of anger. From the depths of depression and grappling with suicidal thoughts, she wished away her differences. Through a transformative shift, Pamela began reframing her life and harnessing her adversity as the driving force behind her journey. She now stands tall at four foot six (and a half) as a globally recognized disability and mental health advocate and professional stand-up comedian. Her engaging, funny, and powerful stories resonate with audiences worldwide.



With the finesse of a professional stand-up comedian, Pamela seamlessly blends her narrative with the actionable tips and tools of a seasoned educator. Her tales of navigating a body beyond her control are not only captivating but also laced with unapologetic humor that resonates with audiences ranging from youth to corporate C-suites.

Pamela has addressed international audiences and clients in every state in the US, reaching 100,000+ children, teens, and professionals. Equipped with degrees in psychology and advocacy through art, a Master's degree in advocacy and policy, and certificates in executive coaching and DEI methods, she has translated her expertise into a repertoire that instills pride in young people, fosters profound inclusivity in communities, and inspires innovation in corporate teams, compelling them to make strategic and audacious moves to strengthen their team through inclusive efforts. Her reach extends beyond the stage and boardrooms, with appearances on Netflix, Curiositystream, Doctor Mike videos, and NBC, and she has consulted on inclusion best practices with industry giants like Disney, Google, GEICO, and Salesforce.

Pamela does not just “tolerate” her uniqueness; she wholeheartedly embraces, loves, and finds humor in it. She exemplifies the transformative power of embracing our authentic selves and creating communities and organizations where people can do the same.


Evening Event Spotlight

Screening of *The Ride Ahead*

Samuel Habib is a typical 21-year-old, itching to move out, start a career, and find love. But no one tells you how to be an adult, let alone an adult with a disability. Can a community of disability activists help him follow his dreams?



 [Watch the trailer for *The Ride Ahead*.](#)

 [Visit *The Ride Ahead* website to learn more.](#)

Virtual Q&A with Co-Directors, Samuel Habib and Dan Habib

Samuel Habib, Co-Director

Samuel Habib co-directed the Emmy Award-winning *My Disability Roadmap*, a 2022 New York Times Op-Doc. The film was a Critics Choice nominee and featured at festivals including Hot Docs, Doc NYC, and Hot Springs. Samuel was also a story consultant on the nationally broadcast film *Mr. Connolly Has ALS* and has presented nationally on disability rights. Samuel is a college student who navigates significant, chronic health challenges due to his underlying [GNAO1 Neurodevelopmental Disorder](#). He works at the Westchester Institute for Human Development.



Dan Habib, Co-Director and Producer

Dan Habib produced and co-directed the Emmy Award-winning *My Disability Roadmap*, a 2022 New York Times Op-Doc featured at Hot Docs, Doc NYC, and Hot Springs. He is the Director/Producer/Cinematographer of the nationally broadcast (public television) documentary films *Intelligent Lives*, *Who Cares About Kelsey?*, *Mr. Connolly Has ALS*, and *Including Samuel*. He served on the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities under President Obama. He is currently the Inclusive Communities Project Director at the Westchester Institute for Human Development.



Exciting Topics

This year's conference will feature numerous professional learning opportunities, including IDEA legal issues, instructional practices, national trends and hot topics, special education compliance, preschool and secondary transition, and content for related service providers.

Learn with experts from around Arizona

- Arizona Department of Education/Exceptional Student Services units
- Other Arizona Department of Education teams
- Agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Raising Special Kids, Diverse Ability Incorporated, Sonoran UCEDD, Arizona school districts, and more
- Session tracks for youths/young adults with disabilities and family members/caregivers
- Community partners and vendors/exhibitors tables

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