

It's time to mark your calendars for the 59th annual Conference on Exceptional Children! On November 2-4, a projected three thousand conferees – teachers, principals, related services providers, parents, administrators, college and university faculty, students, exhibitors, and more – will again join forces in Greensboro to refresh our commitment to the education of students with disabilities.



This year's conference again builds on the successes of prior conferences by presenting a variety of interest strands covering areas such as curriculum, assessment and research. Participants will benefit from hearing status reports on statewide initiatives like Responsiveness to Instruction, Positive Behavioral Support, Universal Design for Learning, Instructional Consultation Teams and our State Improvement Project. Key information will be provided on our Research-to-Practice initiatives that are identifying best practices in reading, writing and math instruction. Conferees will benefit from learning how better teaching leads to better outcomes and documentable progress, and how this progress informs planning processes and reduces the likelihood of unnecessary disputes.

The 59th conference will also be a bit different from prior conferences in that our presenters this year will be exclusively "homegrown". In a determined effort to avoid the almost inevitable kind of constricted thinking forced by current economic uncertainties and tight budgets, we are forging ahead with conference planning with a view toward having all our presenters come from public schools, universities and agencies within the state. Our theme, "**Growing Our Own – Harvesting Results**", reflects an emphasis on learning from each other. Considering how North Carolina has already contributed to our culture by giving us Andy Griffith, James Taylor, Michael Jordan, Krispy Kreme doughnuts, Pepsi-Cola, and even flight – not to mention the nation's largest and longest-running exceptional children conference sponsored by a state education agency – we are confident that this year's participants will receive a veritable cornucopia of practical ideas, ripe and ready for harvesting.

The challenges that confront today's exceptional children are many, but so are the opportunities for assisting them in their pursuit of quality educational outcomes. I promise you this conference will open your eyes and hearts to many such opportunities, and that amid the scores of instructional sessions, institutes, updates sessions and exhibitors, you will find information that will inform, inspire, validate and enlighten.

Come to Greensboro! The Division staff and I will be glad to see you there!

Mary N. Watson, Director
Exceptional Children Division
NC Department of Public Instruction