SECA is an outstanding organization with dedicated leaders and members. I want to serve as President so that we, as a collective, can bring light to the successes and challenges the early childhood community faces. I had wanted to help children and families since I was asked in 5th grade what I wanted to be when I grew up, A TEACHER! Since then, I have been an enthusiastic advocate for the Early Childhood field and encourage others to step up and take the lead. It is in the vein of lifting others that I yield my remaining time to thank those that have supported me and encourage others to get involved in local advocacy efforts.

There is a beautiful meme of women lifting women up, which is what I visualize when I think about the first time I was asked to come to a local board meeting that supported EC issues. I ask SECA voting members to lift each other up, become a mentor, join your state affiliate, lean into your strengths, challenge the system, write a letter to your state legislator, donate your time, treasure, or talent to local initiatives, and VOTE! We can and will make a lasting impact on the southern communities in which we live, work, and serve.

Leading an organization takes the encouragement and efforts of many people. My family, friends, and co-workers have supported me throughout this process. I have been fortunate to work alongside some of the most dedicated and talented professionals in the EC field, including board members of TECA, OKAEYC, OKHSA, NAEYC, and SECA. Special thanks to Matt Ellis, Retta Segar, Meshel Richmond, Marti Nicolson, Mary King, Kelly Ramsey, and Ruthann Ball.

Thanks for your time as a member to engage in the nominating process and good luck to all candidates.
The SECA election begins today, **August 17th** and ends on **September 30, 2020**!

The person elected will assume the office of President-Elect January 2021. During these next few weeks, we hope you’ll take the opportunity to get to know each of these highly qualified candidates. Take a look at all candidate information at [www.seca.info/presidentelect](http://www.seca.info/presidentelect).

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**Judy Whitesell, South Carolina**

My passion in life to serve. My mother was an exceptional woman in many ways, but one of the most powerful lessons I learned from her was to be involved! She believed your name should not merely be on the membership list, but you should be a committed volunteer. With this in mind, I look for organizations which share my values and passion. The Southern Early Childhood Association has been part of my life for 25 years. We guide the most vulnerable and innocent of society - our children. We are dedicated to continuing professional development of ourselves and our colleagues to remain current with research and ideas by lifting one another and mentoring growth. As experts in our field, we are challenged to share information about how to best care for and educate children to others affecting change for the better. Working together toward common goals is our mission.

I’ve been blessed in many ways and feel a responsibility to give. I admire those who are striving for excellence and push myself to stand with them. Having served on the SECA board of directors, I believe I have a firm knowledge base on where we’ve been and a shared vision of where we are headed. I have the experience working within commissions and moving forward. I am organized, committed, enjoy networking and have integrity. A leader can not lead without having team members who feel appreciated and encouraged. Knowing this, I will build respect and collaborate with each member of the board and the states they represent while working together.

Lastly, I recognize that most of us have busy lives requiring our attention daily. As a retired educator, I have the precious commodity of time to focus on leading our organization. I would appreciate your vote and support.