Message from Mary N. Watson  
Director, Exceptional Children Division  

“We can’t control the wind, but we can adjust the sail.”

The 61st Conference on Exceptional Children is fast approaching and the Exceptional Children Division of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction warmly invites you to attend this unique event. Each year we have the honor of hosting the nation’s largest and longest-running exceptional children conference sponsored by a state education agency. On October 31 – November 1, we will welcome nearly three thousand conferees to the Koury Convention Center in Greensboro to learn of new and exciting innovations, remind ourselves of what already works, make new connections and renew our commitment to improving outcomes for students with disabilities in North Carolina Public Schools.

This year we are witnessing changes to public education – some exciting, some challenging – to degrees we have not seen in many years. As the quote above indicates, often we cannot control these changes but we can control how we adjust to them to stay on course toward helping students with disabilities achieve. That approach prompts and leads us in this year’s conference theme, “Leading Change: Improving Outcomes.” As we adjust to the budgetary challenges to public education, we look to be proactive in our responses, turning our attention to an even greater degree toward innovation and existing strategies that are proving effective. This year, due to our first-ever ‘call for proposals’, you will hear from an increasing variety of voices with representation from schools and school systems of all corners of this great state. You will be entertained and informed with an enlightening and humorous keynote presentation from David Richards and Jose Martin, leaders in the special education legal field, with insights into IDEA and the IEP process. You will have myriad options with 100 instructional sessions and post-conference institutes addressing critical areas such as low-incidence disabilities, literacy, autism, early childhood, inclusive practices, related services and so much more. Finally, you will get to partake in our annual Teachers of Excellence event, which recognizes special education professionals from across North Carolina who are leading change and improving outcomes for students.

We invite you to come to Greensboro and join us for this experience. It is the highlight of our year and a unique opportunity for all of us to reconnect and rededicate ourselves to this important field. The Exceptional Children Division staff and I look forward to seeing you there!