

Item 17: Discussion of the Special Education Certification Redesign and Test Development Updates

DISCUSSION

SUMMARY: This item provides the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) an update on the test development and upcoming rulemaking related to the Special Education certification redesign, new Deafblind certification pathway, and additional upcoming educator certification exams.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: The statutory authority for the classroom teacher class certificate structure is Texas Education Code (TEC), §§21.003(a), 21.031, and 21.041(b)(1), (2), and (4), 21.041(c), 21.044(a), 21.0441, 21.048(a).

FUTURE ACTION EXPECTED: Texas Education Agency (TEA) staff anticipates presenting an update on educator certification test development to the Board at each SBEC meeting. TEA staff also anticipate presenting rule text for discussion across multiple chapters to implement the Special Education certification redesign and new Deafblind certification at the September 2022 SBEC meeting.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND JUSTIFICATION: This item provides an update on the Special Education certification redesign process and new Deafblind certification along with upcoming test development dates. The Special Education certification redesign, and the overall set of redesigned assessments,

Texas, (c) recommended changes to those requirements, (d) likely benefits of changing the requirements, and (e) points of concern. A summary of the recommendations included:

- Grade-band and level of support specific certifications,
- Coursework requirements for special education certification,
- Content area certification requirements for special education certification,
- Training requirement for Certification by Examination in special education, and
- Establishing a Deafblind certification pathway.

The full summary of the recommendations can be found in Attachment I.

Special Education Educator Standards Development 2019-2020

directed TEA staff to convene Educator Standards Advisory Committees to develop updated special education educator standards. In the summer of 2019, the TEA convened three committees, as well as a group of internal special education experts, to revise and write standards according to the recommendations of the forums. Committee members included representatives from institutes of higher education, alternative certification programs, special education consultants, and practicing teachers. As an outcome of the standards development process, the SBEC adopted Special Education EC-6, Special Education 6-12, and Deafblind EC-12 educator standards in 19 TAC Chapter 235 in July 2020.

Attachment II provides an overview of the Educator Standards Advisory Com and recommendations.

Special Education Exam Development 2020-2024

With the adoption of the Special Education EC-6, Special Education 6-12, and Deafblind EC-12 standards, TEA staff, in coordination with the testing vendor, began development processes for aligned certification exams. The design of these certification exams will align with the structure of other redesigned content pedagogy exams and will include both multiple choice and constructed response questions. Exam developmnd will

To accomplish the first articulated goal, the Special Education State Leadership team has met monthly between September 2021 to May 2022 to review the stakeholder recommendations to date and provide additional feedback.

Stakeholder Recommendations and Draft Special Education Certification Redesign Pathway

In preparation for discussions with the SBEC, TEA staff have provided an overview of the current pathways to special education certification and a draft set of recommendations for the Special Education certification redesign and new Deafblind certification, grounded in the stakeholder recommendations to date.

Current Special Education Certification Pathway

The table below summarizes the current pathways to special education certification.

Certificate	Special Education: EC-12	Special Education Supplemental
Type	Stand-alone certificate: A teacher can serve as a teacher of record solely on this certificate*	Supplemental: Requires a base content area certification
Placement	Qualifies a teacher to teach special education in all grade levels In most cases, teachers are also required to have a content area certification*	Qualifies a teacher to teach special education in grade levels aligned with base certificate
Coursework and Training	Requires coursework aligned with educator standards Requires an aligned clinical teaching/internship placement for those pursuing initial certification	Requires coursework aligned with educator standards
Certification Exam Requirements	Special Education: EC-12 certification exam	Special Education Supplemental certification exam
Certification by Examination	Allowable (no additional coursework requirement)	Allowable (no additional coursework requirement)

*Per 19 TAC §231.701, if an individual is providing content instruction in a special education classroom setting, a valid certificate that matches the subject and grade level of the assignment is also required, or the individual must demonstrate competency through the state's 2010 and 2011 high objective uniform State standard of evaluation for elementary and secondary special education teachers.

Draft Recommendations for SBEC Discussion

Based on the extensive stakeholder feedback gathered from 2018 onward, TEA staff will discuss with the SBEC a preliminary set of certificate and certification exam recommendations for Special Education certification redesign and new Deafblind certification. TEA staff plan to bring draft rule text, informed by SBEC member discussion, to codify these recommendations related to associated certificates and certification exams at the September 2022 meeting.

Based on stakeholder feedback, TEA staff are recommending the development of a Special Education Specialist EC-12 certificate, Core Subjects with Science of Teaching Reading (STR)/Special Education: EC-6 certificate, and a Deafblind: EC-12 certificate. The chart below summarizes the proposed certificates and associated standards, certification exams, and training requirements.

Certificate	Standards	Certification Exam	Initial Certification Training Requ 9
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Special Education Specialist EC-12 Certificate:

TEA staff will present to the Board for discussion the recommendation to develop a new Special Education Specialist: EC-12 certificate. This recommendation differs from the recommendations originally made by the Special Education Forums and Standards Advisory Committees, who recommended that the SBEC grade-band the certificates into EC-6 and 6-12 certificates. During extensive stakeholder discussions with the State Special Education Leadership team, a number of critical concerns were raised about potential unintended consequences of grade-banded special education certificates:

EPPs expressed concerns about internal capacity to offer both an EC-6 and 6-12 special education preparation pathway, with multiple programs expressing that they would only be able to offer EC-6 preparation. This would further exacerbate the critical shortage of special educators, particularly at the secondary levels.

Stakeholders expressed concerns about the optics of grade-banded special education standards when special education services are tightly connected to the individual needs of the student and their individual education plan (IEP).

Stakeholders shared that an EC-12 certificate would provide additional flexibility related to the assignment of special educators, which is a priority particularly for small and rural local education agencies.

To align with this recommendation, TEA staff will also present to the Board for discussion the development of a new Special Education Specialist: EC-12 certification exam. While TEA staff and the testing vendor had begun work to develop Special Education EC-6 and 6-12 certification exams, pending the direction of the Board, the content from the exams would be combined into one exam, with an anticipated launch date of September 2025.

Implementation of the new Special Education Specialist: EC-12 certificate and aligned certification exam would necessitate that EPPs apply to offer the new certificate. This multi-year runway, with the certificate and certification exam launching in September 2025, provides the necessary time to the field to update curriculum and coursework and apply for approval before the certification launches.

Core Subjects with STR/Special Education: EC-6 Certificate:

TEA will also present to the Board for discussion the development of a new Core Subjects with STR/Special Education: EC-6 certificate. This recommendation was informed by stakeholder feedback regarding the number of certification exams that elementary educators are required to take to become fully certified.

To align with this recommendation, TEA staff will also present to the Board for discussion the development of a new Core Subjects with Special Education: EC-6 certification exam, which would add Special Education as assessed on the compositeETQq0.0f 1 285.5 163.52 Tms0.000009

development necessary to update the content of all the subject areas included in the Core Subjects exam, to ensure alignment with updated TEKS and educator standards.

Implementation of the new Core Subjects with STR/Special Education: EC-6 certificate and aligned certification exam would necessitate that EPPs apply to offer the new certificate. This multi-year runway, with the certificate and certification exam launching in September 2026, provides the necessary time to the field to update curriculum and coursework and apply for approval before the certification launches.

Deafblind: EC-12 Certificate:

Finally, TEA staff will present to the Board for discussion the development of a new supplemental Deafblind: EC-12 certificate and new Deafblind: EC-12 certification exam aligned to the Deafblind educator standards. The certification exam is currently in development, with an anticipated launch date of September 2025. Stakeholder feedback on the Deafblind certification pathway reinforced that the coursework and training necessary to be an effective Deafblind educator necessitated that the certificate only be available as a post-baccalaureate route certificate for those teachers who are already certified as either Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) or Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHOH). In addition, stakeholders recommended that the preparation requirements align with the Deafblind educator standards and include both coursework and a practicum, similar to the requirements for TVI certification, under the supervision of a mentor with relevant instructional experience.

Implementation of the new Deafblind: EC-12 certificate and aligned certification exam would necessitate that EPPs apply to offer the new certificate. This multi-year runway, with the certificate and certification exam launching in September 2025, provides the necessary time to the field to update curriculum and coursework and apply for approval before the certification launches.

Additional Decision Points for Future Discussion:

While stakeholders have provided extensive feedback and recommendations on the special education certification redesign structure since 2018, there continue to be policy recommendations in which there is less consensus among stakeholders that present additional opportunities for discussion and feedback moving forward, including:

Discussion regarding requiring currently certified teachers to complete or count relevant coursework or training in order to add special education or Deafblind certification via the certification by examination route.

At the September 2022 SBEC meeting, staff plan to present three discussion items inclusive of proposed changes to rule based upon the draft recommendations and SBEC and stakeholder input. The anticipated changes are summarized in the table below.

Chapter	Anticipated Changes
230: Assessment of Educators (Subchapter C)	Addition of the Special Education Specialist: EC-12, Core Subjects with Special Education: EC-6, and Deafblind EC-12 certification exams to the testing figure (230.21(e)). Specification on the last operational dates for the current Special Education: EC-12 and Special Education Supfq198.26 5*

Discussion on Future Test Development

In addition to the exams currently slated for development, TEA staff plans to discuss with the SBEC during the July meeting additional opportunities to update and streamline the Core Subjects: EC-6 exam, including the opportunity to also develop a version of the Core Subjects exam that includes an ESL subtest.

PUBLIC AND STUDENT BENEFIT: The public and student benefit anticipated as a result of the recommendations and assessments would be more rigorous, relevant, and reliable requirements for the preparation, certification, and testing of classroom teachers upon entry into the profession, and retention of these qualified professionals for years to come.

Staff Members Responsible:

Jessica McLoughlin, Director, Talent Pathways

Pam Wetherington, Director, Educator Preparation and Testing

Attachments:

- I. 2018-2019 Special Education Forum Process, Members, and Recommendations
- II. 2019 Special Education Educator Standards Advisory Committee Timeline, Recommendations, and Next Steps

ATTACHMENT I

2018-2019 Special Education Forum Process, Members, and Recommendations

Executive Summary

Texas public schools provide special education services to almost 500,000 students. Despite these services, students with disabilities perform significantly lower on state assessments in reading and mathematics than their same-aged peers. To address this discrepancy and improve both student outcomes and teacher preparation, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) developed a Strategic Plan for Special Education based on input from stakeholders across the state.

Two goals of the strategic plan relate, in particular, to preparation and staffing of special education teachers. From October 2018 to January 2019 TEA convened a series of forums comprised of diverse participants within the field of special education to provide a set of

following brief, we present (a) information on the content of the forums and the participants, (b) current certification requirements in Texas, (c) recommended changes to those requirements, (d) likely benefits of changing the requirements, and (e) points of concern.

The forum participants suggested the following recommendations for changing special education certification:

Currently, special education certification is offered in early childhood (EC) through Grade 12, excluding candidates in the areas of on is offa swlv 1 90sug004C0051>50 1 72 539.2e4nfTQq0.00-3(e)-4(n)

- d. Teachers wishing to seek a supplemental special education certification would need to complete continuing professional education (CPE) and pass the *Special Education Foundations* exam, a content test that corresponds with their chosen grade-band, and the *Special Education Focus* exam.

Presently, candidates wishing to seek certification in the area of *visually impaired*, a supplemental certification, must complete two examinations. There were no recommended changes.

Currently, candidates wishing to seek initial or supplemental certification in *deaf and hard of hearing* are required to complete three examinations. The forum recommended only that candidates wishing to seek this certification would not do so by examination alone and would be required to complete either coursework (initial certification) or CPE (supplemental certification) as well.

Currently, there were no requirements listed for candidates wishing to seek certification in *deaf-blindness*. The forum participants recommended that *deaf-blind* be a supplemental certificate that would combine coursework and a required exam.

Background and Methodology

children with disabilities; Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education members, including a paraprofessional, counselor, diagnostician, licensed specialist in school psychology, special education administrator, district special education administrator, district human resources director, superintendent, and school board member; and three parent representatives from advocacy groups. Overall, 31 participants were recruited, and they represented a diverse group of stakeholders, from superintendents to parents. (A full list of participants is shown on the last page of this report.)

Data collection

Data were collected from five forum sessions (three in-person and two virtual sessions) as well as from pre- and post-work that members completed. Post-work often included having forum participants engage with their school and community members to continue to gather more diverse stakeholder feedback.

Opening webinar. In the opening webinar, participants were introduced to each other and oriented to the current educational climate and certification requirements in Texas.

Forum 1. Forum 1 was in person and focused on special education certification. The guiding question that participants grappled with was: *What is the vision for the exemplar beginning special education teacher, and which certification options support that vision?* As part of their post-work, participants were asked to interview people from their school districts and communities about special education certification. A survey was sent out and collected to capture information related to the subsequent interviews.

Forum 2. From the post-work in Forum 1, the survey results revealed that 46% of respondents

The certification process might be simpler if, like other states, there is a separate degree for special education certification.

CPE requirements and demand will largely increase. How will those be monitored?

Proposed Required Examinations

Initial

In addition to the proposed grade-band and disability-specific certification areas, the forum participants also recommended a new set of required examinations. Exhibit 2 displays the proposed changes. As noted, teacher candidates (excluding candidates in *visually impaired*, *deaf and hard of hearing*, and *deaf-blind*) would complete two tests before receiving initial certification:

the Special Education Foundations examination and
a core subject examination.

The Special Education Foundations examination is recommended to include foundational pedagogy for special educators as well as content knowledge of the science of teaching reading and the foundations of numeracy. Additionally, teacher candidates would need to complete a *core subject* examination for their area of certification. Examination choices would include these:

Exhibit 2. Proposed Examinations for Certification Areas

Before entering the classroom:	After entering the classroom:
<p><i>(Two tests)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Special Education Foundation examination<ul style="list-style-type: none">Would have foundational componentsCore subjects test	

Flexibility is recommended for rural districts because they often have persistent teacher shortages in special education or do not have enough students in special education to necessitate educators with certification in specific areas.

Exhibit 3. Areas Where Flexibility Is Recommended

For rural schools, the forum participants recommended flexibility in the teacher assignment and hiring processes. They maintained that educators filling special education positions in rural schools should still continue to pursue proper certification and will be able to do so through both CPE and the passage of appropriate examinations.

The forum participants also recommended that districts be given flexibility when an educator does not possess the specific certification for a grade band and level of support that aligns with

There are several benefits to be gained from this new certification structure but also concerns and unanswered questions. The forum participants urge the State Board of Educator Certification to consider all the information in this brief before making a decision.

Special Education Policy Forum Participants

Name	Role	Organization	Region
James Anderson	Campus special education administrator	Magnolia ISD	6
Janie Baszile	Teacher 6 8	Galena Park ISD	4
Debra Bauer	Director of Special Programs	Goliad ISD	3
Jessica Beaty	Teacher EC 5	Cypress-Fairbanks	4
Brenda Benavides	Special Education Coordinator	United ISD	1
Glenna Billingsley	EPP	Texas State	13
Vicki Brantley	Human Resources director	Region 8 ESC	8
Beth Brockman	Assistant superintendent for employee services	Plano ISD	10
Leah Cloes	Teacher 9-12	Fort Worth ISD	11



ATTACHMENT II

2019 Special Education Educator Standards Advisory Committee Timeline, Recommendations, and Next Steps

January 2019

Recommendations from the 2018–2019 Special Education Forums

Currently, special education certification is offered in early childhood (EC) through Grade 12 (candidates in *visually impaired* and *deaf and hard of hearing* have different requirements).

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