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Information

Professional Services Committee

Update on Education Specialist Credentials and the Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Executive Summary: This item provides information regarding teacher certification for Special Education teachers in California and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA). It concludes with areas outlined for future policy work in special education.

Recommended Action: This is an information item and requires no action.

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Strategic Plan Goal: 1

Promote educational excellence through the preparation and certification of professional educators

- ◆ Sustain high quality standards for the preparation of professional educators.
- ◆ Assess and monitor the efficacy of the Accreditation System, Examination System, and State and Federal Funded Programs.

Update on Education Specialist Credentials and the Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Introduction

The Commission on Teacher Credentialing has authorized credentials in the area of Special Education for more than four decades. Currently, the Commission issues ten credentials for Education Specialist and Clinical Rehabilitative Services, and two certificates, Resource Specialist and Early Childhood Special Education.

Over the past 30 years, numerous legislative measures have influenced programs and services for students with special needs both in California and nationally. The recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act will likely have a significant impact on credentialing in special education.

This item provides information regarding the history of special education and related services credentials in California and identifies possible areas for future study related to the requirements, policies and implementation of the California special education and related services credentials.

Background

The 1970 Ryan Act, which created the Commission, established four Specialist Instruction Credentials in Special Education: Learning Handicapped, Severely Handicapped, Communicatively Handicapped, and Physically Handicapped (including orthopedically handicapped and visually handicapped). Prospective special education teachers were required to hold a basic teaching credential before they could get a special education credential, which was considered an “advanced credential.” In 1974, under the term “individuals with exceptional needs,” the same four sub-classifications identified by the Ryan Act were also identified in the California Master Plan for Special Education by the California Department of Education. A number of further developments took place during the ensuing years as the Commission continued to improve the Special Education Credential structure.

It was determined by the Commission that although the credential structure was appropriate to the California Master Plan, teaching in some areas of special education required specialized knowledge beyond that which was included in the four credential areas. Thus, the Commission, for example, added the Clinical Rehabilitative Services

Credential, the Resource Specialist Certificate of Competence and created authorizations for working with severely emotionally disturbed (SED) students.

In 1993, the Commission adopted policies to begin a major restructuring of the special education credentials. Between 1994 and 1996, a Special Education Advisory Panel composed of special education teachers, administrators, university professors, school board members, personnel directors, audiologists, language and speech specialists as well as infant specialists was asked to advise the Commission in the development of the new credential structure and to recommend program standards. The new structure was adopted by the Commission in the fall of 1996 and implemented beginning in January 1997. The new basic credentials were as follows:

- Education Specialist Credential: Mild/Moderate Disabilities
- Education Specialist Credential: Moderate/Severe Disabilities
- Education Specialist Credential: Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing
- Education Specialist Credential: Physical and Health Impairments
- Education Specialist Credential: Visual Impairments
- Education Specialist Credential: Early Childhood Special Education
- Clinical Rehabilitative Services Credential: Language, Speech and Hearing
- Clinical Rehabilitative Services Credential: Audiology
- Clinical Rehabilitative Services Credential: Special Class Authorization
- Clinical Rehabilitative Services Credential: Orientation and Mobility

At the same time the Commission adopted the new credential structure, it also adopted *Standards of Program Quality and Effectiveness for Education Specialist Credential Programs and Clinical Rehabilitative Services Credential Programs*. These standards have governed preparation programs in special education since that time.

When the Commission adopted the Education Specialist Credential structure in 1997, the Commission designated the Education Specialist Credential as a basic credential. Special Education teachers were no longer required to earn a Multiple or Single Subject Teaching Credential prior to earning the Education Specialist Credential. The standards required collaboration with general education teachers and fieldwork in both general and special education. Under the 1997 standards, education specialist credential candidates were also required to demonstrate subject matter competence either through completion of an approved subject matter preparation program or passage of a Commission-approved subject matter examination. However, the authorization of the credential was not restricted to a particular grade level, or subject matter area. The new special education credential was a two-level credential structure and was implemented beginning with a preliminary credential, followed by a professional level that included induction to be completed after initial employment. This allowed preparation to continue in the context of employment needs.

Both the Commission and the Special Education Advisory Panel recognized the widespread shortages of teachers in Special Education. The elimination of the prerequisite teaching credential requirement was expected to help alleviate the shortage.

Additionally, the panel felt that the inclusion of mentoring and support as part of the Level II Professional Clear Credential program would increase retention rates of special education teachers. Clinical Rehabilitative Services Credentials were exempted from Level II preparation because the Language, Speech, and Hearing; Audiology; and Orientation and Mobility areas already required a Master's degree to meet their respective national accreditation standards.

Despite these changes, the shortage of qualified teachers in special educations persists. According to the California Department of Education, the number of special needs students in our public schools continues to grow.

	Number of Special Education Students	Growth	Number of General Education Students	Growth	Relative Proportion
2000-01	650,719		6,050,895		10.75%
2001-02	663,220	1.92%	6,147,375	1.59%	10.79%
2002-03	675,332	1.83%	6,244,642	1.58%	10.81%
2003-04	681,980	0.98%	6,298,774	0.87%	10.83%

To address this shortage, policy makers and the Commission has encouraged the development of professional preparation programs leading to the education specialist credential. Currently, of the 96 California teacher preparation program sponsors, 44 institutions have one or more special education teacher preparation programs (37 have at least one or more internship programs). In addition, six school districts and/or county offices of education offer an Education Specialist Internship program. Of the 50 program sponsors, 43 offer internship programs. This represents significant growth in the number of program sponsors from 1999, when there were only 38 special education program sponsors.

The increased availability of credential programs has resulted in continual growth in the number of first time special education credentials issued throughout the past few years:

	Number of Special Education Credentials Issued	Growth
2000-01	2,154	
2001-02	2,341	8.68%
2002-03	2,976	27.13%
2003-04*	3,153	5.95%
* Preliminary Number		

Of the preliminary number of Education Specialist credentials issued in 2003-04, 62.4% were issued to internship candidates.

Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA)

The *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (Public Law 94-142) enacted in 1975 was landmark federal legislation requiring education and related services for children with disabilities as well as state and local aid for special education. This special education legislation outlined eleven disability categories: deaf, deaf-blind, hard-of-hearing, mentally retarded, multihandicapped, orthopedically impaired, other health impaired, seriously emotionally disturbed, specific learning disabilities, speech impaired and visually impaired. It later became known as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), and since that time, amendments and reauthorizations were passed in 1986, 1990, 1997 and most recently, 2004. These amendments and reauthorizations primarily dealt with methods of practice related to IEPs, due process, early childhood special education, transition services and suspension/expulsion to name a few. None had specific requirements for special education credentialing until the 2004 reauthorization.

On December 3, 2004 President Bush signed the most recent reauthorization of IDEA (P.L. 108-446). Although the latest law preserves the basic structure and civil rights guarantees of IDEA, it also has significant implications related to credentialing. Most provisions of P.L. 108-446 go into effect July 1, 2005, but some changes also went into effect on December 3, 2004.

At the foundation of the bill are the findings of the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education which called for "Special education reform based on paperwork reduction, early intervention, parental choice, and academic results for students." IDEA is expected to improve results for students with disabilities by shifting the focus away from compliance with duplicative, burdensome, and confusing rules, and placing a renewed emphasis on ensuring children with disabilities are actually learning.

One of the most significant new definitions is that of "highly qualified" teachers (§602(10)). P.L. 108-446 links its definition to the definition of "highly qualified" in Section 9101(23) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA/NCLB), but modifies the definition as it applies to special education teachers. The NCLB definition of "highly qualified" applies only to teachers of core academic subjects and differentiates between new and veteran teachers and between those teaching at elementary level and above elementary level.

Since Education Specialist credential holders may be assigned to serve students in a variety of settings clarification of the definition for a highly qualified special education teacher will be critical to understanding how the credential requirements would need to be revised. Depending on the definition of "highly qualified" teachers in California, the Commission may need to reconsider subject matter preparation requirements or assignment authorizations for these credentials.

The responsibility of defining “highly qualified teacher,” developing of a state plan, and ensuring implementation of “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) rests with the California State Board of Education (SBE). The California Department of Education (CDE) implements NCLB policy from the SBE; provides assistance and information to local education agencies; and collects and analyzes NCLB data. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing is responsible for the certification of teachers and for aligning California certification with NCLB.

To facilitate communication between the agencies that will be responsible for addressing the requirements of IDEA, Commission staff members have been meeting regularly with the staff from California State Board of Education (SBE) and California Department of Education (CDE)/Special Education Division since the legislation was signed into law last December. As with NCLB, the SBE will be responsible for implementing the provisions of IDEA and interpreting the definition of “highly qualified special education teacher” for California. That action must take place before the Commission staff would recommend any potential changes to the current special education credential requirements and/or authorizations. The federal regulations for state’s implementation of IDEA are not expected until later this year. In the meantime, Commission staff will continue to work with the staff of the SBE and CDE to become informed of actions being taken, and will provide regular updates to the Commission.

Areas for Further Consideration

In addition to consideration of possible changes in special education credential requirements that might be necessary as a result of IDEA/NCLB, the Commission may wish to think about additional areas in which changes should be made in the credential structure for special education.

- The current structure has been in place for approximately eight years. There have been a number of changes in the K-12 schools in that period of time. Is the current structure continuing to meet the needs of candidates and employers, or should modifications be considered?
- Since the Education Specialist Credential was implemented with a two-level structure in 1997, the Commission has reformed the Multiple and Single Subject Credentials through SB 2042. The Multiple and Single Subject Credentials are also now a two level credential structure. A formal induction program is required to complete the Professional Clear Credential for Multiple and Single Subjects. The professional level programs of the Education Specialist and the Multiple and Single Subject Credentials are quite different in design and content. Since they are all “basic” credential, should be more uniformity among the requirements of each?
- One major concern about the current Education Specialist standards is that the candidates who need English Learner (EL) authorization must now take an additional CLAD Certificate Program in order to be authorized to work with EL

students. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are requiring more and more teachers to have CLAD certificates. Some have suggested that the Education Specialist Program Standards be adapted to include the necessary EL content, in order to qualify the holder for an EL authorization. This authorization is not currently available in the standards.

Two options have been suggested to address this concern. The first option would be to embed the EL content within the Education Specialist and Clinical Rehabilitative Services Credentials such as was done for Multiple and Single Subject standards. The second option would be to include Education Specialist and Clinical Rehabilitative Services candidates within the new California Teachers of English Learners requirements. How should the need for EL authorization be addressed?

Commission staff will continue to bring regular updates to the Commission on the progress of California's implementation of IDEA.