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Information

Professional Services Committee

Draft Report on the Study of Special Education Certification

AGENDA INSERT

Executive Summary: This item presents a report on the study of Special Education Certification as required by the Commission and SB 1209 (Chap. 517, Stats. 2006). A workgroup of stakeholders was formed to study the structure and requirements of the Education Specialist and Other Related Services Credentials and make proposed recommendations for consideration by the Commission.

Recommended Action: For information only

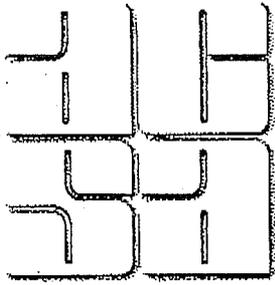
Presenters: Jan Jones Wadsworth, Consultant and Michael McKibbin, Administrator, Professional Services Division

Strategic Plan Goal: 1

Promote educational excellence through the preparation and certification of professional educators.

- ◆ Sustain high quality standards for the preparation and performance of professional educators and for the accreditation of credential programs.

November 2007



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CALIFORNIA SCHOOL
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November 5, 2007

Dr. David Pearson
Chair
California Commission on Teacher Credentialing
1900 Capitol Avenue
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Dr. Pearson:

The Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) Student Services and Special Education Council unanimously support the recommendation of the Task Force Report on the special education credential. In particular, we strongly urge the Commission to accept the recommendation on a supplemental speech and language credential and development of an English language credential. With the current credential, this is the most difficult area to provide services to students.

A large percentage of students that have language and communication difficulties could be served by the holder of a language communication credential.

The development of a new credential does not eliminate the need for speech pathologists that are currently credentialed.

The language communication credential would simply broaden the opportunities to best serve children based on their communication capabilities.

ACSA and the Student Services and Special Education Council appreciate your consideration of this recommendation.

Sincerely,

Maureen O'Leary Burness
Assistant Superintendent, Student Support Services
Folsom Cordova Unified School District
President
Student Services and Special Education Council



November 2, 2007

P. David Pearson, Ph.D.
Chair
Commission on Teacher Credentialing
1900 Capitol Avenue
Sacramento, CA 95814-4213

RE: Education Credential Reform Recommendations

Dear Dr. Pearson:

We are very grateful to have been included in recent discussions concerning the shortage of speech-language pathologists (SLPs), as well as the use of licensed SLPs and speech-language pathology assistants in the public schools. There are a variety of misconceptions over the training and personnel standards for SLPs and support personnel who work in the public schools, and we hope that a continuing dialog between CTC and the licensing board might help to clear these up. Such dialog might also help resolve a variety of issues affecting children enrolled in the public schools who experience communication difficulties.

After studying the report of the CTC working group on special education credential reform and the recommendation to create a new Specialist Teaching Credential, "Communication Development Specialist," the Board has many questions and concerns. We are anxious to engage in a dialog with CTC and other stakeholders as to future possibilities and details regarding this recommendation. Some of our immediate reactions and concerns are outlined below. We will discuss some of the reasons given in the report for creating this credential and identify and/or suggest other ways you might accomplish that same goal:

- Improve access to communication development services for students in the schools.

There is no question that the shortage of personnel is creating access problems in some school districts. However, current laws and regulations permit the use of speech language pathology assistants (SLPAs) to assist the fully credentialed speech-language pathologist (SLP). California has adopted a uniform standard for all settings including public schools with the regulation of the registered SLPA category [*CA Education Code 56363 (b) (1) The language and speech development and remediation services may be provided by a speech-language pathology assistant as defined in subdivision (f) of Section 2530.2 of the Business and Professions Code*]. There are now over 600 SLPAs registered in California, and many of these individuals are helping to expand and enhance the services provided by SLPs in the public schools. In addition, SLPAB has created additional opportunities for bachelor level SLP program graduates to register as Assistants if they have either 70 hours of the required fieldwork experience or nine months of documented work experience involving duties similar to those expected of an SLPA. Bachelor level training programs in California are in the process of creating courses that offer an opportunity to obtain the 70 hours of clinical or fieldwork experience prior to receiving the BA. This will also increase the numbers of BA level individuals qualified to register as Assistants.

What about the quality of service provided? The Board office has received complaints from parents over some schools utilizing unqualified speech paraprofessionals, and sometimes SLPs on waiver who do not have appropriate support and/or supervision. How will parents perceive this newly created credential, and how will they be able to determine which professional is best suited to serve their child? How will special education coordinators and SELPA directors determine which professional serves these students? Special Education in California is already inundated with multiple and confusing layers of procedures and personnel, with an ever increasing amount of paperwork and legal hurdles. A new credential will only add to this confusion, and, potentially, stimulate more complaints.

- Create a new instructional program that primarily focuses on employment in the public schools.

This new Communication Development Specialist credential would supposedly focus on a “full range of communication and language development skills taught and remediated in schools” with standards to be developed at a later date. Individuals trained for service in the public schools need to have a breadth of knowledge concerning language development and language disorders, similar to the current preparation of speech language pathologists. The diversity of terms, constructs, and even attitudes and biases pervade the study of language and its disorders, making it difficult if not impossible to cover all of this information in one or two courses on language disorders or normal language acquisition which might become a part of the requirements for this new credential. While we realize the standards have not yet been developed, it is hard to imagine that the proposed new specialist credential would include the breadth of coursework on language and its disorders that are now required to become a speech language pathologist.

Superficially covering theoretical constructs and theories pertaining to language and its disorders, has the potential to give communication development specialists a little bit of information on these topics but not the in-depth understanding to diagnose language disorders, to plan intervention for language based problems, and/or to discuss a child’s language problems with parents, teachers or other professionals.

We are concerned that the presumption at CTC is that the current training to become an SLP is too medically based with too much time spent on adult or medical issues such as swallowing. However, SLPs in the public schools do have medically fragile children on their caseloads, and our current SLP training programs do an outstanding job of covering information important to the full understanding of language and its disorders. There is a reciprocal relationship between oral and written language that encourages and develops overall learning, and that continues over the human lifespan. Individuals educated to provide communication and language services must understand and have the training and expertise to influence and remediate those communication skills needed for success in life and for success in the classroom.

- Provide multiple points of entry for those interested in working in the schools with children who have language development needs.

We currently have two points of entry for well trained individuals to serve those with communication and language difficulties—speech-language pathologists and speech-language pathology assistants. In addition, CTC already awards a “mild-moderate” teaching credential and the report includes recommendations on ways to create requirements for more competencies in reading/language arts as well as skills to address Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). In other words, there are already three different personnel categories that address the needs of language/learning disabled individuals—SLPs, SLPAs and mild/moderate credential holders.

SLPAs, then, already have an opportunity to enter credential programs either offered through special education departments or those with a focus on communication disorders. A career ladder of sorts is already available to Assistants who wish to further their education.

- This new program will “attract a more diverse population with an expertise in language development and disorders to work with children in the schools.”

It is not at all clear why the working group stipulated this as an outcome of the new credential program. Are they making the assumption that a program with lesser qualifications will then attract more individuals from diverse backgrounds? I certainly hope this was not the thinking of the group. Again, however, it is important to note that we already have opportunities for obtaining a mild-moderate credential or obtaining an Associate degree to become an SLPA.

- Options would be available for paid internships.

CTC could already offer paid internships to those completing their master’s degree. Are those seeking the new SLP Services Credential not eligible for such paid internships?

- New programs will provide an opportunity for “speech therapists” (p. 31 working group report) to stay in the schools without taking the national exam and completing a clinical fellowship experience. Is the Commission making the recommendation that “speech therapists” working in the public schools be dismissed unless they can pass the national exam and complete a fellowship year? We realize that those presently working in the schools might have to complete these requirements if they want to upgrade to the new SLP Services Credential, but it was our understanding that was an option not a mandate.

Finally, it is difficult to understand why anyone would want to see lesser qualified personnel serving individuals with language disorders who are enrolled in public school programs. Many parents are sure to object to the disparity between speech-language pathologists extensively trained to work with language impairments and communication development specialists with a lesser degree of knowledge and skills pertaining to language disabilities.

There are several initiatives underway that will address the critical shortage of personnel in Speech-Language Pathology:

1. There are two new SLP graduate programs planned for opening in fall 2008 (Chapman College and CSU Santa Ynez, and a new undergraduate program in speech-language pathology (CSU Dominguez Hills). In addition there are innovative programs such as the University of the Pacific cohort graduate evening/weekend program, and a similar program at CSU Long Beach.
2. There is an innovative model program through the Monterey County Office of Education and CSU Northridge to train current employees through a joint relationship between a college program and a county office of education. It provides currently employed teaching and support staff with a long-distance graduate program that will qualify them for SLP credentialing (see enclosure).
3. There are efforts underway to expand paraprofessional training in northern California such as the new program at Santa Rosa Community College and the opening next year of a program at American River College in Sacramento.
4. For graduates of bachelor level SLP programs who cannot gain access to SLP graduate programs, there is the opportunity to work as SLPAs based on recently adopted modifications to the licensing regulations.

Don't these initiatives deserve a chance to work before we create a credential that has the potential to add confusion when the IEP team attempts to assign services for those who have language problems? Many parents are already overwhelmed by the number of special education personnel involved at IEP meetings, and very confused about what each of these individuals do and how they can help their child. This new specialist credential will only add to the confusion.

The standards for training speech-language pathologists have been developed over many years and are based on competencies that research has shown to be necessary to successfully address speech, language, hearing and related disorders. The consideration for a new category of specialists with overlapping communication and language responsibilities seems like a quick fix for personnel shortages with unanticipated consequences. Creating a lower standard of training for individuals to provide language services in the public schools runs counter to the current trend of encouraging excellence in students and teachers alike in California public schools.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our concerns, and we hope there will be additional opportunities to dialog with CTC about these important issues.

Sincerely,



Lisa O'Connor, MA

ASHA Certified Speech-Language Pathologist
and Board Chair



Annemarie Del Mugnaio, Executive Officer

Encl.

cc: Dale Janssen, Executive Director
Commission on Teacher Credentialing

Jan Jones Wadsworth, Consultant
Commission on Teacher Credentialing

Mike McKibbin, Professional Services
Commission on Teacher Credentialing

Members of the CTC Working Group on Special Education
Credential Reform

ATTENTION!

ALL TEACHERS INTERESTED IN A SECOND CAREER AS A SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST

Speech and Language Pathologist Masters and Credential Acquisition Program (M-CAP)

California school districts are currently facing a severe shortage of speech and language pathologists (SLPs), with more than 1,000 estimated SLP vacancies in districts across the state. This shortage is projected to increase over the next several years. To address this need, the Monterey County, San Benito County, and Santa Cruz County area SELPAs are participating in an SLP training program for teachers who are interested in a second professional career as an SLP. **This program will provide financial support for participants through a long-term loan which will be forgiven through subsequent employment as a District SLP.**

Any teacher who holds a B.A. or B.S. degree is eligible to participate in this program. The program as currently planned is:

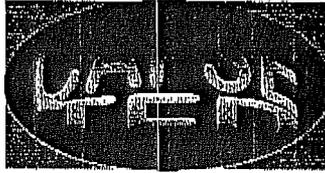
1. Participant obtains sponsorship of a participating school district within the Monterey/San Benito/Santa Cruz Counties area (contact local SELPA for a list of participating school districts).
2. Participant signs agreement with sponsoring district. Agreement provides for an ongoing loan by district to participant to complete the program. District agrees to forgive a portion of the loan for each year that participants works for the district as an SLP after obtaining the SLP credential.
3. Participant enrolls in an on-line program through San Jose State University that will satisfy SLP graduate program pre-requisites. This consists of approximately 13 courses (39 undergraduate semester units). Each course is approximately four (4) weeks long, and most are presented in an on-line (computer learning) format. Because of the content, a few courses (most likely 2-3) will require classroom attendance, and will be held on week-ends at the MCOE or a nearby facility.

Participant will remain in a teaching position during the course of the pre-requisite program.

Note: Participants whose B.A. or B.S. degree is in Communication Disorders will begin their program at Step 4.

4. Upon completion of the pre-requisite program, participant will enroll in an on-line SLP graduate program leading to a credential as an SLP. At this time, participant will begin working for the district within an SLP or SLP-related position.
5. Upon completion of the SLP credential program, participant will continue working as an SLP with the district, with a portion of the participant's loan forgiven by the district for each subsequent year worked with the district.

California Association of Professors of Special Education/Teacher
Education Division
CAPSE/TED



CAPSE/TED

**California Association of Professors of Special Education/
Teacher Education Division, Council for Exceptional Child**

Mr. Ted Janssen
Executive Director
Commission on Teacher Credentialing
1900 Capitol Avenue
Sacramento, Ca. 95814

November 5, 2007

Dear Mr. Janssen:

We represent the professors of special education in the state of California. Our professional organization includes universities from both the public and private sector who train future special educators. We are writing to endorse the product and recommendations of the special education work group, which are being presented to the Commission on November 8, 2007. We applaud the efforts and time devoted by members of the work group to produce the draft report.

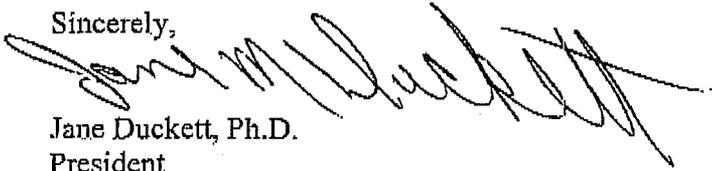
Of particular note are the following points:

1. We strongly endorse the addition of a seventh Education Specialist Credential focusing on the full range of communication and language development skills taught and remediated in schools. There is an extreme shortage of persons who can perform those tasks in the school districts, and the speech-language pathology credential programs should be redesigned to expand the pipeline for that field. This includes building a career ladder for speech aides, as well as other multiple points of entry for those who wish to assist children with language development needs.

2. We also strongly endorse the concept of a special populations major for undergraduates who know that they want to become special education teachers when they enter college. The concept of multiple career paths is an excellent one as well, and the efforts to recruit diverse candidates to the profession are laudable.
3. We endorse the concept of having one clearing process for multiple credentials to reduce the time needed to become professionally credentialed.
4. We endorse the concept of using distance learning and partnerships between universities for low incidence credentials, and potentially other credentials and certificates as well. For example, the Resource Specialist certificate might be broadened by such a delivery model.
5. We agree that the face of the credential should clearly indicate how the candidate became "highly qualified". This will be of genuine assistance to potential hiring agencies. The section in the report that discussed subject matter requirements was a well-written explanation of an extremely complex issue.
6. We support the concept of having partnerships between the universities and the schools for the attainment of the clear credential, but we caution that policies and guidelines will need to be written that clearly delineate the role and responsibilities of each partner. For example, the limiting of the university coursework to only 12 units will by necessity put more of a burden for the induction process on the school partners. The necessity for local support providers to be qualified special educators needs to be made explicit.
7. We support the concept of a teaching performance assessment for Education Specialists, and members of our association could be of assistance in designing such a system. We also urge that the new assessment system be pilot tested and refined before full scale implementation.

In summary, our organization applauds the efforts of both the work group and the Commission staff members in crafting suggestions which will streamline the credentialing process for Education Specialists, strengthen the knowledge and skills of the potential candidates, and broaden the opportunities for career entry for those persons wishing to become special education professionals. Our members are eager to assist in the implementation of the suggestions of the work group.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jane M. Duckett", written over a horizontal line.

Jane Duckett, Ph.D.
President