

Item 15:

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.

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, are a part of the teacher certification redesign plan that has been discussed with the SBEC since 2018 to improve the quality and consistency of newly certified teachers.

Background on Special Education Certification Redesign Process

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. In 2018, to address this discrepancy and improve both student outcomes and educator preparation, the 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. Since the development of the strategic plan, the SBEC has taken systematic, data-informed action to redesign the special education certification process, in collaboration with stakeholders. A summary of relevant special education preparation, production, and retention data can be found in the attachment.

In this item TEA staff will outline the actions taken to date, present proposed updated Special Education Certification and new Deafblind Certification pathways, and discuss the timeline for future action.

Special Education Forums 2018-2019

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 recommendations intended to strengthen Texas' special education certification process. As an outcome of these forums, TEA

staff developed a brief, which was presented to the SBEC for their consideration and feedback in April 2019. The brief, which can be found in the attachment, presented information to the SBEC on (a) 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. 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.

Special Education Educator Standards Development 2019-2020

Based on the forums' recommendations, the SBEC 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.

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 development is currently underway.

Current and Future Special Education Stakeholder Engagement

In preparation for upcoming discussions related to implementing updated special education certification requirements in rule, TEA staff compiled all stakeholder feedback from 2018 to 2021 into a set of initial draft policy recommendations. Beginning in Fall 2021, TEA staff convened a Special Education State Leadership team, in coordination with the CEEDAR (Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform) Center, to seek additional feedback on the draft policy recommendations. The CEEDAR Center provides technical assistance support to state education agencies specifically related to supporting students with disabilities in achieving college- and career-ready standards. TEA staff has convened the leadership team with two primary goals: (1) conduct final rounds of stakeholder feedback to develop a codified set of recommendations regarding implementation of the special education certification redesign, and (2) develop tools and resources to support educator preparation programs and local education agencies to successfully plan for and implement the redesigned special education certification process.

To accomplish the first articulated goal, the Special Education State Leadership team has met monthly between September 2021 to June 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 present draft rule text to codify these recommendations related to associated certificates and certification exams in the Chapter 230 and Chapter 233 discussion items in this agenda.

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 Requirements
Special Education Specialist: EC-12	Special Education EC-6 Special Education 6-12	New Special Education Specialist EC-12 exam (anticipated exam launch September 2025)	Aligned coursework hours and training requirements to certification fields in which the candidate is pursuing initial certification. Majority of teacher candidates will pursue both Special Education and content area certifications.
Core Subjects with STR/Special Education EC-6	Special Education EC-6	New Core Subjects with Special Education EC-6 exam (anticipated exam launch September 2026)	Aligned coursework hours and training requirements to all core subject content areas and special education.
Deafblind: EC-12	Deafblind EC-12	New Deafblind: EC-12 exam (anticipated exam launch September 2025)	Coursework and training requirements, including specialized practicum (similar to current Teachers of Students with Visual Impairment requirements)

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 a “subject” assessed on the composite exam. This would allow for candidates to meet the requirement for demonstration of their content area and special education knowledge and skills on one exam, lowering the overall number of exams candidates would need to take for issuance of their intern, probationary, or standard certification. The anticipated launch date for the exam would be September 2026. This exam would launch one year after the Special Education Specialist: EC-12 exam due to the additional exam 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.
- Discussion regarding personnel assignments, including specification regarding required content area certification, particularly for secondary special education assignments.

The Special Education State Leadership team will continue to discuss these topics during their ongoing working group meetings facilitated alongside the CEEDAR team and TEA staff. TEA staff plan to share with the SBEC additional ideas and recommendations developed by the committee at future SBEC meetings.

Next Steps:

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

Chapter	Anticipated Changes
230: Assessment of Educators (Subchapter C)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 Supplemental certification exams.
233: Categories of Classroom Teaching Certificates (233.8 Special Education)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addition of new Special Education Specialist: EC-12, Core Subjects with STR/Special Education: EC-6, and Deafblind EC-12 certificates.

Certification Exam Development Update

TEA staff are actively working to update the current content pedagogy tests to increase their rigor and relevance and to ensure alignment with the current Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). A summary of the anticipated first operational dates of the new assessments are in the table below.

January 1, 2022	September 1, 2023	September 1, 2024	September 1, 2025	September 1, 2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English Language Arts and Reading 4–8 (217) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English Language Arts and Reading 7–12 (331) Physical Education (257) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health (258) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special Education Specialist EC-12 Deafblind EC–12 (185) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core Subjects with Special Education EC-6
TBD				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESL Supplemental Bilingual Supplemental Bilingual Special Education Reading Specialist School Librarian 				

Discussion on Future Test Development

In addition to the exams currently slated for development, TEA staff plans to discuss future exam development plans with the SBEC during the September meeting. TEA staff will discuss opportunities to update and streamline exams, including the opportunity to also develop a version of the Core Subjects exam that includes an ESL subtest and a new Bilingual Spanish certification exam. TEA staff will also share an update on educator standards development and the translation of the standards into redesigned certification exams for the Reading Specialist, School Librarian, and new proposed Bilingual Special Education fields.

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
DeMarco Pitre, Manager, Educator Standards and Testing

Attachment:

Special Education Data Overview

ATTACHMENT**Relevant Data Points to Special Education Teacher Preparation and Production****Special Education Certificate Production**

Table 1 below presents the past 5 years of special education certificate production. This includes newly certified educators completing educator preparation programs (EPPs) and current educators who have added the special education certificate via certification by exam (CBE). The EPP production data is disaggregated by preparation route.

Table 1: New Special Education Certifications by Route

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Alternative	1,958	1,773	1,902	1,626	2,407
Post Bac	64	55	51	62	31
Traditional	682	627	544	461	525
Out of State	423	397	523	461	645
CBE	3,140	2,988	3,454	2,953	2,871
Total	6,267	5,840	6,474	5,563	6,479

Table 2 below shows the top 10 EPP producers of new special education certificates in 2020-21. This includes all preparation routes at the EPP.

Table 2: Top EPP Producers of Special Education Certificates

EPP	Number	EPP Type
A+ Texas Teachers	1,347	Alternative
iteachTEXAS	476	Alternative
Web-Centric Alternative Cert Program	94	Alternative
Teachworthy	81	Alternative
Stephen F Austin State University	67	Four Year College / University
Education Career Alternatives Program	62	Alternative
Region 4 ESC	62	Alternative
Texas State University	53	Four Year College / University
Sam Houston State University	47	Four Year College / University
University of North Texas	45	Four Year College / University

Special Education Exam Pass Rates

Per 19 TAC 229.5, TEA calculates the second-attempt pass rate for all certification fields annually. Additionally, we have information from our testing vendor which includes the first attempt pass rate and the best attempt pass rate.

Table 3 below presents the pass rate for the special education EC-12 exam for the past 5 years. This includes the first, second, and best attempt.

Table 3: Pass Rates for Special Education EC-12 Exam

Year	First Attempt	Second Attempt	Best Attempt
2017-18	73%	94%	83%
2018-19	74%	95%	82%
2019-20	76%	94%	84%
2020-21	72%	83%	77%

Table 4 below presents the pass rate for the special education supplemental exam for the past 5 years. This includes the first, second, and best attempt.

Table 4: Pass Rates for Special Education Supplemental Exam

Year	First Attempt	Second Attempt	Best Attempt
2017-18	83%	100%	86%
2018-19	84%	100%	87%
2019-20	87%	100%	90%
2020-21	85%	98%	89%

Special Education Related Commendations

The SBEC awards two different EPP commendations annually related to special education. This first is for those EPPs that have a first attempt pass rate of higher than 95% on the exam. The second is for the EPPs that prepare the highest percentage of special educators as a portion of all the teachers they prepare. The following EPPs received these commendations this year:

First Attempt Pass Rate Special Education Commendation

- University of Texas – Austin

Certifying the highest percentage of their candidates in Special Education Commendation

- Austin Community College
- Urban Teachers

Special Education Out of Field Information

Annually, TEA calculates the percentage of educators (by teacher FTE) who are teaching out of field. For special education assignments, educators are required to have both the special education certificate and the appropriate content area certificate. However, there is local flexibility to this requirement. The rules in 19 TAC Chapter 231(F) state:

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 [HOUSSE] for elementary and secondary special education teachers.

Because the K-12 data collections do not include data that allows us to determine if teachers’ demonstrations of competency through HOUSSE, we report two measures. They are: (1) whether the educator held a grade appropriate special education certificate; and (2) whether the educator held an appropriate special education and content certificate based on the subject and grade level of the assignment.

Table 5 below presents this information for the 2020-2021 school year.

Table 5: Out of Field Percentages for Special Education Assignments, 2020-2021

Grade Level	Total FTE	Special Education Certified			Special Education and Content Certified		
		Teachers	FTE	FTE Pct.	Teachers	FTE	FTE Pct.
Elementary School (Grades EC-5)	7,620.3	8,332	6,601.9	86.6%	7,112	5,279.1	69.3%
Middle School (Grades 6-8)	6,497.3	7,398	4,944.2	76.1%	6,014	3,495.1	53.8%
High School (Grades 9-12)	8,109.2	8,383	6,001.0	74.0%	5,398	2,761.7	34.1%
All Grade Levels	22,226.8		17,547.1	78.9%		11,535.9	51.9%