

## 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, 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 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 to preparation and staffing of special education teachers. Since the development of the strategic plan, the SBEC has taken systematic action to redesign the special education certification process, in collaboration with stakeholders. In this item TEA staff will outline the actions taken to date 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 Attachment I, 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.

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

#### 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.

Attachment II provides an overview of the Educator Standards Advisory Committees' activities 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 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 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.

<b>Certificate</b>	<b>Special Education: EC-12</b>	<b>Special Education Supplemental</b>
<b>Type</b>	Stand-alone certificate: A teacher can serve as a teacher of record solely on this certificate*	Supplemental: Requires a base content area certification
<b>Placement</b>	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
<b>Coursework and Training</b>	Requires coursework aligned with educator standards Requires an aligned clinical teaching/internship placement for those pursuing initial certification	Requires coursework aligned with educator standards
<b>Certification Exam Requirements</b>	Special Education: EC-12 certification exam	Special Education Supplemental certification exam
<b>Certification by Examination</b>	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 Requirements
<b>Special Education Specialist: EC-12</b>	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.
<b>Core Subjects with STR/Special Education EC-6</b>	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.
<b>Deafblind: EC-12</b>	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 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)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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)).</li> <li>Specification on the last operational dates for the current Special Education: EC-12 and Special Education Supplemental certification exams.</li> </ul>
233: Categories of Classroom Teaching Certificates (233.8 Special Education)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addition of new Special Education Specialist: EC-12, Core Subjects with STR/Special Education: EC-6, and Deafblind EC-12 certificates.</li> </ul>
228: Requirements for Educator Preparation Programs (228.35)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addition of specific training requirements for Deafblind certification</li> </ul>

**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"> <li>English Language Arts and Reading 4–8 (217)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English Language Arts and Reading 7–12 (331)</li> <li>Physical Education (257)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health (258)</li> <li>Special Education EC–6 (186)</li> <li>Special Education 6–12 (187)</li> <li>DeafBlind EC–12 (185)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Special Education Specialist EC-12 (186)</li> <li>DeafBlind EC–12 (185)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Core Subjects with Special Education EC-6</li> </ul>
<b>TBD</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ESL Supplemental</li> <li>Bilingual Supplemental</li> </ul>				

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 recommendations intended to strengthen Texas' special education certification process. In the 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:

1. Currently, special education certification is offered in early childhood (EC) through Grade 12, excluding candidates in the areas of *visually impaired* and *deaf and hard of hearing*. The forum participants recommended that certification be offered through both grade-band and disability-specific pathways:
  - a. EC through Grade 8, mild/moderate support needs;
  - b. EC through Grade 8, high support needs;
  - c. Grade 6 through Grade 12, mild/moderate support needs; and
  - d. Grade 6 through Grade 12, high support needs.
2. Current candidates in special education seeking certification must pass two examinations to receive a license: *Special Education EC–12* and *Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities (PPR)*. Excluded are candidates in the areas of *visually impaired* and *deaf and hard of hearing*. Depending on the certification area, a content test may be required as well. The forum participants recommended the following changes:
  - a. Candidates would need to pass a *Special Education Foundations* exam, which would require, among other pedagogical competencies, a demonstration of foundational reading and mathematics skills.
  - b. Teacher candidates would no longer be certified by the passage of an exam alone. The forum participants recommended that teacher candidates seeking initial licensure be required to complete coursework in order to take the certification exam (i.e., *Special Education Foundations*). Candidates would also be required to pass a content examination that corresponds with their grade-band choice. Passage of both exams and corresponding coursework would provide the candidate with an intern license.
  - c. After intern educators have taught for a year, they would take the *Special Education Focus* exam, which would correspond with their desired grade-band and disability level of support. Successful completion of this examination would result in a standard teaching license.

- 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.
3. Presently, candidates wishing to seek certification in the area of *visually impaired*, a supplemental certification, must complete two examinations. There were no recommended changes.
4. 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.
5. 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

There are approximately five million students served by Texas' public schools. Of those five million, 9.23% are students with disabilities. The majority of students with disabilities fall into three disability categories: specific learning disabilities (32%), speech and language impairment (20%), and other health impairment (14%). Students with disabilities represent a diverse group of learners and are served both in the general education classroom through inclusion-based services and in resource rooms. However, the achievement gap continues to persist between students with disabilities and their same-aged peers in reading and mathematics and across grades. Compounding the problem is the low number of qualified special education teachers. While the numbers of students in special education increased by 5.7% from 2014 to 2017, the number of certified special educators decreased by 1% during the same period. TEA has identified teacher preparation as a possible lever to increase student achievement. A change in teacher preparation would, in effect, compel a change in licensure and certification. TEA, along with members of the Texas Comprehensive Center (TXCC) at the American Institutes for Research (AIR), conducted a series of forums with stakeholders in special education to examine the current certification requirements in Texas. The forum participants were charged with reconceptualizing special education certification to better serve students, better prepare teachers, and respond to the teacher shortage in special education.

#### Participants

TEA reached out to several special education organizations and associations in order to recruit forum participants and ensure a diverse group of stakeholders to provide recommendations. TEA extended the invitation to the following organizations, associations, and stakeholders: TEA representatives; iTeach; education service center liaisons from Regions 5, 13, and 20; Sam Houston State University; Texas Tech University; Stephen F. Austin State University; the University of Texas (UT) Arlington and UT Austin; Texas A&M University; Texas State University; Huston-Tillotson University; teachers from Teach Plus, including special education teachers representing each of the disability categories (i.e., learning disabilities, emotional disorders, autism, deaf and hard of hearing/visual impairment, deaf-blind, intellectual disabilities, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder) and a representative from the preschool program for

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 preferred a certification structure that allowed for both grade-banded and disability-specific certification. Forum 2 then asked participants to consider personnel and staffing issues in light of the proposed certification recommendations. The guiding questions were: *How do potential special education certificates affect personnel and staffing? After educators receive their initial certification, how can continuing professional education (CPE) be structured to ensure continuous development of best practices?*

**Forum 3.** Forum 3 asked participants to evaluate CPE and certification by exam. The guiding question for the in-person forum was: *How should the current rules for certification by exam be adjusted for the recommended SPED certification?* Post-work required forum participants to share the proposed certification recommendations with their home and school community members. As with the first forum, participants received a survey in order to capture information obtained through those interviews.

**Closing webinar.** In the closing webinar, the final list of recommendations was reviewed by the forum facilitators. Participants had the opportunity to discuss at length the potential benefits and unintended consequences of and unanswered questions about each set of recommendations.



### Current Texas Certification Requirements

Initial teacher candidates in special education  
Special education teacher candidates who wish to seek initial certification can do so by being admitted to an educator preparation program (EPP) or by passing a subject matter test called the *Pre-Admission Content Test (PACT)*. Once teacher candidates in an EPP have completed their coursework, they take the *Special Education: EC–12* certification examination. Candidates who pass receive an intern or probationary certificate, which allows them to be a teacher of record or case manager. Intern teachers must then take and pass the *PPR* examination to receive their

standard teaching certificate. This standard certificate allows teachers to educate students in special education in Grades EC–12.

Supplemental, alternative, or post-baccalaureate pathways

Educators licensed in other disciplines who wish to seek a special education certification as a supplemental certificate, alternative certificate, or post-baccalaureate can either pass the *Special Education: EC–12* or complete the appropriate coursework to be admitted. The teacher candidates are then required to complete the *PPR* examination. Teacher candidates who pass the *PPR* receive a standard certificate (if they have finished all the required coursework) or a probationary certificate (if they have not completed the coursework). If a special education candidate is already assuming a teaching position that requires a content test, the candidate will need to complete the corresponding examination as well.

Teacher candidates in *visually impaired*

Candidates wishing to seek certification in *visually impaired* must seek supplemental certification to be licensed and must complete two examinations: the *Visually Impaired Texas Examination of Educator Standards (TExES)* and either the *183 Braille TExES* or the *283 Braille TExES*.

Teacher candidates in deaf and hard of hearing

Candidates wishing to seek initial certification in *deaf and hard of hearing* are required to complete three examinations: the *181 Deaf and Hard of Hearing TExES*; the *072 Texas Assessment of Sign Communication (TASC)* or the *073 Texas Assessment of Sign Communication-American Sign Language (TASC-ASL)*; required for assignment but not for certification); and the *160 PPR EC-12 TExES*.



## Proposed Certification Requirements

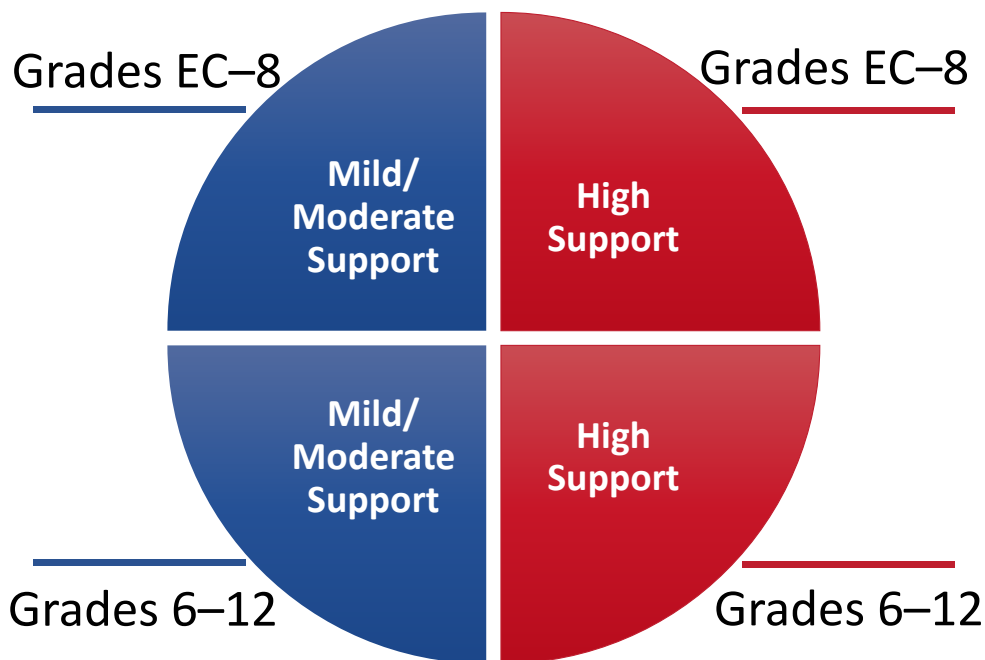
Grade banding and level of student support

Exhibit 1 provides an overview of the certification requirements proposed by the forum participants. Instead of the current certification for special educators (which covers Grades EC–12), the forum participants recommended that certification be offered in specific grade bands and disabilities, which would result in four certification areas. As noted in the summary, all certification areas (initial and supplemental) would require coursework or CPE and the passage of a set of required examinations.

*Benefits of the proposed reconceptualization: grade bands and level of student support.* After implementation of the recommended changes, special education teacher candidates

- will receive more specific preservice preparation for their grade band and level of student support and therefore will be better equipped to serve a student's needs and
- will receive professional development in their chosen area of certification by completing both coursework or CPE and a series of examinations, as a candidate's completion of an examination would no longer be sufficient for certification.

Exhibit 1. Proposed Certification Areas



**Concerns about the proposed reconceptualization: Grade bands and level of student support.** Forum participants noted the following concerns:

- More specificity in certification may unintentionally perpetuate the special educator teacher shortage.
- More specificity may lead to hiring challenges, especially in districts that historically struggle with finding qualified special educators.
- Forum participants felt that one *EC–Grade 12* certification could meet the needs of students who require a high level of support. This was recommended because of the similar academic needs of students who require high-level support.
- EPPs will need to deal with potentially smaller numbers in programs, which could be difficult given the institutional requirements for minimum enrollment numbers.
- Adjustments may need to be made to the Accountability System for Educator Preparation to incorporate flexibility and exceptions for EPPs.
- The current implementation timeline will not allow larger institutions sufficient time to develop and receive approval for new coursework.
- The state had seven certifications in the 1980s and 1990s, which were phased out in favor of the current *EC–Grade 12* certification. What reasons were given for this change, and what implications might they have for the current proposal?

*“By narrowing the grade level certification, teachers will be able to put more emphasis on studies for the grade levels they want to teach. By being disability-specific certified it will allow teachers to be more knowledgeable in the various disabilities.”*

– Forum participant

- The certification process might be simpler if, like other states, Texas required a master's degree for special education certification.
- CPE requirements and demand will largely increase. How will those be monitored?



### Initial

## Proposed Required Examinations

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:

- EC through Grade 6 core subjects
- Grade 4 through Grade 8 core subjects
- Grade 7 through Grade 12 mathematics
- Grade 7 through Grade 12 English language arts
- Grade 7 through Grade 12 other core subject

After one year of initial certification, teachers would complete another examination (i.e., the *Special Education Focus test*). For this examination, teachers would choose the test that corresponded with their chosen area of assignment (EC–8 mild/moderate, EC–8 high needs, 6–12 mild/moderate, or 6–12 high needs).

For teacher candidates in both *visually impaired* and *deaf and hard of hearing*, there were no recommended changes to their examinations.

## Exhibit 2. Proposed Examinations for Certification Areas

Before entering the classroom:	After entering the classroom:
<p>(Two tests)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Education Foundation examination                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Would have foundational components</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Core subjects test                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Must demonstrate knowledge of core subjects for area of assignment</li> <li>– Could be EC–6 core subjects, 4–8 core subjects, or 7–12 math or 7–12 English language arts</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>(One test)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special education focus test                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Teacher chooses one of the four foci                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» EC–8 mild/moderate</li> <li>» EC–8 high needs</li> <li>» 6–12 mild/moderate</li> <li>» 6–12 high needs</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### Supplemental

Teachers wishing to add a supplemental certification in any area (*special education, visually impaired, or deaf and hard of hearing*) would need to complete the appropriate CPE before taking the required examinations. For teacher candidates in *deaf-blind*, it was recommended that a new examination would be required that corresponds with the new recommended supplemental certification.

### Benefits of new examinations

The forum participants saw several benefits of the recommended examination structure. First, they agreed that the *Special Education Foundation* examination should include foundational reading and mathematics skills content. This choice will undoubtedly encourage EPPs to educate all special education candidates, regardless of grade band, in essential reading and mathematics concepts, which the forum participants saw as directly correlated with the ability of educators to teach learners with special needs effectively. Additionally, participants saw the benefits of having teachers complete the *Special Education Focus* test after their first year of teaching. This would allow a teacher to be hired in any one of the grade-banded or specific disability categories before taking the specific foci examination.

### Concerns about new examinations

The most prevalent concern about implementing the proposed new examinations centered around the expense of completing multiple examinations, which forum participants felt might dissuade candidates from entering the field and might adversely impact potential teachers from low-income and minority families. To a lesser degree, there were questions regarding already licensed special educators and how to ensure that they would be “grandfathered in” and not be required to complete the new examinations.



### Flexibility and Exceptions

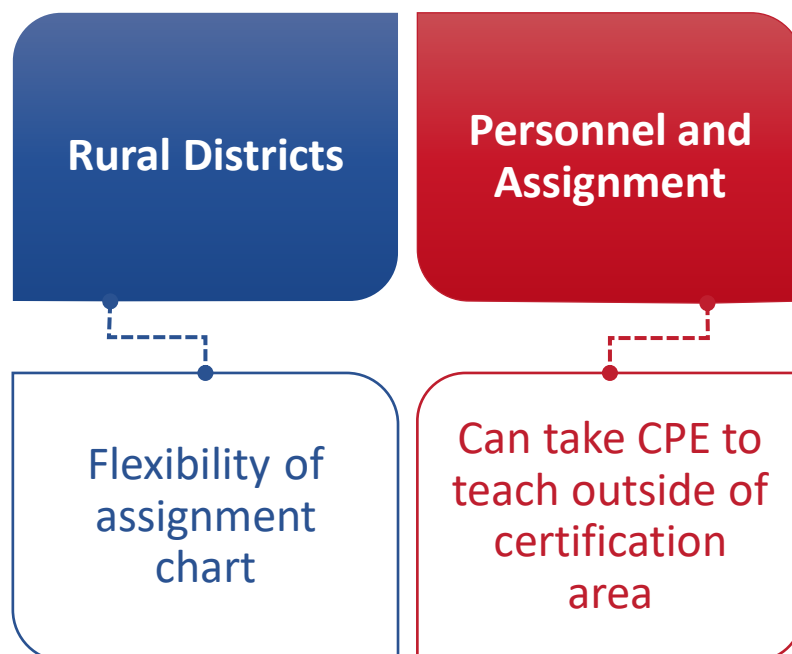
Forum participants recognized a need to allow flexibility and exceptions within the new certification structure to provide more targeted teacher preparation while providing districts the flexibility to hire the best candidate for any position. Exhibit 3 shows the two areas where flexibility was recommended: (1) rural districts and (2) personnel and assignment.



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 the current needs of the school. It was recommended that if a teacher's certifications do not apply to 80% or more of the students served, then that teacher would have one year to acquire the correct certifications through CPE and the required examinations.

Flexibility and exceptions will allow teacher certification requirements to be more specific while still meeting the needs of Texas' diverse districts. The forum participants also noted the need for a state CPE structure in order to maintain integrity and to efficiently respond to the needs of both teachers and districts.



### Defining Mild, Moderate, and High Needs

The proposed certification structure allows for specificity not only of grade band but also of specific disabilities. Teacher candidates would choose their desired student support level, but significant discussion was given to how students would be categorized within this proposed structure (Exhibit 4).



The levels of support would not be based on federal definitions of high-incidence and low-incidence disabilities but would be student dependent and based on need. The forum participants recommended that the levels of support be determined by the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee through the creation of a guidance tool or rubric.

A rubric could be created for each disability category to help synthesize a student’s needs and present level of functioning. Categories could include academics, behavior/social skills, physical ability, adaptive behavior, accommodations/modifications, and the instructional setting.

Although this rubric could be created for each disability category, it also could be used in conjunction with other tools to help guide the committee in determining the student’s level of support. Other data sources could include parent input, teacher input/observations, student self-assessment, level of services, full individual and initial evaluation (FIE), or functional behavior assessment (FBA) and behavior intervention plan (BIP) data.

**Exhibit 4. Categories of Information for Determining a Student’s Level of Support**

Rubric	Other Data Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academics</li> <li>• Behavior and social skills</li> <li>• Physical ability</li> <li>• Adaptive behavior</li> <li>• Accommodations and modifications</li> <li>• Instructional setting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent input</li> <li>• Teacher input and observations</li> <li>• Student self-assessment</li> <li>• Level of services</li> <li>• FIE</li> <li>• FBA/BIP data</li> </ul>

**Benefit of guidance tool or rubric**

The participants recommend that having a tool would provide structure and guidance in the decision-making process. The rubric or tool would consider many facets of the student’s life and require parent input.

**Concerns about guidance tool or rubric**

The ARD committee could misidentify the level of student support needed and provide a potentially adverse educational experience for that child. Additionally, the participants noted that students could have a spectrum of needed supports and may not clearly fit into the designations of mild, moderate, or high needs. Last, the participants feared that eventually the level of support could become tied to coding within the state and ultimately to funding.

**Summary**

Improving student outcomes in Texas will require changing how preservice teachers are prepared and thus how they are certified. The forum participants have provided a set of recommendations that aim to

- keep students first,
- prepare special educators for authentic practices to the greatest extent possible through specificity in certification,
- increase long-term retention of special educators,
- allow flexibility and exceptions when appropriate, and
- require new examinations that would impact how EPPs prepare teacher candidates.

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
Rachel Collins	Teacher EC–12	Round Rock ISD	13
Glenda Cook	Teacher EC–5	Poteet ISD	20
Nacona David	EPP	Region 20 ESC	20
Maria Faqrer	EPP	Relay	20
Kami Finger	District special education director	Lubbock ISD	17
Melissa Fogarty	EPP	Texas A&M University	6
Erica Garza	EPP	Region 13 ESC	13
Ambra Green	EPP	The University of Texas at Arlington	11
Demetrius Hicks	Teacher 6–12	Yes!Prep	20

Name	Role	Organization	Region
Diann Huber	EPP	iTeach	11
Jacqueline Light	Counselor	Ector County ISD	18
Heather Malcolm	Teacher 9–12	Northside ISD	20
Chris Masey	Parent	N/A	13
Toni Miller	Dyslexia coordinator	Kemp ISD	10
Vickie Mitchell	EPP	Sam Houston State University	6
Claire Romero	General education bilingual teacher EC–5	Austin ISD	13
Diana Serrano	Parent	N/A	19
Heather Sheffield	Parent	Eanes ISD	13
Abbey Smith	Teacher EC–2	Pflugerville ISD	13
Katie Tackett	EPP	The University of Texas at Austin	13
Debra Tridico	Teacher 9–12, higher education	Grapevine-Colleyville ISD	11
Annette Unger	Educational diagnostician	Pleasanton ISD	20
Lesley Zentz	Interventionist	Klein ISD	4

*Note.* EPP = educator preparation program; ESC = education service center; ISD = Independent School District.

## 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).

The forum participants recommended that certification be offered through both grade-band and level of support specific pathways:

- EC through Grade 8, mild/moderate support needs;
- EC through Grade 8, high support needs;
- Grade 6 through Grade 12, mild/moderate support needs; and
- Grade 6 through Grade 12, high support needs.

#### August 2019

#### Outcomes from the 2019 Standards Committee meetings

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 forum. Committee members included representatives from institutes of higher education, alternative certification programs, special education consultants, and practicing teachers. The committees referred to the current Texas special education certification standards and the Council for Exceptional Children's standards.

#### Concerns During Standards Drafting

In each of the committee meetings, members raised concerns regarding two areas of the standards: 1) definitions of mild moderate and high levels of support and 2) the overlap of standards in the middle grades.

According to the recommendations of the forums, levels of support would not be based on federal definitions of high-incidence and low-incidence disabilities but would be student dependent and based on need. The forum participants recommended that the levels of support be determined by the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee through the creation of a guidance tool or rubric.

Each of the standards committees raised these concerns about the use of a rubric to determine levels of support, specifically as this would impact teacher certification:

1. To write standards for a strictly high support or mild moderate certificate requires defining these terms. All committees were concerned about the risks of misidentifying and mislabeling students, as well as the risks of campus level decision making based on staffing over student need.
2. High support and mild moderate levels of support are typically defined by student setting, although students often represent a fluctuating spectrum of needed supports.
3. Early childhood special education teachers need to know and understand practices for both students with high support needs and students with mild moderate support needs.

4. The overlap of the proposed certificates—Early Childhood (8<sup>th</sup> Grade and 6<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> Grade) dilutes the specificity of the standards.
5. Four separate certificates may result in teacher shortages in one of the certificate areas, particularly 6<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grade high support.

### **Recommended Changes**

To address these concerns while still maintaining the specificity of the standards, we will seek feedback from the Standards Advisory Committees about offering the following special education certificates:

- Early Childhood–6<sup>th</sup> Grade
- 6<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Each certificate will require knowledge of grade-level TEKS, age-appropriate development, age-appropriate knowledge of transitions and special services, age and grade-specific legal and ethical requirements, and grade-appropriate collaboration strategies. Additionally, approximately 25% of the standards will specifically address students with high support needs.

We believe these changes effectively address the need for grade band specific preservice preparation and knowledge of students with high support needs. The proposed changes will address the initial concerns of the forum regarding hiring challenges and smaller numbers of candidates in programs.