



SPECIAL
REPORT

NAVIGATING HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHER REQUIREMENTS
FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS:
State Challenges and Responses



Navigating Highly Qualified Teacher Requirements for Special Education Teachers: State Challenges and Responses

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Executive Summary

An increasing number of children are being identified as having special needs that affect their ability to learn in traditional environments (Planty et al., 2009). Although the increase in identification of these conditions can arguably be attributed to multiple factors, this increased number of children with special needs has led to an increased demand for teachers trained and qualified to teach students with special needs.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) designated specific qualifications that needed to be met by all teachers: the highly qualified teacher (HQT) requirements. The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, included an alignment of special education teacher qualification requirements with NCLB HQT requirements. The result is that every special education teacher identified as the primary instructor for a core academic subject, in addition to being fully certified as a special education teacher, is required to meet HQT requirements for every core content area that he or she teaches.

In addition to, or possibly because of, the challenges of increased demand for special education teachers and legislated requirements for the highly qualified status of these teachers, special education continues to be a recognized teacher shortage area. According to *Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing 1990–91 Thru 2009–10* (U.S. Department of Education, 2009), a total of 47 states reported one or more areas of special education as shortage areas. This situation underscores the necessity of analyzing the special education teacher policies and practices to investigate if challenges exist for entering this profession.

Navigating Highly Qualified Requirements for Special Education Teachers: State Challenges and Responses provides a review of federal HQT requirements for special education teachers and the certification and licensure structures for special education teachers across the states. It highlights the lack of consistency among the states in regard to terms used, requirements for certification, and variations in disability definitions addressed in certificates. This lack of consistency is a serious impediment—not only for comparisons of state requirements but also for the potential mobility of special education teachers and the type of preparation they receive to meet these varying certification requirements. By highlighting these challenges and state responses, this report serves to open communication across states regarding similarities and differences in certification and HQT requirements for special education teachers and also assists and informs states interested in transforming special education teacher certification systems to better align with federal requirements and requirements across states. It is important to note that this report summarizes state policy and practice only; it is not a statement about whether a state's policy or practice meets federal requirements.

The report also includes the results of a 2008 survey conducted by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), which polled 20 states and the Bureau of Indian Education on their existing certification structures. Responses indicated variation on whether initial certification for special education teachers at the bachelor's degree level is possible and variation on the designations covered by these certificates.

Key Findings

Key findings of this report are as follows:

- The terminology used for teacher certification and licensure is inconsistent across the states, making cross-state comparisons difficult and confusing.
- Specific to special education teacher certification, states differ on the type of certification or licensure that special education teachers are required to hold—with some states requiring special education teachers to hold general education certification with special education endorsements and other states requiring special education–specific certificates.
- States vary on disability designation, severity-level designations, and age designations specified on special education teacher certificates.

Considerations for State Policymakers

The report highlights specific considerations for state education policymakers. Such policymakers can do the following:

- Systemically align the general education and special education teacher certification systems. Such alignment will ensure consistency in the quality of education for all students and reduce confusion between requirements for general education and special education teachers.
- Implement state policies that fully target critical issues impeding special education teacher recruitment and retention. Such policies will address issues relating to the shortage of special education teachers. Examples of policies to target these issues include the following:
 - Policies requiring institutions of higher education to offer degrees at the minimum level mandated through state policy rather than simply identifying minimum degree requirements.
 - Restructuring certification systems to encompass HQT requirements, thereby reducing real and perceived barriers into the special education teaching profession.
- Convene stakeholders within and across states to foster a common understanding of state and federal requirements for special education teachers. Such a convening will promote consistency in the quality of special educators across the nation.
- Increase the efficiency of reporting the numbers of highly qualified special education teachers. Efficiency can be gained through targeting human resource and data system issues within states, evaluating state data systems, and aligning these systems to collect information specific to state and federal teacher requirements.
- Consider special education teacher certificate designations that align with federal requirements. Appropriate designations can include age and grade-level designations, student population designations, and core content designations.
- Target professional development to assist teachers in meeting federal and state requirements and improving the quality of their instruction.

Federal and State Requirements for Special Education Teachers

Children learn in diverse ways, and an increasing number of children are being identified as having special needs that affect their ability to learn in traditional environments (Planty et al., 2009). Although the increase in identification of these conditions can arguably be attributed to multiple factors, the fact remains that more children are requiring special education services, resulting in an increased demand for teachers trained and qualified to perform those services. The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, aligned special education teacher qualification requirements with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) highly qualified teacher (HQT) requirements. The result is that every special education teacher must meet HQT requirements under IDEA 2004; if the teacher also is identified as the primary instructor for a core academic subject, that teacher, in addition to being fully certified as a special education teacher, is required to verify subject-matter competency in every core content subject that he or she teaches.

This report presents information on federal requirements for HQT status for special education teachers through the reauthorized IDEA along with state-level policy governing the requirements for initial special education teacher certification. It presents a national picture of state policy regarding the issue of special education teacher certification structures and HQT requirements—perhaps for the first time—through the collection of this information¹. The report also reviews inconsistencies between states in their terminology and requirements for special education teachers in an effort to highlight the challenges faced by these states and to provide a foundation from which states can access a common vocabulary to discuss special education teacher requirements and compare and contrast alignment with federal definitions and mandates.

IDEA Highly Qualified Teacher Requirements

IDEA 2004 requires all special education teachers to meet the following HQT criteria:

- They must hold at least a bachelor's degree.
- They must have obtained full state teacher certification or licensure in special education.
- They must not have had special education certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis. (20 U.S.C. 1401[10][B])

In addition, special education teachers who are teaching core academic subjects must meet subject-matter competency requirements. The term *core academic subjects* is defined as the following 10 content areas: English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography (20 U.S.C. 7801 [11]). These requirements are aligned to NCLB HQT requirements (20 U.S.C. 7801 [23]).

¹The data in this report were gathered, verified, and analyzed by the Education Commission of the States as part of its work with the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Data were gathered from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories (American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands).

Special educators who do not directly instruct students in core academic subjects or provide only consultation to teachers in adapting curricula—using behavioral supports and interventions, or selecting appropriate accommodations—do not need to demonstrate subject-matter competency in those subjects (34 CFR 300 [10]; 20 U.S.C. 7801 [11]) and are regarded as highly qualified teachers under IDEA. As a point of clarification, a fully certified general education teacher who subsequently becomes fully certified or licensed as a special education teacher is a *new special education teacher* when first hired as a special education teacher and thereby subject to HTQ requirements as a new teacher (34 CFR 300 [10]).

For additional information, refer to the following sidebar on IDEA regulations concerning highly qualified teachers.

IDEA Regulations

HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

The reauthorized *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* was signed into law on Dec. 3, 2004, by President George W. Bush. The provisions of the act became effective on July 1, 2005, with the exception of some of the elements pertaining to the definition of a “highly qualified teacher” that took effect upon the signing of the act. The final regulations were published on Aug. 14, 2006. This is one in a series of documents, prepared by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) in the U.S. Department of Education that covers a variety of high-interest topics and brings together the regulatory requirements related to those topics to support constituents in preparing to implement the new regulations. This document addresses significant changes from preexisting regulations to the final regulatory requirements regarding highly qualified teachers.

IDEA Regulations

1. Establish requirements for special education teachers teaching core academic subjects.

For any public elementary or secondary school special education teacher teaching core academic subjects, the term “highly qualified” has the meaning given the term in section 9101 of the *ESEA* and 34 CFR 200.56, except that the requirements for highly qualified also include:

- The requirements for special education teachers in general described in 34 CFR 300.18(b) [see “Establishes requirements for special education teachers in general,” “Describes how a special education teacher can meet the general requirements when participating in an alternative route to certification program” and “Describes how a special education teacher who is not teaching a core academic subject can meet the requirements” in this document]; and
- The option for teachers to meet the requirements of section 9101 of the *ESEA* by meeting the requirements of 34 CFR 300.18(c) and (d) [see “Establishes requirements for special education teachers teaching to alternate achievement standards” and “Establishes requirements for special education teachers teaching multiple subjects” in this document].

[34 CFR 300.18(a)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(10)(A)]

2. Establish requirements for special education teachers in general.

When used with respect to any public elementary school or secondary school special education teacher teaching in a State, highly qualified requires that:

- The teacher has obtained full State certification as a special education teacher (including certification obtained through alternative routes to certification), or passed the State special education teacher licensing examination, and holds a license to teach in the State as a special education teacher, except that when used with respect to any teacher teaching in a public charter school, highly qualified means that the teacher meets the certification or licensing requirements, if any, set forth in the State's public charter school law;
- The teacher has not had special education certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis; and
- The teacher holds at least a bachelor's degree.

[34 CFR 300.18(b)(1)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(10)(B)]

3. Describe how a special education teacher can meet the general requirements when participating in an alternative route to certification program.

A teacher will be considered to meet the standard in 34 CFR 300.18(b)(1)(i) [see the requirement regarding full State certification in paragraph 2 of this document] if that teacher is participating in an alternative route to special education certification program under which the teacher:

- Receives high-quality professional development that is sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction, before and while teaching;
- Participates in a program of intensive supervision that consists of structured guidance and regular ongoing support for teachers or a teacher mentoring program;
- Assumes functions as a teacher only for a specified period of time not to exceed three years; and
- Demonstrates satisfactory progress toward full certification as prescribed by the State.

The State ensures, through its certification and licensure process, that the provisions in 34 CFR 300.18(b)(2)(i) are met [see the requirements regarding alternative routes to certification in this paragraph].

[34 CFR 300.18(b)(2)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(10)(B)]

4. Describe how a special education teacher who is not teaching a core academic subject can meet the requirements.

Any public elementary school or secondary school special education teacher teaching in a State, who is not teaching a core academic subject, is highly qualified if the teacher meets the requirements of 34 CFR 300.18(b)(1) [see “Establishes requirements for special education teachers in general” in this document] or the requirements of 34 CFR 300.18(b)(1)(iii) [the requirement that the teacher holds at least a bachelor’s degree] and (b)(2) [see “Describes how a special education teacher can meet the general requirements when participating in an alternative route to certification program” in this document].

[34 CFR 300.18(b)(3)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(10)(B)]

5. Establish requirements for special education teachers teaching to alternate achievement standards.

When used with respect to a special education teacher who teaches core academic subjects exclusively to children who are assessed against alternate achievement standards established under 34 CFR 200.1(d), highly qualified means the teacher, whether new or not new to the profession, may either:

- Meet the applicable requirements of section 9101 of the ESEA and 34 CFR 200.56 for any elementary, middle, or secondary school teacher who is new or not new to the profession; or
- Meet the requirements of paragraph (B) or (C) of section 9101(23) of the ESEA as applied to an elementary school teacher, or, in the case of instruction above the elementary level, meet the requirements of subparagraph (B) or (C) of section 9101(23) of the ESEA as applied to an elementary school teacher and have subject matter knowledge appropriate to the level of instruction being provided and needed to effectively teach to those standards, as determined by the State.

[34 CFR 300.18(c)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(10)(C)]

6. Establish requirements for special education teachers teaching multiple subjects.

Subject to 34 CFR 300.18(e) [see “Provides for separate HOUSSE standards for special education teachers” in this document], when used with respect to a special education teacher who teaches two or more core academic subjects exclusively to children with disabilities, highly qualified means that the teacher may either:

- Meet the applicable requirements of section 9101 of the ESEA and 34 CFR 200.56(b) or (c);
- In the case of a teacher who is not new to the profession, demonstrate competence in all the core academic subjects in which the teacher teaches in the same manner as is required for an elementary, middle, or secondary school teacher who is not new to the profession under 34 CFR 200.56(c) which may include a single HOUSSE covering multiple subjects; or
- In the case of a new special education teacher who teaches multiple subjects, and who is highly qualified in mathematics, language arts, or science, demonstrate, not later than two years after the date of employment, competence in the other core academic subjects in which the teacher teaches in the same manner as is required for an elementary, middle, or secondary school teacher under 34 CFR 200.56(c), which may include a single HOUSSE covering multiple subjects.

[34 CFR 300.18(d)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(10)(D)]

7. Provide for separate HOUSSE standards for special education teachers.

Provided that any adaptations of the State’s HOUSSE would not establish a lower standard for the content knowledge requirements for special education teachers and meets all the requirements for a HOUSSE for regular education teachers:

- A State may develop a separate HOUSSE for special education teachers; and
- The standards described in 34 CFR 300.18(e)(1) [see the prior bullet] may include single HOUSSE evaluations that cover multiple subjects.

[34 CFR 300.18(e)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(10)]

8. Create a rule of construction.

Notwithstanding any other individual right of action that a parent or student may maintain under Part

300, nothing in Part 300 shall be construed to create a right of action on behalf of an individual student or class of students for the failure of a particular State educational agency (SEA) or local educational agency (LEA) employee to be highly qualified, or to prevent a parent from filing a complaint under 34 CFR 300.151-300.153 about staff qualifications with the SEA as provided for under Part 300.

[34 CFR 300.18(f)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(10)(E)]

9. Describe the applicability of definition to ESEA and clarification of “new” special education teacher.

A teacher who is highly qualified under section 602(10) of *IDEA* [20 U.S.C. 1401(10)] shall be considered highly qualified for purposes of the ESEA.

For purposes of 34 CFR 300.18(d)(3) [see “Establishes requirements for special education teachers teaching multiple subjects,” regarding new teachers, in this document], a fully certified regular education teacher who subsequently becomes fully certified or licensed as a special education teacher is a new special education teacher when first hired as a special education teacher.

[34 CFR 300.18(g)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(10)(F)]

10. Establish that private school teachers are not covered under the highly qualified teacher standards.

The requirements in this section do not apply to teachers hired by private elementary schools and secondary schools including private school teachers hired or contracted by LEAs to provide equitable services to parentally-placed private school children with disabilities under 34 CFR 300.138.

[34 CFR 300.18(h)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(10)]

11. Describe the responsibility of SEA regarding children with disabilities placed in or referred to a private school or facility by the SEA and LEAs.

Each SEA must ensure that a child with a disability who is placed in or referred to a private school or facility by a public agency is provided an education that meets the standards that apply to education provided by the SEA and LEAs including the requirements of Part 300, except for 34 CFR 300.18 and 300.156(c).

[34 CFR 300.146(b)] [20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(10)(B)]

12. Establish the responsibility of the SEA for personnel qualifications.

The SEA must establish and maintain qualifications to ensure that personnel necessary to carry out the purposes of Part 300 are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained, including that those personnel have the content knowledge and skills to serve children with disabilities.

[34 CFR 300.156(a)] [20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(14)]

13. Describe personnel qualifications regarding related services personnel and paraprofessionals.

The qualifications under 34 CFR 300.156(a) [see “Establishes the responsibility of the SEA for personnel qualifications” in this document] must include qualifications for related services personnel and paraprofessionals that:

- Are consistent with any State-approved or State-recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the professional discipline in which those personnel are providing special education or related services;
- Ensure that related services personnel who deliver services in their discipline or profession meet the requirements of 34 CFR 300.156(b)(1) [see prior bullet] and have not had certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary or provisional basis; and
- Allow paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised, in accordance with State law, regulation or written policy, in meeting the requirements of Part 300 to be used to assist in the provision of special education and related services under Part 300 to children with disabilities.

[34 CFR 300.156(b)] [20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(14)(B)]

14. Establish a deadline for special education teachers to be highly qualified.

The qualifications described in 34 CFR 300.156(a) [see “Establishes the responsibility of the SEA for personnel qualifications” in this document] must ensure that each person employed as a public school special education teacher in the State who teaches in an elementary school, middle school or secondary school is highly qualified as a special education teacher by the deadline established in section 1119(a)(2) of ESEA.

[34 CFR 300.156(c)] [20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(14)(C)]

15. Require each state to adopt a policy on recruitment, training and retention.

In implementing 34 CFR 300.156, a State must adopt a policy that includes a requirement that LEAs in the State take measurable steps to recruit, hire, train and retain highly qualified personnel to provide special education and related services under Part B to children with disabilities.

[34 CFR 300.156(d)] [20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(14)(D)]

16. Create a rule of construction.

Notwithstanding any other individual right of action that a parent or student may maintain under Part 300, nothing in Part 300 shall be construed to create a right of action on behalf of an individual student or a class of students for the failure of a particular SEA or LEA employee to be highly qualified, or to prevent a parent from filing a complaint about staff qualifications with the SEA as provided for under Part 300.

[34 CFR 300.156(e)] [20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(14)(E)]

17. Establish the responsibility of the LEA for personnel development.

The LEA must ensure that all personnel necessary to carry out Part B of the Act are appropriately and adequately prepared, subject to the requirements of 34 CFR 300.156 and section 2122 of the ESEA.

[34 CFR 300.207] [20 U.S.C. 1413(a)(3)]

Source: Office of Special Education Programs (2006)

Teacher Certification and Licensure Structures Across the States

One of the more basic challenges faced by states and teachers in navigating special education teacher requirements involves the terminology used in the profession. Multiple types of teacher certification structures exist across the states, and the language used to define and describe these structures is inconsistent from state to state. *Certificate, license, credential, area* and *endorsement* are terms that are used interchangeably by some states and defined loosely by others. Because of the variation of terminology for certification structures across the states, direct comparisons are difficult to make.

In the context of this report, *license, certificate, and credential* will be referred to as *certificate*. A certificate is conferred by a state to teachers who have completed the designated preparation and testing requirements to become the teacher of record in a classroom. A teaching *endorsement* augments a certificate and qualifies a teacher to teach in an area not specifically designated in his or her teaching certificate.

Special Education Teacher Certification Structures Across the States

In addition to the challenge presented by inconsistent use of terminology across the states, states vary widely in their certification structures specific to special education teachers. Twenty states require initial special education teachers to hold general education certification with special education endorsements. A smaller number of states require initial special education teachers to hold a special education–specific certificate. Other variations include requiring special education endorsements or content-area endorsements.

In addition to the type of certificate or endorsement required, other designations are sometimes defined with a state certification system as well. A review of state certification structures shows the following four general designation areas that states consider in their system of special education teacher certification:

- Grade/age level
- Type of disability (or disabilities)
- Severity of disability (or disabilities)
- Content

Grade/Age-Level Designations

Traditionally, states require teachers to be prepared and certified or endorsed to teach within state-designated grade or age levels, which are organized in this report as early childhood, prekindergarten, elementary, elementary/middle, middle, middle/secondary, and secondary.

A certificate described as a *cross-grade/age certificate* is one spanning most or all of these grade/age designations and is generic for most or all students. Forty-two states offer these types of certificates to special education teachers, and more than one half of these states (22 of 42) do not offer any certificates specific to elementary, middle, or secondary levels.

Type of Disability Designations

The following 13 disability areas are identified and defined in IDEA:

- Autism
- Deaf-blindness
- Deafness
- Hearing impairment
- Mental retardation (includes cognitive designations)
- Several disability areas
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impairment
- Serious emotional disturbance
- Learning disability (specific)
- Speech or language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury
- Visual impairment (including blindness)

Nearly every state uses one or more disability-specific designations on at least one of the special education certificates available. In addition, several states have cross-categorical special education certificates or licenses. A cross-categorical certificate refers to a certificate or endorsement that covers more than one type of disability. State disability designations often are based on the needs of the student population being served within the state.

Severity of Disability Designations

States define severity level using various terms that describe the intensity of services needed for the child. These severity-level designations are reflected in the state's special education teacher certificates and endorsements. In addition to disability designations, cross-categorical certificates also can include severity levels. Three of the nine states with cross-categorical certificates cover multiple disabilities and severity levels. One of these nine states offers a cross-categorical certificate that is solely severity based.

Content Designations

Secondary school teachers who will be teaching a core academic subject are required to demonstrate subject-matter competency for that subject in order to be considered highly qualified. For special education teachers, however, the majority of states do not include core content requirements as a condition for special education teacher certification. This situation is the largest divergence between state certification requirements for special education teachers and federal HQT requirements; it creates difficulties in documenting the highly qualified status of

special education teachers. For the purposes of core academic-content designations, states either have adopted the 10 content areas defined through NCLB or have altered that list in some manner. For example, 44 states have expanded the core content area of *arts* to include specified disciplines such as music, theater, dance, and visual or performing arts. This type of expansion is also seen in the sciences, where 45 states more specifically define *science* to include biology, chemistry, physics, earth/space science, physical sciences, and life science. Other states have added to the number of core content areas to include early childhood, elementary content, and social studies.

Not every state addresses these issues independently for every special education teaching certificate offered within the state. Some states offer only one teaching certificate for initial special education teachers with singular and broad designations, whereas other states require an initial special education teacher's certificate to have a specification for each of the four designation areas listed on page 9. Most states address a combination of these designation areas on some or all certificates for initial special education teachers.

As states work to align special education teacher requirements with federal HQT requirements, many states are considering transforming existing special education teacher certification systems.

Requirements for Initial Special Education Teacher Certification

Although state policies regarding special education teacher certification and HQT requirements are listed and described in this report, the information does not always allow for a complete and accurate representation of the true landscape that special education teachers must navigate. Although all states require at least a bachelor's degree for initial special education teacher certification, it is unclear whether a bachelor's degree is sufficient to meet all academic requirements for certification, as defined and regulated through professional standards boards and institutions of higher education.

In 2008, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) conducted a survey of 20 states (California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming) and the Bureau of Indian Education. This survey revealed a more comprehensive picture of all requirements—both legislated and academic—to become a special education teacher. In response to a question concerning the degree requirements for initial special education teacher certification, four of the states surveyed—California², Kansas, Washington, and Wyoming—reported that there is no certificate available at the bachelor's level, even though their state policy requires a minimum of a bachelor's degree for certification for initial special education teachers.

Table 1 shows the NASDSE survey results indicating the degree requirements for initial special education teacher certification in 20 states and the Bureau of Indian Education.

²California is in the process of restructuring its special education teacher certification system. For more information, see "State Highlight—California" on page 19 in this report.

Table 1. NASDSE 21-State Survey: Requirements for Initial Special Education Teacher Certification

State	Is initial certification for special education at the B.A./B.S. level possible in state?	If yes, for what areas within special education is such licensure available?
California	No	In Progress: The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing is drafting and finding an author to introduce legislation to create this option at the bachelor's level.
Connecticut	Yes	Comprehensive Special Education, Blind/Visually Impaired, Hearing Impaired.
Hawaii	Yes	Special Education K–12.
Illinois	Yes	Learning Behavior Specialist 1.
Indiana	Yes	Exceptional Needs Mild Intervention, Exceptional Needs Intense Intervention, Exceptional Needs Visually Impaired, Exceptional Needs Hearing Impaired.
Iowa	Yes	Strategist I License, Strategist II License (not true for support and related services staff).
Kansas	No	N/A
Michigan	Yes	Licensure is at the elementary and secondary level. Specified special education endorsements (except for speech and language) may be added at the B.A./B.S. level. Not all universities offer the endorsements at this level, but they could.
Missouri	Yes	All areas of special education.
Nebraska	Yes	Early Childhood Unified, Deaf or Hard of Hearing, Mild/Moderate Disabilities, Severe/Multiple Disabilities, Visual Impairment, Vocational Special Needs.
Nevada	Yes	Each special education endorsement in Nevada can be accessed at the B.A./B.S. level (as opposed to a master's degree). This includes speech, which is the only area where there has been interest among some stakeholders to raise the required coursework to the graduate-degree level.
New York	Yes	All areas of special education—but the initial license is provisional, and all special education teachers must go on to get their master's degree.
North Dakota	Yes	Only three areas require a B.A./B.S.: Mental Retardation, Deaf/Hard of Hearing, and Early Childhood Special Education.
Pennsylvania	Yes	Currently, state has a K–12 Special Education Licensure. This is set to change to a Prekindergarten–8 Special Education Licensure and 7–12 Special Education Licensure.

State	Is initial certification for special education at the B.A./B.S. level possible in state?	If yes, for what areas within special education is such licensure available?
Rhode Island	Yes	Early Childhood (Birth–Kindergarten). Must also be eligible for a general education certificate. Elementary/Middle (Mild/Moderate). Must also be eligible for a general education certificate. Secondary/Middle (Mild/Moderate). Must also be eligible for a general education certificate. Severe/Profound Disabilities (ages 3–21). Blind/Partially Sighted (Birth–21 years of age). Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing (Birth–21 years of age).
South Dakota	Yes	General program certification and endorsements at various grade levels.
Utah	Yes	K–12 Special Education License with a Mild/Moderate Endorsement or Severe/Profound Endorsement then linked to that license.
Washington	No	N/A
Wisconsin	Yes	All except designated subcategories.
Wyoming	No (as of last year)	N/A
Bureau of Indian Education	Unknown	Bureau of Indian Education schools follow the licensure requirements of their geographical state.

Degree, Preparation Program, and Coursework Requirements for Initial Special Education Teacher Certification

As reviewed in the discussion on federal HQT requirements, in order to be considered highly qualified, special education teachers must have obtained full state certification as a special education teacher, hold at least a bachelor’s degree, and demonstrate subject-matter competency. All states require teachers to hold at least a bachelor’s degree as a component of full certification for initial special education teachers. Therefore, if a state also requires full state certification for initial special education teachers, those state certification systems align with two of the three HQT requirements for special education teachers. The challenge for special education teachers lies in the state certification requirements. Within these requirements, the wide variation among states is most clearly demonstrated. Although all states require that special education teachers hold a bachelor’s degree for certification, many states also require that candidates complete a state-approved teacher preparation program. Many states also provide the option of completing specified additional coursework for individuals who hold a bachelor’s degree. These variations in requirements present a challenge for special education teachers who move to other states and plan to obtain teacher certification.

Subject-Matter Competency Requirements for Certification as a Special Education Teacher

The requirement that special education teachers teaching core academic subjects must meet subject-matter competency requirements is approached in multiple ways in the states. Although this report includes information on state policy and practice, it is important to note that state certification requirements are not necessarily the same requirements as those mandated by the federal government to be considered a highly qualified teacher.

As outlined in NCLB and incorporated into IDEA 2004 requirements, subject-matter competency must be demonstrated by the responsible instructor within the core content area being taught (e.g., grades are assigned, and/or lesson plans are designed, by the responsible teacher). This requirement does not apply to special educators who do not directly instruct students in core academic subjects or who provide only consultation in adapting curricula, using behavioral supports and interventions or selecting appropriate accommodations. Special education teachers who provide direct instruction in a core academic subject must demonstrate subject-matter competency. All middle and high school teachers of core content have options for demonstrating subject-matter competency; they must meet at least one of the following requirements (U.S. Department of Education, 2004):

- Have a major in the subject taught.
- Have credits equivalent to a major in the subject taught.
- Pass a state-developed test.
- Meet high objective uniform state standard of evaluation (HOUSSE) requirements as defined by the state (only for teachers *not new* to the profession).
- Have an advanced certification from the state.
- Have a graduate degree.

All elementary school teachers of core content must pass a state-developed test to meet HQT requirements. Elementary school teachers *not new* to the profession have the additional option of meeting the HOUSSE requirements as defined by the state (20 U.S.C. 7801 [23][C]).

The majority of states allow special education teachers to meet content-area requirements through the use of a state-designated content assessment. In a small minority of states, this requirement may be met through postsecondary education coursework (e.g., by obtaining a major in an elementary or specific content area) or degree (e.g., by obtaining an elementary or specific content-area advanced degree).

Assessment Requirements for K–12 Special Education Teacher Certification

Tests designed to assess basic skills, subject-matter competency, and pedagogical skills of teachers often are one requirement for certification as a special education teacher. Assessment requirements vary across the states—from the type of tests administered to the required passing score(s). These requirements include initial certification and licensure testing for special education teachers. Teacher examinations may be designed and administered by organizations such as ETS and National Evaluation Systems or by individual states.

Basic Skills Assessments

Basic skills assessments are useful tools for assessing the basic reading, writing, and mathematics competencies of teachers, but they do not contribute to meeting HQT requirements outside of the fact that they often are a certification requirement. The timing of testing requirements varies by state. In some states, basic skills assessments are a requirement for certification; in other states, such assessments are a requirement for entry into or graduation from teacher preparation programs. Basic skills assessments are required by 41 states: 27 states require these assessments for certification, and 14 states require them for teacher preparation programs.

Pedagogical and Core Principle Assessments

Pedagogical assessments are not a requirement of the HQT provisions. These types of assessments often are requirements for certification. Exams that assess the pedagogical skills of an initial teacher and that target the teacher’s knowledge of core principles for teaching students with disabilities are required by 30 states: 21 states require pedagogical assessments, and nine states require a special education–focused assessment of core principles.

Content Assessments

States take a wide and varied approach in assessing the content knowledge of special education teachers. Table 2 lists the assessments required for special education teacher certification. Five states require special education teachers to take general education content-knowledge assessments, and 25 states require assessments of core content targeted toward special education students. A major divergence exists between subject-matter assessment requirements for certification and HQT requirements for special education teachers.

Table 2. Assessments Required for Special Education Teacher Certification

General/Special Education Certification	Type of Assessment Required for Certification	Number of States Requiring Specified Assessments		
		Preparation Requirement	Certification Requirement	Total States
General education	Basic skills assessment			
		14	27	41
General education content assessments	Core content		5	5
	Grade/age level		6	6
	Pedagogical		21	21
Special education content assessments	Core content		25	25
	Categorical		26	26
	Developmental level		3	3
	Core principles		9	9
N/A	Other assessment required		1	1
N/A	No assessment required		2	2
N/A	No information found		3	3

HOUSSE Options for Special Education Teachers

The HOUSSE option provides an additional route for experienced teachers to meet HQT requirements for the core content-area subject-matter competency. An experienced teacher (a teacher who is *not new* to the profession) is one who was teaching prior to the time the HQT provisions were enacted. To demonstrate subject-matter competency through the use of a HOUSSE option, new special education teachers considered primary instructors in more than one core content area—if already highly qualified in mathematics, language arts, or science—have an additional two years to demonstrate subject-matter competency in the remaining core content areas in which they teach (20 U.S.C. 1401 [10][D]).

As of 2007, 31 states allow new special education teachers to use the HOUSSE option under these circumstances. This usage is a federally defined expansion of flexibility (see U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Even though a state may not specifically address this situation, all states are allowed to offer this alternative to new special education teachers teaching multiple core-academic subjects. Although the U.S. Department of Education has not required that states stop using the HOUSSE option, states are encouraged to use the HOUSSE option as little as possible.

Conclusion

The information in this report shows how drastically special education teacher requirements vary across the states. This situation is a serious impediment, not only for comparing state requirements but also for determining consistency in the quality of instruction provided to special student populations from state to state. This significant variance has implications for teacher transfer across state lines.

By identifying HQT requirements for special education teachers, providing definitions for these requirements, and reporting on state terminology, this report serves to open communication across the states regarding similarities and differences in certification and HQT requirements for special education teachers. It also assists and informs states that are interested in transforming special education teacher certification systems to better align with federal requirements as well as requirements across the states.

State education policymakers are charged with implementing informed and effective policies that govern special education teacher certification and HQT requirements. According to *Teacher Shortage Areas: Nationwide Listing 1990–91 Thru 2009–10* (U.S. Department of Education, 2009), 42 states reported one or more special education areas as teacher shortage areas in 2006–07. The persistent shortage of teachers qualified in these areas places continuing demands on state policymakers to implement policies that effectively target the recruitment and retention of qualified special education teachers. In addition to implementing recruitment and retention strategies, other considerations must be addressed to create policies that are sculpted to align across the states and with federal requirements as well as address the drastic national issue of quality special education teacher availability.

Considerations for State Policymakers

The following considerations for state education policymakers are based upon trends that surfaced during the analysis of state information regarding special education teacher requirements collected from across the states and territories and presented in this report. Such policymakers can do the following:

- Systemically align the general education and special education teacher certification systems. Such alignment will ensure consistency in the quality of education for all students and reduce confusion between requirements for general education and special education teachers. (A helpful resource is the *Special Education Resources for General Educators* website developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers [2008]).
- Implement state policies that fully target critical issues impeding special education teacher recruitment and retention. Such policies will address issues relating to the shortage of special education teachers. Examples of policies to target these issues include the following:
 - Policies requiring institutions of higher education to offer degrees at the minimum level mandated through state policy rather than simply identifying minimum degree requirements.

- Restructuring certification systems to encompass HQT requirements, thereby reducing real and perceived barriers into the special education teaching profession. (See “State Highlight—California” on page 19 of this report.)
- Convene stakeholders within and across states to foster a common understanding of state and federal requirements for special education teachers. Such a convening will promote consistency in the quality of special educators across the nation.
- Increase the efficiency of reporting the numbers of highly qualified special education teachers. Efficiency can be gained through targeting human resource and data system issues within states, evaluating state data systems, and aligning these systems to collect information specific to state and federal teacher requirements.
- Consider special education teacher certificate designations that align with federal requirements. Appropriate designations can include age and grade-level designations, student population designations, and core content designations. (See “State Highlight—Georgia” on page 20 of this report.)
- Target professional development to assist teachers in meeting federal and state requirements and improving the quality of their instruction.

State Highlight—California

California is in the process of overhauling and redesigning its special education teacher certification system. Many stakeholders from a variety of groups joined together to tackle the issues of special education teacher quality and access in California. Led by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), this group of stakeholders studied the structure and requirements for the Education Specialist and Other Related Services credentials and proposed recommendations for consideration by the commission. Underlying all recommendations for transformation was the ultimate goal of improving instruction and services to children.

The CTC first required Education Specialist programs to amend their approved programs to include instruction in the areas of literacy and strategies to teach English language learners. They convened 14 meetings around the state to explore a wide range of stakeholder concerns about the structure of special education credentials—with a specific focus on subject-matter requirements for the credential, the clear credential requirements, and redundancy issues. Informed by the outcomes and recommendations of these meetings, the CTC then organized a workgroup to explore special education credentials and make recommendations to the commission.

Workgroup Goal

The goal is to modify the current special education credential structure to accomplish the following:

- Provide improved services to California's students with disabilities.
- Provide more opportunities to become a special education teacher while reducing redundancies in preparation and streamlining the credential structure.
- Improve the skill levels and retention rates among special education teachers.
- Assist local education agencies in meeting their need for qualified special education personnel.

Major Questions

- What have these recommendations done to improve service delivery for children with special needs?
- Have these recommendations improved access to and retention of effective special education personnel?
- How do these recommendations streamline the current processes?
- What redundancies have been addressed and alleviated?
- How do these regulations align California requirements with federal requirements?

The workgroup developed 25 recommendations regarding credential structure, subject-matter competence, content and performance expectations, and service delivery. The full *Report on the Study of Special Education Certification* is available online (<http://www.ctc.ca.gov/reports/Special-Education-Certification-Report-2007.pdf>).

Concern

This transformation is positive because special-population students need access to quality instruction in core curriculum, which has been lacking, yet the concern still exists that this restructuring may do harm by possibly dissuading prospective teachers from entering the profession. This issue is driven by the notion that special education teachers view their role as more of special service providers than deliverers of core content.

State Highlight—Georgia

Georgia certification requirements for special education teachers were transformed to align with federal NCLB and IDEA qualification requirements. In addition to holding a special education certification at the PK–12 levels, regular or remedial special education teachers must have the appropriate special education academic-content concentrations designated on their certificate in order to serve as a teacher of record in one of five academic content concentrations. Georgia also requires that each of the academic content concentrations be designated at a specified cognitive level. *Cognitive level* refers to the grade level of instruction provided to special education students and is based on a description of how well the student is performing on the curriculum being provided, as described in the student’s individualized education program. Cognitive levels include Grades PK–5, 4–8, and 6–12 and mirror certification grade spans except for PK–12 certificates.³

Core Academic Content Concentrations




The Georgia Professional Standards Commission evaluates transcripts for teachers who have renewable certificates in special education and were employed by Georgia school systems during the last two years. Core academic content concentration areas were added to their special education certificates during the conversion to the new titles. The concentrations were identified on the basis of 15 semester hours of core academic-content credit on any available college transcripts. These content areas were added at the PK–5 and 4–8 cognitive levels only. In addition to the transcript analysis, additional ways to add content concentration areas are listed next.

Options at the PK–5 and 4–8 cognitive levels include the following:

- Have a combination of college coursework and/or professional learning units (PLUs) totaling 15 semester hours.
- Have a major in the content area.
- Pass the appropriate content knowledge test or individual middle grades or secondary subject tests.
- Obtain at least 100 points on the special education HOUSSE⁴ evaluation (veteran teachers only).

Options at the secondary cognitive level include the following:

- Have a major or 21 semester hours and/or PLUs.
- Pass the appropriate subject test(s).
- Obtain at least 100 points on the special education HOUSSE rubric (veteran teachers only).

Georgia Certification Requirements Aligned With Federal IDEA and NCLB Requirements	
HQT Requirement: Obtain full state certification as a special education teacher (certification obtained through alternative routes is considered full state certification) or pass the state special education teacher licensing examination and have a license to teach in the state as a special education teacher.	
HQT Requirement: Hold at least a bachelor’s degree.	
HQT Requirement: If providing direct instruction in core academic subjects, demonstrate subject-matter competency for each subject in which the special education teacher is the sole responsible deliverer of content.	

³Georgia Professional Standards Commission (n.d.)

⁴Georgia Professional Standards Commission (2006)

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Additional Resources and Websites

Additional Resources

Goe, L. (2006). *The teacher preparation > teacher practices > student outcomes relationship in special education: Missing links and next steps. A research synthesis*. Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved June 15, 2009, from http://www.tqsource.org/publications/1706_NCCTQResearchSynthesis.pdf

Goe, L., & Coggshall, J. (2007). *The teacher preparation > teacher practices > student outcomes relationship in special education: Missing links and new connections* (TQ Research & Policy Brief). Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved June 15, 2009, from <http://www.tqsource.org/publications/may2007brief.pdf>

Müller, E., & Burdette, P. (2007). *Highly qualified teachers and special education: Several state approaches*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Project Forum. Retrieved June 15, 2009, from <http://www.projectforum.org/docs/HighlyQualifiedTeachersandSpecialEducation-SeveralStateApproaches.pdf>

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. (2007). *Recruiting quality teachers in mathematics, science, and special education for urban and rural schools*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved June 15, 2009, from <http://www.tqsource.org/publications/NCCTQRecruitQuality.pdf>

Websites

Council of Chief State School Officers: Special Education Resources for General Educators Website

<http://serge.ccsso.org>

IDEA Data Accountability Center Website

<http://www.ideadata.org/index.html>

Office of Special Education Programs' IDEA Website

<http://idea.ed.gov/explore/home/>

Learning Point Associates

<http://www.learningpt.org>

National Association of State Directors of Special Education

<http://www.nasdse.org>

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

<http://www.tqsource.org>

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality: NCLB Highly Qualified Teacher and Paraprofessional Database

<http://www.tqsource.org/hqtParaprofessional.php>

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality: Special Education Teacher Certification and Licensure Database

<http://www2.tqsource.org/mb2dev/reports/Reporttq.aspx?id=1542&map=0>

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality: *TQ Connection*: Resources to Support Teacher Preparation—Making the Link Between Special Education and General Education

<http://www.tqsource.org/connection/>

U.S. Department of Education: No Child Left Behind Website

<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml>

About the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center) is a resource to which the regional comprehensive centers (RCCs), states, and other education stakeholders turn for strengthening the quality of teaching—especially in high-poverty, low-performing, and hard-to-staff schools—and for finding guidance in addressing specific needs, thereby ensuring that highly qualified teachers are serving students with special needs.

The TQ Center is funded jointly through the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education. Integral to the TQ Center’s charge is the provision of timely and relevant resources to build the capacity of RCCs and states to effectively implement state policy and practice by ensuring that all teachers—including special education teachers—meet the federal teacher requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA).

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