



Testimony to the State Board for Educator Certification
Re: Item # 15
From Holly Eaton, Director of Professional Development and Advocacy
December 8, 2023

We appreciate this opportunity to testify and to work with TEA staff in addressing this issue. Although we know this is a still evolving proposal, and TCTA greatly appreciates the opportunity to participate in the accompanying stakeholder meetings, TCTA does have some significant concerns about the proposal as it stands.

First, we are still unclear as to why a change is really necessary. We are aware that it's staff's position that current federal law (ESSA) prohibits an alternative means of demonstrating subject competency, unlike under former federal law (NCLB), which allowed states to develop an alternate means for certified teachers to demonstrate subject competency without necessarily passing a content test. Indeed, under NCLB, Texas developed HOUSSE, the acronym for Texas's version of an alternate means to demonstrate subject competency. After ESSA replaced NCLB in December 2015, SBEC adopted a rule in August 2016 that provides that "If an individual is providing content instruction in a special education classroom setting, a valid certificate that matches the subject and grade level of the assignment is also required, or the individual must demonstrate competency through the state's 2010 and 2011 high objective uniform State standard of evaluation (HOUSSE) for elementary and secondary special education teachers." <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/laws-and-rules/sbec-rules-tac/sbec-tac-currently-in-effect/ch231f0.pdf> 19 TAC Section 231.701)

This is the rule that is proposed to be changed based on the assertion that ESSA no longer allows it. However, despite our efforts, we have yet to see the language in federal law that prohibits continuing to use this standard.

As I noted, this rule has been in place for years, and has enabled numerous special education teachers to continue in their assigned teaching positions. For those not familiar with HOUSSE, I have attached a worksheet commonly used by school districts to ascertain whether a given special education teacher meets the HOUSSE standard. You can see that teachers can meet HOUSSE by accumulating a set number of points in any combination of years of experience, college coursework in the subject taught or a related subject, and professional development.

As you can see from the current rule, it applies to ALL special education teachers and sets out a well-established standard for special education teachers to meet.

But the proposal before you is quite the opposite. It seeks to replace this simple, widely used standard with what we view as an overly complicated scenario in which a different standard applies depending on which grade level taught and whether teaching on grade level or teaching pre-requisite skills. As you can see from the matrix, the proposal is that ALL special education teachers would have to take an additional content certification exam, and the only flexibility is in the very narrow circumstance involving a secondary special



education teacher teaching pre-requisite skills. In that case, the teacher would have to pass one content test PLUS a Pre-admission content test (PACT exam) OR have 12 college semester hours in the content area taught.

The use of college semester hours to demonstrate competency in the subject taught clearly has its genesis in HOUSSSE, as it is one of the options for demonstrating competency under HOUSSSE.

We support the use of college semester hours as an option, but we want that option to be available to ALL special education teachers, like it is now under the current rule. If such a standard is acceptable in one circumstance, we see no reasonable basis for it not to be acceptable in all circumstances. If college hours are an option, then we don't see why the other options under HOUSSSE couldn't also be available, including years of experience and professional development.

Additionally, since the PACT exam is also an option in one circumstance under the proposal, it should be an option for all special education teachers.

Given the critical shortage of special education teachers in Texas, and that the current rule allows for ALL special education teachers to demonstrate content competency in part via college semester hours, we strongly encourage the board to continue to make the option of college semester hours in the subject or a related field available to ALL new special education certified teachers.

Additionally, given that our current special education teachers have in good faith met all the requirements for special education certification and HOUSSSE, that special education certification is an area of extreme shortage for Texas, and that special education teachers already have a great number of added responsibilities in their roles, we strongly encourage the board to grandfather all current special education teachers from any new requirements.

Finally, we do believe that the applicability of any new requirements must take into consideration the instructional context. Precedent for this kind of consideration can be found in TEA's NCLB Highly qualified Guidance, which, although no longer in use, provided some extremely useful examples of situations in which special education teachers would not be considered to be teaching content, and thus exempt from additional requirements.

We again appreciate the opportunity to be part of the discussion in developing this new proposal and will continue to advocate for balancing any new requirements with the realities of the situation for our special education teachers.

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