

Assessment Report: Education Specialist Level I Credential Program

Assessment Report for the Education Specialist: Mild/Moderate Disabilities Level I  
Credential Program at California State University Channel Islands: A Three Year Review

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## Assessment Report: Education Specialist Level I Credential Program

### *Purpose of Report*

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the development of the Education Specialist: Mild/Moderate Disabilities Level I Credential Program's exit portfolio assessment framework and ongoing revisions over a three year period (2003-2006). The exit portfolio assessment data are summarized from three cohorts of Level I candidates. Lastly, a discussion about some salient findings and implications for future assessment are presented. It should be noted that the candidates' exit portfolios are but one data set that is used to inform program evaluation at the student level. The teacher education programs collect other data sources as well.

### *History and Context of Education Specialist: Mild/Moderate Disabilities Level I Program*

The Education Specialist: Mild/Moderate Disabilities Level I Credential Program at California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI) began with the first group of teacher candidates in the fall of 2003. The credential program prepares candidates to teach students with mild to moderate disabilities (kindergarten to age 22) in special education and general education classrooms. The program specifically prepares candidates for the diversity of languages and cultures in California's public school classrooms. This is a post baccalaureate program that has two levels: The Level I Program prepares candidates for a preliminary credential. After the Level I credential is issued, the Level II Program is completed while working in a special education setting and requires the collaboration of a university preparation program and the candidate's employing school district.

A professional teacher preparation program report (see: Denney, Leafstedt, Karp, & Vega-Castaneda, 2003) was prepared and submitted in the fall of 2003 to the

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California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) for accreditation of CSUCI's Level I Program. In May of 2004, the CCTC Committee on Accreditation granted initial accreditation to the Level I Program. Among the CCTC accreditation requirements for the credential program is continuous program evaluation and candidate assessment.

Program evaluation. In accordance with the larger strategic plan of CSUCI to develop academic programs of excellence and to earn WASC accreditation, the Education Program is equally committed to continuous quality improvement. Our teacher education programs integrate both national and state standards in designing and evaluating our credential programs. Among the program evaluation efforts presently underway include our participation in the university's WASC accreditation process with a specific focus on the assessment of student- and program-based outcomes in the teacher education programs.

To this regard, the special education faculty articulated some guiding questions to determine the Level I Program's overall effectiveness:

1. Do the candidates' exit portfolios reflect the overall program goals?
2. Are the CCTC Standards consistently reflected in the candidates' exit portfolios?
3. Do the candidates' exit portfolios reflect the program's teaching competencies?
4. Do the candidates' exit portfolios reveal strengths and/or weaknesses of the program?

In addition, our teacher education programs participate in the California State University (CSU) system-wide, post-assessment of graduates from all of the CSU teaching credential programs. Recent graduates are surveyed on a detailed questionnaire about their teacher education preparation and the impact on their teaching in the field. The teacher graduates' school district employers also complete a similar questionnaire in order to evaluate their beginning teachers' preparation for the teaching profession. These

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results are summarized each year by the CSU system. Our education faculty annually reviews the results of the candidates' exit portfolio assessment data in conjunction with the CSU post-graduate assessment data in order to determine areas in which our programs can be improved and/or modified based upon the assessment data received.

Candidate assessment. Each candidate is expected to successfully complete a set of core teaching competencies and related assignments that are aligned to the CCTC Standards for the Education Specialist: Mild/Moderate Disabilities Level I Credential. The CCTC standards are explicitly outlined in the course syllabi and linked to individual course assignments. Table 1 presents a matrix that illustrates the courses and student teaching experiences where each CCTC Standard is addressed. From the inception to program completion, the evaluation of the candidates' performance is assessed by course instructors, cooperating teachers at practicum sites, and field supervisors both, in coursework and fieldwork. In addition, the candidates compile a comprehensive exit assessment portfolio to demonstrate how they have successfully met and/or exceeded all of the requirements of the Level I Program. The candidates' exit portfolios are evaluated by the special education faculty.

### *Initial Development of the Exit Portfolio Assessment Framework*

Teacher education programs in the state of California are increasingly held accountable for the assessment of teacher candidates' competencies and performance. Portfolios are highly regarded as a salient assessment tool in teacher education (Wolf, 1989; 1991). Research on the use of portfolios in pre-service teacher preparation programs reveals that portfolios are a medium through which student teachers can reflect and assess their own professional development (Bloom & Bacon, 1995; Klenowski,

2000; Loughran & Corrigan, 1995). Portfolios are also a valuable means for teacher preparation programs to assess student teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions in core professional teaching competencies.

Within the Level I Program, the special education faculty developed an initial portfolio assessment framework as a pilot project with the first group of teacher candidates in the fall of 2003. After a series of discussions about the program's purpose and hallmarks, the special education faculty identified three core competencies (e.g., foundations, assessment, methods) and associated sub-elements (e.g., laws and policy, behavioral assessment, intervention methods) that the Level I graduates would be expected to demonstrate proficiency upon successful completion of the program. These core competencies and sub-elements of the portfolio were aligned to state and national professional standards for special educators, CCTC and the Council for Exceptional Children, respectively. Refer to Appendix A for an outline of the initial portfolio framework.

#### *Exit Portfolio Assessment of Candidates: A Three-Year Review*

In this section for each academic year, the portfolio assessment process is described with any revisions to the portfolio framework or implementation process. Specific data are shared about the candidates' performance on their exit portfolios.

#### *Academic Year 2003-2004*

The first group of candidates was required to assemble and submit their exit portfolios for faculty evaluation during their graduating spring semester. The students received ongoing guidance for their portfolio development in their culminating student teaching seminar. The candidates were instructed to follow the outline of the initial

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portfolio framework (refer to Appendix A). They included a current copy of their resume and philosophy of teaching. The students were asked to submit a minimum of two different artifacts for each sub-element under the three core competencies. In addition, the candidates were required to write a one to two page reflective summary for each core competency. For the reflective summaries, the students were asked to describe how the artifacts they selected clearly demonstrated their knowledge, skills, and dispositions for each core competency.

Five candidates participated in the initial pilot of the exit portfolio assessment framework. During the first year of the program's implementation, the focus of the pilot was to examine the comprehensiveness of the exit portfolio assessment framework. The special education faculty members were primarily interested in ascertaining how closely the candidates' portfolios reflected the program's curriculum as well as, the CCTC and CEC professional standards for special educators.

A rudimentary evaluation format was developed to ascertain the completeness of the candidates' portfolio submissions. Qualitative written feedback was provided to the candidates about the quality of their individual components as well as, an overall impression of the portfolio. The candidates' portfolio submissions were very complete with all of the required components represented. The candidates' reflective summaries for the three core competencies (e.g., foundations, assessment, methods) were excellent. The choice of artifacts for the sub-elements ranged from good to excellent. Further, it was evident after evaluating the content in the candidates' exit portfolios that the CCTC standards specified in Table 1 were well-represented in the program's coursework and

fieldwork. This finding was a confirmation to the special education faculty of the comprehensive integration of the exit portfolio assessment framework.

*Academic Year 2004-2005*

During the summer of 2004, faculty from the Education Specialist: Mild/Moderate Disabilities Level I and Single Subject (secondary) Credential Programs had the opportunity to develop an *electronic* portfolio assessment system to pilot across the two teacher preparation programs. *TaskStream* was selected as the online portfolio assessment software. Two faculty members from the special education and secondary education programs took the lead with the development of the electronic portfolio structure and evaluation rubrics as well as, the implementation of the e-portfolio process for their respective credential programs. The CSUCI Library's Academic Technology Staff were instrumental in facilitating on-campus faculty training for the digital software *TaskStream*. In addition, the CSUCI Library provided the funding for the e-portfolio user fees for the credential candidates.

Fifteen student teachers in the Education Specialist Program were introduced to the commercial e-portfolio program, the portfolio procedures and requirements in their fall student teacher seminar. The same portfolio framework (Appendix A) developed in year one was also used during the second year of the Level I Program's implementation. The student teachers were primarily supported with the development of their portfolios in their student teaching seminars throughout the academic year.

During their graduating semester (spring 2005), the teacher candidates were required to submit their electronic portfolio for summative evaluation. The teacher

candidates were required to submit a reflective summary for each core competency and a minimum of one artifact for each core competency sub-element.

Rubrics were developed for the evaluation of the candidates' electronic portfolios (Grier & Denney, 2004). For example, the reflective summary rubric was designed with a four-point Lickert scale (e.g., *0* = unsatisfactory, *1* = emergent, *2* = proficient, *3* = distinguished) (refer to Appendix B). Pairs of evaluators were assigned to a common group of students and evaluated the entire portfolios on-line. Inter-rater reliability was established among the respective evaluators with the use of the evaluation rubrics.

The evaluation of the candidates' reflective summaries revealed that their knowledge, skills, and disposition for each of the three core competency areas reached the *proficient* level. There was little difference noted across the three core competencies for *foundations* ( $M = 2.8, SD = .42$ ), *assessment* ( $M = 2.3, SD = .88$ ), and *methods* ( $M = 2.3, SD = .89$ ). This finding confirmed the faculty's expectations for the graduating teacher candidates to demonstrate a level of proficiency for successful completion of the program.

Another finding was related to the candidates' choice of artifacts for the sub-elements of each core competency. Interestingly, the candidates submitted more artifacts from secondary sources (e.g., course materials, downloaded resources from the internet) than from their original work (e.g., curriculum-based assessments, modified lesson plans, research papers). The evaluators expressed their collective preference for the submission of students' original work in future portfolio assessment cycles.

*Academic Year 2005-2006*

During the third year of the Level I Program's implementation, the special education faculty made significant changes to the exit portfolio assessment framework and process. First, the special education faculty decided not to use the electronic portfolio format and returned to a traditional paper format. This decision was due in part to technical difficulties identified by the evaluators and the credential candidates including, computer crashes and compatibility issues with the software program. For an in-depth discussion about how the electronic portfolio system was perceived by the credential candidates and faculty across the special education and secondary teacher preparation programs, please refer to Denney, Grier, and Clark (in review).

The second significant change was to the exit portfolio assessment framework. Refer to Appendix C for the revised matrix of the exit portfolio elements across the program's coursework and fieldwork. The content and development for each core competency of the portfolio was embedded into coursework and fieldwork, and not as an additional requirement for successful program completion. Signature assignments that met the core competencies were identified and explicitly outlined in the program's coursework and fieldwork for the students and the faculty. The content of the student portfolios was condensed to signature assignments, reflective summaries for the core competencies, and student teaching evaluations –all of which must be original student work. The requirement to submit artifacts that represented the sub-elements of the core competencies was deleted from the portfolio framework. However, the students were still encouraged to review and reflect on the sub-elements of the core competencies in order to compose their reflective summaries (see Table 2).

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Third, a performance assessment was added to the portfolio structure that required students to create a poster presentation of a research-based, assessment-driven intervention with students in their teaching practicum. The candidates were required to present their poster of their data-based intervention in a research presentation venue to education faculty and partners in the participating school districts. The candidates were provided with a qualitative, open-ended evaluation on specific content areas (e.g., assessment, methods, communication, and behavioral adaptations) by the special education faculty.

Lastly, for the first two years of the program's implementation, the portfolio was developed by the teacher candidates during their culminating semester in the program. This delay in the development of the portfolio created a tremendous amount of additional work for the credential students and faculty at one point of time at the end of the school year. Hence, the portfolio development process was embedded throughout the program's coursework and fieldwork, and not as an add-on requirement. The credential students began to develop elements of their portfolio at the inception of their program while continuing to receive reinforcement and support throughout the duration of their program completion.

Unlike the previous two years when students received only one evaluation of their portfolio at the end of their program completion, the 11 teacher candidates enrolled in the 2005-2006 academic year received two evaluations for their portfolio. They received a *formative evaluation* of their developing portfolio elements (e.g., resume, cover letter, philosophy of teaching) in the fall semester and a *summative evaluation* of their completed portfolio in the spring semester. The summative evaluation focused on the

candidates' reflective summaries for the core competencies as well as, the comprehensiveness of the portfolios overall.

The evaluation rubrics originally developed the previous year for the electronic portfolio format were utilized for the paper portfolio versions with the group of 11 candidates in 2005-2006. The faculty's evaluations of the candidates' reflective summaries representing their knowledge, skills, and dispositions were deemed *proficient* in all three of the portfolio's core competency areas: *foundations* ( $M = 2.5, SD = .69$ ), *assessment* ( $M = 2.7, SD = .67$ ), and *methods* ( $M = 2.3, SD = .79$ ).

### *Discussion*

This report intended to provide an overview of the development of the Education Specialist: Mild/Moderate Disabilities Level I Credential Program's exit portfolio assessment framework and implementation process across a three year period. Specific exit portfolio assessment data were also summarized from three cohorts of teacher candidates. Some interesting findings emerged.

The initial exit portfolio assessment framework evolved significantly over the three-year period. Initially, the assessment framework was more open-ended and allowed the students freedom to submit artifacts of their choice to their portfolios. Over time, the assessment framework became more prescriptive and required specific elements (e.g., signature assignments) in the candidates' portfolios. The reflective summaries remained the primary unit of analysis of the candidates' knowledge, skills, and disposition for the three core competencies (e.g., foundations, assessment, methods). The addition of the performance assessment/poster presentation of a data-driven intervention added a new assessment area to be developed further. Lastly, the portfolio framework went through

significant format enumerations from paper to an electronic portfolio system, and then back to a paper format. The evolution of the portfolio assessment framework seems to suggest dimensions of a recursive assessment feedback loop, informing process and product level changes from teacher candidates' data and faculty input. However, were these changes made through data-based decisions or through anecdotal feedback from students and faculty?

Another finding was related to the integrity of the exit portfolio assessment framework. At the inception, the special education faculty was committed to designing a credential program with hallmarks that were unique to CSUCI and the region while recognizing the accreditation requirements to integrate state and national professional teacher standards. The portfolio served as one tool to examine the intersection of these program hallmarks, and state and national standards. Despite the evolution of the exit portfolio assessment framework over time, not only did the integrity of the framework remain intact but it became more explicitly embedded in the program's coursework and fieldwork –not as an add-on requirement. Woodward and Nanhohy (2004) recommend that portfolios should be developed within a carefully designed framework. This is an area that warrants well thought-out planning in order to develop a portfolio framework and the evaluation mechanisms that are congruent (Denney, Grier, & Clark, under review).

As described in the aforementioned three year review, the assessment efforts have focused on the development and refinement of the exit portfolio assessment framework. The alignment of the assessment framework with the program's hallmarks and core teaching competencies has been a critical undertaking. The evaluation of the candidates'

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reflective summaries provided useful data about the level of proficiency achieved by students across the program's core teaching competencies. However, other areas warrant future examination as well.

Having established a solid assessment framework of the program's hallmarks and core teaching competencies, it will now be important for the faculty to begin to consider systematically articulating and investigating some research questions in conjunction with student learning outcomes. Although, the exit portfolios have served as an important data set, it would be worthwhile to pursue candidate assessment from multiple sources in order to inform the program's overall effectiveness.

References

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Table 1. Matrix: CCTC Education Specialist Standards by CSUCI Education Courses

Standard	Prerequisite Courses				General Education Focused Course			Special Education Courses					Fieldwork	
	Sped 345	ENGL 475	EDUC 512	EDUC 510	EDMS 522	EDMS 526	EDSS540	SPED 541	SPED 542	SPED 543	SPED 545	SPED 546	SPED 570	SPED 580
10	X	X	X	X				X	X		X	X	X	X
11	X	X	X	X		X		X		X		X		
12	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X
13													X	X
14														
15									X					X
16												X		X
17				X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
18													X	X
19					X	X	X				X		X	X
20				X	X	X	X	X		X			X	
21					X	X	X	X	X				X	X
22									X	X	X	X	X	X
23					X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X
24									X					X
25	X							X	X	X	X		X	X

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Table 2. Core Competencies and Associated Sub-Elements

Core Competency: <i>Foundations</i>	Core Competency: <i>Assessment</i>	Core Competency: <i>Methods</i>
<u>Sub-elements</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History</li> <li>• Laws &amp; Policy</li> <li>• Ethics</li> <li>• Professional Standards &amp; Practices</li> <li>• Family Systems Across the Life Span</li> <li>• Service Delivery Systems</li> <li>• Consultation Models &amp; Processes</li> <li>• Effective Communication &amp; Collaboration</li> <li>• Characteristics of Learners</li> </ul>	<u>Sub-elements</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual Assessment</li> <li>• Group Assessment</li> <li>• Assessment Processes – Pre-referral, Referral, Identification, Evaluation, Re-evaluation</li> <li>• IEP Goals &amp; Objectives</li> <li>• Behavioral Assessment</li> </ul>	<u>Sub-elements</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning Environments, Social Interaction, &amp; Classroom Management</li> <li>• Core Curriculum in General Education</li> <li>• Specialized Curriculum</li> <li>• Instructional Methods</li> <li>• Intervention Methods</li> <li>• Modifications of Methods &amp; Materials</li> <li>• Positive Behavioral Support</li> </ul>

Appendix A

Education Specialist: Mild/Moderate Disabilities Level I Credential Portfolio Framework

- I. Resume
- II. Philosophy of Teaching
- III. Core Competency: Foundations
  - Sub-elements:
    - A. History
    - B. Laws and Policy
    - C. Ethics
    - D. Professional Standards and Practices
    - E. Family Systems Across the Life Span
    - F. Service Delivery Systems
    - G. Consultation Models and Processes
    - H. Effective Communication and Collaboration
    - I. Characteristics of Learners
- IV. Core Competency: Assessment
  - Sub-elements:
    - A. Individual Assessment
    - B. Group Assessment
    - C. Assessment Processes – Pre-referral, Referral, Identification, Evaluation, Re-evaluation
    - D. IEP Goals and Objectives
    - E. Behavioral Assessment
- V. Core Competency: Methods
  - Sub-elements:
    - A. Learning Environments, Social Interaction, and Classroom Management
    - B. Core Curriculum in General Education
    - C. Specialized Curriculum
    - D. Instructional Methods
    - E. Intervention Methods
    - F. Modification of Methods and Materials
    - G. Positive Behavioral Support

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Appendix B

Reflective Summary Rubric

	Distinguished Value: 3	Proficient Value: 2	Emergent Value: 1	Unsatisfactory Value: 0
Knowledge, Skills, & Dispositions	Reflected in-depth on knowledge skills and dispositions related to core competency.	Reflection on knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to core competency.	Reflected on at least two (knowledge, skills, or dispositions) related to core competency.	Little to no reflection present when addressing knowledge, skills and dispositions related to core competency.
Writing: Grammar & Mechanics	Errors in grammar and mechanics are not present. Narrative is extremely well-written.	Few errors in grammar and mechanics are present. Narrative is well-written.	More than a few errors in grammar and mechanics. Writing needs improvement.	Narrative needs extensive revisions due to grammar and mechanics errors.

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Appendix C

Matrix of Exit Portfolio Elements across Coursework & Fieldwork

Portfolio Element	Embedded In:	Evidence
I. Resume	SPED 570	Resume
II. Cover Letter	SPED 570	Cover Letter
III. Philosophy of Teaching	SPED 541	Personal Philosophy of Teaching Statement
IV. Reflective Summaries for Core Competencies		
A. Foundations	SPED 570	Reflective Summary
B. Assessment	SPED 581	Reflective Summary
C. Methods	SPED 581	Reflective Summary
V. Signature Assignments		
	SPED 541	-Advocacy Paper -Legally Compliant IEP
	SPED 542	-Functional Behavioral Assessment -Behavioral Support Plan -Social Skills Intervention
	SPED 543	Research-Based Intervention
	SPED 544	-Lesson Plans -Research-to-Practice Assignment
	SPED 545	-Assessment Report -Curriculum Based Measurement Report
	SPED 546	-IEP Observational Analysis -Research Paper
	EDMS 522	-TPA Task 1, Scenario 1: Developmentally Appropriate Pedagogy -Reader Case Study
	EDMS 526	
	EDSS 540	Learner-Text-Context Case Study
VI. Student Teaching Evaluations	SPED 570 SPED 580	Final Student Teaching Evaluations
VII. Performance Assessment	SPED 543 SPED 545	Performance Assessment Presentation from SPED 543 & 545 Assignments: Curriculum Based Measurement and Research-Based Intervention