The Department of Special Education has three Preliminary Education Specialist programs in Mild Moderate Support Needs (MMSN), Extensive Support Needs (ESN) and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), with active intern programs in each of these areas, and an added authorization in ECSE, on the main campus. Candidates complete most of their courses together with peers from one or two other program areas with separate courses for assessment and methods courses only. Candidates graduate with an understanding of optimal educational programs and services for individuals with disabilities and their families from birth through age 22. As an example, candidates in the Mild to Moderate and Extensive Support Needs Credential programs take a course in Transition focused on post-secondary outcomes. In addition, all candidates are aware of the importance and benefits of intervening early and supporting the learning of foundational skills.

To meet our mission we follow a practice-based approach (Leko, Brownell, Sindelar & Kiely, 2015) guided by an eco-behavioral philosophy influenced by an understanding of implementation science (Cook & Odom, 2013). Our understanding is the didactic information alone does not result in the effective use of the evidence-based practices we aim to implement. Opportunities to apply knowledge and skills with support from a coach, supervisor, or mentor are necessary. In addition, creating multiple opportunities to practice implementing effective strategies is a requirement for building fluency of practice.

Program Design

Leadership. Leadership in this credential program includes a program coordinator for each credential program who reports to the Department Chair and collaborates with all colleagues in the department. The Program Coordinator for the ESCE program advises candidates and ensures that the TPEs are addressed in course content for the courses offered as part of the fifth year program as well as the Integrated Teacher Education Program that is offered for Child Development undergraduate majors. The Program Coordinator works with school districts and early intervention agencies to provide clinical placements in both early intervention agencies and programs and PK-K classrooms.

Communication. Although we have multiple credential programs in our department, SPED faculty members make decisions as a group (1) during our newly established Credential Faculty meetings (4th Wednesday of the month for SPED credential program faculty) and (2) during our All Faculty meetings (2nd Wednesday of the month for all T/TT faculty). Additionally, the Department Chair holds regular meetings with all faculty (including lecturers who teach classes in the department), where issues related to program development and course content changes are discussed. We are active researchers who follow the teacher-scholar model and believe that program candidates benefit from the cutting-edge information they receive from our research efforts.

Structure. Consistent with the framework for practice-based teacher preparation developed by the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform (CEEDAR) (Benedict, Holdheide, Brownell, & Foley, 2016) we aim to use a variety of instructional methods

in our courses linked to applied assignments that are scaffolded in a manner that builds educator competence culminating in the solo student teaching experience in their final semester length practicum. Following the recommendations of the CEEDAR framework we have collectively identified the essential targets of our programs that provide a focus of our programs. These targets include: (1) taking a strengths-based approach; (2) the use of culturally responsive practices; (3) the use of evidence-based practices; (4) the ability to differentiate instruction; (5) data-based decision-making and progress monitoring; and (6) effective collaboration skills and respect for, the lived experience of individuals with disabilities and their families.

Stakeholder Input. Over the past several years in preparation for SPED candidates taking the CalTPA (Fall 2022 was first cohort), in addition to preparing for our Literacy Certification, (certified in Summer 2025) and Residency pathways (ECSE, ESN, MMSN), SPED faculty have met with various stakeholders including Community College colleagues and school district personnel. There were several meetings with stakeholders who provided input on the continued development of our credential programs and how to best support our candidates to meet both district needs and CTC competencies. Funding from the US Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs has enabled targeted collaboration with partner districts (Cajon Valley, San Ysidro, Mountain Empire) for recruitment and retention of MM and ESN Candidates (Project SPLASH!) and for districts (Chula Vista, Cajon Valley) supporting ECSE candidates (Project PERSPECTIVES).

Course Work and Field Experience

All candidates in the ECSE added authorization program are required to take four courses focused on methods and assessments for birth through Kindergarten. The program lasts two semesters (one year; see Course Sequence)

The ECSE added authorization program requires one semester of student teaching (SPED 980D) taken in the Spring semester. Student teaching placements in either early intervention or PK-K settings are negotiated with partnering district and require no less than 3 full days a week. All courses have applied assignments that candidates implement within the practicum settings (e.g., curriculum based assessments, functional behavioral assessments, ecological inventories, unit planning etc).

Early Childhood Added Authorization

SPED 980D: Spring Student Teaching 270 hours (18 hours a week for 15 weeks)

Total 270 Clinical Hours

Student teaching placements are determined through a collaborative process between the candidates, school district partners, and program coordinators. Several districts in San Diego County in which the College of Education and SPED department have collaborative relationships (e.g., Residencies, Strategic Staffing, Intern Agreements) are prioritized for SPED

candidate placement. Candidates are able to share their preferences for both geographic region and age level for student teaching. Program Coordinators then reach out to district leaders to determine the best fit and Mentor Teacher for placement. All Mentor Teachers at minimum must have met the 10 hour CTC training requirement, in addition to being approved by the school site principal and district HR.

University Supervisors for each of the credential areas are hired and vetted by the Department Chair. They often come recommended by credential program coordinators and many are alumni of SDSUs credential and masters programs. University Supervisors attend a minimum of two trainings each semester (see Fall 2025 slides) and are enrolled in a Canvas Home Room for University Supervisors across credential programs in the COE.

All candidates, University Supervisors hired by the Department and Mentor teachers receive a Practicum Handbook prior to beginning the student teaching experience. This handbook outlines the field experience sequence and describes the timeline for assuming responsibilities during student teaching and lists the responsibilities for the a) candidate b) university supervisor and c) the mentor teacher. In addition to the Practicum Handbook, candidates, University Supervisors, and Mentor Teachers follow a Pacing Guide which outlines what candidates should be focusing on each week of the Fall and Spring student teaching semesters. In addition, the role and responsibilities of the program coordinator, as the person who oversees the practicum and addresses any issues that may arise, are described in the handbook.

Assessment of Candidates

Program competencies are assessed in multiple ways throughout the credential program. Key courses have signature assignments tied to rubrics that require the practice and demonstration of meeting the required CTC standards TPEs. Candidates are also evaluated throughout their entire year of student teaching using a credential specific competency evaluation rubric (see ECSE Competency Rubric). This tool is utilized by University Supervisors when they are conducting teaching observations, as well as when engaging in coaching and mentorship meetings with the candidates.

Candidates learn about the Signature Assignments and Candidate Evaluation Rubrics during the mandatory orientation meeting held in the Spring prior to starting the program as well as during their Fall student teaching seminars (SPED 970B).