



PK–3rd ECE Instruction Specialist Credential **PROGRAM DESIGN PRINCIPLES**



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PK-3rd ECE Instruction Specialist Credential Workgroup



California faces an exciting opportunity to strengthen the pipeline for a diverse, qualified workforce teaching in Pre-K through 3rd grade classrooms. The historic expansion of transitional kindergarten (TK), promising universal TK to all of California’s 4-year-olds by 2025, necessitates important changes in workforce preparation to ensure that there is specialized instruction ensuring strong foundational and developmentally-appropriate learning for our youngest students.

Recognizing the opportunity to offer a new credential, the PK–3rd ECE (Early Childhood Education) Instruction Specialist Credential workgroup was formed. The workgroup consists of seven intersegmental teams across California, comprising 51 individuals representing more than 25 different departments and organizations. This workgroup was designed to support faculty members and teacher preparation partners in developing a space to fully understand the new credential and develop cross-segment relationships. Over the course of two full-day and two half-day virtual engagements, participants discussed the importance of designing collaborative resources to center student experiences, support needed to maximize assets, and ways to minimize challenges and barriers as future students work toward the credential. A key goal is ensuring that diverse educators currently in the ECE workforce have full access to these new credential programs.

During the first convening, the PK–3rd ECE Instruction Specialist Credential workgroup spent two days in intersegmental teams to draft user-friendly descriptions of model program pathways. This work made it clear that each group had common themes representing elements that seem important for all students and programs. The following principles and subsequent provocations are offered to each campus to consider as they continue to develop the PK–3rd ECE Instruction Specialist Credential programs.

PRINCIPLE #1: Build on diverse future ECE credentialed teachers' assets and strengths

Our future ECE credentialed teachers come to our programs first as students, with valuable previous experiences, skills, and knowledge sets. These funds of knowledge represent more than high school grade point average and credits earned; they are culturally developed bodies of knowledge that have accumulated historically and that are essential for community well-being.¹ Moreover, they bring with them deep bodies of knowledge related to Child Development/Early Childhood Education. Our ability to see and value students' assets, developmental knowledge base, and strengths as current and future ECE professionals enhances the student experience and the fabric of our campuses. All students have goals and aspirations, and we tell more accurate stories about our students when we define them by their aspirations and assets, not their challenges.

To do this, campuses may consider the following:

- What experiences does this student bring with them (e.g., cultural, professional, academic)?
- What do we know about this student's professional goals and aspirations?
- What do we need to learn about this student? How can we find out?
- What opportunities for input does this student have to share about their assets and strengths?
- How can we eliminate our bias or assumptions in understanding and supporting this student?

PRINCIPLE #2: Minimize known barriers and challenges

Future ECE credentialed teachers continue to experience barriers and challenges to accessing higher education. Designing at the margins to recruit and retain students farthest from access means campuses must be aware of the historical and institutionalized barriers that make it challenging for BIPOC students to attend and attain degrees. This may be especially true for the ECE workforce, which is already diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, age, language, and professional experience. To ensure sustainable recruitment and retention of a rich and diverse teacher pipeline, campuses must move beyond awareness to address and mitigate students' barriers by providing support and solutions.

To do this, campuses may consider the following:

- What communities and identities represent this student?
- How well is this student represented across the campus community (staff, students, degree program, etc.)?
- What preconceived notions and ideas might this student have about our program or campus?
- What resources are available to this student to offset the challenges they will experience while attaining their degree or credential? Can resources be accessed through streamlined processes with support? (NOTE: see this [financial support handbook](#).)
- How can collaboration with other institutions of higher education (IHEs) and programs better support this student throughout their journey to the credential? Are pathways to the credential between community college and 4-year programs clear?
- What resources and opportunities can be developed to minimize known barriers and challenges, including those that might be revealed by engaging these questions?

PRINCIPLE #3: Engage in strategic outreach and recruitment

Every student has a different starting point. Recognizing the barriers students face and the unique assets they bring means targeting outreach to students farthest from access and diminishing the influence of privilege and connections that often increase access to higher education. We are fortunate in California to have significant state investment in educator workforce preparation, and we have the responsibility to design programs and pathways with equity and access as a North Star. These new credential programs should have multiple on-ramps and access points for diverse students, with simplified, streamlined connections to support (advising, financial, career, etc.) for diverse students.

To do this, campuses may consider the following:

- What information does this student need to make enrollment decisions? Where should it be located?
- How well does the information we provide help diverse populations see themselves in higher education (e.g. multilingual students, current early childhood educators, students across racial identities)?
- How can complex regulatory information be simplified and braided together so that students feel empowered to act on it? How can information be more readily and easily accessible?
- Who are the trusted advisors or mentors for this student? How well do they know our program and offerings?
- What does our campus currently do that would work well for this student? Where should we make changes to support recruitment for this student?
- What partnerships exist with high schools, 2- and 4-year IHEs, other programs, and employers to strengthen and coordinate student advising?

- What do we need to do to ensure clear and coherent curricular articulation across community college, undergraduate, and credential programs to support the recruitment process?

PRINCIPLE #4: Provide responsive advising and ongoing support

Supporting future ECE credentialed teachers toward credential completion means responsive recruitment and enrollment and serving the unique needs of students with ongoing and intentional resources. Research shows that programs that engage students of color throughout their transition (from high school, from community college, from the workforce) and through their first year close the retention and completion gap by half.² When students feel welcome and supported by programs and faculty members who know who students are, their strengths, and their challenges, an environment is created where they can thrive and see their career goals as attainable.

To do this, campuses may consider the following:

- How can we actively build on the assets this student brings (e.g., prior learning and experience, cultural knowledge, dual language)?
- What resources and supports are already available? To what degree is the student able to utilize them?
- What professional learning and resources are available to advisors to ensure they can support students with efficient and inclusive advising?
- How can we clearly communicate the career opportunities for this student, especially those present in this new credential option? How well are we working from the student's identified professional goals and aspirations?
- What are the opportunities for this student to feel a sense of belonging (e.g., faculty and peer interactions)?
- How well do our campus faculty and staff mirror the identities of this student? What other resources and people outside of our program can help support this student?

PRINCIPLE #5: Implement clear and robust professional programs

All educators must be well prepared and supported for California to have a stable, diverse, high-quality educator workforce that serves all of the state's culturally and linguistically diverse populations from preschool through high school in every community.³ Retaining students in the PK-3rd grade ECE specialist credential programs requires providing sufficient support to students and ensuring they are prepared to be high-quality educators. For early childhood educators, this means strong grounding in child development content knowledge, thoughtful and holistic pedagogy and assessment frameworks, and strong partnerships with local school districts and programs. This also means building robust developmentally appropriate practice and a strong foundation in early childhood development. Implementing a clear and robust teacher preparation plan while considering the diverse assets and challenges students bring will support their ability to better serve California's diverse young children and families.

To do this, campuses may consider the following:

- How is the program structured, and how are different elements of the program (e.g., coursework, field experience, assessments) made clear to students?
- In what ways does coursework center the assets of students interested in this career path (e.g., diverse, with existing professional experience)?
- Do we have clear and coherent articulation across community college, undergraduate, and credential curricula?
- How can we strengthen or modify partnerships to provide high-quality clinical experiences?
- What are the opportunities for this student to cultivate their professional identity and leadership (e.g., participation in research, exposure to field leaders and practicing professionals, opportunities to attend and present at conferences)?



SAMPLE STUDENT PATHWAY DESIGN PROCESS

The PK–3rd ECE Specialist Instruction Credential workgroup engaged in a multiday workshop to consider the pathways for future ECE credentialed teachers. The workgroup engaged in a series of dialogues concerning future students and their experience in attaining the PK–3rd certification, which ultimately produced the PK–3rd ECE Specialist Instruction Credential design principles shared in this document. Campuses are encouraged to use the following worksheet to engage in similar critical conversations about how to best center and serve diverse future student bodies. Grounded in the design principles, this worksheet provides provocations to consider as campuses seek to understand students who will explore and achieve the PK–3rd credential. With this worksheet, campuses may create their own student pathway that best meets the needs of their campus and programs or may want to dig in deeper to the challenges or opportunities that are raised during this process. An example pathway is presented in the next section.

Identify diverse students' assets and strengths

What experiences does this student bring with them?

What do we know about this student's professional goals and aspirations?

What do we need to learn about this student? How can we find that out?

How can we eliminate our bias in understanding and supporting this student?

Minimize known barriers and challenges

What communities and identities represent this student?

How well is this student represented across the campus community (staff, students, degree program, etc.)?

What preconceived notions and ideas might this student have about our program or campus?

What resources are available to this student to offset the challenges they will experience while attaining their degree or credential? Can resources be accessed through streamlined processes with support?

What resources and opportunities can be developed to minimize known barriers and challenges, including those that might be revealed by engaging these questions?

Engage in strategic outreach and recruitment

What does our campus currently do that would work well for this student? Where should we make changes to support recruitment for this student?

What information does this student need to make enrollment decisions? Where should it be located? How can information be more readily and easily accessible?

Who are the trusted advisors or mentors for this student? How well do they know our program and offerings?

What partnerships exist with high schools, 2- and 4-year IHEs, and other programs to strengthen and coordinate student advising?

Do we have clear and coherent curricular articulation across community college, undergraduate, and credential curricula that will support the recruitment process?

Provide responsive advising and ongoing support

How can we actively build on the assets this student brings?

What resources and supports are already available? To what degree is the student able to utilize them?

What professional learning and resources are available to advisors to ensure they can support students with efficient and inclusive advising?

How can we clearly communicate the career opportunities for this student, especially those related to the new credential?

What are the opportunities for this student to feel a sense of belonging (e.g., faculty and peer interactions)?

How well do our campus faculty and staff mirror the identities of this student? What other resources and people outside of our program can help support this student?

Implement clear and robust preparation

How is the program structured, and how are different elements of the program (e.g., coursework, field experience, assessments) made clear to students?

In what ways does coursework center the assets of students interested in this career path (e.g., diverse, with existing professional experience)?

In what ways does the program highlight the unique attributes of ECE contexts?

Do we have clear and coherent articulation across community college, undergraduate, and credential curricula?

How can we strengthen or modify partnerships to provide high-quality clinical experiences?

What are the opportunities for this student to cultivate their professional identity and leadership (participation in research, exposure to field leaders and practicing professionals, opportunities to attend and present at conferences, etc.)?



SAMPLE STUDENT PATHWAY

The following example created by the workgroup presents a possible student and pathway. The goal was to identify potential solutions to support intentional planning for recruitment and ongoing advising to be sure students with diverse backgrounds and experiences can successfully enroll and complete the steps needed to secure the PK–3rd ECE Instruction Specialist Credential. This example is not intended to include all future students' pathways or to be applicable to each campus, instead serving as a guide to help center the student experience in the sys



Cheri is a 55-year-old Black woman living in Southern California. She is US-born and monolingual, speaking only English. She holds a Master Teacher Permit. Cheri and her program are a hub for families in her neighborhood. In her 27 years, she has seen it all and has created some very effective practices and initiatives. She is ready to translate that experience and expertise into a more solid career path.

Principle #1: Assets & Strengths

Cheri ...

- has previous educational and career experiences in early childhood
- is a family childcare provider with a long history of working with children from a range of age groups and skill levels
- owns a successful business and has related entrepreneurial skills
- maintains strong community connections and relationships

Principle #2: Barriers & Challenges

Cheri ...

- needs support with funding her credential journey
- wants to maintain her business while in school and is specifically concerned about the modality of classes and format of her clinical practice
- has prior work experience that does not count toward the credential
- is unsure she can find her transcripts since she last took classes 27 years ago

Principle #3: Outreach & Recruitment

Campuses should provide ...

- one-on-one contact with students to understand their individual needs
- student panels and peer mentors who can share relevant experiences
- student advisors with expertise in recruiting nontraditional students
- ways to access information virtually, such as virtual campus tours and informational webinars that can be viewed at the best time for the future student
- resources for understanding how to finance the PK–3rd credential and specific expertise in teacher grant opportunities

Principle #4: Advising & Ongoing Support

Campuses should provide ...

- individualized support for those applying for the PK–3rd credential
- a pre-credential advisor with specific expertise in working with nontraditional students
- a portfolio process to document student practices through degrees in lower division and upper division
- leadership opportunities connected to and beyond the PK–3rd credential
- second-generation student supports (e.g., BIPOC, gender)
- a sense of belonging through clubs and centers (e.g., Black student center, center for students who are parents)

Principle #5: Clear & Robust Professional Programs

Programs should be prepared to...

- determine credit for prior learning
- explore a cohort model with other family childcare providers
- tailor course options to allow students to build on existing knowledge and identify areas where additional learning is needed to enhance professional knowledge base (e.g., curriculum development, teaching methodologies for K–3, authentic assessment in K–3)
- ensure inclusive practices with strong foundational information (e.g., legal frameworks, learning theory, instructional frameworks, cognitive development theory) for practical skills, with a focus on high-leverage practices that are developmentally appropriate
- provide culturally relevant child development coursework that builds on funds of knowledge (child, family, community) and provides multiple types of multisensory experiences allowing the learner to acquire and demonstrate knowledge

SAMPLE PROCESS FOR CONTINUED CONVERSATIONS

The PK–3rd ECE Specialist Credential workgroup demonstrates the importance of intersegmental cooperation and collaboration to ensure students experience continuity between programs as they navigate their PK–3rd credentialing journey. While campuses are exploring future student pathways, they will likely discover opportunities to strengthen existing policies, practices, and resources. The following worksheet can be used to dive deeper into these conversations, either as a self-reflective tool or as dialogue prompts to pinpoint opportunities to build on strengths, identify new partners, or ideate solutions to challenges.

Identify diverse students' assets and strengths

What policies, practices , and resources do you have access to that support this principle?	How well are students' needs being met?	What is working well that you can build on?	Where can you take action to make things better?	Whom could you connect to make this a reality?

Minimize known barriers and challenges

What policies, practices, and resources do you have access to that support this principle?	How well are students' needs being met?	What is working well that you can build on?	Where can you take action to make things better?	Whom could you connect to make this a reality?

Engage in strategic outreach and recruitment

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Provide responsive advising and ongoing support

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Implement clear and robust preparation

What policies, practices , and resources do you have access to that support this principle?	How well are students' needs being met?	What is working well that you can build on?	Where can you take action to make things better?	Whom could you connect to make this a reality?



ENDNOTES

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¹ Moll, L. C. (2019). Elaborating funds of knowledge: Community-oriented practices in international contexts. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, 68(1), 130–138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2381336919870805>

² Murphy, M., & Mesmin, D. (2016, June 1). *Promoting inclusion and identity safety to support college success*. The Century Foundation. <https://tcf.org/content/report/promoting-inclusion-identity-safety-support-college-success/>

³ California Department of Education. (2012, September). *Greatness by design*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ps/documents/greatnessbydesign.pdf>

