

PROPOSAL TO REVISE THE NEW YORK STATE MULTI-SUBJECT CONTENT SPECIALTY TEST (CST) FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD (BIRTH – GRADE 2)

From the New York State Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators

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This is a proposal to revise the New York State Multi-Subject Content Specialty Test (CST) for Early Childhood Education (birth – grade 2).

The problem

The problem with the current multi-subject CST for early childhood education is that it does not assess the knowledge considered by the early childhood profession to be the central content of the field – how young children develop and learn. Rather, it focuses on adult content knowledge of a variety of disciplines, little of which is connected to the teaching of young children.

A review of an official practice test reveals that:

35 out of the 40 Arts and Science test questions ask pure content questions, with only 5 questions relating the content knowledge to the teaching of students and none of the questions relating the content to the teaching of young children;

34 of the 40 math test questions focus on pure content, with only 6 of the questions relating the content knowledge to the teaching of students and only one of these 6 related to the teaching of young children;

only 20 of the 40 language arts questions are related to the teaching of young children.

While we understand and agree that teachers should have a basic level of content knowledge in their respective disciplines, knowledge of content in the disciplines (especially of the content used in the upper elementary, middle, and high school years) is not the distinguishing feature of an effective early childhood educator. Rather, we argue that knowledge of the “content” of the field of early childhood education - as defined by the field’s standards for early childhood professional preparation - is the more critical and appropriate body of knowledge to be assessed. This body of knowledge includes how children develop and learn; developmentally appropriate ways to support children’s development and learning; the impact of families, communities, cultures, and language on development and learning; and other pedagogical strategies that support young children. These areas are outlined in the NAEYC Standards for Professional Preparation

(https://www.naeyc.org/caep/files/caep/NAEYC%20Initial%20and%20Advanced%20Standards%2010_2012.pdf) and are reflected in our recommendation below.

Recommendation

To address the fact that the current Early Childhood Content Specialty Test

- a) does not assess specific knowledge of early childhood education and
- b) assesses general disciplinary content knowledge that is already assessed through existing NYS policy that requires completion of undergraduate credits in a variety of

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disciplines with a grade of C or better and/or graduate program admission requirements that include 3.0 GPA and submission of GRE scores, we recommend that NYSED:

Redesign the Early Childhood Content Specialty Test to assess the standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation as outlined by the field's professional organization – The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). These standards focus on the elements of early childhood education that are essential for effective early childhood teaching:

- how young children learn and develop (stages of cognitive/social/emotional/physical development; the natural variation of young learners; the importance of reciprocal relationships; etc.)
- how to set up a classroom environment (room arrangement; appropriate materials; routines; flow of the day; spaces for play; outdoor spaces) that supports how young children learn
- how to engage families and communities in an educative and respectful partnership that utilizes families' backgrounds, languages, and cultures as resources
- how to assess young children's learning through systematic observation and documentation as well as other strategies, use the information to inform teaching and to share with families and the community
- how to build and maintain a caring and productive classroom community (building positive relationships and supportive interactions; using effective communication strategies; carrying out smooth transitions; addressing challenging behavior; etc.)
- how to use developmentally appropriate strategies (using a broad range of developmentally appropriate teaching/learning approaches and tools, including appropriate uses of technology; fostering oral language and communication; teaching through social interactions; utilizing inquiry methods; creating support for play)
- how to use different content areas to build meaningful curriculum (understanding the central concepts and content knowledge of academic disciplines; knowing and using appropriate early learning standards; designing, implementing, and evaluating developmentally meaningful and challenging curriculum that includes use of interdisciplinary studies and projects)
- how to be responsive to diverse learners (attending to differences in language, culture, abilities, interests, strengths, and needs)
- how to conduct oneself as an early childhood professional (reflecting on own practice to promote positive outcomes for each child; acting ethically)

Benefits

Putting this recommendation into effect will benefit the field of early childhood education by ensuring that newly certified early childhood educators possess the essentials of teaching as outlined by the field's national professional organization. While some of these essentials are assessed through the videos and commentaries of the edTPA, a written assessment that focuses specifically on the unique content knowledge of early childhood education would strengthen and support high quality early learning in New York State.