Section 5
Advanced Specialty Sets

Just as the CEC Initial Specialty Sets delineate the essential knowledge and skills that beginning special education professionals must possess to be ready to begin their practice, the Advanced Specialty Sets reflect areas in which special education professionals develop and deepen their skills and broaden their knowledge base. As noted in Section 3, “advanced” programs are designed for candidates who are already special educators and are seeking training in a new role—such as an educational diagnostician, a transition specialist, or in special education administration—and may be at the master’s, specialist, or doctoral level. The advanced standards (Section 3) are built on the assumption that candidates in these programs are trained special educators and have already demonstrated their mastery of the CEC initial level preparation standards.

As discussed in Sections 1 and 2, the preparation standards for advanced special education professionals do not delineate the specialized content, issues, vocabulary, interventions, and settings of different specialty areas (e.g., early childhood, gifted education, educational diagnostician). This specialized content is defined in the CEC specialty sets, which in turn are used to inform the CEC preparation standards. Advanced special education preparation programs use the Standards for the Preparation of Advanced Special Education Professionals as informed by the appropriate specialty set in developing curriculum and creating performance assessments to demonstrate that their candidates have mastered the standards. Note that there is no “advanced specialty set” for gifted education professionals; the Standards for the Preparation of Advanced Gifted Education Specialists are included in Section 6.

Development and Use of the Advanced Specialty Sets

CEC uses a rigorous consensual validation process to identify, update, and maintain specialty sets; this process is outlined in the Validation Study Resource Manual (CEC, 2010). As a part of the validation process, CEC documents and classifies the literature upon which the specialty sets are based, including empirical research, disciplined inquiry, informed theory, and the wisdom of practice. Stakeholders are surveyed to ensure that the items are sufficiently rigorous and are essential for beginning practice. This process has involved thousands of practicing special educators (teachers, administrators, and teacher educators) in consonance with the CEC Knowledge and Skills Subcommittee, which includes representatives from CEC special interest divisions. The result is the most rigorous, collaborative, and comprehensive collection of specialty sets for the preparation of high-quality special educators available.

The Advanced Specialty Sets and Program Review

Because of the shift to a single set of standards, there can be confusion about how preparation programs should use the specialty sets as they prepare for CAEP and CEC review. Special education preparation programs generally offer several different tracks, usually parallel to state licensure frameworks (see discussion in Section 2). For example, a department may offer special education role-based programs in administration, transition, and technology. These three programs are required to demonstrate candidate
mastery of the CEC advanced preparation standards—the standards are the same for each program. Although there will be overlap in the content of each of these programs, there are definite differences between what graduates of each need to know and be able to do. These specialized knowledge and skills are defined in the specialty sets. For guidance selecting the appropriate specialty set for an advanced preparation program, see Figure 5.1.

In order to be able to evaluate whether a program is providing advanced special education professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary for a particular role, CEC evaluates the program’s assessments against the advanced preparation standards, as informed by the appropriate specialty set. Reviewers expect to see in the description of these assessments or in their rubrics use of the vocabulary, settings, content, populations, concepts, and other issues relevant to the specialty set. Thus, in the example previously provided, the special education department would submit three separate program reports through the CAEP program review process.

Again, the specialty sets are not the standards. There is no requirement or expectation for programs to cite individual knowledge and skill items in the documentation submitted for review. Likewise, reviewers do not expect programs to use the exact wording of the knowledge and skills within the rubrics. However, it is expected that content from the appropriate specialty set is used in designing assessments and rubrics, and that this usage is apparent to the reviewers. The CEC website’s Standards page provides examples of appropriate assessments that are informed by the specialty sets.

Other Uses for the Specialty Sets

As with the Initial Specialty Sets, the Advanced Specialty Sets can be used in different ways by different audiences:

- **Practicing special educators** can use the specialty set as a basis for self-evaluation and in developing professional development plans.
- **Credentialing personnel** can ensure that licensure criteria meet national expectations.
- **School district personnel** can use them to develop professional development plans for special educators moving into new areas, and for general educators seeking greater expertise in working with individuals with exceptional needs.
- **Faculty in advanced preparation programs** can use the specialty sets in internal evaluation of program curriculum: Is the program providing its candidates with the knowledge and skill base they need to be ready to practice in these advanced roles?

Structure of the Advanced Specialty Sets

Every advanced specialty set includes the Advanced Common Specialty Items (ACSI). For example, the Specialty Set for Special Education Technology Specialist (SETES) must include both the ACSI and the SETES Items.

The ACSI delineate the common knowledge and skills that special educators in advanced roles need to master for safe and effective practice, regardless of specialty area. The specialty sets delineate the specialized content, issues, vocabulary, and settings of different specializations (e.g., behavior intervention, inclusion, transition). Although the ACSI are a part of every specialty set, neither the common specialty items nor the special sets stand alone; they are, by themselves, not complete. A complete specialty set includes both the ACSI and the knowledge and skills unique to each advanced specialty.

Over the past 30 years, the nomenclature and uses of the common specialty items have changed, but their primary focus has remained constant. For example, in the past, the ACSI were referred to as “the advanced common core”; development of the K–12 Common Core State Standards resulted in confusion and thus renaming of the set.

In the CEC specialty sets, a knowledge and skill item is coded first with an acronym to designate the specialty set in which it occurs (see Table 5.1), followed by the number of the CEC preparation standard to which it correlates. Next, a K or S designates whether it is a knowledge or a skill; the final number designates its sequential placement. For example, SEBIS.7.K2 indicates the item is in the Special Education Behavior Intervention Specialist set, is included under Standard 7, and is the second Knowledge item in the list.
Program admission restricted to candidates holding valid special education credential?

Yes

Program should use CEC initial preparation standards (see Section 4)

Use advanced preparation standards informed by...

Advanced Common Specialty Items plus Special Education Advanced Specialty Set:
- Special Education Administrator
- Special Education Diagnostic Specialist
- Special Education Transition Specialist
- Special Education Technology Specialist
- Special Education Inclusion Specialist

No

Program prepares special education role-based specialists?

Yes

Advanced Common Specialty Items plus Special Education Categorical Specialist Knowledge and Skill Set:
- Learning Disabilities Specialist
- Developmental Disabilities/Autism Specialist
- Special Education/Early Intervention in Early Childhood/Early Intervention Specialist
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advanced Common Specialty Items

No

Program prepares special education category or age-based specialists

Yes

Advanced Common Specialty Items plus any additional program standards identified by the program faculty

No

Program prepares candidates in another special education advanced area?

Yes

Contact CEC

No

Advanced Common Specialty Items plus any additional program standards identified by the program faculty