

As the recognized leader for special education professional standards, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) develops standards, ethics, practices, and guidelines to ensure that special educators are better prepared for successful, long-term careers.

The Professional Preparation Standards define the specialized expertise special educators must master for safe and effective practice and are used to inform preparation programs, accreditation processes, and credentialing agencies. CEC has developed and maintains six sets of professional standards.

Set of Standards	For programs that prepare candidates for
Advanced Standards for Special Educators* (2012)	a second/additional special educator license and/or credential
Initial Practice-Based Professional Preparation Standards for Special Educators (2020)	a first or "initial" special educator licensure within the K-12 range
Initial Practice-Based Professional Preparation Standards for Early Interventionist/Early Childhood Special Educators (2020)	a first or "initial" special educator licensure with the birth to age 8 range
Initial Standards for Gifted Educators (2024)	a first or "initial" gifted educator licensure
Advanced Standards for Gifted Educators (2012)*	a second/additional gifted educator license
Advanced Administrator of Special Education Professional Leadership Standards (2021)	non teacher centric roles as special education administrators
*These standards are currently under revision	

Terminology

Standards	Define the specialized expertise special educators must master for safe and effective practice. Used to inform preparation programs, accreditation organizations, and credentialing agencies.
Initial-Level Program	Prepares candidates for their first special educator license and/or credential. May be at the undergraduate or graduate level.
Advanced-Level Program	Designed to support current special educators who seek to deepen their skills and broaden their knowledge base by seeking an additional license and/or credential. Most will be at the graduate level.
Specialty Sets	Delineate the essential knowledge and skills in specific practice areas. Specialty sets are not standards themselves and are designed to be used in conjunction with the CEC Standards.
National Recognition	Status granted by meeting CEC standards through a programmatic review conducted in partnership with the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) for Educator Preparation Providers (EPPs) seeking CAEP Accreditation.
Accreditation	Process of which educator preparation programs seek a formal evaluation of meeting CEC Standards. CEC Accreditation applies to the program only and does not credential an individual person or group of people.
Citing the Standards	Use the “Purple Book” (Practice-Based Standards for the Preparation of Special Educators) or; Council for Exceptional Children (year standards were released/revised). Name of Standard (Name of the set of Standards: Standard number & component). Retrieved from: exceptionalchildren.org/standards

Revised November 2024

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