



Utah State
Board of
Education

Special
Education
Services

ALTERNATE PATH TO PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR LICENSURE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

A GUIDEBOOK FOR LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES

January 24, 2024

INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to provide an overview of the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) Alternate Path to Professional Educator Licensure for Special Education Program (APPEL-SpEd) as well as an outline of Local Education Agencies' (LEAs) program responsibilities. It describes what the program is, how it works, who it is for, what is required to enroll and earn this license area of concentration, and the role of the LEA in ensuring program completion and up-to-date licensure for individuals in a special education teaching assignment in a district or charter school.

OVERVIEW

WHAT IS APPEL-SPED?

The USBE APPEL-SpEd program is available to individuals with a bachelor's degree (in any discipline) who are seeking Professional licensure in Special Education while employed on a provisional Associate Educator License (AEL).

The APPEL-SpEd program is an alternative path to licensure for individuals not enrolled in a license recommending educator preparation program through a university. The USBE APPEL-SpEd program offers courses "a la carte" via USBE created content and courses with partnering universities. The APPEL-SpEd route is a good option for individuals who already have a Professional Educator License in another license area and only need a few courses to complete the Special Education license area of concentration requirements, however, it is available to anyone who meets the program's criteria.

Please reference the [APPEL-SpEd Framework](#) to view the requirements needed to earn a Special Education license concentration.

The USBE APPEL-SpEd is a licensure-only program and not a degree-granting program. Whether an individual is enrolled in APPEL-SpEd or a traditional educator preparation program through a university, they must apply for an AEL to be a qualified special education teacher while they work toward their Professional Educator License.

HOW DOES APPEL-SPED WORK?

The APPEL-SpEd program helps a participating teacher by providing a custom Professional Learning Plan (PLP) based on the USBE APPEL-SpEd framework. The PLP includes approved coursework from universities here in Utah and in some cases, coursework from the USBE, along with support from the Local Education Agency (LEA) in clinical experiences, mentoring, and evaluation. The culminating evaluation in the program is the required pedagogical performance assessment (PPA).

The expectations of APPEL-SpEd vary slightly from the local education agency (LEA) Alternate Path to Professional Educator Licensure (APPEL) requirements for Elementary, Secondary, or Career Technical Education license areas. The LEA requirements are outlined in the application process for specific [Associate Educator Licenses](#).

By the end of the APPEL-SpEd program, the teacher will demonstrate all the characteristics of a [Portrait of a First Year Teacher](#). Upon completion of APPEL-SpEd, the teacher is recommended for a Professional Educator License in Special Education.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS?

If an individual has questions about the requirements to earn a Professional Educator License in Special Education, if they are unsure whether they are in a traditional university license recommending program or are taking university courses to complete their Professional Learning Plan (PLP) through APPEL-SpEd, they should contact the USBE at appel-sped@schools.utah.gov for more information.

LEA ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This section outlines the responsibilities of the LEA and the roles of LEA staff in the process of ensuring and earning licensure.

ENSURING APPEL-SPED LICENSURE

Someone without a license (either Associate or Professional) in a special education or related area is unqualified for a special education teaching assignment. An underqualified educator is a teacher with a current license who is enrolled in an Educator Preparation Program but has not yet completed required coursework. Unqualified or underqualified individuals, whether they are enrolled in the APPEL-SpEd program or in a traditional educator preparation program, must apply for and qualify to be awarded an Associate Educator License (AEL) to be considered a qualified special education teacher of record.

Completing the [prerequisites for an AEL](#) may be lengthy (ranging from weeks to months) depending on where the individual is in the application process. Therefore, LEAs hiring APPEL-SpEd candidates without the minimum AEL should plan their hire start dates accordingly.

An AEL can only be used for up to three years of teaching experience. To continue teaching in special education, teachers must earn a Professional Educator License in SpEd within three academic years.

ENROLLING IN APPEL-SPED PROGRAM

If an LEA has an unqualified or underqualified individual in a special education teaching assignment, then the LEA and school must be prepared to support the teacher in earning a Professional Special Education teaching license.

The LEA will need to work with the potential teacher to complete the following steps to ensure enrollment in APPEL-SpEd:

1. Verify the potential SpEd teacher is in a SpEd Educator Preparation Program (EPP), either a traditional university license recommending program or APPEL-SpEd, by reviewing the teacher's EPP enrollment letter.

- a. Before a potential SpEd teacher can be provisionally accepted into the [APPEL-SpEd program](#), a Statement of Assurances must be signed by the hiring LEA assuring the candidate is (or will be) assigned to a Special Education teaching assignment for the academic school year.
 - i. The potential teacher requests the Statement of Assurances under [APPEL-SpEd Task 5](#).
 - ii. When the potential SpEd teacher has been accepted, the USBE provides an enrollment letter.
 - iii. Full acceptance into the program is granted once the teacher receives their AEL.
2. Verify the potential SpEd teacher has been awarded a Special Education AEL ([AEL Requirements](#)).
 - a. The teacher is notified by the USBE Licensing Department when the new license area of concentration is posted in the Comprehensive Administration of Credentials for Teachers in Utah Schools (CACTUS).
3. Post APPEL-SpEd teacher's teaching assignment in CACTUS.
 - a. Please notify the USBE APPEL-SpEd team, as soon as possible, of any changes in employment status.
4. After the AEL is posted in CACTUS, APPEL-SpEd requests the name and contact information of the qualified mentor from the building administrator so the teacher can begin participating in the APPEL-SpEd program.

DURING THE APPEL-SPED PROGRAM

The APPEL-SpEd program requires individual progress be monitored and clinical experiences be evaluated by the hiring LEA. Therefore, LEAs are responsible for:

1. Completing a minimum of two in-class evaluations using the LEA-approved evaluation process.
2. Making allowances to schedules and helping to arrange various clinical experiences.
 - a. If the teacher is working toward the Special Education (K-12+) license area, experiences in both elementary and secondary settings are required.
 - i. These experiences range from attending transition specific IEP meetings, observations, or counseling with teachers in different grade levels or content areas.

- ii. A change in teaching assignment to complete the clinical experiences expectations should NOT be required.
3. Assigning the APPEL-SpEd teacher a qualified special education mentor who can support the teacher in completing the required clinical experiences.

SELECTING AN APPEL-SPED MENTOR

When assigning a special education mentor to a teacher participating in APPEL-SpEd, per the Statement of Assurances, LEAs are required to ensure the mentor selected:

- Has a current Utah Professional Educator License in Special Education
- Has a minimum one year of Special Education teaching experience
- Has IEP and paperwork compliance expertise
- Is NOT in an administrative or evaluative role for the teacher

Additionally, it is recommended, but not required, that mentors:

- Have at least three years on Special Education Professional license
- Have previous mentoring experience or experience facilitating adult learning
- Have completed USBE or LEA mentor training
- Can demonstrate implementation of [Utah's High Leverage Practices](#)
- Can demonstrate knowledge of the IEP framework, IDEA, and [USBE Special Education Rules](#)

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MENTOR

When possible, coordinate APPEL-SpEd mentoring expectations with district mentoring initiatives. Please note an APPEL-SpEd Mentor *is not* an evaluative role.

The APPEL-SpEd mentor is expected to:

1. Provide opportunities for the APPEL-SpEd teacher to engage in clinical experiences in various school setting.
2. Meet with the APPEL-SpEd teacher and a USBE Special Education APPEL-SpEd team specialist at least two times a year to review the APPEL-SpEd teacher's progress on their Professional Learning Plan (PLP).

3. Verify which clinical experiences have been successfully completed in the progress report requested periodically by the USBE APPEL-SpEd team via email.
4. Observe the APPEL-SpEd teacher, then:
 - a. Provide feedback and guide reflective conversations.

COMPLETING THE APPEL-SPED PROGRAM

To complete the APPEL-SpEd program, each role involved in ensuring the licensure is required to do the following:

- **Teachers**
 - Complete the requirements of their PLP including coursework and competencies, clinical experiences, and required assessments.
 - Submit official transcripts to transcripts@schools.utah.gov.
 - Schedule a final meeting with the APPEL-SpEd team to review completed PLP.
- **Mentors**
 - Verify the teacher has completed each of the required clinical experiences as requested by the APPEL-SpEd team.
- **Building Administrator**
 - Provide, as requested, a letter outlining a summary of evaluations including the teacher's observed knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
- **USBE APPEL-SpEd Team**
 - Notify the LEA when the teacher has successfully completed the APPEL-SpEd program.
 - Recommend the teacher to the USBE Licensing Department for a Professional Educator License in Special Education

RESOURCES

Please find answers to frequently asked questions through the following links:

- [USBE APPEL-SpEd Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [USBE Educator Licensing Frequently Asked Questions](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have additional questions or would like further information and guidance, please contact:

- General APPEL-SpEd Questions: APPEL-SpEd@schools.utah.gov
- APPEL-SpEd Mentor Questions: Sped-mentors@schools.utah.gov
- Paraprofessionals in APPEL-SpEd Questions: para@schools.utah.gov
- Special Education Licensing Questions: sped-licensing@schools.utah.gov

[Book a 30 minute consultation appointment.](#)