

What is an intern program?

Intern programs are designed for persons who have already demonstrated subject-matter competency and need to complete a teacher preparation program but who must work while taking classes. Interns teach during the day and take classes in the late afternoon, in the evening, or on weekends.

I have heard there are two levels of credentials. What are they?

- a. The first stage is the Preliminary Education Specialist Instruction Credential. To receive this, you must have:
 - i. Earned an undergraduate degree
 - ii. Satisfied the basic skills requirement
 - iii. Demonstrated subject-matter competency
 - iv. Passed the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) test
 - v. Completed a teacher preparation program
- b. The second stage is the Clear Education Specialist Instruction Credential. To obtain this, you must have completed an induction plan.

I have decided to get my credential but will need financial assistance. What programs exist that can help me?

In order to be eligible for financial aid, you must file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by March 2, the priority deadline. Log on to www.fafsa.ed.gov for the application and information. The information you provide will be analyzed, and a determination will be made regarding how much financial aid you are eligible for. This form must be filed every year.

Track your progress by registering in the **My Career Plan** section of the **TEACH California** Web site.

Make the **difference**
of a lifetime.
Teach.



www.teachcalifornia.org



This brochure and other free teacher recruitment materials may be downloaded or ordered online. Log on to www.teachcalifornia.org, click on "Resources," then "Outreach Materials." Online orders will be shipped within two weeks.



This brochure was created by TEACH California and the California School Employees Association (CSEA). For more information about teacher credentialing, financial aid, and school districts, log on to

the TEACH California Web site at www.teachcalifornia.org. For information about CSEA, log on to www.csea.com.

BECOME A Special Educator

A paraeducator's
guide to becoming a
special educator
in California



Paraeducators: Ideal Candidates to Become Special Education Teachers

As thousands of teachers enter retirement age, California faces the challenge of replacing more than 30 percent of its teachers during the next decade. School districts statewide are scrambling to fill the void, but they face a daunting task when it comes to special education. There is a critical shortage of special education teachers, and enrollment in teacher preparation programs is steadily dropping. In addition, nearly half of first-year special education teachers do not hold full credentials.

Paraeducators and other classified employees are ideal candidates to become special education teachers. With practical experience in today's schools and a passion for working with children, classified employees should consider becoming fully credentialed teachers.

There are many different pathways to becoming a credentialed special education teacher. The factors that most affect which path is best for you include the amount of education you possess; your financial situation (can you go to school full time or part time?); where you live (how close is the college you wish to attend?); and life situations that affect your time (do you have family responsibilities?). Here are some steps that will put you on the right path:

Get info about careers in special ed.

Obtaining a credential in special education can open many doors for you. There are many different settings in which you can work. Collaborating with general education teachers, working in resource/learning centers and teaching in home/hospital settings are some examples of the variety of venues in which you can work.

In addition, you must choose an area of specialization when you are completing your teacher preparation program. There are six specialty areas (mild/moderate, moderate/severe, deaf and hard of hearing, visual impairments, physical and health impairments, and early childhood special education), and each specialty area focuses on different disabilities (learning disabilities, mental retardation, hearing and visual impairments are a few examples).

To find out more about special education careers:

- Attend special education credential information seminars.
- Join a Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) chapter (www.cec.sped.org).
- Start/join a discussion group for students interested in special education.
- Log on to www.personnelcenter.org for information about special education career options and resources.



Take the right undergraduate courses.

One of the requirements for a credential is that you have an undergraduate degree. If you do not have one, you may want to start your college career at a community college, where the tuition is less than at a four-year college or university. Before you enroll in classes, make sure you are taking courses that fulfill the requirements for your major and for graduation. Unnecessary classes can waste time and money. Talk with the teacher preparation adviser at the four-year college from which you wish to obtain your credential so that you understand those requirements. Each college is different!

If you already have an undergraduate degree, you may still need to take courses. Check with the teacher preparation adviser at your college or university.

Verify basic skills proficiency.

Verifying basic skills is required of all credential candidates. There are four ways to do this: 1) pass the CBEST; 2) pass the CSET: Multiple Subject Plus

Writing Skills Examination; 3) pass the CSU Early Assessment Program or the CSU Placement Examinations; or 4) pass a Basic Skills Examination from another state. The CBEST has three sections: mathematics, reading comprehension, and writing. Passing scores are required in each section, but once you pass the test, your scores are good for the rest of your life. One test-taking strategy is to take the test twice: for the first time, use the full time to take the two areas in which you are more comfortable; the second time, just concentrate on the subject for which you require more time.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is subject-matter competency?

Subject-matter competency is knowledge of the subject you wish to teach. Providing proof of this knowledge can be done by passing the appropriate, approved California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET) or an approved subject-matter program at a California college or university with an accredited program.

What kinds of courses are required in a teacher preparation program?

Teacher preparation programs focus on teaching you how to teach (pedagogy). Required courses may include child development, teaching reading, and how to teach your specific subject area.

What kind of financial programs are available?

The federal Office of Special Education Programs sponsors programs that often provide financial support. School districts and unions, including the California School Employees Association, work together at the local level to create career ladder programs for paraeducators. Community and professional organizations provide scholarships (but be wary of agencies that charge fees to find scholarships).