

Request to MACCE: Sunset the School Psychological Examiner Certification

**Missouri Association of School Psychologists
and Missouri School Counselor Association**

Some background information:

- Public Law 94-142 passed in 1975 – required schools to employ certified or licensed assessment specialists to evaluate and determine eligibility for special education services
- Most states hired School Psychologists to fulfill this requirement
- Missouri created a School Psychological Examiner certificate, a “supplemental” type of certification, in addition to certification for School Psychologists
- School Counselors were often encouraged to also obtain the SPE certification in order to perform 2 jobs in their school district – however, this practice has been discouraged by the MSCA and School Counseling training programs for several years

Rationale for sunseting the SPE certification:

1. The SPE certification does not align with Missouri's goal to produce only highly competent and effective educators.

- There is NO oversight of the training/coursework requirements to obtain this certification – there is no national organization to support uniform and rigorous training standards or ethical practice for this certification
- There is no requirement for SPE candidates to take and pass a proficiency exam (MEGA) – which is required for every other Missouri certification
- While the SPE certificate includes some hours for practicum/field based experiences, the requirements are significantly less than all other educator certification practicum requirements

Rationale for sunseting the SPE certification:

2. Missouri is allowing poorly qualified educators to make HIGH STAKES decisions about which children qualify for special education.

- Determination of educational disabilities such as Autism, Intellectual Disability, Emotional Disturbance, and Specific Learning Disabilities is extremely complex, requiring a high degree of training and expertise
- Eligibility determinations are costly, both in terms of time & money, to our state and local school districts – these decisions lead to additional protections for students identified with disabilities
- Special education eligibility decisions significantly alter a child's educational experiences and trajectory for future opportunities

No other state allows special education eligibility decisions to be made by professionals who have such minimal training standards.

Rationale for sunseting the SPE certification:

3. Local Missouri school districts will face significant liability if we continue to allow insufficiently trained people to perform these critical job duties:

- There is no state or national professional board that has oversight over the SPE certification standards or ethical practices
- SPE's are not required to take any continuing education specific to their job duties once they have obtained the initial certificate
- There is no assurance that SPE's keep up with frequent changes to federal and state IDEA regulations regarding diagnostic procedures and best practices for special education eligibility determination
- This certification no longer exists in any other state!

Rationale for sunseting the SPE certification:

- Federal law has shifted away from a narrow focus on determining that a student requires special education services based on a simple discrepancy model (IQ discrepant from achievement) to looking at student achievement through a Response to Intervention framework
- Best practice indicates that early screening and intervention are critical to providing ALL at-risk students with appropriate academic and social/emotional supports and can reduce the need for special education services
- The typical National School Psychologist to student ratio is: **1 to 1,380**
- Missouri's School Psychologist to student ratio is: **1 to 4,025**

Rationale Summary:

We need highly qualified professionals to work with our most vulnerable and at-risk students.

We are putting our local school districts at risk by allowing them to employ inadequately trained professionals to make high-stakes decisions that have a fiscal impact and could lead to litigation.

MASP and MSCA support the grandfathering of currently certified SPE's – they should be allowed to keep their certification and perform as SPE's.

We recommend that DESE add to the current SPE certification: school districts who continue to employ SPE's must require them obtain ongoing continuing education specific to their job duties as an SPE.