

TOPIC: RECOMMENDATION TO REVERSE THE CCHE DECISION THAT PROHIBITS INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION FROM OFFERING BACHELOR'S DEGREES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

PREPARED BY: IAN MACGILLIVRAY, ASSISTANT DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

I. SUMMARY

This action item recommends that the Commission reverse its March 24, 1986 decision not to recognize majors in early childhood education. This action would permit institutions of higher education to offer bachelor's degrees in early childhood education.

II. BACKGROUND

Prior to March 24, 1986, institutions of higher education were allowed to offer bachelor's degrees with majors in early childhood and elementary education. At that time, the CCHE was presented with a study that argued that degrees in early childhood education and elementary education lacked academic rigor. Consequently, according to the CCHE meeting minutes from March 24, 1986, the Commission voted to require that:

At the bachelors level, teacher candidates must major in a subject field. The Commission directs governing boards to discontinue all bachelor level degrees identified for discontinuance in Attachment A except Music Education when accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music and with the exception of Physical Education when it is offered as a dual major and on the condition that all other requirements (liberal arts and sciences core curriculum and the concentration requirements in the major field of study are satisfied.) *CCHE Minutes, March 24, 1986, pg. 3*

Unfortunately, Attachment A appears not to have been archived.

According to the collective memory of Colorado faculty who were affected by this decision, the result was to require early childhood and elementary teacher education candidates to complete a degree in a subject area—such as English, history, mathematics and so on—because it was believed that these degrees were academically rigorous. Shortly thereafter, the institutions were allowed to offer early childhood and elementary teacher preparation programs under “interdisciplinary” or “liberal arts” majors, because the early childhood and elementary licensure programs required a breadth of content that was not easily fitted under a traditional liberal arts major.

Currently, nine public and private institutions of higher education in Colorado offer early childhood and elementary teacher preparation programs within “interdisciplinary” or “liberal arts” degree programs. Four institutions offer these programs in a traditional major field and one institution gives candidates a choice between the two options (i.e., in an “interdisciplinary” major or traditional major field).

III. FEEDBACK FROM THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Department staff polled the deans and directors of educator preparation programs at institutions of higher education, as well as their chief academic officers, and a diverse group of early childhood education stakeholders represented on the P3 Professional Development Task Force of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC). The purpose of the poll was to gather opinions as to whether or not the CCHE should reverse its previous decision prohibiting early childhood and elementary teacher education bachelor’s degrees. Members of the P3 Professional Development Task Force were in favor of allowing bachelor’s in early childhood education. The results of the poll for institutions of higher education are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Early Childhood and Elementary Education Majors Poll Results

Institution	Allow bachelor’s in Early Childhood Education	Allow bachelor’s in Elementary Education
CCCS	Yes	Yes
CMC	Yes	Yes
CSU	Yes	Yes
CSU-P	No opposition	No opposition
MSCD	Yes	Yes
UCB	Yes	No
UCCS	Yes	Yes
UCD	Need to discuss	Needs the most discussion
UNC	Yes	Yes
Colorado Christian	Yes	No
University of Phoenix	Yes	Yes

Early Childhood Education (ECE) Of the eleven institutions/systems that responded, only one expressed any reservations about allowing bachelor’s degrees in early childhood education. Institutions that did not respond to the poll are presumed to have no objection.

According to feedback received by the department, the major pros and cons associated with the decision to reverse the Commission’s 1986 decision to eliminate early childhood and elementary education majors are as follows:

Positive aspects of offering a bachelor's degree in early childhood education:

- It is confusing to prospective students, donors, and community members when we explain that these degrees are not allowable.
- Early childhood teachers need to be able to teach a broad spectrum of subjects.
- ECE has a distinct and legitimate curriculum and pedagogy.
- The current lack of degrees in these specific areas makes our state's grant eligibility criteria appear weak for some of the most desirable educational grants.
- A bachelor's in early childhood may increase seamless transfer opportunities for students who start at 2-year institutions.
- Having a major in ECE would better allow for a minor in areas such as special education, literacy or linguistically diverse which would make students well rounded and very marketable.
- The span of ECE is 0-8 years of age and an ECE degree would include the components of the younger developmental stages and strategies for working with this age group.

Potentially negative aspect of offering a bachelor's degree in early childhood education:

- The proposal to allow degrees in early childhood education and elementary education is complex and requires extensive conversations (which have not yet been held) between faculty of education and liberal arts, advising staffs, P-12 district representatives, and early childhood service providers.

Given that the majority of institutions responding were in favor of allowing bachelor's degrees in early childhood education, Department staff recommend that the Commission reverse its 1986 decision to require a degree in a subject area with early childhood teacher education.

Elementary Education (ELED)

Of the eleven institutions/systems that responded to the department's poll, two opposed bachelor's degrees in elementary teacher education and one other requested more time to discuss the matter. According to feedback received by the department, the major pros and cons associated with the decision to reverse the Commission's 1986 decision to eliminate elementary education majors are as follows:

Positive aspects of offering a bachelor's degree in elementary education:

- The bachelor's in ELED would be more interdisciplinary, innovative, communication rich, technology laden, and assessment driven than previous Elementary Education majors.

- A bachelor's in ELED would serve as a strong foundation and allow institutions to shift their focus to school partnerships to enhance induction and further services that support in-service teachers.
- As long as existing content alignment guidelines are monitored and maintained, there's no substantive issue.

Potentially negative aspects of offering a bachelor's degree in elementary education:

- Teachers in elementary who have had to earn a solid content academic major are better prepared to integrate content skills/knowledge with pedagogical skills/knowledge.
- If teachers have not reached mastery in a content area of study, they are not able to provide effective instruction.
- It would be a loss to have pedagogy without higher education academic subject area experience.
- To teach the new academic common core standards with integrity, elementary teachers need to develop both breadth and depth of content knowledge while enrolled as undergraduates.
- Well-delineated core distribution requirements ensure elementary teachers study at the college level core content taught in the subject matters in the elementary curriculum.
- By completing a content major, elementary teachers garner depth in one field of study. This depth allows them to examine more complex arguments, concepts, and ways of understanding typically addressed in upper-division courses in the major. This intellectual foundation is essential for elementary teachers to be well-prepared to respond to and guide children's sense-making of the concept and ideas found in the current elementary curriculum.

Given that two out of eleven institutions responding were opposed to bachelor's degrees in elementary teacher education and at least one other requested more time to discuss the matter, Department staff do not at this time recommend that the Commission reverse its opinion to permit a bachelor's in elementary education.

IV. DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION ANALYSIS

Though the intention of the Commission's decision in 1986 was to improve the rigor of early childhood and elementary education programs, the result for early childhood education programs has been generally insubstantial, as few institutions created early childhood education programs in traditional academic disciplines. Even so, a simple name change could produce many of the benefits highlighted above. Regardless of the program's major field, all current early childhood education endorsement (8.01) programs must meet the State Board of Education content requirements (2260.5-R-8.01) as well as the *Performance Based Standards for Colorado*

Teachers (2260.5-R-5.00). This would not change, regardless of the major under which an early childhood education program was offered.

Furthermore, when students transfer from a 2-year institution to a 4-year institution, they often are discouraged when some of the early childhood coursework from their community college cannot transfer to the early childhood program at the receiving 4-year institution. Faculty report that early childhood bachelor's degrees would allow them to accept more, or all, early childhood coursework completed at 2-year institutions, which could allow for a more seamless revision of the statewide articulation agreement in early childhood teacher education and may ensure more early childhood professionals have access to earning bachelor's degrees, a federal Head Start requirement.

When asked, "What is different now than in 1986, and why should the CCHE allow bachelor's in early childhood education?" one faculty responded that,

There is a tremendous difference between the knowledge base we expected students to learn 25 years ago compared to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions we demand for today's early childhood (and elementary) pre-service teachers. Our practices are now informed by longitudinal studies of child development and the impact of various interventions, the brain research of the 90s, the need for the integration of technology, the importance of involving families and communities, the use of effective assessments, inclusionary practices, an understanding of best literacy and numeracy instructional practices, standards-aligned program design, etc. Today's programs meet NAEYC and ACEI standards, ensuring quality and currency.

And a dean of a School of Education responded,

Since the 1986 decision, we have seen the growth of an incredible, multi-disciplinary research base of insight into the nature and importance of the early years. This knowledge base amounts to an "Early Childhood Discipline" that is important for teachers to understand *in addition* to understanding the content area disciplines as they relate to the young learner (i.e., how foundational knowledge of mathematics, science, literacy, social studies is constructed between infancy and age eight). This EC discipline includes insight from neuroscience, special education/early intervention, family science, educational psychology and more. Early childhood teachers must command knowledge of the content disciplines, of the nature of the learner, of multiple layers of context and of the pedagogies that are appropriate for young children. This integration forms the rigor of the preparation. The Schools of Education are equipped to design the integration in partnership with colleges of liberal arts where the content courses are located. Universities with robust partnerships across the colleges are designing content and content pedagogy courses together that are customized for early childhood.

Other states allow bachelor's in early childhood education. A survey of surrounding states reveals these degrees are offered at University of Kansas and University of Nebraska. A 2006 report published by the University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute, titled *Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States*, reported that of 1,179 institutions of higher education responding to its national survey, 449 (38%) offer bachelor's degrees in early childhood education.

New federal Head Start regulations require that 50% of early childhood teachers nationwide have bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a related field by 2013. According to the Lt. Governor's Head Start State Collaboration Director, 12% of early childhood teachers in Colorado currently hold a bachelor's in early childhood education and 20% hold a bachelor's in a related field. Members of Colorado's early childhood professional community frequently relay to Department staff that early childhood educators who want to go on for a bachelor's degree would prefer a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, and sometimes leave the state to do that.

In addition, to address the quality control issues that led the CCHE to prohibit early childhood degrees in the first place, it is important to note that all new programs in early childhood education will be required to have their content approved by the Colorado Department of Education in accordance to State Board of Education rules for Early Childhood Education teachers (2260.5-R-8.01) as well as the Performance Based Standards for Colorado Teachers (2260.5-R-5.00). And, these programs will need to meet the CCHE's requirements for educator preparation programs per section 23-1-121 C.R.S.

V. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the Commission reverses its previous decision and allow institutions of higher education to offer bachelor's degrees in Early Childhood Education.

VI. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Copies of all relevant statute, policy, and the CCHE Minutes from March 24, 1986 are on file in the Department of Higher Education.

VII. STATUTORY AUTHORITY

§22-60.5 C.R.S.
§23-1-121 C.R.S.