

TOPIC: RECOMMENDATION TO REVERSE THE CCHE DECISION THAT PROHIBITS INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION FROM OFFERING BACHELOR'S DEGREES IN ELEMENTARY 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 elementary education. This action would permit institutions of higher education to offer bachelor's degrees in elementary education. This action would also correspond with the Commission earlier decision (April 5, 2012; agenda item III, A) to approved 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 elementary education. At that time, the CCHE was presented with a study that argued that degrees in elementary education lacked academic rigor. A member of Colorado Council of Deans of Education (CCODE) recalls the discussion was prompted by a national critique of teachers' competencies and alleged low admission standards of teacher preparation programs in the 1980's. 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Unfortunately, Attachment A appears not to have been archived.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 more academically rigorous than programs in education. 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 at the undergraduate level, ten public and private institutions of higher education in Colorado offer elementary teacher preparation programs within “interdisciplinary” or “liberal arts” degree programs. Three 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

Prior to the April 5, 2012 Commission agenda item discussion on allowing bachelor’s degrees in early childhood education, department staff polled the deans and directors of educator preparation programs at institutions of higher education, as well as their chief academic officers. The purpose of the poll was to gather opinions as to whether or not the Commission should reverse its previous decision prohibiting early childhood and elementary teacher education bachelor’s degrees.

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. At the April 5, 2012 Commission meeting, during the discussion on whether or not to allow bachelor’s degrees of early childhood education, the Commission directed department staff to follow up with CCODE regarding why some members oppose offering bachelor’s degrees in elementary education. Department staff followed up on the Commission’s request at CCODE’s April 27, 2012 meeting.

IV. DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION ANALYSIS

Based on this follow-up discussion, CCODE’s main message as it pertains to the Commission allowing bachelor’s degrees of elementary education is that, “It’s not about quality. It’s about the name.” That is, members of CCODE agreed that, since all current, approved elementary teacher preparation programs meet state standards for quality (in that they have been reviewed by CDE and DHE and approved by State Board of Education and the Commission), whether or not the Commission allows bachelor’s degrees in elementary education, it will likely not directly affect the quality of current or future elementary teacher preparation programs. The name change will, however, have some positive consequences, including the following:

- Being able to major in a field that is meaningful to the candidate and reflects his or her professional training.

- Similarly, being able to offer a degree that reflects the professional identity of the field will be meaningful to disciplinary faculty and is understood by employers.
- Being able to offer a degree in elementary education could prompt institutions of higher education to redesign their current programs, which could benefit candidates and the profession, as well as potentially lead to more clinical-based preparation and partnerships with local districts.
- Redesigned degrees in elementary education would make it easier for candidates to add additional endorsements or simultaneously complete other endorsements, such as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education, which could augment their preparation as an elementary teacher.
- The process of redesigning programs could improve collaboration between education faculty and Arts & Sciences faculty, which, ultimately, would better serve the candidates by helping them understand the importance of strong content preparation.

Of note, one member of CCODE whose institution requires content degrees with elementary teacher preparation stated that, “Knowing one discipline deeply is essential and [my institution] will keep doing it.” She also added that if the Commission allows institutions to offer bachelor’s degrees in elementary education and if some institutions begin offering them that “it won’t hurt [my institution] but it could hurt the field [of elementary education] given concerns over the poor reputation of the preparation of teachers.” Some members of the group conceded this point while others offered that it could have the opposite effect—that having bachelor’s degrees in elementary education could actually be a way “to fight back against the bad reputation [of elementary teachers and elementary teacher preparation].”

In sum, all of the members of CCODE who were present at and participated in this discussion agreed that they have no objection to the Commission allowing bachelor’s degrees in elementary education as long as their institution would not be required to do so. Given the positive likely consequences highlighted above that were made during this follow up discussion, Department staff recommend that the Commission reverse its opinion to permit a bachelor’s in elementary education.

V. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the Commission reverses its previous decision and allow institutions of higher education to offer bachelor’s degrees in Elementary 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.