

The Professional Certificate for Educational Staff Associates

Report to the Professional Educator Standards Board

Professional Education and Certification

July 2007

This report elaborates the proposed framework for Professional Certification for ESAs. It includes background information, description of process components, discussion of variables, and next steps.

Background

Since 1995, Washington has pursued an education reform strategy built on higher expectations for all students. A crucial part of this strategy is recruiting, developing, and supporting educators who can help students achieve the new standards. To meet this need, the state has been implementing performance-based residency and professional certificates since 2000. Teacher residency and professional certificates were the first to be developed, followed by residency certificates for administrators and educational staff associates (ESAs). This document describes the proposed next step, the implementation of the professional certificate for three ESA roles: school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers.

The Standards for the School Counselors, Psychologists and Social Workers are located in WAC 181-78A-535. The Residency level benchmarks were developed by work groups that met during 2003-2004 and were approved by the State Board of Education in October 2004. The ESAs are the final group making the transition to the Residency/Professional system. OSPI began issuing Residency ESA certificates to these three roles on September 1, 2005. (Teacher certificates began September, 2000 and administrator certificates on September 1, 2004.) Residency ESA certificates are valid for five years once an individual completes two years in the role. This rule gives Residency ESAs a minimum of seven years.

Following that adoption, a work group representing ESA preparation programs, professional associations, and OSPI developed the professional level benchmarks for each role. The professional level benchmarks were approved by the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) in September 2006.

When the State Board of Education established requirements for teacher professional certificate programs, it simultaneously enacted identical rules for administrator and ESA programs on the assumption that the process would look the same for all roles. Since the state's experience with teacher professional programs has underlined the importance of being thoughtful and thorough about implementation, the Professional Education and Certification office at OSPI decided to work with a committee of key stakeholders to outline a common framework all programs would follow.

The work group

Professional Education and Certification formed a work group that included representation from the professional associations for each of the roles, higher education program faculty, ESA PEAB representatives, and several practicing ESAs. (See Appendix A for a list of work group members.)

The group met numerous times and has communicated frequently by e-mail. Feedback was also solicited at the School Counselor Association fall conference.

The proposal

This document describes a process for earning the educational staff associate professional certificate* and makes a related recommendation:

We ask for Board approval to proceed to the college/university program development phase.

Pending Board approval of this framework, we will bring forward the necessary WAC revisions to accommodate the proposed process at a future Board meeting.

*The proposed process would apply to holders of ESA residency certificates serving as school counselors, school psychologists, or school social workers.

Recommendation: University educational staff associate preparation programs should be asked to develop proposals for professional certificate programs that would follow the guidelines described in this document.

Discussion and Rationale

The challenge

Since a second-level certificate is a form of professional development, the certificate program must satisfy the needs of three groups: ESAs, state policymakers, and school districts. While all three share the need for focused professional development that leads to improved student learning, each also has unique needs not necessarily shared by the others:

- ESAs want professional development that is relevant to their work, respectful of their time, and financially affordable.
- State policymakers want focused, coherent professional development that supports state school reform goals.
- Districts want professional development that is aligned with district improvement needs and is respectful of the district context.

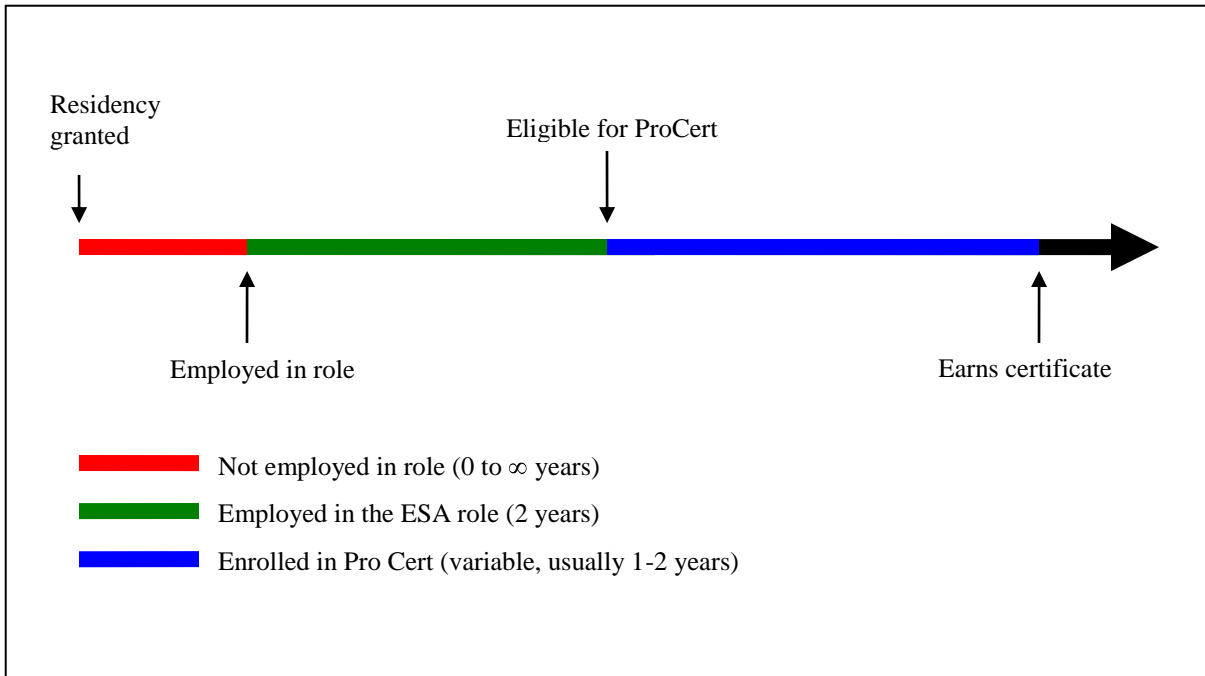
The challenge for the professional certificate is to provide opportunities for these needs to be satisfied.

A second challenge arises from the fact that development of the professional certificate for ESAs was preceded on the stage by the professional certificate for teachers, which encountered numerous implementation problems in the start-up phase. The state's early experience with teacher Pro Cert understandably creates some initial skepticism about using a similar process for other roles including ESAs. More positively, however, that experience provides a rich resource for anticipating potential problems.

ESAs are the third group to develop the professional certificate process; therefore, we were able to learn from the experiences of both the teacher and administrator programs. After studying both processes, the workgroup developed a set of guiding principles. These principles can be found in Appendix B.

From residency to professional certificate: critical timelines

Although the residency certificate was originally designed as a five-year credential, the five-year term placed considerable stress on educators who delayed their entry into the field or who needed to take time off in the first few years. As a result, the State Board of Education in 2005 changed the terms of the residency. When issued, the certificate is undated, and remains so until the holder has completed two years in the role, at which point it becomes a five year certificate. For school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers, the timeline looks like this:



Thus, from the time a residency certificate holder enters an ESA position, he or she has at least seven years in which to earn the professional certificate. In addition, WAC 181-79A-250 allows a two-year extension of the residency if the holder is enrolled in a Pro Cert program, so the ultimate timeline could be as long as nine years.

Could someone begin the Pro Cert program *before* completion of two years in the role? We believe strongly that ESAs in their first two years should be focusing on the immediate demands of their new role without also trying to complete a certificate program. In addition, those two years on the job will be critical in giving new ESAs a clear picture of their professional development needs. Hence, we see the two years of experience as an entry requirement. However, those wanting to get a head start may be able to begin gathering evidence on their progress toward the Pro Cert benchmarks. Guidelines for developing evidence, along with examples, will be available on the OSPI website. A possible exception are experienced ESAs from out-of-state who may wish to begin ProCert right away.

The structure

The proposed structure for the ESA professional certificate resembles structures for both the teachers and administrators, with a few key differences. Like the teacher and administrator programs, it would be a college/university program with three major components:

1. The *Entry Seminar* (similar to the pre-assessment seminar for teacher programs). The seminar would orient candidates to the process and to the benchmarks; would help candidates evaluate their current professional needs; and would result in a

Professional Growth Plan that would guide the remainder of the program. Like the teacher program, the Entry Seminar will include involvement of a Professional Growth Team and/or the Professional Education Advisory Board (PEAB). The candidate will be assigned a mentor to work with them throughout the process.

2. The *Core*. In this phase, candidates would pursue their PGP by gathering evidence on the benchmarks and developing capacity in the major areas they wish to focus on. They would be able to use a variety of formal and informal experiences to do this. They would receive continued guidance and feedback from their mentor.
3. The *Culminating Experience*. Similar to the administrators, when candidates fulfilled their PGP, they would work with their university advisor to arrange a presentation before a panel that often will include ESA PEAB members.

The following sections elaborate on this process.

The heart of the matter: job-embedded professional development

Very early in the process, we reached the conclusion that if the certificate requirements became merely an “add-on” to the already heavy responsibilities of ESAs, the process would collapse under its own weight. This concern, reinforced by the growing national consensus that job-embedded learning is more effective than traditional approaches, led quickly to two conclusions:

1. *ESAs must be able to use the professional certificate process to meet the challenges they face at their own school and in their own district.* This is not to say that the process should become a search for easy answers or that every activity has to have an immediate practical payoff. Ultimately, however, if candidates cannot see that their work in the program is improving their capacity, they will view it as nothing more than a series of hoops.
2. *Candidates should own the process.* Pro Cert candidates are accountable for demonstrating that they meet the standards, but determining *how* and *when* they do so should rest with the candidates themselves.

For that reason, the candidate’s Professional Growth Plan will be critical to the success of the process. The plan, which will be developed in the entry seminar, has two sources:

1. Since the certificate requires evidence that the standards have been met, candidates will identify the evidence they currently have. We expect that with two years of experience in the role, they will enter the program having already acquired a certain amount of evidence of strengths. Possible sources of evidence include performance evaluations, student performance data, artifacts from the school improvement plan or related projects, records of counseling and guidance action plans and results, interventions, and other evidence.

2. The second source is the candidate's analysis of his or her professional needs using the professional certificate benchmarks as a guide. What issues are most urgent at the school or district level? What elements of the job provide the biggest challenge? What changes are needed to assure continued improvement of student learning? The answers to those questions will help determine the content of the PGP.

The goal is to have a plan that is guided by state standards, yet allows candidates to focus their efforts on the needs in their own schools and districts.

Support

As experience with the teacher professional certificate has shown, this kind of process requires scaffolding that provides candidates with the necessary support and guidance.

Much of this support will come during the entry seminar, where candidates engage in a deep review of their professional goals and formulate the growth plan. The primary support here is from the university advisor, who will be serving in a coaching as well as an instructional role. In addition, OSPI will coordinate the development of a handbook that will include general information about the program, examples of PGPs, descriptions of the kind of evidence that will document achievement of the benchmarks, and a variety of other resources. The candidate will have continued support from a mentor during the Core. Finally, programs will use models that encourage collaboration among candidates, either in person or electronically. As stated above, ESA candidates will be supported by a Professional Growth Team which may include PEAB members.

We have deliberately chosen to slightly adjust the requirement for the district representative. A district representative is required, but candidates can petition to have this requirement waived in special circumstances. These circumstances include uneasiness about having principals on their growth team, out of concern that honesty in expressing their development needs will somehow affect their performance evaluation thus confusing the line between evaluation and professional development.. While teachers can often arrange for a district representative other than their immediate supervisor, it would be much more difficult for ESAs to do so, particularly if they are working in a small district. In addition, the workgroup wanted to ensure the PGT members who are involved understand appropriate roles and responsibilities for ESAs. A colleague will also be required and this colleague does not necessarily need to be from the same district as long as the colleague is serving in the same ESA role.

Following the Entry Seminar, candidates will begin implementing their PGP. During this period they will have continuing access to guidance and support of their university advisor and/or colleague. Additional support will be provided by OSPI, which will develop and maintain electronic resources that address the goals that candidates are likely to have. The OSPI website will list major resources on data use, identify upcoming workshops, conferences, and presentations on the topic, and offer online forums for

discussion of issues related to this subject. The professional associations for each of these three roles will play a particularly important role.

Evidence

In a process that is designed to be highly individualized, we can expect that candidates will produce a wide variety of evidence that reflects the unique contexts in which they work and the particular professional development needs they have. A critical challenge for the process will be finding a way to ensure that the evaluation of evidence allows for individuality yet reflects the same underlying set of standards.

Evidence is also a critical issue at the conclusion of the process: how will candidates demonstrate that they have achieved the standards? Because a job-embedded process is inherently individualized, achieving consistency across candidates and programs will require a major effort. We propose three ways to counteract the possibility that different programs will develop different standards:

- OSPI, in collaboration with the preparation programs and professional associations, will facilitate the development of evidence protocols that establish guidelines for judging the evidence that candidates provide. These protocols would also become the basis of training for those doing the evaluating. As part of this development, each of the three roles will develop common assessments for that role. Since each of the three roles has unique aspects of their benchmarks and their work, we will work for consistent assessments within each of the roles.
- OSPI will facilitate periodic meetings of program directors and faculty to engage in shared analysis of candidate work samples. Such collaborative efforts can be powerful tools for identifying divergent interpretations of standards.
- As programs are implemented, OSPI will contract with outside evaluators to sample the documentation being accepted as evidence and review it for consistency with the protocols and with program goals.

What about “unique situations”?

We are not currently seeking PESB action regarding unique situations. However, the board will need to take action on these issues prior to implementation in September 2008.

Certain ESAs are in unique situations relative to ProCert based on the certificates they hold or the type of employment contract they have with the district. Examples of these unique situations are listed below:

- Certified in one or more roles, serving in a classified position.
- Certified in more than one role, serving in one role.
- Certified in more than one role, serving in both roles.

WAC 181-78A-535(3) requires that an individual be employed in the role in order to be eligible to enroll in a Professional Certificate program. This rule, which is the same for teachers and administrators, is in place because Professional Certification requires demonstration of performance and evidence of actual impact which is difficult to do if not serving in the role. However, it is not uncommon for individuals with ESA certificates to be hired into classified positions. They do not hold a contract as an ESA but may actually be fulfilling duties identical to a certified position in another district. Individuals in these classified positions may desire to earn their Professional ESA Certificate for a variety of reasons. A solution will be to define “serving in the role” for purposes of certificate reissuance (and therefore expiration date) to require serving in a certified position while still allowing “serving in the role” to be interpreted much more broadly for purposes of eligibility for enrollment in ProCert. Therefore individuals serving in classified positions would have the option of pursuing the Professional Certificate but not be required to do so.

Another group of ESAs may hold a residency certificate for more than one role. In fact, some institutions have dual residency programs in which candidates earn both a school psychology and school counseling certificate. Individuals with more than one ESA certificate may understandably want to earn the professional certificate for both at the same time. It is reasonable to allow individuals with more than one ESA certificate serving in each role to pursue a professional certification through a dual or overlapping program (such as one Entry Seminar for both programs) as long as the standards for both certificates are fully and clearly demonstrated. However, individuals may have two certificates but only be serving in one role. Candidates may be able to find ways to demonstrate the standards for both roles while serving in one. Yet someone could conceivably be trying to earn a certificate for which they have no experience in the role. The challenge will be striking the appropriate balance of flexibility, consistency, and rigor in the policy for individuals in these situations.

Delivery and access

Washington’s approved ESA preparation programs are not evenly distributed across the state. A few areas such as Seattle-Tacoma and Spokane are well-served, but ESAs, especially school psychologists and social workers, in other areas of the state may reasonably wonder how they will have access to programs.

Given the busy schedule of ESAs, and their wide geographic distribution across the state, it’s clear that a “campus-centric” model will not work. Rather, the access issue will be addressed in several ways.

First, the professional certificate for teachers has already encouraged many institutions to develop models that allow them to take the instruction and support to the candidates, rather than asking the candidates to come to them. ESA programs are prepared to do the same.

Second, the increasing sophistication of web-based communication systems has greatly enhanced the capacity for online instruction and support. Several teacher professional certificate programs are currently done completely online, and there are no inherent barriers to using the same approach in ESA programs. In fact, given the considerably lower numbers of expected candidates and fewer programs, online offerings may be a necessity.

Finally, a number of institutions may join forces as consortia that would work together to meet the needs of ESAs in their region. This would allow more efficient allocation of resources to deliver support where it is most needed. A working model is already visible in the WSU-EWU Residency School Psychology program.

Costs

Feedback from new and future educators has made us conscious that program cost is an important issue for potential candidates. Addressing this concern will require a thoughtful balancing act between two conflicting principles. On the one hand, state policy should not casually impose additional costs on ESAs who may have already completed several required certification programs (in some cases, teacher residency and professional certificate programs followed by a residency ESA program). On the other hand, the state cannot expect universities to operate programs at a loss.

We believe that as programs are developed over the next year a workable balance can be achieved. Discussion of program costs will be an explicit part of the development process, and OSPI will work with institutions to identify models that can deliver programs at a reasonable cost. In particular, we believe those institutions that join together in regional consortia will be well-positioned to make the best use of available resources.

There are also several offsetting factors that may ease the burden for some participants. Districts often provide funds for professional development that could be appropriately applied to a job-embedded professional certificate program. While we cannot assume that all districts will do so (nor that all districts have the resources to do so), it does provide an additional avenue of support in some cases.

In addition, ESA candidates may sometimes wish to continue their preparation beyond the professional certificate by completing a doctoral program. Several institutions have already signaled their willingness to accept the work done for the ESA professional certificate as partial fulfillment of advanced programs.

However, beyond these considerations, we feel compelled to address a larger issue here: the state's responsibility to provide tangible acknowledgement of the increased skills it has mandated for school leaders. ESAs who complete a professional certificate program will have demonstrated advanced skills, yet there is currently no mechanism in place that would let those skills be reflected in the compensation system. We recognize the complexities of changing the state's educator compensation system, but we believe that

the professional certificate will not be fully accepted until its importance is validated by the state's willingness to commit resources.

Next steps

This proposal describes a process that we believe is educationally sound and consistent with best practices in the development of school counselors, psychologists, and social workers. However, its ultimate success will depend on how effectively it is implemented. Some crucial steps remain before candidates can begin the process in fall of 2008.

Program development

One of the issues in teacher Pro Cert programs was the variability across programs. Initially there was little discussion across the state about what the standards meant and what would be considered to be satisfactory evidence. Even after the development of more specific rubrics, programs sometimes interpreted the requirements in very different ways. In our focus groups, we found some concern that the same thing would happen with ESA Pro Cert.

Accordingly, as we did with the administrator programs, we will ask all institutions interested in offering a program (either singly or in collaboration with others) to attend several meetings to discuss key elements of the process in the interest of ensuring that all programs will be speaking the same language and developing the same criteria for evaluating candidates. In fact, many of these discussions have already begun in our framework development and will progress naturally into the next phase. These meetings will also help disseminate ideas and strategies among participating institutions. Institutions will be responsible for developing the proposals for their programs, which then must be approved by the PESB.

Concurrent with these efforts, OSPI staff will prepare support structures for the programs, including development of a handbook, articulation of evidence protocols, and establishment of online support systems. These elements will be in place before any candidates begin the process.

Communication

As the professional certificate takes shape, communication with all parties will be essential. ESAs, districts, professional associations, and state policymakers all have a stake in the process and a need for accurate and up-to-date information. Collectively, these groups have a variety of communication channels that can be used to keep the community aware of professional certificate.

Upon PESB approval of the professional certificate process, this report will be placed on the OSPI website, with links from websites of other participating groups. Letters will be

sent to university deans, directors of ESA preparation programs, chairs of ESA PEABS, and the professional organizations will communicate with their membership through newsletters. OSPI will also communicate with school districts so there is widespread understanding of the process. The OSPI web site will be updated periodically as new information and resources become available.

Evaluation plan

As the programs take shape, OSPI will work with the advisory committee and others to develop a comprehensive evaluation plan for the ESA professional certificate. At a minimum, this plan will include:

1. Strategies for surveying program completers, both at the time of program completion and two-three years following completion. The emphasis in these surveys will be on ways that the program has affected their professional practice.
2. Protocols for program reviews and site visits.
3. External review of evidence that has been accepted as satisfying the standards. As noted earlier, this review would seek to confirm that standards are being applied consistently.
4. A long-range research agenda that would seek empirical evidence that the professional certificate program was having a positive impact on student learning.

The detailed evaluation plan will be available by the time institutions bring their programs for approval to the PESB.

Other perspectives

What are other states doing?

How does this proposal compare with certification requirements in other states?

According to the NASDTEC Knowledgebase for **first tier** certification:

	School Counselor	School Psychologist	School Social Worker
Not a certified position	0	1	11
Bachelors level	4		6
Master’s level	39	24	20
Not reported	7	13	13

The NASDTEC knowledgebase only contains information about second-level *teacher* certification. However, based on our own research, we found some states that have

adopted a form of second-tier certification for ESA roles that is more performance-based and not based solely on experience or credits earned.

Wisconsin has a three-tiered certification system in which the third tier, modeled after National Board certification, is optional. The second-tier is earned through development and implementation of a standards-based Professional Development Plan that results in a portfolio. This process is used for all professional educators including teachers and administrators.

Conclusion

As Washington continues to move toward its goal of success for all students, the need for skillful and committed educators is clearer than ever. The state has already made significant progress toward this goal through the adoption of high standards and the development of performance-based residency preparation programs for ESAs. We believe that approval of the recommendations in this report will take the necessary next step forward.

The process outlined here offers substantial advantages:

- It advances the vision that has guided reform of Washington's educator preparation programs for the past decade.
- It reaffirms student learning and well-being as the core goals of school counselors, psychologists, and social workers
- It establishes a foundation for continuing collaboration/partnerships among professional associations, school districts, higher education, and the state.
- It provides appropriate support for the implementation of professional certificate programs.

While confident that this vision can be realized, we don't wish to minimize the considerable challenges that lie ahead. We know from the state's experience with the teacher professional certificate that an attractive vision and good intentions do not by themselves ensure success. The professional certificate for ESAs represents a considerable departure from past practices, and everyone involved—candidates, universities, professional associations, and the state—has much to learn. But we believe the journey is worth making.

Appendix A

ESA Framework Committee Members

School Counseling

Christine Jensen, Seattle University
Karyn Holt, Gonzaga University
Mary Schroeder, City University
Annette Towne, Coupsville School District
Tina Anctil, Washington State University
Sue Karstetter, Heritage University
Norm Walker, ESD 105

School Psychology

Keith Mars, Central Washington University PEAB
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Janine Jones, University of Washington
Susan Ruby, Eastern Washington University
Dr. Gene Johnson, Central Washington University

School Social Work

Curt Chambers, Eastern Washington University
Melissa Saxon, Franklin Pierce School District, UW PEAB
Mary Laabs, Walla Walla College
Ann Waybright, Bethel School District
Dianne Breen, Bethel School District

Barbara Tompkins, Spokane, Speech-Language Pathologist, WEA Representative
Connie Reichel, Professional Education and Certification Office, OSPI
(prior to retirement)
Judy Smith, Professional Education and Certification Office, OSPI
Mary Jo Larsen, Professional Education and Certification Office, OSPI

Appendix B

Professional Certificate for Educational Staff Associates

Guiding principles

Educational Staff Associates (ESAs) including School Counselors, School Psychologists, and School Social Workers use unique strengths and skills to provide leadership and support for students, families, communities, school staff, and administrators. As ESAs, we collaborate to improve student achievement by removing barriers to learning.

The professional certificate process provides a significant opportunity to help counselors, psychologists, and social workers perform their daily work more effectively and are leaders in meeting the needs of every student. To accomplish this goal, we believe the professional certificate process must adhere to the following principles:

The process should be deeply focused on addressing individual and diverse student needs and supporting improvement of student learning. Educational Staff Associates advocate for policies and practices that maximize student learning and narrow the achievement gap. The certification process is ultimately measured by the success of P-12 students.

The process should be job-embedded and aligned with national standards, best practices and school/district improvement goals. The professional certificate will be useful only to the degree that it increases ESAs' capacities to enhance student success.

The process should encourage reflection and a commitment to research-based strategies. The rapidly changing nature of schools and society means that ESAs cannot rely only on traditional strategies to accomplish goals. We need to invent and evaluate new strategies, deal objectively with value-laden issues, and set priorities among competing goals. Such innovation requires access to quality scholarship and research as well as a high capacity for thoughtfulness.

While programs will include university coursework, candidate success should be measured by performance to standards. In a system that is becoming increasingly performance-based, the preparation and development of ESAs also should focus on evidence keyed to standards. The ESA standards, including the professional-level benchmarks developed for Washington state, provide a solid platform and direction for professional growth.

The process should be adequately supported. The design of the professional certificate for ESAs will require time, attention, and resources from districts, professional associations, institutions of higher education, and state agencies. Effective implementation requires that all partners have the resources to carry out their designated roles.

The process should strike a balance between rigor and reasonableness. The challenges faced by today's ESAs demand an exceptionally high degree of skill and professionalism; at the same time, these challenges place exceptional time demands on ESAs. The

professional certificate program should help ESAs reach a distinctly higher level of performance in a way that allows them to meet the demands of their daily work.

The process should involve a true partnership among universities, professional associations, and districts. Professional associations, districts, universities, and the state all have made substantial efforts to advance the professional development of ESAs. This process should take advantage of the work that is already in progress and serve as a unifying agent in creating a seamless system of preparation and development for ESAs. Accordingly, all partners must endorse the goals of the program and have a clear understanding of their respective roles.

The process should model what it teaches. Just as candidates will be asked to provide evidence of performance to standards, the professional certificate process itself should, over time, demonstrate that the program is having a positive impact on candidates and the students they serve.