

Esteemed Members of the State Standards Board,

This school year, there are over 400 special education teaching openings across our state. We are writing to you today to request your assistance in addressing this shortage. Our request is as follows:

Direct entry bachelor degrees of 120 credit hours that lead to special education teaching licensure are established for the state of Kansas.

As you know, colleges and universities across our state offer a wide range of degree options. These include programs that offer tremendous flexibility, such as “Unified” bachelor degrees that lead to licensure in both general and special education. While these Unified bachelor degree options *do* exist at select colleges and universities, they still typically leave aspiring teachers who wish to enroll in a degree program with a challenging decision. As an example, an aspiring teacher can select a traditional Elementary Education bachelor degree program that often requires approximately 120 credit hours. However, Unified bachelor degrees (which lead to licensure in general and special education) consist of additional credit hours (and thus more time and tuition for students). At colleges and universities where the Unified option does *not* exist, the route to special education licensure is usually even more difficult to pursue, as the needed credit hours (and time/tuition) are even higher. When an aspiring educator with limited financial means is trying to decide which degree to pursue, the decision between...

- a general education degree that requires ~120 credit hours
- a degree plan that provides both general *and* special education credentials, but requires 130, 140, or even 150+ credit hours

...is often not a choice at all. Due to time, costs, and a need to begin earning a living wage, the first option often becomes a *necessity*.

This issue **can** be rectified through the availability of a direct entry, special education undergraduate (~120 credit hour) degree. Other states have already established this practice and have proven that it is a viable option. The creation of this degree program would eliminate the difficult decision described above, and would create a more accessible path for those who wish to serve our students with the highest level of need.

As public educators, by law, we have a federal requirement to meet the special education needs of our students. Abiding by this law with 400+ special education teaching vacancies is not only incredibly challenging, but it is a disservice to students who need our help the most. Thank you for considering how this important initiative could change the landscape of our field and give our students the support that they need to thrive.

Sincerely,

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Who might be willing to sign? KASEA? USA? KNEA? KPA? KBOR? TASN?