

Glossary of terms used in teacher preparation and/or in the *Teacher Prep Review*

Unless otherwise noted, definitions are those used both in teacher preparation **and** in this Review.

Accommodation:

An adjustment to classroom instruction or instructional materials that allows students with specific learning needs to access content.

Adaptation:

See “Accommodation.”

Certification/Licensure:

The state licensure of an individual to teach one or more subjects at a specified range of grades in the PK-12 classroom. Generally, teacher preparation programs recommend candidates for certification by the state.

Clinical coursework:

Coursework that requires teacher candidates to spend time in the PK-12 classroom observing, tutoring small groups, and/or delivering whole class instruction. This coursework includes, but is not limited to, student teaching.

Composite certification area:

See “Secondary Certification.”

Content coursework:

As used in this Review:

Coursework in a K-12 subject-area or discipline, such as English or physics. With the exception of courses in children’s literature and elementary mathematics, content coursework is designed for undergraduate or graduate students pursuing a degree in that subject, not just those students who are teacher candidates. For example, a course in American history offered in the history department and available to provide credit towards an undergraduate history degree is a “content course” generally required of both elementary and secondary teacher candidates.

Cooperating teacher:

The teacher in whose classroom a teacher candidate is placed for a student teaching experience. Teacher preparation programs may also refer to this teacher as a “mentor teacher,” “clinical faculty” (since the university supervisor is often called “clinical faculty” by other IHEs, those IHEs using this term for cooperating teacher use a different term for their university supervisors), or by any number of other titles.

Differentiated instruction:

As used in teacher prep:

“Differentiated instruction” refers to the process of developing and delivering instruction that accounts for the “different ways students learn.” There is no established meaning for “different ways” in teacher preparation or in K-12 education in general. That is, differentiation may be based on different levels of academic proficiency, different levels of aptitude (ranging from developmentally disabled to gifted), different first languages, different ethnic backgrounds, different levels of maturity, different intelligences among the “multiple intelligences,” different “learning styles,” (not a notion to which NCTQ subscribes, as described elsewhere in this glossary), or any or all of these.

As used in this Review:

In light of the fact that a requirement that a teacher candidate “differentiate instruction” is so broad, NCTQ has not considered it equivalent to explicit requirements that teacher candidates design instruction to meet the instructional needs of students with special needs, students for whom English is a second language and/or students who have demonstrated proficiency in relevant standards (aspects of the Lesson Planning standard). In the case of design of instruction for students with special needs and students for whom English is a second language, this explicit requirement may also be conveyed implicitly by requirement that the teacher candidate indicate “accommodations” (alternatively, “adaptations” or “modifications”) on the basis of the use of this term in federal statutory language regarding the education of students with special needs.

Dual certification:

Certification in two discrete areas, such as elementary education and special education. Note that “dual *subject* certification” is not synonymous and instead refers to a form of middle school certification in which teachers are certified to teach in two subject areas, such as both social studies and English, or both mathematics and science.

Elementary certification:

Certification to teach at some range of the elementary grades, as defined by state regulations. For more information on the grade span represented by “elementary certification” in each state, refer to the [Teacher Licensing Structure Infographics](#).

Endorsement:

Endorsements allow individuals to teach in specific grade levels or subject-areas outside of their first or primary area of certification. In some states the endorsement is equivalent to the primary certification. While a teacher preparation program might offer an endorsement and a primary certification in the same subject-area but with different coursework requirements, states commonly offer endorsements (such as a middle school endorsement on elementary certification, or a sociology endorsement on general social science certification) in areas in which teacher candidates cannot receive primary certification.

General audience course:

As used in this Review:

Coursework offered outside of the education department, school or college and designed for undergraduate or graduate students seeking a variety of degrees, not teacher preparation candidates specifically. An example is a biology course offered in the biology department. In contrast, “Biology in the Elementary Classroom” would not be a “general audience” course because it is designed only for teacher candidates. The latter course we term “teacher audience.”



General education course:

Coursework specified by the institution of higher education (IHE) as necessary to fulfill graduation requirements for a bachelors degree. Some or all of such coursework is sometimes required by the state. While the amount of general education coursework varies considerably among IHEs, most require that all undergraduates either demonstrate adequate preparation across a range of content with scores from tests that give them “advanced placement” or take one or more general education courses in mathematics, the humanities, and the sciences.

General science certification:

See “Secondary Certification.”

General social science certification:

See “Secondary Certification.”

Generalist (middle school) certification:

See “Secondary Certification.”

Learning styles:

A theory that claims that each student is most comfortable learning material in one particular “style,” the most commonly cited styles being kinesthetic/tactile, auditory, and visual. Regardless of the merits of the theory in the abstract, any advice that teacher candidates or teachers attempt to plan instruction tailored to students’ learning styles has been condemned by the American Psychological Association on the basis of a complete lack of research substantiation of its efficacy.¹

Licensure/Certification:

The state licensure of an individual to teach one or more subjects at a specified range of grades in the PK-12 classroom. Generally, teacher prep programs recommend candidates for certification by the state.

Low-profile desists:

Actions taken by a teacher to *proactively prevent* student behavior that can disrupt instruction and potentially escalate to significant misbehavior. The actions themselves do not interrupt the flow of instruction and may include non-verbal signals (such as eye contact or proximity), praise of good behavior or giving a rule reminder.

Methods course:

Coursework for teacher candidates on how to teach a specific subject. The focus is on *how* to teach and less on what to teach. An example is a course on “Teaching Social Studies in the Elementary Classroom.”

Middle school certification:

See “Secondary certification.”

Modification:

See “Accommodation.”

1 For more information on the lack of scientific backing for designing instruction tailored to learning styles, please see the [rationale](#) for Standard 11: Lesson Planning.

Multiple subject certification:

See “Secondary Certification.”

Pathway for secondary certification:

See “Secondary Certification.”

Professional coursework:

Coursework that focuses on the foundations of education and the concepts and skills of teaching. This coursework is generally offered within the education department, school or college, but may include courses offered in other departments, (such as an educational psychology course offered in the psychology department). In most undergraduate teacher prep programs, students interested in teaching careers take the bulk of professional coursework in their junior and senior years, after their admission to the program.

Secondary certification:

Secondary certification can allow a teacher to teach at the middle school level,² the high school level, or both, depending on state regulations. For more information on the grade span represented by each of these types of secondary certification in each state, refer to the [Teacher Licensing Structure Infographics](#).

Middle school certification may be single subject (either math, English/language arts, science or social studies), two subject (“**dual subject certification**,” typically, in English/social studies or math/science), or **multiple subject** (“**generalist**” for a teacher of all core subject areas).³

*The description below of high school certification or both middle school and high school (“secondary certification”) uses a term defined for the Review to generalize about terminology that varies by state. The term is “**pathway**.”*

High school or secondary certification has four **pathways** (math, English, the sciences and the social sciences) and can either be entirely **single subject** within each OR a combination of single certification in math and English and some mixture of single and **composite subject** in the sciences and social sciences. Composite subject certification in science is termed “**general science**,” and such certification may either allow a teacher to teach all sciences or simply a general science course; composite subject certification in the social sciences is termed **general social sciences** and such certification may either allow a teacher to teach all social sciences or simply a general social studies course. The structure of secondary certification depends on state regulation and varies by each state. (For information on the structure of each state’s secondary certification, refer to the [High School/Secondary Certification Framework Infographics](#).)

Regardless of variations in the sciences and social sciences pathways, in all states math and English are single subject certifications in which those seeking certification obtain a major in the discipline. If a state has single subject certification in the sciences and social sciences pathways, those seeking certification also obtain a major. For example, a biology certification in the sciences pathway will require a biology major and a physics certification in the sciences pathway

2 In most states, middle school teachers are certified at the elementary or high school levels and teach middle school on a middle school endorsement that signifies that they have taken additional specialized coursework and/or passed one or more additional licensing tests. In 31 states, middle school certification is a discrete category of certification.

3 However, we note that in California, elementary teacher certification is termed “multiple subject certification” to contrast it with secondary teacher certification, which is termed “single subject certification.”



will require a physics major. However, if there is composite certification in either or both of the sciences and social sciences pathways, the academic preparation that will be required is not easily generalized from state to state or even from IHE to IHE in the same state.

Single subject certification:

See “Secondary Certification.”

Special education certification:

Certification to teach as a special education teacher for the elementary grades, the secondary grades or both (grades PK-12), depending on state regulations. In some states, an elementary or secondary teacher may add a special education endorsement to her or his certification by taking additional specialized coursework and/or licensing tests. For information on the grade spans for which a state’s teacher prep programs can train a special education candidate, refer to Figure 12 in any state edition of the *NCTQ State Teacher Policy Yearbook* (access at: <http://www.nctq.org/stpy11Home.do>).

Student teaching:

As used in teacher prep:

A full-time experience in a cooperating teacher’s classroom during which a teacher candidate either experiences all of the responsibilities of a classroom teacher, including responsibility for instruction of the whole class for a week or more, or has significant co-teaching responsibilities.

As used in this Review:

A full-time experience in a cooperating teacher’s classroom during which a teacher candidate experiences all of the responsibilities of a classroom teacher, including responsibility for instruction of the whole class. We refer to the student teaching experience as being the “student teaching semester” because it most commonly occurs during the fall or spring semester of a teacher candidate’s last year in preparation. However, if the IHE is organized in a quarter system, we take the placement during a quarter as a full student teaching experience. In general, when we refer to a “semester” in this context, we are really referring to the *entire* full-time student teaching experience, regardless of length.

If the period described by the IHE as student teaching is longer than a single academic term and the IHE itself makes a categorical distinction between activities of the teacher candidate in the two terms (often done in terms of amounts of time in the classroom, responsibilities, and/or academic credit awarded), we count only the term that involves the greatest amount of classroom teaching (usually the final term) as “student teaching.”

Teacher audience course:

As used in this Review:

Coursework designed solely for teacher candidates. Examples are courses on elementary math offered by the IHE’s mathematics department or courses on methods of teaching elementary math taught in the education school.

Teacher candidate:

An undergraduate or graduate student who is taking the coursework required for certification as a teacher. If a formal admission process is required for teacher preparation, the student must have been admitted to the program.

University supervisor:

An individual employed by the IHE to supervise the teacher candidate in the student teaching experience. Most university supervisors are hired on a contract basis, but some are part- or full-time university faculty who teach other courses in addition to their supervision of student teachers.