

SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS

Academic and Student Affairs
Consent

AGENDA ITEM: 5 – B (4)
DATE: April 2-3, 2025

SUBJECT

New Graduate Certificate Request – NSU – Alternative Certification for Special Education Teachers

CONTROLLING STATUTE, RULE, OR POLICY

[BOR Policy 2.3.2](#) – New Programs, Program Modifications, and Inactivation/Termination

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

Northern State University (NSU) requests authorization to offer a graduate certificate in Alternative Certification for Special Education Teachers. The proposed certificate is designed to formally recognize and validate the completion of essential coursework and training for individuals seeking to meet state teaching requirements through the South Dakota Department of Education (DOE) alternative certification pathway. Completion of this graduate certificate does not automatically confer a special education endorsement.

IMPACT AND RECOMMENDATION

The proposed certificate will be offered on campus, online, and through HyFlex delivery. NSU does not request new resources. No new courses will be required.

Board office staff recommends approval.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment I – New Certificate Request Form: NSU – Alternative Certification for Special Education Teachers

DRAFT MOTION 20250402_5-B(4):

I move to authorize NSU to offer a graduate certificate in Alternative Certification for Special Education Teachers, as presented.



SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS ACADEMIC AFFAIRS FORMS

New Certificate

Use this form to propose a certificate program at either the undergraduate or graduate level. A certificate program is a sequence, pattern, or group of academic credit courses that focus upon an area of specialized knowledge or information and develop a specific skill set. Certificate programs typically are a subset of the curriculum offered in degree programs, include previously approved courses, and involve 9-12 credit hours including prerequisites. In some cases, standards for licensure will state explicit requirements leading to certificate programs requiring more than 12 credit hours (in such cases, exceptions to course or credit requirements must be justified and approved). The Board of Regents, Executive Director, and/or their designees may request additional information about the proposal. After the university President approves the proposal, submit a signed copy to the Executive Director through the system Chief Academic Officer. Only post the New Certificate Form to the university website for review by other universities after approval by the Executive Director and Chief Academic Officer.

UNIVERSITY:	NSU
TITLE OF PROPOSED CERTIFICATE:	Alternative Certification for Special Education Teachers
INTENDED DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION:	Fall 2025
PROPOSED CIP CODE:	13.1001
UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT:	Teacher Education
BANNER DEPARTMENT CODE:	NESE
UNIVERSITY DIVISION:	Millicent Atkins School of Education
BANNER DIVISION CODE:	5E

Please check this box to confirm that:

- The individual preparing this request has read [AAC Guideline 2.3.2.2.C](#), which pertains to new certificate requests, and that this request meets the requirements outlined in the guidelines.
- This request will not be posted to the university website for review of the Academic Affairs Committee until it is approved by the Executive Director and Chief Academic Officer.

University Approval

To the Board of Regents and the Executive Director: I certify that I have read this proposal, that I believe it to be accurate, and that it has been evaluated and approved as provided by university policy.

Michael Wanous

Institutional Approval Signature
President or Chief Academic Officer of the University

2/5/2025
Date

Note: In the responses below, references to external sources, including data sources, should be documented with a footnote (including web addresses where applicable).

1. Is this a graduate-level certificate or undergraduate-level certificate (place an “X” in the appropriate box)?

Undergraduate Certificate Graduate Certificate

2. What is the nature/ purpose of the proposed certificate? Please include a brief (1-2 sentence) description of the academic field in this certificate.

Northern State University’s graduate certificate in alternative certification for special education teachers is designed to formally recognize and validate the completion of essential coursework and training for individuals seeking to meet state teaching requirements through the SD Department of Education alternative certification pathway. Completion of this graduate certificate does not automatically confer a special education endorsement. Additional requirements, as specified by the South Dakota Department of Education, must be met to obtain the endorsement.

3. If you do not have a major in this field, explain how the proposed certificate relates to your university mission and strategic plan, and to the current Board of Regents Strategic Plan 2014-2020.

Links to the applicable State statute, Board Policy, and the Board of Regents Strategic Plan are listed below for each campus.

BHSU:	SDCL § 13-59	BOR Policy 1.2.1
DSU:	SDCL § 13-59	BOR Policy 1.2.2
NSU:	SDCL § 13-59	BOR Policy 1.2.3
SDSMT:	SDCL § 13-60	BOR Policy 1.2.4
SDSU:	SDCL § 13-58	BOR Policy 1.2.5
USD:	SDCL § 13-57	BOR Policy 1.2.6

[Board of Regents Strategic Plan](#)

4. Provide a justification for the certificate program, including the potential benefits to students and potential workforce demand for those who graduate with the credential. For workforce related information, please provide data and examples. Data may include, but are not limited to the South Dakota Department of Labor, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Regental system dashboards, etc. Please cite any sources in a footnote.

NSU proposes the establishment of a graduate certificate in alternative certification for special education teachers to formally recognize individuals who complete the approved curriculum for alternative certification, aligning with South Dakota Department of Education requirements.

Offering a graduate certificate provides formal acknowledgment of the achievement of individuals who complete the required coursework. This enhances their professional credentials and ensures that schools and districts can easily identify candidates who meet the state’s alternative certification standards.

Currently, students pursuing alternative certification coursework are classified as non-degree seeking, meaning their programs of study are not documented in the NSU catalog or Degree Works system. This lack of formal recognition makes it challenging for students, NSU faculty, and Graduate Studies staff to track progress toward credential completion. A certificate program would resolve these issues by providing clear pathways, enabling progress tracking, and ensuring students are assigned an advisor for academic support throughout the program.

Additionally, establishing a formal certificate program allows the Chair of Teacher Education to plan course offerings more effectively, align faculty workloads with program demand, and manage enrollment efficiently. This operational clarity ensures NSU is prepared to meet the needs of students while maintaining academic excellence.

The need for this program is underscored by South Dakota's significant shortage of special education teachers. The U.S. Department of Education lists special education as a shortage area at all levels (PreK-12) within the state.[1] As of January 3, 31 special education positions were advertised on the SD Teacher Placement website, highlighting the urgency of producing qualified professionals in this field.[2] K-12 Special Education is a critical need occupation for the purpose of the Critical Needs Scholarship and the Dakota Corps Scholarship.

South Dakota implemented the Special Education Alternative Certification pathway on July 1, 2017, to address this critical shortage. This pathway allows experienced educators with valid teaching certificates and relevant professional experience to earn the necessary endorsement by completing a 15-credit DOE-approved curriculum. This curriculum includes a 6-credit, year-long special education practicum and 9 credits in special education law, assessment, and instructional methods.

Northern State University is approved by the SD Department of Education for alternative certification for Special Education, and Northern already offers all of the courses required for alternative certification. Northern has teachers pursuing alternative certification for Special Education taking Northern courses. Right now, Northern is tracking these students on an Excel file and manually updating the file, which is not efficient or an effective use of staff or technology systems. Formalizing the pathway in a graduate certificate enables Northern to better serve our students. Students seeking alternative certification in Special Education will have a program in Degree Works, have an assigned faculty advisor, and will earn a graduate certificate. The University of South Dakota offers an alternative certification program, allowing them to track the teachers pursuing this credential in Degree Works and in their program-seeking headcount.

By formalizing the pathway with a graduate certificate, Northern aligns with best practices in program delivery and recognition, offering students a streamlined, officially designated credential that meets the state's professional standards and that will appear on the student's transcript.

[1] Associated School Boards of South Dakota's Teacher Placement System.

<https://teachers.cometeachinsd.com/>

[2] U.S. Department of Education. Teacher Shortage Areas. <https://tsa.ed.gov/#/reports>

5. Who is the intended audience for the certificate program (including but not limited to the majors/degree programs from which students are expected)?

Students eligible to enroll in the alternative certification for special education teachers graduate certificate program must already hold a valid teaching certificate and have at least three years of teaching experience in the last five years. Completing the coursework for the alternative certification for special education teachers graduate certificate is the next step toward obtaining the special education endorsement issued by the South Dakota Department of Education.

6. Certificate Design

- A. Is the certificate designed as a stand-alone education credential option for students not seeking additional credentials (i.e., a bachelor's or master's degree)? If so, what areas of high workforce demand or specialized body of knowledge will be addressed through this certificate?**

The certificate is a stand-alone educational credential issued to individuals pursuing alternative special education teacher certification through the South Dakota Department of Education. The coursework is designed to align with the specific requirements for alternative special education teacher certification established by the State of South Dakota.

- B. Is the certificate a value added credential that supplements a student's major field of study? If so, list the majors/programs from which students would most benefit from adding the certificate.**

Individuals seeking alternative certification from the State of South Dakota must complete the coursework contained in the alternative certification for special education teachers graduate certificate program.

- C. Is the certificate a stackable credential with credits that apply to a higher level credential (i.e., associate, bachelor's, or master's degree)? If so, indicate the program(s) to which the certificate stacks and the number of credits from the certificate that can be applied to the program.**

The certificate is a stackable credential, and all credits can be applied to Northern's MSED in Special Education.

- 7. List the courses required for completion of the certificate in the table below (if any new courses are proposed for the certificate, please attach the new course requests to this form). *Certificate programs by design are limited in the number of credit hours required for completion. Certificate programs consist of nine (9) to twelve (12) credit hours, including prerequisite courses. In addition, certificates typically involve existing courses. If the curriculum consists of more than twelve (12) credit hours (including prerequisites) or includes new courses, please provide explanation and justification below.***

Northern's alternative certification for special education teachers graduate certificate program is required to be more than 12 credit hours to meet coursework requirements set by the SD Department of Education for the alternative certification pathway.

The curriculum is already recognized by the SD Department of Education as meeting the coursework requirements for the alternative certification pathway.

The curriculum for Northern's alternative certification for special education teachers graduate certificate program includes coursework already taught in Northern's MSED in Special Education. These courses are already supported by Northern and taught on a regular basis by highly qualified faculty.

Prefix	Number	Course Title <i>(add or delete rows as needed)</i>	Prerequisites for Course <i>Include credits for prerequisites in subtotal below.</i>	Credit Hours	New (yes, no)
EDAD	720	Special Education Law for School Administrators		3	No
SPED	531	Identification and Assessment in Special Education		3	No
SPED	704	Inclusive Education		3	No
SPED	795	Practicum		6	No
Subtotal				15	

8. Student Outcome and Demonstration of Individual Achievement.

Board Policy 2:23 requires certificate programs to “have specifically defined student learning outcomes.

A. What specific knowledge and competencies, including technology competencies, will all students demonstrate before graduation? *The knowledge and competencies should be specific to the program and not routinely expected of all university graduates.*

Students will:

- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of special education law, including compliance with IDEA and Section 504, and apply legal and ethical considerations when administering special education services in their schools.
- Skillfully utilize a variety of assessment tools and methods to accurately identify students with disabilities and plan individualized education programs (IEPs) tailored to their unique needs.
- Design and implement evidence-based instructional strategies that promote inclusion and meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities, fostering equitable and supportive learning environments in both special education and general education classrooms.
- Effectively apply their knowledge of special education practices in real-world settings through hands-on practicum experiences, demonstrating leadership and advocacy for students with disabilities in their schools.

B. Complete the table below to list specific learning outcomes – knowledge and competencies – for courses in the proposed program in each row. Label each column heading with a course prefix and number. Indicate required courses with an asterisk (*). Indicate with an X in the corresponding table cell for any student outcomes that will be met by the courses included. All students should acquire the program knowledge and competencies regardless of the electives selected. Modify the table as necessary to provide the requested information for the proposed program.

Individual Student Outcome (Same as in the text of the proposal)	EDAD 720	SPED 531	SPED 704	SPED 795
Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of special education law, including compliance with IDEA and Section 504, and apply legal and ethical considerations when administering special education services in their schools.	X			
Skillfully utilize a variety of assessment tools and methods to accurately identify students with disabilities and plan individualized education programs (IEPs) tailored to their unique needs.		X		
Design and implement evidence-based instructional strategies that promote inclusion and meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities, fostering equitable and supportive learning environments in both special education and general education classrooms.			X	
Effectively apply their knowledge of special education practices in real-world settings through hands-on practicum experiences, demonstrating leadership and advocacy for students with disabilities in their schools.				X

Modify the table as necessary to include all student outcomes. Outcomes in this table are to be the same ones identified in the text.

9. Delivery Location.

Note: The accreditation requirements of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) require Board approval for a university to offer programs off-campus and through distance delivery.

A. Complete the following charts to indicate if the university seeks authorization to deliver the entire program on campus, at any off campus location (e.g., USD Community College for Sioux Falls, Black Hills State University-Rapid City, Capital City Campus, etc.) or deliver the entire program through distance technology (e.g., as an on-line program)?

	Yes/No	Intended Start Date
On campus	Yes	Fall 2025

	Yes/No	If Yes, list location(s)	Intended Start Date
Off campus	No		Choose an item. Choose an item.

	Yes/No	If Yes, identify delivery methods <i>Delivery methods are defined in AAC Guideline 2.4.3.B.</i>	Intended Start Date
Distance Delivery (online/other distance delivery methods)	Yes	X02 HyFlex, X15 Online Asynchronous	Fall 2025
Does another BOR institution already have authorization to	Yes	If yes, identify institutions: USD	

offer the program online?			
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B. Complete the following chart to indicate if the university seeks authorization to deliver more than 50% but less than 100% of the certificate through distance learning (e.g., as an on-line program)? This question responds to HLC definitions for distance delivery.

	Yes/No	<i>If Yes, identify delivery methods</i>	<i>Intended Start Date</i>
Distance Delivery (online/other distance delivery methods)	Yes	X02 HyFlex, X15 Online Asynchronous	Fall 2025