

The Early Support for Infants and Toddlers Credential for Developmental Specialists and Developmental Associates

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As of April 1, 2025, the Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) Credential will be available for all Developmental Specialists (DS), and Developmental Associates (DA) in Washington state. The Department for Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), as the State Lead Agency for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C services, has the authority and responsibility to determine and assure qualifications of ESIT providers through a comprehensive credentialing system. The ESIT Credential signifies that an ESIT professional has met requirements defined in the [Qualified Personnel Guidelines \(QPGs\)](#), and is qualified to provide Developmental Services, also known as Special Instruction, and other related IDEA Part C services.



Washington State Department of
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Terminology Changes for Statewide Consistency

To provide more clarity across the ESIT statewide system that better reflects the intention for the ESIT service, the term “Developmental Services” will replace “Special Instruction” across the Washington ESIT system. This change in the ESIT Part C service name is more reflective of actual service provided to children and their families regarding the holistic view and support of a child’s global developmental progress (see Scope of Work below).

The official title “Developmental Specialist” (DS) will replace “Special Educator,” as indicated in previous versions of the QPG. The title “Developmental Associate” (DA) will replace “Paraeducator under Supervision.” Additionally, the titles of “Developmental Specialist – Deaf and Hard of Hearing” (DS-DHH) and “Developmental Specialist – Blind and Low Vision” (DS-BLV) will replace current variations for “Teacher of the Deaf” (TOD) or “Teacher of the Visually Impaired” (TVI).

These changes in no way diminish the role of educators and teachers in the ESIT system as essentially the role of the DS, DS-DHH, DS-BLV, and DA is educational in nature. However, there is a need for consistent terminology and a separate distinction of the discipline in the ESIT system compared to school-based services (Part B). ESIT Provider Agencies may use other titles, such as educator or special educator, for their employees and contractors for agency personnel purposes and for those who may also support students in school-based (Part B) services after transition from ESIT. However, ESIT official titles will be used within ESIT service delivery with families, within Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP), and as billing entities for ESIT Part C services.

Terminology changes will be official July 1, 2025 with the publication of the revised QPG.

Timelines

Beginning April 1, 2025, the ESIT Credential application **will be available** for DS, DS-DHH, DS-BLV, and DA and will be awarded to those who meet qualifications.

New Providers

- Beginning July 1, 2025, the ESIT Credential **will be required** for all new DS, DS-DHH, DS-BLV, and DA within 6 months of their hire or contract date.

Current Providers

- Current Providers are those hired *prior* to July 1, 2025.
- The ESIT Credential **will be required** for all current DS, DS-DHH, DS-BLV, and DA by December 31, 2025.
- Current providers who met the QPGs *prior* to July 1, 2025, including those with an OSPI teaching certificate with an endorsement in Special Education, Early Childhood Special Education, Deaf Education, and/or Visual Impairment, those with an ESIT exemption, or those with a “Paraeducator under supervision” letter from DCYF ESIT, will be issued the appropriate ESIT Credential after application.

- Those hired **AFTER July 1, 2021**, when the Initial Training Requirements were implemented for new employees or contractors, should have already completed the Initial Training Requirements and can be issued the credential after application review.
- Those hired **PRIOR to July 1, 2021**, before the Initial Training Requirements were implemented for new employees or contractors, will be issued the appropriate credential after application review, with or without the completion of the Initial Training Requirements. If training requirements are incomplete, they will have the entire three-year credential period to complete the Initial Training Requirements to meet requirements for renewal. The completion of training can be counted as towards the professional development requirements, including clock hours if needed.

Scope of Work in Developmental Services

Developmental Services, also known as Special Instruction, is a core ESIT service that may be provided to eligible infants, toddlers, and their families. According to Part C of IDEA (CFR 303.12 (13)(i-iv)), Developmental Services, include:

- “The design of learning environments and activities that promote the child’s acquisition of skills in a variety of developmental areas, including cognitive processes and social interaction;
- Curriculum planning including the planned interaction of personnel, materials, and time and space, that leads to achieving the outcomes in the child’s individualized family service plan;
- Providing families with information, skills, and support related to enhancing the skill development of the child; and
- Working with the caregiver and child to enhance the child’s development.”
(CEC/DEC, 2024)

More information regarding the scope of work in Developmental Services can be obtained in the 2024 Division for Early Childhood position paper entitled [The Role of Special Instruction in Early Intervention](#) (CEC/DEC, 2024). In addition to the contents of this position paper, the Appendix outlines what Developmental Services are and are not, which may be helpful in building understanding of the role of the Developmental Services service provider.

Developmental Specialist (DS), including DHH and BLV

- 1) Provide Developmental Services to children and families and might supervise, guide, and mentor direct services provided by a DA.
- 2) Plan and conduct evaluations and/or assessments using developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate, valid, and reliable tools, authentic assessment, and informed clinical opinion to establish eligibility and measure ongoing progress. The DS brings a holistic view of child development to ESIT services and are a qualified provider to be considered one of the disciplines on a multi-disciplinary evaluation team.
- 3) Design and implement services outlined in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) utilizing a variety of evidence-based practices including, but not limited to, natural learning environments, caregiver coaching, and routines-based practices.

Developmental Associate (DA)

- 1) Provide Developmental Services to children and families under the direct guidance and supervision of a credentialed DS, DS-DHH, or DS-BLV. All DAs should have a Supervision Plan on file that is individualized based on experience, knowledge, and skills.
 - a. Components of Supervision Plans should include:
 - i. Frequency of contact – Minimum monthly contact is recommended and could include additional contacts such as weekly touch bases, monthly in-person planning, or quarterly joint home visits.
 - ii. Type of contact - such as phone calls, virtual meetings, or in person to plan service delivery, reflect together on caseload, and conduct joint visits with families according to IFSP.
 - iii. Evaluation/assessments responsibilities - such as who conducts, writes reports, updates present levels of developments, and how the DS will sign off on the work completed by the DA.
 - iv. Service delivery responsibilities – such as who is listed on the IFSP (may be different per child/family), if joint home visits are needed and how conducted, and in general a description of supports for the DA.
- 2) Participate in eligibility evaluations, but may not act alone to complete a tool, interpret results, or determine eligibility. The DA is not a qualified provider to be considered one of the disciplines on a multi-disciplinary evaluation team. However, if both a child development and assessment course are completed, the DA may complete ongoing assessments with a tool to measure child progress and can assist in the drafting of reports to be finalized and signed by the DS as outlined in Supervision Plan.
- 3) Assist in the creation of the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) as a member of the team. Also, implement services as outlined in the IFSP with guidance and mentorship from the DS as defined in the Supervision Plan. If both the DA and the DS provide direct services (Developmental Services) to the family, they both should be listed on the IFSP.

Credential Qualification Requirements

The ESIT Credential for DS expands the current educational requirements to create more inclusive pathways by eliminating the requirement for obtaining and maintaining a teaching certificate. The decision to obtain and maintain an Office for Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) teaching certificate with endorsements in Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), Deaf/Hard of Hearing Education, and/or Blind/Low Vision Education will be up to the individual ESIT Service Provider and their employer as an additional requirement to those set by DCYF.

The ESIT Credential for DA establishes qualifications to ensure the ESIT provider has knowledge and skills necessary to provide quality of service to children and families. Additionally, supervision requirements are outlined to ensure the ESIT provider is supported.

To be eligible for the ESIT credential, the DS and DA must meet educational degree requirements for their role and complete all [Initial Training Requirements](#). Training requirements can be met within six-months of hire or contract, therefore the ESIT Credential should not be a condition of hire and can be obtained after hire. Hiring managers should, however, be aware and knowledgeable about the qualifications for each of the credentials to assist in hiring decisions.

Developmental Specialist (DS), including DHH and BLV

There are two equivalent pathways of qualification for the DS.

- 1) If an applicant holds a minimum of a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) or Inclusive Early Childhood Education, or has graduated from an accredited program for the Education for Students/Children who are Blind or have Low Vision (BLV), Education of Students/Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH), and/or Education for Students/Children who are DeafBlind (DB), they will be approved for the credential without transcript review.
 - a. For Developmental Specialists – DB, formal university course work in DeafBlind can be waived with the following:
 - i. Hold an ESIT credential as DS-DHH or DS-BVI,
 - ii. Complete National Center for DeafBlind (NCDB) Early Support modules
 - iii. Foundations in DeafBlind Infant Toddler Training by WA DeafBlind Program
 - iv. Two years supervision and mentoring by WA DeafBlind Program
- 2) If an applicant holds a minimum of a Bachelor's degree in an ECSE adjacent or related field, such as, but not limited to, Child Development, Child and Family Studies, Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Human Development, or Special Education, a transcript review will be completed.

The following coursework is required when an applicant for the DS credential holds a Bachelor's in related field to ECSE. Courses should be aligned to the [ESIT Competencies](#) and the [Council for Exceptional Children \(CEC\) Division of Early Childhood \(DEC\) 2020 Standards for Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education](#).

- Child Development
 - ESIT Competency 1: Child Growth and Development
 - CEC/DEC Standard 1: Child Development and Early Learning
- Family Systems/Family Centered Practices*
 - ESIT Competency 4: Family and Community Partnerships
 - ESIT Competency 6: Interactions
 - CEC/DEC Standard 2: Partnering with Families
 - CEC/DEC Standard 3: Collaboration and Teaming
- Assessment and Evaluation
 - ESIT Competency 3: Ongoing Measurement of Child Progress
 - Standard 4: Assessment Process
- Interventions/Curriculum Development*
 - ESIT Competency 2: Curriculum and Learning Environment

- CEC/DEC Standard 5: Application of Curriculum Frameworks in the Planning of Meaning Learning Experience
- CEC/DEC Standard 6: Using Responsive and Reciprocal Interactions, Intervention, and Instruction

*Direct service experience of at least four years with children birth through five with disabilities and their families can be substituted for the Family Systems/Family Centered Practices and Intervention/Curriculum Development courses.

Summary of Pathways for Developmental Specialist

Pathway #1	Pathway #2
Minimum Bachelor's degree in ECSE or Inclusive ECE	Minimum Bachelor's degree in related field such as Child Development, Child and Family Studies, Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Human Development, or Special Education
OR	AND
Minimum Bachelor' Degree and completion of an accredited program for Education of Children/Students who are BLV, DHH, and/or Deaf Blind	Transcript review for the following courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Development • Family Systems/Family Centered Practices • Assessment & Evaluation • Interventions/Curriculum Development
	OR
	Transcript review for the above courses with at least 4 years of experience working directly with children with disabilities, and their families as substitute for Family Systems/Family Centered Practices and Interventions/Curriculum Development

Developmental Associate (DA)

There are two non-equivalent pathways of qualification for the DA.

- 1) If an applicant holds a minimum of an Associate's degree (or equivalent) in Early Childhood Education (or related degree such as, but not limited to, Child and Family Studies, Child Life Studies, or Child Development), they will be approved for the credential. An equivalent to an Associate's degree is 90 quarter or 60 semester credits.
- 2) If an applicant does not hold a minimum of an Associate's degree but is actively enrolled at a college or university with at least 45 quarter or 30 semester credits and has completed a child development course, they will be approved for a three-year non-renewable provisional

credential on the condition of a written Plan of Study on file.

- a. Plan of Study should outline the plan to complete the degree, such as coursework in a program and when courses will be taken. The applicant may apply for full credential at any time during the provisional three-year period.
- b. If provisional credential holders do not complete their degree within three years, they can work with their employer to assume another ESIT role as they complete their plan of study and reapply, when appropriate. Provisional credentials are non-renewable and only awarded once.

Summary of Pathways for Developmental Associate

Pathway #1	Provisional Pathway #2
Minimum Associate's degree in Early Childhood Education (ECE) or related field such as Child and Family Studies, Child Life Studies, or Child Development	Actively working toward Associate's degree in related field
OR	AND
Equivalent (90 quarter or 60 semester credits) of Associate's degree in Early Childhood Special Education, Early Childhood Education (ECE), Special Education, Child and Family Studies, Child Life Studies, Child Development, or related field.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enrollment in ECE or related program at college/university• Minimum of 45 credits quarter or 30 credits semester completed• Child Development course• Written Plan of Study on file

How to apply

To apply, complete the online [Credential Application](#). Include college or university transcripts, OSPI teaching certificate with endorsements, ESIT Exemption letter, or other documents with your application, if applicable and relevant.

Applicants will receive immediate notification of their application as received. Within 60 days, the applicant will receive notification that their application has been reviewed and processed. The appropriate credential certificate will be posted in the applicant's Training Portal account where it can be printed and filed in personnel records, as needed. If deficiencies are identified, applicant will be given information to fulfill requirements.

Renewal Requirements and Procedures

ESIT Credentials will be valid for three years from issue date. To *maintain* the ESIT Credential, the DS, DS-DHH, DS-BLV, and DA will be expected to complete 36 hours of ongoing professional development over the three-year credential period. Each credential holder will be responsible for tracking those training hours and may use the optional Training Documentation Form to be retained in their agency's personnel file.

The three-year credential period will begin on the credential issue date with an expiration date after three years. Each DS, DS-DHH, DS-BLV, and DA is responsible for renewing their ESIT credential within 60 calendar days prior to expiration date.

Professional development must be relevant to IDEA Part C services and aligned to ESIT Competencies, which may include, but are not limited to:

- Early Relational Health practices including Infant Mental Health
- Family Centered Practices
- Trauma Informed Care and Healing Centered Practices
- Coaching Families
- Evidence Based Practices
- Leadership and Teaming in the ESIT Program
- Culturally Responsive and Relevant Services

Ongoing professional development hours can be obtained in a variety of ways, including through ESIT sponsored trainings, conferences, online trainings, or by completing college coursework. ESIT sponsored [training calendar](#) and course descriptions are available at the ESIT webpage for [Professional Development](#).

The DS, DS-DHH, or DS-BLV, who also hold an OSPI teaching certificate (though not required) in addition to the ESIT Credential, may earn clock hours from DCYF ESIT sponsored training approved for clock hours and can use clock hours toward the professional development requirements for ESIT Credential renewal.

Lapsed Credential

ESIT professionals who allow their credential to lapse or expire are no longer eligible to provide ESIT services. If credentials expire without renewal, the DS, DS-DHH, DS-BLV, and DA may apply for a temporary waiver by communicating directly with the DCYF ESIT Workforce Development team at dcyf.esittraining@dcyf.wa.gov.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: I have an unrelated bachelor's degree, with a minor in a related field. Does this meet the requirements for a Developmental Specialist?

A: Maybe. It would depend on your bachelor's degree, including the minor, and the courses taken which align with the required courses listed within this document.

Q: I have an unrelated bachelor's degree. If I earn an AA in a related field, does this meet the requirements for a Developmental Specialist?

A: Maybe. Again, it would depend on the bachelor's degree and the courses taken which align with the require courses listed within this document. However, an AA in a related field would meet the requirements for a Developmental Associate credential.

Q: What level of courses meet the requirement for college coursework?

A: Courses must be a minimum of 100 level, and be aligned to the [ESIT Competencies](#) and the [CEC/DEC 2020 Standards for Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education](#).

Q: Do childcare basics trainings or courses meet the education requirement for the Developmental Specialist credential?

A: No.

Q: My OSPI teaching certificate has expired. Am I still eligible for the ESIT credential?

A: Yes. OSPI teaching certificates are not a required component of the ESIT credential.

Q: Do I need to maintain my OSPI teaching certificates after I obtain my ESIT credential?

A: There are many reasons why a DS, DS-DHH, and DS-BLV may choose to maintain their teaching certificate after their ESIT credential is issued, however for ESIT services it is not required. Some ESIT Provider Agencies may continue to require it as a condition of employment. DCYF ESIT will continue to offer various trainings for clock hours for the convenience of providers with current teaching certificates who choose to maintain or is required by their employer.

Q: I am an FRC and also provide Developmental Services. Can I hold two credentials?

A: Yes. If you meet the qualifications, you may hold more than one credential. Both credentials will be required to be renewed with 36 hours of professional development hours every three years. However, the same professional development hour may count for each, if relevant for both roles. Keep in mind, the credential renewal period may be different if each credential was awarded at different times. The professional may need to keep track of more than one renewal period.

Appendix: Which credential should I apply for?

This decision tree is intended to help determine which credential to apply for, either Developmental Specialist or Developmental Associate.

1. Do you have a teaching certificate (current or expired) with an endorsement in any of the following?
 - a. Special Education
 - b. Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)
 - c. Deaf Education
 - d. Visual Impairment
 - ✓ Yes: You qualify for a Developmental Specialist Credential
 - ✓ No: Go to Step 2
2. Do you have a letter from DCYF ESIT granting you an exemption to deliver special instruction on IFSPs?
 - ✓ Yes: You qualify for a Developmental Specialist Credential
 - ✓ No: Go to Step 3
3. Do you have a BA in ECSE or Inclusive Early Childhood Education?
 - ✓ Yes: You qualify for a Developmental Specialist Credential
 - ✓ No: Go to Step 4
4. Do you have a BA in a related field with applicable coursework?
 - ✓ Yes: You qualify for a Developmental Specialist Credential
 - ✓ No: Go to Step 5
5. Do you have an Associate's Degree in ECE or a related field OR 90 quarter or 60 semester credits in ECE or related studies?
 - ✓ Yes: You qualify for a Developmental Associate Credential
 - ✓ No: Go to Step 6
6. Are you enrolled in an ECE or related program and have completed 45 quarter or 30 semester credits, including child development?

- ✓ Yes: You qualify for a provisional Developmental Associate Credential
- ✓ No: You may not qualify for a credential at this time.