



Welcome!

In the state of Texas, as in many other states, there is a rigorous certification examination that potential administrators must pass before they are eligible for certification. In Texas, this test is called the Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES). There is tremendous pressure on current and future educators to pass specific TExES exams over varying content. Without passing a specific TExES exam, they cannot be state certified in that area. There is also tremendous pressure on preparation programs for their students to do well on these tests. Potential exam takers from both inside and outside the state are looking for tools to help them achieve their goal of certification and employment in a specific arena. This book addresses how to become the world's best special education teacher regardless of whether you are taking the initial Early Childhood–12 (EC–12) exam or whether you are already certified in another area and are now seeking supplemental or additional certification in special education. There are separate exams for each of those scenarios. This book addresses both.

Universities and alternative preparation programs work hard to address both the knowledge and the philosophical bases on which both special education TExES exams are framed. The tests are built on a foundation of domains and competencies within the domains. The state assumes that test takers have received the basic knowledge and research preparation through their educational providers. This book supplies needed additional resources for the knowledge base, but it is not intended to substitute for a bachelor's or master's degree. It will focus, however, on the philosophy necessary to think like a learner-centered special education teacher. Many students find it difficult to make the transition from thinking in a realistic manner into thinking in an idealistic manner. These tests are designed for the ideal special education teacher who always thinks of the needs of the students first, never tires, never gets frustrated, and never gives up. Right now, you may already be thinking that philosophy is impossible. Well, guess what. It may not be realistic, but it is idealistic. On the day you test, you are *idealistic*, not realistic. All of the knowledge in the world is useless if you cannot think in the way the test was developed. *Passing the Special Education TExES Examination: Keys to Certification and*

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Exceptional Leaders addresses this philosophy as well as the skills that all teachers must have within each of the domains and competencies to be successful. This book also provides test-taking tips for before, during, and after the exam. Specific attention is given to in-state and out-of-state test takers. There is also a “Suggested Additional Reading” section near the end of the book that supplies additional resources, organized per domain, which will be helpful as you develop the knowledge and philosophical bases necessary to pass the test and pursue beginning or continuing careers as lifelong learners.

Finally, this book is written in an informal, first-person voice. There are real-life stories and applications integrated into each competency to help the reader tie concepts to reality. It is absolutely necessary that test takers apply their knowledge and skills to the test—as well as to life in general. In a friendly, supportive manner, *Passing the Special Education TExES Examination* helps test takers and others interested in student-centered teaching to integrate TExES competencies and domains into real-world application. It is written based on the years of experience I have as a teacher, counselor, principal, professor, and school board member as well as in providing popular, successful, and inspiring TExES preparation seminars at universities, regional service centers, and other training sites around the state.

Let’s see how.

OVERVIEW OF THE TEXES LEARNER-CENTERED DOMAINS AND COMPETENCIES

The Early Childhood-12 (EC-12) special education TExES exam is divided into three domains with 12 competencies.

The three domains of the EC-12 exam are:

- Understanding Individuals With Disabilities and Evaluating Their Needs
- Promoting Student Learning and Development
- Foundations and Professional Roles and Responsibilities

The supplemental special education exam has four domains with 10 competencies. There is considerable overlap between these and the EC-12 domains and competencies, which are explained fully within the text.

The four domains of the supplemental exam are:

- Understanding Individuals With Disabilities and Evaluating Their Needs
- Promoting Student Learning and Development
- Promoting Student Achievement in English, Language Arts, and Reading and in Mathematics
- Foundations and Professional Roles and Responsibilities

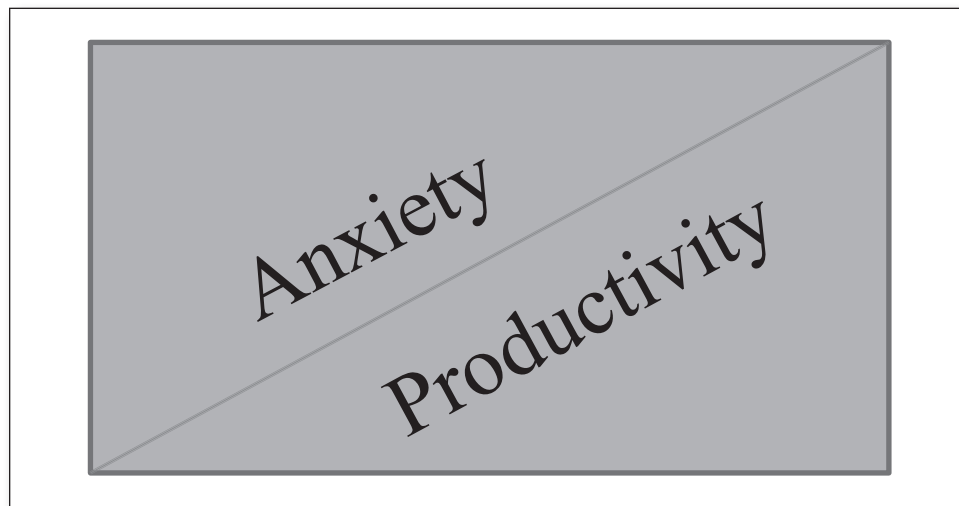
There are no absolute numbers of questions per competency or domain. My goal is for *all* my students to get *all* the questions correct, regardless of which domain or competency a question comes from. Nonetheless, a student does not have to score 100% to pass the exam. For many students, simply realizing they do not have to earn a perfect score on the test, or even each domain, helps to remove some of the pressure. This is a benefit because half the battle of passing this test is a mind game. In other words, you must know and believe that you can and will succeed before you enter the testing site. It is my intention for everyone reading this book to win the mind game. You should walk in to take the test feeling cool, calm, collected, confident—and even downright cocky; you should walk out feeling the same. This mental attitude is necessary to lower your level of stress. When your stress level goes up, your productivity goes down (see Figure 1.1). I want your stress level down and your productivity to be extremely high. Therefore, you should be cool, calm, collected, confident, and downright cocky throughout both your preparation and the test-taking experience.

Many people place great emphasis on figuring out exactly which competency each question addresses. Although I discuss this strategy, it does not receive undue attention. Remember, if our goal is to get every question correct, why do we care from which competency the question came? We do not; we want to get all the questions right. Nonetheless, upon becoming thoroughly familiar with each of the competencies, as you will by reading Chapters 2 through 16, you will recognize key words and concepts that will guide your selection of the appropriate answers to get all the questions right—or at least enough questions correct to pass the test!

In addition to the overlap of domains and competencies between the two tests, there is also significant overlap of key themes within the competencies. Since the test is largely a timed mind game, why would you want to get stressed out, with the clock ticking, by worrying if a question is addressing Competency 001 or 003? Who cares? The important thing is to understand, integrate, and live the competencies. Make them your “Ideal Teacher’s Bible.” Beginning this minute, let your walk match your talk in modeling these competencies in your daily and teaching life. Then on the day of the test, walk in there and ace the TExES exam because you are already walking the talk!

IDEALISTIC TEACHING: A SKILL OR AN ART?

There has been, and likely always will be, considerable discussion of whether good teaching is a skill that can be studied or an art that is practiced as diligently as master painters apply their own art form, working hard to produce a masterpiece. For years, researchers such as Kent Peterson, Lee Bolman, and Terrence Deal have presented a view of teaching and leading

Figure 1.1 When Anxiety Goes Up, Productivity Goes Down

that blends the concepts of skill and art. Indeed, both teaching and leading are each a blend of art and skill. Skills are absolutely necessary, but they must be practiced and nurtured into the nuances of an art. Never forget that idealistic teaching is a talent you must practice. Develop it. Nurture it in yourself and in other educators around you. Your students, as well as you personally and others whom your philosophy and attitude affects, will benefit.

Think of idealistic teaching as a really good jazz band. As the musicians practice before a performance, they individually sound like a whole lot of noise. They all do their own things, warming up and getting ready for the concert. But once the performance begins, everything comes together. The musicians play as a team. They are people who have worked hard, practiced together, and who have the common goal of producing really beautiful music. Because they have done those things, the concert begins, and their skills turn into an art as they blend together, bending and flowing with the crescendos and decrescendos, the tempo, and the dynamics of the music to produce something truly beautiful.

As idealistic teachers, we orchestrate a wonderful jazz band. As long as everyone in the school is doing their own thing, independent of each other, all we get is noise—otherwise known as the status quo. Although some progress may be made, everyone’s skills act independently. They are not making beautiful music. But with idealistic teachers—learner-centered educators who are filled with passion, vision, and purpose—the school of musicians can win a Grammy. Every student in every school deserves to be a part of this fabulous jazz band, the jazz band that produces artful music, not noise, and not just more or the same old status quo every day. Each student deserves to be a part of a masterful learning team. All children deserve to be a part of a classroom that is focused on their success in every facet of their lives. All children deserve the chance to come away winners. Obviously, this is true for all students, but it is especially important for atypical and exceptional learners.

For too many of these students today, there is little hope for the future. It is my goal that you become the idealistic teacher of your student's jazz band. You will be the teacher that does what is right instead of what is easy or bureaucratic. You will be the teacher that facilitates your classroom, department, or even your school in developing a common vision and a solid purpose built on identified common values. You will be the one to change the world . . . or at least your classroom. You will become an awesome special education teacher, or I will come back and haunt you.

But first, you must pass the TExES. Are you ready to get started?

GETTING STARTED

Section II of this book includes Chapters 2 through 13. It addresses each domain and competency for both TExES exams: EC-12 and supplemental. These chapters provide detailed attention to each of the nine learner-centered competencies. If you have never even heard of them up to this point, that is all right. By the time I get through with you, you will be living and breathing them. If not, you are in a coma. Check with your doctor. It is time to wake up to get ready for this test. You are going to know those competencies inside out. You will be reciting them to your family members and friends. If you do not have family or friends, I strongly suggest finding some. They will be a great support system—and they'll be there to celebrate when you pass the test! Remember, the test is merely a gatekeeper designed to see that you have a specific idealistic learner-centered philosophy of teaching as portrayed in the domains and competencies. It requires entry-level skills and expectations, and it is a passable test. You *will* pass this test.

Section III, Chapter 14, compares and contrasts the similarities and differences between the domains and competencies of the EC-12 TExES exam with those of the supplemental exam. It also includes the additional competencies included in the supplemental exam that do not exist on the EC-12. These primarily focus on literacy, reading, and math.

In Section IV, Chapters 15 through 18, you will learn multiple specific test-taking strategies that help you apply the knowledge learned in Chapters 2 through 14. You will also learn to create your own personal success plan to help you prepare and pass the test. Finally, you will connect everything you learn in Chapter 17, "After You Pass the Test: Forever and Ever, Amen." By the time you walk in to take the TExES Exam, you will be so well prepared that all you will want to do is go in and pass so you can go forward to improve the world and eat more chocolate. My goal is to help you pass the test so you can help change the world one student at a time. This test is just a nuisance to get in your way until then. So, let's get rid of the nuisance by passing the test the first time.

THE "GUESS MY FAVORITE" FEATURE

At the end of each competency chapter, you will find a feature called "Guess My Favorite." In it, I list a few of the examples from that

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competency that are my particular favorites. You may be wondering why on earth you would *care* what my favorites are.

The reason is because I think from an idealistic standpoint. The tests are written from my idealistic standpoint. Therefore, if you become accustomed to thinking about the competencies, and teaching in general, from my idealistic perspective, the more likely you will be to select the most idealistic responses to your test questions. The correct answer will always be the most idealistic from the viewpoint of what is best for the student. Notice that I said *always*, not sometimes. The correct answers are not necessarily about what is easiest on the teachers, staff, or school itself. The correct answers are always about what is best for the student. This applies for any TExES exam you may take—now or in the future.

That's why you care what my favorites are. They are hints into the way I think—which is the way you want to think on the day of the test and until the day you *die*. One more time: How are you supposed to think?

Idealistically!

Now, let's get started on those domains and competencies.