

**Educational Leadership and Special Education Administration
Comprehensive Examination
Interdisciplinary Educational Specialist (Ed.S.) Program**

General Description

Interdisciplinary Educational Specialist (Ed.S.) degree students must pass a comprehensive examination as part of their program of studies in Educational Leadership and Special Education Administration. The intent of the comprehensive examination is to assess: 1) Overall knowledge in educational leadership and special education administration, 2) Ability to synthesize and apply that knowledge to cogent discussion of leadership problems or the resolution of significant educational issues, and 3) Skill in organizing and expressing ideas in a logical, coherent, literate, and convincing fashion. The examination is a take-home exam found at the end of this document.

Eligibility and Scheduling of the Examination

In order to take the examination, students must have done the following: (1) have been granted regular admission to the degree program, (2) have an approved plan of study on file with the Graduate School, (3) have completed 20 semester hours of work applicable toward the degree, not including the internship or practicum, (4) have maintained a grade average of at least 3.00 in the graduate degree program, and (5) have obtained approval from their assigned advisor signifying that eligibility has been verified.

The “Permit to Take Written Comprehensive Examination” from the [ELPS Forms webpage](#) must be received by the program coordinator at least three weeks before the exam is due.

Assessment and Evaluation of the Written Examination

The examination will be read and evaluated by three faculty including at least two members of the ELPS faculty (one of which will be the student’s advisor). The following grading system will be used:

Pass—The student has responded to all questions on the examination in an acceptable manner.

Fail—The student has failed to respond in an acceptable manner to one or more of the questions asked.

Please see the rubric included in this document for more details regarding grading of elements of the comprehensive exam.

Examination Retake

Students who fail the comprehensive examination may be allowed one retake of the exam. If permitted, the retake may be taken in a future semester. A second “Permit to Take Written Comprehensive Examination” is required for the retake. If students fail the retake of the examination, their degree program will be terminated.

Notification of Successful Completion of the Examination

Students will be notified via email or in writing if they have successfully completed the exam within four weeks after the comprehensive exam has been turned in to the ELPS office. ELPS faculty will also send the results of the comprehensive exam to the Graduate School by the deadline each semester for each of their advisees. Please note that, in order to graduate in the same semester that the exam is taken, the results of the exam must be submitted to the Graduate School by the published date. Thus, if a comprehensive exam is submitted after the due dates listed below, the results may need to be considered the following semester:

Fall semester—comprehensive exams are due by 5 pm the first Monday in October

Spring semester—comprehensive exams are due by 5 pm the first Monday in March

Summer term—comprehensive exams are due by 5 pm the first Monday in June

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The purpose of the Interdisciplinary Educational Specialist Degree comprehensive exam is to assess students' ability to synthesize and apply the theories, knowledge, concepts and skills that students have studied throughout their program in a practical, complex, and pertinent organizational change situation. To achieve this end, students are to identify a situation in their current or most recent organization that involves the need for complex change that addresses the learning and achievement of all students.¹ *The exam is a student's opportunity to demonstrate what has been learned and can be appropriately applied in a real situation from across all courses taken in the program. Failure to demonstrate this learning by a clear discussion of concepts, knowledge, theories, and skills from ELPS and EDSE coursework, as well as any additional relevant readings and research, will result in failure of the comprehensive exam.* This means that students should include leadership styles, strategies, and theories; change theories and process; relevant political, economic, and social forces; legal contexts and constraints; discussions of equity and diversity; relationship to and/or impact on instructional leadership, and other significant topics covered throughout their program of study. Students should fully explain all concepts that they introduce and apply. It is strongly advised that the paper be organized as outlined below with clear section headers. Be sure to address all parts of each question. **Maximum of 30 pages. Suggested length—25-30 pages.**

Students are to analyze the specific situation and develop an action plan, assuming the role of leader (i.e., building or district level or as a director of special education services, as appropriate to the individual student's major area of program focus), addressing the following elements:

1. Explain the current organizational situation and why it is undesirable.
 - In one paragraph, provide a brief overview of the organization that is the focus of this exam.
 - Describe the current situation. Use relevant data (quantitative and qualitative) and other forms of evidence to illustrate the situation and explain why it is problematic for one or more educational stakeholder groups (student and adult groups).
 - Explain how policy, resource, and/or personnel decisions have contributed to the current problem situation.
 - Discuss the values, epistemologies, and/or philosophies that are represented by the current situation and how these conflict with the purpose, mission, and goals of the organization.

¹ This does NOT duplicate the assignments that were completed in ELPS 603 and EDSE 681. Students may select the same topic but this paper should go much beyond the four frames in analyzing the situation and the change context and process in ELPS 603; or the development of strategic planning components, logic model of planned change, evaluation plan, and identification of quality performance measures in EDSE 681.

2. Articulate proposed changes to address the problem situation identified in section one. For each proposed change, clearly explain the following:
 - The proposed change
 - The intended effects (benefits) of the proposed change on the educational stakeholder groups identified in section one including any applicable equity issues
 - How the proposed change aligns with the purpose/mission/vision/goals/values of the organization
3. Develop strategies to implement and evaluate the proposed change.
 - Explain in clear and logical steps the strategies that should be implemented to enact the changes you have proposed.
 - Identify and discuss the critical organizational elements—structural (including policy), human resource (including professional development), political, and financial—that are necessary to implement the proposed changes, providing a rationale as to why each element is important to bring about change.
 - Outline an action plan for implementing the proposed changes, including approximate timelines, key personnel, and rationales for each element of the plan.
 - Identify possible challenges to implementation and discuss methods for dealing with those challenges.
 - Discuss a feasible plan for monitoring and evaluating the changes to ensure that the problem situation is addressed satisfactorily for stakeholders.
4. Students should critique responses (1-3) regarding how the Colorado Principal Standards and Special Education Director Standards are illustrated by their analyses and proposed action plan.

Students must use both materials from ELPS and EDSE course content and outside resources.

APA 7th edition style must be used.

References must be cited at end of exam.

Interdisciplinary Educational Specialist (Ed.S.) Degree Comprehensive Exam Scoring Rubric

Domains	Distinguished Command (4)	Strong Command (3)	Limited/Partial Command (2)	Weak Command (1)	Rating
Identification and explanation of the current situation and why it is undesirable	The organization is introduced and undesirable situation is described using a variety of data. Explains policy, resource, personnel decisions, and leadership contributing to the situation and the impact on various stakeholders.	Undesirable situation is explained using data/evidence. Provides contributing factors and explains the impact of the situation on stakeholders.	Undesirable situation is explained but may lack data, explanation of contributing factors, leader characteristics, and impact on stakeholders.	Lack of clear definition of the organizational issue. Lack of data to support why the situation is undesirable.	
Articulation of a more desirable situation	The proposed change(s) are clearly articulated. Intended effects, equity issues, and alignment to mission/vision/goals/values are explained.	The proposed change(s) are clearly articulated. Effects and alignment to organization are explained.	Changes are superficial or tangentially related to the situation. Lack of explanation regarding intended effects or alignment.	Changes are unrelated to issue and/or not explained.	
Development of strategies to implement and evaluate proposed change	Strategies are comprehensive to address the complexity of the issue. Action steps are logical and contain sufficient detail to be implemented with timelines and person(s) responsible. Strategies to monitor and evaluate the changes are aligned and feasible.	Strategies address the issue. Action steps are logical and detailed; timelines and persons responsible are included. Strategies to monitor and evaluate the changes are included.	Strategies address the issue. Action steps, timelines, person(s) responsible, and methods to monitor and evaluate changes lack sufficient detail.	Strategies, action steps, timelines, and/or ways to monitor the changes may be missing or severely lacking in detail.	
Use of concepts and materials from ELPS and EDSE program courses in problem analysis and to support change strategies components	Multiple connections to course materials and concepts from the program and leadership standards are integrated throughout exam. Other resources are cited.	Adequate connections to ELPS course materials or concepts. Other resources are cited.	Minimal or superficial use of materials from the ELPS program, relying mostly on one or two courses or outside resources.	Few connections to outside resources or ELPS course/program materials.	
Overall formatting, organization, and expression throughout the exam including use of APA.	Skills in organizing and expressing ideas in a holistic, logical, coherent, literate, and convincing fashion. Consistent, correct use of APA style and formatting.	Skills in organizing and expressing ideas with clarity and persuasiveness. Generally consistent and correct use of APA style and formatting.	Presentation in discrete parts with little overall coherence. Inconsistent or incorrect use of APA style and formatting.	Disorganized or confusing discussion of problem and proposed changes. APA style and formatting contains errors that detract from paper or APA is not used.	
Overall Rating	<p>Note: A rating of “1” for any category above will result in overall failure on the exam. An overall rating of “3” or higher from at least two readers is required to pass the exam.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">4 3 2 1</p>				

Colorado Quality Principal Standards (Revised 2019)

QUALITY STANDARD I

Principals demonstrate organizational leadership by strategically developing a vision and mission, leading change, enhancing the capacity of personnel, distributing resources, and aligning systems of communication for continuous school improvement.

ELEMENT A: Principals collaboratively develop the vision, mission, and strategic plan, based on a cycle of continuous improvement of student outcomes, and facilitate their integration into the school community.

ELEMENT B: Principals collaborate with staff and stakeholders to implement strategies for change to improve student outcomes.

ELEMENT C: Principals establish and effectively manage systems that ensure high-quality staff.

ELEMENT D: Principals establish systems and partnerships for managing all available school resources to facilitate improved student outcomes.

ELEMENT E: Principals facilitate the design and use of a variety of communication strategies with all stakeholders.

QUALITY STANDARD II

Principals demonstrate inclusive leadership practices that foster a positive school culture and promote safety and equity for all students, staff, and community.

ELEMENT A: Principals create a professional school environment and foster relationships that promote staff and student success and well-being.

ELEMENT B: Principals ensure that the school provides an orderly and supportive environment that fosters a sense of safety and well-being.

ELEMENT C: Principals commit to an inclusive and positive school environment that meets the needs of all students and promotes the preparation of students to live productively and contribute to the diverse cultural contexts of a global society.

ELEMENT D: Principals create and utilize systems to share leadership and support collaborative efforts throughout the school.

ELEMENT E: Principals design and/or utilize structures and processes which result in family and community engagement and support.

QUALITY STANDARD III

Principals demonstrate instructional leadership by aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment, supporting professional learning, conducting observations, providing actionable feedback, and holding staff accountable for student outcomes.

ELEMENT A: Principals establish, align, and ensure implementation of a district/BOCES plan of instruction, instructional practice, assessments, and use of student data that result in academic growth and achievement for all students.

ELEMENT B: Principals foster a collaborative culture of job-embedded professional learning.

ELEMENT C: Principals demonstrate knowledge of effective instructional practice and provide feedback to promote continuous improvement of teaching and learning.

ELEMENT D: Principals hold all staff accountable for setting and achieving measurable student outcomes.

QUALITY STANDARD IV

Principals demonstrate professionalism through ethical conduct, reflection, and external leadership.

ELEMENT A: Principals demonstrate high standards for professional conduct.

ELEMENT B: Principals link professional growth to their professional goals.

ELEMENT C: Principals build and sustain productive partnerships with key community stakeholders, including public and private sectors, to promote school improvement, student learning, and student well-being.

COLORADO STANDARDS AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR DIRECTORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

Standard One: Foundations of Leadership

The Special Education Director will have a solid foundation for leadership by: (a) demonstrating a comprehensive knowledge of special education organization, programs, laws and best practices; and (b) setting high standards and a positive direction for special education consistent with the values, mission and vision of the state and administrative unit. The performance indicators for this standard include the following:	
1.1	Promote and reinforce the belief that a free and appropriate education is the fundamental right of all students.
1.2	Recognize and accept personal and professional accountability to direct, monitor and continually work to improve the educational processes and practices for which he/she is responsible.
1.3	Articulate and model a clear set of core professional values.
1.4	Demonstrate ethical behavior by acting with integrity of word and action.
1.5	Articulate comprehensive knowledge of the significant elements of special education; its history, organization, programs, laws and best practices.
1.6	Build mutually respectful relationships through effective listening and empathetic responses.
1.7	Participate in ongoing quality professional development.
1.8	Collaborate with others to ensure there is continued awareness of the latest research regarding special education, learning theory and best instructional practices.

Standard Two: Special Education and School Systems

The Special Education Director shall: (a) demonstrate knowledge of organizational culture; (b) apply a systems approach to the development of special education programs and processes; and (c) facilitate effective systems change. The performance indicators for this standard include the following:	
2.1	Develop organizational relationships between and among: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • federal, state, intermediate and local educational agencies; • district and building levels and the various schools and schooling levels; • special and general education; • the greater community, including but not limited to families, advocates and agencies, and potential employers.
2.2	Demonstrate an understanding of leadership roles, hierarchies, authority and chain-of-command relationships.
2.3	Promote positive culture within special education and in the greater organization, in alignment with district vision, mission and values.
2.4	Support systems thinking at all levels of the organization.

2.5	Lead change processes consistent with proven change theories at all levels of the organization, inclusive of all stakeholder groups.
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Standard Three: Law and Policy

The Special Education Director shall be knowledgeable about and able to apply relevant federal and state statutes, regulations, case law and policies that impact all children, including those with disabilities. The performance indicators for this standard include the following:

3.1	Implement requirements of federal, state and case law in public education, with an emphasis on special education.
3.2	Demonstrate knowledge of policies and procedures required to implement legal requirements.
3.3	Describe legislative processes at local, state and national levels.
3.4	Demonstrate skills in networking and advocating on behalf of students with disabilities in order to develop, influence and impact laws and policies.
3.5	Facilitate the development of student-centered Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to include procedures, processes and legal requirements.
3.6	Identify resources of national organizations in the field of special education.
3.7	Execute federal, state and local data collection, analysis and reporting requirements.
3.8	Provide for an educational environment that is safe, secure, healthy and accessible.
3.9	Implement principles of universal design to assure equal access to students across all educational settings that include specialized transportation, health needs, safety procedures and proactive approaches for students with disabilities in emergency situations.

Standard Four: Instructional Leadership

The Special Education Director shall be able to integrate general education and special education, including curriculum, instructional strategies, and individualized instruction in support of all children, including those with disabilities. The performance indicators for this standard include the following:

4.1	Facilitate the attainment of state standards, expanded benchmarks and access skills.
4.2	Promote high standards for the instruction of all students, including students with disabilities, and for continuously improving their academic achievement.
4.3	Implement assessment systems for identification and programming.
4.4	Develop data driven, evidence-based instructional practices, including behavioral support systems.
4.5	Develop comprehensive approaches to educational planning, including student involvement and self-determination.
4.6	Implement transition plans for individuals with disabilities across the educational continuum and other programs from birth through adulthood.
4.7	Provide leadership to guide appropriate instructional decision-making, focusing on individualization for students with disabilities.

4.8	Facilitate staff development related to evidence-based practices, rigorous content and effective outcomes for all learners, including those with disabilities.
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Standard Five: Program Planning and Organization

The Special Education Director shall be able to evaluate the efficacy and efficiency of special education programs, facilities, services and monitoring systems and to use the evaluation data to improve the programs and services for all children, including those with disabilities. The performance indicators for this standard include the following:

5.1	Apply program evaluation strategies for determining efficacy and efficiency.
5.2	Implement continuous improvement monitoring processes.
5.3	Develop special education programs, facilities, services, and monitoring systems that are complementary to and mutually supportive of one another and of general education.
5.4	Facilitate strategic planning for program development and implementation to encompass all stakeholders.
5.5	Demonstrate and extend collaborative consultation principles with all stakeholders.
5.6	Facilitate professional development to implement, improve and expand programs.

Standard Six: Human Resource Functions

The Special Education Director shall have the knowledge and ability to recruit, retain and evaluate qualified personnel in order to effectively implement programs and services for all children, including those with disabilities. The performance indicators for this standard include the following:

6.1	Recruit and retain qualified personnel.
6.2	Screen, interview and select qualified staff.
6.3	Facilitate professional development of staff members.
6.4	Implement alternative procedures to ensure appropriate personnel when fully qualified individuals are not available.
6.5	Delineate roles and responsibilities of all special education instructional and related services personnel.
6.6	Adhere to established ethical and legal considerations of human resource management.
6.7	Provide supervision and evaluation of personnel serving students with disabilities.

Standard Seven: Parent, Family and Community Engagement

The Special Education Director shall be able to integrate general education and special education, including curriculum, instructional strategies, and individualized instruction in support of all children, including those with disabilities.	
7.1	Implement a comprehensive communication infrastructure to organize and distribute the flow of information coming from and to the district.
7.2	Facilitate collaborative relationships with all stakeholders.
7.3	Promote parent training and support services to support parents in understanding rights, responsibilities, processes and decision-making within special education.
7.4	Develop interactive opportunities with the local and/or state Special Education Advisory Council, parent advocacy groups, the Parent Training and Information Centers, and the Protection and Advocacy Agency.
7.5	Disseminate current research and best practices to improve student achievement.
7.6	Demonstrate conflict resolution in a variety of contexts.
7.7	Develop and implement intra-agency and inter-agency agreements.

Standard Eight: Budget and Resources

The Special Education Director shall be knowledgeable and able to demonstrate school district budgeting and resource allocation, including those related to special education. The performance indicators for this standard include the following:	
8.1	Identify fiscal issues relevant to the provision of services to learners with disabilities.
8.2	Manage human resources to align appropriate expertise with the individualized needs of learners with disabilities.
8.3	Apply knowledge of local, state and federal reporting requirements to promote responsible fiscal management.
8.4	Develop proposals to external agencies to secure supplemental resources to enhance the services available to students with special needs.
8.5	Implement agreements for contractual services from outside agencies to benefit students with disabilities.
8.6	Establish linkages between preschool, school age and post-secondary programs and services.
8.7	Develop program budgets that allocate adequate resources to school sites and programs, and demonstrate sound fiscal management and planning.
8.8	Allocate available Full Time Equivalency (FTE) positions to special education programs and services to ensure a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) to students identified with disabilities.
8.9	Identify current needs and resources for assistive technology to meet the needs of students with disabilities.