

## Recent Updates to the Certificate of Competence in Early Intervention

Dear Early Intervention Leaders:

The Certificate of Competence in Early Intervention (CoCEI) was originally developed in 1991 to address the shortage of qualified special education teachers in the preschool Early Intervention program. While it was designed to be a short-term solution to teacher shortages, some personnel have been working under a CoCEI since the early 1990's. Throughout the years since it began, the CoCEI has been overused and used unnecessarily for licensed speech-language pathologists, teaching assistants, psychologists, behavioral therapists and service coordinators.

The CoCEI was developed to ensure that all contracted educational personnel are qualified to serve preschool age children enrolled in the preschool Early Intervention program. However, the initial requirements and the requirements for annual renewal may not be ensuring that staff have the highest qualifications to meet the needs of preschool children with IEPs. The current CoCEI does not promote increasing the qualifications of preschool Early Intervention staff, helping them obtain an appropriate certification for their position.

The Bureau of Early Intervention Services (BEIS) began in 2015 to implement changes to the CoCEI process to resolve some of these issues. Additional changes will be implemented, starting on July 1, 2016, to fully ensure that the CoCEI requirements help preschool Early Intervention programs contract with staff that can provide high quality Early Intervention services to Pennsylvania's preschoolers with IEPs.

Highlights of the changes in the requirements and procedures for applying for and renewing a CoCEI are below. Complete details and the CoCEI application can be found online at [www.education.pa.gov](http://www.education.pa.gov).

### Changes to Requirements and Process (Beginning July 1, 2016)

- CoCEIs will only be awarded to contracted teachers/special instructors and speech-language pathologists who do not have appropriate Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) certification. The CoCEI is not necessary for preschool Early Intervention staff in other roles (e.g., classroom teaching assistants, psychologists, service coordinators, etc.).
- There will be one level of CoCEI based on the educational background of the applicant. Applicants who are contracted teachers/special instructors must have a bachelor's or master's degree from an accredited college or university in early intervention, early childhood special education, early childhood education, child development, special education or elementary education. Applicants who are speech-language pathologists must have a current speech language pathologist license issued by the Pennsylvania Department of State.
- Staff with an approved CoCEI will have two years to obtain the PDE certification appropriate to their position. The CoCEI is renewed annually and the individual's progress toward obtaining their certificate is now part of the renewal process.
- Preschool Early Intervention programs must now play a more central role in the application for CoCEIs, renewing CoCEIs and for monitoring staff qualifications through the Provider

Monitoring process. All applications and renewals of CoCEIs will be sent to BEIS by the preschool Early Intervention program.

### Next Steps

1. Share this communication with contractors holding a current CoCEI.
2. In July, preschool Early Intervention programs will receive a renewal notification letter from BEIS with a form that includes individuals with a current CoCEI who are contracting with that preschool Early Intervention program.
  - a) The preschool Early Intervention program should review the positions of the individuals on the renewal letter to ensure that the individual is eligible for a CoCEI (teachers/special instructors and speech-language pathologists only) under the newly defined criteria.
  - b) The preschool Early Intervention program should review the qualifications of the individuals with current CoCEIs and complete the form/table with the annual renewal notification letter. Documentation of qualifications should be included in the Provider Monitoring process.
3. The preschool Early Intervention program must return the completed annual renewal notification form to BEIS by **September 1, 2016**. BEIS will review completed annual renewal forms and issue confirmation letters to the preschool Early Intervention program with copies to the provider agency or independent contractor by September 30, 2016.
4. If an individual with a current CoCEI is no longer considered qualified and the preschool Early Intervention program would like to continue to contract with that individual in their same position, the preschool Early Intervention supervisor should contact Lisa Parker at [liparker@pa.gov](mailto:liparker@pa.gov) or 717-214-7130 to discuss potential solutions.
5. The preschool Early Intervention program should assist contractors with a CoCEI to obtain appropriate certification. The following information should be shared with staff as possible resources:
  - o Rising STARS Tuition Assistance Program – Reimbursement program that covers some tuition costs for eligible college coursework taken by certain early learning professionals who are employed at a Keystone STARS designated early learning program for at least 12 months is eligible to apply. For more information, click on: [PA Keys Career Financial](#)
  - o PDE Educational Specialist School Speech and Language Pathologist PK-12 Certification – This certification is an alternative certification for speech and language pathologists to provide preschool Early Intervention speech therapy services. There are two resources with additional information.
    - Pennsylvania Speech and Hearing Association – [PSHA Professional Development Specialist Certification](#)
    - Pennsylvania Department of Education – [Education](#)

Teacher Intern Certification –The teacher intern certification program is an alternate route to certification through an approved Pennsylvania program provider. For more information, go to: [Education Certifications Intern Program](#), then scroll down and click on “Intern Program”.

Cc: Agency Directors