

History and Origin of the Nationally Certified Educational Diagnostician (NCED)

The Nationally Certified Educational Diagnostician (NCED) program was formally established in 2004. Rightly viewed as founders of the NCED, the early groundwork for the NCED was largely organized and orchestrated by three dedicated assessment professionals: Patricia A. Frawley, EdD (NJ); Patricia (Pam) A. McElroy, EdS (LA); and Joe P. Sutton, PhD (NC). They began meeting in earnest in 1997 to develop a national credential for educational diagnosticians during their tenure as members of the Executive Board of the Council of Educational Diagnostic Services (CEDS), a division of the Council of Exceptional Children (CEC).

1997–2000

The NCED finds its roots in a certification program developed by CEC in 1997 called the Professionally Recognized Special Educator (PRSE). CEC awarded the PRSE to special education professionals who met high standards of practice. Three specialty areas of the PRSE were made available to practitioners, including special education teachers, special education administrators, and educational diagnosticians. Therefore, the initial focus of the founders was to promote the PRSE-ED (Professionally Recognized Special Education-Educational Diagnosticians) credential.

The granted phase of the PRSE operated from 1998 to 2001, with requirements based on candidates presenting credentials that documented professional preparation, teaching and assessment experience, and state licensure. The regular phase was slated to commence in 2002, which would have required candidates to pass an examination. All granted PRSE certificates were to expire in 2009, with continuation of certification dependent upon taking an examination and earning a passing score or presenting certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 2022).

By year's end in 1997, CEC communicated to the CEDS Executive Board that it was considering several ideas for the PRSE assessment. As a possible alternative, the CEDS Professional Standards Committee proposed to CEC in 1998 that a portfolio evaluation be adopted as the PRSE-ED assessment in lieu of a traditional criterion- or norm-referenced exam. The proposal was not viewed favorably by CEC. Their efforts to identify and adopt an examination of any kind proved unsuccessful, however, despite negotiations with the Educational Testing Service on possible development of a specialized Praxis II[®] exam for PRSE-ED applicants.

2001–2002

In an effort to preserve the PRSE-ED credential (Sutton, Elksnin, Layton, & McElroy, 2002), the founders rallied the Executive Board of CEDS in 2001 to appoint an ad hoc PRSE Subcommittee, whose chief mission was to assist CEC in identifying an exam for the PRSE-ED program. Members of this Subcommittee were H. Nick Elksnin, PhD (SC), Patricia Frawley, Carol Layton, EdD (TX), Pam McElroy and Joe Sutton. CEDS successfully brokered an arrangement the same year with the State Board of Educator Certification in Texas, a state with a large number of

educational diagnosticians, to adopt a variation of their exam for use at the national level with the PRSE-ED program. The CEDS Executive Board followed with a formal proposal to CEC in 2002, informing them they had identified a resolution to the exam issue.

Unfortunately, CEC rejected the 2002 CEDS proposal to adopt a modified version of the Texas exam for use as the PRSE-ED exam requirement. With the examination issue unresolved, the regular phase of the PRSE-ED was effectively rendered inoperable. Thus, CEC communicated to CEDS in writing its intent to discontinue the regular phase of the PRSE-ED program altogether. Moreover, CEC announced it would terminate all future efforts to provide national certification to members. Most importantly, CEC informed the CEDS Executive Board that CEDS as a Division of CEC could explore development of a national certification program of its own for diagnosticians.

The PRSE Subcommittee immediately began exploring the possibility of establishing a national certification program for member diagnosticians apart from CEC. National certification would serve both to foster growth within the profession of special education assessment and to establish a uniform credential across the states. National recognition of the work and expertise of educational diagnosticians was also considered an important part of the process.

As disappointing as the absolute dissolution of the PRSE-ED credential was for practicing diagnosticians, the PRSE Subcommittee turned its attention to officially establishing a national credential through CEDS. They were supported in the national effort by Linda Elksnin and Nick Elskinin, Editors of the CEDS journal, *Assessment for Effective Intervention*, also CEDS Board members, who offered encouragement and consultation on how to frame the credential in a manner similar to those developed by other professional associations.

Once CEDS received CEC's decision in writing to abandon all interests in the PRSE-ED credential, the next step was raising support among the full CEDS Executive Board. The goal was to help all voting Board members understand that establishing a unique national credential for educational diagnosticians would ultimately enhance and expand the membership of CEDS.

2003

At the 2003 spring meeting of the CEDS Executive Board in Seattle, the PRSE Subcommittee formally proposed establishment of the NCED program to the Executive Board, contingent upon addressing issues related to the credential, including staffing/security of records, liability, a national exam, and benefits of the credential. The motion to accept the proposal was approved by the full Board as follows: "We approve the [NCED] concept and would like the ad hoc PRSE subcommittee to continue clarifying legal issues, such as the liability between the CEDS board and the NCED board to be determined, and CEC. If these issues are not a liability, then the committee will vote [to establish the NCED] via email. The confirmed termination of CEC's involvement with the PRSE will also be obtained in writing."

A formal Board vote to establish the NCED program, though, was still a year away. The services of an attorney eventually had to be retained, and an uphill battle ensued with a few members on

the CEDS Board who were not in favor of a national credential and who expressed concerns regarding funding and related responsibilities and oversight.

2004–2005

On April 5, 2004 at the spring meeting of the CEDS Executive Board, the historic email vote of sixteen members to establish the NCED credential was announced and recorded in the Board's minutes. Voted overwhelmingly in the affirmative (12 yea; 4 nay), the four dissenting votes were from the President of the CEDS Board and Past Presidents who were serving in various office positions on the Board at the time.

With an official vote on record to establish the NCED credential, the Executive Board of CEDS appointed an NCED Subcommittee in 2004 chaired by David Walker, EdD (MS) that included Patricia Frawley, Kathy Good, EdD, Joan Hoffman, PhD, Pam McElroy, Connie Nielson, MEd, and Joe Sutton. CEDS President Nancy Halmhuber served in an ad hoc role. The Subcommittee's first steps included the following:

- Prepare a letter of absolution to CEC regarding dissolution of the PRSE-ED and establishment of the NCED.
- Prepare and submit to the IRS a 501(c)(3) tax exempt application for the NCED program (Note: The NCED Board held only a Texas State Charter as a non-profit corporation in 2008.)
- Secure a liability policy for NCED officers/directors using approved funds appropriated earlier by the CEDS Executive Board.
- Publicize the new NCED program through announcements in the AEI Journal, CEDS Communiqué newsletter, the CEDS website, and in State diagnostician association newsletters.
- Review the Code of Ethics from the NBCC (National Board of Certified Counselors), ASHA (American Speech Hearing Association) and other national credential boards, and prepare a Code of Ethics for the NCED program.
- Review the proposal from the former ad hoc PRSE Subcommittee regarding using the CCE (Center for Educational Credentialing) to manage data for the NCED program.
- Review the proposal from the former ad hoc PRSE Subcommittee regarding the structure of the NCED Board of Directors.
- Empanel an inaugural NCED Board of Directors.

With the assistance of attorney Gregory Mansker, Esq. of Pennsylvania, a letter from the CEDS Executive Board was sent to the CEC governance which provided the following two assurances:

- *CEDS will not use the PRSE name in its new certification program.* CEDS hereby affirms that we will not be using the PRSE name in any way, but will with the new identity be using a totally new name, specifically, the Nationally Certified Educational Diagnostician (NCED) certification program.
- *CEC will be fully absolved of any potential litigation that could arise from the new certification program.* CEDS hereby agrees to hold harmless and fully absolve CEC of any litigation or liability relating to the NCED program. Further, the new National Board for

Certified Educational Diagnosticians (NBCED) will secure a directors and officers liability insurance policy that will cover all directors on the NBCED and all members of the CEDS Executive Board.

Additional goals of the 2004 ad hoc NCED Committee were to establish a directory of nationally certified educational diagnosticians who could provide a resource to state and local education agencies and that would concurrently aid parents in finding assessment professionals with appropriate credentials. With national certification, the committee also envisioned the ability of certified personnel to move from state to state with a standardized credential that would be recognized, much like that of social workers, counselors, psychologists, and other related service professionals.

Letters of support from states with larger delegations of CEDS members and potential NCED candidates such as Louisiana and New York revealed that national certification would also allow the potential added benefit of enabling NCED holders to negotiate with their respective state departments for salary differentials. Advanced by founder Pam McElroy of the Louisiana Educational Diagnosticians' Associations (LEDA), Louisiana became the first state to provide a salary supplement to public school educational diagnosticians who obtained the NCED credential (Louisiana State Legislature, 2013).

The NCED Committee continued its work in 2004 by verifying 22 states that credentialed professionals whose principal role involved special education assessment (Sutton et al., 2002). Over the next several years, the Committee formulated a universal definition of educational diagnostician, prepared policies and procedures for organizing a national credential unique to diagnosticians, and developed a Code of Ethics. Finalized in June 2005, the Code of Ethics addressed issues of privacy, confidentiality, responsibility to individuals undergoing assessment, professional competence, technology, professional development, and research.

2006

Having completed the all-important groundwork needed to launch national certification for diagnosticians, the CEDS Executive Board dissolved the NCED Committee in 2005. Through an application process, an NCED Board of Directors independent from CEDS that reflected geographic diversity was selected and empanelled in January 2006. The inaugural NCED Board included nine members: Patricia Frawley (NJ), Norman Geller, PhD (VA), Eric J. Lopez, PhD (NM), Pam McElroy (LA), Ellen Miller, EdD (TX; Chair), Cathleen Spinelli, PhD (PA), Heather Stephens, EdD (TX), Lisa Turner, PhD (PA), and David W. Walker, EdD (MS). As President of the CEDS Board at the time, Carol Layton, EdD (TX) served *ex officio*.

One of the first challenges faced by the NCED Board was identifying or developing an exam for use with the NCED program. The Board met with representatives from a national testing service who quoted an upfront cost of several hundred thousand dollars to develop an exam. The implausibility of this option was obvious, as the Board did not have, nor was able to generate, funds of this magnitude. With no other viable resolution to the exam issue, NCED Board Chair Ellen Miller recommended that the Board explore the possibility of basing the NCED exam on

measures already in place by the Texas Professional Educational Diagnosticians (TPED) state credential.

2007

Through Ellen Miller's advocacy, the NCED Board successfully obtained authorization from the TPED Board of Registry in 2007 to adapt and modify their exam for use with the NCED program. She brokered an arrangement to provide the NCED Board with a copy of the TPED exam in exchange for allowing TPED holders to be grandfathered into the NCED program.

The New Jersey Association of Learning Consultants (NJALC), many of whom were awarded early NCED certificates, worked cooperatively with the NCED Board in refining the TPED exam. In 2007, founder Patricia Frawley taught an assessment course at Kean University. With the assistance of Eileen Sanchez, the final exam for that course was a modified version of the TPED exam. NJALC's role in helping finalize a first version of the NCED exam was significant, as "Fourteen New Jersey Learning Consultants were part of the initial offsite field trial panel who reviewed the NCED examination items and the administration process," (Sutton, Frawley & Montani, 2008).

Separately, with a national audience of diagnosticians in mind, founder Pam McElroy of LEDA analyzed the TPED exam and removed or modified test items that pertained only to educational diagnostician practice in Texas. The combined work of Patricia Frawley and Eileen Sanchez, on behalf of the NJALC, and Pam McElroy of LEDA, resulted in the first version of the NCED exam. Further, their efforts represented the beginning of an ongoing process to vet and refine the exam. As of this writing, the exam has seen more than seventeen iterations.

With all essential components for national certification in place, the first examination for the NCED was scheduled to be administered in New Orleans, LA, the site of the Annual CEDS Conference in October 2007. Prior to the day the exam was to be administered for the first time, NCED Board Chair Ellen Miller made a special presentation on October 18 to founder Joe Sutton at the CEDS Conference social. Acknowledging his central role in leading the efforts to establish the NCED program, the citation read: "The National Certification of Educational Diagnosticians Board of Directors would like to present the first NCED certificate to a Professor at Bob Jones University, who is a prolific researcher, consultant, and educational diagnostician. He has served as Treasurer and member of the Executive Board of the Council for Educational Diagnostic Services. He is also a visionary who has worked for development of the NCED credential for the past five years. We proudly present this NCED certificate with the number 0001 to Dr. Joe Sutton."

Saturday, October 20, 2007, the closing day of CEDS Conference week, marked a milestone for the NCED program. More than 250 candidates were poised to sit for the NCED exam that day in New Orleans. Founder Pam McElroy of LEDA took the lead in overseeing the administration of the first exam. She arranged to have copies of the exam professionally printed, each with a unique identification number. Most importantly, Pam negotiated with Louisiana State University who agreed to (a) provide scannable answer forms and (b) score the exams for the NCED Board.

Recognizing test security, Pam responsibly archived the examinee test copies and answer forms for a three-year period in the event that the NCED Board would face challenges to exam results.

2008–2009

By January 2008, the NCED Board awarded the initial round of certificates to 511 professionals, which included candidates who passed the first administration of the exam and grandfathered TPED candidates. Early work of the first NCED Board continued in 2008 with finalization of a Constitution and Bylaws. That year, the NCED Board developed a letterhead for written communications, established banking procedures and adopted Professional Standards. In addition, an NCED website was created, promotional brochures were printed and plans were outlined to expand the certificate holder base. The CEU process for certificate holders was also developed in 2008 and was refined through the work of Eileen Sanchez (NJ) and various members of the NCED Board.

In 2009, as the Board faced the challenge of obtaining 501(c)(3) tax exempt status as a non-profit organization, Joe Sutton offered his assistance again. The Board's application submitted to the IRS in the fall of 2008 was initially denied, due to Board's insufficient accounting of activities of the NCED program from its inception in 2004. Joe's involvement with, recollection of, and archived records for the early stages of the NCED program development allowed him to chronicle NCED activities (Sutton, 2009) in detail, which satisfied the IRS. The NCED Board was subsequently awarded a tax exempt letter on June 12, 2009. A chronology of key events leading to the establishment of the NCED is provided in Figure 1.

2012

At the 2012 Annual CEC Convention and Expo in Denver, CO, research spearheaded by Joe Sutton was selected for the CEC/CEDS Showcase session entitled, "Nationally Certified Educational Diagnostician (NCED): A Credential with Value-Added Potential." This research represented the first study with empirical data on the NCED program and was eventually published in the *Assessment for Effective Intervention* journal (Sutton, Montani, Frawley, & McElroy, 2014).

Arguably the lead founder of the NCED, Joe Sutton's contributions are noteworthy. On April 12, 2012 at the Annual CEC Conference social for CEDS, Joe was recognized for his service in shepherding the development of the NCED program. CEDS President Dr. Kathy Good presented him with the coveted James A. Poteet Leadership Award and named him *Father of the Nationally Certified Educational Diagnostician*. The Poteet Leadership Award is presented annually by the CEC Council for Educational Diagnostic Services to a professional with noteworthy career achievements and contributions in the field of special education assessment.

The collective contributions of Patricia Frawley, Pam McElroy and Joe Sutton as founders of the NCED program are historically important. They worked together to garner the support necessary to formally establish the NCED credential and to advance the agenda in developing the NCED program. At every opportunity, they promoted the concept of national certification for

educational diagnosticians through numerous conference presentations and publications, from the earliest discussions in 1997 to the first round of NCED certificates awarded in 2008.

May future generations of NCED holders and leaders acknowledge and embrace the rich history and origin of the NCED program. Moreover, like the founders, may they revere and promote the NCED as the premier national credential for special education assessment professionals who hold high standards of practice.

Figure 1
Chronology of Events Leading to Establishment of the NCED

Year	Significant Events
1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Council for Educational Diagnostic Services (CEDS) president acknowledges the need to address national certification for diagnosticians in an issue of the CEDS newsletter, <i>Communiqué</i>. ▶ Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) establishes a national certification program for educational diagnosticians, called the <i>Professionally Recognized Special Educator in Educational Diagnosis (PRSE-ED)</i>; CEC begins search for a certification exam.
1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ CEDS Professional Standards Committee proposes to CEC a portfolio evaluation to serve as the PRSE-ED assessment, in lieu of a criterion- or norm-referenced exam.
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ CEC informs CEDS Executive Board that it has been unable to identify an exam for the PRSE-ED program; CEC communicates its intention to discontinue the PRSE credential and to terminate efforts to provide national certification for its membership. ▶ CEDS Executive Board appoints an ad hoc committee for the PRSE-ED certification program whose primary charge is to assist CEC in identifying an acceptable exam. ▶ Texas State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC) and National Evaluation Systems, Inc. invite a CEDS Executive Board member to participate in the validation of the new revision of the TExES diagnostician exam. ▶ Texas SBEC director of teacher accountability provides CEDS with a written letter of cooperation and support to share the TExES diagnostician exam items for use in developing a national-level exam for the PRSE-ED.
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Seminal article on preservation of the PRSE-ED is published in the <i>Assessment for Effective Intervention</i> journal which identified 22 states that license diagnosticians. ▶ CEDS Executive Board informs CEC governance of the Texas SBEC offer of the TExES exam, and proposes to the CEC governance that they reconsider continuation of the regular phase of the PRSE-ED.
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ CEC governance informs CEDS that it will discontinue the regular phase of the PRSE-ED for certain, but gives CEDS the liberty to pursue its own certification program. ▶ CEDS Executive Board appoints an ad hoc committee to explore development of a national certification program for CEDS member diagnosticians. ▶ CEDS Executive Board votes to support the establishment of a new credential, the <i>Nationally Certified Educational Diagnostician (NCED)</i>.
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ CEDS dissolves ad hoc committee for the NCED, having accomplished its intended mission to establish initial policies and procedures for the new NCED certification program, including development of a code of ethics and structure for an independent NCED Board of Directors.
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ First Board of Directors for the NCED (NCEDB) is empanelled with nine members who begin the formal process of developing and instituting the NCED program. ▶ The Texas Professional Educational Diagnosticians' Board of Registry (TPED) shares their board exam with an independent panel of diagnosticians from the New Jersey Association of Learning Consultants for review; Texas-specific items are identified. ▶ NCEDB and TPED begin negotiations on the use of the TPED board exam items as a basis for development of the NCED exam. ▶ NCEDB finalizes a constitution and bylaws and negotiates with an outsourcing agency to process NCED applications.
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ NCEDB reaches a formal agreement with TPED, who agrees to allow the use of its board exam items as a basis for development of the NCED exam. ▶ NCEDB finalizes development of the NCED exam; Texas-specific items are eliminated; other items modified; new items included; the final item set reflects CEC advanced knowledge and skills for educational diagnosticians. ▶ The first exam for the NCED is administered to several hundred qualified candidates in New Orleans, LA at the close the annual CEDS Conference. ▶ NCEDB creates a website for disseminating information about the NCED credential, including final versions of the constitution and bylaws, code of ethics, application, etc.
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ NCED Board of Directors issues first NCED certificates to 509 qualified candidates representing the following ten states: Alabama, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia.

Source:

Sutton, J. P., Frye, E. M., & Frawley, P. A. (2008). Nationally Certified Educational Diagnostician (NCED): The professional credential for assessment specialists. *Assessment for Effective Intervention, 35*, 17-23.

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