



# An Innovative Pathway to CHES Eligibility: The 25-Credit Certificate Program



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## Abstract

High school-based Youth Specialists in a rural southeast school district were threatened with dismissal if they didn't comply with a new state credentialing requirement. They were offered a 25-credit eligibility preparation certificate program. The program consisted of an orientation, nine courses, and one CHES exam review session. The orientation, seven courses, and two CHES exam review sessions were given. The program was evaluated by conversations with faculty and by records of participants who qualified for, took, and passed the CHES exam. Of 29 program participants, 15 qualified for and sat for the CHES exam; four passed. Those who didn't were within 3-12 points of passing. Three who passed had completed all seven courses; the other completed six. This pilot confirmed the advantages of offering a complete 25-credit certificate program as a pathway to CHES exam eligibility. This poster highlights advantages of the 25-credit certificate pathway.

## Problems and Challenges

### 1. Inadequately trained health education practitioners

Some organizations want to enhance their health promotion and disease prevention initiatives by adding health education services but do not have a pool of applicants trained or certified as health education specialists.

Some organizations offer health education services but have not hired trained and/or credentialed health education specialists to provide those services.

### 2. The high price (time/money) of professional preparation

Completing a second Bachelor's degree could require up to 30 more credits or up to 48 credits for a Masters degree.

Many health education courses emphasize specific health topics and issues rather than health education competencies.

### 3. Variability of course work among 25-credits earned

Courses submitted to meet the requirements of the second pathway to CHES exam eligibility (25-semester hours of 37-quarter hours of health education courses that address the 7 Areas of Responsibility) may be a variety of courses that do not address the full scope of the 7 Areas of Responsibility.

### 4. Professional goals may be jeopardized

We may fail to...

- Increase public's access to/confidence in health education
- Increase visibility and voice of the profession
- Increase number, visibility, and credibility of CHES
- Increase number of CHES hired and/or promoted
- Increase perceived effectiveness of health education among health/medical professionals, researchers, funders, the media, the public
- Increase integration of health educators into medical teams
- Increase likelihood of achieving HP 2020 goals
- Increase enrollment in health education programs/classes
- Expedite 3rd party reimbursement for health education services
- Establish professional parity with other health professions

## The 25-Credit Certificate Program

A responsibilities and competencies-based 25-credit program can be delivered in 18 months. With 250+ health education programs across the country, schools can offer four major markets (see below) basic professional preparation and facilitate their efforts to qualify to take the CHES examination.

All told, it is a win-win-win-win situation for employers, employees, service recipients, and the health education profession.

	Courses	Credits
1	Personal and Community Health	3
2	Introduction to the Health Education Profession	3
3	Theoretical Frameworks of Health Education	3
4	Health Education Communication and Coordination Skills	3
5	Needs Assessment, Program Planning, Implementation	3
6	Health Education Research and Program Evaluation	3
7	Health Education and Promotion Strategies/Methods	3
8	Health Curriculum Development and Teaching Methods	3
9	Fieldwork	1

## Potential Markets

Health education providers without formal training in health education.

Health professionals who would like certification as a health education specialist to enhance their marketability but do not need or want another degree.

Educated, recently downsized and laid off former employees.

Retirees and others wishing to start new careers.

## Certificate Partners

- **College/university** with accredited health education major/minor
- **Employers offering health education services** by staff without formal health education training or certification
- **Local professional associations and coalitions** to help identify service-learning and internship opportunities

## Discussion: Certificate Costs/Benefits

### Benefits:

- Helps achieve profession's goals (see Panel 2)
- Enhances value of advanced CHES (MCHES) credential
- Facilitates evaluation of 25-credit pathway applications
- Produces thousands of new health education specialists
- Suggest additional areas for research related to CHES exam
- Infuses communities quickly with trained and certified health educators

### Costs:

- Compromises perceived professionalism of CHES among professions that have more exclusive eligibility criteria

## Conclusions

There are many advantages to a 25-credit competency-based health education certificate program as an alternative pathway to CHES exam eligibility.

Colleges/universities and CHES in health organizations/agencies can lead the way in identifying thousands of potential customers. The certificate program can also be offered as a workforce development program for the educated unemployed. The entire program can be delivered in 18 months.

This innovative pathway can help achieve a number of important goals of the health education profession and NCHCEC. It has the potential to offer a win-win-win-win situation for employers, employees, service recipients, and the profession.

## References

1. National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc. website [www.nchec.org](http://www.nchec.org)  
<http://www.nchec.org/becomeches/eligibility.asp>  
<http://www.nchec.org/becomeches/faqs.asp>
2. National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc. (NCHCEC), Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE), American Association for Health Education (AAHE) (2006). *A competency-based framework for health educators - 2006*. Whitehall, PA: Author.

## Introduction: CHES Exam Eligibility

Since the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing (NCHCEC) first offered the Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) exam in 1990 there have been two paths to eligibility.

**Pathway 1:** A bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree from an accredited institution of higher education and an official transcript (including course titles) reflecting a major in health education (e.g., Health Education, Community Health Education, Public Health Education, School Health Education)

**Pathway 2:** A bachelor's degree from an accredited institution and an official transcript that demonstrates a minimum of 25 semester hours or 37 quarter hours of "course work with specific preparation addressing the Areas of Responsibility for health educators."<sup>1</sup>

The 25-credit minimum may come from one or more degree programs, or courses from one or more institutions of higher education taken independently of any specific degree program as long as they address the competencies outlined in the current Framework<sup>2</sup> for health educators and are from accredited institutions of higher education.

Prospective exam candidates can use NCHCEC's prescreening service to determine if they meet CHES exam requirements<sup>1</sup>. "Deficiencies" are identified; guidance for exam qualification is provided<sup>1</sup>.

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**Summary:** This post baccalaureate curriculum includes a series of eight skills-based health education undergraduate level courses offered in cooperation with an accredited college or university and a CHES exam review course. It is designed to prepare college graduates to meet the Certified Health Education Specialist examination eligibility requirements of a minimum of 25 credit hours in courses that address the Seven Areas of Responsibility for Health Education specialists.

**Goals:** The goals of this program are to (1) attract new students to the college to complete a qualifying program to sit for the Certified Health Education Specialist examination, (2) to enhance the health education skills and credentials of health and medical professionals, (3) to prepare more Certified Health Education Specialists to meet the local health education workforce need, and (4) to offer an alternative professional health career opportunity to adults in transition.

**Caveat:** As with all academic programs, there is no guarantee that any student who successfully completes this course of study will pass the Certified Health Education Specialist examination.

**Curriculum:**

Course #	Course Title	Credits
HlthEd	Personal and Community Health	3
HlthEd	Introduction to the Health Education Profession	3
HlthEd	Theoretical Framework of Health Education	3
HlthEd	Communication and Coordination Skills for Health Educators	3
HlthEd	Health Education Needs Assessment, Program Planning and Implementation	3
HlthEd	Health Education Research and Program Evaluation	3
HlthEd	Health Education Promotion and Strategies	3
HlthEd	Health Education Curriculum Development and Teaching Methods	3
HlthEd	Field work experience	1
	<b>Skills Related to 7 Areas of Responsibility</b>	<b>25</b>
	CHES Review Course	0

**Standards:** All eight Health Education Certification Eligibility Curriculum syllabi must be designed to address specific health education specialist responsibilities, competencies, and objectives. All together, if carried out as planned, the implemented curriculum should address the 82 subcompetencies outlined in *A Competency-Based Framework for Health Educators – 2006* (NCHEC, 2006). Certain objectives are specifically taught in some classes, reviewed/reinforced in others, and referred to in others. Sponsoring colleges review these objectives to determine if their existing courses cover those objectives or if they would prefer to develop an experimental course.

**Faculty:** The faculty for this program is determined by the academic institution and is usually a combination of current college/university full-time and part-time faculty, though outside adjuncts may be hired.

**Curriculum**

**Delivery:** The curriculum is delivered in accordance with the requirements of the hosting college/university in terms of how and which students are enrolled, the number of hours for each course, frequency with which the course is scheduled, the on-campus time required, etc. *For example, the courses may be offered every other week over a six week period with in-class and off-campus project hours totally 36 hours to students with a college GPA of at least 3.0 and/or a compelling application essay and references.*