Purpose: The purpose of this project is to enhance the initial certification programs at the University of South Florida in special education high-incidence disabilities, one at the undergraduate and one at the graduate level (MAT). These programs prepare teachers who meet the Highly Qualified requirements as defined by NCLB (No Child Left Behind) to teach students with high-incidence disabilities in K-12 schools. Specifically, the project will: (a) engage key stakeholders in planning and programming design; (b) review roles and responsibilities of special educators in the context of NCLB, including the identification of specialized knowledge and skills related to Highly Qualified requirements; (c) review and revise the special education curriculum to meet Highly Qualified requirements; (d) create structures that facilitate ongoing professional development for university faculty and school personnel related to Highly Qualified requirements; (e) implement and evaluate the revised program; and (f) submit the revised program and implementation plan to OSEP for review and disseminate the program design at the state level and nationally.

Method: This project builds on current strengths while integrating additional curriculum, instruction, and programmatic features to ensure that graduates meet the Highly Qualified requirements. A key feature of this project is an emphasis on building multiple pathways for special education graduates to obtain Highly Qualified competencies at the elementary and secondary levels. The project will also collaborate across departments to enhance the preparedness of new general education teachers at the elementary and secondary levels. Local school district stakeholders and staff are involved to ensure that all programmatic
features align with state and local needs. An existing mentoring process will be enhanced to create an innovative approach to the induction and mentoring of recent graduates in conjunction with local school districts. And finally, the integration of technology in teaching will be enhanced through collaborative initiatives with Apple. This will prepare graduates to provide effective specific content instruction at the elementary and secondary levels through innovative use of technology and will include the online modules developed by the National Center to Enhance the Professional Development of School Personnel.

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