

Pre-Practicum Policy Proposals

What follows is a set of pre-practicum policy proposals that will be open for public comment through October 31, 2017. ESE will use feedback from the public comment period to develop guidelines for these policy proposals. Formal guidelines will be released in March 2018 for full implementation by September 2019.

Ensuring that all candidates are fully ready for the classroom requires extending and deepening candidates' experiences in PK-12 settings throughout their preparation. Right now, we know that not enough of our first year teachers are fully ready to teach¹ and that this has significant consequences for our students, especially those who need the most. Over the last five years, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) has elevated the expectations for candidates and providers – including updating the [Professional Standards for Teachers](#) and implementing a new [performance assessment](#) during the practicum. In both of these cases, we have focused largely on the end goal of candidate readiness for employment.

Building on this work, we believe that there is an opportunity and a necessity to re-examine the supports and structures in place to ensure that candidates are well-positioned to demonstrate readiness prior to entering the capstone preparation experience known as the practicum. Given that the practicum is designed to allow candidates to *demonstrate* their abilities as a teacher, there must first be sufficient, robust opportunities that allow them to observe and practice essential prerequisite knowledge and skills. This set of experiences, referred to as the pre-practicum, is a critical time for candidates to apply learning from coursework into authentic practice in PK-12 settings. Meaningful and robust experiences prior to the practicum position a candidate to successfully demonstrate readiness for the practicum and beyond. As such, there is a need to articulate a common set of expectations for this important component of preparation.

Current policies have set the foundation for this work. Regulations ([603 CMR 7.02](#)) stipulate that the pre-practicum involves “early field-based experiences with diverse student learners, integrated into courses or seminars that address the Professional Standards for Teachers.” Formal Review [criteria](#) require that “responsibilities in pre-practicum and practicum build to candidate readiness for full responsibility in the licensure role” and “candidates at risk of not meeting standards are identified throughout the program (in pre-practicum, during coursework, and while in practicum) and receive necessary supports and guidance to improve or exit the program.”

Yet, despite these requirements, we have found that the pre-practicum experiences vary widely in structure, content, and effectiveness throughout the state. For example, when asked to indicate the number of hours spent in the field prior to the practicum on a statewide survey, some providers listed as few as ten hours and some as many as 500. Given this, we believe it is the state's role to set forth minimum requirements for the pre-practicum that ensure all candidates enrolled in Massachusetts preparation programs have the necessary experiences to prepare them be effective upon the first day of employment.

The following proposals were informed by a field survey of current organization- and program-level policies about the pre-practicum. The survey received 56 responses from 45 sponsoring organizations (68% of our initial teacher preparation providers). These responses represent an equal distribution of organizations offering baccalaureate programs and/or post-baccalaureate programs. While almost all organizations reported having a standard set of expectations for pre-practicum, these policies vary widely. The following policy proposals and forthcoming guidelines

¹ See Stakeholder Survey: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/surveys/SurveySummary.pdf>

are intended to codify the effective practices already in place in many sponsoring organizations as well as clearly articulate ESE's expectations for this critical component of preparation.

The proposals that follow address three aspects of the pre-practicum:

- I. **Time** allocated to the pre-practicum,
- II. **Content** (types of experiences, activities, and/or assignments) candidates engage in during this time, and
- III. **Feedback** the candidate receives on his/her progress and **assessments** the program uses to evaluate readiness for the practicum.

For each of these aspects, we have outlined intended outcomes of setting forth policy in this area, the background and rationale for the proposal, and ultimately, the policy proposal itself. The full set of policy proposals are also listed in Appendix A of this document.

This is not a comprehensive guidance document. A complete set of guidelines will be published in support of the final set of policies around the pre-practicum in March 2018. The objective in outlining the core policy prior to releasing a full draft of detailed guidelines is to ensure that we can understand and use feedback from the field about the shifts being proposed. ESE will review and synthesize all feedback received to ensure that the final set of policies and corresponding guidelines are appropriate for the needs of the state and are as clear and explicit as possible about expectations.

Timeline for pre-practicum guideline development and implementation:

- Field Survey: May 2017 - June 2017
- Public Comment on draft policy proposals: September 2017 - October 2017
- Guidelines developed based on Public Comment: November 2017 – February 2017
- Final Guidelines released: March 2018
- Full Implementation: September 2019 (18-month implementation window)

As with all ESE policies, the state is responsible for articulating the minimum requirements. Sponsoring Organizations may certainly go above and beyond the proposed proposals set forth below.

NOTE: Recognizing that implementing the pre-practicum for candidates who are serving as a Teacher of Record under a preliminary license requires a somewhat differentiated approach, we have outlined the implications of these proposals for Teachers of Record in section IV of this document.

*For those interested in providing public comment on these draft policy proposals, please complete this survey by **October 31, 2017**:*

<http://tinyurl.com/MApreprac>

I. Time in Pre-Practicum

Intended Outcome: *Teacher candidates engage in field-based experiences early and often in their preparation experience.*

Background/Rationale: Based on regulatory requirements and survey data, teacher candidates currently spend approximately 400 hours in a PK-12 setting prior to employment, including a 300-hour practicum and an average of 100 hours in pre-practicum. This equates to less than one-third of the 1,260 hours of an average teacher's first year of employment (based on average contracted work schedule of 7 hours per day, 180 days per year). Moreover, while the majority of providers report that pre-practicum experiences start at or near the beginning of a candidate's preparation, the amount of time candidates currently spend in pre-practicum varies widely, from a reported 10 to 500 hours. In order for us to begin to close the experience gap for candidates and ensure that they are fully ready for their first year of employment, we must set common, baseline expectations for when and how long candidates spend engaged in meaningful pre-practicum experiences.

Policy Proposal:

1. Candidates must complete a minimum of 200 hours of pre-practicum. This field-based experience should be fully integrated into a candidate's program of study, with opportunities for meaningful engagement in PK-12 classrooms (see Section II: Content of Pre-Practicum) starting with a candidate's first courses in a program.

II. Content of Pre-Practicum

Intended Outcome: *Pre-practicum experiences are designed in a way that ensures candidates are able to gain the knowledge and skill necessary to demonstrate their abilities in the practicum.*

Background/Rationale: We know that time in the field is not sufficient alone to impact candidate readiness. A candidate's ability to assume full responsibility for the licensure role is predicated on the strategic and supported practice and application of the Professional Standards for Teaching (PSTs).

To this end, candidates must engage in pre-practicum activities that more authentically reflect the actual work of teaching. Most organizations reported on the survey that they have constructed pre-practicum experiences that gradually increase responsibility, with two of the most frequently cited activities being small-group or one-on-one work with students. However, for instructional activities such as these to be authentic and effective preparation experiences, candidates must not only be interfacing with students, but also planning and delivering data-driven lessons, assessing student learning, and providing feedback to students on their performance. According to the survey, these data analysis and feedback experiences were among the lowest ranked activities on the survey in terms of the frequency that candidates engage in them during pre-practicum.

Pre-practicum activities and assignments should be designed and scaffolded in such a way that candidates enter the practicum prepared to meet the [expected levels of practice on the PSTs](#). For PST Indicators that the candidate will be expected to *demonstrate* during the practicum, s/he must first have sufficient opportunities for *introduction* and *practice* during the pre-practicum. For example, in order to successfully demonstrate PST Indicator 1(b) Assessment during practicum, a candidate must have opportunities during pre-practicum to practice assessing student learning and using that data to inform future instruction.

According to the PST guidelines, the levels of practice are defined as:

- Introduction: Candidates show understanding through coursework and/or in field-based experiences.
- Practice: Candidates have opportunities to practice, to be observed, and to receive feedback through coursework and/or in field-based experiences.
- Demonstrate: Candidates consistently demonstrate competency through coursework and in field-based experiences as measured by the teacher performance assessment.

This proposal may necessitate a shift away from some activities and assignments towards others that are more aligned with Massachusetts' expectations articulated in the PSTs preparing candidates to assume full responsibility of a classroom. For example, though journaling may support and reinforce the PST Indicator of 4(a) Reflective Practice, it should not proportionally outweigh other, more rigorous assignments that more directly build the essential skills of a new teacher.

Additionally, given that the individuals who complete a preparation program are licensed to teach a range of grade levels (e.g., 1-6, 5-12, etc.), it is critical that the pre-practicum experience provide candidates with exposure to the entire span of levels they are authorized to teach in. We think it is important that given that the practicum is typically occurs within one grade and classroom, candidates have opportunities to see various approaches and grade levels.

Policy Proposals:

2. The pre-practicum must be comprised of activities and assignments that bridge theory and practice, mirror the work of teaching, and build towards full candidate readiness. This must include opportunities to perform the [PST indicators](#) at the appropriate level of practice (introduction, practice, or demonstrate) in preparation to meet readiness expectations in the practicum.
3. The pre-practicum must include opportunities to practice the PST indicators in authentic settings, including both PK-12 classrooms and low-risk environments such as mixed-reality simulations, role-plays, and/or mock lessons.
4. The pre-practicum must include opportunities to participate in at least two series of Instructional Rounds. Instructional rounds consist of focused observations of multiple classrooms and a guided debrief. These instructional rounds should occur in classrooms representative of the full range of grade-levels and/or delivery models within the pursued licensure field or level.

NOTE: As a program approval and formal review requirement, providers will be expected to submit a PST Matrix that maps pre-practicum activities and assignments to the corresponding PST level of practice and provide other appropriate documentation on the components of the pre-practicum. This is a notable shift in the current approach to PST matrices which document what courses skills are taught in. In this approach, we will be looking for where candidates show what they know or can do relative to that PST. This will ensure that pre-practicum activities and assignments are intentionally designed so that candidates enter the practicum prepared to demonstrate readiness.

III. Feedback & Assessment in Pre-Practicum

Intended Outcome: *SOs measure and track candidate progress throughout the pre-practicum in order to better understand readiness prior to the full practicum.*

Background/Rationale: According to the survey, a majority of providers are very interested in finding ways to more strategically embed aspects of the Candidate Assessment of Performance into the pre-practicum as a way to accelerate candidates' learning curve and overall readiness leading into the practicum. The pre-practicum is designed to be both highly supportive and diagnostic of a candidate's strengths and areas for growth leading up to the practicum. Currently, just 52% of SOs report that their candidates are formally observed and provided feedback in the pre-practicum. As the pre-practicum serves as a form of guided practice preparing candidates to successfully demonstrate their skills and knowledge during the practicum, it is imperative that candidates receive ongoing, high-quality feedback that supports their growth and development.

In addition, assessing candidate progress throughout pre-practicum is important in order to position the candidate for success in practicum or counsel them out of the program. Program approval [criterion](#) states that "candidates at risk of not meeting standards are identified throughout the program (in pre-practicum, during coursework, and while in practicum) and receive necessary supports and guidance to improve or exit the program." Currently, 89% of survey respondents report that their SO administers gateways or benchmarks for their candidates to meet during pre-practicum in order to begin their practicum placement. However, these gateways are often input-based and may be only loosely connected to candidate's performance in authentic teaching experiences.

Policy Proposals:

5. Pre-practicum candidates must be observed and receive feedback on their performance at least twice by a supervisor who is fully calibrated with the SO's expectations and has a firm understanding of the candidate's coursework. Feedback may be based on an in-person observation or a video of the candidate's lesson. It is highly recommended that ed prep faculty conduct at least one observation of the candidate in the field during pre-practicum in order to continue to build the bridge between theory and practice for the candidate. Feedback from these observations should be used to set a professional practice goal and complete a self-assessment prior to or at the start of the practicum as part of the pre-cycle stage of the Candidate Assessment of Performance.
6. Pre-practicum candidates must video themselves teaching at least twice. This is a powerful way to make their teaching visible, provide an opportunity for reflection and peer-to-peer feedback, and improve instruction.
7. There must be a minimum of two explicit gateway assessments of candidate performance during the pre-practicum. Candidates must meet these benchmarks in order to enter the practicum phase of their program. Gateways should be performance-based measures of the Professional Standards for Teachers, outcomes-oriented, and authentic to the actual work of teaching. They should be used to identify at-risk candidates during pre-practicum and provide them with the necessary supports and guidance to improve or exit the program. Gateways should include a combination of:
 - Assessment of performance on the PSTs;
 - Supervisor evaluation;
 - Dispositions assessment; and
 - Course grades or GPA

NOTE: The policy proposals above are not mutually exclusive and may overlap with one another in fulfilling expectations (e.g., A candidate may videotape a lesson (#6), receive feedback on it from faculty (#5) and have that used as a gateway assignment in moving into the next stage of the program (#7)).

IV. Pre-Practicum for Teachers of Record

The following section outlines implications of these policy proposals for candidates who are employed and serving as Teachers of Record under a preliminary license during their pre-practicum experiences.

Background/Rationale: We understand that supporting and training candidates who are already employed full-time and assuming full responsibility for the licensure role requires a different approach. However, regardless of current employment, all candidates enrolled in an initial licensure program must be held to the same expectations. By endorsing a candidate for initial license, providers are certifying that the individual has the necessary knowledge and skill to be effective in Massachusetts classrooms and is immediately ready to positively impact student learning. In fact, the urgency of preparation for teachers of record is heightened given that they are currently responsible for student learning. While the policy proposals outlined above apply to all initial licensure candidates, including teachers-of-record, a differentiated approach for teachers of record should entail intensified support in the beginning of the school year, an even greater connection between coursework and the realities of the PK-12 setting, and a leveraging of the significant opportunity that these candidates have given their regular access to students.

Policy Proposals:

8. For candidates who are teachers of record, the pre-practicum activities, assignments, and assessments described above must be front-loaded into the first three months of the school year in order to provide candidates with the support and feedback that they need to demonstrate readiness on the Candidate Assessment of Performance (CAP).
9. Providers must correspond with the teacher of record's school-based supervisor (e.g. principal) to ensure alignment of expectations and, to the extent possible, processes for calibrating feedback about performance.

Appendix A: Pre-Practicum Policy Proposals

1. Candidates must complete a minimum of 200 hours of pre-practicum. This field-based experience should be fully integrated into a candidate's program of study, with opportunities for meaningful engagement in PK-12 classrooms (see Section II: Content of Pre-Practicum) starting with a candidate's first courses in a program.
2. The pre-practicum must be comprised of activities and assignments that bridge theory and practice, mirror the work of teaching, and build towards full candidate readiness. This must include opportunities to perform the [PST indicators](#) at the appropriate level of practice (introduction, practice, or demonstrate) in preparation to meet readiness expectations in the practicum.
3. The pre-practicum must include opportunities to practice the PST indicators in authentic settings, including both PK-12 classrooms and low-risk environments such as mixed-reality simulations, role-plays, and/or mock lessons.
4. The pre-practicum must include opportunities to participate in at least two series of Instructional Rounds. Instructional rounds consist of focused observations of multiple classrooms and a guided debrief. These instructional rounds should occur in classrooms representative of the full range of grade-levels and/or delivery models within the pursued licensure field or level.
5. Pre-practicum candidates must be observed and receive feedback on their performance at least twice by a supervisor who is fully calibrated with the SO's expectations and has a firm understanding of the candidate's coursework. Feedback may be based on an in-person observation or a video of the candidate's lesson. It is highly recommended that ed prep faculty conduct at least one observation of the candidate in the field during pre-practicum in order to continue to build the bridge between theory and practice for the candidate. Feedback from these observations should be used to set a professional practice goal and complete a self-assessment prior to or at the start of the practicum as part of the pre-cycle stage of the Candidate Assessment of Performance.
6. Pre-practicum candidates must video themselves teaching at least twice. This is a powerful way to make their teaching visible, provide an opportunity for reflection and peer-to-peer feedback, and improve instruction.
7. There must be a minimum of two explicit gateway assessments of candidate performance during the pre-practicum. Candidates must meet these benchmarks in order to enter the practicum phase of their program. Gateways should be performance-based measures of the Professional Standards for Teachers, outcomes-oriented, and authentic to the actual work of teaching. They should be used to identify at-risk candidates during pre-practicum and provide them with the necessary supports and guidance to improve or exit the program. Gateways should include a combination of: assessment of performance on the PSTs; supervisor evaluation; dispositions assessment; and course grades or GPA.
8. For candidates who are teachers of record, the pre-practicum activities, assignments, and assessments described above must be front-loaded into the first three months of the school year in order to provide candidates with the support and feedback that they need to demonstrate readiness on the Candidate Assessment of Performance (CAP).
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