

Guidelines for Pre-Practicum for Teachers

(Draft for Public Comment)

February 2018

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Overview

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is committed to ensuring that all PK-12 students have access to effective educators. It is imperative that preparation results in candidates who are fully ready to positively impact student learning on day one of employment; this is especially true given that new teachers are twice as frequently assigned to teach in high poverty and high minority schools in our state.¹

The Pre-Practicum Guidelines build off of Massachusetts' efforts to elevate expectations for candidates and providers, including updating the [Professional Standards for Teachers](#) to align with expectations of in-service teachers and implementing a new [performance assessment](#) to assess readiness during the practicum.

According to the Regulations for Licensure and Educator Preparation Program Approval, the pre-practicum consists of field-based experiences with diverse student learners that take place during the early part of a candidate's preparation ([603 CMR 7.04](#)). These field-based experiences are integrated into courses or seminars that address the [Professional Standards for Teachers](#) (PST) and the [Subject Matter Knowledge](#) (SMK) requirements. The pre-practicum provides candidates with multiple opportunities to apply learning from coursework into authentic teaching experiences with students in PK-12 settings in preparation to successfully demonstrate readiness during the capstone preparation experience known as the practicum.

The Pre-Practicum Guidelines are informed by increasing evidence that preparation rooted in authentic, supported practice and feedback opportunities produces new teachers who are more effective, feel more prepared, and remain in the classroom longer.² Shifting educator preparation towards authentic, supported field-based experiences helps bridge theory and practice for candidates and translates into more effective, well-prepared new teachers. Recent reports from the field of educator preparation and PK-12 have called for stronger connections between preparation and practice through extended clinical experiences aligned to the licensure role that provide opportunities to learn, practice, and be assessed on the pedagogical content knowledge needed for successful teaching and learning.³

Given the necessity to scaffold early field-based experiences in order to gradually build towards candidate readiness for the licensure role, the pre-practicum can be considered to include two stages:

- **Stage 1** supports a candidate's initial introduction to the PSTs and SMKs through activities such as guided observations, mixed-reality simulations, and mock teaching embedded into coursework requirements such that a candidate has sufficient opportunity to be introduced to and observe the practice of specific skills.

¹ See MA's [Equity Plan](#) for more information.

² See: Silver-Thorn, 2013; Boyd et. al, 2009; Guha et. al, 2016

³ See: Teach Plus, 2015; AACTE, 2012; NCATE, 2010.

- **Stage 2** consists of direct engagement with PK-12 students with a continued, gradual increase in responsibility such that a candidate has sufficient opportunities to practice skills in authentic settings and become prepared to demonstrate readiness during practicum.

The guidance that follows derives from this model of gradual release and incremental ramp-up in responsibilities such that candidates complete their preparation fully ready for students on day one.

The Pre-Practicum

Intended Outcomes

Through these guidelines, ESE seeks to be descriptive of expectations, not prescriptive of approach and to afford providers the flexibility and autonomy to design and implement programming in a way that is aligned with their context and produces educators who are ready for the licensure role. In support of this, below we outline expectations based on the [ESE Review Criteria](#) that correspond to aspects of the pre-practicum phase of preparation. Sponsoring Organizations will be held accountable for these expectations during the formal review period.

Sponsoring Organizations are responsible for designing and implementing pre-practicum experiences for initial licensure candidates such that:

- Field-based experiences are fully embedded in program coursework such that connections between theory and practice are explicit (Field-Based Experiences Criterion 3).
- Responsibilities in pre-practicum and practicum experiences build to candidate readiness for full responsibility in licensure role (Field-Based Experiences Criterion 4).
- Candidates receive high-quality, targeted feedback during field-based experiences that improves their practice (Field-Based Experiences Criterion 10).
- Candidate readiness for the licensure role is measured using a performance assessment that is implemented consistently across/within programs and rigorously such that only candidates who are ready to make a positive impact for PK-12 students in the licensure role complete the program (Field-Based Experiences Criterion 12).
- 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 (The Candidate Criterion 4).
- Sponsoring Organization oversees and has systems in place to monitor all individual licensure programs to ensure each is effective (Continuous Improvement Criterion 1).

Observations and Feedback

Pre-practicum candidates must be observed and provided with feedback at least three times during the pre-practicum. These three rounds of observation and feedback must:

- Observe and provide feedback on the candidate's practice in PK-12 settings. These may be conducted on-site or using video/streaming technology, assuming teacher-student interaction is visible in the video.
- Be conducted by a supervisor who is calibrated with the Sponsoring Organization's expectations and has a firm understanding of the candidate's coursework. This may include faculty, program supervisors or supervising practitioners - all of whom must have participated in training and development activities facilitated by the Sponsoring Organization.
 - It is highly recommended that at least one of the observations be conducted by educator preparation faculty in order to build explicit connections between theory and practice (Field-Based Experiences Criterion 3).
 - If PK-12 host teachers⁴ conduct observations and provide feedback of pre-practicum candidates, Sponsoring Organizations must ensure that they receive the training, support, and development necessary to effectively contribute to and evaluate the readiness of candidates (Field-Based Experiences Criteria 9 & 11). Host teachers may participate in the observations and feedback but may not be the one with primary responsibility for this task.

Gateway Assessments

Sponsoring Organizations must evaluate candidate readiness by employing a minimum of two ESE-approved gateway assessments prior to the practicum. Gateway assessments are outcomes-oriented measures of candidate performance that are used to benchmark candidate readiness and identify at-risk candidates in order to provide them with the necessary supports and guidance to improve or exit the program (The Candidate Criterion 4).

Gateway assessments must:

- Be administered consistently within a licensure program area. For example, any candidate enrolled in a Sponsoring Organization's Elementary 1-6 program will be required to participate in and pass the same gateway assessment regardless of their courses or instructor assignment.
- Assess content-specific pedagogical skill (PSTs *and* SMKs together). In addition to the two required gateway assessments aligned to the PSTs and SMKs, Sponsoring Organizations may elect to administer a third gateway assessment that assesses the dispositions necessary for

⁴ PK-12 host teachers are teachers who host pre-practicum candidates in their classrooms. These teachers may or may not also be Supervising Practitioners. A Supervising Practitioner provides formal supervision of teacher candidates, makes determinations of candidate readiness, and has specific eligibility requirements for serving in the role (See [603 CMR 7.02](#)).

success in the licensure role.

- Set minimum performance standards that candidates must meet in order to advance beyond the pre-practicum.
- Be chosen from an ESE-approved list. With input from stakeholders, ESE will establish a set of criteria and approval process for reviewing and approving gateway assessments and update this list on a recurring basis. This requirement does not preclude a Sponsoring Organization from implementing additional gateway assessments not included on the ESE-approved list.
 - If there is no Gateway Assessment currently approved in a specific subject/grade area, the Sponsoring Organization is responsible for implementing its own until ESE provides an approved assessment in that area.
 - Sponsoring Organizations that are Approved with Distinction or approved with a rating of exemplary in the Field-Based Experiences domain have the flexibility to implement gateway assessments outside of the ESE-approved list.

Sponsoring Organizations are responsible for collecting data from the gateway assessments to monitor individual licensure programs and ensure each is effective (Continuous Improvement Criterion 1). ESE will not collect this data.

Background & Development Timeline

The Pre-Practicum Guidelines align with other policy shifts in recent years to improve outcomes for educator preparation and PK-12 student learning, including:

- June 2012: Updating the [Regulations for Educator Licensure and Preparation Program Approval](#) (603 CMR 7.03) to heighten expectations for field-based experiences and data-driven accountability for preparation providers;
- January 2014: Updating the [Professional Standards for Teachers \(PSTs\)](#) that define the pedagogical and professional knowledge and skills required of all teachers in order to align expectations for candidates with those for in-service teachers;
- June 2014: Developing and implementing the [Candidate Assessment of Performance](#), a performance assessment of candidate readiness for employment aligned to the [Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework](#) for in-service teachers; and
- 2016 - 2017: Revising the [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks](#) for English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science and Technology/Engineering in order to better reflect 21st century college- and career-readiness standards.

In continuation of these initiatives, the Pre-Practicum Guidelines are designed to support Sponsoring Organizations in their efforts to accelerate candidate preparation in order to ensure full readiness on day one. Below is a timeline of activities associated with the development of the guidelines, which

involved a multi-stage process of gathering input from the field, including stakeholders from educator preparation and PreK-12:

- May 2017 – June 2017: ESE administered a field survey of current organization- and program-level requirements for the pre-practicum and initial interest in certain policy areas
- September 2017 – October 2017: ESE released and solicited public comment from educator preparation and PK-12 stakeholders on a draft set of proposed policies.
- October-February: ESE revised guidelines using feedback from public comment.
- February 2018: ESE released revised guidelines for public comment.
- March 2018: ESE releases the final set of guidelines. [*Pending*]

Conclusion

The pre-practicum is a critical time for candidates to apply learning from coursework into authentic practice in PK-12 settings with ample support, supervision, and feedback. Meaningful and robust field-based experience in pre-practicum positions candidates to successfully demonstrate their abilities in the practicum and enter their first year of employment fully ready to positively impact student learning from day one.