

December 4, 2003

DEC - 9 2003

Mary Jayne Fay
Mass. Dept. of Education
350 Main Street
Malden, MA 02148-5023

Dear Ms. Fay:

I am pleased to submit this review of the Massachusetts Adult Basic Education Licensure process. It was heartening to review the materials and see how far along the difficult road to creation of a performance-based licensure system Massachusetts has traveled in creating this initial set of requirements and processes.

My report points out areas in which more work needs to be completed on the processes for ABE teacher licensure in Massachusetts. These observations of work still to be done should be understood and interpreted in the larger context of performance-based licensure for teachers, and its current status in the measurement arena. I would be remiss if I did not give you some caveats about interpreting my review too stringently at this point in your development cycle.

First, no state in the US currently uses a portfolio-based methodology as the sole means to a teacher license. Connecticut, Ohio, and Arkansas all use some form of portfolio assessment for granting permanent licenses for beginning teachers (after the initial years of classroom teaching). California is currently in the process of building such a system through its institutions and programs of teacher education. Connecticut has the most elaborate portfolio assessment system, and they have spent more than a decade (and many millions of dollars) on this part of their licensure process.

The Massachusetts Department of Education had the foresight and professional accountability to ask for an interim review of the ABE licensure model as it currently exists. While this is wonderful evidence of sincere efforts to validate the process, very few organizations ever take such a step. It speaks to the interest of the Department in quality and fairness that you solicited such a review.

Furthermore, much has been learned about portfolio-based assessment since you began the design of the ABE licensure process, and that learning is reflected in my review. For any performance-based system that has consequential stakes associated with

the assessment outcome, an initial period of operation—which should be regarded as an extended field test—is both necessary and inevitable. You must have multiple performances to validate your standards for evaluation and adjust your scoring processes. My review points out that you do not yet have such performances, and that you need them. Obviously, you cannot have the performances until you implement the process. This is entirely to be expected. It should be noted here that the nation's most sophisticated portfolio-based assessment, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification assessments, administered their first assessments for 4 full years before finalizing a scoring system and beginning the standardization of all parts of the assessment system.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to review this process; I hope the review proves helpful to you as you move this very interesting and forward-looking approach to licensure forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mari Pearlman". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Mari Pearlman
Senior Vice President
General Manager
Higher Education Division