Guidelines for Pre-Practicum for Teachers

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Table of Contents

Overview

The Pre-Practicum

Intended Outcomes

Observations and Feedback

Gateway Assessments

Background & Development Timeline

Conclusion
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, implementing a new performance assessment to assess readiness during the practicum and updating the Subject-Matter Knowledge Requirements governing the content knowledge candidates must know to teach well.

According to the Regulations for Licensure and Educator Preparation Program Approval, the pre-practicum is defined as the field-based experiences with diverse student learners that take place during the early part of a candidate’s preparation (603 CMR 7.02). This includes all field-based experiences integrated into courses or seminars that address the Professional Standards for Teachers (PST) and the Subject Matter Knowledge (SMK) requirements.

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 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 Shifting educator preparation towards field-based experiences helps bridge theory and practice for candidates and translates into more effective, well-prepared new teachers.

The purpose of the pre-practicum is to provide candidates with multiple opportunities to apply learning from coursework into practice through increasingly authentic teaching experiences in preparation to successfully demonstrate readiness during the capstone preparation experience known as the practicum. Given the necessity to scaffold early field-based experiences in order to meet the developmental needs of individual candidates and build towards full readiness for the licensure role, the pre-practicum may be considered to include two, potentially overlapping, 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

¹ See MA’s Equity Plan for more information.
² See: Silver-Thorn, 2013; Boyd et. al, 2009; Guha et. al, 2016
coursework requirements, such that a candidate has sufficient opportunity to be introduced to and observe the practice of specific skills.

- **Stage 2** typically 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.

This progression from stage one and stage two is not a state requirement but instead a supportive framework that may be helpful in considering when and how to implement cycles of feedback and the gateway assessments outlined later in this set of guidelines. Providers should work, however, to ensure that there is a mix of activities across these different stages in support of individual candidate readiness.

Throughout the pre-practicum experience, Sponsoring Organizations partner with districts and schools to provide candidates with opportunities to observe and practice in PK-12 settings. Sponsoring Organizations and their partners may select placements best served to meet the needs of the candidate and the structure of the program. PK-12 classroom teachers may serve in a range of roles in support of the pre-practicum, including:

- **Host Teacher**: A teacher who opens up his/her classroom to candidates as a model of practice and may provide informal support and feedback. This is a role uniquely defined for the pre-practicum experience.

- **Supervising Practitioner**: A teacher who provides formal supervision of teacher candidates, makes determinations of candidate readiness, and meets specific eligibility requirements for serving in the role (See 603 CMR 7.02). This role is required during the practicum but an individual in this role may also support candidates during the pre-practicum experience.

The Pre-Practicum Guidelines outline expectations for implementation of the pre-practicum such that candidates are prepared to demonstrate readiness during the practicum and complete their preparation fully ready to make a positive impact for students on day one. The guidelines include:

- Intended outcomes of the pre-practicum for candidate readiness;
- Expectations for providing candidates with high-quality feedback during the pre-practicum; and
- Expectations for evaluating and monitoring candidate readiness through gateway assessments.
this, below we outline expectations based on the **ESE Review Criteria** that correspond most closely to aspects of the pre-practicum phase of preparation.

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**

In order for candidates to be ready to demonstrate their skills during the practicum, they must first have sufficient, robust opportunities to learn, observe, and practice during the pre-practicum. Providing high-quality, targeted feedback during early field-based experiences is therefore critical to candidates’ growth, development, and ultimate readiness to assume full responsibility for the licensure role.

Candidates must receive high-quality, targeted feedback during field-based experiences that improves their practice (FBE 10), and as such, Sponsoring Organizations shall design and implement pre-practicum experiences to ensure that candidates receive feedback:

- Based on observations of their practice of the PSTs and SMKs in PK-12 settings and/or with PK-12 students. Where appropriate and applicable, observations may be conducted using video/streaming technology, assuming teacher-student interaction is visible in the video.
- At least two times over the duration of the pre-practicum experience. Feedback may be provided through formal pre- and post-conferences or through more informal coaching models.
Guidelines for the Pre-Practicum

- By Supervising Practitioners, Program Supervisors, and/or course faculty/instructors. Host teachers, unless they can also be classified as Supervising Practitioners, should not be the ones primarily responsible for the observation and feedback cycles outlined here. They may provide informal support of feedback. Sponsoring Organizations must ensure that the individuals responsible for providing feedback to candidates for the purpose of this requirement receive the training and support necessary to do so effectively (FBE 9). In addition, it is highly recommended that at least one of the two required observations be conducted by faculty in order to build explicit connections between theory and practice (FBE 3).

**Gateway Assessments**

It is imperative that Sponsoring Organizations evaluate candidate readiness prior to the practicum in order to 1) identify at-risk candidates and provide them with the necessary supports and guidance to improve or exit the program (CAN 4) and 2) monitor individual licensure programs to ensure that each is effective (CI 1).

Sponsoring Organizations shall administer gateway assessments to benchmark candidate readiness at at least two junctures prior to the practicum. These gateway assessments are to be selected and/or designed by Sponsoring Organizations to meet the following criteria:

- Involve a performance-based task assessing content-specific pedagogical skill (both PSTs and SMKs). One gateway must be conducted in a PK-12 setting and/or with PK-12 students (e.g. in Stage 2) and the other may be conducted in coursework, such as through a mixed-reality simulation (e.g. in Stage 1). Gateway assessments may also be conducted as part of the observation and feedback process described in the section above.

- Be administered consistently within a Sponsoring Organization’s licensure program area. For example, any candidate enrolled in a Sponsoring Organization’s Elementary 1-6 program will be expected to participate in and pass the same gateway assessment as identified by the Sponsoring Organization, regardless of their courses or instructor assignment. Sponsoring Organizations may request to waive this requirement for individual candidates as needed.

- Include clearly defined minimum performance standards that candidates must meet in order to pass the assessment and ultimately advance beyond the pre-practicum. Candidates at risk of not meeting the standards must be identified and receive the necessary supports and guidance to improve or exit the program (CAN 4).

Sponsoring Organizations are responsible for collecting data from the gateway assessments to monitor individual licensure programs and ensure each program is effective (CI 1) and will demonstrate outcomes tied to the gateway assessments through the formal review process.
**Background & Development Timeline**

The Pre-Practicum Guidelines align with other 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 revised guidelines for public comment.
- May 2018: ESE released the final set of guidelines.

**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.