Ed Prep Policy Advisory 2015

Needs Assessment

This advisory provides an overview of the needs assessment process and supports Sponsoring Organizations (SO) in preparing a needs assessment comprised of sufficient evidence.

Policy Context

Needs assessments are required in two instances:

1. **Low-Completion or Zero Completer Programs**: At the point of formal review, ESE requires that SOs assess the breadth and depth of their program offerings. Specifically, ESE will identify programs that have had zero-completers or low-completion rates in the last three years. The threshold for low-enrollment is determined by ESE annually and takes into account state-level completer data.

2. **New Programs**: SOs may put forth new programs during the formal or informal review cycle.

In both these instances, SOs must demonstrate state-specific need for the program as well as the ability to meet the demand. Operating a high-quality program, as well as reviewing it effectively, takes a considerable amount of resources for both organizations and the state; ESE wants to ensure that investments are made where they are most needed. Similarly, there are concerns that programs that have been largely dormant over a period of years may lack the vitality necessary to produce effective educators.

This is not an insignificant policy challenge: in 2013 there were 1,719 initial licensure teacher programs approved to operate in Massachusetts, just 46% (n=787) of those programs were active.

Because of this and our belief that preparation in Massachusetts should meet the demands of our workforce, the bar for demonstrating need is high. As an example, during the 2014 Informal review period, 12 out of 30 needs assessments were confirmed on their first attempt. This advisory seeks to support organizations in preparing needs assessments by making the rationale and ESE’s decision-making more explicit. While the information below will be helpful in completing the needs assessment form, ultimately, confirmation of need is predicated on a program that has been built intentionally to fill a need in Massachusetts.

Demonstrating Need

SOs are responsible for demonstrating need and providing evidence that they will be able to meet the demand. There are no restrictions on what programs can be put forth; we believe organizations are best positioned to identify the areas of need in the field. Additionally, there are also no automatic confirmations just because a program is nationally or locally recognized as an area of need. For example: Most would agree that STEM teachers are needed; but, of the 106 chemistry programs that are approved in the state only 20 of them were “active” in 2013 – producing fewer than 30 combined chemistry teachers in 2013-2014. We share this data point to illustrate that simple existence of a program does not in and of itself guarantee that a need will be addressed. ESE is eager to review and approve programs that are going to actively recruit, enroll and produce educators for high-need areas.

The section below describes a few categories in which need is may be demonstrated. It may be the case that need is confirmed in one or more of these category areas; you do not need to demonstrate need in each area to have need for your program confirmed.

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1 For purposes of this analysis, we considered “active programs” to be those for which there was at least 1 completer in 2013-2014.
Common Categories of Need

After analyzing past years’ needs assessments, ESE found that there are common categories in which need for a program tends to be based: high-need subject area, district need, and/or candidate interest. Additionally, because we are supportive of any program that produces effective educators, regardless of its size, we have added a fourth category in which we anticipate being able to confirm need: Impact/Effectiveness of completers. The chart below provides a brief description of what need in each of these categories may look like and potential evidence sources that have been presented in the past. This is not an exhaustive list; SOs may demonstrate need in other ways and use sources of evidence other than those provided as examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Need</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Potential Evidence Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High-need subject area</td>
<td>Subject areas that are hard to staff.</td>
<td>Waiver data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Note: While the Critical Teacher Shortage list may be a helpful starting point, it is not sufficient on its own to warrant confirmation of need.</em></td>
<td>Hiring/Retention Data MA Status of the Workforce Reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District need</td>
<td>License areas in which a school/district has indicated need.</td>
<td>Survey data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partnership agreements Employment data Communications w/ Superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Note: General support for a partnership between a district and an SO may be insufficient. If support from a district is being used as evidence, it should be targeted in addressing the need for a particular program.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate interest</td>
<td>Programs that candidates, or potential candidates, are interested in.</td>
<td>Survey data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enrollment data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact/Effectiveness of completers</td>
<td>Candidates who complete this program are demonstrably and consistently effective in their roles. Evidence here must be particularly compelling for need to be confirmed under this category.</td>
<td>Evaluation data SGP data Prestigious recognition/excellence awards Surveys from employers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Guidance

Overall, SOs should work to construct a clear, concise and cogent argument for need. Please keep in mind that based on the nature of the needs assessment, ESE will not make assumptions; will review only the evidence presented; and will not connect dots that are not clearly articulated. Outlined below are other considerations to keep in mind:

- **Evidence should be program-specific.** You want data and information that speaks to both the subject
and the level of the program for which you are applying. For instance, if you are putting forth a physics program, citing data that aggregates all sciences together will be insufficient. Similarly, if you are putting forth a Moderate Disabilities, Prek-8, Initial we will be looking for evidence of need in PreK-8, not 5-12.

- **Avoid generalizations and unsubstantiated assumptions.** Organizations should embed evidence within their narrative to support claims that are made. Statements such as, “Survey data (see supplemental doc #1) indicates that 6 candidates would be interested in enrolling in this program” are stronger than, “many candidates have expressed interested in the program.”

- **Program design is evaluated as a component of the review, not as evidence of need.** While we can appreciate efforts with regards to program development (e.g. philosophy, curriculum, etc.), particulars about program delivery and design are not considered relevant to the demonstration of need.

- **Choose your best evidence.** By being selective, you will focus the narrative on only the most powerful pieces of evidence. Even one piece of strong evidence can justify confirmation of need. For more information, see page 3 of the [Worksheet Overview](#), document provided in the Toolkit.

- **Pay attention to the instructions.** Importantly, adhere to the word limit and only attach supplemental documents (maximum 3) if they strengthen your claim to offer the program and are clearly referenced in the narrative. Additional information on the inclusion of supplemental documents can be found in the [Worksheet Overview](#), document provided in the Toolkit.