



Guidelines for the Pre-Practicum for Teachers

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Guidelines for the Pre-Practicum for Teachers

Introduction

Dear Educators,

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), educator preparation programs, and PK-12 schools and districts each strive to ensure that all students in Massachusetts have access to diverse and effective educators. While this focus has contributed to continued achievement for students overall, disparities in PK-12 student experiences and outcomes persist, in particular for Black, Hispanic and Latino, Asian, Indigenous, and Multiracial learners, as well as multilingual learners and students with disabilities.¹ This is especially true for students with intersecting underserved identities.²

Effective educators in Massachusetts are those who use evidence-based practices to create affirming environments where students have a sense of belonging, engage in deeper learning, and are held to high expectations with targeted support ([DESE Educational Vision, 2023](#)). These *Guidelines for the Pre-Practicum for Teachers* articulate the expectations for early field-based experiences in teacher preparation programs. The updates reflect our goal that all aspiring educators are prepared in evidence-based practices that well-serve all students in Massachusetts, particularly those from systemically marginalized groups and communities, such that all students will have equitable opportunities to excel in all content areas across all grades.

We commit to continuing to work with all stakeholders to improve the experiences and outcomes of the PK-12 students, current educators, and future educators of Massachusetts.

In partnership,

Office of Educator Effectiveness

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

¹ Massachusetts Educational Equity Partnership. (2018).

² Hosp, John L. (n.d.); Jiménez-Castellanos, O., & García, E. (2017).

Purpose

In the Regulations for Licensure and Educator Preparation Program Approval, the pre-practicum is defined as “early field-based experiences with diverse student learners, integrated into courses or seminars that address either the [Professional Standards for Teachers](#) as set forth in [603 CMR 7.08](#) or the [Professional Standards for Administrative Leadership](#) as set forth in [603 CMR 7.10](#), in accordance with the Pre-Practicum Guidelines”³. While all Initial licensure programs include pre-practicum experiences, these Guidelines apply only to Initial teacher programs.

The *Guidelines for the Pre-Practicum for Teachers* 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.⁴ Recent reports from the fields of educator preparation and PK-12 education 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.⁵

The pre-practicum provides candidates with multiple opportunities to apply coursework through increasingly authentic teaching experiences in preparation for the practicum.

Through these guidelines, DESE seeks to be descriptive of expectations, not prescriptive of approach. This provides sponsoring organizations with the flexibility and autonomy to design programming that is aligned with their context.

³ For candidates serving in an apprenticeship or employed as educator of record, these experiences may occur simultaneously with the practicum or practicum equivalent. ([603 CMR 7.02](#)).

⁴ Clinical Practice Framework Six Focus Areas for Effective Student Teaching. (2024).

⁵ University, H., Hill, H., Coppersmith, J., Carter, H., Pollard, C., & Monschauer, C. (n.d.).

Background and Development Timeline

In accordance with the DESE's [Educational Vision](#), these Guidelines were updated to align with other DESE expectations and requirements for defining, developing, and supporting effective teaching practice:

- In September 2023, DESE released the [Guidelines for Educator Preparation Program Approval](#) (2023 Program Approval Guidelines) that describe requirements of programs that endorse candidates for licensure in the Commonwealth. The 2023 Program Approval Guidelines emphasize an expectation that sponsoring organizations center evidence-based practices in individual programs, throughout coursework and field-based experiences, including pre-practicum experiences.
- In June 2024, the [Standards of Effective Teaching Practice](#) were updated to reflect the definition of effective teaching as teaching that centers the evidence-based, culturally and linguistically sustaining practices necessary to advance equitable learning opportunities for all students.
- At the same time, the [2024 Guidelines for the Professional Standards for Teachers](#) (PSTs) and [2024 Guidelines for the Candidate Assessment of Performance](#) (CAP Guidelines), which define the pedagogical knowledge and skills required of all teachers who complete a Massachusetts educator preparation program, were updated to ensure continued consistency between expectations for pre-service and in-service teachers.

In alignment with these requirements, these 2025 *Guidelines for the Pre-Practicum for Teachers* reflect the expectation that teacher candidates begin developing the evidence-based, culturally and linguistically sustaining practices necessary to advance equitable learning opportunities for all students early in their preparation programs.

Pre-Practicum Components

The pre-practicum consists of two components⁶:

1. Observations and Feedback
2. Gateway Tasks

Observations and Feedback

Providing candidates with targeted, high-quality feedback⁷ during early field-based experiences is critical to candidates' growth and development.⁸ Candidates must have sufficient, robust opportunities to learn, observe, and practice their skills during the pre-practicum to be ready to demonstrate them during their practicum and, ultimately, for full responsibility in the licensure role. Sponsoring organizations should design and implement pre-practicum experiences that enable all candidates to be observed and receive high-quality, targeted feedback on their practice.

Observations should be designed to support candidates' learning, particularly in the early stages of their preparation. Given the role of observations in a candidate's development, the sponsoring organization may determine whether pre-practicum observations are announced or unannounced. The sponsoring organization may also determine the appropriate length of each observation; however, observations should be sufficiently long to allow for meaningful engagement and to provide targeted, high-quality feedback on the candidate's practice.

Each program's pre-practicum experiences must meet the following criteria:

1. Observations and feedback must happen at least two times during the candidate's pre-practicum experience.
2. Observations must be of the candidate's pedagogical skills, as articulated in the PSTs.
3. Observations must be conducted of the teacher candidate working directly with PK-12 students.
4. Feedback must be delivered by supervising practitioners, program supervisors, and/or course faculty/instructors.
 - Host teachers that are **not** supervising practitioners may provide informal support to candidates; they are not responsible for the observations or feedback during pre-practicum. (See [page 9](#) for more information).

⁶ In accordance with [603 CMR 7.04 \(4\)](#), the pre-practicum must begin early in the preparation program and be integrated into the courses or seminars that address Professional Standards for Teachers.

⁷ According to the [2023 Guidelines for Educator Preparation Program Approval](#), high-quality feedback is feedback that is specific (based on evidence from a candidate's practice), concrete (related to quality, scope, and/or consistency of practice), useful (provides the candidate with clear next steps for improvement), and addresses areas of both strength and improvement.

⁸ Kiomi Matsumoto-Royo, Conget, P., & María Soledad Ramírez-Montoya. (2023).

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- Sponsoring organizations must ensure that the individuals responsible for providing high-quality feedback receive training and support.

Virtual Observations

Observations and feedback during the pre-practicum are ideally conducted in-person, however virtual observations are permissible. Programs that intend to conduct any⁹ pre-practicum observations virtually must submit a statement of assurance to DESE that includes (1) a statement affirming that no candidate will have all observations and feedback conducted virtually, and (2) a description of how virtual observations will meet the following parameters:

- The teacher candidate is audible (as appropriate) and visible throughout the observation;
- All students are audible (as appropriate) and visible when participating in full-class activities;
- Students working independently or in groups are visible during relevant portion(s) of the observation;
- Student work from individual or group activities is visible during relevant portion(s) of the observation; and
- The recording reflects the full observation; no components of instruction are cut or edited (except as necessary to remove students without permission to be recorded).

Gateway Tasks

All candidates must complete and pass two gateway tasks during the pre-practicum in order to advance beyond the pre-practicum. Gateway tasks assess candidates' performance in discrete skills embedded in the Professional Standards for Teachers (PSTs) and represent a snapshot of candidate performance during the pre-practicum. Gateway tasks are not intended to be comprehensive, multi-point, long-term assessments such as the Candidate Assessment of Performance (CAP).

Gateway tasks must:

1. Involve a performance-based task assessing [pedagogical skills \(PSTs\)](#).
 - a. One gateway task **must** be conducted in a PK-12 setting and/or with PK-12 students.

⁹ For programs that do not routinely use virtual observations: If, due to extenuating circumstances (e.g., illness), one or more observations must be conducted virtually for an individual candidate, that decision and its rationale must be documented with a waiver. Any virtual observation conducted in these circumstances must also meet the listed parameters.

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- b. One gateway task **must** assess candidates in the PST element [I-A-3 Curriculum Literacy](#) in a content area relevant to the license sought (see the [Guidelines for Subject Matter Knowledge](#)).
 - c. Gateway tasks **may** be conducted as part of the observation and feedback process described in the [Observations and Feedback](#) section above.
2. Be administered consistently within a sponsoring organization's licensure program area (e.g., all Elementary 1-6 programs must have the same gateway tasks, which may differ from the gateway tasks used in other licensure programs at the sponsoring organization).
3. Have clearly defined minimum performance standards that candidates must meet in order to pass the gateway task and advance beyond the pre-practicum.
 - a. Candidates who need additional support to meet standards must be identified and receive the necessary guidance (see [CAN 3](#)).

Sponsoring organizations are responsible for collecting data from the gateway tasks to understand the experiences and outcomes of all candidates, and use these data in continuous improve processes to make evidence-informed, equity-centered decisions that lead to improved experiences and outcomes for all candidates (see [CI 2](#) and [CI 4](#)). This data may be requested during the sponsoring organization's Formal or Interim Review.

Structure

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

- **Host Teacher:** A teacher in PK-12 setting where a candidate is completing their pre-practicum experiences.
- **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](#)). Supervising practitioners must have at least three full years of experience under an appropriate Initial or Professional license and have received an evaluation rating of proficient or higher. This role is required for all practicum experiences; an individual in this role may also support candidates during their pre-practicum experiences, but it is not required for a pre-practicum placement.

Considerations

Massachusetts recognizes candidates come with a wide range of lived experiences and professional backgrounds, including those who are changing careers or already working in a school setting. Given this diversity, sponsoring organizations should consider the background of their teacher candidates to design pre-practicum experiences that are responsive to the strengths and needs of their candidates while also meeting program expectations.

While not a comprehensive list, the following are some backgrounds candidates may have that sponsoring organizations should consider in the design or implementation of pre-practicum experiences:

- Teachers of Record
 - [603 CMR 7.02](#) states that “for candidates serving an apprenticeship or employed as educator of record, [pre-practicum] experiences may occur simultaneously with the practicum or practicum equivalent.”
- Dual Program Candidates
 - Candidates completing two separate programs for endorsement (Dual Licensure)¹⁰ will participate in gateway tasks to advance beyond at least

¹⁰ See the [Add License vs. Dual License Advisory](#) for additional information.

two points in each program before entering their practicum. When the sponsoring organization's gateway tasks are the same in both programs, the gateway task(s) may be used as a benchmark for candidate readiness in both licensure programs. For candidates of any program, including dual licensure programs, no fewer than two gateways must be completed prior to entering the practicum.¹¹

- Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Practicum (RTAP)
 - Candidates in a Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program complete their pre-practicum while working in a paid, school-based instructional role within a PK–12 classroom. The apprenticeship model is designed to pair coursework with structured, job-embedded experience over time. During the pre-practicum, apprentices begin developing core teaching skills by observing instruction, supporting students, and applying strategies from their preparation program. These experiences must be intentionally planned to align with licensure requirements and program expectations. Apprentices gradually take on more instructional responsibility and transition into the practicum phase while continuing in the same setting under formal supervision from a supervising practitioner.
- Candidates who work in a PK-12 school/district not as a Teacher of Record
 - Candidates who are working in school settings and are not Teachers of Record may complete their pre-practicum in that setting, provided the experience is supported by the sponsoring organization; includes opportunities for observation, reflection, and feedback; and is aligned with program and licensure role expectations.

¹¹ It is still the expectation that a gateway task be used consistently across respective licensure programs (i.e., a gateway task should not be unique to dual licensure, nor developed specifically for an individual candidate pursuing dual licensure).

Example Observation, Feedback, and Gateway Task Framework

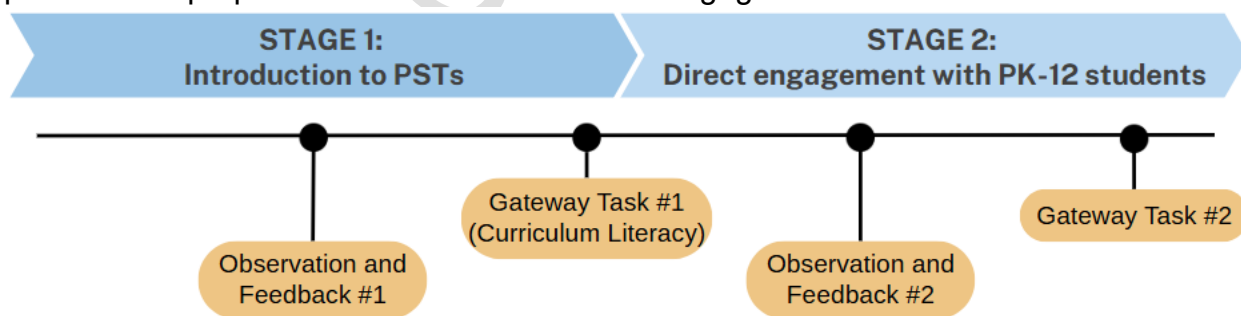
Below is an **example** framework that may be helpful in considering when and how to implement cycles of feedback using gateway tasks. Sponsoring organizations are not required to use this framework; they should design pre-practicum experiences for their programs that provide a mix of activities across different stages in support of individual candidate readiness.

Given the need to scaffold early field-based experiences to meet the needs of individual candidates as they 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 through activities such as guided observations, mixed-reality simulations, and mock teaching embedded into coursework, 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 instructional skills in authentic settings and become prepared to demonstrate readiness during practicum.

Example Structure of Observations & Feedback and Gateway Tasks

Below is an example of how a program might structure its observations, feedback, and gateway tasks during Stage 1 and Stage 2 of a candidate's pre-practicum. This structure is meant to address I-A-3 Curriculum Literacy early in the candidate's pre-practicum to prepare for the candidate's direct engagement with PK-12 students.



Conclusion

The pre-practicum is a critical time for candidates to apply learning from coursework to authentic practice in PK-12 settings with ample support, supervision, and feedback. Meaningful and robust pre-practicum experiences position candidates to successfully demonstrate their abilities in the practicum and enter their first year of employment fully ready to effectively serve *all*¹² students from day one.

¹² “All” represents each member of that group, inclusive of, but not limited to, all races, ethnicities, cultures, languages, socioeconomic statuses, sexual orientations, gender identities, and abilities, with particular focus on those who have been systematically marginalized or underserved, such as those who identify as Black, Hispanic and Latino, Asian, Indigenous, and/or Multiracial.

Appendix A: Corresponding Program Approval Criteria

The following are the criteria from the [2023 Guidelines for Educator Preparation Program Approval](#) that correspond to aspects of the pre-practicum phase of preparation.

Instruction Domain

- INS 6: The program(s) of study embeds field-based experiences such that candidates have opportunities to observe, apply, and reflect on evidence-based practices, including anti-racist and culturally and linguistically sustaining leadership practices.

Continuous Improvement Domain

- CI 2: At least annually, the Sponsoring Organization collects and analyzes evidence from a variety of sources (including stakeholder feedback, data collected by the organization, and, when available, state-collected data) in order to understand the experiences and outcomes of all candidates (with particular focus on those from systemically marginalized races, ethnicities, identity groups, and backgrounds) and identify program strengths and areas for improvement.
- CI 4: The Sponsoring Organization makes evidence-informed, equity-centered decisions that lead to improved experiences and outcomes for all candidates

Candidate Domain

- CAN 2: The Sponsoring Organization positions all candidates to be successful in their program, licensure, and career through equitable, effective, and comprehensive guidance and support systems.
- CAN 3: The Sponsoring Organization identifies and provides differentiated interventions for candidates who need additional support in coursework, fieldwork, or for their social and emotional well-being, and ensures that only candidates who are prepared to be effective educators are endorsed for the licensure role.

Partnerships Domain

- PAR 1: The Sponsoring Organization establishes, evaluates, and sustains partnerships with PK-12 schools/districts to ensure partnerships meet the needs of all candidates (with particular focus on those from systemically marginalized races, ethnicities, identity groups, and backgrounds) and improves or discontinues those that do not meet candidates' needs.

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Field-Based Experiences Domain

- FBE 1: The Sponsoring Organization ensures that pre-practicum and practicum placements expose all candidates to a range of settings, including settings with:
 - access to high-quality curricular materials;
 - diversity of students (including racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic diversity, and diversity of ability);
 - opportunities to integrate candidates into all components of the school community (e.g., staff meetings, professional development, family engagement opportunities); and
 - anti-racist and culturally and linguistically sustaining school cultures.
- FBE 4: Pre-practicum and practicum ensure all candidates experience key milestones throughout the PK-12 academic year (e.g., establishing classroom routines, parent-teacher conferences, IEP meetings, benchmark assessments) and build to readiness for full responsibility in the licensure role.

Appendix B: I-A-3 Curriculum Literacy

I-A-3 Curriculum Literacy states that candidates should:

Skillfully use curricular materials by:

- Determining strengths and weaknesses of materials and adapting as necessary to plan evidence-based, inclusive, and culturally sustaining instruction, including identifying opportunities to create meaningful, relevant connections rooted in the local context.
- Identifying necessary supplemental resources and/or tiered supports to provide all students access to grade-level instruction.
- Utilizing a coherent instructional approach that builds student learning towards grade-level standards or individual learning goals over time through aligned lesson goals, scope, sequence, and tasks.

Curriculum Literacy Definition

Below is additional information about DESE's definition of curriculum literacy, as reflected in both the *2023 Guidelines for Educator Preparation Program Approval* and the *2024 Guidelines for the Professional Standards for Teachers*.

A growing body of research indicates that [curricular materials](#) make a difference in student outcomes and can have a significant impact on ensuring educational equity. High-quality, better-aligned curriculum can prompt improvement in student outcomes that are:

- Comparable to over half a year of additional learning (see [Teaching Higher](#))
- About 1.5 times the difference between an average teacher and one at the 75th percentile (see [Choosing Blindly](#))
- Greater than the difference between a new teacher and one with three years of experience (see [Never Judge a Book by Its Cover](#))
- Reflective of more equitable access to rigorous schoolwork, high expectations, and effective instruction (See [The Opportunity Myth](#))

Educator candidates must be prepared with knowledge and skills to evaluate and skillfully use curricular materials with evidence-based practices, including anti-racist and culturally and linguistically sustaining practices, to ensure equitable outcomes and promote academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness for every student. All educator candidates should have coursework and field-based experiences that prepare them to be curriculum literate. For candidates in Administrative Leadership programs, these experiences may focus on how to provide educators with the knowledge, skills, support, and conditions to develop curriculum literacy.

Curriculum literacy is the ability to:

1. Understand that the integration and connections among content expectations, aligned curricular materials, and student engagement are at the core of high-quality, equitable instruction;
2. Discern high-quality curricular materials from low quality curricular materials; and
3. Skillfully use materials through evidence-based practices that are inclusive and [culturally and linguistically sustaining](#) to ensure the enacted curriculum supports and engages all students to reach their full potential.

Curriculum literacy requires educators and educator preparation programs to shift from exclusively **creating curriculum** from scratch, to include **effectively evaluating curriculum and strategies for skillfully implementing curriculum**. The following definitions anchor DESE's use of **curriculum literacy**:

- **Curricular materials** are resources teachers use to facilitate sequences of learning experiences (e.g., lesson and unit plans, texts); also referred to as adopted curriculum or written curriculum.
- A **curriculum** is a sequence of student learning experiences that teachers facilitate using curricular materials as a foundation (not a script!); also referred to as enacted curriculum or taught curriculum.

DESE strongly encourages sponsoring organizations to design coursework and experiences to build familiarity with the components of high-quality curricula, including those used by partner and/or top hiring districts. Regardless of the materials being used in the school/district where a completer is ultimately employed, curriculum literacy is necessary for all educators in critically and effectively navigating the breadth of options available.

All educators, including administrators, coaches, educator candidates, novice educators, and veteran teachers should understand the following competencies as a means to be curriculum literate:

1. **Understand that the integration and connections** among content expectations, aligned curricular materials, and student engagement are at the core of high-quality equitable instruction.
 - Be fluent with the [state standards](#) and [learning progressions](#) within their content area
 - Be fluent with evidence-based approaches to teaching the content (pedagogical content knowledge)
 - Understand the relationship between equity and challenging tasks outlined in reports such as [The Opportunity Myth](#)
 - Understand how materials support knowledge-building and important content-specific instructional practices (such as explicit teaching of phonemic awareness in early literacy)

- Understand the consequences of the lack of high-quality materials, such as low-quality tasks and low expectations for students
 - Be fluent in the features of high-quality materials, such as:
 - High-quality lessons that support culturally sustaining practices and include rich texts with diverse perspectives and stories, and
 - Providing guidance for supporting multilingual learners, students with disabilities, students working above grade level, and students not yet meeting learning targets
2. **Discern high-quality curricular materials** from low-quality curricular materials in order to advocate for high-quality curricular materials.
- Understand how to use credible curricular reviews, where available, including those from [CUrriculum RATings by TEachers \(CURATE\)](#), [EdReports](#), and [STEM Learning Design](#), as resources for identifying high-quality curricular materials
 - Understand how to use tools such as the [CURATE rubrics](#) for content areas where there are comprehensive curriculum or the [IMET \(Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool\)](#) and [EQuIP](#) tool in content areas that are not being rated by curricular reviews
 - Understand how to use tools such as the [Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard](#) to evaluate the extent to which the curricular materials are culturally responsive and relevant
 - Understand how a curriculum builds student understanding of the content over time by recognizing how lesson goals, scope, sequence, and tasks fit together to support that understanding
 - Understand how curricular materials represent, reflect, affirm, and support many student identities such as, but not limited to race, ethnicity, language, religion, family structures, ability, gender, and sexual orientation
3. **Skillfully use materials** through evidence-based practices that are inclusive and culturally and linguistically sustaining, to ensure the enacted curriculum supports and engages students to reach their full potential.
- A. Grounding in the materials' instructional approach
- Understand the instructional approach of the specific set of curricular materials
 - Understand how the specific curricular materials build student understanding of the content over time through the lessons and units
 - Understand the specific strengths and weaknesses of the materials, and ways that the materials should be supported to address any weaknesses
- B. Navigating the materials
- Understand how to navigate specific curricular materials and resources, including the teacher's guide and high-quality resources outside of the curriculum, to plan for a lesson

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- Understand the features of each unit and/or lesson and how it fits with other aspects of the curriculum (e.g., lesson, section, unit)
 - Be able to use the curricular materials effectively to plan a lesson by examining the lesson objectives, tasks, and expectations for student work and determine the preparation or learning teachers need to do to implement the lesson effectively
- C. Enacting curriculum
- Be able to implement materials effectively and skillfully (what to keep, what to emphasize, what to add, what to adjust, etc.) without undermining the coherence or rigor of the materials and addressing time constraints, specific student learning needs, etc.
 - Understand how to identify supplemental resources and practices needed to address specific student needs
 - Be able to use Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction to support students not yet reaching learning goals
 - Be able to use scaffolding to support students in accessing the curriculum – and removing scaffolds at the appropriate time
 - Be able to use the content and pedagogical knowledge necessary to make instructional decisions based on inclusive and culturally sustaining teaching practices
 - Be able to draw upon students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds to enhance curricular materials and inform instructional decision making
- D. Adjusting practice
- Be able to analyze data from a wide range of sources, including formal and informal assessments and feedback from colleagues, students, and families
 - Be able to use data to adjust practice and implement differentiated supports
 - Be able to engage with families in constructive, asset-based conversations around students' learning and progress and partner with them to understand, monitor, and improve student learning
 - Be able to identify areas where an educator would benefit from additional professional development or coaching to more effectively use curricular materials

Appendix C: Works Cited

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