



## CAP Implementation: Issue Brief 2

### Setting the Stage for CAP: Connecting Pre-Practicum and Practicum Experiences

#### Introduction

In May 2018, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) released [Pre-Practicum Guidelines](#) that summarize expectations for the pre-practicum phase of teacher candidates' preparation.<sup>1</sup> The guidelines reflect relevant evidence about key features of effective teacher preparation, including authentic, supported practice; regular high-quality feedback opportunities; and strengthening the bridge between preparation and practice with ample opportunity to develop and apply the necessary pedagogical content knowledge in classroom settings.

Implementation of the Candidate Assessment of Performance (CAP)—the culminating performance assessment for all teacher candidates in Massachusetts—is the focus of an ongoing research-practitioner partnership between DESE and Abt Associates. In spring 2018, Abt sought to learn about how CAP has been informing candidate experiences and programmatic decisions related to the pre-practicum, including both coursework and field-based experiences (FBE) offered to candidates, and how selected Sponsoring Organizations (SOs) have intentionally used backwards mapping to better align the pre-practicum experience to CAP. Abt staff interviewed teacher preparation program leaders, program supervisors, supervising practitioners (e.g., cooperating teachers), and teacher candidates from two SOs—Bridgewater State University and Catherine Leahy Brine Education Consultants (CLB).

Interview information is complemented by findings from DESE's spring 2018 statewide stakeholder surveys administered to teacher candidates, recent program completers (new teachers with at least one full year of teaching), supervising practitioners, and hiring principals. Together, the survey and interview findings illustrate how CAP is informing pre-practicum experiences for candidates in two SOs, and how the results can be supportive of expectations in the new guidelines for pre-practicum.

---

<sup>1</sup> The pre-practicum represents candidates' earlier field-based preparation addressing the Professional Standards (before student teaching), including field-based experiences integrated into coursework. Following the pre-practicum, candidates move into the field-based practicum experience, during which they assume full responsibility for the classroom(s) for at least 100 hours.

**Written by:** Hayley Didriksen<sup>1</sup>, Sarah Costelloe<sup>1</sup>, and Beth Gamse<sup>2</sup>, January 2019.

<sup>1</sup>Abt Associates; <sup>2</sup>Independent Consultant



## Main Findings

- ✓ *Statewide surveys of teacher candidates, teacher completers, supervising practitioners, and hiring principals indicate appreciation for CAP as a valuable component of effective teacher preparation.*
- ✓ *Introducing components of CAP during the pre-practicum experience may help teacher candidates be better prepared to meet students' needs during practicum.*
- ✓ *Candidates benefit from formal and informal feedback during the pre-practicum experience.*
- ✓ *CAP supports explicit connections between pre-practicum coursework and field-based experiences.*

## Statewide Surveys Suggest CAP Is a Valuable Component of Effective Preparation

Responses to statewide surveys administered by DESE in spring 2018 to teacher candidates,<sup>2</sup> teacher completers,<sup>3</sup> supervising practitioners (SPs), and hiring principals indicate overall positive impressions of CAP as a valuable component of effective teacher preparation.<sup>4</sup> More than half of respondents reported strong positive assessments. Specifically:

- **61%** of teacher candidates and **59%** of teacher completers reported that their **teaching practice improved** as a result of going through CAP during field-based experiences.
- Over half of candidates and completers reported that CAP gave them a **better understanding of their strengths (65% and 57%, respectively) and their areas for improvement** as educators (**66% and 57%**, respectively).
- About half (**49%**) of SPs reported that candidates' **teaching practices improved** as a result of going through CAP.

- **57%** of SPs reported that **participating in CAP helped prepare candidates to participate in the state's Educator Evaluation system.**
- Half of hiring principals (**50%**) who had teacher candidates at their schools agreed that **CAP assesses authentic teaching practices** relevant to the first year of teaching.

Pre-practicum experiences reportedly prepared teacher candidates and completers for their student teaching experience:

- About two-thirds of teacher candidates (**65%**) and teacher completers (**69%**) reported that their **pre-practicum experiences prepared them to assume full responsibility during student teaching.**
- Similarly, two-thirds of SPs (**67%**) reported that **candidates' pre-practicum experiences prepared them for the full student teaching experience.**

The majority of (**81%**) teacher candidates reported that their field-based experiences prepared them to be effective educators. Observations followed by

<sup>2</sup> Teacher candidates at the point of preparation program completion.

<sup>3</sup> Teacher completers are those whose teacher preparation experiences included CAP and who had recently completed their first year of teaching in a Massachusetts public school as of the spring 2018 survey administration.

<sup>4</sup> Respondents included 116 Hiring Principals, 1447 Supervising Practitioners, 778 Teacher Candidates, and 570 Teacher Completers representing over 50 educator preparation programs. This brief summarizes responses to questions asking respondents whether they agreed, somewhat agreed, were neutral, somewhat disagreed, or disagreed with statements about implementation of the Candidate Assessment of Performance (CAP). Percentages reported reflect respondents who "agreed" with statements about CAP, unless otherwise noted.

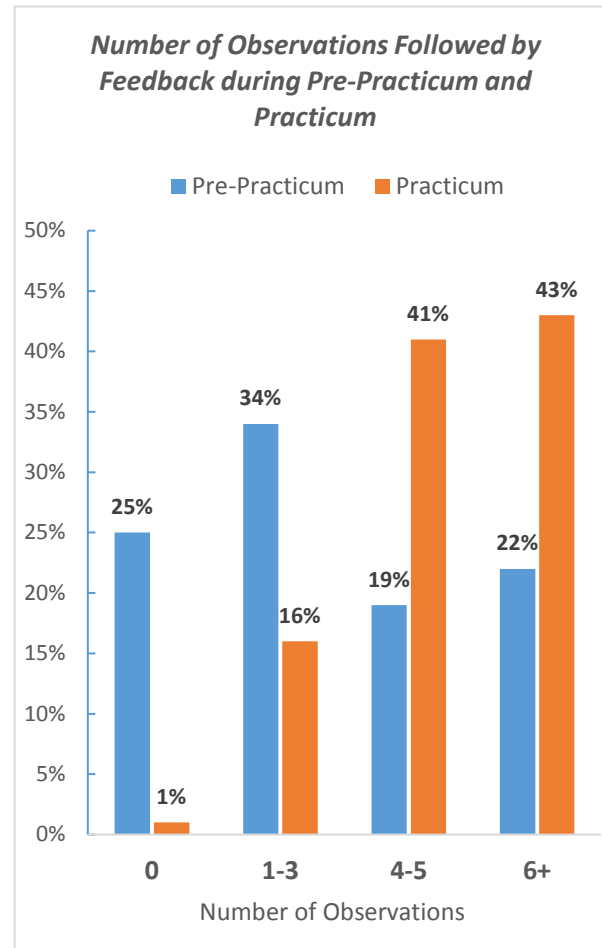
feedback – a core component of CAP – were perceived to be an important aspect of preparing teacher candidates and completers to be effective educators. For example:

- Nearly all supervising practitioners (97%) reported that **providing candidates with feedback on their practice after each observation is an “extremely important” or “very important” activity** for preparing candidates to be effective educators.
- Most (88%) teacher completers statewide reported that **receiving feedback from their supervisors based on observations of their practice was extremely or very important for preparing them to be effective educators.**
- Many teacher candidates (69%) and teacher completers (56%) reported that they will or have already **used feedback received as part of CAP during practicum to identify professional development, trainings, and other resources to improve practice.**

Despite the value placed on meaningful observations and feedback during the practicum, findings from the statewide survey indicate that opportunities for candidates to be observed and receive feedback *during pre-practicum* vary widely: one-quarter of candidates reported that they had neither been observed nor provided feedback in the pre-practicum, and over a third had been observed and provided feedback between one and three times. Further, candidates generally reported having had fewer opportunities to be observed and receive feedback during pre-practicum than practicum experiences (see graph to right).

The survey findings highlighted above provide a useful context within which to consider how SOs approach the pre-practicum experience. All SOs in the Commonwealth are using CAP, and all are

expected to rely upon the state’s guidance about how to prepare teacher candidates. Not surprisingly, SOs customize their offerings to the specific candidates enrolled in their programs. We next turn to a more in-depth examination of two SOs that purposefully vary in who they serve and how they do so.



NOTE: N=778, Missing=33  
SOURCE: Teacher Candidate Survey Q20-21

## Key Characteristics of SOs Participating in Interviews

The two Sponsoring Organizations (SOs) featured in this brief represent different types of preparation programs; each tailors its programs to the needs of the candidates served. Bridgewater State University, which provides both baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate education degree programs, offers perspectives on CAP implementation from a more traditional university-based teacher preparation program. Catherine Leahy Brine (CLB), an organization serving primarily teachers of record seeking masters of education credentials (and those individuals seeking initial or professional licensure), offers perspectives on CAP implementation from a less traditional teacher preparation program.<sup>5</sup> Both SOs offer programs and content areas spanning preschool to grade 12, although they differ in size, institutional characteristics, and types of educator preparation programs offered (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Key Characteristics of Participating SOs**

	Bridgewater State University	Catherine Leahy Brine Education Consultants
Institution Type	Public	Private
Program Types	Baccalaureate, Post-baccalaureate	Post-baccalaureate
# of Program Completers (2016-17)	423	31
# of Initial Licensure Preparation Programs	79	32

## Pre-Practicum Introduction to CAP Helps Prepare Candidates for Practicum Teaching Responsibilities

*The Pre-Practicum Guidelines state that Sponsoring Organizations should design and implement pre-practicum experiences for teacher candidates that allow for responsibilities in pre-practicum and practicum experiences to gradually build such that candidates are ready for full responsibility once in a licensure role (Field-Based Experiences Criterion 4).*

SOs may introduce elements of CAP – both explicitly and implicitly – during the pre-practicum experience, so that candidates are ready to demonstrate efficacy once they start their practicum. Bridgewater and CLB each highlight specific CAP components to introduce and feature

in their pre-practicum coursework and field-based experiences, and both SOs use the pre-practicum experience both to introduce candidates to CAP and help prepare them for what to expect from the CAP process during their practicum experience.

<sup>5</sup> Forty percent of candidates surveyed statewide reported being employed as a teacher of record before or during their teacher preparation program; this suggests that learning about CAP implementation in diverse SO contexts—including those SOs that serve teachers of record—is important at both traditional university-based as well as less traditional programs.

Bridgewater program supervisors (PSs) reported that CAP can be perceived as a complicated and potentially overwhelming process if first introduced during practicum. Therefore, Bridgewater has been particularly deliberate in backwards mapping CAP into the pre-practicum experience, specifically in its Elementary and Early Childhood Education programs. Bridgewater staff described the CAP as a “tremendous tool” at risk of becoming “meaningless if everything [in it] is taught at once.” As such, they chose to focus the pre-practicum on just a few select components of CAP: goal-setting, evidence collection, self-reflection, and an introduction to the essential elements (well-structured lessons and safe learning environment are the primary focus areas) (see callout box). CAP is explicitly referenced during pre-practicum, and the selected CAP components are used to focus coursework and field-based experiences, including observations followed by feedback.

*“I think the piece that really stands out to me is that many of my candidates are teachers of record and the CAP is very reflective of teacher evaluation in the state, I mean it’s almost the same, and that’s what our teachers are accustomed to. They already have the verbiage and understand what we’re talking about, so it’s a real easy transition.” – Program Supervisor*

Bridgewater teacher candidates noted in a focus group that their pre-practicum experience prepared them well for the practicum experience. Focus group participants acknowledged that not all of CAP’s components were necessarily covered during pre-practicum, yet they valued the opportunity to become familiar with some components prior to starting their practicum experience. They perceived CAP – and especially the essential elements – as a valuable lens through which to reflect upon and refine their practice during their field-based experiences. One teacher candidate commented, “It makes you conscious of what you’re doing in the

## Backwards Mapping CAP: Prioritizing and Scaffolding

**Prioritize.** To address concerns about CAP seeming overwhelming if introduced all at once, program directors at Bridgewater have identified specific components of CAP as highest priority to introduce during pre-practicum. Program directors asked the question, “which of the essential elements of CAP will be most important for candidates to consider as they begin their time in the classroom?” With this in mind, they chose to focus on two essential elements during pre-practicum: well-structured lessons and safe learning environment.

**Scaffold.** For these two elements, they created their own set of indicators (“look fors”) in the classroom (e.g., What specific behaviors from the teacher and students would I see in a well-structured lesson?). Candidates refer to this list of indicators when they are observed by peers or by their supervisors. Bridgewater uses components of CAP to create additional scaffolding to help candidates reflect on their field-based experiences, while simultaneously aligning the pre-practicum experience with the evaluation framework they will be assessed on during practicum (and ultimately as a teacher of record).

classroom and how you’re interacting with students.”

Another candidate noted that being introduced to certain CAP components during pre-practicum allowed candidates additional time to develop familiarity with those components. She explained that by the time a candidate enters the actual practicum experience, “you’re so familiar with the elements, that even if you aren’t implementing them [successfully], you can still focus on areas of strengths and weaknesses.”



CLB's approach to integrating CAP into the pre-practicum experience also includes opportunities for candidates to become familiar with some of CAP's components, albeit somewhat differently. Interview respondents noted that while certain CAP components are covered during pre-practicum, explicit connections to CAP during coursework are not necessarily prominent. For example, a CLB program supervisor described the pre-practicum course on literacy instruction, which includes discussion of student assessments, in which candidates learn how different types of assessments may be used to measure impact on student learning. In this specific course, candidates learn about and are prepared to be assessed on a key component of CAP – measuring impact on student learning – without making an explicit connection to the CAP rubric or CAP cycle. The SO leader at CLB advised, "For integrating more CAP into pre-prac, you don't create new courses, but look at the good things in the courses you have that are directly tied to good teaching practices... See how you can use what you have."

In addition, CLB requires all candidates to participate in the Advanced Seminar course or "Prac Sem" course, which spans candidates' pre-practicum and practicum experiences and explicitly covers all aspects of CAP. The Prac Sem supplements pre-practicum coursework and serves to support and help guide candidates during their field-based experiences. During the pre-practicum, the Prac Sem activities focus on preliminary activities in the CAP cycle; teacher candidates complete a self-assessment and draft preliminary goals for their teaching. Next, candidates complete

the Preliminary Goal-Setting Form, based on their self-assessment. Candidates discuss these CAP documents as part of the Prac Sem course. In addition, both of these forms are shared with the program supervisors and supervising practitioners at the beginning of the candidate's practicum. One PS at CLB emphasized the value of more explicitly introducing components CAP into the pre-practicum experience is that "[candidates] have the verbiage and understand what we're talking about" as they transition to the practicum.

For teachers of record enrolled at CLB, the pre-practicum field-based experience is simply another aspect of their regular teaching responsibilities while simultaneously participating in a M.Ed. and/or licensure program. In fact, the distinction between pre-practicum and practicum experiences was less salient for CLB candidates who were already teachers of record; rather, the CLB candidates were more conscious of CAP overall. Teacher candidates at CLB expressed appreciation for CAP as a tool for helping them refine their practice, and one candidate noted that CAP offers a "good opportunity to self-reflect." Two candidates described being nervous about CAP or thinking it was a form of criticism, but once through the CAP experience, acknowledged that it helped make them "better educator[s]" and was created "to help candidates succeed." Similarly, CLB program supervisors and supervising practitioners noted that the pre-practicum experience offers candidates an opportunity to develop a habit of reflective practice, and further, to focus on improvements to teaching practices in targeted areas.

### Key Takeaways

- ✓ Incorporating CAP into the pre-practicum experience may not require covering all components of CAP, but instead focusing on just a few components.
- ✓ Introducing CAP during the pre-practicum experience helps to build candidates' familiarity with the evaluation framework and its key components.

## Candidates Benefit from Formal and Informal Feedback during Pre-Practicum

---

*The Pre-Practicum Guidelines state that SOs are responsible for implementing pre-practicum experiences for teacher candidates that include opportunities for candidates to receive high-quality, targeted feedback during field-based experiences that improves their practice (Field-Based Experiences Criterion 10).*

Opportunities for candidates to be observed and receive feedback during the pre-practicum experience can be an important step for ensuring that candidates are ready to teach once they become teachers of record. As indicated by statewide survey responses, observations followed by feedback – a core component of CAP – are perceived to be an important aspect of preparing teacher candidates and completers to be effective educators. Interviews with SOs leaders and supervisors suggest that integrating opportunities for feedback into the pre-practicum experience requires intentionality by program directors, and may be more logistically challenging for certain program types.

During interviews, teacher candidates at Bridgewater expressed great appreciation for the numerous opportunities to be observed and given detailed feedback. Bridgewater staff explained that feedback can be provided by other educators and not only by supervisors. For example, their program developed a number of strategies to integrate both formal and informal opportunities for observation followed by feedback including:

- **Peer feedback.** Bridgewater assigns candidates to pre-practicum classroom placements in clusters of two to three candidates; as such, candidates have opportunities to observe and be observed by the other candidates who share a field placement to provide and receive written feedback to/from peers.
- **Video reflections.** Candidates, their peers, and program supervisors watch video recordings of candidates teaching a lesson to provide formal and informal feedback.
- **Use of Mursion simulation system.** Candidates participate in Mursion virtual reality simulation

where they practice delivering a short lesson segment. Candidates receive immediate, real-time feedback as the Mursion avatars' react to and change behaviors in response to their teaching decisions, as well as feedback from their program supervisor and peers who observe the simulation.

At CLB, program supervisors and supervising practitioners reported challenges in carving out opportunities to conduct observations immediately followed by feedback for teachers of record during pre-practicum. They attributed this to limited staff capacity to visit candidates' classrooms to conduct observations during pre-practicum. Perhaps not surprisingly, they noted this was markedly less of an issue during the practicum itself, when the program supervisor's time is purposefully integrated into the CAP observation structure.

Although program supervisors at CLB do not currently have a formal mechanism in place for conducting observations followed by feedback during pre-practicum, one program supervisor suggested that having candidates record videos of themselves in their classroom could be a potential alternative. This individual explained that she had several candidates in her course bring in videos of their pre-practicum work unprompted so that they could watch and critique themselves and receive feedback both from her as well as from peers. Further, she pointed out, using video recordings may offer an alternative means for SOs with limited supervisor capacity to conduct live pre-practicum observations to provide feedback to candidates on their practice.

Teacher candidates from CLB identified the opportunities to be observed and receive

immediate feedback among the “most useful” components of CAP during their pre-practicum experience. As one candidate noted, observations

followed by feedback during pre-practicum helped her “learn a lot about myself as a teacher.”

## Key Takeaways

- ✓ Feedback comes in many forms, and candidates may benefit from opportunities to receive both formal feedback from supervisors and informal feedback from peers.
- ✓ Integrating use of technology, including video recordings and classroom simulation systems, can offer a means to increase opportunities for candidates to receive feedback during pre-practicum.

## CAP Helps Support Explicit Connections between Coursework and Field-Based Experiences

*The Pre-Practicum Guidelines indicate that SOs are responsible for implementing pre-practicum experiences for teacher candidates that include field-based experiences that are fully embedded in program coursework such that connections between theory and practice are explicit (Field-Based Experiences Criterion 3).*

CAP offers a framework that helps support explicit connections between pre-practicum coursework and field-based experiences. The content and structure of pre-practicum varies across the two SOs, yet each approach reflects the SOs’ respective efforts to create meaningful and relevant early field-based experiences for the candidates in their programs.

At Bridgewater, the pre-practicum experience is designed to serve traditional teacher candidates in a baccalaureate or post-baccalaureate program. As such, staff from Bridgewater perceive the pre-practicum experience as a vehicle for structured introductions to classroom settings, with support from Supervising Practitioners, to help prepare candidates for their upcoming practicum. Typically, the pre-practicum experience is one of the first opportunities Bridgewater candidates have to spend time in the classroom, and thus pre-practicum focuses on providing foundational knowledge and experiences to prepare candidates to take over more teaching responsibilities once they get to practicum. However these experiences are informed and shaped by an emphasis on

recurring opportunities to practice, to be observed, to provide and receive feedback, and to reflect.

For candidates in the Elementary and Early Childhood Education programs, Bridgewater provides teacher candidates with hands-on preparation experiences by creating clusters of two to three teacher candidates who are jointly assigned to a given classroom for a semester. Each cluster visits the classroom regularly and is responsible for collectively teaching three or four lessons over the semester. The individual candidates take turns leading and presenting the lessons, and work together as a team to co-plan the lessons they teach during the pre-practicum. This allows teacher candidates to experience leading and teaching a classroom of students while receiving peer support and peer feedback throughout the process. The program supervisor and supervising practitioner also provide feedback on candidates’ lessons. Candidates use the CAP essential element specific indicators or “look fors” that have been developed by program directors (see callout box on page 5) to help scaffold the feedback they provide to their peers and to reflect on the feedback they receive from supervisors.



To further support the transition from pre-practicum to practicum, Bridgewater candidates' final exam during pre-practicum coursework consists of completing a self-assessment using evidence collected over their entire semester, including video of their own practice. The semester ends with goal-setting for the next semester so candidates have something concrete to work towards during practicum.

*"[Candidate] has already been a teacher, so [CAP] really just helped her hone her skills... she's already an early childhood professional, so she has that skill set already... I always call it 'new eyes' like they've been doing something the whole time and just didn't realize it."*

*– Supervising Practitioner*

Because most candidates at CLB are teachers of record and are, therefore, already in their own respective classrooms full-time, the pre-practicum experience necessarily differs in structure from that offered by programs serving candidates enrolled in more traditional baccalaureate teacher preparation programs. As such, the emphasis of pre-practicum is not necessarily about preparing candidates to take on additional responsibilities in the classrooms during practicum, but instead about providing a

new set of tools they can implement in their own classrooms.

CLB's pre-practicum coursework includes three required courses (Psychology of Learning for the Inclusion of All Students; A Literacy Course customized to individual candidates' area and level of license; and Curriculum Design and Implementation for Multi-Needs Populations). Pre-practicum at CLB focuses on leveraging the day-to-day experiences candidates have in their own classrooms to help them learn, grow, and prepare to demonstrate success in CAP. Specifically, pre-practicum coursework is closely tied to candidates' field-based experiences, and it generally emphasizes learning skills and strategies that candidates can immediately test out by implementing in their own classrooms. Candidates then reflect on those experiences in subsequent coursework discussions. In addition to the required pre-practicum courses listed above, candidates also participate in the "Advanced Seminar course" (called "Practicum Seminar" or "Prac Sem" described above). This course spans the semester prior to the practicum and continues during the practicum; it focuses specifically on CAP requirements.

## Key Takeaways

- ✓ CAP offers a framework to support meaningful reflection on practice through candidates' field-based experiences.
- ✓ The structures and content of pre-practicum, including the degree to which CAP is explicitly introduced, vary across SOs, reflecting an effort to tailor the pre-practicum experience to the needs of the teacher candidates they serve.

In summary, the purpose of pre-practicum is to provide candidates with opportunities to apply learning from coursework so that they will be prepared to demonstrate their readiness to teach during the practicum. Integrating CAP into the pre-practicum experience can help provide a framework for providing meaningful field-based experiences, observations followed by high quality feedback, and opportunities to practice and be assessed *before* practicum, where CAP will be the ultimate capstone assessment of candidate efficacy.