February 2021

Pilot of Alternative Assessments for Licensure: Guidance for Educator Preparation Programs

Introduction

All educator candidates must take and pass both the Communication and Literacy Skills MTEL and the relevant subject matter knowledge (SMK) MTEL(s) as a requirement for provisional and initial licensure. This requirement is set forth in M.G.L. chapter 71, section 38G, which states that candidates for licensure must "*pass a test established by the board which shall consist of two parts: (A) a writing section which shall demonstrate the communication and literacy skills necessary for effective instruction and improved communication between school and parents; and (B) the subject matter knowledge for the certificate.*"

In October of 2020, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) voted on a regulatory amendment, CMR 603 7.04(2)(e), which creates flexibility in piloting alternative assessments to the MTEL for educator licensure. These pilots came as a result of the Commissioner's push to examine our licensure practices and other strategies to promote entry into the profession and retention for individuals of color, based on compelling data, research, and feedback from the field. Through these pilots, we hope to learn about alternative ways to assess prospective educators' content knowledge and communication and literacy skills in a way that maintains a high standard for the profession.

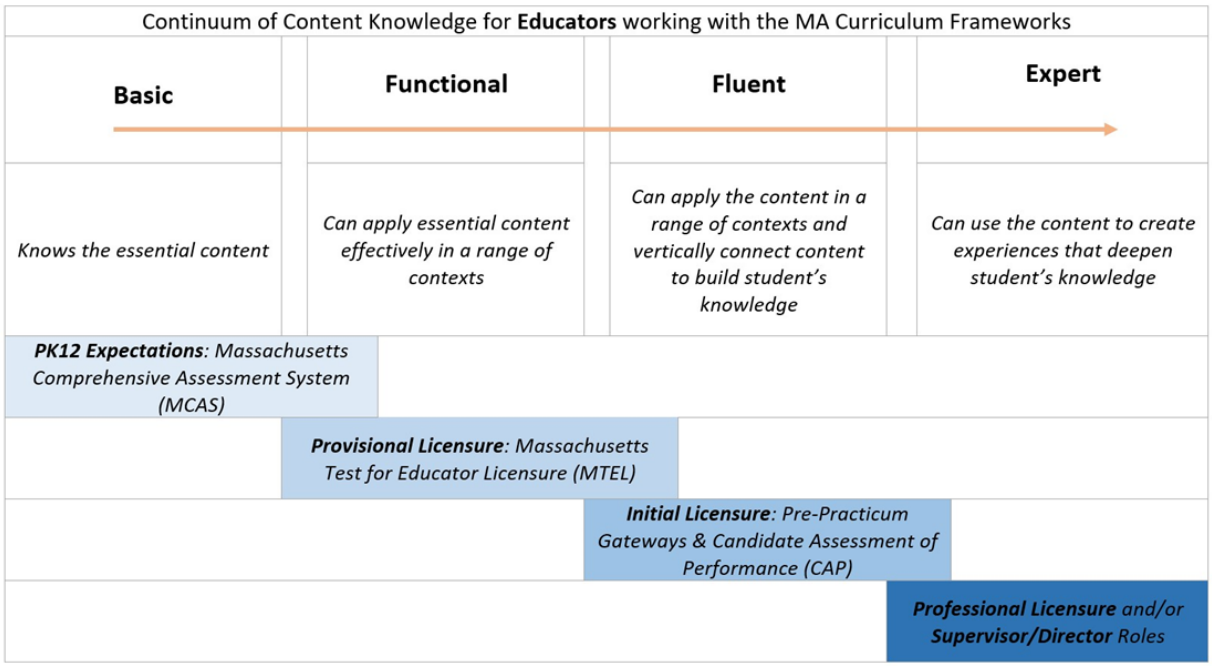
We see this as an incredible opportunity to pilot and learn about alternative assessments for licensure that further support recruiting and retaining more educators of color into our Massachusetts classrooms. Through the pilots, we will explore what types of alternatives to the MTEL are possible and evaluate whether educator preparation programs are well-positioned to attest to required knowledge and skills and under which conditions. Massachusetts is one of the first states in the nation to create a regulatory structure to pilot alternatives like this. Massachusetts is leading the way in building an evidence-base to support additional ways in which we assess teacher candidate knowledge and skills.

Background

The Commissioner has approved three alternative assessments to pilot, including an alternative assessment for MA Sponsoring Organizations to attest to educator preparation candidates' subject matter knowledge in place of the required subject matter MTELs. The guidance below outlines expectations for Sponsoring Organizations interested in applying to participate in this pilot. At this time, Sponsoring Organizations are *only* eligible to attest to the knowledge assessed through the subject matter MTELs. DESE will host at least one roundtable meeting each year with participating Sponsoring Organizations to understand what we are collectively learning and experiencing through the pilot, and based on these discussions, DESE may update this guidance accordingly.

This subject matter attestation pilot was approved in large part due to increased coherence between subject matter knowledge requirements in preparation and employment and corresponding accountability structures and expectations now in place. In 2018, the Department released the Subject-

Matter Knowledge Guidelines, which grounded all preparation and licensure expectations in the *Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.* These SMK Guidelines necessitate support and assessment of subject-specific pedagogy in preparation programs in order to ensure that initial teacher licensure completers can demonstrate content fluency (see continuum below), which exceeds the functional level of content knowledge assessed via MTELs. Preparation providers have since implemented content-specific performance-based assessments through at least two subject-specific gateway tasks during the pre-practicum stage before a candidate enters into student teaching. Additionally, teacher candidates are assessed during the practicum using the Candidate Assessment of Performance as a final measure of readiness to teach, and recently released research finds that candidate performance on this Massachusetts-specific assessment is predictive of on-the-job performance.



It is worth noting that candidates enrolled in educator preparation programs ultimately need to demonstrate content fluency, which extends beyond functional knowledge (see image above on page two), as a component of their initial licensure program. Content fluency, however, is measured through other mechanisms (i.e., Candidate Assessment of Performance) and is not part of the guidance for this attestation. Additionally, it is highly unlikely that the breadth of content covered on an MTEL would be demonstrated through a practicum, given the full license band and the limitations of a single placement. Therefore, the successful completion of an initial licensure program is insufficient evidence to attest to functional content knowledge.

This subject matter attestation pilot creates structured flexibility for Sponsoring Organizations when they have evidence of a candidate's functional content knowledge, independent of their success on MTEL. The pilot allows Sponsoring Organizations to attest that teacher candidates have demonstrated the required functional content knowledge.

Eligibility and Requirements

It is important to acknowledge the additional capacity and investment that this type of attestation will require of an organization when determining whether to apply to participate in the pilot; we understand that not all eligible Sponsoring Organizations will choose to apply to participate in this pilot. Since MTELs are a licensure requirement and are not explicitly connected to program approval, structures for establishing or determining functional content knowledge are not currently embedded into programs equally across Sponsoring Organizations. In many cases, demonstrating functional content knowledge through the MTEL currently serves as a foundation upon which organizations have built licensure programs to deepen candidates' content fluency, connected to the Professional Standards for Teachers.

That said, some Sponsoring Organizations are currently well-positioned to attest to functional subject matter knowledge covered on required MTELs through assignments in subject-specific courses, pre-practicum experiences including Gateway Tasks, and/or other required assessments that are currently embedded in programs that allow for robust triangulation of candidates' knowledge. Other Sponsoring Organizations are currently well-positioned to incorporate new assessments that would allow them to collect evidence and attest to functional content knowledge.

All MTELs are eligible to be incorporated into this attestation pilot **except for** the following:

- Adult Basic Education
- Reading Specialist
- Sheltered English Immersion
- Vocational Technical Literacy Skills
- Bilingual Education
- Communication and Literacy Skills Test

Per the regulatory amendment, this pilot will continue through June 30, 2024. Continued acceptance of the alternative assessments beyond the pilot period requires approval by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. DESE maintains the ability to: 1) revoke pilot participation at any point during the pilot period and 2) require adjustments based on what we are learning from evaluators and/or annual data collection.

Below is information regarding Sponsoring Organization eligibility to apply to participate in the pilot, candidate eligibility requirements, expectations regarding evidence collection to attest to subject matter knowledge, and annual data collection requirements.

Sponsoring Organization Eligibility

Sponsoring Organizations that meet the following requirements are eligible to apply to participate in this pilot:

- Offer initial teacher licensure programs;

- Approved or Approved with Distinction;[1]
- Submitted Subject Matter Knowledge Statement of Assurance indicating programs have been revised in support of ensuring candidates meet expectations as outlined in the 2018 Subject Matter Knowledge Guidelines;
- Dean or Dean-equivalent who will sign off on all pilot attestations (one individual identified per organization); and
- One designated content expert per MTEL who will sign off on all relevant pilot attestations in accordance with their content expertise (see below for additional information on content expertise).

Eligible Sponsoring Organizations can apply to attest to any of the content MTELs (with the exception of those listed above) that are licensure requirements for initial teacher programs they are approved to offer. If an organization offers multiple programs for a license (e.g., English 5-12 at both the baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate level), they can apply for all routes to be included in the pilot or just one. All candidates enrolled in a program approved to include an attestation route do not need to demonstrate functional content knowledge through this attestation rather than through passing the MTEL. For example, an organization attesting to functional content knowledge covered on the English MTEL could use this route for five of the 20 candidates enrolled in the English 5-12 baccalaureate licensure program.

In the application, organizations will specify which MTELs they wish to include in the pilot and will submit a written MTEL Attestation Policy that articulates how they will implement the attestation process at their organization in accordance with the guidance below (see Appendix A, prompt 1). Candidates who complete this attestation route will be part of program approval accountability alongside completers who did not participate in the pilot.

Candidate Eligibility

At a minimum, candidates must be enrolled in an approved initial teacher licensure preparation program, as documented in ELAR, and must be in good standing with the program. Sponsoring Organizations must either: 1) have candidates demonstrate they have taken and failed the required MTEL for which they are seeking an attestation, or 2) articulate a separate candidate eligibility requirement approach to be reviewed and approved by DESE.

The intent behind requiring that candidates meet an eligibility threshold are twofold. First is the additional capacity and investment required by a Sponsoring Organization to implement this type of assessment and attestation process. During the pilot period, organizations do not need to completely restructure programs such that *all* candidates be required to demonstrate evidence for *every* test objective in an MTEL. Using the results of one failed MTEL as a baseline streamlines the focus to the

[1] Organizations currently undergoing the formal program approval review process are eligible to apply, though eligibility may be impacted by the result of the review. If you are currently undergoing review and would like to discuss this alongside your review timeline, please let us know by emailing us at EducatorPreparation@mass.gov

components of the assessment where the candidate did not demonstrate proficiency. Second, it is essential that Sponsoring Organizations do not preemptively make assumptions about an individual's ability to pass an MTEL. Sponsoring Organizations may choose to add additional candidate eligibility requirements to ensure consistent and fair opportunities for candidates to engage in this pilot. Articulating clear and consistent eligibility criteria at the outset will ensure that candidates understand the options available to them so that: 1) programs are not completely restructured when not all candidates will participate in this pilot, and 2) there is fair and consistent access to this pilot.

Similar to policies for passing the MTEL, insufficient demonstration of functional content knowledge through this attestation should not, on its own, preclude a candidate from progressing through their licensure program.

Standards for Evidence Collection using MTEL Test Objectives

MTEL attestations must measure the breadth of content knowledge found within the Frameworks in the manner that the SMK MTELs are currently designed to do, e.g., including content two grade levels above and below the grade span of the license and full coverage of all MTEL objectives. This level of functional content knowledge is articulated through the relevant test objectives for each MTEL. In the case where the objectives have recently been revised, the proposed pilot approach must be aligned to the *revised objectives of each test, even if the equivalent MTEL test is not yet available to be taken*. For example, revised objectives for the English MTEL are posted here for the revised test beginning in late Spring 2021; in this example, programs should align the relevant attestation to the English (61) test objectives.

In the application, organizations must identify the sources of evidence they will use to authentically assess candidate **functional** content knowledge at the same level of rigor as the MTEL, as well as how they will evaluate that evidence (see Appendix A, evidence grid). It is likely that multiple pieces of evidence will be needed to comprehensively assess functional knowledge of each test objective, given the depth of content embedded within each objective. Evidence may be evaluated from work previously completed by the candidate, assessed by the content expert from the Sponsoring Organization. Evidence may also be evaluated from newer demonstrations of content knowledge through assignments, oral defense questions, or other performance-based assessments developed by the Sponsoring Organization and assessed by the designated content expert. Examples of what may and may not be used as evidence of functional content knowledge for the purposes of this pilot are listed below.

- Example sources of evidence include, though are not limited to:
    - Specific assignments with grading rubric and grade
    - Essays with clear rubric/expectations
    - Pre-practicum Gateway Tasks with grading rubric and grade
    - An interview or content-defense review
    - Written test
    - Work products or experience from other industries where the candidate was the sole contributor

    - An analysis of a student work sample focused on addressing student misconceptions
    - Observation of a lesson where demonstration of functional content knowledge is clear
- Non-examples include:
    - GPA
    - Course grade in subject area
    - Lesson Plans
    - The Candidate Assessment of Performance

If the candidate must demonstrate they have taken and failed the required MTEL for which they are seeking an attestation from the Sponsoring Organization (the recommended eligibility requirement noted above), candidates must submit their score report to their program. The Sponsoring Organization will assess and attest to any MTEL test objectives within subareas for which the candidate did not answer "many" or "most" of the multiple choice items and/or provide an "adequate" or "thorough" response to open-response items. Sponsoring Organizations cannot use results from one or multiple MTEL attempts to account for more than 50% of the MTEL subareas.

Organizations must also indicate in their application how they will determine the originality of the work submitted by a candidate (see Appendix A, prompt 2), designing the process in such a way that ensures a candidate provides documentation that is solely a reflection of their own knowledge.

Content Expertise - The individual(s) evaluating evidence to attest to candidates' functional content knowledge must have expertise in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the license area subject matter knowledge requirements outlined in the SMK Guidelines. While multiple individuals can collectively evaluate evidence, a single content expert (per MTEL attestation) must sign the attestation for all candidates going through this attestation route within an organization to ensure consistency and rigor. Sufficient content expertise will need to be described in the application (see Appendix A, prompt 4).

Annual Data Collection

On an annual basis, per expectations in the regulations regarding the evaluation of this pilot, participating organizations must submit the following information:

- Name, MEPID, program, race/ethnicity, native language, and email of candidates who engaged in this pilot, including those who attempted, but did not ultimately receive the attestation.
- Documentation of the fulfillment of the candidate's eligibility requirements.
- Documentation of the fulfillment of the candidate's functional content knowledge, including the evidence evaluated and the rubric or scoring expectations used on specific pieces of evidence. Organizations must ensure that the candidate evidence addresses and measures a breadth of knowledge within the MTEL test objectives in a rigorous manner and must specify how rigor was determined.
    - Sign off from the content expert and Dean for each candidate.

Additional information as needed based on provider implementation and annual data collected by DESE.

DESE will provide additional information and guidance on how and in what form this annual data will be collected. Organizations must maintain documentation for each candidate for a period of at least seven years. All documentation related to this pilot is subject to audit.

Application Process

Sponsoring Organizations interested in participating in this pilot may submit one application that includes information about each content MTEL for which they would like to establish an attestation (see Appendix A). Using the guidance in this document, organizations should articulate an MTEL Attestation policy (see prompt 1), outlining the process for a candidate opting into this pilot, including what will happen if a candidate does not meet the expected bar of the attestation. Similar to the waiver policy, organizations will determine when and when not to activate this attestation route for individual candidates. While the policy must be approved by DESE in alignment with the expectations in this guidance, it is under the authority of the Sponsoring Organization to determine when to support a candidate through this route; an organization's participation in this pilot does not automatically signal that enrolled candidates must gain access to the pilot.

DESE will review the application and notify the organization within 30 days of receipt of the application. If approved to begin the pilot, Sponsoring Organizations will receive attestation authority for each applicable MTEL through the secure Department score reporting system. Sponsoring Organizations can begin implementing the pilot and collecting evidence upon receipt of notification of approval to participate in the pilot.

Organizations will attest to meeting the MTEL requirement and will use the Dropbox feature in Directory Administration to upload results (DESE will work with SOs on uploading results). This attestation will serve as meeting the requirement currently met by passing that MTEL. Once a candidate has met all additional licensure requirements, they will be issued an initial license that looks and operates like any initial license obtained by an individual who met the MTEL requirements through passing all relevant MTELs. Organizations should notify candidates that they are not required to disclose how they met the MTEL requirement when applying for employment in MA public schools.

Timeline

- 1st round applications will be due on April 5, 2021 with rolling applications beginning June 1, 2021: Within no more than 30 days of receipt, DESE will review applications and send notification of review decision
- Annual Virtual Roundtables with participating SOs
- Annual Data Collection for participating SOs
- 2022: Webinar to share out what we are learning from the alternative assessment pilots
- July 1, 2023: Final day by which SOs may submit an application. In order to support the evaluation of this pilot, DESE will not accept new applications for this pilot within one year of the end of the Pilot.

Appendix A: Subject Matter Attestation Application

Please submit Application and supporting documents to EducatorPreparation@mass.gov with the subject line: Subject Matter Attestation Application

Sponsoring Organization	
Name and Title of Individual completing the Subject Matter Attestation Application	
List each teacher licensure program included in this application and associated MTEL(s).	*For Example:* *Elementary, 1-6, Baccalaureate – Foundations of Reading only* *Elementary, 1-6, Post-Baccalaureate – Foundations of Reading only*
Prompts 1-4, are required for each licensure program. Please duplicate this table as needed.	
Prompt 1: **MTEL Attestation Policy. Please provide (as an attachment to this application) or describe here your policy that includes candidate eligibility requirements to go through this alternative.** Examples of what this might include are: Where in their program must they be? Will you require that candidates take the required MTEL and share their score report, or will you define some other benchmark in order to become eligible? Will you take a different approach for Baccalaureate and Post-Baccalaureate candidates? What will happen if a candidate does not meet the expected bar for the attestation (Can the candidate go through the process again? What type of support will they be provided?)? **Please Note:** If you are not requiring at least one attempt on the MTEL, a separate candidate eligibility articulation must be included as part of this application for review and sign-off by the Department.	
Prompt 2: **Please describe the process that will be used for capturing and reviewing evidence of a candidate's functional content knowledge.** Considerations include: Will you allow the	

inclusion of evidence from outside of your Sponsoring Organization? Will you allow the inclusion of evidence captured before the individual became eligible for this route? How will you determine the originality of the work submitted by a candidate?	
Prompt 3: **Given the original intent and goals for this pilot, describe how you will target this pilot in ways that contribute to the diversification of the ed prep workforce?** (e.g. the programs you are putting forth for pilot, candidates unlikely to re-attempt MTEL). Please include how many currently enrolled candidates of color are in your program and the percentage of enrolled candidates versus overall enrolled in your institution.	
Prompt 4: **Please describe your decision-making procedure that will lead to attestation of candidate knowledge**. This attestation must include sign off from at least a relevant content expert and program leader (Dean or Dean-equivalent) - please name the individuals who will serve in this role and explain why they are the appropriate signers.	

Please respond to the prompt below and complete the evidence grid by listing the MTEL test objectives and sources of evidence your organization would consider as a part of this attestation. A separate prompt response and evidence grid should be submitted for each MTEL included in the application.

MTEL: (for example, Foundations of Reading)	
Please briefly describe how these pieces of evidence: 1) were selected and 2) will be used holistically in determining functional content knowledge	
Name of Content Expert:	(this should be one person that will be signing off for all candidates for this specific MTEL Alternative Assessment)

Test Objective – List each MTEL test objective for the relevant MTEL below (as an example, Foundations of Reading MTEL test objectives are listed below)	**Evidence Source(s) that would be considered by organization to meet functional knowledge of the content in the test objective**
Demonstrate knowledge of principles and evidence-based instructional practices for developing language and emergent literacy skills, including phonological and phonemic awareness, concepts of print, and the alphabetic principle.	
Demonstrate knowledge of principles and evidence-based instructional practices for developing beginning reading skills, including phonics, high-frequency words, and spelling.	
Demonstrate knowledge of principles and evidence-based instructional practices for developing word analysis skills and strategies, including syllabication, structural or morphemic analysis, and orthographic skills.	
Demonstrate knowledge of principles and evidence-based instructional practices for developing reading fluency at all stages of reading development.	

Demonstrate knowledge of principles and evidence-based instructional practices for promoting academic language development, including vocabulary development.	
Demonstrate knowledge of principles and evidence-based instructional practices for promoting comprehension and analysis of literary texts.	
Demonstrate knowledge of principles and evidence-based instructional practices for promoting comprehension and analysis of informational texts.	
Apply knowledge of principles and evidence-based best practices for assessing reading development.	
Apply knowledge of principles and evidence-based best practices of reading instruction.	
Prepare an organized, developed analysis on a topic related to the development of foundational reading skills.	
Prepare an organized, developed analysis on a topic related to the development of reading comprehension.	