Associate to Bachelor's Degree Pathways Advisory

Updated Spring 2025

This advisory outlines the expectations for licensure pathway programs established by sponsoring organizations to allow candidates with an associate degree to transfer into a bachelor's degree educator preparation program.

Background

In alignment with DESE's Educational Vision that "all students in Massachusetts, particularly students from historically underserved groups and communities, will have equitable opportunities to excel in all content areas across all grades," the Office of Educator Effectiveness supports approved sponsoring organizations' creation of pathways towards Initial licensure that increase access to preparation programs and contribute to a diverse and effective workforce in the Commonwealth. This includes pathways that support prospective candidates' transition from an associate degree to a bachelor's degree program.

Associate to Bachelor's Degree Pathways

Within an approved preparation program, sponsoring organizations may design multiple variations or pathways that afford candidates choice in how their program of study is structured, such as a residency model, a double major pathway, or an associate-to-bachelor's-degree pathway, while adhering to **equivalent overall program requirements**. During a sponsoring organization's formal review, DESE reviews evidence of effectiveness for all variations and pathways within each licensure program.

Sponsoring organizations may partner with community colleges, early college programs, and other institutions offering associate degree programs (hereafter referred to as "starting institutions") to offer clear pathways for prospective candidates to transfer into bachelor's degree teacher preparation programs. As the endorsing institution, the sponsoring organization is responsible for reviewing the starting institution's program(s) of study to determine alignment with the sponsoring organization's existing or proposed licensure program.

Sponsoring organizations may take one of two approaches to supporting an associate-to-bachelor's-degree pathway for a prospective teacher candidate:

1. ***Establishing a formal pathway with an articulated agreement between the sponsoring organization and the starting institution***. With an established and documented pathway from the starting institution to the sponsoring organization, candidates transferring into the bachelor's degree preparation program do not require individual waivers. Sponsoring organizations collaborate with the starting institution to determine alignment with their approved program and design a pathway for any transfer candidates from the starting institution to fulfill all licensure program expectations.
    - Sponsoring organizations can create these transfer pathways with one or more starting institutions within and across its approved preparation programs.

- All such pathways must have a documented program of study that indicates which requirements are met at each institution.
  - If a transfer candidate deviates from the established program of study during their enrollment at ***either*** institution, the sponsoring organization has the authority to issue a waiver, when appropriate. These waivers must adhere to the expectations in Appendix J of the Guidelines for Educator Preparation Program Approval.

2. ***Enrolling candidates from starting institutions without an articulated agreement.*** Sponsoring organizations may accept candidates transferring into their bachelor's degree preparation program from a starting institution outside of an articulated agreement or established formal pathway, but decisions about prior credit will require course waivers and must be made on an individual candidate basis and documented as articulated in Appendix J of the Guidelines for Educator Preparation Program Approval.

Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Programs (RTAP)

Sponsoring organizations approved to offer a bachelor's degree RTAP with one or more districts may establish RTAP pathways for transfer students from associate degree-granting institutions or other starting institutions. The sponsoring organization is responsible for determining which coursework at the starting institution is equivalent to their Related Technical Instruction (RTI) program requirements. When an articulated and documented pathway between the starting institution and the sponsoring organization is established, individual waivers are not required for candidates transferring into the bachelor's degree RTAP program, as this is considered a formalized pathway.

Additional Resources and Considerations

- Sponsoring organizations should both provide comprehensive support to and hold high expectations for all candidates, including those that transfer into approved preparation programs. We encourage sponsoring organizations to evaluate programs of study and transfer policies to determine any differentiated support or guidance transfer candidates may benefit from.

- The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE) maintains a MassTransfer page for institutes of higher education that participate in its MassTransfer Guarantee program and a directory of mapped A2B programs between community colleges and public 4-year institutions. We recommend sponsoring organizations periodically review the information about its programs on these sites to provide accurate information to prospective candidates.