

This advisory provides clarity around Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) requirements, the appropriate use of the MTEL within preparation programs, and DESE's efforts to support equitable access to the MTEL.

Background

The MTEs are a suite of assessments designed to assess the communication and literacy skills and content knowledge of educators before they enter Massachusetts classrooms. These tests are required for provisional and initial licensure.

The Massachusetts Test for Licensure (MTEL) Requirement

The MTEs were established as part of the Education Reform Act of 1993 and have been in use in Massachusetts educator licensing since 1998. Their purpose is to ensure a standard of content knowledge and communication/literacy skills associated with the profession and to set up a mechanism for qualified individuals to demonstrate content knowledge before earning an educator license. MTEs are a gate into the profession; this is particularly true for the provisional license, which in most cases requires only a bachelor's degree and passing scores on the MTEs. The subject-specific MTEs are designed to assess functional content knowledge of individuals interested in entering the workforce. Data about all MTEs, including pass rates and retake rates, are reported publicly on DESE's [website](#). The data are reported [annually](#) and by test [administration](#).

DESE has continued to revise and improve the quality and alignment of the MTEs over the life of the program and has conducted significant updates to tests in recent years to ensure alignment to relevant curriculum frameworks.

How DESE Supports Equitable Access to the MTEL

DESE continues to study the impact and efficacy of the MTEL as an entry requirement to teaching, particularly for educators from systemically marginalized groups. In [October 2020](#), DESE approved an amendment to the [Regulations for Educator Licensure and Preparation Program Approval](#) to launch a multiyear pilot of [alternative mechanisms](#) for assessing knowledge and skills. Through this pilot, DESE seeks to be more inclusive in our approach to identifying strong educators in the state by cultivating alternative assessments that hold a high bar for all educators' communication/literacy skills and content knowledge.

In addition to exploring alternative assessments through the pilot program, DESE works to promote more equitable access to MTEL in a variety of ways, including the convening of bias review committees at every stage of test development, commissioning multiple research studies on the [predictive validity of MTEL](#) relative to teacher efficacy, working to expand access to [test preparation resources and materials](#), and maintaining a robust voucher distribution program to assist candidates for whom the fee presents a financial barrier. Please see additional information [here](#) re: the MTEL development process including the role for the bias review committee.

Use of the MTEL in Educator Preparation Programs

MTEL Requirements in Preparation

The MTEL (or any approved alternative) is a requirement for *licensure*. It is not a requirement for *program completion*. Many providers link these two requirements, however, in order to ensure program completers will be eligible for licensure. This advisory seeks to clarify the distinction between them and elevate the concerns and implications of rigid policies regarding the MTEL.

Providers that position MTEs as a determining factor in decisions about admission, continuation in, or completion of initial teacher preparation programs should interrogate the implications of this policy and consider revising the existing policy based on information in this advisory.

Embedding MTEL completion as a strict requirement at the beginning of or at rigid checkpoints throughout preparation positions the MTEL as a gate to program completion, which is not its purpose. Rigid MTEL policies associated with admission, continuation in, or program completion can prevent individuals from otherwise accessing and progressing through preparation programs.

DESE expects all initial teacher preparation programs in the Commonwealth, both baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate, to support candidates in progressing in their content knowledge, moving from basic or functional content knowledge to fluent by the end of the preparation experience (see continuum below).

Continuum of Content Knowledge for Educators working with the MA Curriculum Frameworks			
Basic	Functional	Fluent	Expert
Knows the essential content	Can apply essential content effectively in a range of contexts	Can apply the content in a range of contexts and vertically connect content to build student's knowledge	Can use the content to create experiences that deepen student's knowledge
PK12 Expectations: Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)			
Provisional Licensure: Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure (MTEL)			
		Initial Licensure: Pre-Practicum Gateways & Candidate Assessment of Performance (CAP)	
		Professional Licensure and/or Supervisor/Director Roles	

Excerpted from [DESE Subject Matter Knowledge Guidelines \(2019\)](#)

Candidates are expected to move from functional to fluent content knowledge over the course of their preparation. Content-specific MTEls are one way of demonstrating functional content knowledge. However, this should not be the only way for a candidate to gain access to developing content fluency through an educator preparation program. This may mean differentiated supports are put in place for individuals coming to programs at different places along the continuum and/or determined to need additional support in meeting content fluency expectations.

Programs may want to consider a candidate's demonstration of communication/literacy skills and content knowledge through the MTEls when making decisions about a candidate's ability to progress through their program, particularly after candidates have been provided preparation, intervention, and support around passing required MTEls. However, *if* a passing score on MTEL is the only remaining requirement for a candidate who has otherwise successfully progressed through an approved initial licensure program, the organization should issue an electronic endorsement signaling they have met program requirement expectations. This will allow them to be eligible for their license upon passing remaining MTEls without needing to return to the organization for an endorsement.

Accountability Provisions for Performance on the MTEL

Program Approval: Through 2012, MTEL pass rates were an explicit component of program approval expectations, requiring providers to maintain an 80% or higher pass rate for candidates in their programs. **This pass rate threshold was removed from regulations and is no longer used in decisions about renewal of program approval.** Along with other state available outcome data, MTEL pass and retake rates are one of multiple sources of evidence considered in approval determinations, though a specific pass rate threshold requirement does not exist.

Federal Title II of the Higher Education Act Requirement: DESE has confirmed with the U.S. Department of Education that there are **no funding implications** in federal statute related to pass rates on state licensing exams.

Public Reporting: MTEL pass rates by organization are reported annually on our [public profiles](#) as one of numerous metrics associated with candidate and program quality.

Additional Resources & Considerations

- We encourage all preparation providers to evaluate programs of study and course content sequencing alongside guidance provided to candidates about when to take the necessary MTEls. Many providers have already taken intentional steps to support this timeline for candidates.
- DESE provides a limited number of fee vouchers to each Sponsoring Organization for distribution to candidates. We will continue to identify additional resources to support providers who are using these vouchers strategically to minimize barriers to the MTEL, particularly when multiple attempts are necessary.

Ed Prep Policy Advisory

MTEL Use in Approved Programs

Updated September 2023

- Detailed data about candidate performance on the MTEL is available to educator preparation providers both in [Edwin Analytics](#) (DESE reports) and the Results Analyzer tool (hosted by Pearson). We strongly encourage all providers to actively use these tools to both support candidates and assess their own efficacy in facilitating candidate success.
- Programs should stay abreast of available alternatives to the MTEL during the period of the MTEL Alternative Assessment pilot and ensure that candidates are knowledgeable of all options available to them. Information about approved alternatives is available [here](#).
- **If organizations need to amend their approved programs based on the guidance in this advisory, they do not need to seek approval from DESE before making changes.** Any changes to MTEL requirements for program completion and/or continuation can be noted through the State Annual Reporting process.