



# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Massachusetts Sponsoring Organizations  
**From:** Educator Effectiveness Team  
**Date:** January 6, 2021  
**Subject:** Updating the Guidelines for Educator Preparation Program Approval

After a transformative overhaul of the educator preparation accountability system beginning in 2012, DESE intends to deepen and evolve program approval expectations and procedures in the coming two years. These Guidelines for Program Approval support the existing rigorous, high-quality standards established for educator preparation by outlining the procedures for the approval of all educator preparation programs in Massachusetts.

### Context

Eight years ago, we worked with you to set our goal for educator preparation in the Commonwealth: *Prepare educators to be effective with their students on day one in the classroom*. Grounded in that vision, we embarked on a new approach, outlined in the 2013 Guidelines for Program Approval. All related expectations and systems developed since then have aligned with that vision - the [Candidate Assessment of Performance](#); the [Performance Assessment for Leaders](#); the [Professional Standards for Teachers, Pre-Practicum](#), and [Subject Matter Knowledge](#) Guidelines; [stakeholder surveys](#); and the [Educator Preparation Annual Snapshot](#) and other Edwin reports.

The current iteration of program approval, which guides our support and accountability structures, focuses heavily on ensuring there are systems and processes in place to well-support effective preparation, regardless of the size of the organization and the number of programs offered or candidates prepared. Specifically, the following questions guide this work:

- *Is the organization set up to support and sustain effective preparation?*
- *Is the organization meeting the needs of the PK-12 system?*
- *Is the organization engaging in continuous improvement efforts that result in better prepared educators?*
- *Is the candidate's experience in the program contributing to effective preparation?*
- *Do candidates have the necessary experiences in the field to be ready for the licensure role?*
- *Do candidates have the knowledge and skills they need to be effective?*

We worked to set consistent expectations, focused on outcomes rather than inputs, and organizations as a whole rather than programs. The goal of the revisions to the 2012 program approval process was to be:

- **Effective** - build a solid evidentiary base for decision-making,
- **Efficient** - streamlined, targeted, and systematic, and
- **Consistent** - within and across organizations.

This review process has done what [we intended for it to do](#). It has helped us to differentiate across organizations, and it has prompted intentional and strategic continuous improvement within organizations. Overall, it has improved the outcomes for new program completers and the students they teach.

### What to Expect Next

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, our plans for the next iteration of formal reviews had to shift. We had planned to begin the next round of formal approvals in 2022-23. This plan was predicated on the strong foundation established with candidate and completer outcomes at the center. This data would have helped us target and differentiate reviews for an even more effective and efficient process. Given the upheaval of the last and the current academic year, we need more time to assess the impacts on these metrics before implementing the next iteration of formal reviews.

In place of launching this next set of formal approvals in accordance with the original timeline, we mapped out a series of activities to keep the momentum and expectations around educator preparation in place. This includes:

- **Extending current formal approval** for all Sponsoring Organizations that are Approved or Approved with Distinction until new formal approval timelines are established.<sup>1</sup>
- **Supporting any Sponsoring Organizations** that are Approved with Conditions or under Probationary Approval to address conditions and provide evidence to obtain full approval.
- **Conducting targeted reviews** as needed.
- **Releasing updates to the Program Approval Guidelines in phases**, with new Formal Reviews slated to begin in 2024-2025 (see table below for more information).

We understand that managing evolving statewide policy while continuing to focus on the day-to-day to support candidate readiness through a pandemic is complex. It is our intention to work with you thoughtfully to build and roll out these guidelines over the coming months and years. As a state agency, our role is to set and uphold expectations while keeping the long view in mind. It is in partnership with you, who are doing the vital work of well-preparing educators each day, that we will realize the vision of a generation of educators who are ready on day one to meet the needs of all their students. We look forward to engaging in these updates to the Guidelines for Program Approval alongside you.

### Updating the Program Approval Guidelines

Our goal is to release revised Guidelines for Program Approval that:

- Maintain consistency with the high expectations in the program approval [regulations](#) passed by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in 2012 and outlined more explicitly in the [Review Criteria](#).
- Revise the program approval process to ensure that it is increasingly effective, efficient, and consistent.

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<sup>1</sup> All Sponsoring Organizations that are Approved or Approved with Distinction *and* not currently undergoing the Formal Review process will have their current approval status extended through Summer 2025, despite current approval expiring before then.

- Provide clear emphases for evidence collection and analysis to focus more deeply on anti-racism and on the instruction domain, including foci on evidence-based practices such as early literacy and curriculum literacy, and administrator preparation.

### Program Approval Updates timeline

The table below lists the rounds of updates that will be made to the Program Approval Guidelines. All updates are [subject to a period of public comment](#) for a minimum of 30 days.

When	Focus of Update	Sections Impacted
<b>Winter 2020-21</b>	This first round of updates will focus most heavily on updates to the <b>overall expectations</b> portion of the Guidelines to bring them up to date with other connected expectations (e.g., Subject Matter Knowledge, Pre-Prac Guidelines) and the instructional emphases intended moving forward: a focus on early literacy and curriculum literacy. This will also include a more robust section around the <b>interim reviews</b> , given DESE's decision to postpone formal review until 2024.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context and Purpose</li> <li>• Program Approval Overview and DESE Role</li> <li>• National Accreditation and State Approval</li> <li>• Interim Review of Approved Programs</li> </ul> <p><i>New sections to be added:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instruction Focus and Program Level Expectations</li> </ul>
<b>Spring 2021</b>	The second round of updates will focus on explicitly adding the dimension of <b>racial equity and anti-racist expectations</b> into the criteria, evidence collection, and decision-making processes associated with reviews. This update of expectations will be accompanied by tools and supports provided by DESE.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision-Making, Criteria Ratings, and Domain Recommendations</li> <li>• Approval Determinations and Status Designations</li> <li>• Program Approval Standards and Review Criteria</li> <li>• Field-Based Experiences</li> <li>• Annual Reporting</li> <li>• Appendix B: Review Criteria</li> <li>• Appendix C: Program Approval Standards and Domain Crosswalk</li> </ul>
<b>2021-2022</b> (as needed)	During this academic year, we will work to revise additional sections of the Guidelines, as needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance Assessments</li> <li>• Informal Review</li> <li>• Appendix D: Continuous Improvement Cycle</li> <li>• Appendix E: Delivery Models</li> </ul>
<b>2022-2023</b>	The most substantial of our updates will come in detailing new <b>protocols and processes</b> in place to support continuing review and approval via the formal review process. This update to the guidelines will be accompanied by a newly established <b>timeline for organizational review</b> and a review <b>toolkit</b> that will support organizations under formal review in the 2024-2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal Review</li> <li>• Implementing Waivers</li> <li>• Public Reporting</li> </ul>

	academic year and beyond.	
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