**Formal Review Overview**

## Introduction

Research shows that an effective teacher is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement. In Massachusetts, educators must participate in a preparation program to obtain and maintain licensure. Logic follows then, that the opportunity to impact an educator’s effectiveness may be greatest at the point of preparation. Leveraging this link, Massachusetts has set out on an ambitious mission: *guarantee that preparation in Massachusetts results in effective educators ready to support the success of all students.*

Consider the following[[1]](#footnote-1):

* **Massachusetts public schools employ a lot of newly prepared educators each year**: More than sixty percent of preparation program completers were employed in a Massachusetts school within one year of program completion
* **Completers stay local in their first year**: The average distance from a completer’s program to the location of their first job was only 21 miles
* **High poverty and underperforming schools hire a disproportionately large share of first-year teachers**. In 2012-2013, new teachers comprised 12 percent of the teaching staff in high poverty schools, compared to 5 percent in low poverty schools.
* **Across all schools, students taught by first-year teachers have lower median student growth percentiles**: 48.5 in math and 48.0 in ELA compared to 50 or higher for students taught by more experienced teachers.

We believe that preparation CAN and SHOULD prepare educators to be ready on day one. Recognizing the developmental nature of any skill, we remain steadfast in the commitment that educators be prepared to enter Massachusetts schools ready to effectively teach and lead.

## Background

Massachusetts Context

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) has identified a number of strategies in support of [improving educator effectiveness](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CB0QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.doe.mass.edu%2Fresearch%2FStrategicPlan.docx&ei=2kvQU7btIMLNsQTssYCgAQ&usg=AFQjCNGiouez7p35gR6jB05DbNZA6OdDxA&sig2=iODzlCcDbZEKWGFsO4NuQA) in the Commonwealth. One such mechanism is the implementation of an effective, efficient and consistently rigorous system of accountability, referred to as “Program Review and Approval.”

Regulatory changes [(603 CMR 7.00)](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr7.html?section=03) in 2012 aimed to improve the effectiveness of educator preparation programs in the Commonwealth by raising the bar for approval and requiring that preparation providers demonstrate their ability to produce effective educators. Together with these revised regulations, new [*Guidelines for Program Approval*](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/ProgramApproval.pdf) released in July 2013 signal a shift towards an outcomes-focused review process.

Through the review process, ESE cultivates a solid evidence base for decision-making. This evidence base will:

* Inform continuous improvement efforts for preparation providers;
* Support approval decisions made by the Commissioner of Elementary & Secondary Education; and
* Contribute to the state and national understanding of best practices in educator preparation

In addition, the 2012 Program Approval standards:

* require educator preparation programs to work in partnership with districts and schools to support the needs of the PK-12 sector and inform educator preparation program effectiveness;
* increase expectations for Sponsoring Organizations in monitoring individual program efficacy;
* ensure that educator preparation programs focus recruitment, retention, and preparation efforts on preparing educators for high-need placements in Massachusetts;
* emphasize the need for a stronger field-based experience component in preparing educators, such as:
  + ensuring preparation candidates work with effective educators by requiring that Supervising Practitioners have a summative evaluation rating of proficient or higher in order to be eligible to serve in that capacity (refer to the two-page overview of [the MA Educator Evaluation Framework](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/)); and
  + increasing the minimum-hour requirements for the practicum, and requiring that field-based experiences span the full school year and that they occur in diverse settings.
* align with the national direction for educator preparation by: (1) including updated accountability measures with increased annual reporting requirements; and (2) shifting from a five-year to a seven-year approval cycle with increased interim review options.

## The Formal Review Process

The Educator Preparation team at ESE supports, evaluates, and oversees the authority of organizations who prepare educators for Massachusetts licensure. There are about 70 Sponsoring Organizations (ed prep providers) in Massachusetts. Organizations vary in type and size – from traditional institutions of higher education to alternative providers such as district-based programs, non-profits, or collaboratives. This wide array of organizations prepares educators in all license areas: teachers, administrators, school guidance counselors, etc. On average, these organizations endorse over 6,500 program completers each year. [[2]](#footnote-2)

In addition to annual monitoring and inter-cycle reviews such as the [informal or interim](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/ProgramApproval.pdf) review process, the most rigorous and robust evaluation of an organization happens every seven years during a [formal review](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/toolkit/). A formal review includes an offsite review (assessing an organization’s claims about effectiveness via documents and state data) and an onsite visit (confirming via interviews and observations that claims about effectiveness are in fact a reality). The ESE Ed Prep team conducts 11-13 formal reviews each year (a calendar of reviews through 2021 is available [here](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/SOListReviewDates.pdf)). The new standards and processes outlined above were fully implemented for the first time in the 2014-2015 academic year.

According to 603 CMR 7.03 (1)(d):

The regulatory language states: *“A Sponsoring Organization seeking approval for its preparation program(s) shall invite ESE to review them. The Sponsoring Organization shall provide written evidence in accordance with these Guidelines, demonstrating that it satisfies the requirements set forth in 603 CMR 7.03 (1) through (4). ESE shall review the written information for each proposed program along with outcome measures and verify them through an onsite review of the Sponsoring Organization.*”

A Sponsoring Organization *must* receive approval from ESE *before* enrolling candidates into any educator preparation program.

Periodic program review ensures continued growth, improvement, and educator preparation program effectiveness beyond the initial approval. Sponsoring Organizations with currently approved educator preparation programs who are nearing the end of the seven-year approval window and would like to continue operating programs are required to have those programs reviewed. Currently approved educator preparation programs in formal review may continue operating, even beyond the seven-year approval window, until ESE has conducted the formal review process, unless the Sponsoring Organization does not submit required materials for review. If an SO fails to meet one or more deadlines associated with review, program(s) will expire on the established expiration date of approval.

In designing the review process, ESE’s goal is to implement an effective, efficient, and consistent review process that provides a solid evidence base for decision-making. The formal review of currently approved programs is a multi-step process, and the timeline for this process is centered on the formal, onsite review.

The table below describes the steps in the general framework for review which is characterized by four main phases: initiation, offsite, onsite, and determination. Supporting resources for each of the phases can be found at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/toolkit/>.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Time Relative to Onsite Visit | **Stage/Step** | **Description of Activities** |
| 12 months prior | **Initiation: Launch** | Sponsoring Organizations whose programs are nearing the end of their approval period will be contacted by ESE and notified of the need for an onsite formal approval visit. This notification will occur at the beginning of the sixth year of approval.  ESE will host all SO’s under review at an in-person launch meeting to outline the details of the process specific to upcoming review. |
| 10 months Prior | **Initiation: Needs Assessment** | At the point of formal review, ESE requires that SO’s assess the breadth and depth of their program offerings. Specifically, ESE will identify programs that have had zero completers or low-completion rates in the last three years. The threshold for low enrollment is determined by ESE annually and takes into account state-level completer data. In the case of low-enrollment programs, SO’s must demonstrate state-specific need for the program as well as the ability to meet the demand or choose to expire the program. In the case of zero-completer programs over the past three years, with the exception of STEM programs because of the ongoing shortage of teachers in this area (these programs will be eligible to continue to operate with an affidavit), ESE will expire these programs. Sponsoring Organizations may put forward new programs during this phase. Only programs for which need is demonstrated will be considered as part of the formal review. |
| 6 months prior | **Offsite: Initial Submission** | The Sponsoring Organization prepares documents demonstrating how the program meets the formal review criteria. Required documents must be submitted to ESE electronically. |
| 5 months prior | **Offsite: Completeness Check** | An initial completeness check of the submitted documentation is conducted by ESE to ensure required materials are submitted. ESE does not evaluate the quality of the content included in the submission. The completeness check simply serves to ensure that reviewers receive a complete package of materials consistent with the way they were trained. If the documentation is insufficient, the Sponsoring Organization will be asked to address the insufficiencies. If the documentation is complete, no further action is required but the SO may choose to revise the submission and resubmit until the final due date. |
| 4 months prior | **Offsite: Final Submission & Offsite Review** | The Sponsoring Organization prepares documents incorporating changes based on feedback from the Initial Review. All required documents are submitted to ESE and then shared with reviewers who conduct an offsite review. Additionally, ESE will survey PK-12 partners regarding their experience with the SO. |
| 2 months prior | **Onsite: Pre-Visit Call** | A pre-visit call will occur approximately two months prior to the formal onsite visit. ESE will use this call to coordinate with the Sponsoring Organization the logistics and expectations for the formal onsite visit. |
| **Onsite: Site Visit** | | The formal onsite visit typically lasts three days. The state team consists of a minimum of one ESE staff member and a team of external reviewers. It is the responsibility of the Sponsoring Organization to pay the cost of travel, lodging, and meal expenses for reviewers.  At the end of the formal onsite visit, an exit meeting is held and next steps are discussed. Final decisions are not shared with the SO in this exit meeting. |
| 90 days post-onsite | **Determination: Factual Accuracy Report** | ESE will issue a report summarizing commendations and findings within 90 days of the onsite visit. |
| 10 business days from receipt  of report | **Determination: Factual Accuracy Response** | Upon receiving the final report, Sponsoring Organizations will review the document for factual accuracy. During factual accuracy, the SO should communicate with ESE regarding factual errors or omissions in the report. ESE will review the response to Factual Accuracy carefully and amend the report as deemed appropriate. |
| **4 months following onsite visit** | **Determination: Notification of Approval Determination** | As a result of the review, ESE will notify the Sponsoring Organization of its approval determination. The Sponsoring Organization will work with ESE to determine timelines and next steps in response to findings requiring action. The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education will notify Sponsoring Organizations of approval status in writing. |
| **30 days from receipt of Final Report &**  **Approval Determination** | **Determination: Rejoinder Response and Hearing Requests** | Any SO with an approval determination of Approved With Conditions, Probationary Approval, or Not Approved may contest judgments or decisions reflected in the report by submitting a rejoinder response within 30 days of receipt of the final report and approval letter. The rejoinder response must be submitted using the ESE provided template. ESE will review the rejoinder response and the Commissioner may modify the report and determinations solely at his/her discretion.  Upon receiving a notice of an approval determination of Not Approved, the SO shall have all rights of review required by G.L. c. 30A,s. 13 and 801 CMR 1.00. All requests for hearings, where hearings are provided by statute, shall be in writing, addressed to the Commissioner, and must be received within 30 days of receipt by the Sponsoring Organization of the notice of approval determination. At such hearing, the SO shall bear the burden of proof and present its case first. |
| **August 31** | **Determination: Approval Determinations updated on Profiles** | ESE will publish the approval determinations for each Sponsoring Organization on the Public Profiles. |

**Recruiting, Selecting and Training an Elite Cohort of Reviewers**

The Ed Prep Team has worked to build a comprehensive system of review. As outlined above, this included the development of numerous resources and structures. Reviewers are part of a cohort of PK-12 and Ed Prep who were actively recruited for a set of specific skills; selected for the ability to leverage their experiences and demonstrate those skills on an application; and that are trained and supported strategically throughout the process.

1. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/2013-12EducatorReport.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A list of preparation providers and associated data can be found on ESE’s public profiles: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)