



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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MEMORANDUM

To: Massachusetts Educator Preparation Providers
From: Educator Preparation Team
Date: February 7, 2020
Subject: Educator Preparation and Program Approval

As we continue to be driven by our moral imperative, "All children in Massachusetts, especially students who need the most, must have access to effective teachers and leaders," we know there are ways we can deepen our commitment to making this moral imperative reality. As such, this memo is designed to initiate a series of conversations about the focus of our collective efforts as we look ahead to the next ten years of educator preparation work in Massachusetts. Specifically, in this memo we are outlining changes that will happen over the next two years and a process for engagement:

- **February-September 2020:** Develop draft Program Approval Guidelines that outline a broad framework for review, working with Sponsoring Organizations (SOs) to provide input and finalize these guidelines ([see details below](#));
- **September 2020-August 2021:** Pilot and develop a program approval review toolkit - this will detail the specifics of the review process;
- **September 2021-August 2022:** "Bridge year" between the last cohort of reviews in the current process (2020-21) and implementation of this new process¹;
- **Beginning September 2022:** Implement the revised program approval process for all educator preparation programs.

Taken together, we anticipate that these changes -- while building on the foundation of reform to date -- will mean that, beginning in 2022 and beyond, providers will experience components of program review that are substantially different than the current process.

Over the course of the next several months, we will be providing opportunities for SOs to contribute ideas and provide feedback on the areas identified below, as well as on the review process more broadly. This input will directly shape the program approval guidelines, but also inform the upcoming work of building out the details of the review toolkit.

What is it we hope to do? There is still much to decide about the ways in which this process may evolve, but we do have some sense of the areas of emphasis we would like to see moving forward. These include:

- **More explicit focus on racial equity:** One of the driving questions in our work moving forward will be, "How are educator preparation efforts designed to break historical patterns of inequity-- not by accident, but by design?"
- **Deeper look at the Instruction Domain with a focus on Early Literacy and Administrator Preparation:** We will continue empowering providers at the organization-level, while also

¹ Please note anticipated review timelines after 2020-2021 may be adjusted.

providing a level of feedback and insight into instructional programming that we have not provided to date. We will look to see increased alignment between expectations for PK12 and educator preparation (e.g., emphasis on practices outlined in the MA Curriculum Frameworks, instruction that emphasizes and supports the skillful use of high-quality instructional materials, and practice connected to the [Teacher Educator Practice Framework](#)) and intend to examine Early Literacy and Administrator Preparation more closely, given research pointing to stagnant reading levels and the important role of principals' effect on student learning².

Our goal is to release revised Program Approval Guidelines to the field in September 2020. In doing so, we intend to:

1. Maintain consistent expectations embodied in the program approval [regulations](#) passed in 2012 and outlined more explicitly in the [Review Criteria](#)
2. Revise the program approval process to ensure that it is increasingly effective, efficient, and consistent
3. Provide clear emphases for evidence collection and analysis to focus more deeply on equity and on the instructional domain, including in early literacy and administrator preparation

What is the timeline and process? It is very much our hope and intention to engage meaningfully and responsively with you, our partners, in this work. In support of this, we've designed opportunities for the field to engage with us throughout the process. This Program Approval Guidelines development work will take place in three phases:

Shaping Stage: Ongoing through March 2020

- SOs provide initial reactions, hopes, fears, and ideas via this [survey](#)
- Attend a regional office hour event. [Register](#) for one of the identified options below or email edprep@doe.mass.edu if you are able to host a session on your campus.
 - In person: February 18, times TBD (Western Mass)
 - In person: March 10, times TBD (Central Mass)
 - In person: March 17, times TBD (Greater Boston)
 - Virtual: March 27

Drafting & Feedback Stage: April through June 2020

- DESE shares a draft of the Program Approval Guidelines with the field for feedback
- The field provides public comment via a survey

Finalizing & Publishing: June through September 2020

- DESE revises guidelines draft based on feedback, consults with individuals from the field as appropriate/needed
- DESE releases updated Program Approval Guidelines in September 2020
- DESE solicits advisors and providers interested in piloting one or more aspects of the process

After the release of the updated Program Approval Guidelines, we plan to pilot aspects of the new review process. As indicated above, we created a “bridge” year between the last cohort of reviews in the current process (2020-21) and implementation of this new process (2022-23). The “bridge year” will allow us to revise and refine the review toolkit as a result of the pilot and provide educator preparation providers time to adjust to the updated review process.

² See [NAEP Data](#) below and [How Leadership Influences Student Learning](#)

Why are we doing this now?

We believe in the power and importance of educator preparation in the Commonwealth. Educator preparation is critical to cultivating and supporting an increasingly effective workforce and a key mechanism for disrupting persistent opportunity gaps and systemic inequities that have long plagued our schools and classrooms.³ The state invests in educator preparation by dedicating capacity and prioritizing the work. We continue to be guided by our responsibility as a state agency to meaningfully evaluate and differentiate the performance of preparation providers in the Commonwealth and ensure that endorsement of licensure results in educators who are fully ready for the role on the first day they enter the classroom.

We know that the work you are doing makes a difference. We know that teachers who have gone through an educator preparation program achieve better outcomes for their students⁴ compared to teachers who have not completed educator preparation programs. The changes you have made to improve your programs over the last few years are resulting in better prepared teachers⁵. We will continue our partnership with the field of providers to build on the good work already underway as we embark on this next phase.

We've seen a lot of success through the implementation of our current process, and yet, know that there are gaps. A few things in particular are shaping our understanding of these gaps:

1. **Feedback from providers, reviewers, and participants of the review:** We collect substantial data on the current review process from various stakeholders and have been using that information annually to improve the process. Still, there are aspects that continue to come up that the field would like to see changed (e.g., approach to focus groups capturing sufficient representation of work at the organization). Additionally, by the end of the 2020-2021 academic year, all MA providers will have experienced the current program approval process, demonstrating the impact of their work in alignment with the Formal Review Program Approval Criteria.
2. **State, federal, and international data on student achievement,** and in particular widening gaps for our sub-groups of students who have been historically marginalized in our system: For instance, our latest NAEP data showed just 45% of 4th graders overall are reading at or above a proficient level. When broken down by race/ethnicity, only 25% Hispanic and 29% Black/African American students at or above proficient.⁶
3. **Evolving research on best practices in educator preparation & PK12 practice:** We committed in 2012 to build a process that could contribute to a broader understanding of educator preparation in MA and nationally. In pursuing this, we have become connected to, and part of, an increasingly robust evidence base⁷ for things that make a difference in preparation. These findings generally dovetail well with our standards and criteria, though there is currently no emphasis placed on any of them in particular (e.g., role of the supervising practitioner).

We embark on this effort to revise the review process knowing there will be trade-offs with any path forward. We are eager to engage with you to inform this decision-making process. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us at edprep@doe.mass.edu

³ We know that educator preparation is neither the "silver bullet" nor something that exists in a vacuum; still, we do see it as an essential component of impacting student experiences in schools.

⁴ [Massachusetts Teacher Pathway Study](#)

⁵ Hiring Principal (HP) data collected through [DESE-issued annual stakeholder surveys](#) notes an increase from 27% of HPs agreeing teachers were fully ready on day one in 2016 to 48% agreeing in 2018.

⁶ National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) State-level results for Massachusetts, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/natl-intl/naep/results/>

⁷ <http://caldercouncil.org/re-framing-the-discussion-about-teacher-education/#.Xj29qzFKg2w>