

Guidelines for Educator Preparation Program Approval

Addendum: Program Approval Criteria for Professional Teacher Programs

Context and Purpose

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE; the Department) expectations of sponsoring organizations are based in state regulations ([603 CMR 7.03](#), also found in [Appendix A](#)). This Addendum: Program Approval Criteria for Professional Teacher Programs articulates the expectations for programs that lead to endorsement for Professional licensure in the Commonwealth. The criteria outlined below are descriptive of expectations but are not prescriptive of approaches or strategies to meet those expectations.

Importance of Professional Teacher Programs

Statute and regulations ([603 CMR 7.00](#)) require that teachers obtain a Professional license before their Initial license expires in order to remain licensed to teach in the Commonwealth. Most teachers will earn a Professional license after three to five years of employment. As of Fall 2024, [just over two-thirds](#) of teachers working in Massachusetts public schools had a Professional license. Professional Teacher programs support continuous learning through this licensure progression.

Developing and Retaining a High-Quality Workforce

It is important to provide ongoing support and opportunities for continuous learning that enable teachers to develop their practice after receiving an Initial license, all of which contributes to the efficacy and retention of educators in their positions and in the field.

[Statewide data](#) continue to show inequitable experiences and disparate outcomes for Black, Hispanic and Latino, Asian, Indigenous, and/or Multiracial students, as well as English Learners and students with disabilities. Supporting experienced educators to continuously strengthen their practice and knowledge is vital for decreasing educational disparities for these vulnerable populations and promoting stronger outcomes.

Efficacy leads to retention. Retaining effective, experienced teachers is imperative to maintaining a high-quality statewide education system. Experienced teachers are largely beneficial to both students and colleagues by better supporting their students to meet key measures of success and by supporting greater learning for their colleagues (Kini, 2016).

Purpose of Professional Teacher Programs

The criteria for Professional Teacher programs are anchored in [DESE's Educational Vision](#), which sets the expectation that all PK-12 students attain academic knowledge, understand and value themselves and others, and engage with the world so that they have equitable opportunities to excel. In their Professional Teacher programs, candidates further develop the skills and competencies necessary to be effective educators with this ultimate vision in mind.

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In their purpose and design, Professional Teacher programs support candidates to advance both their content knowledge and pedagogy, leading to educators who are increasingly prepared to create experiences that deepen students' learning.

Meeting the Needs of Professionals

Professional Teacher programs build on the expectations for Initial Teacher programs, while enabling more personalized opportunities for strengthening educator practices. As they approach Professional licensure, educators benefit from varied approaches and supports informed by prior experiences and goals for future growth. Professional Teacher candidates are uniquely diverse in their experiences and needs – some candidates previously attended and completed approved educator preparation programs, others completed the Performance Review Program for Initial Licensure (PRPIL), while still others were awarded licenses through out-of-state reciprocity. The Professional Teacher program expectations are structured with this in mind to allow flexibility in how educators may progress toward the Professional license.

Sponsoring organizations with Professional Teacher programs need to meet the applicable program approval criteria while effectively supporting the diverse needs and contexts of educators seeking their Professional license. By focusing on candidate needs, programs can offer appropriate entry points and allow candidates to focus on their interests or areas for growth.

Expectations for Professional Teacher Programs

Professional Teacher programs are subject to the expectations articulated in the 2023 Guidelines for Educator Preparation Program Approval relative to the Organization Domain, the Partnerships Domain, the Continuous Improvement Domain, and the Candidate Domain. Professional Teacher programs are not subject to Field-Based Experiences Domain requirements. The criteria articulated in this Addendum outline specific expectations for Professional Teacher programs relative to the Instruction Domain.

Professional Teacher programs must integrate the Subject Matter Knowledge requirements (SMKs) and Professional Standards for Teachers (PSTs) into their program of study and should intentionally design and routinely update programs of study and their associated coursework to ensure they are aligned with current evidence-based practices; represent diverse identities, experiences, and perspectives; and prepare effective educators.

Professional Teacher candidates must demonstrate expert level knowledge and application of the SMKs. Educators seeking their professional license must also demonstrate advanced pedagogical skills in accordance with the PSTs.

While not required to incorporate field-based experiences, Professional Teacher programs should still provide candidates with continued opportunities to reflect on how their own identities, biases, and practices shape the experiences of students in their schools and classrooms. This can be achieved through strong partnerships with employing PK-12 schools/districts, which can provide insight into the various challenges facing teachers who are seeking Professional licensure and can enable mutually beneficial practices to develop and retain Massachusetts educators.

Guidelines for Educator Preparation Program Approval Regulations Pertaining to Post-Baccalaureate Degree Expectations

State regulations do not require a master's or other post-baccalaureate degree for the Professional license. Sponsoring organizations can determine if they would like to offer a degree in conjunction with their Professional Teacher program(s) of study.

The Instruction Domain

The sponsoring organization provides effective instruction to all candidates and ensures that all completers have the requisite content knowledge and evidence-based pedagogical skills, including curriculum literacy and anti-racist and culturally and linguistically sustaining practices, for the licensure role.

Professional Teacher Programs

INS 1: The sponsoring organization regularly examines and updates the program(s) of study to ensure content and practices throughout the program that:

- Represent diverse identities, experiences, and perspectives; and
- Align with current evidence-based practices, including anti-racist and culturally and linguistically sustaining practices.

INS 2: The program(s) of study deepens candidates' teaching practice in the following areas:

- Expert Subject Matter Knowledge (as articulated in the [Subject Matter Knowledge Guidelines](#)); and
- Advanced Professional Standards for Teachers (as articulated in the [Guidelines for Professional Standards for Teachers](#)).

INS 3: The program(s) of study includes opportunities for candidates to reflect on and apply new learning related to their program's area(s) of focus and their licensure role.

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Stakeholder Engagement in the Revision Process

The requirements for professional licensure programs articulated in this Addendum reflect feedback from over 150 current educators, educator preparation personnel, and program completers. Input was gathered via interviews and surveys with currently approved professional teacher preparation program personnel, members of the 2024-2025 DESE Principal and Teacher Advisory Cabinets, and members of the 2024-2025 Educator Personnel Advisory Council.

Stakeholders' feedback is grouped into three categories. First, stakeholders emphasized the need for varied and flexible ways to demonstrate expertise at the professional licensure level, given educators' varied experiences in schools and districts. Second, they identified areas in which educators can further develop their practice and knowledge so that they would be successful in their licensure roles, including, but not limited to, the Professional Standards for Teachers. Lastly, representatives from educator preparation programs elevated specific topics that would be important to address through a professional licensure program, including but not limited to, supporting English learners, supporting students with disabilities, and deepening content knowledge. Additionally, educators and leaders indicated the need for greater clarity regarding the purpose of a professional license.

Combined, this feedback directly informed the development of this Addendum. Given the role of the professional license in an educator's career progression, it is important to ensure that participating educators experience a program that is aligned to [DESE's Educational Vision](#), the needs of the current practitioner, and the needs of schools and districts.

Sample Structures for Programs of Study

The expectations outlined in this addendum can be accomplished through various program designs. Suggestions, including examples and ideas gathered from the stakeholders involved in developing these criteria, will be compiled and available on the DESE website.