



Compliance Visit Report 2009-2010 ACT Houston ♦ Dallas

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Mixon Henry, Program Specialist, and David Carmody, Manager of Educator Standards, conducted a Texas Education Agency Continuing Approval visit on November 19 and 20, 2009. The following is an Executive Summary of the findings and recommendations for program improvement.

Date self-report submitted: September 8, 2009

COMPONENT I: COMMITMENT AND COLLABORATION – Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §228.20 – Governance of Educator Preparation Programs

Findings:

ACT Houston ♦ Dallas is in compliance with Texas Administrative Code (TAC) § 228.20 – Governance of Educator Preparation.

The governing body is an Advisory Committee which gives adequate support. Advisory Committee membership includes all suggested members in TAC rule: 27 members from private and public schools, 1 member representing the Education Service Center, 2 representing institutions of higher education, and 6 representing business and community interests. An intern is invited to participate as an additional member category.

The members of the Advisory Committee understand their roles and responsibilities adequately as evidenced by their responses to their electronic questionnaires. The members participate in all areas: design, delivery, policy decisions, and program evaluation. Advisory Committee members have influenced how technology was incorporated into certain trainings, how changes to Texas Administrative Code rules were implemented, and how reviews from participants and the State Auditor's Office should be addressed.

The Advisory Committee meets twice during the academic year on a regular and continuing basis. The program provided documentation of attendance with sign-in sheets. ACT Houston ♦ Dallas also presented agendas and minutes for each meeting. For additional communication with advisory committee members, minutes are emailed to allow further review and reflection and to emphasize the importance of their active participation. The Advisory Committee works with representatives from K-12 environments to determine relevant field-based experiences for the teaching candidates.

Compliance Status for Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §228.20 - GOVERNANCE OF EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAM. In light of the findings detailed above, ACT Houston ♦ Dallas is in compliance.

COMMENDATIONS:

ACT Houston ♦ Dallas is commended for adding an intern as a member to its advisory committee in order to gain a wider perspective on the program.

COMPONENT II. ADMISSION CRITERIA - Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §227.10 - ADMISSION CRITERIA

Findings:

ACT Houston ♦ Dallas is compliance with TAC rule §227.10, Admission Criteria. From reviewing student files, it is clear that ACT Houston ♦ Dallas requires several components for entry into the program. They include a bachelor's degree, a GPA of 2.5 or better, 24 hours in the content field (for secondary candidates), satisfactory test scores on Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Assessment, and a written assessment on the signed application. The writing component addresses two issues: writing skills of the applicant and perspective toward education. In addition, each applicant is required to have an oral interview which staff members use to assess a candidate's commitment and appropriateness to teach.

The program publishes its requirements for admission on its website and in its program brochures. Admission requirements are applied consistently, and students from out of country are required to have their credentials evaluated to show equivalence to US requirements. All admitted student folders examined showed that candidates met specified entrance criteria. The program reports five or fewer percent of applicants were admitted as exceptions to the GPA requirement.

ACT Houston ♦ Dallas recruits through their website, program brochures, Advisory Committee members, and extensive university and job fairs visits. Most applicants, however, learn of the program through word-of-mouth.

Compliance Status for Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Section 227.10 - ADMISSION CRITERIA. In light of the findings detailed above, ACT Houston ♦ Dallas is in compliance.

Commendations:

ACT Houston ♦ Dallas is commended for going beyond the state-mandated admission criteria by requiring a passing score on the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Assessment and a writing component.

COMPONENT III. CURRICULUM - Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §228.30 - EDUCATOR PREPARATION CURRICULUM

Findings:

ACT Houston ♦ Dallas is in compliance with TAC rule §228.30, Educator Preparation Curriculum.

The program's instructors have attained advanced degrees, are certified teachers in the state of Texas, and have teaching experience in public schools. Many are working in leadership positions and some have won Teacher of the Year awards. Instructors are hired based on their expertise in a content or specialty area. Therefore it is possible that an instructor will only teach one or two courses in which he/she is an expert.

In review of the curriculum correlations, ACT Houston ♦ Dallas' curriculum covers the required 17 items of the Pedagogy and Professional Responsibility. Course syllabi include objectives, materials needed, content of course, activities, and assessments to denote the progress of the candidate. It is clear that the program is successful at embedding the 17 curriculum items throughout the curriculum and continually spiral reinforcement of them throughout the program of study. Some highlights include analysis of Harry Wong's work, each candidate's essay-no matter the certification field-on "Your Role as a Reading Teacher," and focus on equity in the classroom for student with special needs.

ACT Houston ♦ Dallas' test preparation is nine hours on each TExES tests. The test preparations include a review of terms, specific vocabulary issues, and scenarios. All of this is reviewed prior to the practice test to clarify terminology, create a working knowledge of the information, and gain confidence. This is a factor in the successful test results of the program (96%-97% success rate over the last three years).

Feedback from candidates' electronic questionnaires reported the need for improvement in the following curriculum areas: administering TAKS examinations, reading strategies across the curriculum, strategies for gifted and talented students, strategies for English language learners, and technology in the classroom. Since these topics are present in their curriculum, so discussions were held with program staff to emphasize and reinforce them in the curriculum.

Compliance Status for Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §228.30 - EDUCATOR PREPARATION CURRICULUM. In light of the findings detailed above, ACT Houston ♦ Dallas is in compliance.

COMPONENT IV: PROGRAM DELIVERY AND ONGOING SUPPORT - Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §228.35 – PREPARATION PROGRAM COURSEWORK AND/OR TRAINING

Findings:

ACT Houston ♦ Dallas is in compliance with TAC rule §228.35, Program Delivery and On-Going Support. ACT Houston ♦ Dallas provides personal service to its applicants and candidates. The staff is made up of, down to the receptionist who answers phones, professional educators with significant experience as both teachers and administrators in K-12 districts. The program director's qualifications include five years of research on the needs and areas of assistance for new teachers.

There is strong evidence on ongoing training. ACT Houston ♦ Dallas' total training and coursework hours exceeds the state requirement of 300 clock hours. Please note that ACT Houston ♦ Dallas' self report misinterprets this in the self report answer of "30-50" for total number of contact hours. Documentation shows full compliance with well over 300 hours.

The program's field experience meets state requirements of 30 clock hours and candidates follow-up with written reflections and required documentation. Before internship, the candidates exceed the require 80 hours of curriculum coursework. The candidates also receive more than the allotted 6 hours of test preparation at the appropriate point in their preparation program. Observations of interns are performed three or more times, per the appropriate schedule, which includes a 45 minute observation, written and oral feedback, and interactive conferencing. The observation instrument is a modified PDAS instrument that displays five categories and space for anecdotal comments. All staff and advisors are past educators. They guide the candidates through the requirements with face-to-face meetings and informal contact to simply the process. The program only includes a portion of the total allowed school district training hours (50) and documents the candidate's attendance as required. The teaching practicum meets or exceeds the required number of hours.

Training for mentors is provided by ACT Houston ♦ Dallas with the following: TxBESS training, mentor agreement, and handbook review. Two training dates were noted in the document review: September and March. Attendance at both is required by the program. Mentors are compensated with a \$500 stipend at the end of the internship. In addition, a principal packet, which is available online, helps to provide the campus administrator with necessary criteria and responsibilities.

Field Supervisors' qualifications include the following: advanced degrees, experienced professional educator currently certified in Texas, former administrators, and a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience. ACT Houston ♦ Dallas also looks for field supervisors who are committed to mentoring new teachers, have dynamic communication and people skills, and are dedicated to the program's mission and core values. Training for field supervisors is accomplished through TxBess training, coaching techniques, mentoring methods, and handbook review. ACT Houston ♦ Dallas' ratio of field supervisor to intern averages 1 to 6. Intern electronic questionnaires revealed 98% satisfaction with the effectiveness of field supervisors.

Struggling candidates receive individual support, often involving not only coaching from staff, but a customized plan developed cooperatively with the mentor, field supervisor, candidate and other personnel as needed.

Compliance status for Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §228.35 – PREPARATION PROGRAM COURSEWORK AND/OR TRAINING. In light of the findings detailed above, ACT Houston ♦ Dallas is in compliance.

Commendations:

ACT Houston ♦ Dallas is commended for paying its mentors stipends.

COMPONENT V. PROGRAM EVALUATION - Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §228.40 - ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF CANDIDATES FOR CERTIFICATION AND PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT.

Findings:

ACT Houston ♦ Dallas is in compliance with TAC rule 228.40, Assessment and Evaluation.

Student records are well organized and kept in secure cabinets in locked offices. Other documentation is kept electronically for at least five years. All of the documentation is arranged systematically for easy tracking of the candidate's progress in the program. Student folders provide evidence of benchmarks, assessments, test preparation and ethics understanding.

Evaluation of the program's curriculum and instructors is provided by candidates after each course/module and institute. An overall program evaluation is completed by candidates at the completion of the program. Program evaluation takes place annually to refine or adjust to the needs of the interns and districts. Curriculum is evaluated by candidates' feedback, ASEP data, and advisory committee member input. Questionnaires are answered by interns, mentors, campus administrators, and field supervisors to obtain more feedback regarding program improvement. Data analysis of program evaluations is completed by both staff and advisory committee members.

Compliance Status for Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Section 228.40 - ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF CANDIDATES FOR CERTIFICATION AND PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT. In light of the findings detailed above, ACT ♦ Dallas is in compliance.

Commendations:

ACT Houston ♦ Dallas is commended for developing an evaluation process that includes key stakeholders to gather reliable data.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATION

The following are recommendations based on the findings of the Texas Education Agency Visit. If the program is NOT in compliance with any component, please consult the TAC rules and correct the issue IMMEDIATELY. Program recommendations are suggestions for general program improvement. A progress report will be required in one year on Compliance Recommendations.

PROGRAM COMPLIANCE RECOMMENDATIONS:

No compliance recommendations at this time.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

Results of advisory committee input and program implementation of decisions made due to the input should be shared orally, as well as emailed to advisory committee members. This will reinforce the value placed on their input and decisions made as a result of it.

Reinforce and review the curriculum in light of the intern's questionnaires results; specifically instructing the gifted and talented student; integration of technology in lessons and classroom implementation. This would enhance recall and aid in the implementation of the curriculum into the classroom.