FAQ Overview

This document provides response to questions about Cycle 4 Mentor Program Allotment applications that were submitted by the September 20, 2024, deadline. Districts are encouraged to review the following materials that are posted on the MPA website as they will be referenced throughout this document:

- MPA Cycle 4 Guidelines
- Review Criteria
- Scope & Sequence Model
- Texas Education Code §21.458 and §48.114
- 19 Texas Administrative Code, §153.1011, Mentor Program Allotment

Please note that there is also list of commonly asked questions and responses on pages 15-16 of the MPA Cycle 4 Guidelines.

Section A: About MPA

Cycle 4 (SY 2025-28)

a) **What is the potential impact of the MPA?**

As stated on page 4 of the Guidelines, the Mentor Program Allotment provides LEAs the opportunity to build or sustain mentorship training programs aligned to research-based mentoring best practices. The primary goal of MPA is increasing student outcomes through increased beginning teacher (BT) retention and effectiveness.

b) **What are the best practices of implementing a mentor program?**

The Mentor Program Allotment was designed around mentorship best practices. Please see TEC §21.458 & TAC §153.1011 for MPA requirements. Additionally, TEA has posted resources for districts and mentors on its MPA website.

c) **What are the notable changes from Cycle 3 to Cycle 4?**

The most notable change to Cycle 4 will be the introduction of a "District and Campus Leader" training pathway. As stated in TEC §21.458 & TAC §153.1011, LEAs must provide training to mentor teachers and any appropriate district and campus employees. Prior to Cycle 4, mentor teachers and all other appropriate staff were required to attend the mentor teacher training. Please see pages 18-22 of the Guidelines and pages 14-16 of the Review Criteria for more information on the District and Campus Leader training competencies.

d) **What are the benefits to the mentee and mentor and the time/obligations expected of the mentee and mentor?**

The goals of the Mentor Program Allotment are to increase student outcomes through increased teacher retention and effectiveness. Mentors are required to attend mentor training in the summer, fall, and spring. Additionally, mentors and their beginning teachers are required to meet for at least 12 hours per semester during the school day. See page 8 of the Guidelines for more information.

e) **How can a district sustain the program when grant funds end?**

Cycle 4 of the Mentor Program Allotment is intended to be a 3-year cycle, dependent upon the availability of funds. LEAs may re-apply for the next cycle of MPA; however, there is no guarantee funding will be awarded. TEA encourages districts that partner with Approved Providers to engage in early conversations around how the training may be sustained long-term and engage district leaders and other stakeholders in these ongoing conversations. TEA also encourages district leaders to discuss other sources of funds and strategies, such as strategic staffing, to sustain the program long-term.

f) **Is this program right for our district?**

The primary goal of the Mentor Program Allotment is to increase student outcomes through increased teacher retention and effectiveness. LEAs prepared to commit to a rigorous set of requirements for mentors, district leaders, and campus leaders in support of beginning teachers are encouraged to apply. See the MPA Cycle 4 Guidelines, pages 7-8, and TAC §153.1011) for more information on MPA requirements.

g) **How have others utilized MPA in the past?**

Since Cycle 1 (SY 2020-21), MPA has provided funding to 127 LEAs to build or sustain beginning teacher mentoring programs aligned to research-based mentoring best practices with the primary goal of increasing student outcomes through increased beginning teacher retention and effectiveness. These LEAs used MPA funds to provide mentor stipends, mentor training delivered through an approved training provider, and release time for mentoring activities. A list of previous MPA districts can be found on the MPA website.

h) **Who qualifies as a beginning teacher?**

Per the definition in TAC §153.1011, a beginning teacher (BT) is a classroom teacher in Texas who may or may not yet hold a certificate issued under Texas Education Code (TEC), Chapter 21, Subchapter B and has less than two years of teaching experience in the subject or grade level to which the teacher is assigned.

However, Cycle 4 MPA funding prioritizes teachers new to the classroom and is only calculated based on the number of BTs with less than two years of experience in the profession (see page 5 of the Guidelines).

i) **Do mentor teachers need to be certified educators?**

No. Per TAC §153.1011, the definition of a mentor teacher does not state that the mentor teacher must be certified. However, LEAs must ensure that mentor teachers meet all the mentor selection requirements in TAC §153.1011, section (b)(1).

2) Eligibility

a) Who is qualified to apply?

As stated on page 4 of the Guidelines, all LEAs committed to meeting the requirements in TEC §21.458 & TAC §153.1011 are eligible applicants. LEAs that were approved in Cycles 1-3 must re-apply for Cycle 4. Previous approval in Cycles 1-3 does not guarantee approval for Cycle 4.

b) Our current program has roles for mentors and roles for coaches. Our mentors are not trained as coaches, and our coaches are not trained as mentors. Would this affect our eligibility?

No, eligibility would not be affected. However, an LEA must provide two separate training pathways: training for mentor teachers aligned to mentoring competencies and training for any appropriate district and campus leaders (DCLs) aligned to DCL competencies. As defined in TAC §153.1011, district and campus leaders include any appropriate employees who provide direct instructional support to BTs, including principals, assistant principals, and instructional coaches. See Policy Requirements section of the Guidelines beginning on page 7.

c) Can a charter network apply to MPA?

Yes, a charter network can apply to MPA. Charter networks with multiple charter schools, each with an individual CDN, may apply to MPA and are eligible to receive a total allotment not to exceed 40 BTs. In their application via the Campus Implementation List, charter networks must indicate on which campuses (CDCNs) they will implement MPA to determine priority points. MPA allotments will flow to the individual CDNs where MPA is being implemented.

d) Can SB 1882 OPs submit applications for MPA? How can an SB 1882 partnership campuses, which are district campuses operated by an SB 1882 Operating Partner (OP) as in-district charter schools, access MPA?

An SB 1882 Operating Partner (OP) may apply to MPA. However, MPA funding will flow to the parent districts in which the participating 1882 campuses are located. The SB 1882 OP must have an agreement with the partner district to ensure funding flows to the 1882 campus. In their application via the Campus Implementation List, OPs with multiple Subchapter C charters will indicate on which campuses (CDCNs) they will implement MPA. If SB 1882 OPs receive approval for MPA, funding will be capped at 40 BTs per OP.

e) Are we too small to be funded?

No, please see the LEA eligibility section on page 4 of the Guidelines.

f) I did not receive the Grant 1-3, can I still apply for 4?

Yes, please see the LEA eligibility section on page 4 of the Guidelines.

g) Are charter schools eligible?

Yes, please see page 4 of the Guidelines.

h) Our current training providers are not listed, but we partner with a non-MPA provider to train our mentors. Will we need to retrain our mentors if we join MPA?

All LEAs will be required to either partner with an approved training provider or undergo the rigorous vetting process for commissioner approval of an LEA-created training. All MPA districts must have their mentors and appropriate district and campus staff fully trained by the end of the first year of MPA Year 1 (SY 2025-26).

3) Funding

    a) Can you give me an estimate of what a mentor would make? Would they be paid in September of 2025, or would it be September of 2026?

    LEAs determine mentor stipends. Please see the table on page 6 of the Guidelines for funding.

    b) What does the grant cover?

    Participating LEAs may use MPA funds on mentor stipends, release time, and providers of mentor training. Please see the Uses of Funding section on page 5 of the Guidelines.

    c) Is there a limit to the number of mentor teachers?

    No; however, all MPA mentors must be fully trained by an approved training provider in their first year of mentoring. Please see the "Funding Formula" section of the Guidelines on page 5 for more information on MPA funding.

    d) Is the cost of the training provider covered?

    Districts must communicate directly with Approved Providers regarding costs, which vary across providers. Districts may use MPA funds to pay providers of mentor training. For more information, please see the "Uses of Funding" section on page 5 of the Guidelines.

    e) For the mentors to be trained will the MPA grant cycle pay for the substitutes needed during the school year to provide on-going job embedded support?

    Districts may use MPA funding for release time. Please see the Uses of Funding section on page 5 of the Guidelines.

    f) What are some examples of allowable vs. unallowable expenditures?

    Please see the "Uses of Funding" section on page 5 of the Guidelines.

4) Training Providers

   a) **How are the training providers selected? What do most other districts choose?**

   MPA's approved training providers undergo a rigorous vetting process to receive commissioner approval similar to the LEA-created mentor program approval process (see "Training Providers" section of the Guidelines, beginning on page 9). This includes a review of their evidence base, impact to date, and training materials. LEAs should select the right training provider based on their unique district and mentoring program needs. In MPA Cycle 3, 90% of districts selected to work with and Approved Provider.

   b) **What are the costs associated with the various Approved Providers?**

   Costs for Approved Provider training vary by approved provider. All MPA Approved Providers have gone through a rigorous vetting process to receive commissioner approval. Please see the Approved Provider section of the MPA website for program and contact information for all MPA Approved Providers. Districts can reach out directly to these providers to inquire about costs.

   c) **Would a provider not on the MPA list be an option for training?**

   No, LEAs must submit their own LEA-created mentor training program for commissioner approval or partner with one of MPA's Approved Providers for training. As mentioned in the "Uses of Funding" section of the Guidelines (page 5), MPA funds cannot be used to pay for the services of an external partner unless they are an MPA Approved Provider.

Section B: Cycle 4 Application

1) Application Process

    a) **If we use a locally developed training program, how long does it take to be approved. If it is not, can we select from another provider?**
As stated in the "Application Timeline" section of the Guidelines on page 11, the Cycle 4 application closes on Friday, November 15th, 2024, and applicants will be notified by January 10th, 2025. Page 9 of the Guidelines state that LEAs may partner with an Approved Provider or seek commissioner approval for an LEA-created mentorship training program.

    b) **How do I access the application?**

    The application and all it's materials may be accessed through the MPA website. Please review the Guidelines and Review Criteria documents in their entirety prior to starting an application.

    c) **How are allocations calculated and awarded?**

    First, MPA applications are reviewed to determine which districts have met the requirements and the number of priority points assigned. Please refer to the Cycle 4 MPA Review Criteria and Priority Points list for an explanation of how applications are scored and priority points are assigned. Next, TEA applies the funding formula to all districts that meet the requirements (see page 5 of the Guidelines). TEA funds all districts that are eligible, up to the state-allocated amount of $1.65M.

2) Application Components

    a) **Are there completed exemplars for the application attachments?**

    Yes, the MPA team has provided examples with explanations for the Scope & Sequence and Evidence of Impact attachments. For evidence of impact, review the information and comments on the "Example – Applicant Data" tab. Please note that only LEAs applying for LEA-created training will need to complete these application components (see the "Application Review Breakdown" section on page 3 of the Review Criteria document and pages 19-22 in the Guidelines for more information on required application components).

    b) **What data points can I begin collecting for the application?**

    On the Cycle 4 district application, only LEAs applying for LEA-created training are required to submit their evidence of mentoring program impact. Review the Evidence of Impact spreadsheet (Attachment D) and pages 19-20 of the Guidelines for more information.

3) Priority Points

    a) **My LEA was a recipient of the GYO grant, and the Priority Points list shows that we did not receive points for GYO. Why is this?**

    For the purposes of this Cycle 4 application, TEA has awarded priority points to LEAs participating in specific programs. Please review the "About Priority Points" tab of the Priority Points list and pages 11-13 of the Guidelines for more information on qualifying programs.

    b) **Errata Notification: Priority Points List**

    Please note that as of September 27, 2024, an errata regarding priority points for Paid Teacher Residencies was issued. The errata notification and update Priority Points list have been added to the MPA website.

    c) **How are priority points determined for charter networks or SB 1882 Operating Partners?**

    Refer to the About Priority Points tab of the Cycle 4 Priority Point Excel document, updated on October 4, 2024. For charter networks or SB 1882 Operating Partner applicants, the district size point value will be determined by an average of the point value score (0 to 7) applied to the CDNs in which the campuses are located. For charter networks or SB 1882 Operating Partner applicants, the rural status will be determined by an average of the point score (0 or 5) for the rural status of each CDN in which campuses on the Campus Implementation List are located.

4) Training Providers

a) **If we secure an Approved Provider to assist us with the application and possible implementation, does the LEA typically pay the Approved Provider up front with their own funds, or does the Approved Provider partner for free and is only paid if the LEA receives the grant?**

Districts must communicate directly with Approved Providers regarding costs, which vary across providers. For more information on Cycle application & award timelines and MPA funding schedules, see pages 11 and 6 of the Guidelines, respectively.

b) **Could our LEA receive assistance with the application with an Approved Provider and pay them later out of the grant funds if we receive the award?**

Districts must communicate directly with Approved Providers regarding costs, which vary across providers.

c) **How does a district apply to be a part of the pilot program?**
LEAs interested in applying to be a part of the Statewide Mentorship Training (SMT) pilot program will follow the same process as LEAs partnering with an MPA Approved Provider. There is an item in the "Training and Support Questions" section of the Qualtrics application for LEAs to indicate interest in joining the SMT pilot program. If interested, the LEA will select "yes" on that item. Please note there is limited capacity for the SMT pilot program, and any LEAs interested in joining the pilot will need to select a back-up pathway (AP-partnered or LEA-created) and follow the application process for that pathway. Please see pages 10 and 14 of the Guidelines and the Review Criteria for more information on the SMT pilot program and application process.

d) **Who is trained as part of the pilot program?**

The Statewide Mentorship Pilot Training will train mentors and any appropriate district and campus employees, such as principals, assistant principals, and instructional coaches, as outlined on page 9 of the Guidelines. Additionally, since the Statewide Mentorship Training is being designed to provide aligned training for various mentorship roles such mentor of first- and second-year teachers, cooperating teachers, and host teachers of teacher candidates, TEA will work with selected pilot districts to determine interest and availability in including these additional roles in the 2025-26 pilot training. If included, training cooperating teachers and host teachers would come at no additional cost to the district.