

Educator Preparation Program Communication Regarding COVID-19
March 16, 2020

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) continues to work with the Office of the Governor, Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), and the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) to coordinate and plan the state's response to COVID-19. We are writing today to provide updates related to educator preparation programs (EPPs) and testing. Please know that we hear your concerns and appreciate the specific situations you have raised. This is a very fluid situation, and we will be providing additional information as we are able.

Clinical Teaching, Internship, and Practicum Assignments

With the disruption to normal schedules for our public schools and institutions of higher education, issues related to clinical teaching and internship assignments have been a critical concern for EPPs and candidates. Governor Abbott declared a state of disaster for all Texas counties, which provides some additional flexibility for preparation programs as it relates to the requirements for clinical teaching, internship, and practicum assignments. Specifically, the rules in 19 TAC Chapter 228.1(d) state:

(d) If the governor declares a state of disaster consistent with the Texas Government Code, §418.014, Texas Education Agency staff may extend deadlines in this chapter for up to 90 days and decrease clinical teaching, internship, and practicum assignment minimums by up to 20 percent as necessary to accommodate persons in the affected disaster areas.

Based on the disaster declaration and the provisions in rules, TEA is providing programs with the discretion to decrease clinical teaching, internship, and practicum assignment minimums by up to 20 percent to accommodate closures around the state. We will continue to monitor the status of school closings around the state and will provide additional guidance if it becomes necessary. For now, we would recommend that all candidates in clinical teaching, internship, or practicum assignments continue in their placement subject to the discretion of the districts where they are assigned.

Field-Based Experiences

For candidates completing field-based experiences and observations in the school setting, it is important to note that SBEC rules require only a minimum of 30 clock-hours, with up to 15 clock-hours permitted to be provided through electronic transmission or other video or technology-based method. Most programs greatly exceed these numbers, but if there are individual circumstances where a candidate cannot meet the 15 clock-hours of in-person field-based experience due to campus closures or restrictions, we will revisit that issue when we know how long schools will be closed.

If you are looking for ways to keep your candidates engaged or to provide some high-quality technology-based tools, we would recommend the use of the Texas TLAC Online platform, which includes videos of exemplar practitioners in the field along with additional instructional resources. The platform is available for free upon signing up. The platform is accessible at <https://texastlaonline.org/>.

EPP Accountability and Observation Requirements

During these times, we know that EPPs have numerous concerns and priorities. Related to the Accountability System for Educator Preparation (ASEP), we plan to consider rulemaking in 19 TAC 229 to address issues emerging from the field, including observation requirements. We will plan to work with stakeholders, including EPPs, to determine what flexibility is necessary to introduce into the rule to accommodate changes to EPP and LEA schedules and access levels stemming from COVID-19 concerns.

TEA Staff plans to bring 19 TAC 229 to the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) meeting on May 1, 2020, for discussion with the Board. Following that meeting, we will gather additional feedback and plan to present the rule to the Board at the July 24, 2020 meeting of the SBEC. This rulemaking timeline will allow us to address the situation prior to the issuance of any future ASEP statuses.

Applying for Educator Certification

The Educator Certification Online System (ECOS) will remain available for candidates to submit online applications for certification, and you will still be able to provide recommendations for certificate issuance. Please be sure to confirm your candidates have submitted a complete and accurate application for your review prior to submitting your recommendation for certification to the agency.

Additional Notes

TEA has established a [COVID-19 website](#) as a central source for information to school districts, and this should also provide beneficial information for EPPs.

If you have additional specific concerns that are unique to your program or geographic area that may not be addressed by the guidance provided, please let us know by completing a Help Desk Ticket submitted to [Educator Testing and Preparation Programs](#). We will be in touch as additional information is available.