
2G

Information

Professional Services Committee

Accountability, Outcomes, and Accreditation

Executive Summary: This agenda item presents for discussion ways in which the accreditation system could be modified to more effectively focus on program outcomes and the most critical aspects of preparation.

Policy Question: Should the Commission undertake a process to modify its Accreditation system to enhance the focus on preparation program quality and candidate outcomes?

Recommended Action: For information only

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Strategic Plan Goal

II. Program Quality and Accountability

- ◆ Develop and maintain rigorous, meaningful, and relevant standards that drive program quality and effectiveness for the preparation of the education workforce and are responsive to the needs of California's diverse student population.

December 2013

Accountability, Outcomes, and Accreditation

Introduction

This agenda item presents for discussion and potential Commission direction ways in which the Commission's accreditation system might be streamlined and strengthened to provide increased evidence of the effectiveness of educator preparation programs, including candidate performance outcomes. During the presentation, staff will also provide an oral update on the pilot of the Preliminary Program Completer Survey.

Background and Overview of Current Accreditation System

Over 260 educational entities are currently approved by the Commission to sponsor educator preparation programs for California credential candidates. Together, these institutions offer 1,395 programs leading to over 30 different credentials or added authorizations. The Commission's responsibilities include assuring that all approved educator preparation programs are aligned to the Commission-adopted standards. How best to ensure the preparation and licensing of the highest quality educators for California's public schools continues to be a topic of significant interest and consequence.

In 2004, the Commission approved the establishment of an Accreditation Study Work Group to review and refine the Commission's accreditation system. At that time, the accreditation system was comprised of a singular activity – the accreditation site visit – which took place every 6-7 years for each institution. The site visit was considered a “snap shot” of program quality, as defined by meeting the Commission's adopted standards. The site visit involved a review of all evidence presented by the institution, including interviews with stakeholders. No accreditation activities took place between site visits other than revisits for programs that failed to meet the Commission's standards.

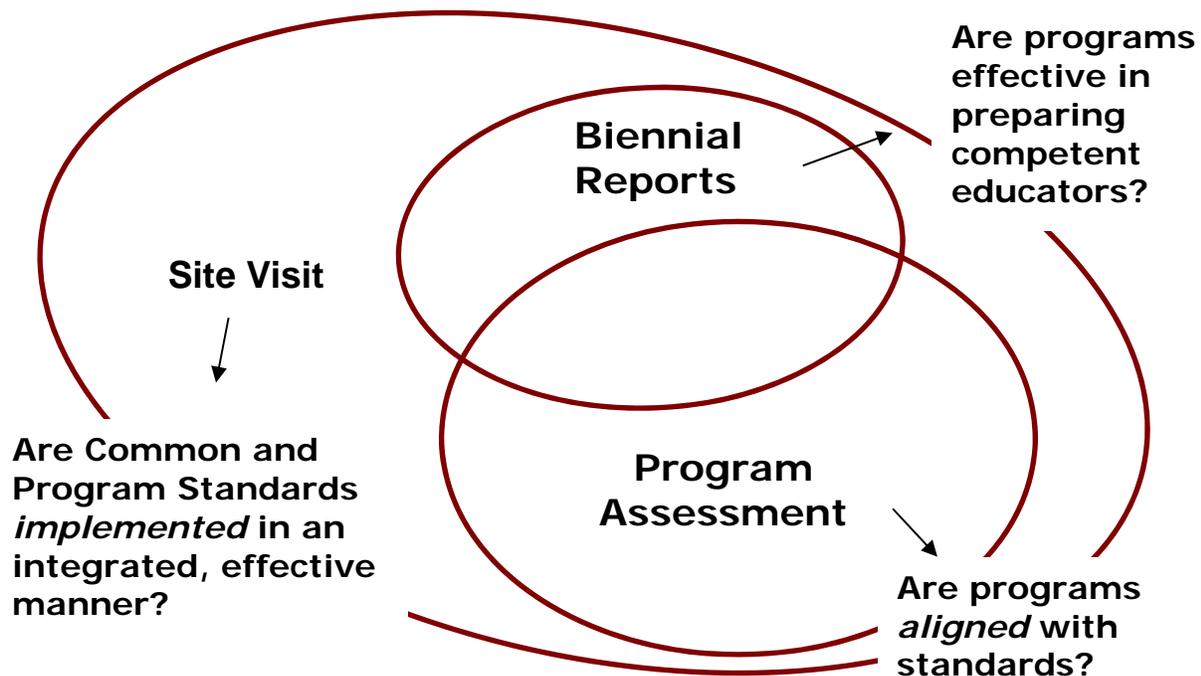
The structure and implementation of the former accreditation system fueled a belief that the accreditation system was a bureaucratic process that required substantial effort to provide and confirm documentation, did not consistently ensure program quality, and did not allow for sufficient engagement with institutions between visits every seven years. In addition, there was a widespread perception that the prior accreditation system did little to encourage ongoing program improvement and that many institutions returned to “business as usual” after the accreditation site visit team concluded its work.

The 2004 Accreditation Study Work Group recommended several important changes to the Commission's accreditation system. In 2006, the Commission adopted many of these recommendations as well as a revised *Accreditation Framework*, the Commission's policy document. The current *Accreditation Framework* is available at: http://www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/PDF/accreditation_framework.pdf.

The 2006 *Accreditation Framework* outlines four critical purposes to the Commission's accreditation system. They are:

- Accountability to the public and the profession
- Ensuring high quality programs
- Adherence to standards
- Fostering ongoing program improvement

The current accreditation system was designed, in part, to address the deficiencies in the previous system. To that end, the four purposes identified in the 2006 *Accreditation Framework* are achieved through the implementation of a comprehensive 7 year accreditation cycle. The revised requirements include *Biennial Reports*, submitted by institutions following years 1, 3 and 5 of the 7 year cycle, with *Program Assessment* occurring in Year 4. A culminating *site visit* takes place in Year 6 of the cycle followed by a 7th year in which institutions are expected to address any issues identified by the site visit review team and stipulations issued by the Committee on Accreditation (COA). The graphic below demonstrates the interrelated nature of the accreditation activities.



The foundation for the accreditation system is the Commission's adopted standards, both Common Standards which address the institutional responsibilities for supporting the credential programs that it offers, and the various program standards that specifically outline the required program and candidate expectations for each credential type. The revised system was launched in 2007 with the reinstatement of site visits following a five year hiatus due to fiscal constraints.

Taken together, these three components of accreditation, i.e., Biennial Reports, Program Assessment, and site visits provide a comprehensive and ongoing picture of how an institution

and its programs are meeting Commission-adopted standards. A summary of the three components of accreditation is included in Appendix A.

Discussion of the Current Accreditation System's Strengths and Areas for Improvement/Refinement

The current accreditation system was phased in beginning in 2007-08 and all components of the system are being fully implemented at this time. Since the system has been in place for a number of years, it is appropriate to consider whether the system is operating optimally and whether adjustments or refinements are needed to respond to the changing conditions of education since the system was first designed and implemented. With this in mind, and given that the Commission is poised to revise the Multiple and Single Subject standards as recommended by the Teacher Preparation Advisory Panel, Commission staff has been engaged both internally and with various stakeholders in discussions this past fall about the broader topic of standards and accreditation. These conversations, guided by the following questions, have allowed for reflection about strengths and challenges of the accreditation system:

Is the Commission's accreditation process yielding the type of information needed to determine the quality of both preparation programs and program graduates? If not, what are the "right things" to evaluate and/or measure in order to provide insights into the quality of educator preparation and of program graduates?

Are additional refinements and/or adjustments needed so that the accreditation system functions in the most efficient and least bureaucratic manner possible while still yielding a sufficient level of assurance to the public that programs are producing high quality educators for California public schools?

Strengths of the Current Accreditation System

- ***The current system is comprehensive in determining whether programs are meeting the Commission's standards.*** The Commission's accreditation system requires that reviewers confirm that the institution has addressed every aspect of the standards. Reviewers are trained to review evidence to assure that the program is in fact aligned with Commission-adopted standards. Types of evidence provided by program sponsors vary widely and can include, among other things, documentation in the form of meeting minutes, agendas, student handbooks, advising materials, course syllabi, course descriptions, copies of assignments, student portfolios, and assessments and rubrics. The current system relies on substantial documentation by the institution, which is then reviewed, and, further substantiated through interviews with candidates, employers, faculty, program administrators and other stakeholders at the time of the site visit.
- ***The current system fosters program improvement.*** The current accreditation system cycle facilitates the collection, analysis and use of candidate performance data to inform needed program modifications. Anecdotal information from program sponsors suggests that the Biennial Report process has led to significant and sometimes difficult conversations among key program personnel about the strengths and weaknesses of their program. These conversations then have led to positive changes in programs. Similarly, the COA has heard repeatedly from personnel of programs that have addressed stipulations about the numerous positive changes that have taken place as a result of the accreditation process.

- ***The Commission's accreditation system is state of the art.*** Staff has presented information on California's accreditation system at both national and regional conferences and meetings. The system was described in one of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education's (NCATE) publications as a state of the art system. The focus on continuous program improvement in the Commission's accreditation system is very closely aligned with the recent modifications to the NCATE accreditation system and the efforts within the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). Additionally, in 2013, the Chief State Schools Officers issued a report entitled, *Our Responsibility, Our Promise: Transforming Educator Preparation and Entry Into the Profession*. Many of the concepts in the report are in line with the Commission's standards and accreditation system. This document can be accessed at the following website: (http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2012/Our%20Responsibility%20Our%20Promise_2012.pdf)

Areas for Potential Improvement/Refinement of the Accreditation System

The Commission has been operating the current accreditation system for six years, and the institutions have participated in five sevenths (5/7) of the accreditation cycle. As the system has matured and Commission resources have dwindled in recent years, implementation challenges have surfaced that point to areas where the system could potentially be improved and become more efficient and effective in assuring that all institutions are offering high quality preparation for California's education workforce.

Some of these challenges and areas for potential improvement/refinement of the current system are outlined below:

- ***The system is driven by lengthy and complex standards requiring extensive supporting documentation.*** One primary objective of the Commission's accreditation system, as defined in the current *Accreditation Framework*, is to ensure that approved programs are aligned with Commission-adopted standards. Each program sponsor must address the Commission's *Common Standards* and each set of program standards for every preparation program it offers. Currently the Commission has nine Common Standards (<http://www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/STDS-common.html>). These standards focus on unit (institutional) capacity, and are designed to ensure that the institution has sufficient infrastructure to support all the educator preparation programs it offers.

Program Standards specifically address each credential area and differ in length, focus, and prescriptiveness. For example, Added Authorization Programs address as few as three or four standards, while Pupil Personnel Services: School Counseling programs are held to thirty-two standards. The Commission's program standards have been developed by educators—practitioners and those who prepare educators—over time. The focus and detail of the standards differ depending on when the standards were developed and adopted in addition to the credential specific content of the standards.

Although the content of program standards differs significantly based on the credential type, all program standards are similar in that they address program design, coursework and fieldwork, and candidate assessment. Many of the standards address aspects of the

program and what must be provided to candidates (program qualities) while others are focused on what the candidate must demonstrate (candidate performance expectations) in order to earn the credential. Institutions offer as few as 1 program, with the larger institutions offering over 20 programs. For each program offered, the institution must submit a program narrative and supporting documentation for review during program assessment, and a Biennial Report following years 1, 3 and 5. Program Assessment documents typically include 100-200 pages of narrative text describing the program's design and how the institution approaches each of the Commission's standards, with up to 1,000 pages of addenda that constitute "evidence" that the standard is being fully addressed. The resources required by the institution to generate these documents are extensive. The resources required to review each of these documents are also extensive.

- ***The system is time and resource intensive.*** The system relies upon a large pool of K-12 personnel and higher education faculty volunteers who serve to provide the professional judgments which form the basis on which accreditation decisions are ultimately made. In order to ensure the continued availability of reviewers for initial program review, program assessment, and site visits, the Commission needs to continually recruit, train, and replenish the pool of individuals who constitute the Board of Institutional Reviewers (BIR). It is challenging to maintain the numbers of individuals with expertise in all credential areas needed for document review and site visits, especially given the agency's resource constraints. However, some of the demands on volunteer time and effort could potentially be mitigated by addressing other related issues as described below.
- ***The system provides extensive useful information about the program offered by an institution (inputs) but less extensive information about the overall quality of candidates (outcomes) who complete educator preparation programs.*** Standards in all credential areas require that programs assess candidates to determine whether they meet performance expectations required for licensure. In the case of teacher preparation, passage of a Commission-approved teaching performance assessment is required for licensure, and programs are required to discuss candidate performance on this and other key assessments in the Biennial Report. The accreditation system, including the Biennial Report component, focuses on where and how the program assesses candidates as well as whether the program collects and uses candidate assessment data for program improvement. While the current accreditation system includes performance outcomes, the preponderance of evidence about quality in preparation is still heavily weighted toward evaluation of inputs generated by the institution under review. Some could argue that the accreditation system might be strengthened by a closer analysis of the results of those assessments.

The discussion about the use of outcomes for accreditation purposes predates even the 2004-2006 accreditation revision work. The Accreditation Study Work Group discussed this issue at length while developing the purpose and format of the Biennial Report process. The members grappled with the relative advantages and disadvantages of the outcome measures available at the time, and in the end the consensus of the group was to focus more using the Biennial Report as a means to help institutions use to a greater degree the aggregated candidate assessment data to make positive program changes.

In the intervening years, however, there have been greater public demands for accountability along with increased focus on the analysis and implications of K-12 student data. Similarly, there are increased public demands for program accountability for educator preparation outcomes. Partly in response to this focus on data and accountability, ongoing advances in the field of candidate assessment are now providing more options, including but not limited to performance assessments and closer links between what is addressed in coursework and fieldwork and what is expected in terms of candidate competencies. The issue still remains, however, as to what types of assessments and what types of data are most valid and feasible to use within the accreditation system across all institutions and at a statewide level. Thus, it might be time to revisit this discussion with the accreditation community.

- ***The system may focus too heavily on compliance at the expense of innovation.*** While the Commission's standards are designed to allow for a variety of pathways and means to meeting the standards, in some cases, the standards may be overly prescriptive and may not lend themselves well to innovation. For example, the field experience standard in the Multiple and Single Subject program requires two placements for the Multiple Subject candidate either in K-2, 3-5, or 6-8. As national research began to show the effectiveness and benefits of year-long residencies in a single classroom, the Commission's standards, rather than support these innovative models, served as a barrier to their use in California.

Possible Approaches to Improvements/Modifications in the Accreditation System to Sharpen the Focus on Program Quality and Candidate Outcomes

The current accreditation system has many strengths, and goes a long way in service of its essential function, to ensure quality in preparation of educators. Moreover, the system stands as the state's only accountability mechanism over quality in this sector. Improvements and modifications can be made, however, to enhance the focus on a wider variety of useful outcome information regarding candidate performance, and develop a better balance between evaluation of program documentation (inputs) and evaluation of program performance (i.e., candidate outcomes).

Options are offered below for consideration by the Commission and its stakeholders.

1) Focus on the Essentials: Rethink Educator Preparation Standards

As previously indicated, the Commission's accreditation system requires that reviewers seek to confirm every phrase in every sentence of the standards to ensure adherence to the adopted program standards. The teacher preparation program standards alone contain 15,000 words and approximately 1,500 sentences. Institutions and programs are required to submit evidence that they in fact operate programs that are aligned with every aspect of these standards.

The standards are the foundation of the accreditation system, which is why the content, format, and focus of the standards are critical to an understanding of quality in preparation. While the standards are comprehensive, the length and breadth of standards in some credential areas requires extensive work on the part of both programs to respond and reviewers to evaluate these responses. Both situations may detract from a clear focus on the key, critical aspects of teacher preparation that make a difference to candidate outcomes. As the Commission begins to discuss

the work of a standards panel for the next iteration of the Multiple and Single Subject program standards, it could be appropriate to direct the panel to look specifically at developing more concise standards that focus only on the most essential aspects of preparation.

As part of this work, the Commission could also direct staff to facilitate a review of the Common Standards to determine which aspects are still relevant and essential to maintain for accreditation purposes.

2) Increase Reliance on Performance Outcomes as an Indicator of Program Quality and Effectiveness

By focusing more on candidate outcomes within the accreditation system, the Commission may be able to shift the accreditation system so that it is appropriately balanced in evaluating compliance with required standards and examination of performance outcomes. This approach might allow for greater innovation, and could streamline some accreditation processes.

Moving in this direction would require that the Commission identify the specific combination of indicators that provide confidence in those outcomes. Ultimately, this approach would hold programs accountable for producing graduates who demonstrate competence and readiness to begin practice. This work would also be critical to the work of standards panels in focusing on the key critical elements that make a difference to candidate outcomes within the preparation process for inclusion into streamlined program standards.

The question arises as to what types of performance outcome measures could play a greater role in determining program effectiveness and accreditation decisions. Institutions rely on varied internal performance measures in assessing their own effectiveness, yet the accreditation system does not specify any particular measure or measurement to assist in the determination of findings on standards that would be common across all institutions/programs. Possible examples of such measurement-based outcomes would be:

- a) *Performance Assessments* that document candidate knowledge, skills, and abilities
- b) *Beginning educator surveys* that document candidates' perceptions about program quality and about their own effectiveness (i.e., sense of personal efficacy) as beginning educators
- c) *Employer surveys* that document employers' perceptions of the preparedness of newly credentialed educators
- d) *Other indicators* that could be judiciously used such as program completion rates, employment rates and employment retention rates, indicators that are commonly used by other national accrediting bodies. Reliance on these indicators would require careful attention to context, given that they can also be impacted by external factors such as a downturn in the economy.

With an appropriate mix of outcomes measures in addition to more concise and focused program standards, the accreditation system might be further streamlined. For example, institutions meeting certain outcomes expectations might be allowed a more abbreviated response with a lesser level of implementation detail in documenting adherence to standards. If programs consistently document candidate outcomes at a high level of performance, this factor could also improve public confidence that beginning educators have acquired the knowledge, skills, and

abilities to be effective on the job from day one and that the Commission's accreditation system is effective and efficient in identifying those programs and graduates.

3) Reduce the Length and Complexity of Program Documents within the Accreditation System

While the Biennial Report is intended to be brief and focused, some institutions choose to submit large documents with lengthy text. The Commission could work with stakeholders to shorten and refocus these documents on the essential information needed for a robust data- focused report. Further, templates for data reporting could increase consistency across institutional reports and focus institutions on the type of data most useful for the multiple, yet related, purposes of ensuring candidate quality, program improvement, and alignment to the standards.

Similarly, current documentation submitted by institutions for purposes of program assessment is also extensive, as indicated above. This situation could be significantly improved through reducing and refocusing the scope of applicable program standards, as described in #1 above, which would in turn reduce the necessary scope of program documents submitted for review. The Commission could also work with stakeholders to define appropriate page limits, matrices to capture program information in summary form, and other strategies to make this component of the accreditation system more manageable for institutions, volunteer reviewers, and the Commission.

4) Consider Other, Nontraditional Strategies

Other more nontraditional strategies might be considered as well, such as, for example, identifying which standards are more important for focus within a program document because they are more closely linked with candidate outcomes, or deciding that not all standards would need to be included in the review process for institutions that have met Commission expectations for documented candidate outcomes. Alternatively, if the Commission were to adopt a solely outcomes-based approach, perhaps the candidate expectations would become the de facto standards and all program documents would focus only on these expected candidate outcomes.

5) Consider Different Processes for Initial vs. Ongoing Accreditation

Currently, the Commission requires that all prospective and current educator preparation programs address all standards (i.e., Common Standards, Program Preconditions, and Program Standards). Proposals from an institution to sponsor a new program must respond to Common Standards and the relevant program standards prior to being initially approved for operation. Programs seeking ongoing program approval must respond, again, to all program standards in the fourth year of the cycle (program assessment) and to all Common Standards prior to the site visit. Full comprehensive reviews take place for both initial and ongoing accreditation, even if little has changed since the initial approval was granted. The Commission could reduce this burden for programs seeking ongoing approval.

6) Encourage Innovation

The Commission's standards and the need for institutions to comply with the standards may unintentionally undermine or discourage innovative practices. The Commission might consider ways in which to encourage innovation and experimentation with high leverage practices while ensuring that programs are aligned with state adopted standards.

Summary and Next Steps

This agenda item presents a variety of approaches that could, alone or in combination be effective in moving the Commission's accreditation system to a next iteration that is more streamlined, effective and efficient in improving the balance between program evaluation and accreditation based on documentation and program evaluation and accreditation based on demonstrated candidate outcomes.

Based on the Commission discussion, the Commission staff will work with stakeholders, including the Committee on Accreditation, to take appropriate next steps as directed by the Commission.

Appendix A

Summary of the Components of the Commission’s Accreditation System for Educator Preparation

Biennial Reports: Biennial Reports require institutions to provide written evidence that they are both collecting candidate assessment and program effectiveness data and are using that data to drive programmatic decision-making and program improvement. All accredited institutions must submit a report that contains information for each Commission-approved program offered. Each approved program’s biennial report must: 1) describe major changes that have taken place since the last accreditation activity; 2) provide aggregated candidate assessment and program effectiveness data; 3) provide an analysis of the data indicating what the data suggest about program strengths and areas for improvement; and 4) identify program modifications undertaken or proposed by the program to address areas identified through data analysis as needing improvement. With the exception of data from the teaching performance assessment, no specific type of data or manner of reporting data is currently required by the Commission. Program sponsors use their own discretion with regard to what goes into the biennial report, and there is currently wide variation in the types of data and level of detail in the information submitted in the reports.

Further, the Biennial Report requires that the institutional leadership indicate that they have reviewed the information provided by each of the programs they offer and identified what the data suggests both at the program level and for the institutional level in support of those programs.

Biennial Reports are intended to be brief (generally 10-20 pages) and focused on data (e.g., tables, charts), rather than extended narratives. Biennial Reports are reviewed initially by staff and then by program assessment reviewers and site visit team members to inform those accreditation activities. A copy of the 2013 Biennial Report submitted by California State University, Channel Islands is provided in Appendix B.

Program Assessment: Program Assessment is the process of determining whether, based solely on documentation provided by the program sponsor, the educator preparation program’s design (i.e., the planned sequence of coursework and fieldwork experiences) meets the Commission’s program standards. In the 4th year of the accreditation cycle, all programs at an institution must submit a document that addresses each program standard and, because the document itself does not constitute evidence but rather a claim made by the institution, it must also provide links to supporting documentation. The documentation is typically voluminous and includes candidate handbooks, course syllabi, course assignments, and advising materials. A team of two reviewers with expertise in the specific credential area reviews the materials submitted by the program and determines whether the program is “preliminarily aligned” to each applicable Commission standard or whether additional information needs to be submitted by the program. The institution has an opportunity to resubmit documentation and by one year prior to the site visit, the program assessment process should be completed. The report of findings is provided to the institution and to the site visit team, and, in cases where there are outstanding issues, helps focus the site visit on investigating these issues further.

Site Visit: The site visit is the summative accreditation activity taking place in the 6th year of the cycle. Because an in-depth review of the documentation (program assessment) has been done in year 4, the site visit teams are much smaller than in years past (ranging from 3 to 9 instead of teams of up to 20 or more individuals). Having reviewed the documentation ahead of time allows the team to focus on how well the program is *implemented*. The objective of the site visit is to confirm the findings of the program assessment reviewers, examine deeper any areas identified as concerns or needing additional information, assure that the program is being effectively implemented, and determine if the institution is meeting the Common Standards. Site visit reviewers use information provided in the Biennial Reports, the Program Assessment process, as well as all information provided at the site visit, including but not limited to interviews with key stakeholders such as candidates, faculty, graduates, employers, program and institutional personnel, and educational and community partners.

At the conclusion of the site visit, reviewers prepare a report outlining their findings on all Common and Program Standards as well as an accreditation recommendation for consideration by the Committee on Accreditation. The site visit team may recommend stipulations and require follow up. Any areas with stipulations are to be addressed in the 7th year of the cycle, in accordance with COA action. When the COA places stipulations on an institution the follow up may include a revisit to determine if the institution has met the stipulations and is meeting the Commission's standards.

Appendix B

Sample Biennial Report Submitted by CSU Channel Islands

Due to its size, Appendices B is available in electronic form only at
<http://www.ctc.ca.gov/commission/agendas/2013-12/2013-12-2G-appendix.pdf>