

Discussion of the Experimental Standards for Preparation of Professional Educators February 2012

Overview of this Report

The purpose of this item is two-fold. First, it provides general information on the existence and objective of the Experimental Program Standards. Recently, several institutions have expressed interest in submitting proposals to the COA under the Experimental Program Standards and several of these may come forward to the COA in the coming months. Because many COA members are new to the COA and may not be familiar with the experimental program standards and the role the standards have played in expanding the knowledge base on educator preparation. This item provides a discussion of the history of experimental standards, reasons for why the standards were revised, and the rationale for the current standards.

The second purpose is to begin the discussion about challenges of implementing the Experimental Program standards. Given that the potential value of Experimental Programs has long been recognized by the Commission and COA, staff will request guidance from the Committee on Accreditation (COA) on implementation issues for the Experimental Program Standards.

Staff Recommendation

This is an information item only.

Background

The CTC History document¹ indicates that, as early as 1968, experimental teacher preparation programs were being operated in California. From 1976 forward, records indicate that an Education Code revision assigned the task of adopting guidelines for the development and approval of experimental programs of professional preparation to the Commission. In 1978 the Commission distributed guidelines and encouraged colleges and universities to develop experimental programs for approval under the terms of Education Code section 44273.

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During the next seven years, colleges and universities proposed fourteen experimental programs for the Commission to approve. The Commission approved all fourteen proposals. During the same period, partial drafts of several other experimental program proposals were received by the Commission's staff, but the sponsoring institutions did not complete these additional proposals.

The experimental program guidelines related to professional competencies and field experiences were substantially different from those for other programs. To fulfill these guidelines, an institution was required to provide statements or descriptions of:

¹ <http://www.ctc.ca.gov/commission/files/CTC-history.pdf>

- Purposes of the program,
- Anticipated value of the program to teacher education,
- Experimental or research hypotheses that guided the program design,
- Methodology and procedures of the program,
- Program's objectives, and the relationship of these to the Commission's competency guidelines for other programs,
- How the program departs from the Commission's regular program requirements,
- Criteria to be used in evaluating candidates' skills and knowledge,
- Procedures to be used in evaluating the program, and,
- Reporting procedures by which the results of the program were to be communicated to the Commission.

The Commission also adopted policies regarding the reporting obligations of institutions that operated experimental programs, the term of approval of experimental programs, the renewal of such approval, and the award of credentials to candidates who complete experimental programs after the experimental program approval expires. These policies required institutions to report annually on experimental programs, and to present a final report of each completed experiment. The Commission's staff was required to present an annual report about all experimental programs to the Commission. Specific conditions in which an experiment could be extended were enumerated, as were the conditions under which credentials were granted to candidates who complete expired programs.

On many occasions since 1978, Commissioners have affirmed and reaffirmed their desire to encourage experimentation in educator preparation, and their willingness to consider experimental programs. In 1986, the Commission thoroughly reexamined its own policies to determine how they might be shaped to encourage greater experimentation that would contribute to knowledge of educator preparation, and innovation that would contribute to greater diversity in educator preparation.

Redesign of the Experimental and Alternative Program Policies, 1986

In 1986, the Commission's professional staff sought to determine why the response to the experimental program option had been so low. Discussions of this issue among commissioners and staff members, combined with correspondence and conversations with education professors and deans, led to the following explanations:

- 1) The Commission's guidelines for experimental programs allowed institutions to depart from the "regular" program requirements of the Commission. However, from 1978 until 1986, the Commission did not clearly communicate the extent to which experimental programs could depart from the requirements of laws that govern non-experimental programs. As a consequence, most institutions conceived of experimental programs within the restrictive framework of laws that apply only to non-experimental programs.
- 2) The requirement that institutions indicate how an experimental program departs from the Commission's regular requirements had a "chilling" effect on some institutions that

might otherwise propose experimental programs. Similarly, the requirement that institutions identify the relationship between a program's objectives and the Commission's regular competency guidelines was interpreted by some institutions to mean that the Commission expected experimental programs to pursue the same competency objectives as regular programs.

- 3) With the exceptions noted above, the Commission's guidelines for documenting experimental programs were generally reasonable, particularly in light of the legal requirement that institutional proposals to establish experimental programs be "supported by detailed data and justification" (Ed Code section 44273(a)). However, the documentation requirements were seen as formidable in many institutions where there were few incentives for faculty to spend time and energy developing innovations in teacher education.

Development of the Revised Experimental Program Standards, 2007-08

As the COA and the Accreditation Study Work Group (Work Group) reviewed and proposed revisions to the Commission's accreditation system, they discussed the Experimental Program option. Three points were of major interest: 1) the underutilization of this option in the past; 2) a need to update the standards to reflect current best practices in research-based program design and assessment; and 3) a need to clarify Commission and COA processes and procedures with respect to Experimental Programs. There was significant interest in both revising the Experimental Program Standards and reinvigorating field interest in Experimental Programs in order to contribute to the body of knowledge in the area of educator preparation. Consensus was reached that a revision of the standards was necessary to reflect current best practices of research-based program design and assessment as well as clarification of Commission and COA processes and procedures with respect to Experimental Programs.

A subgroup of COA and Work Group members met a number of times to review and suggest revisions to the current Experimental Program Standards. The draft revised standards were discussed by the COA and the group revised the draft standards based on the COA's feedback. At the June 2007 COA meeting, the COA requested that staff take the revised draft experimental program standards to the Commission for consideration. The draft standards were initially presented to the Commission for information at the August 2007 meeting and subsequently posted on the Commission's website for field comment.

Policy Principles Underlying the 2008 Redesign of Experimental Program Standards

The following principles represent Commission guidelines related to the proposal, review and evaluation of Experimental Programs.

1. The Commission encourages experimental programs that seek to resolve significant questions regarding educator preparation. Experimental programs must have a scholarly focus, and proposals must be research-based and clearly identify the issue being investigated, the intended outcomes and the evidence that will be collected, analyzed and used for program improvement.

2. Colleges, universities and school district educator preparation programs are encouraged to develop experimental programs that depart from the Commission's program standards for traditional programs if the proposed program meets the goals of the statement above. The Common Standards will apply to all proposals and submissions—both traditional and experimental.
3. The Committee on Accreditation will approve experimental programs that adhere to the experimental program standards, including indicators of candidate competence and how they will be assessed. As part of this process, the institution/program sponsor must describe how it will investigate and evaluate the experimental program. Biennial reports of research findings will be required as a part of the accreditation cycle. Experimental programs will be approved providing they have the potential to improve the quality of service authorized by the credential as required by Education Code.
4. An experimental program proposal will be determined to have merit based upon an analysis of its proposed design to address fundamental issues in schooling in California and preparing educators for those settings.
5. Experimental programs will be evaluated based upon the proposal and the data collected related to program quality and candidate competence. The potential for improving the quality of service authorized by the credential will be determined on the basis of analysis of the indicators of program effectiveness that the institution/program sponsor submits as part of its program proposal.
6. Each experimental program submits a final report to the Committee. The Committee on Accreditation hears the reports on results of Experimental Programs and innovations. The Committee may recommend to the Commission a review of Program Standards based on data and scholarship regarding educator preparation reported by Experimental Programs.

The COA and Work Group agreed early in the process that it is essential that candidates who are completing an experimental program have, at minimum, the same knowledge, skills and abilities as candidates who complete a program operating under the adopted program standards. The institution/program sponsor is responsible for proposing an experimental research design as well as a program design that together indicate a high likelihood of producing candidates with the appropriate knowledge, skills and abilities as well as contributing to the knowledge base within the education profession. The COA will approve only those experimental programs that have completed the peer review process and demonstrate a high possibility of meeting both goals—preparing qualified candidates and contributing to the professional knowledge base related to the preparation of California educators.

Although field comment received was minimal, the COA revised the standards to address both the questions raised by the Commission at the August 2007 meeting and other issues raised by the members of the Committee as they discussed this topic further at their January 2008 meeting. One of the areas of concern raised by the Commission related to the duration of time that a program may be considered an experimental program. This question was subsequently discussed by the COA and, as a result, the proposed standards were revised to indicate that a time limit would be needed as part of the proposal and that no experimental program may exceed 7 years. Among the changes to the procedures related to Experimental Standards was a clarification that

programs must submit proposals that address the Preconditions as well as the Common Standards and the Experimental Program Standards. In addition, the revised procedures discussed in the agenda item include a requirement that all experimental programs must provide the COA with a midpoint progress report to help ensure sufficient oversight of these programs. Finally, clarification was made in the procedures that the final evaluation of the program must include next steps for the program, including plans for dissemination of program evaluation results, thereby allowing the COA the opportunity to discuss the future of the program after its completion as an experimental program.

Rationale for Experimental Programs

The experimental program option is designed to encourage innovations in educator preparation and investigation of those innovations, with the aim of increasing the profession's knowledge about the process of professional learning and improving professional practice for the benefit of all students in California. Experimental programs were provided for in Education Code 44273(a) as a way for programs of "merit and the potential of improving the quality of service authorized by the credential" to be developed. In the past, few programs have been submitted under this option. The revised Experimental Program standards take into account this under-utilization and are designed to encourage innovation with accountability to the profession.

Experimental programs can be proposed and are encouraged in any credential area. They should be outcome driven and address the need for high quality educators in leadership and support roles to promote and facilitate learning for all students, as well as, for classroom teachers.

California's educator work force is prone to fluctuation and change. There will always be a need for highly qualified and effective educators. Institutions are encouraged to develop experimental programs, incorporating innovative and new ways designed to attract individuals to the profession and prepare highly qualified educators to meet the needs of California's public school students.

Institutions are particularly encouraged to develop proposals for experimental programs to address the following specific needs in California: (a) the need for quality educators in low performing schools, and/or those serving large numbers of minority students, low-income students, and English language learners; (b) critical needs for teachers in specific areas, such as math and science; and (c) the need for highly qualified teachers given the expected future teacher shortage.

In general, experimental program options should be designed with the aim of improving educator preparation and professional practice for the benefit of all educators and students in California's schools. Program improvement should be an ongoing professional process whereby programs develop, implement and investigate preparation approaches informed by the latest research and literature. The results of these investigations should then be disseminated within the professional and policy arenas to encourage, as appropriate, broader use and adaptation to current practice.

Goals for Experimental Programs

The goals for experimental programs include the following:

1. As with all other Commission program completers, experimental program completers have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities as identified by the Commission's candidate competence standards to teach and support student learning for all children in California public schools.
2. Program completers can, through their practice, meet the needs of populations that have been underserved and contribute to the success of all students (including meeting the needs of English language learners and/or helping to close the achievement gap).
3. Experimental programs contribute to the construction of new knowledge and scholarship on educator preparation to improve student learning.

Experimental Program Standards

Standard 1: Program Rationale

The experimental program proposal provides a credible rationale for the program, drawing upon relevant and recent scholarly and research literature in the field. Experimental programs have a scholarly focus and proposals are research-based with a clear plan for investigating an issue of significant importance for the theory and practice of educator preparation.

Standard 2: Research Question(s)

The proposal clearly identifies the topic of investigation and submits one or more research questions, hypotheses or objectives that the experimental program is expected to address. The proposal relates to fundamentally significant issues in the selection, preparation and/or assessment of prospective professional educators.

Standard 3: Program Design

The proposal submits a complete and thorough description of the proposed program. The proposal includes details of the activities and coursework that candidates will complete as well as indicators of outcomes of candidate competence for program completion. The proposal must outline all essential elements of the research design, as appropriate to the nature of the inquiry. This includes the intended outcomes and evidence that will be collected.

Standard 4: Research Design

The proposal clearly illustrates the connection of the Program Philosophy and Goals, Research Questions and Program Design to the implementation of the experimental program and investigation of the issue(s) being investigated as well as a timeline for the investigation. Standards of scholarship will be applied as part of the peer and staff review used to approve, monitor and review proposals and reports. The length of time for the experimental program is provided and is appropriate to the focus of the inquiry but may not exceed 7 years.

Standard 5: Anticipated Outcomes

The proposal identifies the anticipated outcomes of implementing the experimental program and how the implementation and investigation will add to the knowledge base of educator preparation. The proposal includes details about how the efficacy of the program will be assessed and how the program will ensure that program completers have the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to work in California's diverse public schools and support students in meeting standards.

Standard 6: Contribution to Scholarship and the Profession

The proposal clearly shows that the knowledge generated by implementing the experimental program will improve the quality of preparation for service authorized by the credential. The program and the scholarship generated from the research should lead or have the potential to lead to improvements in the preparation of professionals and guide education policy.