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Dear Superintendents, Deans of Education and Directors of Induction Programs:

Strategies to Strengthen EPP and LEA Partnerships During COVID-19

With the school year back in full swing, educators from preschool through graduate school find themselves in a very different environment from years past. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, every education institution in the state is grappling with how to offer powerful learning opportunities to students in virtual and hybrid settings, attend to their social, emotional and academic needs, address learning loss, and maintain essential health and safety standards in the process. Equity and access to learning is at the forefront of educators' concerns. What we have seen as we engage with educators in all sectors across the state are high levels of resilience and commitment to innovation. This is, without a doubt, a challenging time to be an educator; but it is also a moment ripe with opportunity to strengthen teaching and learning and together move our collective practice to the next level.

Approximately 16,000 student teachers and 4,000 future school administrators are also enrolled in preparation to earn a credential this year and need high quality placements in our schools. Educator preparation programs (EPPs) across the state are reporting difficulties with finding these placements for a variety of reasons, mostly having to do with the challenges local education agencies (LEAs) are dealing with as they open the new school year. The purpose of this memo is to underscore two important points:

- 1. Student teachers and other credential candidates are an invaluable resource that can make all the difference for TK–12 students and their teachers in this time of need.**
- 2. California continues to grapple with critical and chronic teacher shortages, and we must continue to recruit and prepare a diverse pool of new teachers, administrators, counselors, and other educators to staff our schools.**

Student teachers increase the adult to student ratio in the classroom; and in many

cases, also bring additional experience with technology tools and online teaching methods. In whatever environment they find themselves, student teachers and their cooperating master teachers have opportunities to work together in new and deeper ways this year, as they co-plan instructional activities, co-teach, and work collaboratively with small and large groups of students in a variety of settings. If we can find a silver lining in this COVID-19 moment, it might be the opportunities afforded EPPs and LEAs to create more effective, tailored ways of meeting TK–12 student needs while pre-service and in-service educators work side by side on new practices.

It is not yet clear what impact we might see related to TK–12 retirements or budget shortfalls this year. We do know, however, that 6.2 million students continue to need access to diverse and well-prepared teachers in every field, and we must maintain a robust pipeline into teaching and school leadership. This will require that LEAs and EPPs work proactively and flexibly to meet the needs of TK–12 students and ensure teacher and school administrator candidates have the experiences and mentorship that prepares them to enter service ready to teach and lead.

With this in mind, we urge LEAs and EPPs to communicate, collaborate, and innovate as they strengthen their partnerships. It is vital that we overcome barriers in the current teaching environment and build new structures that support effective instruction in all contexts. Below are some examples of LEA-EPP innovations beginning to take root all over the state and country:

Expanding Access to Expert Teaching: *The most expert teachers can support other teachers in a variety of ways. Long Beach Unified School District in California capitalized on the opportunities provided by distance learning to enable students and teachers from across the district to tune in to the lessons offered by expert teachers so that they could learn both the content and the teaching strategies these teachers used.¹*

Creating Collaboration Time: *Collaboration time is ranked by teachers as among the most important variables for their learning and retention in the profession, and research finds that those who work in collegial work settings grow more rapidly in effectiveness. To meet this need, the Johnston Community School District in Iowa has released a draft proposal with Fridays reserved not only for deep cleaning but also for a full day of professional learning. Wednesdays can serve a similar purpose if a day is needed for cleaning between two groups of students within the same week. These modified schedules present an unprecedented opportunity for educators' professional development and to enhance their ability to collaborate and deliver hybrid instruction.²*

Piloting New Strategies within LEA-EPP Partnerships: *UC Merced's (UCM) Teacher Preparation Program student teachers taught lessons in a virtual youth*

¹ Example drawn from a recent report from the Learning Policy Institute, [Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond](#)

² Ibid.

leadership program for middle school students from Fresno Unified School District (50) and Sylvan Middle School in Sacramento (50) over the summer. The UCM student teachers worked with groups of students in breakout rooms under the supervision of a UCM supervisor and school district leader. It was so successful that Chowchilla School District is using the model and has hired half the program's student teachers to be placed with their teachers this fall and they will be paid as substitute teachers.

Engaging with Families: *Teachers' and administrators' efforts to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of students have led to increased opportunities to engage with parents about how they can help their children. The COVID-19 pandemic and other pressing social issues around racial equity are presenting new ways for educators to connect with families, and our novice educators are right there, side by side with their master teachers learning this key aspect of effective practice.*

These are only some of the ways in which LEAs and EPPs are meeting the COVID-19 moment. This type of innovation is absolutely critical if we are to reach and teach California's diverse student population this year and beyond. Strong partnerships between LEAs and EPPs are key to our success. The following recommendations are offered in support of LEAs and EPPs as they work to meet the needs of TK–12 students and credential candidates this year.

- 1. Consider the possibilities for increased collaboration and student contact that student teachers and future administrators, school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, school librarians, and school nurses can offer your schools this year.**

What this enables:

- A second set of hands at the wheel and additional skill sets related to virtual learning.
- New teaching roles and arrangements for both novice and experienced teachers.
- Opportunities to support smaller groups of students by, for example, placing more than one student teacher with a master teacher.

Some issues to consider:

- Distance and hybrid teaching scenarios create flexible opportunities for collaboration between a student teacher and their master teacher. Some schools are even encouraging student teachers to get their substitute teaching credentials, allowing them to perform duties of substitute teachers, access school online platforms, and facilitate breakout rooms under the guidance of their master teachers. While time as a substitute might not count toward their required student teaching hours, the additional experience and income could be vital to retaining new educators in uncertain times.

- Many master teachers conduct Zoom classes from within the physical walls of their own classrooms, where they have access to curriculum materials and manipulatives. To fully support instruction of students, student teachers will also need access to these materials. Student teachers also need to be informed about and/or trained on the safety protocols for both virtual and in-person instruction and provided the appropriate personal protective equipment necessary to work safely with other adults and students.
- 2. Rethink the parameters of clinical practice to enable student teaching placements that work for the current school models and needs. It may be that a longer, half- or full-year placement in one classroom is a better solution for LEAs and master teachers than shorter placements in rotating classroom settings.**
- One approach for LEAs to consider is a residency-style model. These models provide high-level preparation for candidates and enable a master teacher to rely on a student teacher's presence as a co-teacher for a sustained and regular time period.
 - We are hearing from LEAs that managing a variety of placements from a range of programs is more than they have capacity for currently. EPPs may need to consider simplifying and unifying field experiences to accommodate the needs of the schools and teachers with whom their candidates are placed. To the extent possible, this rethinking should be a joint LEA-EPP process.
 - The Commission on Teacher Credentialing (Commission) recently approved flexibilities for clinical practice in Academic Year 2020–21 that includes all settings of virtual instruction, with the expectation that teacher candidates would need sustained, synchronous teaching practice, supplemented by asynchronous work with their cooperating master teacher and students in order to earn a preliminary credential.
- 3. Facilitate and support the completion of a performance assessment by student teachers and administrator candidates as part of their preparation to earn a credential.**
- Teaching Performance Assessments require that teaching credential candidates have opportunities to work with TK–12 students in classrooms—whether virtually or in person—and to document these interactions through annotated video, samples of student work, and reflective writing.
 - Administrator Performance Assessments require that Administrative Services credential candidates have access to school data, teachers, and classroom instruction to practice and demonstrate the full range of expected leadership skills, and to document their performance with educators through annotated video, reflective writing, and other supporting materials.
 - It is critical that LEAs work with their EPP partners to facilitate access for

these future educators to the clinical experiences and data they need in order to earn their credentials and be fully prepared to teach and lead.

4. Enable teacher and administrator candidates to video record their work with students and teachers in order to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, abilities, and readiness to teach and lead.

Over the past decade the use of video has become a fundamental tool to help future educators learn to teach and serve as school leaders. Teacher candidates film their classroom practice for review and analysis with their supervisors and classmates. The goal is to help them “see” what they missed and grow their practice. Performance assessments also use video to document classroom practice. Although credential candidates have been collecting video clips (with permission from LEAs, teachers, and parents) for many years in order to complete their performance assessments, some LEAs have recently expressed concern about video recording online instruction. Suggestions and potential modifications for working through this situation include:

- EPPs could be proactive in meeting with LEAs to help them understand the ways in which video clips will be captured and used, with emphasis on the protection of privacy and secure storage of the clips. EPPs are responsible for working with their candidates and LEAs to ensure that permissions from students and families are on file prior to collecting video clips.
- All credential candidates are required to sign an attestation statement certifying that they have not shared or posted, and will not share or post, the videos to any non-secure and/or publicly accessible location (e.g., YouTube™, Facebook™).
- Security measures have been embedded inside the Performance Assessment platform by the Commission’s testing contractor to protect the privacy of students and families.
- A Memorandum of Understanding between LEAs and EPPs should be in place to guarantee these security provisions and permissions, and to support appropriate recording of practice consistent with LEA policies and practice.

5. Strengthen and support Induction programs to meet the needs of new teachers and administrators whose preparation was impacted significantly due to COVID-19.

When school buildings closed in March 2020, many educator candidates were unable to complete preparation, clinical practice, and assessments required to earn their preliminary credential. An Executive Order and subsequent legislation enabled candidates enrolled in preparation during 2019–20 and 2020–21 academic years to earn their Preliminary credential and complete required assessments during their Induction program prior to earning their Clear credential. Induction provides a natural context for completing a performance assessment, with implications for both LEAs and EPPs that are important:

- EPPs are required to work with their graduates to develop an Individual Learning Plan for use when they enter induction. Now more than ever, these plans need to be carefully constructed and detailed to help induction providers understand each candidate's need for support in their first year of teaching.
- Working with new credential holders as they complete their performance assessments will require induction mentors to provide more targeted support than is typical for new teachers. The Commission is providing training and technical assistance for Induction programs to prepare them to support candidates as they complete their performance assessments.
- LEAs need to be aware of new teachers' and administrators' needs as they begin professional practice this year and next year and support their Induction programs as they mentor the incoming workforce.

Research and policy discussions over the past few years have acknowledged the critical role relationships and collaboration between LEAs and EPPs play in the successful preparation of future educators—educators who stay in the profession for decades and impact countless students' lives. Despite the enormous challenges presented by the current situation, it is critical that we continue to provide rich clinical experiences in the schools for our future education workforce. This context provides a unique learning experience for our current and future educators.

Student teachers, administrators, counselors, school psychologists, and other service providers and specialists can be invaluable partners to the education workforce as we teach in distance and hybrid learning environments providing for deeper support and engagement of students and families. The opportunity to earn a credential under these circumstances is not only critical to ensuring a diverse and adequate supply of well-prepared educators for the future, but also vital to expanding opportunities for all children in our schools.

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Resources:

- [Commission on Teacher Credentialing Actions and Guidance Related to COVID-19](#)
- [California Department of Education Guidance Related to COVID-19](#)
- [Report from the Learning Policy Institute: *Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond*](#)
- [Policy Analysis for California Education \(PACE\) Guidance Related to Quality Distance Instruction and Equity](#)
 - [*What districts can do to ensure quality distance instruction*](#)
 - [*What state leaders can do to support equity and ensure quality instruction for all California students*](#)