

The Framework for Secondary Grades 7-12 Program Guidelines

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Introduction

The fundamental purpose of an educator preparation program (EPP) approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) is to admit, prepare, and support candidates for the profession who, upon graduation, have the knowledge and skills to enable PK-12 students in Pennsylvania to achieve academic success. Pennsylvania's preparation of new teachers is one component of a standards-based instructional system.

Teachers in the secondary grades (7-12) are expected to have knowledge of the subject matter they teach. Candidates interested in teaching at the 7-12 level must be prepared to “unpack” complex issues and procedures to their foundational elements yet also be able to motivate and challenge students with a variety of evolving applications of the subject matter. This expertise may result from an educator preparation program that requires subject matter coursework, or it may be a result of an undergraduate major in the subject area that is accompanied or followed by an educator preparation program.

This document has been created to provide the professional knowledge, skills, and competencies that 7-12 teachers will learn by completing a prescribed sequence of courses (including field placements). In addition to specific requirements and competencies, these guidelines discuss the 7-12 program design, professional core rationale, candidate competencies, Pennsylvania Academic Standards and Assessments in a standards-aligned system, faculty, field experiences, student teaching, and new teacher support. To develop 7-12 preparation programs, Education Preparation Program providers should utilize the material contained in this document and consult these existing guidelines:

- [Subject Specific Guidelines](#);
- [Accommodations and Adaptations and ELL Program Framework Guidelines](#);
- [Common Ground Framework Guidelines](#);
- [Structured Literacy \(SL\) Program Framework Guidelines](#) (if applicable);
- [Professional Ethics \(PE\) Program Framework Guidelines](#); and
- [Field Experience Guidelines: Stage 1 – Stage 4](#).

Philosophy for Preparing Effective Pennsylvania Educators

Pennsylvania's standards-based instructional system is built on six interconnected elements. These six elements are standards, curriculum, instruction, materials and resources, assessments, and interventions. Together, these system components support strong student outcomes.

In the case of educator preparation programs (EPPs) and their contribution to (1) *instruction*, all programs are expected to align their course content with (2) *state standards*. All EPPs are expected to provide candidates with the knowledge and skills to teach a (3) *standards-based curriculum* effectively and successfully. Through university coursework and extensive, well-designed clinical experiences, all candidates for the profession are expected to learn how to use (4) *materials and resources for instruction* (including technology) to meet the individual needs of each student in their classroom. Each EPP is expected to give considerable attention to helping

all candidates acquire and use (5) *assessment skills*, enabling them to understand and respond to pupil results on standardized tests (such as the PSSA or Keystone exam), local school or district assessments, and individualized assessments of the achievements and challenges of each pupil. Taken together, this set of knowledge, skills, and competencies must enable every candidate for the teaching profession in the Commonwealth to implement (6) *appropriate interventions* in the classroom to improve student learning. EPPs and the new teachers who complete them will be judged according to their success in achieving the six key goals described above.

Program and candidate success do not happen by accident. Program design, the components of that design, and the ongoing assessment of their effectiveness must all point in the same direction. The needs and interests of 7-12 students and their schools are at the center of the program. This means that 7-12 teachers and administrators must be involved in program assessment activities, decisions about selection and use of clinical sites, and regular feedback on candidate and program performance. Program outcomes must include strong subject matter content preparation, more extensive clinical experiences for students, and the use of technology in curriculum and instruction.

Because teaching is a clinical profession, candidates for the profession are expected to spend extensive time in school settings—beginning early in their EPP sequence—guided by university faculty and appropriately prepared 7-12 mentor teachers. Preparation programs must be able to demonstrate how they use evidence about program graduates and evidence about 7-12 students of their graduates to make continuous program improvements. Continuous program improvement depends on gathering feedback from school partners, monitoring candidate performance, and evaluating the impact of program graduates on their 7-12 students. Strong subject-matter preparation, meaningful clinical practice, and purposeful use of evidence are essential to preparing new teachers who are capable of applying appropriate interventions and contributing effectively to student learning across Pennsylvania’s schools.

Program Design and Delivery

The professional core courses, competencies, and experiences for the Secondary Grades 7-12 EPP should be designed to address the broad set of issues, knowledge, and competencies that are relevant to secondary-level teaching and learning. The program must prepare teachers who will be able to ensure students’ mastery of academic standards and the content assessment anchors. The Professional Core component of the program design must be maintained regardless of the configuration or options that the preparation program selects.

The Professional Core in the Secondary Grades 7-12 EPP is the essential set of learning experiences. These learning experiences are the **essential courses, defined competencies, and field experiences**:

Courses

All courses within the Professional Core should be grounded in knowledge of how adolescents grow and learn, providing candidates with opportunities to design effective lessons using sound

teaching practices and technology, giving them experiences to assess student learning in multiple ways, helping them to support diverse and English-learning students, and building their knowledge of how secondary schools operate, as well as their experience working with families and the broader community.

Competencies

Within the Professional Core structure, a competency is a clearly defined skill or ability that teacher candidates must be able to *demonstrate* by the time they complete their program. Additionally, a competency describes what candidates should *know* and what they should be able to *do* in real teaching situations. Programs must teach these competencies through coursework and hands-on field experiences, and candidates must show evidence that they can apply these skills in classrooms, especially during student teaching.

While some on-line courses may be a component of the program, programs are expected to include face-to-face components.

Field Experiences

The Professional Core also includes field experiences. Field experiences are sequenced and scaffolded, culminating in a **minimum 12-week student teaching placement**, ensuring candidates apply their learning under qualified mentor guidance in real classrooms. See the section on Field Experiences for more information.

Professional Core Rationale

Title 22 of the Pennsylvania Code, §354.25(a), as well as §354.32 (a)(1) and §354.33(1)(i)(A)-(H) enumerate aspects of the knowledge and skills that candidates for teaching in the Commonwealth are expected to learn and demonstrate. While this set of knowledge and skills is developed in university academic classroom settings and clinical practice, the program curriculum should reflect this centrality to the process of educator preparation. The candidate competencies detail specific assessable skills, concepts, and foundational understandings of the five areas overviewed here. This overview is meant to provide a context for the Candidate Competencies.

I. Secondary Education

Organizational Structure of the High School

Understanding the organizational structure of the high school is central to the work of secondary teachers. Such work is guided by knowledge of the philosophical, historical, and social foundations of education, including the development of the high school, the diverse needs of 7-12 students, and the particularities of the need for active citizens and community members, as well as the labor market. Teacher preparation in this area should be geared toward the social, emotional, and intellectual development of adolescents and should be grounded in the notion of communities of practice.

Adolescent Development

The study of adolescent development is critical for any secondary-level teacher. A teacher should have a working knowledge of the concepts, principles, and theories of adolescent development, which will support the teacher in ensuring the healthy social, intellectual, sexual, emotional, and moral development of all students. Likewise, awareness of diversity issues supports the motivation and self-esteem of students in grades 7-12, as well as encouraging academic excellence.

II. Subject Matter Content and Pedagogy

7-12 Subject Matter Content: Wide and Conceptual in Scope

Teachers in the secondary (7-12) grade levels are expected to have expertise in the subject matter they teach and understand the underlying ideas and frameworks of the subject area. This expertise is critical for modeling the thinking patterns of experts in the subject field, as well as for relating the various components of secondary subject matter. Candidates interested in teaching at secondary levels must in one sense be prepared to “unpack” complex issues and procedures to their foundational elements, yet in another sense be able to motivate and challenge students with a variety of evolving 21st century applications of the subject matter. This expertise may be a result of a teacher education program that requires subject matter coursework, or it may be a result of an undergraduate major in the subject area that is accompanied or followed by a teacher preparation program.

7-12 Subject Matter Specific Guidelines: Detailed and Programmatic in Scope

PDE has subject-specific guidelines that all secondary education programs are expected to follow to ensure that the required discipline-level content is completed prior to the completion of the program. The Subject Specific Guidelines provide the concrete, itemized requirements/competencies that PDE expects EPPs to include within their academic programs to prepare candidates for certification. In developing the guidelines, efforts were made to align the content with the Pennsylvania Academic Standards, the standards of the professional organizations, the content of the state-required assessments, and specific language and conditions of the state's professional education community.

Refer to the Subject Specific Program Guidelines for secondary grades 7-12 for each individual content area below:

- [Career and Technical Instructional Certification 7-12](#) (PDF)
- [Citizenship Education 7-12](#) (PDF)
- [Communication 7-12](#) (PDF)
- [Computer Science 7-12](#) (PDF)
- [Cooperative Education 7-12](#) (PDF)
- [Driver Safety Education](#) (PDF)
- [English 7-12](#) (PDF)
- [Mathematics 7-12](#) (PDF)

- [Science-Biology 7-12 \(PDF\)](#)
- [Science-Chemistry 7-12 \(PDF\)](#)
- [Science-Earth and Space Science 7-12 \(PDF\)](#)
- [Science-General Science 7-12 \(PDF\)](#)
- [Science-Physics 7-12 \(PDF\)](#)
- [Social Science 7-12 \(PDF\)](#)
- [Social Studies 7-12 \(PDF\)](#)

Pedagogy

Institutions are charged with producing evidence to demonstrate that their graduates understand and apply the knowledge, concepts, and skills essential for successful grades 7-12 instruction.

Pedagogy includes understanding of how a particular content area's concepts are related to one another and to other content areas; the historical and evidence-based variety of approaches to teaching the content; engaging and maintaining the interest of typical and atypical adolescent learners; utilizing a range of resources and technology to facilitate learning; knowing how to differentiate instruction; and supporting literacy development in a variety of contexts (e.g., textual, media).

Curriculum Development

Candidates must be able to develop, implement, assess, and modify curriculum and lessons for grades 7-12 students. This includes the ability to explain how individuals acquire and process information. Candidates should be able to describe the developmental stages of learners and the physical, cognitive, and psychosocial implications. Candidates must also relate how attention, memory, conceptual knowledge and its formation, reasoning, decision making, problem solving, executive functioning, principles and mechanisms of development, intelligence, action, and motor control influence learning. Candidates must be able to identify appropriate interactions with adults and peers, the teaching methods and curricula that are appropriate for the various age groups, and interventions that support learning and development. All candidates must demonstrate an understanding of the legal rights and responsibilities of the teacher for special educational referral and evaluation, as well as the rights and procedural safeguards that students are guaranteed, so as to not misinterpret behaviors that represent cultural or linguistic differences as indicative of learning problems.

Required Coursework and Credit Requirements of Academic Majors

Coursework in majors will differ in part because of the professional goals or concentrations of the student. Chapter 354.24(3) states that “academic content area courses for the preparation of professional educators shall include all required core courses and required elective courses” in the “major academic area.” In addressing this requirement, institutions must provide evidence, usually in the form of advisement sheets that demonstrate a consistent core of courses for any student declaring a major in the academic field that is consistent with a preparation program.

III. Assessment

Assessment skills, extensive practice, and the application of assessment results to design effective individualized interventions are essential secondary level teaching skills. Successful demonstration of these abilities is an expected outcome through the PDE 430, *Pennsylvania Statewide Evaluation Form for Student Professional Knowledge and Practice*.

The preparation program coursework content should be organized to provide candidates with the knowledge, understanding, and skills to recognize students having difficulty, identify student challenges, design interventions (with collaborative assistance from colleagues when needed) and test the effectiveness of appropriate interventions. Course content must enable candidates to learn how to understand and use data about student learning (standardized tests and other assessment practices), adapt and modify instruction, use technology appropriately, and adapt curriculum successfully. Translating diagnostic information about student learning into successful teaching strategies that will improve student learning requires formal preparation, proficiency with assessment tools, and extensive practice under careful supervision and mentoring. The content must also include explicit attention to [PA Academic Standards](#) for specific content areas for grades 7-12, as well as be consistent with authentic, screening, diagnostic, formative, benchmark, and summative diagnostic assessments.

Definitions of Assessments

The following definitions describe different types of assessments used in classroom settings. Candidates are expected to understand the differences between screening authentic, diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. The design of a program must include instruction and assessments of candidates demonstrating the appropriate use of each type of assessment.

1. **Authentic:** A form of assessment in which students are asked to perform real world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills. The assessment usually includes a task for students to perform, and a rubric is used to evaluate their performance.
2. **Screening Assessment:** Screening assessments are used to determine which students may be at risk. Poor performance on the screening assessment identifies those students needing additional, in-depth assessment of strengths and weaknesses. The primary purpose of screening assessments is to identify those students who need additional instructional (or behavioral) intervention. As adolescents develop, additional screenings may be necessary. An essential element of using a screening assessment is implementing additional identified intervention(s) (instructional, behavioral, or medical).
3. **Summative Assessment:** Summative assessments seek to make an overall judgment of progress made at the end of a defined period of instruction. They occur at the end of a school level, grade, or course, or are administered at certain grades for purposes of state or local accountability. They are designed to produce clear data on the student's accomplishments at key points in his or her academic career. Scores on these

assessments usually become part of the student's permanent record and are statements as to whether or not the student has fallen short of, met, or exceeded the expected standards. Whereas the results of formative assessments are primarily of interest to students and teachers, the results of summative assessments are also of great interest to parents, the faculty as a whole, the central administration, the press, and the public at large. It is data from summative assessments on which public accountability systems are based. If the results of these assessments are reported with reference to standards and individual students, they can be used as diagnostic tools by teachers to plan instruction and guide the leadership team in developing strategies that help improve student achievement. Examples of summative assessment are PSSA, PASA, Keystone Exams, end of unit tests, midterm and final exams.

4. **Formative Assessment:** Formative assessment is used by teachers and students during instruction to provide feedback, which guides the teacher to adjust ongoing instruction to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes. CCSSO in "Revising the Definition of Formative Assessment" (2026) contextualizes formative assessment as follows:

Formative assessment is a planned, ongoing process used by all students and teachers during learning and teaching to elicit and use evidence of student learning to improve student understanding of intended disciplinary learning outcomes and support students to become self-directed learners.

Effective use of the formative assessment process requires students and teachers to integrate and embed the following practices in a collaborative and respectful classroom environment:

- *Clarifying learning goals and success criteria within a broader progression of learning;*
- *Eliciting and analyzing evidence of student thinking;*
- *Engaging in self-assessment and peer feedback;*
- *Providing actionable feedback; and*
- *Using evidence and feedback to move learning forward by adjusting learning strategies, goals, and next instructional steps.*

The key is how the results are used. Results should be used to shape teaching and learning. Under this definition, formative assessment encompasses questioning strategies, active engagement check-ins, (such as response cards, white boards, random selection, think-pair-share, and numbered heads) and analysis of student work based on set rubrics and standards including homework and tests. Assessments are formative when the information is used to adapt instructional practices to meet individual student needs, as well as providing individual students corrective feedback that allows them to "reach" set goals and targets. Ongoing formative assessment is an integral part of effective instructional routines that provide teachers with the information they need to

differentiate and make adjustments to instructional practice to meet the needs of individual students.

5. **Benchmark Assessments:** Benchmark assessments are designed to provide feedback to both the teacher and the student about how the student is progressing towards demonstrating proficiency on grade level standards. Well-designed benchmark assessments and standards-based assessments measure the degree to which a student has mastered a given concept; measure concepts, skills, and/or applications; reported by referencing the standards, not other students' performance; serve as a test to which teachers want to teach; and measure performance regularly, not only at a single moment in time. An example of a benchmark assessment is the Firefly Progress Indicator. Firefly is designed to provide a prediction for the end of year assessments (PSSA and Keystone Exams).
6. **Diagnostic Assessment:** Diagnostic assessment ascertains, prior to instruction, each student's strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, and skills. Establishing these permits the instructor to remediate students and adjust the curriculum to meet pupils' unique needs. An example of a diagnostic assessment is the Classroom Diagnostic Tools (CDTs).

IV. Professionalism

Secondary Education candidates need to develop professional attitudes and behaviors. Candidates will demonstrate knowledge of and competence in fostering professionalism in school and community settings. Because students in grades 7-12 are developing into adults and may exhibit behavior and interests that resemble adult relationships, it is vital for all secondary education candidates to become thoroughly aware of the [Code of Professional Practice and Conduct for Educators](#), as well as the [Professional Ethics \(PE\) Program Framework Guidelines](#).

Professional practice is influenced by the work of professional education associations. Secondary education candidates should become familiar with the work of the various professional associations that conduct research, prepare resources for grades 7-12 teachers, and provide professional development opportunities. Professional education candidates should be guided to think of themselves as lifelong learners who continue to develop deep understanding of the content and pedagogy that relates to their area of secondary education.

Candidate Competencies

This section outlines the competencies required for certification by Chapter 354 regulations: "The preparing institution shall ensure that candidates complete a well-planned sequence of professional educator courses and field experiences to develop an understanding of the structure, skills, core concepts, facts, methods of inquiry and application of technology related to each academic discipline the candidates plan to teach." (22 Pa. Code § 354.25(b)(3)).

Aligned resources and tools to support the acquisition of these competencies can be found on the [Standards Aligned System \(SAS\) portal](#).

Secondary-level teachers should be prepared in programs that facilitate understanding of the organizational structure of the high school, adolescent development, subject matter content, pedagogy, and assessment. Likewise, candidates should uphold professional standards and engage in lifelong learning and professional development. Each of these competencies embrace the notion of the school and classroom as a community of learners which maintains that reflection is at the core of successful practice.

I. Secondary Education

A guiding principle for the secondary level is to prepare professionals who support student learning consistently in a variety of contexts and with a variety of means. Candidates will demonstrate their abilities in and understanding of:

A. Organizational Structure of the High School

1. Make curricular decisions that are grounded in the social, philosophical, and historical foundations of education.
2. Engage adolescents in activities related to their interpersonal, community, and societal responsibilities.
3. Develop classrooms as communities of practice that are learner oriented.
4. Utilize student assistance and student support programs that attend to the intellectual, social, and emotional needs of adolescents.
5. Participate in professional organizations related to a subject-area specialization, academic discipline, and/or teaching.
6. Interact with various professionals that serve adolescents (e.g., school counselors, social service workers, home-school coordinators).
7. Understand the philosophy of secondary education.

B. Adolescent Development

1. Recognize and implement the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to adolescent cognitive, social, sexual, emotional, and moral development.
2. Design and implement strategies that encourage students' positive self-esteem, self-efficacy, and motivation.
3. Identify and respect the range of individual and cultural differences of all adolescents and the implications of those differences in teaching and learning.

4. Identify how the development of all adolescents occurs in the context of classrooms, families, peer groups, communities, and society.
5. Design and implement strategies that provide students with appropriate skills in making the transition from middle-level to high school, and then to full citizenship (work, college, military, etc.).
6. Incorporate knowledge of adolescent development into educating students in goals setting and decision-making.
7. Create and support learning environments that promote the healthy development of all adolescents.
8. Demonstrate effective adolescent behavior strategies for the classroom.

II. Subject Matter Content and Pedagogy

A. Content for 7-12 subject areas is found in the [Subject Specific Guidelines](#).

B. Pedagogy

1. Use effective instructional principles, especially those that draw on the research on pedagogical content knowledge in course content.
2. Employ teaching and learning strategies that consider and capitalize upon the developmental characteristics of all adolescents.
3. Use effective comprehensive instructional principles responsive to the needs of students.
4. Incorporate technology into instruction appropriately.
5. Use materials designed explicitly for the secondary grades.
6. Make decisions about curriculum and resources that reflect an understanding of adolescent development.
7. Utilize subject-specific methodologies.
8. Deliver curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory.
9. Incorporate adolescents' ideas, interests, and experiences into instruction.
10. Design successful interventions responsive to the needs of individual students.
11. Integrate technology and other resources appropriately to prepare students for higher education and the workforce.

12. Apply PA standards into both short-term and long-term instructional goals.
13. Create lessons that support literacy across the curriculum.
14. Prepare students to gain, process, and use information in different contexts.
15. Design educational experiences that help students communicate using various tools and means.
16. Create lessons that demonstrate an understanding of literacy both broadly and in disciplinary contexts.
17. Utilize literature, classic texts in different genres, commercial reading materials, electronic-based information and locally created materials.
18. Demonstrate the adaptation of educational or subject-specific research in lessons.
19. Differentiate instruction, assessment, and management strategies to represent a broad spectrum of learning abilities, learning styles, multiple intelligences and interests.
20. Develop inclusionary practices that respect differences and encourage students to work together to maximize their own and one another's learning.

III. Assessment

- A. Utilize assessment practices which match instructional strategies that are culturally relevant and authentically measure student performance.
- B. Continuously monitor the results of interventions and alter instruction accordingly.
- C. Use multiple assessments (authentic, screening, diagnostic, formative, benchmark and summative) that are developmentally appropriate for adolescent learners, including graduation and end of course examinations.
- D. Implement technology in student assessment and measures.
- E. Use assessment data to guide instruction.
- F. Strategically tutor students whose assessments indicate need for additional instruction.
- G. Use multiple assessment strategies that effectively measure student mastery of the curriculum in more than one way.

- H. Design assessments that target academic standards and content standards in subject areas.
- I. Develop assessments that impact instruction, facilitate learning communities, and support diverse students' development and learning.
- J. Apply assessments that help reveal readiness in making the transition from school (to work, to higher education, to military service, to full citizenship, etc.).

IV. Professionalism

Refer to the Candidate Competencies listed in the Professional Ethics Program Framework Guidelines.

Faculty

EPPs submitted for review to the Department will include the qualifications of faculty assigned to teach each course within the professional core of the program. Faculty who teach in the professional core must have demonstrated expertise in education methods appropriate to engaging the minds of adolescent learners and in the 7-12th grade content they are teaching, as well as a minimum of a master's degree in disciplines appropriate to teaching in the program.

Field Experiences

Candidates completing 7-12 Instructional preparation programs will complete stages of field experiences. These stages are:

- Stage 1: Observation;
- Stage 2: Exploration;
- Stage 3: Pre-Student Teaching; and
- Stage 4: Student Teaching.

Providers of 7-12 Instructional programs must include Stages 1-4 in undergraduate-level programs and include Stages 3-4 only in post-baccalaureate-level programs. As regulated by Chapter 354 of the Pennsylvania Code, the planned sequential field experiences may begin as early as the initial semester of college enrollment but must be prior to the Stage 4 Field Experience which is the minimum 12-week full-time student teaching experience requirement (§354.25(d)&(f)). These experiences benefit the candidates' preparation by providing opportunities to apply principles and theories from the program to actual practice in the classroom, and provide practice with diverse populations, ages, and school settings (§354.25 (d)).

The requirements of the field experiences are located in the [Field Experience Guidelines: Stage 1 – Stage 4.](#)

New Teacher Support

Induction is a requirement in Pennsylvania schools. According to §49.16 (22 Pa. Code), all school entities (LEAs) must submit a plan for the induction experience for first-year teachers. The regulation further states that preparing institutions shall provide, "...ongoing support for novice educators in partnership with local education agencies during their induction period, including observation, consultation, and assessment" (22 Pa. Code §49.14(4)(ix) also see 22 Pa. Code § 354.26 (d)). Therefore, EPPs are connected to new teacher induction to provide new teachers with support and assistance in beginning their professions successfully.

In the first two years of teaching, new teacher support is more a process than a program, involving the period of transition where new teachers evolve from being students of teaching to teachers of students. For these reasons, 7-12 EPPs must develop and maintain a support program for their new teacher candidates for a minimum period of two years. This support is to provide access to professional networking, resource information, and job placement services. It may include graduate surveys that the program uses to assess its own effectiveness. The program is expected to attempt active outreach to its graduates.