

MACTE Minute  
December 11, 2020

MACTE members would like to thank the PELSB board and staff for your flexibility and the commitment you have shown to solving the problems the pandemic has raised for our programs and our teacher candidates. We greatly appreciate the many waivers and resolutions that have allowed more flexibility in meeting field experience and student teaching requirements. Due in large part to these PELSB actions, we have had a great deal of success placing students in virtual and hybrid settings and creating pathways for many of our candidates to complete their licenses this academic year.

However, despite this increased flexibility, many of our member institutions continue to have difficulty securing student teaching and field experience placements for all of their candidates in all of the required areas. As you are aware, the need to change instructional modalities has increased the workload of our teachers. Teachers are feeling overwhelmed and far fewer are willing to take on student teachers, and even fewer can accommodate clinical placements. They see these placements as an added burden at an already difficult time. Many principals are not even willing to ask their teachers to host teacher candidates when we contact them. Some teachers who had agreed to serve as cooperating teachers are backing out now as their districts are moving fully to distance learning amid the surge in COVID cases.

The placement staff at our institutions continue to work hard, seeking placements that fulfill all remaining requirements while also offering our candidates productive learning experiences. Despite our commitment to this work, we believe it will ultimately not be possible for us to guarantee that every candidate meets each hour, diversity, scope, and disability category requirement, even with the resolutions that have already been passed.

We were encouraged by the conversation about this at the Teacher Preparation Committee last week and were happy to see this topic on the Board's agenda today. We are in support of the proposal from the TPC that any inability to meet all criteria be considered leniently when our processes are reviewed at our future site visits. A process that may be effective at ensuring compliance during normal times may not be practicable during a pandemic, and we were encouraged by the conversation at the TPC indicating that it would be reasonable for site visit teams to examine the processes at future site visits and deem them as meeting standards, even if the processes were not fully effective during the COVID pandemic.

We encourage the full board to adopt the approach taken by the TPC. However, we also hope that the conversation the Board has today is clear and specific enough that it will provide guidance to future members of site visit teams. We hope that a resolution or an official statement of some kind will be created. While COVID-19 Handbook is helpful, it in itself reflects many moving targets, creating some confusion, and those targets continue to move as we enter deeper into a public health emergency.

We are somewhat fearful that once the pandemic has subsided and life returns to normal, the usual retirements and staff turnover that always occur may potentially erase the memory of these conversations and lead to very different site visit results for our institutions depending on who is serving on the review team, in effect, creating a double-jeopardy situation. Something official from the Board would keep this from occurring.

The pandemic has forced all of us to think creatively. Dynamic new ways of teaching and learning have been developed at many of our institutions, and rigorous alternative assignments have been created. Our candidates are experiencing these times as very stressful, but they are also sharing that the work we are doing is very demanding, and is adding value to their experiences. We believe that the value of this learning will continue even after the pandemic has passed.

We thank you again for your time, your flexibility, and your dedication to this Board. We remain committed to working collaboratively with you to develop the best possible teaching force for the children of our state.