The work that pre-service candidates do as they observe exceptional teachers and practice their own instructional strategies is key to the development of the next generation of outstanding teachers. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the opportunities Educator Preparation Providers (EPPs) and their candidates typically have to work in traditional P-12 environments.

The Georgia Department of Education and the Georgia Department of Public Health jointly released *Georgia’s Path to Recovery for K-12 Schools*. The document provides considerations, recommendations, and best practices to ensure a safe and successful 2020-2021 academic year. In it, three possible scenarios are described for school districts, with variations for each:

- **Traditional** face-to-face structure for instruction with modified social distancing and cleaning practices in place.
- **Blend** of remote and in-person instruction (e.g., limited/staggered use of school buildings).
- **Fully remote** learning structure, particularly if there is a resurgence of COVID-19.

Because the guidance is not mandated, and local school districts have the authority and flexibility to select the scenario that meets their own individual needs, EPPs must consider all of the alternatives to traditional face-to-face field and clinical experiences. Provided in the following sections is guidance for adjusting clinical experiences and field experiences for Academic Year 2020-21, as well as expectations for clinical supervision and partnerships.

*The term used to describe the culminating experience, clinical practice, is also referred to as student teaching or internship, and those terms are used interchangeably throughout this document. The term field experiences refers to the experiences occurring prior to clinical practice.*
Clinical Practice

In the event that partnering school districts offer traditional instruction for their P-12 students, but limit the number of teacher candidates to be placed in schools, the priority will be face-to-face experiences for those completing student teaching.

Educator Preparation Rule 505-3-.01, Requirements for Approving Educator Preparation Providers and Programs, states that “teacher candidates must spend a minimum of one full semester or the equivalent in residencies or internships” (2020, p. 15), and a year-long residency is preferable. Many EPPs currently require year-long residencies for their teacher candidates, and leadership and service field programs require significant time in job-embedded or school and/or district clinical placements. To adjust for P-12 clinical placement limitations due to COVID-19, EPPs should consider the following options.

For Academic Year 2020-2021, the following allowances will be made for those who are completing clinical practice:

- Candidates will work with their assigned cooperating teacher (or mentor for service/leadership programs), participating in all of the activities he/she does. If school is meeting face-to-face, the clinical practice educator will complete the clinical practice experience in a face-to-face format. If the school is using remote learning for instruction, candidates will complete all requirements in virtual settings.
  - Note that candidates completing clinical practice in a face-to-face setting may be required to sign a daily disclaimer, participate in temperature checks, wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and complete all additional requirements outlined by the school district.

- While one full semester of student teaching is required for completing a teacher preparation program, there may be instances where candidates are simply unable to complete all of the hours equivalent to one full semester. At a minimum, EPPs must assert that candidates who complete clinical practice in Academic Year 2020-2021 have spent at least one half of the semester with a cooperating teacher in either a traditional or virtual format.

- If an EPP’s school partners are unable to accommodate all clinical practice candidates for Academic Year 2020-2021, EPPs must develop innovative ways for those candidates to meet all of the learning objectives for clinical practice. For instance, EPPs might consider providing a hybrid student teaching experience. Clinical practice candidates might spend part of the semester completing additional field experience work (see suggestions below) and spend the rest of the semester with a cooperating teacher.
Innovation is encouraged. Clinical practice candidates might serve as substitute teachers, teachers of record (where allowed), or in other roles that allow them to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected by program completion. In addition, clinical practice candidates may need to engage in a broader set of experiences than is traditionally expected. These might include researching virtual learning strategies, collaborating with cooperating teachers to structure learning experiences, and conducting family outreach and engagement. For instance, clinical practice candidates might create weekly family newsletters or compile recommended activities for families to support student learning at home. Clinical practice candidates should also participate in all ongoing professional learning provided to support educators, even if those experiences are offered virtually.

The most important factor in all of the scenarios above is that the EPP must be able to evaluate candidates’ abilities to assess, plan, and instruct. This includes candidates’ abilities to effectively implement classroom management strategies.

If a school district remains open, and clinical practice candidates are displaced because the EPP’s campus closes, EPPs have the flexibility to decide how those individuals will meet all of the learning objectives for clinical practice. EPPs may need to re-place clinical practice educators with a different cooperating teacher, if necessary, to ensure that teacher candidates are effectively prepared. For remote learning guidance, EPPs may find additional useful information at the Virtual Student Teaching site produced by the College of Education at California State at Fullerton.

**Field Experiences**

**Educator Preparation Rule 505-3-.01** states, “Candidates must complete field experiences that include organized and sequenced engagement in settings providing them with opportunities to observe, practice, and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions delineated in all applicable institutional, state, and national standards. (The experiences must be systematically designed and sequenced to increase the complexity and levels of engagement with which candidates apply, reflect upon, and expand their knowledge and skills. Since observation is a less rigorous method of learning, emphasis should be on field experience sequences requiring active professional practice or demonstration and including substantive work with B/P-12 students or B/P-12 personnel as appropriate depending upon the preparation program)” (2020, p. 15).

Although field experiences are foundational for future teachers, during Academic Year 2020-2021, EPPs must place the highest priority on assigning clinical practice candidates to cooperating teachers. If partner districts are unable to host both field experience and clinical practice candidates, EPPs must place the highest priority on assigning clinical practice candidates to cooperating teachers.
Year 2020-2021, candidates needing clinical practice must be placed first and those who need field experiences will need to complete field experience learning objectives through some other innovative approach.

Field experience candidates might fulfill required expectations by observing and completing activities with videos recorded by exceptional teachers. With any of the video suggestions listed below, EPPs must be very specific about what is expected of candidates in relation to the videos. For instance, candidates might be required to watch for specific pedagogical skills and strategies, document them, and reflect on how they might incorporate them into their own practices with a variety of learners. See the links below for suggestions.

- The ATLAS (Accomplished Teaching, Learning, and Schools) Library, produced by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, is currently used by 13 traditional preparation providers in Georgia. At this time, the cost of a subscription for 50 candidates is $2,000 for one year. Given the current challenges due to the pandemic, ATLAS is offering both 3-month and 12-month subscriptions. A 3-month subscription will cost $500 for 50 users. The subscription includes:
  - Access to over 1,400 cases and all ATLAS frameworks, including National Board Standards, InTASC Standards, High Leverage Practices, and Next Generation Science Standards; and
  - A webinar training provided by the National Board.
- Lipscomb University offers a set of videos. Each candidate will need to create an account, but the account is free.
- Achieve the Core also offers teaching videos, and they provide supplemental materials, such as lesson plans, a class profile, and student work samples.
- The Teacher Toolkit is another site that offers videos and supplemental materials.
- There are also “Plug and Plays” (video examples) that come with the book Teach Like a Champion.

In addition to video observations and responses, field experience candidates might practice teaching with avatars. Some EPPs have already begun using Artificial Intelligence software for field experiences, particularly those for the foundational education classes (i.e., Area F courses).

EPPs that require in-person field experiences for foundational education/Area F courses should consider alternative arrangements (like those listed above) during Academic year 2020-2021, so the emphasis can remain on those completing clinical practice.
For Academic Year 2020-2021, EPPs might consider allowing candidates to complete field experiences in a setting other than a P-12 school, such as a boys and girls club or a church setting. Because of the importance of training future teachers in classroom management, traditional EPPs will want to look for opportunities for candidates to practice those skills in a variety of settings. Community settings might be excellent places to practice classroom management techniques and complete related assignments.

EPPs offering programs that are nationally accredited may need to review additional information provided by the individual accrediting bodies. For instance, the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs has specific requirements for School Counseling programs (CACREP Accommodations for Practicum and Internship).

### Additional Resources for Working with Students in a Digital Environment

Because many teacher candidates may be teaching in a distance learning environment, EPPs may find the following resources helpful:

- The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) offers online faculty development courses for P-12 teachers related to effective online instruction, and teacher candidates are allowed to complete those. GaDOE also offers FIP (Formative Instructional Practices) modules, and those are a great resource for faculty and students. Contact your EPP Head to obtain the access code.
- The State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA) has a page dedicated to the eLearning Coalition, with resources for teachers, parents, and students, including vetted digital content. SETDA also offers resources specific to students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).
- The Center on Great Teachers and Leaders offers many helpful resources, including ones specific to teaching English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

### Grade Band Requirements

**Educator Preparation Rule 505-3-.01** states, “...candidates must complete supervised field experiences consistent with the grade levels of certification sought” (2020, p. 14). For each certification type, these grade bands include:

- Birth-Kindergarten: ages 0-2, ages 3-4, Kindergarten
- Elementary: PK-K, 1-3, 4-5
- Middle grades: 4-5, 6-8
- Secondary: 6-8, 9-12
- P-12 fields: P-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

Candidates enrolled in preparation programs during the COVID-19 pandemic may not be able to participate in a field experience with a cooperating teacher at every level. However, the suggestions offered in the Field Experiences section above may help EPPs ensure candidates have the opportunity to participate in meaningful observations in all required grade levels.

**Supervision of Candidates**

*Educator Preparation Rule 505-3-.01* states, “B/P-12 educators who supervise candidates (mentors, cooperating teachers, leadership coaches/mentors, service field supervisors) in residencies or internships at Georgia schools shall meet” specific requirements (2020, p. 15). These requirements include three years of successful experience in the field in which the candidate is seeking certification. In addition, pages 11 and 12 of the *Guidance for Interpreting and Implementing Rule 505-3-.01*, as well as Appendix C, which begins on page 51 of that document, provide additional information about the expectations for the qualifications and certification of those who supervise clinical experience candidates.

When selecting cooperating teachers/mentors for clinical practice candidates, EPPs are expected to adhere to requirements and guidance as closely as possible. However, as described in the next section, partnerships are the key to this work. As a reminder, the *Educator Preparation Rule 505-3-.01* explains that Partnership Agreements between the EPP and the partnering districts will include a statement that the principal or employer will assure that educators selected for the supervision of residencies/internships are the best qualified for that role. (2020)

Regarding observations of clinical practice: Many EPPs observe their candidates every other week or more. If faculty supervisors are not allowed in the building as “guests,” providers will need to explore virtual options for observing and providing feedback to clinical practice candidates. These may include joining live virtual teaching sessions and reviewing recorded ones.

**Partnerships Are Essential**

*Educator Preparation Rule 505-3-.01* states, “Effective partnerships with B/P-12 schools and/or school districts are central to the preparation of educators. At a minimum, GaPSC-approved EPPs shall establish and maintain collaborative relationships with B/P-12 schools, which are formalized as partnerships and focused on continuous school improvement and student growth and learning through the preparation of candidates, support of induction phase educators, and professional development of B/P-20 educators. EPPs are encouraged to establish and sustain partnerships meeting higher levels of effectiveness” (2020, p. 14).
Particularly during Academic Year 2020-2021, EPPs may seek to maximize their partnerships and relationships with local school officials as they place teacher candidates in P-12 settings. EPPs might help partner schools see the benefits of hosting clinical practice and field experience candidates. COVID-19 has significantly impacted the learning of all P-12 students, and teacher candidates who participate in student teaching or field experiences in Academic Year 2020-2021 can provide scaffolded support and assistance for those students who need it most (one-on-one, in small groups, in large groups, in person, or virtual). Clinical practice candidates could be a significant asset to schools where teachers are concerned about health risks (or if teachers become ill).

COVID-19 also considerably impacted the training of those who were student teaching during the spring of 2020. EPPs might consider expanding existing partnerships to support newly hired, first-year teachers, as they will need more support than typical induction-phase educators.

EPPs might also offer virtual Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) comprised of former candidates who are now teaching who might be willing to lend support to current student teachers or field placement candidates through conversations about experiences.

The success of the suggested strategies identified above will depend on the development and ongoing maintenance of deep partnerships with local districts. During recent program approval reviews, EPPs have demonstrated many strengths in Standard 2: Clinical Partnerships and Practice, and those strengths are due to strong P-12 partnerships. Although GaPSC has specified expectations and provided guidance for Standard 2, EPPs have been innovative in their approach to meeting Standard 2. EPPs now need to leverage those partnerships and maximize the benefits for teacher candidates and for local P-12 schools and students.

Closing

No in-school intervention has a greater impact on student learning than an effective teacher—one who is strong in both content and pedagogy. While our current circumstances require EPPs to create innovative methods for teacher candidates to complete field experiences and clinical practice, our goal must remain focused on preparing educators who are classroom ready for their assignments on Day One. This time in our history calls for EPPs and school districts to come together and collaboratively provide the best preparation experiences for all future teachers.

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” Helen Keller