

Item 6:

Update on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Disaster Declaration and SBEC-Related Implications

DISCUSSION

SUMMARY: This item provides the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) an update on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Disaster Declaration and implications for candidates for educator certification, educator preparation programs (EPPs), and school districts.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND JUSTIFICATION: The Texas Education Agency (TEA) continues to work with the Office of the Governor, Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), and the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) to coordinate and plan the state's response to COVID-19. TEA's role in these efforts is to help coordinate the flow of information from the state to districts, help districts solve problems, and provide guidance that will aid in districts' decision-making.

TEA staff who administer SBEC requirements have been working diligently to support the Board's work and to provide guidance to all stakeholders during this time of uncertainty. There have been ongoing requests for guidance from stakeholders in implementing SBEC rules and ensuring SBEC compliance in a time of changing educational platforms and with the disaster declaration in place. TEA staff have focused on the shared goals of the safety of Texas students, both PK–12 and teacher candidates, and ensuring a well-prepared teacher workforce to meet the demands of the school districts across the state. TEA staff have had regular communication with candidates, EPPs, school districts, and organizations, including the Texas Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (TACTE), the Texas Alternative Certification Association (TACA), the Associate and Assistant Deans and Directors of Texas (ADoT), the Texas Association of Certification Officers (TACO), and the Texas Coordinators for Teacher Certification Testing (TCTCT). Some of the key activities related to SBEC issues are:

March 13

- Governor Abbott issued the disaster declaration.

March 16–17

- TEA staff transitioned to teleworking.

March 17

- TEA staff provided guidance to EPPs.
- TEA staff shared that information and Attorney General's guidance regarding open meetings with SBEC Board.
- Pearson (testing vendor) suspended testing sites.

March 20

- TEA staff updated SBEC Chair, Dr. Art Cavazos, of communications and inquiries from the field.

March 25

- TEA staff conducted EPP Town Hall via Zoom to provide interested parties with updates regarding SBEC rule flexibility and the Governor's waivers related to candidates completing clinical teaching or field-based experience requirements in spring 2020 as well as candidates engaging in an internship or practicum during spring 2020.
- TEA staff shared the EPP Town Hall information with SBEC Board.

April 22

- TEA staff conducted EPP Town Hall via Zoom to provide interested parties with updates regarding Governor's waivers related to teacher candidates who completed clinical teaching during fall 2019 or spring 2020, teacher candidates who completed an internship during spring 2020, and non-teacher candidates who completed a practicum during fall 2019 or spring 2020.
- TEA staff shared the EPP Town Hall information with SBEC Board.

May 1

- SBEC held its regularly scheduled meeting, and TEA staff provided an update on issues related to COVID-19.
- Pearson resumes Texas certification testing at Pearson Professional Centers.

May 29

- TEA staff provided updates and received input at the Texas Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (TACTE) Retreat.

June 8

- TEA staff conducted EPP Town Hall via Zoom to provide interested parties with updates regarding Governor's waivers related to teacher candidates beginning an internship in fall 2020, completing clinical teaching in 2020–2021, and field-based experiences in 2020–2021 as well as non-teacher candidates completing a practicum in 2020–2021.
- TEA staff shared the EPP Town Hall information with SBEC Board

June 11

- SBEC held a special meeting to propose changes in response to COVID-19.

June 15

- TEA staff provided updates and received input at the summer convening of organizations representing various roles within EPPs.

This item updates the SBEC on the results of those efforts that are under the SBEC's purview. As this situation continues to develop, TEA staff will continue to update the Board and will be providing any additional information at the SBEC meeting. Additionally, all of the pertinent guidance information and frequently asked questions are located on the TEA's Coronavirus (COVID-19) Support and Guidance webpage: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/health-safety-discipline/coronavirus-covid-19-support-and-guidance>.

Although SBEC has provisions codified in rule regarding flexibility in the event of a disaster declaration issued by the governor, those rules do not adequately address the severity, timeframe, or statewide impact that COVID-19 has presented. SBEC-related issues that have arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic generally fall into three categories:

1. SBEC rules or state law provide flexibility to meet the needs of candidates or EPPs.
2. SBEC rules or state law do not provide flexibility to meet the needs of candidates or EPPs, but the timeline does not require immediate action, allowing SBEC to address the issues through rulemaking on a normal schedule.
3. SBEC rules or state law do not provide flexibility to meet the needs of candidates or EPPs, and the timeline requires more immediate responses than the SBEC rulemaking process can accommodate.

The specific SBEC-related actions and guidance up to this point come from current SBEC rules that provide flexibility in implementation of rules or from waivers granted by Governor Greg Abbott.

The waivers provided flexibility for the following groups:

1. Candidates completing internships, clinical teaching, and practicums in 2019–2020
2. Candidates beginning internships, clinical teaching, and practicums in 2020–2021
3. Educators who completed a one-year emergency permit in 2019–2020

Candidates completing internships, clinical teaching, and practicums in 2019–2020

The flexibility for these candidates included:

- Allowing virtual settings for clinical teaching, internships, practicums, and field-based experience assignments
- Reducing the required length of clinical teaching
- Allowing Probationary Certificates for candidates who completed their EPP but were unable to test

Candidates beginning internships, clinical teaching, and practicums in 2020–2021

The flexibility for these candidates included:

- Allowing virtual settings
- Allowing Intern Certificates for candidates who will complete an internship but who are unable to test

Educators who completed a one-year emergency permit in 2019–2020

For the 2020–2021 school year, the Governor’s waiver suspended the requirements prohibiting the renewal of the one-year emergency permit for individuals with emergency permits that were effective for the 2019–2020 school year. This allows employing districts to renew the one-year emergency permit.

Staff Responsible:

Educator Leadership and Quality Department Staff