Return to the Field (RTTF) Guidance*
Educator Preparation Programs

RE: Guidance for early field, clinical, intern, and practicum students: ver. 2

As Texas schools complete continuity of instruction plans and prepare for a "Strong Start" to the 2020-2021 school year, the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) leadership understands that school re-openings come with a great deal of uncertainty for educators, PreK-12 students, families, and field-bound education students. The Educator Preparation Office staff, a subunit of Academic Affairs, is closely monitoring developments of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. School districts are preparing for face-to-face, remote, or hybrid (combination of in-person and remote) instruction for PreK through grade 12 learners. In response, we have developed return to the field (RTTF) guidance for field-bound education students (early field, clinical, intern, and practicum students) who will complete field hours in school districts throughout the state of Texas for the 2020-2021 school year. The RTTF Guidance will allow educator preparation program (EPP) leaders to respond to students’ needs who will serve in scores of school districts with disparate continuity of instruction plans. As is the nature with guidance dictated by an outside agency, this RTTF Guidance is subject to change or modification based upon new updates by the TEA.

CEHD does not have the broad authority to decide if our education students will go into school districts to complete required field-based experiences for certification during a health emergency. This authority lies with the TEA through direction provided by the Governor of Texas. Governor Abbott’s executive order of April 27 (GA-18) laid out the plan for the reopening of Texas. Further, Governor Abbott has suspended certain provisions of law and rule allowing for new and continued certification for the following groups (see Educator Certification Updates, COVID-19 Disaster Declaration and Candidate: EPP, and LEA Implications June 8, 2020):

- Teacher candidates who will begin an internship in Fall 2020
- Teacher candidates who will complete clinical teaching in 2020-2021
- Non-teacher candidates who will complete a practicum in 2020-2021
- Teacher candidates who will complete field-based experiences in 2020-2021

*RTTF Guidance is tentative and subject to change pending TEA updates.
Approved 7.14.20
This RTTF document is informed by (1) the meeting held on June 18, 2020 with EPP leaders and staff, (2) TEA’s Educator Certification Updates, COVID-19 Disaster Declaration and Candidate: EPP, and LEA Implications June 8, 2020, and (3) TEA’s July 7th Comprehensive Guidelines for a Safe Return to the Campus for 2020-21 School Year for school districts.

This RTTF Guidance is designed to support EPP leaders and staff as they prepare for the field-based field experiences for their students for during the 2020-2021 school year. Therefore, the areas of focus for this RTTF Guidance are: (1) health and safety, (2) observations of education students’ field-based experiences conducted by university supervisors, (3) requirements for field-based experiences.

In developing these directives, we have adopted the following guiding principles:

1. **Priority**: Health, safety, and high quality field experiences for education students in the field remain a chief high priority for the College.

2. **Flexibility**: The RTTF offers flexible rules to be used by educator preparation program area leaders and staff as general direction to develop detailed and context-specific plans to support early field students, clinical teachers, interns, and practicum students for service in school districts that may offer:
   (a) 100% face-to-face instruction for PreK through grade 12 learners;
   (b) 100% virtual/remote learning instruction for PreK through grade 12 learners in synchronous and asynchronous formats;
   (c) hybrid or a combined instructional approach that is part in-person instruction and part virtual/remote learning for PreK through grade 12 learners.
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I. Health and Safety

While on campus, education students are expected to follow the COVID-19 Guidance established by Texas A&M University and the COVID-19 Guidance offered by the College of Education and Human Development. However, while engaging in early field placements, clinical teaching, internships, or practicum experiences, CEHD education students must abide by the health and safety protocols of the host campus / school district. A link to the TEA’s comprehensive public health guidance can be found here. EPP leaders should note the information below that provides (a) instructions for CEHD’s COVID-19 training for all field-bound education students and (b) answers to possible questions related to liability and personal protective equipment (PPE).

A. Required Training for Field-Bound Education Students:

All field-bound education students (early field students, clinical teachers, interns, and practicum students) are required by the Office of the Dean in CEHD to complete a two-part training to support their field readiness.

- The total training time for the two-part training is equivalent to three clock hours and eligible as a virtual field experience.

  - Part 1 of 2: CEHD has created a 10-item quiz based on the National Institute of Environmental Health Science (NIEHS) training tool. Students can take the quiz multiple times and must pass Quiz 1 with a passing rate of 80% or greater. The link to the online tool and Quiz 1 is available on CEHD’s Data Portal. Students are then instructed to acknowledge the intent to comply with the content of the training and Quiz 1 is marked as complete in CEHD’s Data Portal.

  - Part 2 of 2: Requires participation in a Health and Safety Webinar via Zoom with Dr. Shawn Gibbs, Dean of the School of Health at Texas A&M University for Monday, July 27th at 9:00-10:15 AM CST. Please access the Zoom meeting here. For education students who cannot participate in the live webinar, it will be recorded and the link to the online tool (archived webinar) and Quiz 2 will available on CEHD’s Data Portal by August 4, 2020. Students will take a 10-item quiz and must pass Quiz 2 with a passing rate of 100%. Next, students are instructed to acknowledge the intent to comply with the content of the training and Quiz 2 is marked as complete in CEHD’s Data Portal.
A sample email to field experience students might share, with your program’s context-specific amendments, the following message:

“All Your Program’s Name Here students must complete mandatory Health/Safety Training before reporting to your assigned schools for Fall 2020. All field-bound education students will participate in a 2-part health and safety training that can be accessed via the CEHD Data Portal.

- Part 1 is now ready and concludes with a 10-item assessment (Quiz 1) and an acknowledgment of compliance for you to complete. Students can access the CEHD Data Portal at myrecord.cehd.tamu.edu/certification/.
- Part 2 is a webinar on Monday, July 27th at 9:00-10:15 AM CST. Please access the Zoom meeting here. If you are unable to attend this webinar, it will be recorded and assessment questions will be added. The webinar with a 10-item assessment (Quiz 2) will be available on the Data Portal by 5 pm on August 4, 2020.
- The deadline to complete both parts of the mandatory Health/Safety training is Your Program's Date Here.”

B. Questions and Answers Related to Liability and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

1. Are education students liable if they are found responsible for the spread of COVID19 to a stakeholder at a school district while conducting their duties?

No. Per Texas Administrative Code §22.051, sets out immunity status for education students:

a. A professional employee of a school district is not personally liable for any act that is incident to or within the scope of duties of the employee’s position of employment and that involves the exercise of judgement or discretion on the part of the employee, except in circumstances in which a professional employee uses excessive force in the discipline of students or negligence resulting in bodily injury to students.

b. This section does not apply to the operation, use, or maintenance of any motor vehicle.

c. In this section, “professional employee” includes:
   1. A superintendent, principal, teacher, supervisor, social worker, counselor, nurse, and teacher’s aide;
   2. A student in an education preparation program participating in a field experience or internship;
   3. A school bus driver certified in accordance with standards and qualifications adopted by the Department of Public Safety; and
   4. Any other person whose employment requires certification and the exercise of discretion.
2. **Will the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to its undergraduate or graduate students who are completing fieldwork within school districts?**

No. All education students (clinical teachers, interns, and practicum students) must adhere to the public health requirements, professional code of ethics, and attire as determined by the school district for which they serve. As such, students are encouraged to know and abide by the PPE and attire requirements for professional employees in your assigned school district.

- Any student who needs assistance in purchasing PPE should contact your scholarship and financial aid advisor at Texas A&M University to apply for a "cost of attendance" adjustment for your personal funding needs. For more on this contact (979) 845-3236 or financialaid@tamu.edu.

- Per Texas Education Agency’s (TEA) June 9, 2020 Update: “In collaboration with the Governor’s Strike Force and Texas Department of Emergency Management, PPE was procured to help school systems reopen for the 2019-2021 school year.” In a [statewide PPE procurement overview](https://www.tea.state.tx.us), the TEA determined all items are for both staff and students with the exception of gloves, which are to be provided exclusively to staff. Further, The Texas Education Agency (TEA) is shipping PPE to school districts across the state to help keep staff and students safe this upcoming school year. TEA will be providing school districts with disposable and reusable masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, thermometers, face shields, and desk dividers. The amount of supply will vary on the district’s size and need. TEA plans to start delivering supplies mid-July to early August.” (Rodriguez, 2020, para. 1-2)
II. Observations of Education Students’ Field Experiences by University Supervisors:

Per TEA TAC Rule 228.35(g)(1), each formal observation must be at least 45 minutes in duration, must be conducted by the field supervisor, and must be on the candidate's site in a face-to-face setting. According to the Educator Certification and Preparation Guidance FAQ, the requirement that observations of teacher candidates must occur in a face-to-face setting has been suspended. Therefore, teacher observations can be conducted in virtual settings for the 2020-2021 academic year. However,

- Observations are still required
- Observations are required to be reported to TEA
- This would allow the field supervisor to be remote even if the intern or clinical teacher is local
- Notes:
  - 228.35(h)(2) Already provides flexibility for practicum observations that are not in the traditional face-to-face setting.
  - 228.35(j)(2)(C)(ii) similarly already provides flexibility for practicum observations that are not in the traditional face-to-face setting.
  - Interns are teachers of record at school districts and also subject to the rules of the campus.

A. Zoom Platform:

1. Access: Access to a Zoom account is available at https://tamu.zoom.us/. Our University Supervisors (USs) are eligible to receive a UIN so they can gain access to an email address and a Zoom account to conduct online observations of face-to-face and virtual field experiences. The required paperwork is hyperlinked below and here's what EPP leaders need to do to get started:

   - To create TAMU credentials for our university supervisors, each field placement officer will need to complete a NetID Request. Please see the attached instructions. On the NetID Request, you will indicate "see CEHD University Supervisors NetID Request spreadsheet" for reference. The attached spreadsheet will need to be completed to the best of your ability and sent with the request.
   - Identity Management is aware of you all separately submitting UIN requests for the university supervisors. It may take them up to two weeks to complete this request, so EPP leaders were advised in mid-June to submit the requests in a timely manner.
• For programs that share the services of university supervisors, please communicate with each other on who will submit for the shared services of a US.

2. *Observation Protocol*: Procedures that provide step-by-step instructions for reviewing and assessing observations remotely, synchronously or asynchronously, will be jointly created by the Field Placement Staff and shared with the USs. The supervisors’ observation forms must be uploaded to CEHD Data Platform as per current program requirements.

3. *Videotaping*: Education students can access Zoom remotely and record lessons or other classroom experiences from their cell phones, laptops, iPads, or other devices. Instructions for videotaping a Zoom meeting (i.e. classroom lesson or field-based experience) are attached. [see Addendum 1 – How to Record Zoom Meetings].

4. *Security*: The USs and education students may use Zoom confidentially and securely.
   a. There are various Zoom account types: namely public versus private. TAMU Zoom can be enabled to assure the highest security; offering near immunity from “Zoom-bombings” [see Addendum 2 - Using Zoom].
   b. *Secure Zoom Recordings (Cloud)*: All recordings saved to the Zoom cloud are only accessible for viewing by authenticated TAMU users. In other words, you have to login to TAMU Zoom with your NetID. In addition, only the host (i.e. student) is allowed to download recordings from the Zoom cloud. There is an option to allow both the host and participants to record the sessions locally, but the Office of Innovation representatives strongly recommend this option not be used, especially allowing participants to create a local recording. If this is allowed the host will lose total control of where that recording is shared. For the purpose of videotaping field-based experiences in school environments, please disable the local recording option (see attached recording settings screen shot). [see Addendum 2 - Using Zoom].

5. *Student Privacy and FERPA*: Per the FERPA and Virtual Learning document provided by TEA, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is the federal law that protects the privacy of personally identifiable information (PII) in students’ education records. “Education records” are those records that are: (1) directly related to a student; and (2) maintained by an educational agency or institution or by a party acting for the agency or institution. FERPA provides parents and eligible students (turned 18 or attending college at any age) the right to protect the PII in students’ education records. An educational agency or
institution may not disclose PII from students’ education records, without consent, unless the disclosure meets an exception under FERPA. 20 U.S.C. 1232g; 34 C.F.R. Part 99.

- Can non-students observe a virtual lesson? FERPA applies to the disclosure of tangible records and of information derived from tangible records. [A video recording is a tangible record.] A teacher is prohibited from disclosing information from a child's education records to other students [and non-students] in the classroom unless appropriate written consent has been obtained. Assuming that during the virtual lesson PII from student education records is not disclosed, FERPA would not prohibit a non-student from observing the virtual lesson. (please see FERPA and Virtual Learning).

6. Memorandum of Understanding: All school districts, where CEHD clinical teachers are placed for field-based experiences, are required to complete a memorandum of understanding (MOU) by December 31, 2020 as determined by the Dean. Due to the current crisis, it is essential for field placement staff members to secure MOUs with as many school districts possible before Fall 2020 due to possible remote evaluation needs of university supervisors. Section 4.10 of the MOU encourages school district partners to:

  - Permit teacher candidates to video record themselves in compliance with all District policies as they deliver instruction for the purpose of licensure, self-reflection, and personal professional development. Signed permission from PK-12 students’ parents/guardians will be secured as outlined and required by district policy. [please refer to Addendum 3 – CEHD MOU – Clinical Teaching/Educator Placements; Addendum 4 – Video Release Form (Sample)]

All of the classroom permission forms and a copy of the executed MOU should be kept on file with the field placement staff member. In addition, email a copy of each executed MOU to the Assistant Dean of Educator Preparation and School Partnerships, or designee, before videotaping of students’ field experiences takes place in the district or by December 31, 2020.
III. Requirements for Field-based Experiences

A. General Provisions:
Per TEA TAC Rule §228.1, Requirements for Educator Preparation Programs; if the governor declares a state of disaster consistent with the Texas Government Code, §418.014, Texas Education Agency staff may extend deadlines in this chapter for up to 90 days and decrease clinical teaching, internship, and practicum assignment minimums by up to 20 percent as necessary to accommodate persons in the affected disaster areas. This provision is not applicable for the 2020-2021 school year at the time of this guidance report.

B. Virtual Field Experiences:
Per TEA TAC Rule §228.35, education students must complete field experience in an “authentic school setting”. For purposes of EPP training under §228.35 of this title (relating to Preparation Program Coursework and/or Training) during the 2020-2021 academic year, actual school settings and authentic school settings may include campuses with a traditional, in-person setting that are temporarily functioning in a virtual setting.

The flexibility provided by Governor Abbott’s waiver creates the possibility for candidates who are completing an internship, clinical teaching, or a practicum in 2020-2021 to complete these experiences in virtual settings. Consequently, field-based experiences can be conducted in virtual settings for the 2020-2021 school year.

- Educator candidates will be able to complete clinical teaching, internships, and practicums in adapted settings
- Districts using virtual settings will be able to employ and support educator candidates
- EPPs will be able to prepare and support candidates

1. Definition: Until further definitions are provided, the definition of a virtual setting is taken from the TAC Rule §228.35 as the “use of electronic transmission or other video or technology-based method. Field-based experience provided by use of electronic transmission or other video or technology-based method…”

2. Planning by School Districts: Per TEA, schools are reimagining the school day with their Strong Start, Preparing for Remote Instruction plan (see Overview of Remote Instruction Guidance for SY 20-21) for various instructional scenarios that include: asynchronous and
synchronous learning for face-to-face, remote, and hybrid learning opportunities. Also, a timeline for sharing resources has been outlined in the plan (see Figure 1).

- **Guidance and Resources**
  - Changing School Start Date Guidance (PDF) June 15 2020
  - Adjusting 2020-2021 School Calendars (PPT)
  - Additional Days School Year FAQ (PDF) July 9 2020
- **Remote Instruction**
  - Overview of Remote Instruction Guidance for SY 20-21 (PDF) July 7 2020
  - SY 20-21 Asynchronous and Synchronous Template Overview (PDF) July 7 2020

**Figure 1.** Timeline for receiving upcoming resources for TEA’s “Strong Start, Preparing for Remote Instruction” plan.

3. **Resources and Program Requirements:** For purposes of educator preparation training under §228.35 of this title (relating to Preparation Program Coursework and/or Training) during the 2020–2021 academic year, actual school settings and authentic school settings may include campuses with a traditional, in-person setting that are temporarily functioning in a virtual setting, hybrid or face-to-face settings. In order to effectively prepare for various school reopening scenarios, teacher education program area leaders are encouraged to:

- Review the Overview of Remote Instruction Guidance for SY 20-21 provided by TEA for school districts and utilize the virtual training opportunities provided by the College (see addendum 5 – Strategies and Resources for Virtual Experiences). CEHD’s resources are meant to supplement, not supplant, the virtual experiences as deemed appropriate for coursework and/or training needs for your educator preparation program area.

- Document education students’ virtual field experiences. These field experiences must be logged on a “Virtual Field Experience Form” created by the program area. The document
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should provide the student’s name, type (early field, clinical teaching, internship, practicum), UIN, program area, department, semester, as well as the date, start/end time, and description of the virtual experience. The “Virtual Field Experience Form”, for each education student who engages in virtual field experiences, must be uploaded to CEHD Data Platform within 10 days of the end of the semester. Further, samples of students’ work products (formative or summative assessments, assignments, reflections, etc.) should be kept on file with the program area for TEA reporting and compliance purposes.

- Ensure the MOU with district partners is executed as clinical teachers will need access to the district partner’s remote learning platform if this approach is instituted. Specifically, proviso 4.13 of the MOU states:
  - To the extent not in conflict with District policies and procedures, provide teacher candidates with log-on credentials to access the District’s online management / remote learning systems to support the Mentor/Cooperating teacher and K-12 learners.

C. Requirements for Field-Based Experiences:

As previously stated on page one of this document, the CEHD does not have the general authority to decide if our education students will go into school districts to complete required field-based experiences for certification during a health emergency. This authority lies with the TEA through orders made by the Governor of Texas. Education students may elect to, based on underlying medical issues in accordance with Student Rule 7, not complete field-based experiences during the 2020-2021 school year. The request must be made in writing by the student and received by the designee for the educator preparation program area within five business days before the start of the assigned field experience. Should a student receive a field placement deferment for medical reasons by their certification program, then s/he must:

- Engage in virtual field experiences as dictated by the education student’s assigned school district, or
- Proceed with the completion of their program area degree without an educator certification credential. The said student may, at a date s/he finds acceptable and aligned to the field placement provisions established by TEA, complete the field placement requirements at a later date determined by the education candidate.
- Further, the education student who has decided to forego clinical teaching, internship, or practicum experiences placement during the 2020-2021 academic year due to medical
reasons, and who cannot complete field experiences in a virtual setting, is required to sign a Field Deferment and Acknowledgement (DFA) Form. The DFA Form indicates that the certification-seeking student understands the nature of his/her decision as explained above and must adhere to the mandatory deadlines and requirements for field placements and certification exams as determined by TEA. Please obtain a copy of the DFA form from the College’s Certification Officer on or after August 1, 2020.

IV. Stay Informed: Web-links to Professional Agencies

US Department of Education
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Texas Education Agency, COVID 19 Guidance
College of Education and Human Development, COVID19 Guidance
American School Health Association
Texas Department of State Health Services