



AAQEP Expectations Framework

The Expectations Framework for Programs Accredited by
the Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation

January 2018

The purpose of this document is to provide members of the Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation (AAQEP) and others with a clear statement of AAQEP's standards, a description of its accreditation process, and an outline of its evidence expectations. Supplemental information will be published in a *Guide to AAQEP Accreditation* in April 2018. For updates, additional information, and to contact AAQEP, please visit our website at www.aagep.org.

Introduction: Student Success Begins with Educator Preparation

The Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation (AAQEP) bases its work on the premise that educator preparation matters deeply to student success. Teaching impacts student achievement more than any other in-school factor; preparing effective, adaptable, innovative, evidence-driven educators matters deeply to the future of education and society. Successful schools require effective leaders who support students and teachers—so leader preparation also matters. Effective preparation takes place in settings where excellent teachers, leaders, and community members support new educators—partnerships matter.

AAQEP was founded by educators in 2017 to promote the preparation of effective educators in innovative, outcome-focused programs that engage education's toughest challenges directly and in context. AAQEP's comprehensive standards for educator preparation specify aspects of completer performance and program practice that identify effective programs and that qualify those programs for AAQEP accreditation.

A national network of educational professionals committed to quality educator preparation developed the AAQEP system. The system leverages quality assurance processes to foster program improvement and, through collaborative peer-review, to spread innovation. AAQEP's system addresses recent calls to strengthen accreditation by promoting innovation over compliance, providing nuanced accounts of quality rather than simple binary decisions, and differentiating processes on the basis of evidence, rewarding strong performance with reduced reporting burdens while focusing support and scrutiny where needed. AAQEP re-casts accreditation as a learning system that informs the field as it provides quality assurance.

Core questions drive quality assurance in educator preparation: Are new teachers prepared to meet the demands of the classrooms they enter? Are new school leaders ready to support learning? Regardless of role, can educators support *all* learners equitably in our increasingly diverse student populations? Do preparation programs—regardless of delivery model—provide appropriate, high-quality clinical experiences? Are local schools engaged as partners? Can the provider ensure quality, ongoing improvement, and innovation? Can the public be confident that its interests are served? Credible answers to these questions require solid evidence, transparent systems, and collaboration. AAQEP's standards and processes meet these demands.

AAQEP Vision:

Excellent, effective, and innovative educator preparation that is committed to evidence-based improvement, engages with the P20 system, and holds high public confidence.

AAQEP mission:

To promote and recognize quality educator preparation that strengthens the education system's ability to serve all students, schools, and communities.

Background: AAQEP's Origin and Development

The Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation (AAQEP) was founded in 2017 by leaders in educator preparation and quality assurance from across the US with shared interests in strengthening P-20 education through the preparation of excellent educators. The group set out to create an outcome-based quality assurance process to support excellence, innovation, and continuous improvement in preparation programs. In August of 2017, three working groups were formed to develop a draft expectations framework. Each group addressed one core aspect of accreditation: standards and related evidence, self-study and peer-review processes, and preparation and support of peer volunteers who enact the processes and uphold the standards.

Development of the framework was guided by AAQEP's commitments to:

- Improvement-focused and innovation-friendly frameworks and protocols
- Continuous improvement through inquiry and engagement with partners
- Reliance on multiple measures, with priority given to direct evidence of performance
- Accuracy, transparency, and consistency in requirements and decisions
- Consistent high-quality training and calibration of reviewers and decision-makers
- Efficient and transparent data sharing, and reporting and efficiency in operations
- Partnership and supportive collaboration among the accreditor, states, and institutions.

AAQEP circulated the draft for public comment and feedback through presentations and website posting in October and November 2017. Extensive and constructive feedback from across the nation guided the development of the final Expectations Framework presented in these pages.

AAQEP's Standards for Educator Preparation: Rationale and Scope

Standards are at the heart of quality assurance and accreditation; they simultaneously establish clear expectations for practice and an agenda for improvement and innovation. Standards are grounded in a field's best research evidence and, where research does not yet shed light, in well-reasoned practices and aspirations. Standards also incorporate opportunities for inquiry that guide improvement and innovation, leading eventually to new or reformulated consensus.

AAQEP's Expectations Working Group began its work with the observation that expectations for educator preparation, while widely shared across the nation, include two 'types' of expectations. One set of *fundamental expectations* for which defined and widely-accepted measures exist are addressed in broadly similar ways regardless of context. A second set of *contextual challenges* might be thought of as widely shared commitments that demand local solutions, developed with partners. The standards that follow recognize the need for accountability with regard to the former, and for innovation and investigation with regard to the latter. In addition, the standards recognize that each state defines its own program approval requirements, and that each institution has a distinctive mission. The standards take into account each type of expectation.

Four standards define AAQEP's expectations for accredited preparation providers. Two of these address *candidate performance*; two address *program practices*. As the tables below illustrate, within each of these pairs, foundational expectations and contextual challenges are specified. Standard 1, Completer Performance, and Standard 3, Quality Program Practices, address aspects of individual and programmatic performance for which established measures are available. Standards 2 and 4, in contrast, address areas of individual and programmatic quality that are of critical importance, and which require greater innovation in measurement and inquiry methods.

Table 1: Expectation Dimensions Captured in AAQEP Standards

	Candidate Performance	Program Practice
Foundational Expectations	<i>Widely shared expectations for which accepted measures are readily available</i>	
Contextual Challenges/ Institutional Context	<i>Shared questions or challenges that demand local solutions and invite innovation</i> <i>Reflection of specific institutional missions</i> <i>Responsiveness to state requirements</i>	

Table 2: AAQEP Standards Matrix

	<i>Candidate Performance</i>	<i>Program Practice</i>
<i>Foundational Expectations</i>	Standard 1: Completer Performance	Standard 3: Quality Program Practices
<i>Context, Challenges, Mission, Mandates</i>	Standard 2: Completer Professional Competence and Growth	Standard 4: Program Engagement in System Improvement

The standards, which follow, are stated concisely; this is intended to preserve flexibility while assuring quality, and to promote improvement by avoiding prescription that would limit innovation. Each standard contains a bulleted list of particulars; these lists are bulleted rather than numbered to reflect the fact that each item in the list represents a part of the overall evidence package for the standard. The items in each list are not separate ‘substandards’ or ‘elements’ to be considered independently, apart from the whole body of evidence relating to the standard. The standards are to be considered holistically.

A Note on the Scope of AAQEP Standards

The AAQEP standards apply to all types of preparation programs, including initial preparation of teachers, preparation of school building and district leaders, and advanced preparation of educators who are adding credentials, or preparing for new professional roles. Additional commentary on application of the standards in each of these programmatic contexts will be published in the *Guide to AAQEP Accreditation* (anticipated April, 2018). That guidance will suggest ways in which the standards might be approached for the various types of programs; no new standards specific to particular types of programs will be added.

Standard 1: Completer Performance

Program completers perform as professional educators with the capacity to support success for all learners

Candidates and completers exhibit the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions of competent, caring, and effective professional educators. Successful candidate performance requires knowledge of learners, context, and content. Candidates demonstrate the ability to plan for and enact and/or support instruction and assessment that is differentiated and culturally responsive. Evidence shows¹ that, by the time of program completion, candidates exhibit knowledge, skills, and abilities of professional educators appropriate to their target credential or degree, including:

- Content, pedagogical, and/or professional knowledge relevant to the credential or degree for which they are prepared;
- Learners, learning theory including social, emotional, and academic dimensions, and the application of learning theory in their work;
- Culturally responsive practice, including intersectionality of race, ethnicity, class, gender identity and expression, sexual identity, and the impact of language acquisition and literacy development on learning;
- Assessment of and for student learning, assessment and data literacy, and the use of data to inform practice;
- Creation and development of positive learning and work environments;
- Dispositions and behaviors required for successful professional practice.

Evidence for this standard will include multiple measures, multiple perspectives (such as program faculty, P12 partners, program completers, graduates' employers), direct measures, and evidence of performance in a field/clinical setting appropriate to the program.

¹ This bulleted list represents a part of the overall evidence package for the standard; each bullet is not a 'substandard' to be considered apart from the whole standard.

Standard 2: Completer Professional Competence and Growth

Program completers adapt to working in a variety of contexts and grow as professionals.

Program completers engage in professional practice in educational settings and show that they have the skills and abilities to do so in a variety of *additional* settings and community/cultural contexts. For example, candidates must have broad and general knowledge of the impact of culture and language on learning, yet they cannot, within the context of any given program, experience working with the entire diversity of student identities, or in all types of school environments. Candidate preparation includes first-hand professional experience accompanied by reflection that prepares candidates to engage effectively in different contexts they may encounter throughout their careers. Evidence shows² that program completers have the capacity to:

- Understand and engage local school and cultural communities, and communicate and foster relationships with families/guardians/caregivers in a variety of communities;
- Engage in culturally responsive educational practices with diverse learners and do so in diverse cultural and socioeconomic community contexts;
- Create productive learning environments, and use strategies to develop productive learning environments in a variety of school contexts;
- Support students' growth in international and global perspectives;
- Establish goals for their own professional growth and engage in self-assessment, goal setting, and reflection on their own practice;
- Collaborate with colleagues to support professional learning.

Evidence for this standard will show both that program completers have engaged successfully in relevant professional practice and that they are equipped with strategies and reflective habits that will enable them to serve effectively in a variety of school placements and educational settings appropriate to their credential or degree sought.

² This bulleted list represents a part of the overall evidence package for the standard; each bullet is not a 'substandard' to be considered apart from the whole standard.

Standard 3: Quality Program Practices

The program has the capacity to ensure that its completers meet standards 1 and 2.

Preparation programs ensure that candidates, upon completion, are ready to engage in professional practice, to adapt to a variety of professional settings, and to grow throughout their careers. Effective program practices include: consistent offering of coherent curricula; high quality, diverse clinical experiences; dynamic, mutually-beneficial partnerships with stakeholders; and comprehensive and transparent quality assurance processes informed by trustworthy evidence. Each aspect of the program is appropriate to its context and to the credential or degree sought. Evidence shows³ that the program:

- Offers coherent curricula with clear expectations that are aligned with state and national standards, as applicable;
- Develops and implements quality clinical experiences, where appropriate, in the context of documented and effective partnerships with P12 schools and districts;
- Engages multiple stakeholders, including completers, local educators, schools and districts, in data collection, analysis, planning, improvement, and innovation;
- Enacts admission and monitoring processes linked to candidate success as part of a quality assurance system aligned to state requirements and professional standards;
- Engages in continuous improvement of programs and program components, and investigates opportunities for innovation, through an effective quality assurance system;
- Maintains capacity for quality reflected in staffing, resources, operational processes, and institutional commitment.

Evidence related to this standard will include documentation of program practices and resources as well as the program's rationale for its structure and operation.

³ This bulleted list represents a part of the overall evidence package for the standard; each bullet is not a 'substandard' to be considered apart from the whole standard.

Standard 4: Program Engagement in System Improvement

Program practices strengthen the P20 education system in light of local needs and in keeping with the program’s mission.

The program is committed to and invests in strengthening and improving the education profession and the P20 education system. Each program’s context (or multiple contexts) provides particular opportunities to engage the field’s shared challenges and to foster and support innovation. Engagement with critical issues facing the field is essential and must be contextualized. Sharing results of contextualized engagement and innovation support the field’s collective effort to address education’s most pressing challenges through improvement and innovation. The program provides evidence⁴ that it:

- Engages with local partners and stakeholders to support high-needs schools and participates in efforts to reduce disparities in educational outcomes;
- Seeks to meet state and local educator workforce needs and to diversify participation in the educator workforce through candidate recruitment and support;
- Supports completer entry into and/or continuation in their professional role, as appropriate to the credential or degree being earned;
- Investigates available and trustworthy evidence regarding completer placement, effectiveness, and retention in the profession and uses that information to improve programs;
- Meets obligations and mandates established by the state, states, or jurisdiction within which it operates;
- Investigates its own effectiveness relative to its stated institutional and/or programmatic mission and commitments.

Evidence for this standard addresses the identified issues in light of local and institutional context.

⁴ This bulleted list represents a part of the overall evidence package for the standard; each bullet is not a ‘substandard’ to be considered apart from the whole standard.

Evidence Expectations

Evidence requirements operationalize an accrediting agency's standards. The evidence put forward by preparation providers in making their case for AAQEP accreditation will include:

- Multiple measures with reasonable continuity of instruments;
- Direct evidence of performance in the role for which candidates are being prepared;
- Completer, employer, and other 'downstream measures' to supplement direct measures of candidate performance; and
- Evidence of the reliability, validity, fairness and trustworthiness of all measures as appropriate to the type of data, which may include qualitative and quantitative data.

Relying on multiple sources of evidence around any particular standard or issue increases accuracy of conclusions both because any given measure adds information and because the quality of measures vary. In addition, using multiple measures allows providers to adopt new, adapt existing, and discontinue inadequate measures as needed so long as some measures remain in use to provide longitudinal benchmarks.

Priority will be given in the AAQEP system to direct measures of candidate, completer, and program performance, in particular to such measures that are most comprehensively available for a given program's candidates and completers. Performance assessments that capture actual teaching (or the professional activities for which a candidate is in preparation) performance, scored by trained and calibrated raters, constitute the field's strongest measures. Where available, these might form the core of the evidence base.

Nevertheless, a *body* of evidence that includes *multiple* measures provides the strongest warrant for judgments about program quality. Programs will provide measures that relate to the full range of matters addressed in the standards. Indirect indicators, and those that are available for only some candidates and completers can be quite valuable and must be considered where they can be collected. By prioritizing direct and comprehensive measures, the clearest and most valid account of program performance and impact can be assured.

Brown, Kurzweil, and Pritchett (2017) argue for a 'management-based' approach to quality assurance that blends common evidence expectations and criteria with institution-defined measures, allowing for individualization and supporting innovation. AAQEP's evidence framework is consistent with such an approach; it will ensure that AAQEP's decisions provide assurance of quality to a variety of stakeholders while its processes advance quality through the ongoing innovation and improvement in the field.

AAQEP encourages the ongoing development of innovative measures and refinement of existing measures, particularly but not exclusively related to ‘contextual challenges.’ With regard to characteristics and qualities of measurement, and in support of its innovation agenda, AAQEP supports contextual expectations of evidence quality as recommended by Bryk (Bryk Gomez, Grunow, LeMahieu, 2015).

Finally, programs must have and report on their means of monitoring their own quality on an ongoing basis. Functioning of an effective internal quality control system supports improvement and innovation. As part of such a system, programs should establish and justify criteria for successful performance for individuals and programs.

AAQEP Process Features

AAQEP's standards and processes work together to support innovation and collaboration as means of advancing excellence in educator preparation. The AAQEP accreditation process builds on the long history of quality assurance through peer review that is the hallmark of higher education in the US. The AAQEP accreditation process incorporates both standard features of peer-review-based accreditation and innovations designed to increase accreditation's utility and credibility. AAQEP emphasizes collaborative professional engagement and incorporates innovations drawn from recent proposals to strengthen accreditation.

The accreditation system is informed by AAQEP's process values—that accreditation must be:

- **Formative:** providing timely formative feedback throughout the accreditation process to support growth and development.
- **Flexible:** consistency need not be gained at the price of rigidity; flexibility in processes and approaches against the background of clear expectations maximizes improvement and supports innovation.
- **Collegial:** collaboration as the basis of quality assurance in higher education is a value that AAQEP affirms and seeks to reflect in its processes; it enhances the quality of programs locally and the effectiveness of the field generally.
- **Accurate:** accreditation processes must accurately determine areas of strength and areas of weakness and report transparently on findings.
- **Contextual:** accreditation processes must be sensitive to local contexts and respectful of local institutional mission and relevant state policies.
- **Supportive:** quality assurance, improvement, and innovation can be mutually supportive.

While the accreditation *decision* punctuates each accreditation cycle and represents the cycle's final quality determination, the *process as a whole* is designed to provide formative feedback through facilitated collaborative engagement among members and between members and the agency.

The core of the AAQEP accreditation process consists of a self-study conducted by the provider, off-site and on-site review by trained and calibrated peer reviewers, and a final review rendering an accreditation decision by an independent body of peer reviewers. AAQEP's process meets the recognition standards of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the recognition requirements of the Secretary of Education.

Within the broad framework of this process, AAQEP has embedded a number of distinctive features designed to increase the utility and credibility of the process, and to reduce uncertainty and inconsistency in its operation. These features include cohort grouping of providers seeking accreditation, proposal review at the planning stage of the process, the option of ‘staggering’ submissions across the accreditation term, evidence-based (‘strengths-based’) customization of reviews (off- and on-site), and a staffing plan to ensure consistency of communication between agency and provider. Each of these is described briefly below.

Cohort placement All preparation providers seeking accreditation through AAQEP will be placed in a cohort of institutions that anticipate completing the accreditation process at approximately the same time. The aims of establishing cohorts are to coordinate efficient communication between AAQEP and providers, and to foster collaboration among providers. Each cohort will have an assigned staff liaison at AAQEP to facilitate communication and technical assistance. Collaboration among providers will be optional; many providers engage in regional or state-based collaboration around improvement and quality assurance efforts.

Proposal review As providers plan their self-study, they will have the opportunity to request review of that plan—their proposal—by a group of trained and calibrated peer reviewers. Reviewers will provide formative feedback, and indication that a proposal is consistent with addressing AAQEP standards will become part of the case record—in effect, an agreement regarding how the self-study will be conducted. This will provide clarity for all parties as the review proceeds. The proposal process will have particular relevance for the ‘contextual’ dimensions of each self-study. It is anticipated that the completed ‘contextual’ portions of the self-studies will be, in effect, small scale studies on issues common to the field.

Staggered or ‘rolling’ submission The common pattern in accreditation systems is for all standards to be addressed in a single self-study, and all evidence related to standards to be reviewed in one ‘batch’ near the conclusion of a given term of accreditation.⁵ AAQEP intends to offer the possibility of staggering submission of evidence across the term of accreditation, provided that all standards are addressed within each term of accreditation, and that annual reports are kept current. This optional arrangement would be codified in an agreement between the accreditor and the provider; it would allow the provider to focus serially on standards and to distribute effort and resources in a different way.

Evidence- or strengths-based customization Among the several policy proposals to strengthen accreditation, the proposal to differentiate reviews and on-site visits is heard frequently. The

⁵ N.b. Some evidence related to standards also provided and reviewed in annual reports, in most accreditation systems—as will be the case for AAQEP.

aim of customizing reviews and site visits is to ensure efficiency and focus in the reviews. Evidence related to each of the standards will be thoroughly verified in each review, but the degree of attention and the focus of reviewers work will be determined on the basis of the strength of the evidence reported in annual reports and in the self-study materials. Differentiating processes on the basis of evidence can reward strong performance with a reduced reporting burden while focusing support and scrutiny where it is most needed.

Continuity staffing strategies Drawing on the experience of regional accreditors and other programmatic accreditors, AAQEP's staffing pattern includes 'case managers' who are full-time or contingent staff with the agency, and who 'manage' a portfolio of cases to provide a consistent point of contact for institutions.

Volunteer Roles In implementing its process, AAQEP will rely on volunteers from the profession and the public to fill a number of roles. Key roles are described below.

Case Manager An AAQEP staff member will be assigned to a provider for the duration of the accreditation process. This individual provides technical assistance, organizational support, and logistical support. The Case Manager is responsible for coordinating the flow of information, directing questions and concerns to the appropriate audience, and serving as the connection among state departments of education, providers, and AAQEP. The Case Manager will assure clarity and transparency regarding the accreditation process, managing a portfolio of providers who have similar accreditation decision completion dates and those providers that choose to utilize the staggered submission process.

Formative Evaluator Formative Evaluators, through a peer-review process, assess the extent to which qualitative and quantitative outcomes are articulated in the developing self-study narrative or self-study proposal. Formative Evaluators are engaged in the process early and on an ongoing basis so as to provide actionable feedback prior to the final self-study submission. Working with the primary author at the provider, the Formative Evaluator's role is to continually challenge and question the self-study narrative in ways that assist the provider to better clarify the foundational expectations, context, challenges, mission, and mandates as outlined in the AAQEP standards.

State Consultant State Consultants, at the discretion of the state department of education, provide on-site and off-site contextual information regarding items such as demographics, state-specific rules and regulations, licensure processes, curriculum, state initiatives, and the testing practices of the state and/or region in which the provider operates. State Consultant engagement allows for a shared understanding of the accreditation process and outcomes allowing the state department of education to better support and challenge the provider throughout the next cycle of review.

Lead Visitor The Lead Visitor will develop points of further inquiry based on the self-study. The Lead Visitor determines the extent to which the AAQEP standards will receive further inquiry, the methods of inquiry, and the processes for on-site and off-site inquiry of the self-study. The Lead Visitor consults with the provider, State Consultant, Case Manager, and other trained AAQEP personnel to determine the size of the site visit team and needed expertise for a quality inquiry to occur in the on-site and off-site formats. The Lead Visitor is responsible for communicating the accreditation visit findings to the provider and AAQEP personnel.

AAQEP Scholar The AAQEP Scholar facilitates post-accreditation decision dialogue with the provider to clarify the accreditation outcomes relative to actions the EPP might take for the next self-study cycle. AAQEP Scholars, through collegial dialogue and inquiry, assist the provider in constructing strategies for their next steps and work to both challenge and support the EPP in its thinking based on the accreditation outcome. The Scholars will reinforce any revisions in AAQEP standards and expectations and collaborate with the provider to explore the body of evidence, processes, partnerships, and measures possible for the development of the next self-study.

Consistency and Capacity

Every peer-review-based quality assurance system depends on the generosity and professional competence of volunteer reviewers to accomplish its work. AAQEP ensures consistency in its work and capacity for operation by supporting its reviewers, decision-makers, and board members with role-specific preparation and professional learning. Professional learning is also made available to the staff of providers who are seeking or hold AAQEP accreditation, and to other interested professionals.

AAQEP ensures that:

- All staff and volunteers' roles are clearly defined, their respective responsibilities clearly articulated, and they are supported by preparation and ongoing professional learning;
- High quality professional learning that is provided for volunteers includes online, face-to-face, and blended delivery (and is recorded and retrievable wherever possible);
- Evaluation of all parties and processes is conducted consistently, and results are shared for feedback and to support ongoing improvement;
- An 'audit committee' of members and stakeholders will evaluate the agency's performance independently and on a regular basis.

Consistency in a system is supported when each aspect engages in continuous improvement so that all aspects of the organization are evaluated and refined. AAQEP's operations, standards, staff, processes, volunteers, and governance processes will all participate in ongoing quality assurance review. As an accrediting body, AAQEP will adhere to the same discipline of quality assurance expected of its members and will be subject to review by an independent committee of its members on the same cycle as are members.

Conclusion and Timelines

AAQEP's expectations framework is shaping the establishment of a new quality assurance system in the field of educator preparation, one that is grounded in peer collaboration, consistent with the best aspects of established peer-review accreditation practice, and incorporates innovative dimensions in its standards and processes. The result is an accreditation system that supports innovation and improvement as it provides assurance of quality to the field, its stakeholders, and the public generally.

Upon publication of these standards, AAQEP will establish cohorts of preparation providers seeking accreditation. Initial cohort members seeking accreditation in 2019 will engage intensively with AAQEP staff and volunteer reviewers to develop plans for self-study submission in late 2018 in anticipation of off- and on-site reviews in 2019. A timeline of AAQEP's inaugural cohorts follows:

- **January 2018:** Standards development process completed; standards published
- **April 2018:** Process guidelines in Guide to AAQEP Accreditation published
- **Spring 2018:** First cohort of providers seeking accreditation identified/supported
- **Summer/Fall 2018:** Initial training seminars for site visitors and reviewers conducted
- **Fall 2018:** First cohort self-studies submitted for formative and off-site reviews
- **Spring 2019:** First cohort site visits conducted and accreditation decisions rendered
Second cohort completes self-studies, etc.
- **Summer 2019 and following:** Additional cohorts complete accreditation cycle

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The following sources have informed the Working Groups and staff engaged in developing AAQEP's standards and processes.

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The AAQEP Expectation Framework was developed by a network of professionals from across the country. The membership and leadership are listed below.

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