

## **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES OF THE MINNESOTA COLLABORATIVE TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED**

The Minnesota Collaborative Teacher Preparation Program in Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired (the Program) is a joint venture between the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), participating universities, and practitioners from the field of blindness and visual impairments in Minnesota. Funding support for the Program is made available through federal award Special Education – Program to States, CFDA 84.027A that MDE has awarded to the Minnesota Low Incidence Projects at the Metropolitan Educational Cooperative Service Unit (Metro ECSU).

A *Governance Committee* provides the instructional leadership for the Program. The Governance Committee consists of two Boards that (a) have different responsibilities, (b) perform some functions independently, and (c) act upon other functions in concert. The *Program Board* consists of representatives from all of the Minnesota universities with approved special education programs that are participating in the Program. The Program Board is empowered to make all decisions regarding candidates for the Program. The *Advisory Board* consists of MDE staff, either directly employed by MDE or funded through grants or contracts to other agencies and exemplary Minnesota teachers licensed in Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired. The Advisory Board provides advising, administering, and coordinating responsibilities for the Program.

A *Representative of Metro ECSU* provides oversight and coordination of the federal award and all fiscal matters for the Program, such as course scheduling and providing instructional and student support. The *Program Coordinator* is an initial point of contact for the Program, responds to inquires and disseminates information about the Program, maintains Program records and information, and provides support to students in the Program.

To participate in the Program, candidates must be admitted to, progress in good standing, and complete the requirements of both the Program and one of the institutions of higher education, as involvement with each serves different and necessary purposes. Specifically, candidacy within the Program enables the candidate to take the specialized coursework addressing the state's Teachers of Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired Subject Matter Standards and, upon satisfactory completion of all requirements, be recommended for that teaching license. Involvement with a participating university provides a means through which the candidate may satisfy any Board of Teaching (BOT) licensure requirements not provided by the Program (for example, but not solely, satisfaction of the Standards of Effective Practice and the Core Skills for Teachers of Special Education); the opportunity, upon agreement by the university, to apply the Program's specialized coursework to other purposes, such as work on a graduate degree; and a single, permanent location for the candidate's Program records.

The following description of policies and processes by the stages in the Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired Preparation Program specifies the roles and responsibilities of candidates, the Program, and the participating institutions of higher education in this collaboration.

## Program Admissions Process and Requirements

*A potential candidate applies for admission to the special education program of one of the participating universities.* The applicant notifies the institution that the application is for admission to the Collaborative Teacher Preparation Program in Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired. The Program has a list of contacts at each institution who are able to advise the applicant as to which procedures are to be followed at the institution to accommodate the applicant's educational background and professional development needs. The institution's admissions process may include several components and a variety of application materials, with deadlines varying across institutions. To the extent possible and appropriate, the applicant should provide materials that may also be suitable for the application to the Program as such materials may then be used as sources of information for or components of that part of the admissions process. A signed letter or form allowing the institution to share application materials with the Program is also required.

*The institution of higher education makes its own admissions decision regarding the applicant's application.* The decision considers only admission to the institution's special education program, and not admission to the Collaborative Teacher Preparation Program in Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired.

*If the applicant is accepted for admission to the institution's special education program, the institution identifies and documents the requirements for which it has responsibility that are satisfied and the means by which they are satisfied as well as the requirements not yet satisfied and a plan for completing them.* These are the licensure requirements other than the Teachers of Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired Subject Matter Standards, such as, but not solely, the Standards of Effective Practice and the Core Skills for Teachers of Special Education. The plan for completing requirements not yet satisfied might include additional coursework and/or requirements during the final practicum in addition to those that address the Subject Matter Standards. The institution uses its process that has been approved by the BOT for determining how an applicant's prior academic preparation and/or teaching experiences are evaluated and credited toward licensure requirements.

*If the applicant is accepted for admission to the institution's special education program, the institution informs the Program of the decision and forwards documentation regarding the status of satisfaction of non-specialization requirements to the Program.* The candidate is notified that this step has occurred. The Program accepts the institution's decisions about satisfaction of the requirements for which it has responsibility.

*The application process for admission to the Program begins.* Although there is no set deadline for application to the Program, materials need to be reviewed by the Program by early in the calendar year when the two-year cycle of specialization courses begins so that the application can be processed and an admissions decision made before those courses begin. A complete application for the Program consists of the following documents.

1. A cover letter to the application presenting the reasons why the applicant would be a good candidate for the Collaborative Teacher Preparation Program in Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired. This includes a brief description of experiences with students

and others with disabilities, particularly those who are blind or visually impaired. Letters that contain spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors will negatively affect the evaluation of an application. The letter should be one to two pages, typewritten and single-spaced, in length.

2. A completed and signed Application Form.
3. A copy of the application for admission to the special education program at a university participating in the Program.
4. A complete set of official undergraduate and graduate transcripts as evidence of a completed bachelor's degree with a 2.75 grade point average (GPA). An applicant with a GPA lower than 2.75 must contact the Program Coordinator for assistance.
5. Photocopies of any teaching licenses held.
6. Three letters of reference addressing the applicant's skills or potential for working as a teacher of Minnesota students who are blind or visually impaired. These letters should preferably come from educators (e.g., special education directors, supervisors, principals, or other administrators) or other professionals familiar with the applicant and his or her teaching or work.
7. A signed form allowing the Program to share with the applicant's institution information from the applicant's application materials, as well as Program progress materials if the applicant is accepted into the Program, including information about professional concerns, should they arise.

Whenever appropriate, the Program will use the applicant's institution application materials to satisfy application requirements for the Program, informing the applicant of any additional materials that are needed. The Program's Governance Committee reviews only complete applications.

*The Program Board makes its own admission decision regarding the applicant's application.*

The decision considers only admission to the Collaborative Teacher Preparation Program in Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired. The Program Board asks the Advisory Board to review application materials as needed. If there is a conflict of interest between a Program Board or Advisory Board member and an applicant, the Board member excuses him- or herself from the application review or decision process.

*If the applicant is accepted for admission to the Program, a document for the Program identifies and documents the requirements for which it has responsibility that are satisfied and the means by which they are satisfied as well as the requirements not yet satisfied and a plan for completing them.* These are the licensure requirements pertaining to the Teachers of Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired Subject Matter Standards. The Program Board determines whether any of the candidate's prior academic preparation and/or teaching experiences can be credited toward satisfying these Standards, drawing on the Advisory Board for review of the materials as needed. If there is a conflict of interest between a Program Board or Advisory Board member and an applicant, the Board member excuses him- or herself from the academic preparation and/or teaching experience review or decision process. (For a more complete description of this process, see Evaluation and Crediting of Candidates' Academic Preparation and/or Teaching Experiences Towards Licensure Standards in Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired on page 8.)

*An applicant who is denied admission may pursue an appeal of that decision. The appeal process used is the one in place for the special education program at the institution to which the applicant has been admitted. The Program Board agrees to accept the decision that results from the institutional appeal process.*

*The Program informs the institution of its decision regarding the applicant's admission to the Program. In the case of successful applications, the Program sends the institution its document regarding satisfaction of the Subject Matter Standards. The institution accepts the Program Board's decisions about satisfaction of these Standards. If the applicant needs to complete courses to satisfy Standards of Effective Practice and the Core Skills for Teachers of Special Education requirements, the Program and the institution jointly determine which courses must be completed prior to which specialization courses. For both successful and unsuccessful applicants to the Program, application materials are sent to the special education program at the institution to which he or she has been accepted as part of the individual's records there.*

#### Program Maintenance Requirements and Process

After a candidate is admitted and begins coursework, the following requirements and procedures are used to monitor satisfactory progress through the Program.

*The candidate satisfies any maintenance requirements of the university special education program to which he or she has been admitted.*

*The candidate satisfies the Program's maintenance requirements. These include:*

1. Maintenance of a 2.75 GPA in visual impairments specialization coursework.
2. Satisfactory performance in field experiences associated with visual impairments specialization coursework.
3. Progress in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be a teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired, as documented in a portfolio containing evidence from coursework and experiences.

Instructors provide students' course completion information to the Program Board via the Program Coordinator.

*Course instructors inform the Program Board about candidates for whom they have concerns. Concerns are conveyed by instructors during or at the end of a course. The Program Board's representative from the institution offering the course is made aware of the situation so that the institution's policies and procedures in such situations are followed. The Program Board also notifies the candidate's institution of the concern that has been expressed.*

*The Program Board and the university review the candidate's progress each term in a timely way and inform the candidate of the results of that review. If the candidate's progress becomes unsatisfactory, the Program Board and the university work with the candidate to develop a Professional Development Plan to remedy the situation. The candidate or the Program Board may initiate a Plan.*

*A candidate may pursue an appeal of the Program Board's decision about program progress.* The appeal process used is the one in place for the special education program at the institution to which the applicant has been admitted. The Program Board agrees to accept the decision that results from the institutional appeal process.

#### Final Practicum Requirements and Determination Process

Three factors determine the precise requirements that candidates must satisfy for their final practicum.

First, the BOT requires that "a teacher of special education: blind or visually impaired applies the standards of effective practice in teaching students who are blind or visually impaired through a variety of early and ongoing clinical experiences with prekindergarten, kindergarten or primary, intermediate or middle level, and high school students across a range of service delivery models" (Minnesota Rule 8710.5100, Subpart 3E).

Second, the Program expects its candidates to have clinical experiences with a wide range of students who are blind and students who are visually impaired and their resulting, differing educational needs.

And third, candidates come to the Program with different teaching backgrounds. For some, licensure in Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired will be an additional special education teaching license, for others this will be their first special education teaching license, and for the rest this will be their initial teaching license. From the first situation described to the second, and from the second to the third, there will be increasing practicum requirements for candidates in order for the Program to determine that they are well-prepared to fulfill the duties and responsibilities normally assigned to a special education teacher for students who are blind or visually impaired.

The Program's Governance Committee reviews a candidate's situation relative to these three factors to determine the length and placements for the final practicum, as well as any modifications, alterations, or adaptations to the standard set of final practicum requirements in order that the candidate may best satisfy the state's Teachers of Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired Subject Matter Standards.

The Committee also works with the candidate's institution of higher education to determine what, if any, additional requirements must be satisfied through the final practicum to address institutional requirements. Additional requirements are likely for candidates seeking their initial teaching license or their first special education teaching license.

The exact set of requirements for a candidate will be specified before the final practicum begins using the following process.

1. The Program Board conducts individual reviews to determine that all visual impairment specialization courses and any other non-specializations requirements (e.g., Standards of Effective Practice and Core Skills for Teachers of Special Education coursework) are

satisfactorily completed. When determined appropriate by the Program Board, a timeline plan may be established for any requirement not completed by the time the final practicum begins.

2. The candidate completes and submits a written pre-practicum questionnaire summary and/or participates in a pre-practicum interview conducted by a member of the Governance Committee to summarize the candidate's pre-practicum experience status in relation to the state's Teachers of Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired Subject Matter Standards.
3. Using the candidate's written pre-practicum questionnaire summary and/or the summary of a pre-practicum interview, the Advisory Board uses the following general guidelines to determine each candidate's practicum time requirements.
  - An experienced special education teacher will complete a minimum of 240 hours of practicum experiences with students who are blind or visually impaired. At least 50% or 120 hours of the practicum experience must be spent in full-time placement during the school year or the summer.
  - A teacher who holds a regular but not a special education teaching license will complete approximately 400-450 hours of practicum experiences with students who are blind or visually impaired (ten to eleven 40-hour weeks). The actual amount may be more or less and will be determined by the Program's Governance Committee. At least 120 hours must be spent in full-time placement during the school year or the summer.
  - A candidate who does not hold a teaching license will complete a semester of full-time student teaching with students who are blind or visually impaired, representing 600 practicum hours (fifteen 40-hour weeks), to occur in a minimum of two different placements.

For all three, practicum hours must include a minimum of 50% of hours in direct service, a minimum of 30% of hours in indirect service, and 20% of hours in either direct or indirect service as determined necessary to meet the needs of the students that are served during the practicum. Direct service is defined as time spent in direct instruction of or other direct service to students who are blind or visually impaired. Indirect service is defined as time spent engaging in other professional duties, such as consulting with professionals and parents, observing other professionals teach lessons, planning lessons, attending meetings, and preparing adapted materials.

4. The Governance Committee and the Program's university supervisor for the practicum review the candidate's submitted materials to determine practicum placements and activities required, based on the candidate's previous teaching and related experiences prior to and during the Program.

## Program Completion Process and Requirements

As the candidate nears completion of the Program, the following process and requirements are addressed.

*The candidate's institution determines whether all of the components necessary for licensure in Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired for which it had responsibility have been satisfied.* That decision is conveyed in writing to the Program Board, along with a statement as to whether they would recommend the candidate for licensure based upon the satisfaction of these requirements. An institutional recommendation for the candidate is a necessary but not solely sufficient requirement for a licensure recommendation by the Program Board. There may be additional requirements the candidate needs to satisfy in order to complete programs in addition to this licensure. Information and progress about those matters are not shared with the Program Board and do not affect a decision about completion of the Program.

*The Program Board determines whether all of the requirements necessary for licensure in Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired for which it had responsibility have been satisfied.* These requirements consist of:

1. Completion of all necessary coursework as documented by transcripts and a statement from the candidate's university.
2. Maintenance of a 2.75 GPA in visual impairments specialization coursework.
3. Satisfactory completion of the candidate's final practicum (student teaching).
4. Satisfactory completion of the candidate's Professional Development Plan, if one is initiated.
5. Praxis II--Principles of Learning and Teaching (PLT) passed.
6. Praxis II--Special Education test (20353) passed.

The licensure recommendation decision is conveyed in writing to the candidate's institution.

*A candidate may pursue an appeal of the Program Board's decision about program completion.* The appeal process used is the one in place for the special education program at the institution to which the applicant has been admitted. The Program Board agrees to accept the decision that results from the institutional appeal process.

*With program completion verified by the student's university and the Program, the designated authorized representative of the student's university signs off on a successful candidate's application for Minnesota licensure in Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired.*

*Upon completion of the Program, any materials relating to the candidate that are in the possession of the Governance Committee are either returned to the candidate or sent to the candidate's institution.*

## EVALUATION AND CREDITING OF CANDIDATES' ACADEMIC PREPARATION AND/OR TEACHING EXPERIENCES TOWARDS LICENSURE STANDARDS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

In implementing the Minnesota Collaborative Teacher Preparation Program in Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired, the licensure standards for Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired are divided into two separate sets of standards as different partners in the Program have the expertise, and thus the responsibility, for evaluating and crediting candidates' academic preparation and/or teaching experiences. These processes are described to candidates in the Policies and Procedures of the Program, a copy of which is included when application materials are requested.

The institutions of higher education with approved special education licensure programs that are participants in the Program are responsible for evaluating and crediting as appropriate candidates' preparation and/or teaching experiences for the licensure standards that do not involve specialized knowledge and skills in blindness and visual impairments. Such standards include the Standards of Effective Practice, the Core Skills for Teachers of Special Education, and any others that are in effect during the life of the Program. Each institution uses its process that has been approved by the Board of Teaching. The results of the evaluation and crediting process are conveyed to the Program Board in a document that identifies which non-specialization licensure requirements are satisfied and the means by which they are satisfied as well as the requirements not yet satisfied and the plan for completing them. In addition, the collaborating university determines whether or not the candidate has achieved passing scores on the Praxis I – Basic Skills in Reading, Writing and Mathematics tests.

The Program Board is responsible for evaluating and crediting as appropriate a candidate's preparation and/or teaching experiences for the Teachers of Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired Subject Matter Standards, drawing on the Advisory Board for review of the materials as needed. In the application to the Program, a candidate will provide transcripts of undergraduate and graduate course work and descriptions of educational employment and particularly of employment experiences working with individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The members of the Governance Committee with expertise in visual impairments review, in the case of Advisory Board members, and evaluate, in the case of Program Board members, this information to determine if the candidate has adequately satisfied any Program requirements.

In reviewing and evaluating course work, Governance Committee members considers information such as the course title and content, the institution that offered the course, when the candidate took the course and the candidate's performance in the course to determine both how well the course matches with the Program's courses and how well the candidate performed in the course. Additional information may be requested from the candidate, such as a copy of the course syllabus, the candidate's assignments from the course, and/or evidence from the candidate's experiences to show competency in the skills targeted by the course.

In reviewing and evaluating the candidate's teaching experiences, Governance Committee members considers information such as the number of years of teaching experience and the

nature of the role and responsibilities in those experiences. Additional information may be requested from the candidate, such as teaching evaluations or evidence from the candidate's experiences to show competency in skills targeted by specific courses and/or the Program as a whole.

The Program Board uses the results of its course and experience evaluation process to develop a document for the Program that identifies Teachers of Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired Subject Matter Standards that are satisfied, the means by which they are satisfied, the requirements not yet satisfied, and the plan for completing them. That document will be conveyed to the candidate and the candidate's institution.

## PROGRAM ASSESSMENT OF ATTAINMENT OF LICENSURE STANDARDS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

The following lists the decision points in The Minnesota Collaborative Teacher Preparation Program in Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired where a candidate's knowledge, skills, and dispositions are reviewed, in the case of actions by Advisory Board members, and evaluated, in the case of actions by Program Board members, as well as the methods and information used to assess them.

1. Admission to the special education program of a participating university
  - a. Institutional review of application materials
2. Admission to the Program in Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired
  - a. Program review of application materials
    - i. Cover letter
    - ii. Application form
    - iii. Transcripts verifying 2.75 GPA
    - iv. Review of three letters of recommendation
3. Progress in the Program
  - a. Institutional review that maintenance requirements of the candidate's special education program are satisfied, including passing scores on the Praxis I – Basic Skills in Reading, Writing and Mathematics tests
  - b. Program review that visual impairments maintenance requirements are satisfied
    - i. 2.75 GPA in visual impairments specialization coursework
    - ii. Satisfactory performance in field experiences associated with visual impairments specialization coursework
    - iii. Progress in acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions as documented in a portfolio containing evidence from coursework and experiences
  - c. Program review of concerns expressed by course instructors
  - d. Program review of progress on Professional Development Plan, if initiated
4. Program completion and recommendation for Special Education: Blind or Visually Impaired licensure
  - a. Institutional review that special education program requirements are satisfied
  - b. Program review that visual impairments specialization requirements are satisfied
    - i. Satisfactory completion of all necessary coursework as documented by transcripts and a statement from the candidate's institution
    - ii. 2.75 GPA in visual impairments specialization coursework
    - iii. Satisfactory completion of the candidate's final practicum
    - iv. Satisfactory completion of the candidate's Professional Development Plan, if initiated
    - v. Praxis II--Principles of Learning and Teaching (PLT) passed
    - vi. Praxis II--Special Education test (20353) passed