



Fitness to Teach Policy

Preamble

“A certified educator holds a unique position of public trust with almost unparalleled access to the hearts and minds of impressionable students. The conduct of an educator must be held to the highest standard.” (19 TAC §249.5 (b)(1)).

“Educators have positions of authority, have extensive access to students when no other adults (or even other students, in some cases) are present, and have access to confidential information that could provide a unique opportunity to exploit student vulnerabilities. Educators must clearly understand the boundaries of the educator-student relationship that they are trusted not to cross.” (19 TAC §249.5 (b)(2)(F)).

“The University of Texas at San Antonio is committed to admitting and retaining students who meet the highest professional expectations of the professions they wish to enter.” (HOP 5.17 Student Fitness for Professional Practice).

The Fitness to Teach Policy stands on a foundation of national standards, state regulations, and university standards and polices. For a fuller understanding of Fitness to Teach, review the [Educators’ Code of Ethics](#), the [NASDTEC Model Code of Ethics for Educators](#), the [UTSA Student Code of Conduct](#), and [UTSA’s Student Fitness for Professional Practice](#) policy in Appendices A-D.

Fitness to Teach

The COEHD offers a curriculum designed to academically prepare individuals for the teaching profession. However, satisfying the curriculum and testing requirements alone does not make a candidate worthy for The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) to recommend the candidate to the State of Texas for teaching certification. All teacher candidates in the UTSA Educator Preparation Program (EPP) will have passed a criminal history background check prior to enrolling in the teacher certification program and are expected to demonstrate that they are prepared to teach children and youth throughout the remainder of the EPP. See [Criminal History Policy](#). This preparation results from the combination of successful completion of university coursework and the demonstration of important human characteristics and dispositions that all teachers should possess.

A. Definitions

1. Teacher candidate: A person who has been formally admitted to the UTSA Teacher Certification Program. Candidates are admitted to the Teacher Certification Program when they sign the Acknowledgement of Admission form and the Interdisciplinary Education (IDED) Advising Center receives the Acknowledgement of Admission form. The Certification Officer maintains the official list of persons admitted to the Teacher Certification Program in the TEA ECOS System.
2. Fieldwork: Coursework and exposure to school environments as described in Section 4 of this manual, and related catalog and course syllabi.
3. Preclinical teaching – Level I, II, and III field experiences as described in the [Tiered Experience](#) table.
4. Clinical teaching: Coursework and practice teaching in school environments as described in [Section 5](#) of this manual, and related catalog and course syllabi.

B. Professional Conduct Expectations

1. Each UTSA teacher candidate is subject to the Texas Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Educators, found at 19 TAC §247.1 and § 247.2. The Educators' Code of Ethics is found in [Appendix B](#) of this document. The Texas Educators' Code of Ethics applies "to educators and candidates for certification" (19 TAC §247.1 (b)).
2. Each UTSA teacher candidate is also expected to follow the tenets of the Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE), passed in 2015 by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC). This professional code of ethics is not only a guide to expected conduct of educators, but also serves as a guide to assist the UTSA teacher candidate in making ethical decisions in the best interests of the students, profession, and the community at large. The MCEE is found in [Appendix C](#) of this document.
3. Each UTSA teacher candidate is also subject to the following internal UTSA expectations for professional conduct:

1. Academic Requirements

1. Attends all classes as required. Preparedness for class and punctuality are expected at all times.
2. Completes course assignments in a professional manner according to the timelines designated by the course instructor.
3. Completes and documents all field experiences in a professional and timely manner as required.
4. Demonstrates honesty and integrity by being truthful about background, experiences, and qualifications; doing one's own work; giving credit for the ideas of others; and providing proper citation of source materials. Refer to the [UTSA Academic Honesty Policy](#).
5. Demonstrates written and oral communication skills expected of an education professional that shows the ability to comprehend information and communicate ideas and feelings.
 - (1) Written: Writes clearly, uses academic grammar and spelling. Demonstrates professional level skills in written English to understand content presented in the program and to adequately complete all written assignments, as specified by faculty.
 - (2) Oral: Communicates effectively with other students, faculty, staff, and professionals. Expresses ideas and feelings clearly and demonstrates a willingness and an ability to listen to others. Demonstrates professional level skills in spoken English to understand content presented in the program, to adequately complete all oral assignments, and to meet the objectives of field placement experiences, as specified by TAC 230.11. Bilingual education candidates must also demonstrate proficiency in Spanish.
 - (3) Electronic: Uses available electronic tools proficiently to facilitate appropriate and professional communication. Refrains from inappropriate electronic communication with K-12 students including, but not limited to, electronic communications by cell phone, text messaging, email, instant messaging, blogging, or other social network electronic communication.

2. Personal and Professional Requirements

1. Protects confidential information concerning K-12 students or colleagues unless disclosure serves professional purposes or is required by law.
2. Demonstrates interpersonal skills that are required for successful professional teaching. These skills include:
 - (1) an openness to accepting and testing the results of unfamiliar ways of teaching;
 - (2) the ability to accept and act upon reasonable criticism and constructive feedback;
 - (3) the ability to understand others' perspectives about teaching;
 - (4) the ability to separate personal and professional issues when in the classroom or completing course work;

- (5) the ability to work collegially with parents, teachers, staff, and administrators in school settings and elsewhere;
 - (6) the ability to work collegially and productively with classmates in course assigned group projects
 - (7) the disposition to act always for the benefit of all students.
3. Does not sexually harass others; make verbal or physical threats; become involved in sexual relationships with students, supervisors, or faculty; abuse others in physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual ways.
 4. Maintains appropriate personal hygiene habits.
 5. Dresses appropriately in professional contexts.
 6. Behaves professionally both in and out of the classroom or school setting, including social media sites.
 7. Is morally fit and worthy to instruct or supervise the youth of this state.
 8. Has not been convicted of certain offenses that directly relate to the duties and responsibilities of the licensed occupations or other offenses less than five years before the date the person applies for the license. See Texas Occupation Code, Chapter 53, Sections 53.001 through 53.105: <http://www.texas-statutes.com/occupations-code/chapter-53-consequences-of-criminal-conviction>.
3. Cultural and Social Attitudes and Behavior
 1. Respects superiors, peers, families, community members, children and youth in all settings.
 2. Understands and appreciates the value of diversity and looks beyond self in interactions with others; respects differences of race, ethnicity, religion, and social class, national allegiance, and cultural heritage. Teacher candidate does not impose personal, political, religious, sexual, and/or cultural values on others.
 3. Accepts and accommodates exceptional learners.
 4. Works productively with peers.
 5. Speaks in a manner appropriate to the classroom or other context.
 6. Displays positive attitudes toward faculty, colleagues, families, community members, and students;
 7. Demonstrates positive social skills in professional and social interactions with faculty, colleagues, parents, and students.
 4. Physical Skills
 1. Exhibits motor and sensory abilities to attend and participate in class and practicum placements, with or without accommodations as recommended by the Office of Disability Services.¹

¹ No otherwise qualified teacher candidate shall, on the basis of disability, be subjected to discrimination or excluded from participation in the EPP. A teacher candidate with a disability may be protected by Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act and be eligible for a reasonable accommodation that will provide an equal opportunity to meet the academic criteria related to professional behavior and scholastic performance.

Any otherwise qualified teacher candidate with a qualified disability who requests a reasonable accommodation must notify the Office of Disability Services and provide documentation as needed. The Office of Disability Services

5. Emotional Dispositions
 - a. Stress Management - The teacher candidate demonstrates the ability to deal with current life stressors through the use of appropriate coping mechanisms. The candidate handles stress effectively by using appropriate self-care and developing supportive relationships with colleagues, peers, and others.
 - b. Emotional and Mental Capabilities
 - (1) Uses sound judgment.
 - (2) Demonstrates the emotional and mental health required to function effectively as a teacher.
 - c. Cognitive Dispositions
 - a) Thinks analytically about educational issues.
 - b) Reflects on their practice.
 - c) Is flexible, open to new ideas, and willing and able to modify beliefs and practices.
 - d) Questions and tests assumptions about teaching and schooling.
4. Each teacher candidate remains subject to the [UTSA Student Code of Conduct](#), which is found in [Appendix D](#) of this document.
5. Each teacher candidate is subject to the policies of the local school district at which the candidate engages in field observations, preclinical teaching, or clinical teaching.

C. Admission to the Educator Preparation Program at UTSA

Prior to admission to the EPP, all teacher candidates will be apprised of the Fitness to Teach (FTT) policy. This policy applies to all students upon admission to or enrollment in the EPP, whichever occurs first, and to students completing coursework in the COEHD that requires interaction with schools, and remains so until completion of their program.

1. Students must be in good standing with the UTSA.
 - a. Students seeking admission to the Undergraduate Educator Preparation Program (EPP) who have at any time been previously referred to UTSA's [Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards](#) ("SCCS") may have those referrals and the outcomes of those referrals considered by the Associate Dean of Professional Preparation and Partnerships (ADPPP) in determining whether to grant admission to the Program. Admission is at the discretion of the ADPPP.
 - b. Students requesting admission to the EPP who have cases pending with the SCCS will not be admitted until the SCCS case has been fully adjudicated.
2. Students must have passed an initial Criminal Background Check or have had their criminal history evaluated by the Texas Education Agency. See

makes recommendations for accommodations. A COEHD ad hoc committee will review academic performance criteria in light of individual circumstances to explore issues of appropriate accommodation. An initial assessment, subsequent plans, use of outside experts (including the Office of Disability Services), and periodic checks between the committee and the teacher candidate are appropriate courses of action in making accommodations.

<https://tea.texas.gov/texas-educators/investigations/national-criminal-history-checks-faqs>.

After the IDED Advising Center has reviewed an application and the supporting documents, they will send the applicant an Acknowledgement of Admission form. Applicants will be required to sign the Acknowledgment of Admission form which will be emailed to their preferred email address. Once the IDED Advising Center receives the acknowledgement form, the student will be admitted to the program. The Certification Officer maintains the official list of persons admitted to the program in TEA's Educator Certification Online System.

D. Conditions for Completion of Student Teaching/Internship

Successful completion of student teaching/internship is a condition for meeting teacher certification requirements. Students may attempt student teaching/internship a maximum of two times. If the student does not successfully complete the second clinical teaching experience, they will not be eligible to enroll in clinical teaching a third time. The student may appeal to the Fitness to Teach Council to be reinstated only in the case of documented extenuating circumstances.

E. Review of Teacher Candidates at UTSA

All teacher candidates referred for review are expected to participate in the process. Refusal to participate will not terminate the process and may result in dismissal from the EPP. The level of review will depend on factors such as the nature, severity, frequency of the incident or concern. For example, repeated violations may result in immediate Formal Level 2 review. Alleged violations of the UTSA student code of conduct or the host school district's employee code of conduct will result in immediate Level 2 Formal Review.

1. Ongoing Review

In addition to curriculum and testing requirements addressed in the UTSA catalog and other UTSA policies, all teacher candidates will be screened throughout their program according to the criteria addressed in this policy, including dispositions for teaching. Dispositions for teaching are defined as those professional attitudes, values, and beliefs expected of an education professional contained in this document. As a professional program, the COEHD reserves the right to recommend or not recommend teacher candidates for certification. If all criteria are not met satisfactorily, teacher candidates may be denied the clinical teaching opportunity. Without acceptance into the EPP and successful completion of all course work, field work, and clinical teaching or its equivalent, the university cannot recommend teacher candidates for Texas Teacher Certification. All teacher candidates referred for review are expected to participate in the process. Refusal to participate will not terminate or invalidate the process and may result in dismissal from the EPP. Fitness to Teach reviews are internal institutional reviews and are not open to the public, including family members, friends, and other professionals unless specifically requested by the ADPPP.

- a. In October and March a reminder will be sent to faculty to use the [Referral Forms](#) for identification of [Outstanding Teacher Candidates](#) or the Faculty Concerns Regarding Fitness to Teach. Faculty and partner school district representatives may submit the referral forms at any time prior to or during the professional level courses.
- b. The completion of these forms will allow the COEHD to identify teacher candidates who display outstanding knowledge and/or skills that deserve recognition and identify those who may have some difficulties that raise concerns about the candidate's ability to successfully complete the program. All forms completed will be sent to the ADPPP.
- c. Completed Criminal History Review. In accordance with Texas Education Code § 22.083, an examination of each teacher candidate's criminal history will be conducted by the independent school district (ISD) prior to the candidate's participation in field-based course work, including preclinical or clinical teaching. Criminal history record information, which includes both conviction and arrest records, is obtained. An ISD or other school field-based entity may deny placement of teacher candidates based on the results of the criminal history review. In certain cases, information discovered in the candidate's criminal history record information may require the cooperating school district or UTSA to report this information to the State Board for Educator Certification (see 19 TAC §249.14) for investigation. The teacher candidate's clearance for fieldwork is the prerogative of the ISD or participating entity and not UTSA. If a teacher candidate is unable to obtain a field-based placement, he/she will not meet UTSA's requirements for recommendation for teacher certification. If a teacher candidate cannot complete course-required field work because of their criminal history, the teacher candidate will be required to withdraw from the course and/or the EPP. The teacher candidate may retake the course if and when the criminal history changes, allowing them to be cleared by the school district. If the offense is one that will preclude any further field work, the teacher candidate will be dismissed from the teacher education program. Generally, the ADPPP will work with advising in these cases. See 19 TAC § 227 regarding the preliminary evaluation of certification eligibility.

2. Informal Review

An informal review involves a faculty member, and/or a partner school district representative (e.g. mentor teacher, campus administrator, central office field experience/clinical teaching coordinator-liaison), and a teacher candidate. When a faculty member and/or a partner school district representative has concerns about a teacher candidate meeting any of the Fitness to Teach criteria, the faculty member and/or partner school district representative will:

- a. discuss the concerns directly with the teacher candidate and seek to work with the candidate to resolve the difficulties;
- b. advise the appropriate department head and the ADPPP or ADPPP's designee of the concern(s) in order to identify potential patterns and issues related to the teacher candidate;
- c. document dates and content of meetings with teacher candidates;
- d. Submit documentation to the ADPPP or ADPPP's designee.

If a problem arises in the field, the mentor/cooperating teacher or administrator of the host school district may discuss concerns directly with the UTSA faculty member or appropriate staff. The teacher candidate may also be included in this meeting.

3. Formal Review: Level 1

When a faculty member and/or a partner school district representative is sufficiently concerned about a teacher candidate's fitness to teach, he or she will fill out the Fitness to Teach Formal Review Level 1 form. These forms are to be turned in to the ADPPP or ADPPP's designee.

A three-way conference will then be scheduled with the instructor and/or a partner school district representative, the teacher candidate, and the ADPPP or ADPPP's designee. At this conference, the teacher candidate will be given the opportunity to respond to the concerns raised. During this conference, a plan for remediation will be developed. The nature and content of the plan will depend on the specific situation. However, all remediation plans will be stated in measurable, objective terms, include a reasonable timeline, and be signed by all parties involved. If the candidate fails the remediation plan(s) candidate will be placed on Level 2 Formal Review. If the candidate successfully completes the remediation plan, he/she will continue in the EPP. The remediation plan may continue for more than one semester, depending on the individual circumstances.

4. Formal Review: Level 2

If a second incident or concern is reported on the same teacher candidate, the candidate has failed a remediation plan during the Level 1 Review, or the seriousness of the incident or concern warrant it, the Fitness to Teach Council will be convened. This group (made up of faculty and chaired by the ADPPP or ADPPP's designee) will meet to:

- a. review the paperwork,
- b. interview the faculty member(s) and/or a partner school district representative who have instructed the teacher candidate,
- c. interview the teacher candidate, and
- d. determine the teacher candidate's suitability to continue in the program.

The teacher candidate is afforded due process, including an opportunity to respond to any concerns, incidents, or allegations of misconduct, throughout each of these proceedings. The Fitness to Teach Council may seek information from school district partners should the concern, incident, or allegation of misconduct be related to the performance of the teacher candidate in preclinical or clinical teaching. Following a Level 2 review and determination, the teacher candidate may submit a letter of appeal to the Dean of the COEHD for consideration. The Dean's decision is final.