

**Texas Education Agency Division of Educator Standards  
Post Approval Site Visit  
Education Service Center 20  
San Antonio, Texas  
February 19-20, 2009**

**Visit Conducted by TEA Staff: Glendelia Zavala, Manager and  
Mixon Henry, Program Specialist**

**Texas Administrative Code (TAC) § 228.10 (b) Educator Preparation Program  
Approval Process**

**Background**

Education Service Center (ESC) Region 20, Teacher Orientation & Preparation Program (TOPP) is located in San Antonio, Texas. TOPP serves approximately 50 districts in 15 counties in central Texas. ESC Region 20 began their alternative certification program in 1986. TOPP has assisted over 2,500 educators earn a standard certificate in over 50 certification fields over the last nine years.

Prior to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) visit, Education Service Center 20 TOPP submitted a self-report which addressed all required components. Their current accreditation status in the state Accountability System for Educator Preparation Programs (ASEP) is “accredited.”

The opening session of the post approval site visit was held on February 19, 2009. There were 19 participants, primarily members of the ESC Region 20 TOPP program and the Advisory Committee. John Gutierrez, the ESC Region 20 TOPP Program Director, welcomed the attendees and requested everyone in attendance to introduce themselves and share their role in the program. John Gutierrez gave a brief overview of the program.

TEA Program Specialist Mixon Henry and Manager, Glendelia Zavala, provided a framework for the visit by discussing the proposed two-day agenda format and rules compliance. At the end of the two-day visit, Mr. Gutierrez and staff met with the TEA team for a clarification meeting in order to allow everyone to ask and answer questions regarding aspects of the visit, including items on the Self-Report and information gathered during interviews. Finally, the closing session was led by the TEA team, who provided an oral briefing to share the findings, commendations, and recommendations.

**Number and Roles of People Interviewed:**

A total of twenty-one (21) people were interviewed. At the ESC Region 20 site or at campuses there were four (4) advisory committee members, one (1) program staff, one (1) field supervisor, three (3) principals, four (4) mentors, and eight (8) interns interviewed.

## **I. Entity Commitment and Collaboration**

### **TAC §228.20**

### **Governance of Educator Preparation Programs**

#### **Findings:**

The ESC Region 20 TOPP Advisory Committee is comprised of 18 members. The committee included members from higher education, Education Service Center and local school district administration. Membership was primarily focused on Human Resource Departments from school districts. The Advisory Committee did not consist of the required membership, as per Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Chapter 228.20(b), but a good faith effort has been documented for the omitted members who would represent the business/community. The Board meets twice yearly to review the results of evaluations and to recommend changes as needed. Severe weather has interfered with consistent meetings, but agenda do indicate twice yearly meetings with topics for membership discussions.

Interviews with members of the Advisory Committee revealed that the “quality of the training and well prepared candidates made placement easy”. It was also stated that TAC rules and guidelines were “communicated to districts, so compliance was not an issue”. Communication between district and TOPP was an ongoing collaboration and partnership.

TOPP recruiting efforts include job fairs and advertisements, but word-of-mouth was the most influential factor when interviewing interns. It was clear that the job fairs, with district HR departments in attendance, helped with placement. Referrals from friends and family drew a large segment of the candidates to the program. One intern stated that “My sister came to the program and was successful, so I thought it would work for me. I am very pleased with the program and would tell anyone about it.”

**ESC Region 20 TOPP is in compliance with Texas Administrative Code §228.20.**

#### **Commendations:**

The strong focus on including Human Resource members in the Advisory Committee helped in the placement of interns. It is clear that this relationship is mutually beneficial; placement is easier for interns and the districts have an opportunity to review interns and select individuals that fit their criteria.

## **II. Admission Criteria**

### **Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §227.10 Admission Criteria**

#### **Findings:**

TOPP’s criterion for admissions has many components. All of the requirements are well defined and available on the ESC Region 20 website. The application is completed online and requires the submission of official transcripts, a completed criminal history release form, and admission fees. Candidates must have a conferred bachelor’s degree from an accredited university. A minimum overall grade point average (GPA) of 2.6 on a 4.0 scale is required. One of three options is allowed to demonstrate basic skills. Candidates can use the Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA), PRAXIS or a Master’s degree from an accredited university. The candidate must also submit a writing sample, which is scored with a rubric that was developed by program staff.

If a candidate is a graduate from a university outside the United States, the previously stated criteria must be met as well as two additional components. University transcripts must be evaluated by an approved evaluating service and the candidate's English proficiency must be demonstrated with a passing score on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

### **ESC Region 20 is in compliance with TAC §227.10**

#### **Commendations:**

ESC Region 20 TOPP's requirement of 2.6 verses the minimum of 2.5 enhances the opportunity of success of the educator.

The requirement of the THEA or Praxis or a Masters degree to demonstrate basic skills reinforces the desire for strong academic candidates.

Interviewing of candidates allows the program to eliminate individuals that may not be appropriate for the classroom or their program.

Criminal background checks upon entering the program assures schools that ESC Region 20 is concerned for the safety of the students.

### **III. Curriculum**

#### **Texas Administrative Code §228.30 Educator Preparation Curriculum**

#### **Findings:**

TOPP meets and exceeded the clock hour requirement in TAC. The program's curriculum is divided into three phases.

**Phase I - Content Preparation Training.** This phase lasts 12-13 weeks and covers 117 – 141 clock hours. Educators are grouped according to content and grade level. The focus of the first phase of training is to pass the TExES content test. Educators are able to add online Special Education training during this cycle.

**Phase II - Pre-Employment Training.** This phase consists of two-week face to face training during the summer. The total training is 60 clock hours. In both Phases I and II content training is offered, but the main focus of the second phase is preparation for the internship. Classroom management and research based instructional techniques are the focus of this phase. Educators are required to pass the content test prior to entering Phase III. If an educator has difficulty with the content tests (two unsuccessful attempts), a content specialist is assigned to the educator to address specific area where remediation is needed. ESC Region 20 provides 12 clock hours of test preparation during the two phases.

**Phase III - Employment Training.** This phase consists of 75 clock hours and book studies (90 clock hours). These sessions are face-to-face classes that meet once a month on a Saturday. The total clock hours for completion of the curriculum section of the program ranges from 309-366 clock hours.

There are specific training courses that are incorporated into the TOPP curriculum. Topics include poverty, gangs, ESL (English as Second Language), Special Education, Texas Code of Ethics, and how to assess difficult students. These are elements also included in the Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities (PPR) curriculum. There are also 28 clock hours dedicated to reading across content areas. The instruction will allow the educator to understand the need for reading skills and will emphasize ways to address reading across the curriculum. The book study assignment is an online activity with a minimum requirement of two book studies. For educators who focus on the Generalist EC-4 and/or 4-8 training for certification, both areas encompass EC-8 materials to better understand the curriculum and offer more opportunities for the educator. The success of the TOPP program implementation and training is evident by the pass rate of 99-100% over the last three years. An Intern revealed, "It (curriculum) was helpful in working with difficult students. It gave me options I would not have thought of on my own." And "structure the book studies differently; it did not apply (like the coursework), which I found very useful."

### **ESC Region 20 TOPP is in compliance with TAC §228.30.**

#### **Commendations:**

The TOPP program has already addressed teaching the Texas Code of Ethics and requires documents to be signed by educators. This reinforces that ethical behavior is important and expected as candidates move into the school environment.

The investment of 28 clock hours of reading across content areas emphasizes how important it is for candidates to have the tools to support struggling students.

The 12 clock hours of test preparation assists the candidate to be successful when taking certification examinations.

Specialists in content areas offer remediation for unsuccessful test takers by assisting them one-on-one.

## **IV. Program Delivery and Evaluation**

### **Texas Administrative Code §228.35 Preparation Program Coursework and/or Training Texas Administrative Code 228.40 Assessments and Evaluation of Candidates for Certification and Program Improvement**

#### **Findings**

After the candidate is enrolled in the program, 30 clock hours of field experience is required. The field experience is closely monitored and documented by program staff. Following the field experience, candidates are asked to attend a debriefing session to reflect and discuss insights and overall impressions of their field experience.

The candidate must complete both Phases I and II prior to participating in an internship. This includes passing the specific content test. If an educator is unsuccessful in passing the content test, remediation is provided by the program. A content specialist is assigned to assist the candidate. In Phase III, the year long internship takes place. Additional coursework is incorporated to provide more information and prepare the candidate to take the PPR test. The

evening and weekend classes are conveniently arranged to assist the candidate. Online options are available for candidates who are located outside the Region 20 area.

The progress of each educator is documented and is kept in a secure manner. ESC Region 20 uses a Filemaker Pro database for electronic record keeping. This database tracks the following information: orientation date, attendance, book studies, training attendance, testing results, mentor training, field experience observation hours, recommendation for the probationary certificate, classroom observations conducted by field supervisors, mentors, and principals, final assessments by field supervisors.. If requested, information from the database is made available to districts and campus administrators. The database is easily accessible for staff and allows simple tracking progress of the candidate.

The TOPP candidate completes a variety of self-evaluations. Candidates are given the opportunity to provide feedback through completing an evaluation after each training session. The evaluations have 11 questions, with 2 questions being open-ended. The second evaluation is compiled by Stetson and Associates. Stetson and Associates are contracted by Consortium of Teacher Preparation and Certification Programs (made up of Education Service Centers throughout the state) to conduct extensive annual program evaluations. In 2007-2008, ESC Region 20 had their 14<sup>th</sup> annual evaluation. The evaluation surveys were given to the following participants: district Human Resource directors, interns, mentors, and campus principals. Data is analyzed to provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the program. ESC Region 20 TOPP reviews the data and shares the data with the Advisory Committee.

#### **ESC Region 20 is in compliance with TAC §228.40.**

#### **Commendations:**

The electronic data system implemented by ESC Region 20 is an easy assessable system that allows tracking of a candidate's progress from start to finish. It documents each step in the process and can be used to show strengths and identify needs of the candidate.

The self-evaluation system allows the program to gain data about their curriculum and the success of individual instructors. It gives candidates the opportunity to anonymously provide feedback on the program without repercussions. The Stetson surveys also provide additional information about the program.

#### **V. On-Going Support**

##### **Texas Administrative Code 228.35 (f) On-going Educator Program Support**

#### **Findings:**

The field supervisor's first contact with the intern is within a few weeks of the placement. Interviews with interns revealed "early September or the first couple of weeks into the school year" was a common response. The field supervisor is a part-time contractor with a Texas Teaching Certificate. The field supervisors are hired for a variety of tasks: TExES content training, facilitate book studies, conduct classroom observations. The instrument for conducting the observations is a modified PDAS. The ratio of field supervisor to intern is 1 to 3/4. The intern is observed for at least 45 minutes with immediate feedback and debriefing. The intern and campus administrator receive a copy of the observation document. Interviews indicated that communication between the campus administrator and field supervisor is continuous and strong. Campus administrators revealed that "communication and support was strength" and "great support group and open accessible lines of communication."

The mentor is selected by the campus administrator. The TOPP program requires two years teaching experience and must be in the same content area as the intern. Training for the mentor is provided by the TOPP program takes place on one or two Saturdays. The training is a version of TxBess with a focus on the program's expectations of the mentors. The responsibilities of the mentor are clearly defined in training and in the program handbook. A stipend is paid to the mentors by the TOPP program, but mentors were not clear of the exact amount ("400, 500, and 1200" were stipend figures given during interviews). Mentors conducted observations, review lesson plans, arranged cooperative lesson planning sessions, attended training, and provided written feedback. The communication between mentors and field supervisors was not as strong. Interviews revealed some mentors had spoken "3 or 4 times," had "no contact" or had "never spoken to her".

Communication with the intern takes place face-to-face, by phone, and email. Multiple observations are conducted by the mentor, field supervisor, and campus administrator. Oral and written feedback is provided to the intern after each observation. If an intern needs additional support to correct specific issues, a growth plan is created by the field supervisor and campus administrator. The field supervisor will arrange additional visits to support the intern. By program policy the district, as well as the program, must agree that the intern is prepared to be recommended for a standard certificate.

### **ESC Region 20 is in compliance with TAC §228.30.**

#### **Commendations:**

Mentor training helps prepare and set the expectations of their role with interns. The stipend paid by the program demonstrates the value placed on the mentor and their support for the intern.

The field supervisor to intern ratio is low. This allows the field supervisor to focus on a few interns and immediately address any issues.

#### **Overall Program Recommendations:**

Recommendations include:

- Add more diverse members (university, business, and community) to expand the collaborative efforts outside of school district personnel. A good faith effort was demonstrated by program, however it would be extremely beneficial to add additional members.
- With the Pre-admission Content Test (PACT) available, consider using the PACT to streamline the curriculum and instruction. It would allow the focus of the curriculum to be on the Pedagogy and Professional Responsibility (PPR) and the curriculum requirements in Chapter 228.
- Add more instruction for special populations; Special Ed., Bilingual, ESL and GT.
- Include instructional methods for different learning styles (those students that may not qualify for special education, but still need modifications).
- Implement a plan for increasing communication between field supervisors and mentors.