



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

BRIAN J. WHISTON
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

December 11, 2015

Dr. Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson, President
Michigan Association for Colleges of Teacher Education
Central Michigan University
426 EHS Building
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859

Dr. Pehrsson,

I am in receipt of the MACTE report on the assessment of Michigan pre-service teacher candidates, dated October 15, 2015.

Firstly, I would like to thank you and your colleagues at MACTE for the hours of dedicated work that have been put in reviewing three important issues and opportunities, as outlined in your report:

1. The use of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) as a measure that can be used to unify the P-20 education experience in Michigan;
2. The problems MACTE perceives in the existing Professional Readiness Examination (PRE); and
3. The recommendation MACTE forwards in replacing the PRE with a PRAXIS test to satisfy Michigan Compiled Laws (MCL) 380.1531, paragraph 14, stating that a basic skills examination must be passed before a teacher candidate is enrolled for student teaching.

As you know, the MDE strives to keep K-12 student achievement and well-being at the front-and-center of its mission, and at the vanguard of its operation. Toward this end, Michigan's K-12 teachers have the responsibility of supporting children's development toward learning standards embodied by the Michigan Merit Curriculum and the State Board of Education academic standards for the core content areas.

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Accordingly, the MDE feels that it is a reasonable expectation that K-12 teachers entering the profession demonstrate, at a minimum, mastery of the same learning standards toward which they will be preparing their students.

The MDE does not believe that any K-12 teacher should be required to know less than the equivalent of high-school career- and college-readiness content. This is true regardless of the content area(s) he or she teaches, the setting that he or she teaches in, the geographical location of his or her employing school, or any other factors.

As you know, the passing-score standards for the PRE had been set in October 2013 with a mind toward this goal. At that time, a rigorous basic skills assessment customized for prospective Michigan teacher candidates was designed, developed, and validated by Michigan K-12 teachers and teacher educators at our colleges and universities. The methodology used to validate the content of the PRE as appropriate for this purpose, as well as to set passing scores on the three sub-areas of reading, writing, and mathematics, met the best practices requirements set forth by the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education.¹

With the forthcoming first administration of the SAT in March 2016 for Michigan's high-school students, a new opportunity exists for a review of the career- and college-ready expectations for Michigan's future teacher candidates, who are among many of the students taking the SAT next spring. With that in mind, I was very interested in your recommendation that the SAT score of 1550 be seen as a "valid and reliable measure for admittance into Michigan educator preparation programs," especially since this measure is "beyond the recommended standards set by CAEP."²

I see this as positive direction to satisfying not only the requirements of the law, but also in ensuring that Michigan's educator preparation institutions (EPIS) join the MDE as critical allies in the goal to maintain appropriate standards of rigor for those who wish to become the next generation of Michigan's K-12 teachers—making this state a top ten state for education in ten years.

In addition, an assessment that aligns the P-20 experience may have the further benefit of reducing the amount of standardized testing that Michigan's students experience over the span of their education. As I am sure you are aware, this is a personal goal of mine.

¹ *The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* are a product of the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association and the National Council on Measurement in Education. Published collaboratively by the three organizations since 1966, it represents the gold standard in guidance on testing in the United States and in many other countries.

² MACTE Report, "Assessment of Michigan Pre-Service Teacher Candidates," October 15, 2015

To do this, then, we must first build on the work of the October 2013 committee by ensuring that we speak with one voice that an SAT score of 1550 represents an equivalently appropriate standard of rigor necessary to admit teacher candidates into preparation programs. At the MDE, we have not yet taken this step alone, as it must be done in partnership with our EPIs, as well as K-12 teachers across the state. I hope that you will now join me and my fellow MDE staff as we convene a new stakeholder group and review committee tasked with exactly this purpose.

As for the PRE and a PRAXIS test, I would caution that we ought not allow these questions to distract us in the meantime from the shared goal that lies ahead, should you agree with me that we are to undertake it. The reason I say this is twofold:

1. The PRE has been mindfully established as Michigan's examination of basic skills taken before student teaching along the widely-respected methods outlined above, and to discontinue its use before finding a viable alternative puts into jeopardy our reliability in providing high-quality examinations for our teacher candidates.
2. In September of 2016, the MDE intends to put out to bid a Request for Proposals (RFP) aimed at awarding a new contract for the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification (MTTC) program, with an award hopefully made by February 2017. Naming a PRAXIS test as an erstwhile alternative to the PRE, however, puts into jeopardy the closely rule-governed process of procurement under state guidelines, as the PRAXIS might thus be seen to other competing vendors as an "heir apparent" to the MTTC.

That said, I wish to make it clear that your work in reviewing the PRE and the question of a PRAXIS test as an alternative is well-received by me, as it represents the thoughtful work of those who care about teacher quality—and consequently, K-12 student achievement—as much as I do.

In closing, I thank you again for your report, and ask you once more to please join me and my staff as we consider ways to operationalize your first recommendation regarding the use of the SAT. I look forward to our upcoming discussion on these topics scheduled for December 18 and to working with you and the members of MACTE to meet the needs of our students.

Sincerely,



Brian J. Whiston
State Superintendent