Core Teaching Practices

Introduction

In pursuit of the Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) ongoing goal to maintain the high quality of Michigan's educators, new Clinical Experience Requirements and Core Practices for the preparation of Michigan teachers have been created to support the Top 10 in 10 Years Strategic Goal 3 to "develop, support, and sustain a high-quality, prepared, and collaborative education workforce" and the implementation of the revised certification structure. These requirements complement Michigan's teacher preparation standards to inform program development and continuous improvement efforts at Michigan's educator preparation institutions.

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has collaborated with a variety of stakeholders across Michigan's education community to revise the teacher certification structure, update teacher preparation standards, and define clinical experience requirements and to assure a quality teacher workforce emerges from these preparation programs ready to teach Michigan's PK-12 students.

Supporting the preparation experience is a set of 19 research-based Core Teaching Practices that teacher candidates are to develop, practice, and demonstrate appropriate mastery of within their clinical experiences, regardless of grade band or discipline area. Known as High-Leverage Practices, TeachingWorks identified these fundamental competencies that "are used constantly and are critical to helping students learn important content. The high-leverage practices are also central to supporting students' social and emotional development. These high-leverage practices are used across subject areas, grade levels, and contexts. They are 'high-leverage' not only because they matter to student learning but because they are basic for advancing skill in teaching."[1]

These requirements were created with the frame of prioritizing the needs of Michigan's current PK-12 students and producing a quality teacher workforce for Michigan's future students. They reflect current research indicating teacher candidates learn best through clearly and cohesively designed programs that situate teacher learning in the work environment of the PK-12 classroom and upon the expert practice of effective teachers.

On the following pages, the 19 Core Teaching Practices are identified and described.

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[1] TeachingWorks. (n.d.). High-leverage practices. Retrieved from http://www.teachingworks.org/work-of-teaching/high-leverage-practices

Core Teaching Practices

1. Leading a group discussion

2. Explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies

3. Eliciting and interpreting individual students' thinking

4. Diagnosing particular common patterns of student thinking and development in a subject-matter domain

5. Implementing norms and routines for classroom discourse and work

6. Coordinating and adjusting instruction during a lesson

7. Specifying and reinforcing productive student behavior

8. Implementing organizational routines

9. Setting up and managing small group work

10. Building respectful relationships with students

11. Talking about a student with parents or other caregivers

12. Learning about students' cultural, religious, family, intellectual, and personal experiences and resources for use in instruction

13. Setting long- and short-term learning goals for students

14. Designing single lessons and sequences of lessons

15. Checking student understanding during and at the conclusion of lessons

16. Selecting and designing formal assessments of student learning

17. Interpreting the results of student work, including routine assignments, quizzes, tests, projects, and standardized assessments

18. Providing oral and written feedback to students

19. Analyzing instruction for the purpose of improving it

Core Teaching Practices[2]

1. Leading a group discussion

In a group discussion, the teacher and all of the students work on specific content together, using one another's ideas as resources. The purposes of a discussion are to build collective knowledge and capability in relation to specific instructional goals and to allow students to practice listening, speaking, and interpreting. The teacher and a wide range of students contribute orally, listen actively, and respond to and learn from others' contributions.

2. Explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies

Explaining and modeling are practices for making a wide variety of content, academic practices, and strategies explicit to students. Depending on the topic and the instructional purpose, teachers might rely on simple verbal explanations, sometimes with accompanying examples or representations. In teaching more complex academic practices and strategies, such as an algorithm for carrying out a mathematical operation or the use of metacognition to improve reading comprehension, teachers might choose a more elaborate kind of explanation that we are calling "modeling." Modeling includes verbal explanation, but also thinking aloud and demonstrating.

3. Eliciting and interpreting individual students' thinking

Teachers pose questions or tasks that provoke or allow students to share their thinking about specific academic content in order to understand student thinking, including novel points of view, new ideas, or misconceptions; guide instructional decisions; and surface ideas that will benefit other students. To do this effectively, a teacher draws out a student's thinking through carefully-chosen questions and tasks and considers and checks alternative interpretations of the student's ideas and methods.

4. Diagnosing particular common patterns of student thinking and development in a subject-matter domain

Although there are important individual and cultural differences among students, there are also common patterns in the ways in which students think about and develop understanding and skill in relation to particular topics and problems. Teachers who are familiar with common patterns of student thinking and development and who are fluent in anticipating or

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[2] These descriptions were authored by TeachingWorks-University of Michigan

identifying them are able to work more effectively and efficiently as they plan and implement instruction and evaluate student learning.

5. Implementing norms and routines for classroom discourse and work

Each discipline has norms and routines that reflect the ways in which people in the field construct and share knowledge. These norms and routines vary across subjects but often include establishing hypotheses, providing evidence for claims, and showing one's thinking in detail. Teaching students what they are, why they are important, and how to use them is crucial to building understanding and capability in a given subject. Teachers may use explicit explanation, modeling, and repeated practice to do this.

6. Coordinating and adjusting instruction during a lesson

Teachers must take care to coordinate and adjust instruction during a lesson in order to maintain coherence, ensure that the lesson is responsive to students' needs, and use time efficiently. This includes explicitly connecting parts of the lesson, managing transitions carefully, and making changes to the plan in response to student progress.

7. Specifying and reinforcing productive student behavior

Clear expectations for student behavior and careful work on the teacher's part to teach productive behavior to students, reward it, and strategically redirect off-task behavior help create classrooms that are productive learning environments for all. This practice includes not only skills for laying out classroom rules and managing truly disruptive behavior, but for recognizing the many ways that children might act when they actually are engaged and for teaching students how to interact with each other and the teacher while in class.

8. Implementing organizational routines

Teachers implement routine ways of carrying out classroom tasks in order to maximize the time available for learning and minimize disruptions and distractions. They organize time, space, materials, and students strategically and deliberately teach students how to complete tasks such as lining up at the door, passing out papers, and asking to participate in class discussion. This can include demonstrating and rehearsing routines and maintaining them consistently.

9. Setting up and managing small group work

Teachers use small group work when instructional goals call for in-depth interaction among students and in order to teach students to work collaboratively. To use groups effectively, teachers choose tasks that require and foster collaborative work, issue clear directions that permit groups to work semi-independently and implement mechanisms for holding students accountable for both collective and individual learning. They use their own time strategically, deliberately choosing which groups to work with, when, and on what.

10. Building respectful relationships with students

Teachers increase the likelihood that students will engage and persist in school when they establish positive, individual relationships with them. Techniques for doing this include greeting students positively every day, having frequent, brief, "check in" conversations with students to demonstrate care and interest, and following up with students who are experiencing difficult or special personal situations.

11. Talking about a student with parents or other caregivers

Regular communication between teachers and parents/guardians supports student learning. Teachers communicate with parents to provide information about students' academic progress, behavior, or development; to seek information and help; and to request parental involvement in school. These communications may take place in writing, or over the phone. Productive communications are attentive to considerations of language and culture and designed to support parents and guardians in fostering their child's success in and out of school.

12. Learning about students' cultural, religious, family, intellectual, and personal experiences and resources for use in instruction

Teachers must actively learn about their particular students in order to design instruction that will meet their needs. This includes being deliberate about trying to understand the cultural norms for communicating and collaborating that prevail in particular communities, how certain cultural and religious views affect what is considered appropriate in school, and the topics and issues that interest individual students and groups of students. It also means keeping track of what is happening in students' personal lives so as to be able to respond appropriately when an out-of-school experience affects what is happening in school.

13.   Setting long- and short-term learning goals for students

Clear goals referenced to external standards help teachers ensure that all students learn expected content. Explicit goals help teachers to maintain coherent, purposeful, and equitable instruction over time. Setting effective goals involves analysis of student knowledge and skills in relation to established standards and careful efforts to establish and sequence interim benchmarks that will help ensure steady progress toward larger goals.

14.   Designing single lessons and sequences of lessons

Carefully-sequenced lessons help students develop deep understanding of content and sophisticated skills and practices. Teachers design and sequence lessons with an eye toward providing opportunities for student inquiry and discovery and include opportunities for students to practice and master foundational concepts and skills before moving on to more advanced ones. Effectively-sequenced lessons maintain a coherent focus while keeping students engaged; they also help students achieve appreciation of what they have learned.

15.   Checking student understanding during and at the conclusion of lessons

Teachers use a variety of informal but deliberate methods to assess what students are learning during and between lessons. These frequent checks provide information about students' current level of competence and help the teacher adjust instruction during a single lesson or from one lesson to the next. They may include, for example, simple questioning, short performance tasks, or journal or notebook entries.

16.   Selecting and designing formal assessments of student learning

Effective summative assessments provide teachers with rich information about what students have learned and where they are struggling in relation to specific learning goals. In composing and selecting assessments, teachers consider validity, fairness, and efficiency. Effective summative assessments provide both students and teachers with useful information and help teachers evaluate and design further instruction.

17. Interpreting the results of student work, including routing assignments, quizzes, tests, projects, and standardized assessments

Student work is the most important source of information about the effectiveness of instruction. Teachers must analyze student productions, including assessments of all kinds, looking for patterns that will guide their efforts to assist specific students and the class as a whole and inform future instruction.

18. Providing oral and written feedback to students

Effective feedback helps focus students' attention on specific qualities of their work; it highlights areas needing improvement; and delineates ways to improve. Good feedback is specific, not overwhelming in scope, and focused on the academic task, and supports students' perceptions of their own capability. Giving skillful feedback requires the teacher to make strategic choices about the frequency, method, and content of feedback and to communicate in ways that are understandable by students.

19. Analyzing instruction for the purpose of improving it

Learning to teach is an ongoing process that requires regular analysis of instruction and its effectiveness. Teachers study their own teaching and that of their colleagues in order to improve their understanding of the complex interactions between teachers, students, and content and of the impact of particular instructional approaches. Analyzing instruction may take place individually or collectively and involves identifying salient features of the instruction and making reasoned hypotheses for how to improve.

Implementation

Development of the Proposal

A congress of representatives of Michigan's educator preparation institutions and their PK-12 partners was convened on February 19 to set a direction for initial statewide implementation of Core Teaching Practices to accompany the new certificate structure. All 29 currently active Michigan educator preparation institutions (EPIs) with initial teacher preparation programs were asked to send two representatives: one to represent the EPI and one to represent a PK-12 partner with whom the EPI collaborates for pre-service clinical experiences. Representatives from 22 EPIs and 18 PK-12 partners participated in the congress either virtually or in person.

A panel of presenters including Mark Olson and Anthony Tuf Francis from Oakland University, Paula Lancaster from Grand Valley State University, and Cara Lougheed from Stoney Creek Schools outlined the work their institutions have engaged in as part of the TeachingWorks Michigan Program Network on implementing a core set of High Leverage Practices across the teacher preparation curriculum and in clinical experience partnerships. They discussed how the Practices deepen and strengthen the programs though intentionality, common language and depth of focus, and how a strong focus on four to six selected practices supported inter-departmental and inter-institutional planning and collaboration to build cohesion throughout and across programs.

After open whole group and small group discussion, the congress participants engaged in a dot-storming protocol to select from the 19 Core Teaching Practices a subset upon which to focus statewide efforts for initial implementation. **Four Core Teaching Practices emerged as a strong consensus among participants with over 20 votes each.** They are:

- Leading a group discussion (1);

- Explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies (2);

- Eliciting and interpreting individual student thinking (3); and

- Building respectful relationships with students (10).

The Core Teaching Practices with the next highest level of support (10-20 votes) were the following:

- Setting up and managing small group work (9);

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- Learning about students' cultural, religious, family, intellectual, personal experiences, and resources for use in instruction (12); and

- Checking student understanding during and at the conclusion of lessons (15).

Because there was a great deal of support for these Core Teaching Practices as well, an option was proposed by Oakland University representatives that the four practices with the highest level of support become the statewide focus Core Teaching Practices and that those practices in the next level of support would be options from which EPIs, in collaboration with their PK-12 partners, may select as areas for local focus. This option was put to a vote and supported by a large majority of participants in attendance.

Next Steps

Providers seeking approval to offer teacher preparation programs for the PK-3 and 3-6 grade bands will describe in their program applications how their proposed courses of study support candidate development in the four Core Teaching Practices for statewide focus and any of the three practices selected for local focus.

The Office of Educator Excellence will collaborate with the Michigan Program Network on development and refinement of formative assessments that EPIs may utilize to measure candidate development in these Core Teaching Practices.

The Office of Educator Excellence will collaborate with the Michigan Program Network on developing alignment documents between the Core Teaching Practices and the four broad categories of In-TASC Standards to support EPIs seeking national accreditation in demonstrating candidate proficiency in these standards.

The Office of Educator Excellence welcomes representatives of EPIs and PK-12 schools/districts to join as thought partners in developing a research agenda around statewide implementation of Core Teaching Practices into teacher preparation programs to assess the impact this focus has on Michigan's educational system and student outcomes.

Participants in Core Teaching Practices Development

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