



Teacher Development Center

FITNESS TO TEACH POLICY

The Teacher Development Center (TDC) 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 Dallas (UTD) to recommend the candidate to the State of Texas for teaching certification. All teacher candidates in the UTD Teacher Development Program (TDP) are expected to demonstrate their preparedness to teach children and youth. This preparation results from the combination of successful completion of university coursework and the demonstration of important human characteristics of dispositions all teachers should possess.

A. Required Documentation cited

Prior to admission to the TDP, all teacher candidates will be apprised of the *Fitness to Teach* (FTT) policy. This policy applies to all students upon enrollment in the Teacher Certification Program (TCP) as well as students completing coursework in the TDP requiring interaction with schools, and remains so until the completion of their program.

1. In October and March, a reminder will be sent to faculty from the Director of the TDC to use the *Fitness to Teach* forms for *Identification of Outstanding Students*, *Informal Review Summary*, *Formal Review: Level 1 or 2*, and/or the *Remediation Plan*. Faculty may submit the referral forms at any time prior to or during professional level courses.
2. The completion of these forms will allow the TDC to: (1) identify teacher candidates who display outstanding knowledge and/or skills who deserve recognition, and (2) identify those teacher candidates who have some difficulties, which raise concerns about the candidate's ability to complete the program successfully. All forms completed will be sent to the Director of the TDC.

3. Students must be in good standing with UTD.
 - a. Students seeking admission to the undergraduate TCP who have ever been referred to UTD's Dean of Student's Office may have their referrals and outcomes considered by the Director of the TDC to determine whether to grant admission to the TCP. Admission to the TCP is at the discretion of the Director of the TDC.
 - b. Students who have cases pending with the Dean of Student's Office will not be considered for admissions to the TCP until the case has been fully adjudicated.

B. Fitness to Teach Criteria

In addition to curriculum and testing requirements stated in the UTD catalog and other UTD policies, all TDC teacher candidates will be held accountable to the criteria specified in this policy, including dispositions for teaching. Dispositions for teaching are defined as those professional attitudes, values, and beliefs expected of an education professional.

If all criteria are not met satisfactorily, teacher candidates may be denied full acceptance into the TCP and /or denied the opportunity to student teach. Without unconditional acceptance into the TCP and successful completion of all coursework, field experience, and student teaching or its equivalent, the TDC does not recommend teacher candidates for Texas Teacher Certification. As a professional program, the TDC reserves the right to recommend or not recommend teacher candidates for certification.

All teacher candidates referred for review are expected to participate in *Fit to Teach* process. Refusal to participate will not terminate or invalidate the *Fit to Teach* process. *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 Director of the TDC.

1. Completed Criminal History Review

In accordance with Texas Education Code section 22.083, an examination of each teacher candidate's criminal history will be conducted by the independent school district (ISD) or school field-based entity prior to participation in field-based

course work, including field experience and student teaching. Criminal history record information including both conviction and arrest records is obtained. An ISD or other school field-based entity may deny a student's placement based upon the results of that student's criminal history background examination. If a student cannot complete course-required field work because of his/her criminal history, the student will be required to withdraw from the course. The student may retake the course if and when his/her criminal history changes allowing him/her to be cleared by the ISD or school field-based entity. If the offense is such that it will preclude any further fieldwork, the student will be released from the TCP.

2. Academic Requirements

- a. Teacher candidates attend all classes as required. Preparedness for class and punctuality are expected at all times.
- b. Teacher candidates complete course assignments in a professional manner according to the timelines designated by the course instructor.
- c. Teacher candidates complete all field experiences in a professional and timely manner as required.
- d. *Scholastic Integrity:*
The teacher candidate 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.
- e. *Communication Skills:*
The teacher candidate displays written and oral skills expected of an education professional demonstrating the ability to comprehend information and communicate ideas and feelings.
 - 1) *Written:*
The teacher candidate writes clearly using correct grammar and spelling; demonstrates professional level skills in written English; understands written content presented in the program; and adequately completes all written assignments as specified by faculty.

2) *Oral:*

The teacher candidate communicates effectively with other students, faculty, staff and professionals; expresses ideas and feelings clearly; demonstrates willingness and ability to listen to others; demonstrates professional level skills in spoken English; understands oral content presented in the program; adequately completes all oral assignments; and meets the objectives of field placement experiences as specified by faculty.

3) *Electronic Communication:*

The teacher candidate refrains from inappropriate communication with a faculty member and/or a student including electronic communications by cell phone, text messaging, instant messaging, facebooking or other social network communications.

3. Personal and Professional Requirements

- a. A teacher candidate does not reveal confidential information concerning students unless disclosure serves a professional purpose or is required by law.
- b. Teacher candidates demonstrate interpersonal skills required for successful professional teaching. These skills include:
 - 1) a commitment to accept and try new ways of teaching;
 - 2) the ability to accept and act upon constructive criticism;
 - 3) the ability to understand the perspective of others concerning teaching;
 - 4) the ability to separate personal and professional issues when in the classroom or completing professional 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; and
 - 7) the disposition to always act for the benefit of all students.

- c. The teacher candidate does not sexually harass others; make verbal or physical threats; become involved in sexual relationships with their students, supervisors, or faculty; abuse others in physical, emotional, verbal or sexual ways.
- d. Teacher candidates demonstrate positive personal hygiene habits.
- e. Teacher candidates dress appropriately in their professional contexts such as class or in a school building.
- f. Teacher candidates adhere to the *Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators*.

4. Cultural and Social Attitudes and Behavior

- a. Teacher candidates demonstrate respect for superiors, peers, and children and youth in all settings.
- b. Teacher candidates understand and appreciate the value of diversity and look beyond self in interactions with others; respect differences of race, ethnicity, religion, social class, and cultural heritage.
- c. Teacher candidates exhibit acceptance of and provide accommodations for exceptional learners.
- d. Teacher candidates are able to work productively with their peers.
- e. Teacher candidates are able to speak in a manner appropriate to the context of the classroom.
- f. Teacher candidates must display positive attitudes toward faculty, colleagues, and students and their parents.
- g. Teacher candidates demonstrate positive social skills in professional and social interactions with faculty, colleagues, parents, and students.

5. Physical Skills

The teacher candidate exhibits motor and sensory abilities sufficient to attend and participate in class and practicum placements, with or without accommodations as recommended by the Office of Disabilities Services.

Note:

No otherwise qualified teacher candidate shall, on the basis of disability, be subjected to discrimination or excluded from participation in the TCP. A teacher candidate with a disability may be protected by Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, thereby being eligible for a reasonable accommodation that provides 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 accommodation must notify the Office of Disability Services and provide documentation as needed. The Office of Disability Services makes recommendations for accommodations. A TDC ad hoc committee will review academic performance criteria in light of individual circumstances to explore issues of appropriate accommodations. An initial assessment, subsequent plans, use of outside experts (including the Office of Disabilities Services), and periodic checks between the committee and the teacher candidate are appropriate courses of action in making accommodations.

6. Emotional Dispositions

a. Stress Management:

The teacher candidate demonstrates the ability to deal with current life stressors through the use of appropriate coping mechanisms. He or she handles stress effectively by using appropriate self-care and developing supportive relationships with colleagues, peers, and others.

b. Emotional and Mental Capabilities

- 1) The teacher candidate uses sound mature judgment.
- 2) The teacher candidate demonstrates the emotional and mental health required to function effectively as a teacher.

c. Cognitive Dispositions

- 1) Teacher candidates think analytically about educational issues.
- 2) Teacher candidates are thoughtfully reflective about their practice.

- 3) Teacher candidates are flexible, open to new ideas, and willing and able to modify their beliefs and practices.
- 4) Teacher candidates question and test their assumptions regarding teaching and schooling.

C. Admission to the Teacher Certification Program (TCP)

1. Provisional Admission:

All teacher candidates at UTD are provisionally admitted to the Teacher Certification Program upon application, interview, submission of writing sample, and satisfactory completion of all admission criteria.

2. Official Admission:

Official Admission in the Teacher Certification Program is granted prior to the student teaching (or internship) experience if the following conditions are met:

- a. There are no outstanding negative *Fitness to Teach* reviews a candidate has not successfully remedied;
- b. The teacher candidate successfully completes American Public Schools and Educational Psychology;
- c. The teacher candidate has met THEA requirements;
- d. The teacher candidate has earned the required grades and GPA in the last 60 hours of coursework; and
- e. The teacher candidate has earned the required grades and GPA in any and all teacher preparation courses.

3. Probationary Acceptance:

The teacher candidates are placed on probationary status in the case of a Level 1 or 2 Formal Review. (See below.) Teacher candidates remain on probationary status until such time as they have successfully completed a remediation plan or a decision to revoke candidacy has been made. If a student successfully completes a remediation plan and additional *Fitness to Teach* referrals arise, the student's

full program history will be reviewed to determine the student's status in the TCP.

D. Conditions for Completion of Student Teaching/Internship

Successful completion of student teaching/internship is a prerequisite for meeting teacher certification *requirements*. *Students may attempt to successfully complete student teaching/internship a maximum of two times at UTD. If the student does not successfully complete the second student teaching/internship experience, they will not be eligible to enroll in student 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 UTD

All teacher candidates referred for review are expected to participate in the process. Refusal to participate will not terminate the process. 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 Review: Level 2. Violations of the UTD student code of conduct and/or host school district's or school field-based entity's faculty code of conduct will result in immediate Formal Review: Level 2.

1. Informal Review:

An informal review involves a faculty member and a teacher candidate. When a faculty member has concerns about a teacher candidate meeting any of the *Fitness to Teach* criteria, the faculty member will:

- a. discuss the concerns directly with the teacher candidate and seek to work with the candidate to resolve the difficulties;
- b. advise the Director of the TDC 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 the teacher candidate; and
- d. send copies of all documentation to the TDC to be placed in the teacher candidate's file.

If a problem arises in the field, the cooperating teacher of the host school district may discuss concerns directly with the appropriate TDC personnel.

- Field Experience: Coordinator, Student Teaching & Field Experience Programs
 - Student Teaching/Internship: UTD University Field Supervisor
- The teacher candidate may also be included in this meeting.

2. Formal Review: Level 1

When a faculty member is sufficiently concerned about a teacher candidate's fitness to teach, s/he will complete the *Fitness to Teach Formal Review: Level 1* form. The completed form(s) is given to the Director of the TDC or his/her designee. At the conference with the teacher candidate, a remediation plan will be developed. The nature and content of the remediation plan will be specific to the situation with remedial criteria stated in measurable, objective terms including a timeline for accomplishment of the stated criteria. The remedial plan will be signed by all parties involved. If the teacher candidate fails to successfully complete the remediation plan within the stated timeline, s/he will be placed on Formal Review: Level 2. If the teacher candidate successfully accomplishes the remediation plan, s/he will be removed from probationary status. The remediation plan may continue for more than one semester depending on individual circumstances.

3. Formal Review: Level 2

If a second incident or concern arises for a teacher candidate, if a teacher candidate fails a Level 1 remediation plan, or the seriousness of the incident warrant, the *Fitness to Teach Council* will be convened. The FTT Council (made of faculty and chaired by the Director of the TDC or his/her designee) will meet to:

- a. review the paperwork,
- b. interview the faculty member(s) who have instructed the teacher candidate to date,
- c. interview the teacher candidate, and

- d. make a determination regarding the teacher candidate's suitability to continue in the TCP.

The teacher candidate is afforded due process throughout these proceedings. Following a Level 2 review, the teacher candidate may submit a letter of appeal to the Dean of Interdisciplinary Studies. The Dean's decision is final.