



**OFFICE OF EDUCATOR LICENSURE**  
**SUBJECT MATTER KNOWLEDGE**

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**The Competency Review**  
**Made Simple**

Meeting and Verifying Subject Matter Competency Requirements  
January, 2016



# Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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# **Licensure Subject Matter Knowledge Competency Review Introduction**

## **What is a Competency Review?**

A Competency Review is used in the license evaluation process for determining whether the subject matter knowledge or “Coverage of” requirements for a license have been met and appropriately verified in a specific field for which there is no subject matter knowledge test (MTEL), where the MTEL does not capture some of the subject matter knowledge competencies, and elsewhere as required, using Department guidelines and in accordance with the Regulations for Educator Licensure and Preparation Program Approval 603 CMR 7.00. It is a review process typically required for applicants seeking a Preliminary, or an additional Initial or Professional license, in not only special education but other license fields as well.

Back on December 17, 2012, the Licensure Office posted a document online which was intended to provide you with some assistance on meeting and verifying licensure Competency Review requirements for special education licenses. We are therefore very pleased to share with you this enhanced guidelines document to serve for documenting competency compliance for all such licenses requiring the competency review, as listed below, and not just special education licenses.

## **What licenses are impacted?**

These competency review guidelines are intended to assist applicants seeking to obtain any of the following licenses:

- Moderate Disabilities
- Visually Impaired
- Deaf & Hard-of-Hearing
- Severe Disabilities
- General Science, 1-6 (Competency Review or Subject Matter MTEL testing option)
- History, 1-6 (Competency Review or Subject Matter MTEL testing option)
- Instructional Technology
- Foreign Languages (For those languages where there is no Subject Matter MTEL offered)
- Library

To view general requirements as well as Subject Matter Knowledge applicable for each license, you may visit <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr7.html> and view the **Regulations for Educator Licensure and Preparation Program Approval (603 CMR 7.00)**.

## **Meeting Competency Review Requirements**

Generally, the Department refers to satisfying a subject matter knowledge competency as **“Coverage of.”**

### **How can a competency be satisfied?**

Subject matter knowledge competencies may be satisfied through any of the following means:

- a) Coursework
- b) Seminars
- c) Workshops
- d) Other Professional Learning Experiences.

### **What is considered adequate coverage?**

The depth of “Coverage” specific to and completely covering a specific competency is considered adequate when:

At least 10 hours of instruction/mentored experience or professional development, specific to and completely covering each subject matter knowledge competency is met.

### **Equating Hours of Instruction/Mentored Experience, College Credit, PDPs, and CEUs**

<b>The Competency Review Guidelines Permits Equating as follows</b>		
<b>1 semester hour, or 1 undergraduate college credit</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>15 hours of professional development</b>
<b>1 semester hour, or 1 graduate college credit</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>22.5 hours of professional development</b>
<b>1 Professional Development Point (1 PDP)</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>1 hour of professional development</b>
<b>1 Hour of Instruction/Mentored Employment<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>=</b>	<b>1 Hour of Professional Development</b>
<b>1 Continuing Education Units (CEU)</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>10 hours of professional development</b>

## Acceptable Means of Verification

### COURSEWORK FOR COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY CREDIT

#### *Please submit:*

An official transcript for the applicable coursework, and

A copy of the official catalog course description(s), so that this Office can better review the course content.

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**Further clarity** may be gained by submitting a letter on official college/university letterhead, signed by the appropriate department head, verifying the number of hours of instruction delivered in a course specific to addressing a particular topic. A course may be used to satisfy more than one topic

If the topic has been completely satisfied through coursework, such should be documented through the following language:

*“At least (10 or more) hours of instruction were delivered within (the noted coursework) specific to and completely covering the applicable topic.”*

### SEMINAR/WORKSHOP/TRAININGS

#### *Please submit:*

A copy of your certificate of completion and a seminar/workshop training description.

Certificates of completion should verify the sponsoring agency, seminar/workshop title, and number of PDPs or CEUs earned or hours of instruction delivered.

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**Further clarity** may be gained by submitting a copy of the official seminar or workshop description.

Additional clarity may be gained by submitting a letter verifying the number of hours of instruction (or PDPs/CEUs) delivered in a specific seminar or work shop toward addressing a particular competency.

This letter should be on official letterhead and be signed by the professional development provider, verifying the number of hours of instruction delivered within specific to addressing the particular topic. If the topic has been completely satisfied through seminars/workshops/trainings, such should be documented through the following language:

*“At least (10 or more) hours of instruction were delivered within (the noted seminar(s)/workshop(s)/training/s) specific to and completely covering the applicable topic.”*

Letters should be on official letterhead and must be signed by the professional development provider.

## Acceptable Means of Verification

-CONTINUED-

### OTHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

In order for other professional learning experiences (e.g., mentored employment, peer coaching, etc.) to be considered toward satisfying coverage of a competency(ies) identified within a Competency Review, the school/district administrator may provide *a letter explaining in detail how a competency has been gained and demonstrated in each specific area.*

**If the professional learning experience occurred in a school or school district, this detailed letter must:**

- ✓ Be written on official school/district letterhead,
- ✓ Be co-signed by the superintendent and the appropriate department head. If the experience occurred in a setting other than a public school, this letter must be signed by the appropriate head administrator and co-signed by the executive director,
- ✓ The letter must indicate specifically how the individual acquired and demonstrated competency.
- ✓ The letter must include the specific number of hours of mentoring delivered addressing each topic. If the topic has been completely satisfied through mentored employment, this should be documented through the following language:

*“At least (10 or more) hours of mentoring were delivered specific to and completely covering the applicable topic.”*

- ✓ The license number of the Head Administrator/designee and the educator who served as the mentor should also be included

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**Please note:**

**Examples of Appropriate Head Administrators:**

- The Special Education Administrator for any of the special education licenses;
- The Instructional Technology Supervisor/Director for an Instructional Technology License,
- The Pupil Personnel Director for Guidance Counselor or any other counseling license, etc.

**If the school does not have such a licensed administrator:**

The letter should be co-signed by the individual responsible for supervising educators in the role the license sought and the Department should receive clarification in the letter that the head administrator is the most appropriate administrator to be verifying the experience.

**If the experience was not acquired in a public school:**

The letter must be on the official letterhead of the institution/organization signed by the Head Administrator.

The Department will not consider letters that are not written on letterhead and are not signed by the Head Administrator.

**Who qualifies as a Mentor?**

The educator serving as the mentor must hold the license sought, have at least an Initial license, have at least three years of employment under such a license, and have been trained as a mentor.

## **Subject Matter Knowledge Competency Review**

The following listing of licenses and subject matter knowledge typically will require a Competency Review.

*Licensure requirements for ALL licenses may be found by visiting  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr7.html>.*

### **SPECIAL EDUCATION LICENSES:**

#### **Moderate Disabilities**

##### **Coverage of:**

- Educational terminology for students with mild to moderate disabilities
- Preparation, implementation, and evaluation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)
- Design or modification of curriculum, instructional materials, and general education classroom environments for students with moderate disabilities
- Federal and state laws and regulations pertaining to special education
- Coverage of Knowledge of services provided by other agencies
- Ways to prepare and maintain students with disabilities for general education classrooms
- Instruction on the appropriate use of augmentative and alternative communication and other assistive technologies

#### **Visually Impaired**

##### **Coverage of:**

- Similarities and differences between visually impaired and non-visually impaired children in emotional, social, physical, and intellectual development
- Anatomy and physiology of the eye and visual abnormalities
- Historical and current developments in education of the visually impaired in the United States and other countries
- How to use state-of-the-art diagnostic information
- Medical and educational research related to the visually impaired
- Use of Grade II Braille and the Nemeth Code
- *Use of assistive technology such as low-vision devices*
- Design or modification of the curriculum and instructional materials for the visually impaired
- Ways to prepare visually impaired students for classrooms ranging from general education classrooms to schools for the visually impaired
- Features of family support and services
- Preparation, implementation, and evaluation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
- Federal and state laws pertaining to special education

## **Deaf & Hard-of-Hearing**

### **Coverage of:**

- Theories of language acquisition for American Sign Language (ASL) and English in hearing and deaf and hard-of-hearing children
- Theories on the relationship between ASL and the English language
- Similarities and differences in the linguistic structure of ASL and English
- Benefits and limitations of ASL, spoken English, and printed English for learning, and the instructional strategies for using them
- Knowledge of how deaf people live their daily lives
- Historical and current developments in deaf education in the United States and other countries
- Features of family support and services
- Similarities and differences between hearing and deaf and hard-of-hearing students in emotional, social, and intellectual development
- Ways to prepare deaf and hard-of-hearing students for classrooms ranging from general education classrooms to schools for the deaf and hard of hearing
- Design or modification of the curriculum and instructional materials for the deaf and hard-of-hearing
- Modifications of theories of reading for hearing children necessary for the learning of reading by deaf and hard-of-hearing children
- General and specific effects of hearing loss upon the production of speech and the reception of speech and other sounds
- General and specific effects of visual processing and reception of a visual language and its acquisition
- Anatomy and physiology of human speech, hearing, and language mechanisms
- Knowledge of state-of-the-art diagnostic instruments; procedures for testing and interpreting results
- Characteristics of types of amplification equipment and their uses by teachers and students
- Medical, social, ethical, and educational research relating to the deaf and hard-of-hearing, including the effects of cochlear implants on language learning
- Preparation, implementation, and evaluation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
- Federal and state laws pertaining to special education.



## **Severe Disabilities**

### **Coverage of:**

- Definitions, etiologies, and characteristics of severely disabling conditions
- Theories, concepts, and methods of assessing physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development in children and adolescents
- Theories of language development and the effects of disabilities on learning
- Knowledge of the significant theories, practices, and programs for developing reading skills and reading comprehension
- Phonemic awareness and phonics: principles, knowledge, and instructional practices
- Diagnosis and assessment of reading skills using standardized, criterion-referenced, and informal assessment instruments
- Development of a listening, speaking, and reading vocabulary
- Theories on the relationships between beginning writing and reading
- Theories of first and second language acquisition and development
- Preparation, implementation, and evaluation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
- How to design or modify curriculum, instructional materials, and classroom environments for students with severe disabilities
- Ways to prepare and maintain students with severe disabilities for general education classrooms; for example, use of behavioral management principles
- Knowledge of services provided by other agencies
- Knowledge of appropriate vocational or alternative school programs, or work-study and community-based opportunities and alternative high school programs and how to refer students to them
- Federal and state laws pertaining to special education
- Techniques for developing skills designed to facilitate placement in least restrictive environments
- Instruction on the appropriate use of augmentative and alternative communication and other assistive technologies
- Source and operation of orthotic devices, medical technologies, and computer-moderated prosthetic devices

### **NOTE:**

The following **General Science 1-6** and **History 1-6** licenses have the option of satisfying either the appropriate MTEL Subject Matter Test or the Competency Review.

### **General Science, 1-6 (or pass the General Science MTEL)**

#### **Coverage of:**

- Basic principles and concepts of the life sciences appropriate to the elementary school curriculum.
- Basic principles and concepts of the physical sciences appropriate to the elementary school curriculum.
- History and philosophy of science.
- Safety issues related to science investigations.

### **History, 1-6 (or pass the History MTEL)**

#### **Coverage of:**

- United States history from the age of exploration to the Civil War.
- World history from human beginnings and ancient and classical civilizations of the Mediterranean area; and English and Western European history through the Enlightenment.
- Geography: major physical features of the world and key concepts of geography.
- Basic economic principles and concepts.
- United States political principles, institutions, and processes, their history and development.
- Major developments and figures in Massachusetts history

### **Instructional Technology**

#### **Coverage of:**

- Technology tools for word processing, databases, spreadsheets, print/graphic utilities, multi- and hypermedia, presentations, videos for the purpose of formal and informal assessment, instruction, and administration for professional and instructional use.
- Communications and research tools such as email, World Wide Web, web browsers and other online applications that link to the state standards and requirements, for professional and instructional use.
- Criteria for selection, evaluation, and use of appropriate computer/technology based materials to support a variety of instructional methods.
- Ethical and social issues surrounding privacy, copyright, and crime relating to educational technology and resources.
- Use of resources for adaptive/assistive devices that provide access for all students.
- Methods to support classroom teachers and other school personnel in improving student learning through appropriate use of technology in the classroom, including consultation techniques and professional development.

## **Foreign Languages-**

**An MTEL covering the subject matter knowledge requirement is available for the following Languages:**

Chinese (Mandarin), French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish

**A Competency Review is required for all other foreign languages, and will assess the listed Subject Matter Knowledge Requirements listed below.**

**(a) The following topics will need addressing for the PreK-6 level:**

**Coverage of:**

- Spoken and written command of a standard version of the target language (the version used by a formally educated speaker of the language).
- Knowledge of culturally and historically significant literary and non-literary texts and authors associated with the country of origin of the target language and of one other country with which the target language may now be associated.
- Introductory knowledge of contemporary political, social, and artistic features of the country of origin of the target language and of one other country with which the target language may now be associated.
- Children's literature, songs, and games in the target language.
- Characteristics of elementary reading and writing pedagogy in the target language.
- Similarities and differences between the target language and English.
- Theories of, and differences between, first and second language acquisition.

**(b) The following topics will need addressing for the 5-12 level:**

**Coverage of:**

- Spoken and written command of a standard version of the target language (the version used by a formally educated speaker of the language).
- Similarities and differences between the target language and English.
- Theories of, and differences between, first and second language acquisition.
- Knowledge of culturally and historically significant literary and non-literary texts and authors associated with the country of origin of the target language; literary traditions, periods, and genres.
- Introductory knowledge of the other arts (historical traditions, genres, and major artists) associated with the country of origin of the target language.
- Introductory knowledge of the political, social and intellectual history of the country or culture with which the target language is or was originally associated.
- Introductory knowledge of significant literary and non-literary texts, the arts, and history of at least one other country or people with which the target language may now be as associated.

**(c) The following topics will be addressed on a subject matter knowledge test for American Sign Language at the PreK-6 and 5-12 grade levels:**

**Coverage of:**

- Expressive and receptive fluency in American Sign Language at a level of proficiency set by the Board.
- Knowledge of deaf history.
- Knowledge of deaf culture.
- Introductory knowledge of deaf art.
- Knowledge of different literary genres; for example, children's literature, poetry, and games associated with the deaf.
- Theories of first and second language acquisition for American Sign Language.
- Similarities and differences in the linguistic structure of American Sign Language and English.
- Knowledge of methods of instruction in American Sign Language.
- Knowledge of philosophies of American Sign Language.

**Library**

**Coverage of:**

- Characteristics, uses, and design of information systems, for standard reference sources and appropriate technologies.
- Selection, acquisition, organization, and maintenance of information resources.
- Appropriate equipment for using information resources.
- Development, organization, management, and evaluation of school library media programs and resource centers.
- Literature for children and young adults.
- Selection, adaptation, and production of instructional materials.
- Federal and state laws and regulations pertaining to media, including those governing access to and reproduction of materials.
- Ethical issues affecting library media services.
- Community and governmental resources.

*Licensure requirements for ALL licenses may be found by visiting  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr7.html>.*

## Competency Review Outline Worksheet

What follows is a possible sample outline format that may helpful for outlining how each competency review requirement has been satisfied. If any competencies were addressed only via coursework, a letter verifying compliance may be submitted from the college or university, utilizing the assistance provided on the template found on page 16.

Please know that this worksheet is not to substitute the needed official verification.

All required supporting documentation must be submitted.

*(i.e., Official College Transcripts and/or PD Certificates of Completion/Description, and/or Mentored Employment Letter signed-off by the school/district administrator.)*

*\*\*We have used Moderate Disabilities 5-12 below as an example of the license field and grade level, and noted some of its subject matter knowledge competencies in the statements that follow. You may use this same format for any license field and grade level on the blank template that follows this example. \*\**

Applicant's Name: John Doe

MA Educator License Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Or MEPID: 50000000

Or Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_

License Field and Grade Level: Moderate Disabilities (5-12)

I have satisfied competency for each of the needed subject matter knowledge competencies required for the license noted above. The method of coverage is indicated below.

I am enclosing appropriate verification, as described in this guide.

Coverage of: Educational terminology for students with mild to moderate disabilities

Coursework: \_\_\_\_\_

Seminar/Workshop: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Professional Learning Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Coverage of: Preparation, implementation, and evaluation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

Coursework: \_\_\_\_\_

Seminar/Workshop: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Professional Learning Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Optional Competency Review Outline Worksheet**

What follows is a sample competency review outline which may be helpful to be used as a worksheet for noting down how each competency review requirement has been satisfied. It is an optional worksheet for your use only and does not need to be sent to the Department. However, if you feel that, in addition to the required official verification, your outline may prove helpful in serving as a point of reference for our reviewers, you may submit it along with the required official verification.

**Please know that this worksheet is not a substitute for the needed official verification.**

**All required supporting documentation must be submitted.**

*(i.e., Official College Transcripts and/or PD Certificates of Completion/Description, and/or Mentored Employment Letter signed-off by the school/district administrator.)*

If competencies were only addressed via coursework, and we have received official transcripts and course descriptions, yet there remains insufficient evidence of specific coverage or required depth of coverage specific to and completely covering a particular competency; please be sure to provide us with a letter from the college or university following the helpful template supplied on page 16.

**--REMEMBER--**

**“Adequate coverage” is considered as:**

- a) Verifying at least 10 hours of instruction/mentored experience or professional development specific to and completely covering each subject matter knowledge competency,  
and
- b) The equating is measures as follows:

<b>The Competency Review Guidelines Permits Equating as follows</b>		
<b>1</b> semester hour, or 1 undergraduate college credit	=	<b>15</b> hours of professional development
<b>1</b> semester hour, or 1 graduate college credit	=	<b>22.5</b> hours of professional development
<b>1</b> Professional Development Point (1 PDP)	=	<b>1</b> hour of professional development
<b>1</b> Hour of Instruction/Mentored Employment <sup>1</sup>	=	<b>1</b> Hour of Professional Development
<b>1</b> Continuing Education Units (CEU)	=	<b>10</b> hours of professional development

## **Optional Competency Review Outline Worksheet**

**Applicant's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MA Educator License Number:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Or MEPID:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Or Social Security Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**License Field and Grade Level:** \_\_\_\_\_

**I have satisfied competency for each of the needed subject matter knowledge competencies required for the license noted above. The method of coverage is indicated below.**

**I am enclosing appropriate verification, as described in this guide.**

**Coverage of:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Coursework (Institution/Course Name/Course Number):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Seminar/Workshop:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other Professional Learning Experience:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Coverage of:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Coursework (Institution/Course Name/Course Number):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Seminar/Workshop:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other Professional Learning Experience:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Coverage of:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Coursework (Institution/Course Name/Course Number):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Seminar/Workshop:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other Professional Learning Experience:** \_\_\_\_\_

Coverage of:	_____
Coursework (Institution/Course Name/Course Number):	_____
Seminar/Workshop:	_____
Other Professional Learning Experience:	_____

Coverage of:	_____
Coursework (Institution/Course Name/Course Number):	_____
Seminar/Workshop:	_____
Other Professional Learning Experience:	_____

Coverage of:	_____
Coursework (Institution/Course Name/Course Number):	_____
Seminar/Workshop:	_____
Other Professional Learning Experience:	_____

Coverage of:	_____
Coursework (Institution/Course Name/Course Number):	_____
Seminar/Workshop:	_____
Other Professional Learning Experience:	_____

Coverage of:	_____
Coursework (Institution/Course Name/Course Number):	_____
Seminar/Workshop:	_____
Other Professional Learning Experience:	_____



Coverage of:	
Coursework (Institution/Course Name/Course Number):	
Seminar/Workshop:	
Other Professional Learning Experience:	

Coverage of:	
Coursework (Institution/Course Name/Course Number):	
Seminar/Workshop:	
Other Professional Learning Experience:	

Coverage of:	
Coursework (Institution/Course Name/Course Number):	
Seminar/Workshop:	
Other Professional Learning Experience:	

## Template

### FOR USE IN CONSTRUCTING A COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY COMPETENCY VERIFICATION LETTER OF COVERAGE VIA COURSEWORK

#### Helpful in providing further clarity:

Constructing a letter with any of the information indicated below is especially helpful to the competency review process when we have received official transcripts and catalog course descriptions, yet there remains insufficient evidence of specific coverage or required depth of coverage specific to and completely covering a particular competency.

#### -Important components of such a letter-

- ✓ Must be on college/university letterhead
- ✓ Must be signed by the College or University Department Chair, Registrar, Licensure Officer, or Dean.

<b>Applicant's Name:</b> _____	
<b>MA Educator License Number:</b> _____	<b>Or MEPID:</b> _____
<b>Or Social Security Number:</b> _____	
<b>License Field and Grade Level:</b> _____	
<b>Completion of the course(s) listed below provide <u>at least ten hours</u> of instruction <u>specific to and completely covering each of the</u> competency review requirements noted below.</b>	
In total, at least _____ total hours of instruction have been provided in the coursework.	
<b>Course Name and Course Number:</b> _____	
Coverage of: _____	
Coverage of: _____	
Coverage of: _____	
Coverage of: _____	
Coverage of: _____	
<b>Practicum (if applicable:</b>	
The applicant has completed the course _____ <i>(insert course name and number)</i> which is a _____ hour	
practicum in the role of _____ <i>(insert license field and grade level)</i>	
<b>Signature:</b> _____	
<b>Printed name:</b> _____	
<b>Title:</b> _____ <i>(Registrar, Dean, Department Chair, or Licensure Officer)</i>	

**Please note:** The completed College/University Competency Verification Letter of Coverage via Coursework letter can be uploaded directly into your/the applicant's ELAR account. For directions on how to upload documents, please visit [www.mass.gov/ese/licensure](http://www.mass.gov/ese/licensure) and select the *How to Use the ELAR Portal* link in the left navigational bar.