Perspectives from Year 1 of CAP Implementation

What We've Learned and Where We're Going

In 2015-16, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) piloted its Candidate Assessment of Performance (CAP), a new performance assessment for teacher candidates. CAP is designed to improve teacher preparation statewide by ensuring that newly credentialed educators are ready to teach when they enter the classroom. By aligning expectations for teacher candidates with the state's Educator Evaluation Framework (EEF) for in-service educators, CAP represents a major shift in educator preparation. During the pilot year (2015-16), all Massachusetts preparation programs (referred to as Sponsoring Organizations, or SOs) were required to implement CAP within at least one preparation program that enrolled 10 or more candidates; the purpose was to build SO knowledge of and familiarity with the assessment process.[i] In 2016-17, all SOs were expected to use CAP to assess *every* teacher candidate's performance by the end of the preparation experience.

In spring 2017, as part of a research-practitioner partnership between ESE and Abt Associates that focuses on CAP implementation, Abt Associates staff conducted interviews with program leaders, program supervisors, supervising practitioners (e.g., cooperating teachers), and teacher candidates from Clark University, Fitchburg State University, and Lesley University.[ii] [iii] The SOs selected for case studies differ in size, institutional characteristics, and types of educator preparation programs offered (see Table 1). The selected SOs offer programs and content areas spanning preschool to grade 12. This brief summarizes key findings and takeaways about SOs' early experiences with CAP, and includes links to resources to support CAP implementation.

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Main Findings

- CAP is reshaping the roles and responsibilities of both supervising practitioners and program supervisors.
- SOs are customizing CAP training to align with their respective program structures and meet both supervisors' and candidates' needs.
- SOs are beginning to strategically implement CAP components earlier in preparation in order to scaffold candidates' knowledge and facilitate their practice.
- CAP is perceived as an improvement over the prior teacher candidate assessment system.
- Strong SO/district partnerships strengthen CAP implementation.

Table 1. Key Characteristics of Participating SOs

	Clark University	Fitchburg State University	Lesley University
Institution Type	Private	Public	Private
Program Types	4+1 post-baccalaureate	Baccalaureate, post- baccalaureate	Baccalaureate, post- baccalaureate
# of Program Completers (2014-15)	39	147	410
# of Initial Licensure Preparation Programs	17	57	50

CAP Is Changing the Supervisor Role

Stakeholders from the three SOs described the important roles that program supervisors and supervising practitioners play to support CAP implementation, and how their responsibilities are changing. Teacher candidates benefitted when program supervisors and supervising practitioners had clearly articulated responsibilities about implementing components of CAP, with program supervisors serving as primary "drivers" of effective implementation, and supervising practitioners providing ongoing, daily support and guidance.

> "I really think the PSs need to be the driving force and [understand] the big picture [of CAP] in order to have the details clear for everyone else along the way"
> —Program Supervisor

The three SOs each provided initial--and substantial--CAP training for supervisors customized to these specific roles.

ESE Resources

- [CAP Implementation Brief: Selecting and Supporting High Quality Supervising Practitioners](#)
- [Supervising Practitioner Job Description (Sample)](#)

Program supervisors are widely perceived to be the main "drivers" of effective implementation. Because program supervisors serve as a liaison between SOs, supervising practitioners, and teacher candidates, they are best positioned to help all members of the triad through the CAP process, and are perceived as essential to providing resources and supports to both supervising practitioners and teacher candidates.

In support of this role, program supervisors across the three SOs participated in introductory training and could access additional support throughout the year:

- Fitchburg State leadership provided an orientation session about CAP for program supervisors at the beginning of each semester; the orientation included role-specific presentations and trainings about the CAP process and materials, plus a checklist for each component's schedule and action steps. New program supervisors were also offered individual or small-group training, as needed.
- Clark University used a "train-the-trainer" model to on-board program supervisors. First, selected program supervisors reviewed ESE-provided resources. They then trained other program supervisors, met weekly to review the CAP process, trained supervising practitioners and teacher candidates, and integrated CAP into Clark's curricula and practicum experiences.
- Lesley University's leaders provided initial training to all program supervisors, who then were responsible for overseeing CAP integration into their specific programs. Program supervisors worked together to develop the initial syllabi and continuously reworked the plan based on what they learned from CAP. The SO leadership offered one-on-one or small group sessions throughout the academic year for program supervisors needing additional support.

The three SOs' program supervisors – who ranged from adjunct staff to part-time to full-time university faculty– worked closely with SO leaders to redesign practicum experiences, disseminate resources, and regularly communicate with candidates. In some cases, the SOs adapted implementation to account for requirements of particular non-traditional program configurations. For example, Fitchburg State allowed teacher candidates in the Early Childhood program to participate in CAP over two 8-week placements, whereas teacher candidates at Clark went through the CAP cycle more than once because their practicum lasted a full school year. Program supervisors at Clark established monthly meetings with their supervising practitioner groups to review the CAP requirements, and met with candidates individually three times per week to do the same. These frequent interactions helped program supervisors to

cultivate a positive working relationship with teacher candidates, and also kept all members of the triad informed about what to expect next.

Introducing CAP: Customized CAP Binder

Fitchburg State leadership integrated supplemental materials specific to its supervising practitioners, program supervisors, and teacher candidates with ESE-provided guidance and documentation into a cohesive CAP binder. The binder includes a detailed checklist of key milestones in the CAP process, customized to reflect Fitchburg's program structure and nomenclature. The binder is a living document that incorporates ongoing feedback from program supervisors, supervising practitioners, and teacher candidates.

Leveraging Technology to Facilitate CAP Implementation

Just-In-Time Email Reminders
Lesley University used *just-in-time email messages* to provide participants real-time reminders about essential CAP processes, milestones, and deadlines. Messages were customized to teacher candidates, supervising practitioners, or program supervisors, respectively, and included reminders about preparing for the first observation or first three-way meeting, talking points to include in a three-way meeting, and examples of types of evidence teacher candidates were expected to bring to their three-way meetings. These communications helped to ensure that everyone stayed on track.

Virtual Communication and Calibration
Program supervisors and supervising practitioners across the three SOs reported using e-mail and/or phone communications to share information and coordinate CAP activities. Activities included sharing observation notes, calibrating feedback over email, and taking turns with editing and responding to written comments. Program supervisors and supervising practitioners appreciated easily accessible electronic records about communications and decisions both before and after observations and other key activities.

> *"My two [supervisors] were trained last year on how to do the CAP, which made a huge difference because they held my hand the whole time. They knew what they were doing and helped me fill out the paperwork. I think having well-trained supervisors… makes a big difference"—Teacher Candidate*

Supervising practitioners support CAP implementation in real time. Supervising practitioners were perceived to play a critical day-to-day role in supporting implementation of CAP's multiple components, and therefore help keep teacher candidates on track. Supervising practitioners also reported that, as intended by ESE, their roles had shifted away from the mentoring roles typical under the prior system to more formal evaluator roles under CAP.

To best support changing roles and new responsibilities, supervising practitioners received targeted and customized training from their SO. The most effective training for supervising practitioners included targeted skill-building within the geographic and logistical constraints of placement sites. For example, Clark leadership capitalized on the university's proximity to six Worcester schools by providing training luncheons for the supervising practitioners, led by both administrative leadership and program supervisors, throughout the

academic year. Participants reviewed the CAP process, learned how to conduct classroom observations and provide feedback, and practiced non-judgmental note-taking intended to improve the quality of feedback offered to teacher candidates. Supervising practitioners also communicated at least weekly with Clark's leaders and program supervisors about CAP implementation.

Key Takeaways

✓ Supervisors benefit from training and communications customized to their roles.

✓ CAP trainings that address both the *process* for implementing CAP (e.g., which forms are needed when) and the *quality* of implementation (e.g., how to collect strong evidence or provide useful feedback) are helpful.

✓ Integrating CAP into existing structures, programs, and processes may require more time and attention initially, yet may also contribute to more meaningful implementation for candidates as a result.

✓ Program supervisors play an essential role in designing, supporting and communicating about CAP implementation.

SOs Are Customizing CAP Training to Meet Their Needs

The size of SOs, from the number of candidates to the geographic spread of their placements, had a direct effect on the type and scope of trainings provided to supervisors and candidates. Smaller SOs whose placements were within a shorter distance provided more in-person trainings with individual supervisors at school sites, while larger SOs whose candidates were geographically dispersed relied more on electronic communications to provide support.

ESE Resources

▪ [Video-Based Calibration Training Workshop](#)

SO-specific adaptations facilitate smooth CAP implementation. SOs described ESE materials as both widely used and helpful; however, the three SOs also commented on the importance of developing trainings and supplemental resources customized to their own institutional norms and structure. One size can fit many, yet some adaptation led to more effective implementation within each SO and its different programs. For example, because many of Fitchburg's undergraduate teacher candidates were locally based, one program leader visited local public schools to review its **CAP Binder** with supervising practitioners in person (see callout box on page 3). This practice helped SO leadership cultivate valuable relationships with individual supervisors and build their familiarity with CAP, while minimizing the need for practitioners to leave their school building.

A Balancing Act: Fitting CAP into the Practicum Experience

The length of practicums varied across and, in some cases, within the three SOs:

- Lesley and Clark had a standard practicum length for teacher candidates across all licensure programs (14-week and year-long practicums, respectively).
- At Fitchburg, practicum lengths varied by program type. For example, the Early Childhood program required two 8-week placements, the Severe Disabilities program required one 5-week and one 11-week placement, and other programs required one 16-week placement.

Integrating CAP into shorter practicums posed some challenges. Fitchburg placed teacher candidates in the same school for both 8-week practicums, if possible, to facilitate coordination between the two supervising practitioners, and to allow teacher candidates to spread CAP over 16 weeks instead of 8.

In contrast, Lesley worked with much more geographically dispersed teacher candidates (and therefore more dispersed supervising practitioners). Lesley's strategy for building knowledge of and familiarity with CAP among its cadre of SPs was to develop "***just-in-time" emails*** (see callout box on page 3) which were sent as needed throughout the semester. The SO leaders also offered individualized support to supervising practitioners. The supervising practitioners generally relied heavily on program supervisors to help answer questions about the CAP process and requirements.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Training modalities that take SO characteristics (e.g., size, program offerings, placement sites, etc.) into account are more likely to be effective.
- ✓ Maintaining regular communication within the CAP triad is important.

SOs Are Starting to Introduce Components of CAP Earlier in Preparation

Monitoring and meeting CAP program requirements remained a challenge for many teacher candidates, who commented that earlier exposure to CAP might have allowed them to establish greater familiarity and comfort *before* beginning the CAP process formally in their practicum. Teacher candidates preferred to be introduced to components of CAP earlier in their preparation program experiences, and supervisors noted that introducing terminology associated with CAP prior to the start of practicum helped candidates become more familiar with its components and the process from the start. That said, program supervisors often noted that even when candidates were introduced to aspects of CAP prior to the practicum, they did not always retain the information and often needed to start anew at the beginning of the practicum. SOs addressed this challenge by strategically embedding components of CAP prior to

the practicum, scaffolding skill development, and building familiarity with CAP expectations (and therefore expectations for readiness once employed) earlier in preparation. Such planning was a useful complement to SOs' efforts to build local knowledge and expertise about the roles and responsibilities associated with CAP.

The earlier the introduction to CAP, the better. The three SOs began introducing CAP to teacher candidates informally during pre-practicum experiences. For example, Lesley introduced selected CAP components during pre-practicums, including SMART goals and the concept of measuring impact on student learning. Lesley's individual licensure programs also had discretion to determine how best to integrate CAP into their program-specific coursework. Program supervisors described a process of continuously reworking their program curricula to integrate both CAP and the Massachusetts Professional Teaching Standards, as well as introduce teacher candidates to the state's Educator Evaluation Framework. Given different program

requirements, such flexibility has allowed each program to set up its own pacing and examine how best to integrate CAP earlier into the preparation experience.

> *"I like the fact that [CAP] aligns with the Massachusetts standards for teachers because it gives us a common language to talk [with Supervising Practitioners]… They understand what we're looking for."*—Program Supervisor

Clark leadership introduced the concepts of scope, quality, and consistency to teacher candidates during the pre-practicum, and the forms at the beginning of the practicum, so that information about the CAP process was phased in gradually. All teacher candidates took a common seminar course during their practicums, and SO leaders also relied on program supervisors leading the seminars to describe key steps in the CAP with their assigned group of teacher candidates. Since processes, communications, and expectations related to CAP were well-established and communicated prior to the practicum, expectations for teacher candidates were essentially unchanged before and after CAP.

Key Takeaway

✓ Integrating components of CAP into the pre-practicum and earlier coursework can help to facilitate stronger practice during the practicum.

CAP is Perceived as an Improvement Over the Prior Candidate Evaluation System

Overall, stakeholders from the three SOs reported that CAP is a significant improvement over the prior teacher candidate assessment, noting that it provides more opportunities for collaboration, reflection, and feedback, and better assesses candidates' ability to meet expectations for in-service classroom teachers.

> *"I know more about what the state expects from licensed teachers now. I have a better sense of how I will be evaluated in the future."* —Teacher Candidate

CAP helps teacher candidates better understand what the state expects of licensed professionals and also helps them become higher quality teachers. By assessing candidate performance using content and processes that parallel those used to evaluate in-service teachers, both supervisors and candidates believed that CAP better prepares candidates to be successful once they complete their preparation. For example, CAP observations (both announced and unannounced) and associated three-way meetings mirror the observation and feedback process used during in-service teacher evaluations. The Six Essential Elements included in CAP, which are drawn directly from the teacher evaluation rubric, articulate specific expectations for the teacher candidates aligned to expectations for in-service teachers, and provide a focus for each observation. These components give candidates first-hand experience with demonstrating specific skills, receiving feedback, and reflecting upon practice. Supervising practitioners and teacher candidates specifically reported that the pre- and post-observation conferences —during which supervisors provide calibrated feedback to candidates on their practice—helped teacher candidates reflect on their strengths and weaknesses more meaningfully. In general, all stakeholders indicated that CAP both supported and better assessed the successful preparation of teacher candidates.

Leaders from the three SOs expressed commitment to providing guidance on and support for CAP, adapting the resources to fit their own institutional structures and needs, and ensuring a valuable learning experience for their teacher candidates. This organizational commitment seemed to be reflected in generally positive experiences for program supervisors.

ESE Resources

▪ [Protocol: Using Measures of Student Learning](#)

> *"[CAP] is a lot less cumbersome than the former instruments were (PPA). It's much more streamlined and it's easier to do as a snapshot in the moment… it feels more aligned with what we are already going through [with the Educator Evaluation Framework]."*
> —*Supervising Practitioner*

Supervising practitioners indicated that the time commitment and burden (for supervising a teacher candidate) was higher for CAP than the prior assessment, yet they did not report feeling overburdened. Supervising practitioners from Lesley and Fitchburg noted that any additional work associated with implementing CAP was outweighed by the benefit of having another supervisor (the program supervisor) in the classroom with whom to collaborate on providing feedback and discussing candidate progress. Further, supervising practitioners at Clark reported that CAP added a new dimension and focus to conversations with program supervisors about candidate performance.

Even though it may be more time-consuming, program supervisors and supervising practitioners reported that the CAP process was more streamlined, and the components were more **organized and straightforward than the prior system.** Multiple supervising practitioners across SOs reported that a supervising practitioner's experience implementing CAP would likely become less burdensome after going through the process once.

Across the three SOs, program supervisors, supervising practitioners, and teacher candidates all reported that CAP and its components were clear and relatively easy to understand, although some components were easier than others to understand and implement (see Table 2). Despite the streamlined nature of CAP, many teacher candidates and supervising practitioners remained

uncertain about how to measure candidate impact on student learning and how to identify an appropriate measure for their subject area/grade that could fit within the specific timeframe of their practicum. Also, stakeholders expressed uncertainty about the definition of "proficient" in the 4-point rating scale as applied to teacher candidates.

Table 2. Understandability of CAP Components

Easier to Understand	Harder to Understand
■ Overall goals and purpose of CAP	■ Impact on Student Learning
■ Summative and Formative Assessments	■ Calibrating ratings
■ Observations and Three-Way Meetings	■ What the components of the 5-Step Cycle are and how they fit together (specific to teacher candidates)
■ Student feedback surveys	
■ Six Essential Elements*	
■ Developing SMART Goals*	

* For these components, perceptions about the ease of understanding varied by respondents and SOs.

Key Takeaways

✓ CAP implementation may initially take more time for supervising practitioners compared to the prior evaluation system, yet its benefits are widely perceived as outweighing the initial time investment.

✓ SOs can focus additional trainings and supports on the more challenging components of CAP (e.g., the student impact measure).

Strong SO/District Partnerships Strengthen CAP Implementation

The three SOs emphasized that CAP implementation was facilitated by strong relationships with supervising practitioners, schools, and the districts in which teacher candidates are placed. Successful collaboration depended on SOs' ability to build strong relationships with school administrators, district leaders, and supervising practitioners in local school districts, as well as effective communication techniques designed to inform and continuously enhance the partnership. Examples of some engagement strategies are depicted below.

ESE Resource

▪ Partnership Toolkit

Relationship Building to Inform, Improve, and Impact Student Outcomes

▪ Fitchburg hosts superintendent and principal breakfasts intended to provide an overview of CAP to district leadership and build relationships across districts.

▪ Lesley, whose teacher candidates are geographically dispersed, reaches out directly to principals at schools where teacher candidates are placed to open lines of communication and maintain two-way conversations about placement needs and candidate preparation.

▪ Clark works with six schools each year, all within walking distance, and builds individual relationships with supervising practitioners, many of whom have a prior history of working with Clark. Through the supervising practitioners, Clark has also identified and built relationships with district contacts and communicates regularly with them about school needs and teacher placements.

Key Takeaways

✓ SOs should engage district and school leaders about the purpose and expectations of CAP implementation for both teacher candidates and supervising practitioners.

✓ Building relationships with partner schools—regardless of geographic proximity—better supports high-quality, reliable placement sites.

Endnotes

[i] Sponsoring organizations can offer multiple preparation programs (e.g., elementary/secondary, early childhood, special education).

[ii] This partnership is supported through a three-year grant from the Spencer Foundation.

[iii] Program supervisors coordinate the CAP process for teacher candidates and provide them with guidance, support, and feedback during their practicum experiences. Supervising practitioners oversee teacher candidates in the classroom and assess and document evidence of candidate readiness for the licensure role. Teacher candidates participate in CAP and field-based experiences.