



May 11, 2020

Dear Member of the Senate Education Committee:

The Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators (PAC-TE) is a nonprofit association for all those in Pennsylvania who are engaged in the preparation and development of teachers. We are dedicated to providing strong advocacy for teacher education within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and by providing the collective voice to enable and support that work. We promote the development and implementation of quality programs designed to prepare professionals for PK-12 classroom teaching. Additionally, we promote opportunities for individual professional growth for the benefit of P-12 students across Pennsylvania.

In this unprecedented time, Pennsylvanians, along with the rest of the country and world, are teaching and learning remotely. The transition to educating our population through the use of synchronous and asynchronous technology was thrust upon us and occurred with lightning speed. As the school year draws to an end at all levels, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary, the Commonwealth now has an opportunity to reflect on the events of the past few months as a way to prepare for our inevitable future. As the legislature endeavors to begin conversation surrounding our ability to maintain the continuity of education in our state, PAC-TE encourages lawmakers to listen to all voices, including those of higher education, and in particular, teacher preparation.

The consequences of the pandemic were and continue to be grave and far-reaching. There will be predictable ripple effects for the education of our children, one of which to be mitigated is the effect on the preparation of their future teachers. As public schools closed and Universities went remote, teacher preparation programs sought to limit the impact of the situation with full knowledge of the reality that there is already a shortage of teachers across the state. Programs pulled together to support teacher candidates and maintain student teaching placements while waiting on further guidance. As immediately as possible, and at the kind invitation of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), PAC-TE membership engaged in conversation, offering feedback and insight into the issues affecting our craft, and uplifting the efforts of our members. Those members were hard at work innovatively finding ways to keep teacher candidates engaged, supporting mentor teachers, facilitating online lessons, reflecting on virtual experiences, studying past practices, researching new pedagogies, and meeting the required competencies, all as a reaction to an unparalleled situation. Professors worked tirelessly to ensure that teacher candidates would gain the necessary experiences, finding ways to support those who had limited access to resources, connecting those sitting in convenient store parking lots to gain access to free wi-fi, and finding ways to serve those K-12 schools which had limited to no technology to which to turn.

From this experience we have learned much already. Though we have always focused on solid instructional design, we must now be intentional to include synchronous and asynchronous teaching methods that meet the needs of all students regardless of ability. Though we have always understood the importance of family, we now have discovered the need for more discussion of family dynamics, necessary support systems, and intentional positive interactions, especially for those whose cultures are different than our own. Though we have always incorporated a focus on technology for teaching, learning, and assessing, we must now be broader, more encompassing, and deliberate to include scenarios confronting the inequities that exist in our public schools. Though we have taken this unusual opportunity to interact more effectively with families, strengthen our University – K12 partnerships, and model dynamic problem-solving, we must acknowledge that the skills gained during this time differ than those traditionally attained.

As we anticipate having to continue down this altered path, we look to be proactive. Yes, as academics, we will endeavor to delve into research, define best practices, and provide evidence for successful interventions. Beyond this, however, it is PAC-TE's desire to engage with the PDE and with the State Legislature in conversations exemplified by this hearing today. All stakeholders need to engage in thoughtful, intentional reflection and analysis of the response to the COVID-19 crisis in education, focusing, among other, on the following aspects:

- Providing the necessary resources to Universities and students to fill the pipeline of teachers with diverse, qualified candidates;
- Building cooperation and collaboration between IHEs and LEAs to support newly hired teachers and provide professional development for in-service teachers;
- Employing new evaluative tools, built on evidence-based frameworks that can be used to assess candidates in any setting or situation;
- Exploring the options for shifting certain aspects of education and teacher preparation away from legislation toward regulation to allow for more nimble, reaction in times of crisis;
- Developing a clear, systematic approach to observing student teachers during instruction with children in remote situations using a variety of platforms and technologies.

Though this is in no way an exhaustive list, it is included to demonstrate that PAC-TE is poised to collaborate with PDE, partner with lawmakers, and advocate to all who will listen for the needs of teacher preparation in order to maintain the continuity of education for all students, PK-20, should we experience a future crisis.

Respectfully,

Gwyneth Price
PAC-TE President-Elect
Chair, Government Relations Committee