

February 18, 2016

Honorable Representative David Sharpe,

At your request, as the Chair of the House Committee on Education, the Agency of Education is writing to affirm our strong support for inclusion of the Results-Oriented Program Approval (ROPA) fee proposal in the fiscal year 2017 fee bill. ROPA is the State of Vermont's accrediting body for college Educator Preparation Programs in the state, administered by the Agency of Education.

While the fee request represents a new cost to Educator Preparation Programs currently accredited in Vermont, the modest fee would allow for the continuation of a long-running program that is valued by both the Agency of Education and Educator Preparation Programs. If these fees are not approved, the AOE lacks the financial capacity to continue to support ROPA. As accreditation is required to be able to recommend a candidate for licensure, the discontinuation of ROPA will result in Educator Preparation Programs having to seek accreditation through an alternate provider--mostly likely Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the national accrediting agency--or shutter their programs. Currently, only the University of Vermont accredits any programs through CAEP; the remaining 16 Educator Preparation Programs accredit all of their programs through ROPA.

As we testified last year, the Agency of Education believes that ROPA serves the Educator Preparation Programs, their candidates, and, ultimately, the students of the state well for the following reasons:

- Over the course of the last several years, the collaboration between ROPA and the Educator Preparation Programs has developed into a close partnership, where the AOE's counsel has come to be valued and input actively sought by the Educator Preparation Programs while we work toward the common ends of ensuring high-quality teaching and learning in an efficient and cost-effective manner.
- ROPA has the strong support of Vermont's Educator Preparation Programs.
 - Compared to CAEP, the proposed ROPA fees are quite modest. Average annual cost per institution would range between \$1500-\$3000 depending on the size of the program. When factoring in its considerable associated staffing costs, we estimate CAEP accreditation to cost institutions an average of \$50,000 or more on an annual basis.
 - Due to these costs, several currently operating Educator Preparation Programs in the state have expressed their concern that they will be forced to close their programs rather than submit to CAEP accreditation.



- ROPA is nimble in its ability to respond to programs. At the request of an Educator Preparation Programs, ROPA recently scheduled a review to be completed in less than a month, allowing the program the possibility of enrolling students in a new route for the autumn 2016-17 academic year. This would not have been an option through CAEP.
- ROPA facilitates program reviews, though the assessment is made by selected Educator Preparation Program faculty, practitioners from the field, and, ultimately, the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators (VSBPE). Educator Preparation Programs and practitioners have repeatedly cited their experience as reviewers as an impetus for altering and improving their own programs and practice. Learning from peers is a hallmark of the ROPA process and would be lost if Educator Preparation Programs turned to CAEP for accreditation.

The AOE would welcome the opportunity to provide further clarification or testimony to legislative committees, if requested.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Holcombe
Vermont Secretary of Education

