



Feasibility of No-Cost Testing Requirements for Educator Candidates

As required by Section 288 of Chapter 238 of the Acts of 2024: An Act Relative to Strengthening Massachusetts' Economic Leadership, this report summarizes the feasibility of allowing certain educator candidates to complete the testing requirements pursuant to section 38G of chapter 70 of the General Laws at no cost to candidates and includes a description of The Department's recent voucher systems designed to pay for licensure test fees.

March 2026

This document was prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
135 Santilli Highway, Everett, MA 02149
Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370
www.doe.mass.edu





March 17, 2026

Dear Members of the General Court:

I am pleased to submit this report, *Feasibility of No-Cost Testing Requirements for Educator Candidates*, pursuant to Section 288 of Chapter 238: An Act Relative to Strengthening Massachusetts' Economic Leadership.

Within this report, you will find a summary of the feasibility of allowing educator candidates to complete the testing requirements pursuant to section 38G of chapter 70 of the General Laws at no cost to candidates, as well as a description of the Department's recent voucher systems designed to pay for licensure test fees.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pedro Martinez", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Pedro Martinez
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE; The Department) respectfully submits this Report to the Legislature: *Feasibility of No-Cost Testing Requirements for Educator Candidates* pursuant to Section 288 of Chapter 238: An Act Relative to Strengthening Massachusetts' Economic Leadership:

SECTION 288. (a) Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education shall study the feasibility of establishing a program that allows certain educator candidates to complete the testing requirements pursuant to section 38G of chapter 71 of the General Laws at no cost to candidates. Such program shall apply to candidates who are determined by the department to qualify for financial assistance, or have: (i) attempted to complete the testing requirements pursuant to said section 38G of said chapter 71; (ii) failed to meet the minimum score requirements established by the department; and (iii) earned a score or scores within 1 standard error of measurement of passing, as determined by the department. The study may include analysis of prior or existing voucher systems designed to pay for licensure test fees.

(b) Not later than October 1, 2025, the department shall file a report, including any analysis or recommendations on the feasibility of the program with the clerks of the Senate and the House of Representatives and the joint committee on education.

Definitions

Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL):

The Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) was initiated by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in 1998 as part of our statewide education reform initiative for educators seeking PreK to grade 12 academic licenses. The MTEL includes a test of communication and literacy skills as well as tests of subject matter knowledge. The tests are designed to help ensure that Massachusetts educators can communicate adequately with students, parents/guardians, and other educators and that they are knowledgeable in the subject matter of the license(s) sought. MTEL includes tests for candidates seeking vocational technical and adult basic education licenses.

School Year:

Teacher preparation programs follow the federal definition of an academic year that runs from September 1st through August 31st. At the time of writing this report, the most recent complete school year is SY2024: September 1st, 2023 through August 31st, 2024.

Dates included:

This report includes testing data from September 2014 (SY2015) to June 2025 (SY2025 YTD). Reporting on SY2025 will be incomplete as data from July and August 2025 were not available at the time of writing.

Program Feasibility

A “program that allows certain educator candidates to complete the testing requirements pursuant to section 38G of chapter 71 of the General Laws at no cost to candidates” is feasible.

All educator candidates are required to pass the Communications and Literacy Skills Test (CLST)¹, and most are required to pass at least one subject matter knowledge MTEL¹ in the licensure field being sought. The CLST MTEL costs \$112, and the typical subject matter knowledge MTEL costs \$139².

Estimated annual costs to provide MTEL vouchers range from \$1.1 million (the cost of one CLST voucher per educator candidate) to \$5.4 million (the cost of vouchers for all MTEs including first attempts and retakes). A more comprehensive version of a no-cost MTEL program would include a combination of testing vouchers, MTEL preparation, wraparound supports, and financial support for state staff (1 FTE) to fund program operation³. Providing one CLST voucher to every educator candidate with additional preparation and wraparound support would cost an estimated \$2.5 million annually while providing vouchers for all MTEs administered each year along with associated supports would cost an estimated \$6.8 million annually.

Recommendation

Based on the Department’s prior experience with testing vouchers and licensure support, the best value for cost would be \$2.6 million annually, which funds retest vouchers for any educator candidate who is within -1 SEM (standard error of the mean) of passing an MTEL, free MTEL preparation courses for all educator candidates, wraparound testing and licensure supports for all interested educator candidates, and funding for state staff (1 FTE) to support the program.

Historically, the Department has distributed vouchers broadly, regardless of candidate testing history; approximately one-third of these vouchers go unused. Analyses from research partners also show that vouchers are more likely to result in passing an MTEL when used by candidates who have taken an MTEL previously and are closer to the passing score (i.e., within -1 SEM). Based on this data, a program that covers the cost of all MTEs without taking into consideration candidate readiness may not be cost-effective nor result in licensure. We also know that candidate readiness improves with MTEL preparation and wraparound supports. Thus, this report’s recommendation is to make available test preparation and wraparound licensure supports for all educator

¹ or approved alternative.

² Test fees vary depending on the specific assessment. Current tests in the MTEL suite, including approved alternatives to the MTEL, range in cost from \$49 to \$156. Estimates in this report are based on the most frequently accessed tests.

³ Historically, the development and administration of the MTEL program has been funded entirely through candidate test fees. No state funding is currently dedicated to the program or the staff who support it.

candidates and to provide MTEL vouchers to candidates who have attempted an MTEL at least once and earned a score within -1 SEM of the passing score.

Table 1 summarizes the estimated costs of all testing combinations specified in the legislation:

- (i) attempted to complete the testing requirements pursuant to said section 38G of said chapter 71;
 - All MTEs (first attempts and retakes)
 - 1 Communications and Literacy Skills test (CLST) + 1 subject matter test
 - 1 Communications and Literacy Skills test (CLST) only
- (ii) failed to meet the minimum score requirements established by the department; and
 - All retakes
- (iii) earned a score or scores within 1 standard error of measurement of passing, as determined by the department.
 - Retakes for 1 SEM below cut score

Table 1 also includes projected costs for comprehensive MTEL supports available to all educator candidates, including the costs associated with developing free MTEL preparation courses for all licensure areas, wraparound licensure supports for individual candidates, and operational support for one FTE in the state agency.

Table 2 details the cost of the recommended program, totaling \$2.6 million annually.

Table 1. Estimated annual cost for multiple versions of a program that supports no-cost testing requirements for educator candidates

		MTEL vouchers	Annual Cost
MTEL voucher combinations	All MTEs (first attempts + retakes)	41,000	\$5,429,000
	1 CLST & 1 subject matter test	20,000	\$2,510,000
	CLST only	10,000	\$1,120,000
	All retakes after first attempt	11,500	\$1,589,500
	Retakes for -1 SEM only	8,600	\$1,195,400
Comprehensive MTEL support	Free MTEL preparation	All interested candidates	\$750,000
	Wraparound supports		\$500,000
	State staff (1 FTE)	-	\$150,000

Table 2. Estimated annual cost for the recommended program that supports no-cost testing requirements for educator candidates

Recommendation cost		\$2,595,400
MTEL vouchers	Retakes for -1 SEM only	\$1,195,400
	Free MTEL preparation	\$750,000
Comprehensive MTEL support	Wraparound supports	\$500,000
	State staff (1 FTE)	\$150,000

Estimating Participation and Cost

This section describes the calculations and recent program experience used to determine the report’s recommendation and its associated estimates. The structure for these sections follows the order of the second column in Table 1.

Estimating CLST and Subject Matter Test Attempts

- On average, 41,000 MTEs are taken each year
- On average, 10,000 unique educator candidates take an MTEL each year

Table 3 describes the total and average number of MTEs taken as well as the number of candidates by calendar year. The total number of candidates across 2014-2025 (196,879) is more than the total number of unique candidates (108,231,) as many candidates took an MTEL in multiple years.

Table 3. MTEL attempts by year

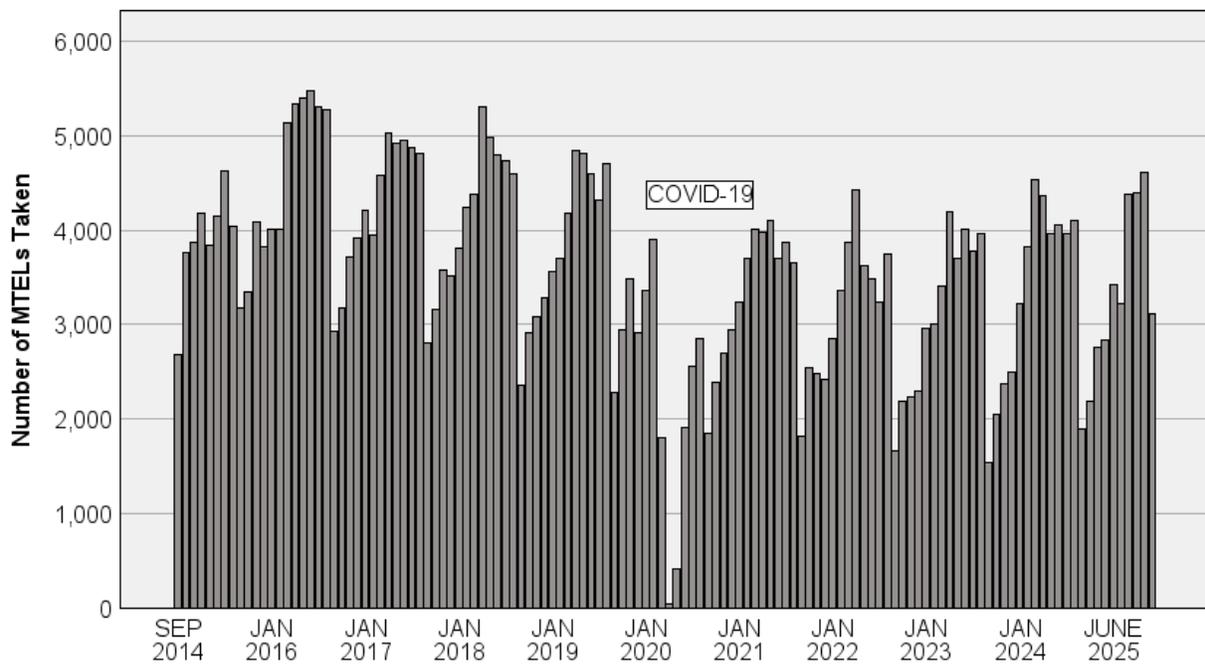
Calendar Year	Number of MTEs Taken	Number of Candidates
June 2025 ^a	23,120	11,642
2024	41,710	18,495
2023	37,442	17,017
2022	36,967	16,162
2021	39,484	17,157
2020	26,731	12,737
2019	46,323	19,575
2018	48,498	20,495
2017	50,383	21,111
2016	53,650	20,972
2015	31,068	14,072
September 2014 ^a	14,497	7,444
MTEs Taken, total	449,873	
Average MTEs Taken, per year	41,226	
Unique Candidates, total		108,231
Average Unique Candidates, per year		9,839

^a These partial calendar years are weighed in the annual average calculation, i.e. only September-December 2014 and January-June 2025 are included in the 2014 and 2025 calendar years, respectively, to align with school years.

Table 1 uses 10,000 educator candidates and 41,000 MTEs taken per year to estimate the cost of (1) vouchers for all MTEs taken in one year including retakes: 10,000 CLST and 31,000 subject matter tests at an estimated cost of \$5.4 million, (2) every candidate receiving one CLST voucher: 10,000 CLST vouchers at an estimated cost of \$1.1 million, and (3) the cost of every candidate receiving one CLST and one subject matter test voucher: 10,000 CLST vouchers and 10,000 subject matter test vouchers at an estimated cost of \$2.5 million.

Figure 1 illustrates trends in the number of MTEs taken each month from September 2014 through June 2025. More MTEs are taken in spring than fall, and both this pattern and the overall number of tests taken have been relatively consistent over these years - excluding a COVID-19 dip due to closed test centers. Thus, this report is justified in its use of estimates of participation based on averages across the included school years.

Figure 1. MTEL attempts by month



Estimating Reattempt Rates

- Across assessments and years, 74% of test takers have passed MTELEs on their first attempt, and 89% have passed MTELEs on any attempt.

The Department has reported MTEL data, including pass rates, for the past decade using a variety of candidate background characteristics like educator preparation program, enrollment status, test subject, gender, ethnic/racial group, and primary language. Summary pass rate data are publicly accessible, and candidate-specific information is available behind security portals.

Table 4. Sources for MTEL data reporting

Source	Description	Link
DESE Website	Annual Test Results	https://www.doe.mass.edu/mtel/annual
	Test Results by Administration	https://www.doe.mass.edu/mtel/results
DESE Public Profiles	MTEL Data Report	https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/epppmteldata.aspx
	Educator preparation provider Profiles pages	example Profile page
Edwin EP703 Report	DESE reporting tool behind a security portal for educator preparation providers	Getting Started with Edwin
ResultsAnalyzer	Evaluation Systems of Pearson reporting tool behind a security portal for DESE and educator preparation providers	Understanding and Analyzing Program Data

Across assessments and years, 74% of test takers have passed MTELEs on their first attempt. Pass rates increase to 89% when calculating candidates' "best attempt", i.e., if they ever pass a specific MTEL. Table 5 shows trends in both first and best attempt pass rates overall and by school year. Best attempt rates for recent years will be lower than prior years, as these candidates have had less time to reattempt an MTEL. Using the overall first attempt pass rate of 74% to estimate that 26% of test takers will not have passed an MTEL on their first attempt, approximately 11,000 assessments may be retaken each year. This matches the average across years in Table 5 of 11,532. Table 1 uses a rounded value of 11,500 to estimate the number of potential MTEL retakes in future years.

Table 5. MTEL pass rates by year and overall

Year	Retake Count	Pass Rate	
		First Attempt	Best Attempt
SY2025, YTD	8,332	73%	-
SY2024	8,675	72%	81%
SY2023	9,767	69%	77%
SY2022	10,244	70%	82%
SY2021	10,137	73%	85%
SY2020	8,445	74%	86%
SY2019	13,201	74%	88%
SY2018	14,029	74%	89%
SY2017	13,863	74%	89%
SY2016	13,673	74%	89%
SY2015	13,285	74%	89%
Overall	11,532	74%	88%

Estimating Scores within -1 SEM

- Approximately 8,600 MTEL scores (about 20% of all scores) are within -1 SEM of the passing score each year.

Scaled scores on the MTEL range from 100 to 300 points, and all tests require a scaled score of 240 to pass. Figure 2 shows the distribution of MTEL scaled scores from September 2014 (SY2015) through June 2025 (SY2025 YTD) and highlights in blue the scores within -1 SEM of passing. Table 6 counts the number of scaled scores, i.e., test attempts, within -1 SEM of passing by year. Table 1 uses 8,600 as the rounded average across these years to estimate how many future scores may be near passing.

Figure 2. Distribution of MTEL scaled scores from SY2015 to SY2025YTD, highlighting those within 1 SEM of passing

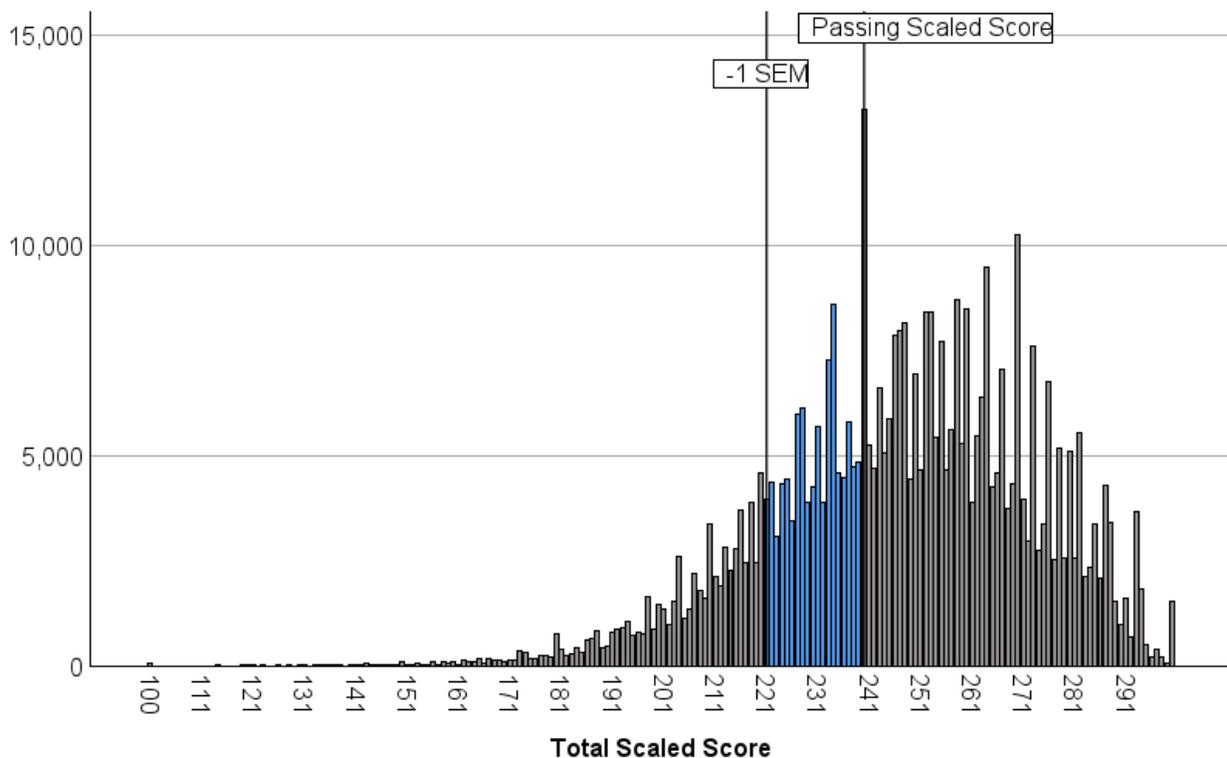


Table 6. Count of scaled scores within -1 SEM of passing by year

Year	Count
2014	2,927
2015	6,189
2016	11,021
2017	10,539
2018	10,144
2019	9,844
2020	5,530
2021	8,416
2022	8,113
2023	7,871
2024	8,465
2025 YTD	4,755
Total	93,814
Average	8,613

Estimating MTEL Costs for Candidates

Current tests in the MTEL suite, including approved alternatives to the MTEL, range in cost from \$49 to \$156. Table 7 details these costs for each assessment option.

Cost estimates in Table 1 use the CLST cost of \$112 and the subject test cost of \$139. Retake estimates use the higher \$139 test cost as subject matter tests have overall lower pass rates than CLST and may require additional attempts.

Table 7. Assessment costs

MTEL Type	MTEL Subject	Cost
MTEL CLST	Communication and Literacy Skills: Reading	\$ 69.50
MTEL CLST	Communication and Literacy Skills: Writing	\$ 69.50
MTEL CLST	Communication and Literacy Skills: Both Subtests	\$ 112.00
MTEL CLST	Vocational Technical Literacy Skills: Reading	\$ 69.50
MTEL CLST	Vocational Technical Literacy Skills: Writing	\$ 69.50
MTEL CLST	Vocational Technical Literacy Skills: Both Subtests	\$ 112.00
MTEL Subject Test	Early Childhood	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Reading Specialist	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	General Science	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Physics	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Chemistry	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Biology	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Latin and Classical Humanities	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Music	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Visual Art	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Business	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Health/Family and Consumer Sciences	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Physical Education	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	French	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	German	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Spanish	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Chinese (Mandarin)	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Italian	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Russian	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Portuguese	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Technology/Engineering	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Speech	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Theater	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Dance	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Middle School Humanities	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Middle School Mathematics/Science	\$ 139.00

MTEL Type	MTEL Subject	Cost
MTEL Subject Test	Academically Advanced	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Elementary Mathematics	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	English as a Second Language	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Adult Basic Education	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Sheltered English Immersion	\$ 166.00
MTEL Subject Test	English	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Mathematics	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Middle School Mathematics	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Digital Literacy and Computer Science	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	History/Social Science	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Earth and Space Science	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Bilingual Education	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Gen Curric Lang Arts and History/Social Science	\$ 69.50
MTEL Subject Test	Foundations of Reading	\$ 139.00
MTEL Subject Test	Gen Curric Math, Science, and Tech/Engineering	\$ 69.50
MTEL CLST Alternative	Indiana Core Academic Skills Assessment (CASA)	\$ 76.00
MTEL CLST Alternative	Missouri General Education Assessment (MoGEA)	\$ 50.00
MTEL CLST Alternative	National Evaluation Series (NES) Essential Academic Skills	\$ 75.00
MTEL CLST Alternative	Praxis Core	\$ 110.00
MTEL CLST Alternative	Washington Educator Skills Test-Basic (WEST-B)	\$ 64.00
MTEL Flex	English	\$ 69.00
MTEL Flex	English as a Second Language	\$ 69.00
MTEL Flex	Foundations of Reading	\$ 69.00
MTEL Flex	General Science	\$ 69.00
MTEL Flex	General Curriculum: Language Arts and History/Social Science	\$ 49.00
MTEL Flex	General Curriculum: Mathematics, Science, and Technology/Engineering	\$ 49.00
MTEL Flex	History/Social Science	\$ 69.00
MTEL Flex	Spanish	\$ 69.00
MTEL Flex	Mathematics (Middle School)	\$ 69.00
MTEL Flex	Mathematics (Secondary)	\$ 69.00
MTEL Subject Test Alternative	English to Speakers of Other Languages	\$ 130.00
MTEL Subject Test Alternative	Physical Education: Content and Design	\$ 156.00

Estimating Free MTEL Preparation

The Department has already developed MTEL preparation support in several high-incidence licensure areas, including five recently developed [free MTEL preparation courses](#) focused on advancing content knowledge. The Department also contracts with two test preparation vendors who offer fee-based courses for a subset of MTEL areas, which some candidates have accessed using DESE-sponsored preparation vouchers. [Testing tutorials and practice tests](#) are also available for the majority of MTEL subjects through the Department's contract with Evaluation Systems Group of Pearson.

This report's recommendation would expand free MTEL preparation courses from five to forty to cover all subjects and all potential educator candidates. Each course would cost an estimated \$150,000 to develop, with five subjects developed each year. This cost would cover MTEL preparation for all subjects, including harder-to-staff licensure areas that do not currently have DESE-approved MTEL preparation (free or fee-based), such as Earth and Space Science, Technology/Engineering, or Mathematics. Table 1 estimates an annual cost of \$750,000 to develop and maintain free MTEL preparation for all educator candidates.

Estimating Wraparound Supports

Estimated costs for wraparound supports are based on a model of five [regional centers](#) established by the Department in 2024 to support working emergency license holders to transition to provisional or initial licensure. These centers were developed in response to input from emergency licensed teachers, educator preparation providers, and district leaders seeking additional licensure assistance. Regional licensure assistance centers provide locally accessible, individualized support to educator candidates that includes navigating the MTEL registration process, requesting alternative arrangements when needed, and understanding all assessment options for a specific licensure area. Over two-thirds of employed emergency licensed educators have been supported by their regional center. Due to the ongoing nature of these centers, licensure conversion and educator retention outcomes are not available at the time of writing this report.

Continued funding for regional licensure assistance centers for all interested educator candidates in the state would cost an estimated \$500,000 per year.

Estimating Income-Based Testing Vouchers

Neither the Department nor its testing vendors collect income information from test takers when they register for a licensure test or when they create an account in the Educator Licensure and Renewal (ELAR) system. The Department is thus unable to determine a threshold or estimation of how many candidates would qualify for income-based testing vouchers.

Recent Voucher Systems

Educator Preparation Provider Vouchers

Educator preparation providers receive MTEL vouchers as part of the Department's MTEL contract with Evaluation Systems Group of Pearson. Since 2016, approximately 5,000 vouchers have been made available to educator candidates via their educator preparation program. Educator preparation providers may also purchase additional vouchers to provide full or partial credit towards test fees or preparation resources.

DESE Vouchers

The Department has purchased MTEL vouchers as part of multiple initiatives, e.g., [InSPIRED Fellows](#) and [Teacher Diversification Grants](#). Most recently, the Department purchased vouchers to cover MTEL costs for all employed emergency licensed educators to aid these educators in obtaining their provisional or initial teacher licenses. In total, the Department has purchased over 4,000 vouchers that have been disseminated to educators through various mechanisms.

Estimating State Staff

The Department has experience supporting MTEL vouchers, preparation, and wraparound supports; however, the scale of the proposed program would require a significant increase in staff time dedicated to the MTEL portfolio. Table 1 includes \$150,000 annually for 1 FTE to administer the program.

Considerations

A “program that allows certain educator candidates to complete the testing requirements pursuant to section 38G of chapter 71 of the General Laws at no cost to candidates” is feasible, and DESE’s recommended version of the program is estimated to cost \$2.6 million annually.

The Department has experience administering MTEL vouchers, preparation, and wraparound supports to assist educator candidates with licensure requirements, and evidence of these programs indicates that the return on investment for a voucher program varies depending on several factors. Historically, the Department has distributed vouchers broadly, regardless of candidate testing history; approximately one-third of these vouchers go unused. Analyses from research partners also show that vouchers are more likely to result in passing an MTEL when used by candidates who have taken an MTEL previously and are closer to the passing score (i.e., within -1 SEM). Based on this data, a program that covers the cost of all MTEs without taking into consideration candidate readiness may not be cost-effective nor result in licensure. Thus, this report’s recommendation is to make available test preparation and wraparound licensure supports for all educator candidates and to provide MTEL vouchers to candidates who have attempted an MTEL at least once and earned a score within -1 SEM of the passing score.

While the expansion of these programs could aid candidates in obtaining their educator licenses and, ultimately, working as effective educators in Massachusetts public schools, some considerations about the program’s scale remain. The scale of the program estimated in this report is based on historic data. Greatly expanding an MTEL voucher program may increase the overall number of educator candidates taking these assessments beyond prior years, a potential benefit for the educator pipeline and a detriment to its cost. The costs estimated in this report are also based on historical data. As seen in some prior government contracts, costs for services may increase when the state subsidizes those services. Fully funding vouchers for all MTEL takers may result in an overall increase in test fees that would impact the estimates included in this report. Additionally, the recent Mass Leads Act proposes changes to the state’s educator licensing system that would affect the estimates included here. For example, the option to waive a required MTEL would decrease the overall number of tests taken and, therefore, vouchers given. The recommendation of this report is based on best estimates using historic data and the most current licensure policy.