



**GUIDE TO FIELD EXPERIENCES  
IN TEACHER EDUCATION AT  
ELMHURST UNIVERSITY**

**2025-2026**

## **TEACHER EDUCATION GOALS AT ELMHURST UNIVERSITY**

1. Develop and implement innovative approaches to content knowledge development that integrate cross-disciplinary knowledge through culturally responsive pedagogy.
  2. Demonstrate how instructional planning and delivery utilize the multiplicity of literacies present in our changing and interdependent world.
  3. Transform student learning opportunities using equitable and responsive assessments.
  4. Create classroom environments that are inclusive and representative of students' cultural backgrounds within the classroom, school, and community.
  5. Engage in authentic experiences with all invested parties (learners, families, colleagues, community) to develop collaborative practices both in and outside of the classroom that cultivate equitable and socially just learning environments.
  6. Engage as a critical reflective practitioner who is committed to inclusive schools that ensure a quality anti-racist education for all students.
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## **PRIMARY CONTACTS FOR FIELD EXPERIENCES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Dr. Kelley Kalinich, Director of Field Experiences  
kelley.kalinich@elmhurst.edu  
630-617-3546

Dr. Joe Elliott, Associate Chair of Licensure  
joseph.elliott@elmhurst.edu  
630-617-6437

Dr. Jeanne White, Department Chair  
whitej521@elmhurst.edu  
630-617-6485



## OVERVIEW OF FIELD EXPERIENCES

The *2025–2026 Guide to Field Experiences* serves as an essential resource to ensure that field experiences are conducted with best practices in teacher preparation. The guide details the structure and expectations of field placements and emphasizes the responsibilities of all stakeholders, including the teacher candidate, mentor teacher, and university supervisor, collectively referred to as the “triad.” The guide also shares key procedures and policies, including Criminal Background Investigations (CBIs), which detail university and district-level requirements and the implications of criminal history for licensure and placement eligibility.

## FIELD PLACEMENTS AND HOURS

### Field Experience Placements

The Director of Field Experiences places all teacher candidates with their field sites. Teacher candidates must communicate with the director regarding their field placements and cannot seek placements independently. The course professor directs all field-based assignments at Elmhurst University. Assignments in beginning courses typically involve observing, interviewing, and working with individual or small groups of students. Assignments at the upper level involve planning, instructional delivery, and assessment of larger groups and the whole class.

### Field Hour Types

During field experiences, a teacher candidate leads or assists with instruction under the supervision of a licensed educator. The Department of Education requires two types of field experience:

1. Observation includes watching instructional interactions or school activities and interviewing teachers or school staff or attending extracurricular activities in PK-12 or transitional settings.
2. Participation includes interacting one-on-one, small-group, or whole-class instruction with PK-12 or transitional students during a required attendance day for students.

### Field Hours and Documentation

Teacher candidates participate in field experiences weekly and document their timesheets in the Sonia database system. Field experiences counted toward a course requirement must be completed during the academic term in which the teacher candidate is enrolled in the course. Fieldwork is a major component of the checkpoints that teacher candidates complete at three points in their preparation:

- Checkpoint 1: end of the second semester.
- Checkpoint 2: semester before student teaching.
- Checkpoint 3: end of student teaching.

Teacher candidates must complete a minimum of 100 hours of field experience prior to admission to student teaching. Of the 100 hours, at least 80 participation hours require work directly with students, and at least 50 hours require work with diverse student populations. The 100 hours must meet grade-level requirements for the licensure area.



### **School District Requirements**

All teacher candidates working with PK-12 and transitional students must provide, upon request, proof of their most recent Criminal Background Investigation (CBI) check to hosting schools. The University's policy on criminal background checks is found in Policies & Procedures. Individual school districts may require additional checks or medical documentation, and the teacher candidates are responsible for providing them. Teacher candidates are responsible for checking their Elmhurst University email and communicating with the school district regarding the onboarding requirements. Failure to respond promptly to the school district's communication may lead to a loss of a site placement and a delay in completing the program requirements.

## **FIELD EXPERIENCE POLICIES**

### **Mentor Teacher Qualifications**

All mentor teachers should have a minimum of three years of full-time teaching experience, licensure in the areas of their teaching assignment(s), have demonstrated the ability and willingness to mentor a pre-clinical candidate, be directly engaged in teaching subject matter or learning activities in the required area, and hold a valid State of Illinois license. School districts may have additional requirements for serving as a mentor teacher. The Department of Education requests that mentor teachers work with only one teacher candidate at a time, unless agreed upon in writing.

Teacher candidates often ask mentor teachers to host them as student teachers. Serving as a mentor teacher, however, does not automatically qualify one to become a cooperating teacher for student teaching. School districts may have specific requirements for a teacher to serve as a cooperating teacher. School districts also make the final decision about who serves as a mentor and a cooperating teacher. The Department of Education officially requests all student teaching placements through the district's central office administration 3 to 6 months in advance.

### **Placement Locations**

Field and student teaching placements are to be with licensed teachers in Illinois public schools within a 25-mile radius of campus. In special cases and depending on the licensure area, a placement may be made in a private school with a licensed teacher.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

No field experience should represent a professional conflict of interest. A conflict of interest exists if a family member is employed by the school district or serves on the district's Board of Education. Candidates may not conduct field experiences in any school district they attended or the school district in which they permanently reside.

### **Confidentiality**

Teacher candidates must maintain confidentiality in all field experiences. Teacher candidates must use pseudonyms when describing field experiences in course



assignments. At no time should they reveal the identity of a school, teacher, or student, except on the forms in Sonia that officially document the field experience. Mentor teachers should use their professional judgment in following FERPA when discussing student records with teacher candidates. All teacher candidates at Elmhurst University have signed a confidentiality agreement, which has been reviewed by the Elmhurst University attorney, stating they will not share the video/audio with anyone other than course instructors and/or university supervisors.

### **Video and Audio Recording**

To prepare for the student teaching semester, teacher candidates may video and/or audio record their instruction to receive feedback and guidance. PK-12 students may appear on the video or audio recording. Building administrators will be asked to approve all recordings. Permission forms will be shared with families, and only students whose parent/guardian gives consent will be part of these recorded lessons. Teacher candidates will keep these signed forms in a secure location until the video is deleted. Student names will not appear on any materials and will always remain confidential. Recording will be nonintrusive and limited to specific lessons the teacher candidate is teaching under the supervision of a licensed teacher, the university faculty or supervisors, or parent/guardians.

### **ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

During field experiences, the three members of the team are referred to as a triad. The triad consists of the teacher candidate, mentor teacher, and the university supervisor. Their roles and responsibilities are as follows.

#### **Teacher Candidate**

The teacher candidate is expected to approach the practicum with enthusiasm, a readiness to learn, and a willingness to take initiative. Early in the placement, candidates should introduce themselves to all team members and school personnel, actively ask questions, and participate in professional discussions. Collaboration is key; candidates are encouraged to share ideas, work cooperatively, and remain flexible in their approach. They are responsible for planning engaging, standards-based lessons for both small and whole group instruction, as aligned with their course assignments. Constructive feedback must be received openly and applied thoughtfully.

Clear and proactive communication is crucial, especially when questions or concerns arise. These should be promptly addressed with the university supervisor. Throughout the practicum, candidates should exhibit respectful behavior, be reflective in their practice, and show patience with both themselves and their mentor teacher. Understanding and applying the policies and procedures of the school, district, and state, especially as a mandated reporter, is essential. In the event of illness or emergency that prevents attendance, candidates must immediately contact their mentor teacher and practicum supervisor by phone or email.



It is important to acknowledge that the legal and professional responsibilities of the classroom always remain with the mentor teacher. However, the teacher candidate is expected to actively participate in managing the classroom efficiently and effectively, with an emphasis on fostering student motivation and maintaining discipline. Confidentiality must be maintained regarding all student information, and the candidate must also adhere to any district's technology acceptable use policy.

### **Mentor Teacher**

The mentor teacher plays a pivotal role in creating a welcoming and supportive environment for the teacher candidate. This involves sharing resources and ideas, observing the candidate during instruction or student interactions, and offering constructive feedback. Modeling effective teaching practices and professional conduct is a vital aspect of this mentorship. Flexibility is encouraged, allowing the candidate to experiment with new instructional approaches, while clear communication of expectations and patience are essential qualities for successful mentorship.

The mentor teacher should also help the candidate understand the broader school context by familiarizing them with school policies, administrative procedures, curriculum materials, and the specific needs of students. By fostering a supportive and harmonious working relationship, the mentor teacher helps the candidate develop the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for professional teaching. Regular observation and weekly conferences allow the mentor teacher to provide feedback, promote self-reflection, and assist the candidate in identifying both strengths and areas for growth.

In cases of concern, whether large or small, the mentor teacher is expected to notify the university supervisor promptly. They collaborate with the supervisor to assess the candidate's development, meet during each supervisory visit as feasible, and maintain ongoing communication. At the end of the term, the mentor teacher submits a final electronic summative evaluation through a Qualtrics survey.

### **University Supervisor**

Serving as a liaison between Elmhurst University and the host school, the practicum supervisor works closely with both the mentor teacher and the teacher candidate to ensure a productive and positive experience. At the beginning of the semester, the supervisor consults with the mentor teacher about expectations, including required teaching responsibilities and hours. The supervisor also acts as a confidante and advocate for both the candidate and the mentor, ensuring that communication remains clear and supportive.

In addition to facilitating collaboration, the supervisor helps the mentor-candidate team establish realistic and attainable goals. They address any sensitive or challenging issues that arise, keeping the Director of Field Experiences and Associate Chair of Licensure informed of any concerns. During site visits, the supervisor confers with both the candidate and mentor teacher about the candidate's strengths, challenges, and any



necessary remediation plans. Their feedback is honest and constructive, focusing on classroom performance and professional growth.

The supervisor guides the evaluation process by clarifying the final evaluation procedures to the mentor teacher and offering insights to support the mentor's evaluation. Regular support is provided throughout the practicum, and additional visits may be conducted if necessary. The supervisor is responsible for submitting two formative electronic monitoring review forms and one summative review for each candidate.

### **TEACHER CANDIDATE CRIMINAL BACKGROUND INVESTIGATIONS**

Criminal Background Investigations (CBI) are required in all teacher education programs at the University: (a) before admission to a teacher education program and (b) before the time a teacher candidate begins a student teaching experience. The CBI must have been completed within one year at the time of application to the program. CBIs for student teachers must be completed within the academic year (i.e., after January in the year of fall student teaching; after June the year before spring student teaching). It is the students' responsibility to ensure that these required investigations are performed promptly and to assume any costs associated with such investigations.

#### **Responsibilities and Eligibilities**

The University's requirement that all teacher candidates submit the results of any criminal history records check by the Illinois State Police to the Department of Education and provide copies of such results to all hosting schools is consistent with Illinois law. The University will assist teacher candidates by providing them with information about background investigations and opportunities to obtain them through outside companies or agencies. Candidates are responsible for all fees connected with this procedure. In compliance with the School Code, school districts/boards require an FBI criminal history records check and may require additional background information in addition to the criminal history records check by the Illinois State Police. Evidence of a criminal history records check must be provided upon request by any school/district official and the Director of Field Experiences.

As outlined on the application to teacher education and the application materials for placement in student teaching, teacher candidates may not be admitted to a teacher education program, retained in the program, or approved for student teaching if a background investigation determines that they have been convicted of criminal behavior that, by law, automatically prohibits them from obtaining Illinois licensure. Offenses that automatically prohibit licensure currently include first degree murder, any Class X felony, juvenile pimping, soliciting a juvenile prostitute, exploitation of a child, obscenity, child pornography, criminal sexual assault, aggravated criminal sexual assault, criminal sexual abuse, aggravated criminal sexual abuse, some offenses outlined in the Cannabis Control Act, and some crimes defined in the Illinois Controlled Substances Act. Teacher candidates are responsible for knowing which offenses are automatically disqualifying. Information on the legal requirements for obtaining an Illinois Professional Educator



License and being hired by an Illinois school district is available at any Regional Office of Education and on the Illinois State Board of Education website. Students who are ineligible for a Professional Educator License or to be employed in Illinois public schools will not be admitted to or retained in a teacher education program.

### **Administrative Review**

If a background investigation reveals a criminal history that does not automatically disqualify the candidate from being licensed or employed as a teacher in Illinois, then an administrative review will be held to determine the impact of a student's criminal history on their status in the teacher education program. A teacher candidate will be informed in writing of the potential consequences of this history by the Department of Education Chair or designee. Candidates will be asked to acknowledge this formal notification and to allow the Department of Education to discuss the criminal history records check information with any school district/board officials in which field experiences or student teaching are being requested. An administrative review will be conducted by the Department's Performance Review Committee as outlined in the Guide to Policies and Procedures for Teacher Education Programs. The Committee will recommend whether the candidate should be retained in the program and will inform the teacher candidate of the right to appeal its decision to the University's Teacher Education Committee. The decision to accept a teacher candidate with an offense on their criminal history for all school placements will be made by the school district/board, not by the University. Candidates should be aware that some school districts/boards may limit or deny their presence in a school based on charges rather than convictions or based on offenses that are not automatically disqualifying under Illinois state law.

### **Representation and Discretion**

At no time should students represent themselves as Elmhurst University teacher candidates and work with PK-12 students if they have a record of any criminal offense unless they have been expressly approved to work with PK-12 students by the school district/board in question. To participate in schools with any offense requires that the Department of Education communicate this status to the hosting school and that the teacher candidate provides the school with a copy of the results of a current criminal background investigation before any field experience is undertaken. As noted above, the school district/board retains the authority and discretion to determine whether to accept a student for field experiences. Concealment or misrepresentation of a criminal history is a violation of the Department of Education's Academic Integrity policy as outlined in the Guide to Policies and Procedures for Teacher Education Programs and will result in a recommendation to remove the student from the teacher education program. The School of Education's policies and procedures are not a substitute for actions that may be taken by Elmhurst University as outlined in the Student Handbook.

### **Copies of Records**

A copy of the criminal history records check results will only be retained by the department when an offense is recorded. All copies of criminal history and any accompanying records





will be retained in a separate file by the Department of Education Chair or designee. The documentation will be shared only with Elmhurst faculty and staff on a need-to-know basis. This documentation will also be available to the student upon request. All copies of criminal history records check results, as well as other required documentation (e.g., TB test results), must be provided by teacher candidates directly to their hosting school districts. The University does not provide copies of any criminal history records check results directly to schools. The University informs school districts/boards of this policy in communications regarding field experiences, in formal placement documentation for field experiences, and as part of the contracts signed by school districts/boards that accept Elmhurst teacher candidates for field experiences.

