

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework(s) establishes the shared vision for a unit's efforts in preparing educators to work effectively in P-12 schools. It provides direction for programs, courses, teaching, candidate performance, scholarship, service, and unit accountability. The conceptual framework(s) is knowledge-based, articulated, shared, coherent, consistent with the unit and/or institutional mission, and continuously evaluated. The conceptual framework(s) provides the bases that describe the unit's intellectual philosophy, which distinguishes graduates of one institution from those of another.

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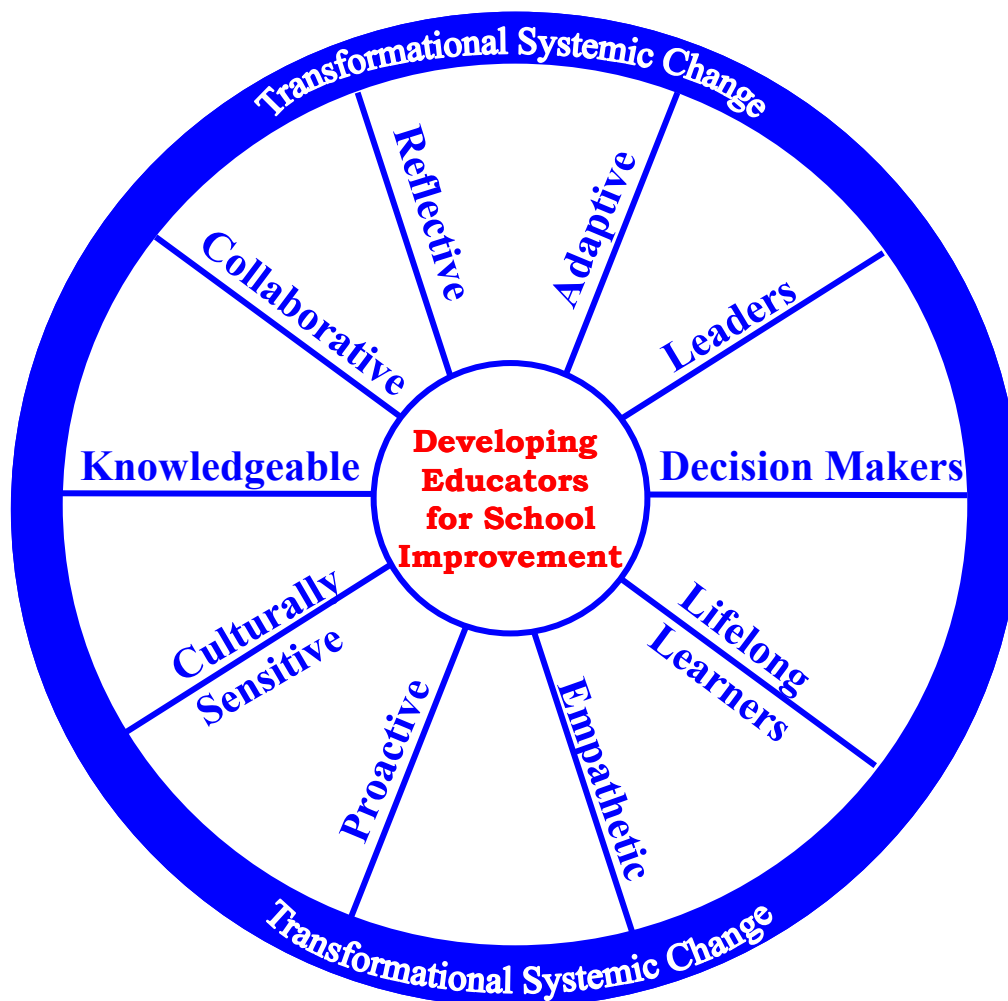
Introduction

In 1997, the College of Education (COE) adopted as its Conceptual Framework the standards of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) for initial preparation programs and the propositions of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) for advanced preparation programs. At that time, it was the intent of the COE to delineate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required by candidates at the two levels of preparation and ensure a performance-based Conceptual Framework that would lead to more accurate assessment of candidates' achievements in the preparation programs. The framework was implemented in the Fall, 1998. Following initial implementation, we engaged in reflective study of the adopted Conceptual Framework based on feedback from our NCATE and PSC teams following the Spring, 1999, visit. At that NCATE/PSC review, a conceptual framework weakness was cited indicating that not all components of our Conceptual Framework had been clearly developed or clearly articulated for all programs. As a result of this cited weakness, the leadership of all units of the COE in conjunction with the COE administration and COE faculty began developing a Conceptual Framework that articulates more clearly the mission of the COE and our theme *Developing Educators for School Improvement*. Based on continuing review of our progress in developing our Conceptual Framework, the PSC lifted its stipulation in September, 2003, indicating that we had adequately addressed the Conceptual Framework weakness previously cited.

The graphic schema for the Conceptual Framework (Figure CF.1) was conceived to depict the thematic mission and the endorsed assumptions that are infused in COE professional programs. The shape of the circular wheel denotes the belief that the development of professional educators and the design of the programs are continual and dynamic processes. The hub of the wheel signifies our theme and serves as our guiding mission for *Developing Educators for School Improvement*. The spokes of the wheel

establish the strength of the wheel, and the descriptors (our professional commitments) are the significant elements in the development of educators. We believe that educators need to be *Empathetic*, *Adaptive*, *Culturally Sensitive*, *Collaborative*, *Reflective*, *Knowledgeable*, and *Proactive*. Moreover, educators need to be *Decision Makers*, *Leaders*, and *Life Long Learners*. Given the thematic mission and the development of the descriptors in COE educators, we expect school improvement to occur through transformational systemic change—the rim of the wheel that is supported by our professional commitments.

Figure CF.1 College of Education Conceptual Framework



The Conceptual Framework is the rationale and organizing principle that guides the curriculum for *Developing Educators for School Improvement*. The Conceptual Framework is grounded in research, knowledge, and experience that describe what undergraduate and graduate candidates should know and apply to foster transformational systemic change. Our Conceptual Framework incorporates the standards and principles established by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC), and Specialized Professional Associations (SPAs). The following beliefs give credence to our professional commitments—the 10 descriptors used to describe the qualities and dispositions that we feel educators must possess to positively impact school improvement—and provide further delineation of the Conceptual Framework:

1. Decision Makers: We believe that candidates should be able to demonstrate knowledge and skills when making decisions that will influence effective transformational systemic change.
2. Leaders: We believe that candidates should be able to demonstrate effective leadership skills to initiate and facilitate transformational systemic change.
3. Life Long Learners: We believe that candidates should seek continually to improve their knowledge, disposition, and skills to influence transformational systemic change.
4. Adaptive: We believe that candidates should be able to demonstrate flexibility and strategic planning appropriate to a wide variety of learners for effective transformational systemic change.
5. Collaborative: We believe that candidates should be able to develop skills to work effectively with various stakeholders involved in the educational process that will bring about transformational systemic change.
6. Culturally Sensitive: We believe that candidates should be able to develop awareness and understanding of individual and group differences when diagnosing and prescribing transformational systemic change.
7. Empathetic: We believe that candidates should be able to develop the sensitivity for individual, family, and institutional needs that will embrace transformational systemic change.
8. Knowledgeable: We believe that candidates should be able to demonstrate general knowledge inherent in a liberal arts curriculum, advanced knowledge in content areas, and specific knowledge in professional education for the implementation of transformational systemic change.
9. Proactive: We believe that candidates should be able to advocate for the removal of barriers that impede life long learning and hinder transformational systemic change.
10. Reflective: We believe that candidates should be able to demonstrate critical thinking skills in the diagnosis and prescription for transformational systemic change.

In reviewing all programs, we formally reexamined our core beliefs about teaching and the attributes and characteristics that we perceive should be possessed by beginning and experienced educators. This review led to 10 descriptors—our professional commitments—that are illustrated in the Conceptual Framework diagram. These descriptors define what we believe is the essence of a successful practitioner, and what COE candidates should embody upon completion of initial and advanced preparation programs at the State University of West Georgia.

Throughout the program review process, we were mindful of the emergence of the INTASC standards and NBPTS propositions, as well as the articulation of area-specific standards from each of the SPAs, that govern our various program areas. Yet, our review was not focused specifically on these guidelines but rather on the need to articulate core beliefs and principles and to identify program adaptations that will enable us to realize these outcomes. The outcome of the review process produced a series of belief statements that are highly congruent with the INTASC standards and NBPTS propositions. Indeed, all of our core beliefs are captured by the INTASC standards, and these guidelines reflect a level of knowledge and skill attainment that is a prerequisite to the achievement of NBPTS propositions.

We believe that we have developed a Conceptual Framework that articulates our philosophy and undergirds all programmatic efforts. Furthermore, we perceive that the INTASC principles and NBPTS propositions are the most concise specification of the types of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that we seek to promote and require of State University of West Georgia candidates. The Conceptual

Framework provides the philosophical basis for justification of our utilization of the INTASC principles and NBPTS propositions as the means to prepare candidates in their initial and advanced programs. In regard to syllabi, faculty have indicated for each objective on every syllabus which INTASC principle, NBPTS proposition, Conceptual Framework descriptor, and/or SPA standard is addressed in that objective.

In attempting to articulate the Conceptual Framework more clearly, the faculty (through Faculty Governance Council and input from the Administrative Council) expanded the descriptors to include knowledge, skill, and disposition statements *for each descriptor* to reflect further the unit's philosophical beliefs about what educators should know, be able to do, and value. This development spanned nearly two semesters. In working to align syllabi, assignments, and assessments with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions statements for each descriptor (which a group of faculty members attempted during Summer, 2003), it became apparent that the statements were too prescriptive and did not allow flexibility in defining the descriptors for particular programs and at various levels. For example, defining the descriptor *leaders* for initial preparation candidates working on a B.S. degree in Middle Grades is much different than defining *leaders* for advanced candidates who are working on their Ed.S. degrees in Educational Leadership. Further, the way the descriptor *leaders* is assessed and the levels of leadership that are expected for candidates in different programs vary greatly. Ultimately, faculty determined that we could more accurately and effectively integrate knowledge, skills, and dispositions in syllabi if we focused on broad definitions for each descriptor. Additionally, faculty in each program have defined the 10 Conceptual Framework descriptors based on program goals and level of program. These definitions are described in each program's PSC Report.

Shared Vision Our Conceptual Framework supports the College of Education's mission as a student-focused institution committed to providing excellence in the initial and advanced preparation of professionals for a variety of educational settings. We view our Conceptual Framework as a dynamic, living model that is under continuous revision. Not only do we value the development of *reflective, proactive, collaborative* educators who are *decision makers* and *lifelong learners*, we value these skills and dispositions in ourselves as well. Thus, we continue to revisit our Conceptual Framework, seeking feedback from faculty within the College of Education as well as from colleagues in Arts and Sciences and Business, from colleagues in the educational community, and from candidates and graduates, about ways to strengthen the Conceptual Framework.

In revising our Conceptual Framework, we ensured that it was grounded in research, knowledge, and experience that describe what our candidates should know and be able to accomplish in order to impact transformational systemic change. Though we realize that graduates of initial preparation programs may have only a small impact on changing schools, we expect candidates, as they complete more advanced degrees, to have a significant impact on transformational systemic change. Thus, we see our model as a developmental model: in masters and specialist programs we emphasize candidates assuming leadership roles to impact school improvement. Similarly, candidates in the Ed.D. program in School Improvement are expected to facilitate and lead transformational systemic change in their schools and school districts.

Coherence During AY 2003-2004, faculty began to further align course syllabi with the College of Education's Conceptual Framework. In addition to course objectives, assignments and assessments have been aligned with Conceptual Framework descriptors. For each syllabus, faculty have written a *Link to Conceptual Framework* statement that (a) defines the relevant descriptors for the course and (b) aligns

the descriptors to an assessment activity(ies). The alignment of course syllabi, assignments, and assessments was completed in Fall, 2003; in Spring, 2004, syllabi reflect these changes.

During Spring, 2004, faculty from each program constructed a Conceptual Framework matrix that illustrates which descriptors are covered in each course. Though this work was completed earlier for inclusion in our PSC reports that were due in October, 2003, the changes made to the Conceptual Framework as well as the new emphasis we have placed on assessment of the descriptors, necessitated our updating syllabi and program matrices. An example of a matrix from the Department of Educational Leadership is available at [Educational Leadership Matrix](#).

Aligning course syllabi, objectives, assignments, and assessments with the Conceptual Framework descriptors allows us to determine the level of coherence in our programs, particularly as the matrices are completed and we are able to look at entire programs to ensure that each descriptor of the Conceptual Framework is not only covered in each program, but also is assessed.

Professional Commitments and Dispositions The College of Education's Conceptual Framework illustrates the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that our faculty and community value in educators. In terms of knowledge, we expect that our candidates are *knowledgeable* of the liberal arts curriculum, have advanced knowledge in content areas, and possess specific knowledge in professional education. We believe that the educator's acquisition of knowledge is paramount to being able to disseminate knowledge to the learner. Griffin, Dodds, and Rovegno (1996) indicate that educators need a pedagogical content knowledge base that will allow them to plan learners' activities, instructional strategies, and sequential content. By broadening the knowledge base and highlighting the educator's production of knowledge, teaching can become a more mutually beneficial occurrence (Golombek, 1994). Because knowledge is increasing at an exponential rate, Winston (2000) suggests that we need to answer the basic question, "What do we need to know and do to improve the outcomes for all young children?" With a strong knowledge base, educators will be prepared better to initiate school improvement.

We value skills essential for good educational practice, including candidates' ability to be *adaptive* and *proactive* as well as their ability to demonstrate that they are sound *decision makers*. First, we believe that educators should be *adaptive*, demonstrating flexibility and strategic planning appropriate to a wide variety of learners. We believe that schools that positively impact the performance of students have personnel at all levels who focus on changing instructional practices and methodologies to meet students' needs (Fullan, 2000). In educational settings that are increasingly diverse, educational excellence depends substantially on the educator's ability to adapt instruction, both content and presentation strategies, to students who exhibit various levels of ability (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1997). The content of the instruction should match appropriately the student's knowledge base and experiential background so that newly acquired information, skills, and dispositions can be internalized and generalized to future situations both in and out of the educational setting (Danielson, 1996). Additionally, educators increasingly are expected to work in collaboration with professionals from many agencies, children from varying family structures, and parents/guardians with varying interests and knowledge levels.

Second, we believe that educators should be *proactive*, working to become effective advocates for the removal of barriers that impede lifelong learning and hinder transformational systemic change. Reactive educators spend too much time responding to situations that arise in their schools. As proactivity makes

individuals responsible for their actions (Covey, 1990), educators who are proactive cease blaming others and reacting to problems. To promote lifelong learning in all schools, educators must devote considerable energy to their craft (Kohl, 1998) while spending less time in a responsive, reactive mode. To truly inspire transformational systemic change, educators must search openly for better ways to reach and serve children (Sergiovanni, 1996). It is vital that all educators take the initiative to promote lasting school improvement.

Third, we believe that educators must be good *decision makers*, and they should be able to demonstrate knowledge and skills when making decisions. The ability to make decisions is a critical component of continuous school improvement. Because the decision making process plays an integral role in motivation, communication, leadership, and organizational change (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1999), it is vital that educators are able to demonstrate knowledge and skill in effective decision making. Making decisions with increased student learning in mind empowers educators to allocate resources effectively to programs and students (Hartman & Boyd, 1998). Critical to transformational systemic change is the educator's knowledge of how best to function within constraints of available school resources. This heightened ability for allocating resources in turn resolves ethical dilemmas that are a normal and routine part of educational decision making (Strike, 1998).

Our Conceptual Framework includes six dispositions descriptors: *empathetic*, *culturally sensitive*, *collaborative*, *reflective*, *leaders*, and *lifelong learners*. We value *empathetic* educators who are sensitive to individual, family, and institutional needs. Empathy is a critical characteristic of any educator who is involved in school improvement and who influences high academic achievement in all students. An empathetic view of others is essential for educators to develop and maintain in order to enter the very personal world of children (Wilson & Cameron, 1996). While empathy traditionally has been associated with the work of counselors, the need for empathetic teachers (Schechtman & Zipora, 1994) and administrators (Duke, 1986) has been recognized. In fact, Santa (1999) stresses that great teachers have empathy. Affirming diversity demands empathy, and educators with high levels of empathy create a positive school climate that correlates with high student achievement (Danielson, 1996). In this respect, we are suggesting that empathetic understanding of students leads to empathetic responding to their needs that, in turn, strengthens the learning process (Egan, 1998).

We value educators who are *culturally sensitive* and who develop awareness and understanding of individual and group differences. It is critically important that educators recognize that the demographics of American public schools are changing rapidly and the number of language-minority students attending Georgia public schools has more than tripled in the past decade (Georgia Department of Education, 1999). The Georgia Department of Education estimates that approximately 46% of the children now enrolled in Georgia public schools (P-12) are minority students. These students usually bring with them languages, cultures, and educational experiences markedly different from those of their classmates and their teachers. Therefore, it is critical that our graduates embrace multicultural and global perspectives (Gollnick & Chinn, 2001), reflect upon their personal attitudes and beliefs about diverse groups in today's classrooms, and understand that throughout their teaching careers they will be expected to be proactive in constantly adapting their teaching styles and strategies to create educational environments that are truly equitable (Banks, 1994; Nieto, 2004).

We believe that educators should be *collaborative* individuals who have the skills to work effectively with various stakeholders involved in the educational process. As the roles and responsibilities of school

professionals change and student diversity continues to increase, there is an expectation that educators will work directly with one another to educate students (Rainforth, 1997). Educators currently are working in interdisciplinary, subject, and grade level teams. In order to fully participate on these collaborative teams, educators need to acquire and possess certain skills. Educators who are collaborative facilitate effective communication, cooperation, and coordination with other school professionals, parents, and families (Dettmer, Dyck, & Thurston, 1999). They promote professional interactions between and among professionals, parents, and families to advance commonly agreed upon goals that are in the best interest of students (Mostert, 1998). These educators demonstrate the ability to jointly share resources and knowledge, use effective decision making/problem solving skills, and develop effective interventions to meet the educational needs of students (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997).

We value educators who demonstrate *reflective*, critical thinking skills in order to engage effectively in transformational systemic change. We are dedicated to developing educators who think actively about practice in order to improve their teaching and to facilitate student learning (Freese, 1999). We believe that there must be a connection between practitioners and the educators of practitioners in terms of dialogue, critical inquiry, and reflective practices (McIntyre & Byrd, 1996). Strategies to foster reflective and critical thinking skills include delineation of the problem, information gathering, and diagnosis and evaluation in which information is used to transform the educational process (Strohm & Baukus, 1995).

We believe that educators should strive to become *leaders* who are able to demonstrate effective leadership skills to initiate and facilitate transformational systemic change. A prerequisite to lasting change is effective leadership (Fullan, 1998). As researchers increasingly focus on the need for all educators to assume a degree of leadership within their schools in order to promote a higher level of learning, it becomes essential for all educators to demonstrate effective leadership skills (Kaplan & Evans, 1997). Over the last 15 years, we have seen a shift from the expectations of educator competence in the individual setting toward “professional community” expertise—educators jointly defining goals and taking responsibility for all students’ progress, engaging in on-going inquiry and experimentation, and assuming leadership in school development (Anderson, Rolheiser, & Gordon, 1998). In order to ensure that educators engage in transformational systemic change, they must have the capacity to lead.

Finally, we value educators who are *lifelong learners* and continually seek to improve their knowledge, skills, and dispositions for transformational systemic change. Learning is an ongoing process and should be a lifelong occurrence. Wadlington (1995) proposed that educators should be prepared to be active problem solvers and lifelong learners if they are going to assist their students and provide a suitable learning environment. Being a reflective educator and a lifelong learner provides opportunities for growth, change, and the development of understanding (Hutchinson & Allen, 1997), ultimately leading to an enhanced learning setting. Teaching and learning are not static processes, but rather are developing dimensions that continually are being refined (Ward & Murray-Ward, 1999). For educators to be effective school improvement agents, they must remain current in their respective fields and be aware of “best practices” within their professional areas of study.

Throughout our programs, candidates are assessed on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are reflected in our Conceptual Framework. The *Link to Conceptual Framework* statement that is included in each syllabus reflects the ways that we assess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions descriptors. In initial preparation programs, assessment of these descriptors occurs throughout field experiences/

practica and internships, and both university supervisors and field supervisors assess our candidates' knowledge, skills, and dispositions in the field. Initial preparation candidates complete the *Undergraduate Program Evaluation* at the end of the student teaching internship that provides candidates' self-report data regarding how well their program helped them develop Conceptual Framework descriptors. Follow-up surveys with initial preparation graduates and their employers provide further evidence of how well our programs help candidates develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that we value. In advanced programs, we assess Conceptual Framework descriptors throughout coursework as well as in field experiences/practica and internships (for Media and Instructional Technology, Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Interrelated Special Education). Follow-up surveys with completers of all advanced programs provide additional information on graduate completers' perceptions of how well our programs helped them to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions outlined in our Conceptual Framework.

Commitment to Diversity Because we feel that educators must be able to support learning for all students, we have emphasized diversity in a number of our Conceptual Framework descriptors. As we prepare our candidates to be *leaders*, for example, we expect that they will work as part of a professional community that defines educational goals and takes responsibility for all students' progress. As we prepare our candidates to be *adaptive* educators, we emphasize that educational settings are becoming increasingly diverse, meaning that educational excellence depends substantially on the educator's ability to adapt instruction for students who exhibit various levels of ability. Further, because educators are increasingly expected to work with children from varying family structures, interests, and knowledge levels, educators must be adaptive when planning instruction that can help all students succeed. We emphasize the need for educators to be *collaborative* because of the increase in student diversity and the need for educators to work together to help all students learn. We expect our candidates to be *empathetic* educators who are sensitive to individual student and family needs. In addition, we believe that for an educator to truly affirm diversity, he or she must demonstrate empathy for students. We value the ability of our candidates to be *proactive* educators who remove barriers that impede learning. The proactive educator constantly searches for ways to ensure that all students learn. Finally, we expect our candidates to become educators who are *culturally sensitive* and aware of the diverse backgrounds of their students and how best to serve these diverse students. We expect our candidates to create educational learning environments that are equitable, which requires them to embrace multicultural and global perspectives, reflect upon their personal attitudes and beliefs about diverse groups in today's classrooms, and understand that throughout their teaching careers they will be expected to be proactive in constantly adapting their teaching styles and strategies.

Our definition of diversity is not limited to ethnic or racial diversity. Instead, we believe that educators must be aware of the various ways their students are diverse—in terms of intellectual capability, culture, language, family situation, educational experience, interests, affluence—and they must be able to proactively and collaboratively design instruction to meet the needs of diverse students.

Commitment to Technology Technology has become such an integral part of our programs, courses, and experiences in the College of Education that we do not consider it to be a separate entity within our Conceptual Framework. Instead, technology is embedded throughout the curriculum, and we expect our candidates to integrate technology appropriately into instruction, which is accomplished when our candidates are competent *decision makers*, *lifelong learners*, and *adaptive, knowledgeable, proactive* educators. Further, we have embraced Georgia's requirement that all educators are skilled in five areas

of technology competence, which is accomplished through InTech training. The Georgia InTech Framework recognizes that instructional redesign is best accomplished through professional development activity that simultaneously builds teacher skills in five interrelated areas of proficiency. Georgia's Five Critical Areas for technology professional development target improved student achievement through: (a) focus on Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum Standards using (b) modern technological resources to propel (c) new designs for teaching and learning and (d) classroom management strategies that result in (e) a new and enhanced classroom pedagogy. InTech training is required for all B.S.Ed. candidates who are seeking certification. InTech, which has been approved by the Professional Standards Commission, is a 50-hour program offered on-campus through our Educational Technology Training Center. During the training, candidates learn to use technology to plan and implement technology-connected lessons, create alternative assessments, develop whole-group lessons using presentation tools, create technology-based activities and projects, structure large- and small-group technology connected lessons, create web-based lessons, evaluate websites and software to meet curricular objectives, communicate globally through email and the Internet, follow ethical and copyright guidelines, and develop activities that meet curricular objectives. Our commitment to technology is evident in faculty use of technology and in the expectation by faculty that candidates use technology throughout their coursework.

Candidate Proficiencies Aligned with Professional and State Standards The candidate proficiencies that are outlined by program and are aligned with our Conceptual Framework descriptors also are aligned with professional and state standards. At the initial preparation level, we have aligned our Conceptual Framework descriptors with INTASC principles; at the advanced preparation level, we have aligned the descriptors with NBPTS propositions. Table CF.1 illustrates these alignments.

Advanced programs for other school personnel in Counseling, Media and Technology, Speech-Language Pathology, and Educational Leadership have aligned candidate proficiencies with relevant professional standards (*Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs* [CACREP] for Counseling, *American Speech-Language-Hearing Association* [ASHA] for Speech-Language Pathology, *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium* [ISLLC] for Educational Leadership, and the *American Association for School Librarians* [AASL] and the *International Society for Technology in Education* [ISTE] for Media and Instructional Technology). The alignments are illustrated in [program matrices](#).

Table CF.1 Articulation of Conceptual Framework Descriptors with INTASC Principles and NBPTS Propositions

INTASC Principles	Conceptual Framework	NBPTS Propositions
7	Decision Makers	1, 2, 3, 4
5, 10	Leaders	3
2, 7, 9, 10	Lifelong Learners	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
3, 8	Adaptive	1
5, 6, 7, 10	Collaborative	1, 2, 3, 4
5, 6, 7, 10	Culturally Sensitive	1, 2, 3, 4
1, 3, 8	Empathetic	1, 2
1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	Knowledgeable	1, 2, 3, 4
5, 7, 9, 10	Proactive	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
4, 9	Reflective	3, 4, 5

Our Conceptual Framework relates specifically to two UWG institutional standards. First, the University is committed to excellence in imparting broad knowledge and fostering critical understanding that is

needed for intellectual growth, personal and social responsibility, cultural and global literacy, and lifelong learning. These areas of excellence align with the descriptors *decision makers, leaders, lifelong learners, adaptive, culturally sensitive, knowledgeable, and reflective*. Second, the University is committed to excellence in fostering development of effective communication, critical and independent thinking, problem solving, and the use of technology. These areas of excellence align with the descriptors *decision making, knowledgeable, and collaboration*.

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