



# School of Education

## Guide to Field Placements

Point Park University's PDE teacher preparation programs require candidates to engage in a variety of course-based field experiences across four distinct stages, spanning the entirety of the program. This guide outlines the different types of field experiences and provides instructions on how teacher candidates secure, complete, and document these placements.

### What Are the Four Stages of Field Experiences?

PDE has identified four stages of field experiences.

#### PDE Stages of Field Experience

Stage	Description
1	<b>Observation</b> Teacher candidates gain observational experience in a variety of educational and education-related settings, including community-based childcare, Head Start programs, early intervention services, and school districts. Observations should take place across diverse school and early learning environments- such as urban, suburban, and rural settings, as well as high- and low-performing schools- so that candidates develop a broad understanding of learners and the philosophies that guide PreK-12 education.
2	<b>Initial Experience</b> (Interaction/Exploration): The candidate engages under the teacher's supervision in one-on-one tutorials or small-group activities. Experiences may include reading, math, dance, other academic subjects, tutoring, facilitating small-group discussions, participating in outdoor play, and observing classroom routines and procedures. <b>A total of 40 hours is required for Observation and Exploration (Stages 1 &amp; 2).</b>
3	<b>Pre-student Teaching</b> This marks the beginning of hands-on teaching experience, where candidates instruct small groups of students in schools and early learning settings. Experiences include individual tutorials, small-group activities, and whole-class instruction at the selected grade level throughout the semester. Candidates utilize materials they have prepared and developed for classroom instruction. Many of these experiences will be tied to course assignments. <b>Stage 3 requires a total of 150 hours.</b>
4	<b>Student Teaching</b> A minimum of <b>12 weeks (420 hours)</b> full-time student teaching as prescribed by PDE.

### How Are Field Experiences Tied to Courses

Throughout each certification program, students will be required to complete field experiences on their own, not related to coursework. However, each instructor designs a series of course-based assignments and field experiences that provide teacher candidates with meaningful exposure to schools and other educational settings. These experiences help candidates deepen their understanding of family and cultural issues, standards-aligned instruction, inclusive practices, and differentiated instruction. Field experiences embedded throughout the

curriculum allow candidates to connect coursework to practice through observation, data collection, one-on-one tutoring or teaching, small-group activities, and whole-class instruction.

Stage 1 and 2 field experiences are intended to help candidates reflect on their learning and consider how it aligns with current practices in the field. Since these stages are integrated into coursework, assessments are typically conducted within the course, such as through reflective assignments. Instructors work closely with candidates to compare their field observations with research-based best practices presented in the course, fostering critical thinking and professional growth.

Stage 3 field experiences provide candidates with opportunities to apply these research-based best practices in authentic classroom settings. The goal is for candidates to identify areas of challenge or uncertainty and to collaborate with course instructors and university supervisors to refine their teaching strategies. Through discussion, mentorship, and guided reflection, candidates develop their skills, address barriers, and enhance their overall effectiveness as emerging educators.

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### **Can Instructors Change the Number of Hours of Field Experience Required for Their Courses?**

A course instructor may determine that students should complete additional field experience hours in any or all stages. Your instructor will inform you of any field experience requirements linked to course assignments. Please note: students may need to complete extra hours to meet the total requirements established by PDE: **40 hours for Stages 1 & 2, 150 hours for Stage 3, and 420 hours (12 weeks) for Stage 4 student teaching.**

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### **Can my fieldwork hours count for more than one course?**

Required fieldwork hours for each course are counted separately. For example, if you are enrolled in two courses that each require 10 hours of fieldwork, you must complete a total of 20 hours.

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### **Clearances Required for Placements**

Candidates must have all current clearances when going into schools for field experiences. Students should **NOT** select volunteer clearances. For information on obtaining clearances, visit [here](#).

## **Which Teacher Candidates Need Field Placements?**

All students enrolled in an approved PDE certification program are required to complete the mandated field experience hours. These programs include PreK-4, 4-8, Special Education, 7-12, and Dance.

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## **How Do Teacher Candidates Obtain Field Placements?**

For undergraduate education students, field placements are often arranged by the course instructor. If a student needs to complete additional hours beyond those assigned, they are responsible for finding their own placements. Undergraduate education students are encouraged to consult their course instructors for guidance and for potential contacts at schools or early learning settings.

Graduate and “Fast Track” students are typically responsible for locating their own field placements. However, they can seek support and guidance from their course instructors as needed, including assistance with identifying appropriate schools or programs.

There may be situations in which a candidate can complete field experiences at a familiar or convenient site. For example, a former school, a location where a family member is employed, or their own place of work-such as a school or childcare center-provided the site is willing to host them for fieldwork.

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## **What Do Candidates Need to Do Once They Have Obtained Their Placements?**

If a field experience is coordinated by the course instructor, each candidate will receive contact information for their placement. The instructor will support students in reaching out to the classroom teacher, introducing themselves, and making arrangements to complete the field experience. In some cases, van transportation may be provided if the school is not accessible by public transit. Candidates must comply with any restrictions set by the placement site and should not attempt to persuade the site to alter these requirements.

Candidates are responsible for bringing their clearances to the school, as administrative offices may request to review or retain a copy. Some schools may require submission of clearances before the first visit.

If a student is responsible for coordinating and scheduling their own field experience, all the above protocols must still be followed.

## **How Do Teacher Candidates Who Hold Full-time Jobs Complete Field Experiences?**

Most field experiences must take place in school settings, particularly at Stage 3 and Student Teaching. This requirement can pose challenges for teacher candidates who hold full-time jobs and are not consistently available during regular school hours. While our goal is to accommodate these candidates as much as possible, flexibility on the part of the candidate is essential. Candidates may need to coordinate with their employers to adjust schedules-for example, arriving later or leaving earlier on certain days, shifting lunch hours, or using flex or vacation time to allow for time in schools. Even with these adjustments, some candidates with full-time jobs may still find it difficult to complete the required hours in traditional school settings.

In such cases, consideration may be given to alternative placement sites that provide opportunities for evening or weekend field experiences. These require creativity and thoughtful planning. Potential sites may include nature centers, libraries, science museums, discovery centers, historic sites, weekend programs for children and youth, online teaching or tutoring, cyber schools, or other technology-supported interactions with learners.

The essential requirement is that any alternative placement must enable candidates to meet PDE competencies at the appropriate Stage, with learners who match the intent of the field experience and the candidate's certification area. For example, a PreK-4 candidate cannot complete field hours with secondary (7-12) students, and a secondary candidate cannot fulfill requirements with children younger than seventh grade. Likewise, if a field experience is designed to include exposure to inclusive settings, the placement must provide that context.

If you believe you need an alternative placement, it is your responsibility to consult with your course instructor and secure approval prior to beginning the experience.

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## **Your Responsibilities During the Field Experience Placement**

Recognizing that you represent Point Park University and are a guest within a school community, it is important to understand that sometimes the fit feels natural and easy, while other times it requires adjustments. You may need to thoughtfully align what you've learned at Point Park with the unique culture of the school. The goal is always to create the best possible experience.

To ensure a successful experience in your field placement, keep the following best practices in mind:

- Be consistent and reliable in attending your scheduled times.
- Arrive on time and stay for the full duration of your placement.
- Dress professionally and in alignment with the school's expectations.
- Come prepared and ready to engage with students and staff.
- Share observations in a respectful, constructive manner.
- Remain open and receptive to feedback as an opportunity for growth.

Your clothing should always be professional and appropriate to the setting and activities in which you are participating. Be sure to review your school's dress code policy and, if necessary, consult with the building principal about any school-specific expectations. Remember: it is always safe to dress above the standard; it is unwise to dress below it or to challenge it.

Finally, as you prepare to enter the teaching profession, it is strongly recommended that you read and become familiar with the **Professional Code of Conduct** on the PDE website:

[code-of-conduct.pdf](#)

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## **How Do We Confirm Teacher Candidates Have Completed Their Field Experiences?**

If a field experience is coordinated by a course instructor for an undergraduate course, the School of Education will maintain a record of the hours completed. For all other field experiences, students must use the [Log Sheet](#) and [Classroom Observation / Field Experience Interactive Form](#) to document their visits. This documentation will be requested by the Director of Student Teaching when planning your student teaching practicum.