

## Proper Use of the *Praxis*® Assessments and Related Assessments

### *Overview*

Educational Testing Service (ETS) is committed to furthering quality and equity in education by providing fair and valid assessments, research, and related services. Central to this objective is helping those who use our assessments understand what we consider to be proper test use. The purpose of this document is to define what the *Praxis*® program means by proper test use for the *Praxis* assessments and related assessments. It is not intended, however, to be a complete treatment of proper assessment use. It is not intended to provide recommendations for specific study designs, procedures, or data gathering approaches to accumulate additional validity evidence or to establish cut scores for the *Praxis* assessments.

### *Proper Assessment Use*

Proper assessment use, in essence, means there is adequate evidence to support the intended use of the assessment and to support the decisions and outcomes rendered on the basis of candidates' assessment scores. Proper use, therefore, is inextricably connected to validity. Validity refers to the "degree to which accumulated evidence and theory supports a specific interpretation of test scores for a given use of a test" ([Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing](#), AERA, APA & NCME, 2014, p. 11). Validation refers to the gathering of evidence to support the use of test scores for a particular purpose; the test itself is not being evaluated.

It is important to note that validity evidence is needed for each different use of an assessment. Assessment results may be appropriate (valid) for one use, but not necessarily for another. For example, validity evidence supporting the use of test scores for licensure purposes cannot be assumed to support the use of the same test scores for selection or hiring decisions. Interpretations regarding a teacher candidate's level of content knowledge may be supported but interpretations regarding a candidate's pedagogical skills may not be supported.

### *Responsibilities for Proper Assessment Use*

Central to the discussion of validity is the establishment of the intended uses and interpretations of assessment scores. Proper assessment use is a shared responsibility between the assessment developers and the assessment users. As the developer of the educator assessments being discussed, ETS has the responsibility to follow sound procedures to develop and administer fair and valid licensure/certification assessments to support state agencies and institutions of higher education. Intended, and unintended, consequences are considered when defining the relevant content to be measured, developing items and tasks to measure the content, administering and scoring the assessments in a reliable manner, and reporting valid scores in an understandable format. Test users

have the responsibility to interpret scores in a manner consistent with the design of the assessment. Test users must select the appropriate *Praxis* assessment title given the intended use and they must establish the performance standard (i.e., passing score) to differentiate candidates who meet a particular subset of the licensure/certification requirements. Test users must validate the use of an assessment for purposes other than those intended and supported by existing validity evidence. In other words, they must be able to justify that the intended alternate use is acceptable.

Both ETS and test users share responsibility for minimizing misuse of assessment information and for discouraging inappropriate assessment use.

### *ETS Educator Series Assessments*

Under the ETS Educator Series assessment umbrella, we include the following categories of assessments.

- ***Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators (Core)***: These assessments measure academic knowledge and skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. An overview of the *Praxis Core* assessments is available at <http://www.ets.org/praxis/about/core>.
- ***Praxis Subject Assessments***: These assessments measure content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, and content-specific pedagogical knowledge. An overview of *Praxis Subject Assessments* is available at <http://www.ets.org/praxis/about/subject>.
- ***Praxis Elementary Education: Content Knowledge for Teaching***: These tests measure subject-specific content knowledge, with a focus on specialized content knowledge used in elementary education teaching. An overview of *Praxis Elementary Education: Content Knowledge for Teaching* is available at <http://www.ets.org/praxis/about>.
- **The School Leadership Series**: This series includes the School Leader Licensure Assessment, the School Superintendent Assessment, and the Kentucky Specialty Test of Instructional and Administrative Practices. Overview of the assessments are available at <http://www.ets.org/sls>.
- **The ParaPro Assessment**: The ParaPro assessment measures basic reading, writing, and mathematics knowledge, and the ability to apply this knowledge to assist in classroom instruction. An overview of the assessment is available at <http://www.ets.org/parapro>.

Licensure is a legal requirement to enter or practice a profession, established by a government agency charged with overseeing the particular occupation or profession. Licensure assessments, as components of the licensure process, examine whether candidates possess the knowledge and skills required for practice at the time of entry into the profession to help ensure the welfare of the public.

Licensure assessments focus on acceptable levels of performance at entry into a profession. Licensure assessments are designed to measure only the knowledge and skill that protect the public. The ETS educator licensure assessments measure the knowledge and/or skills thought to be relevant and

important for beginning educators. As noted by Kane (2004, p. 142),<sup>1</sup> licensure assessments are intended to measure knowledge and skills that may be “necessary but not sufficient for effective practice.” Therefore, licensure assessments often rely primarily on content-related validation strategies rather than predictive validity evidence (Kane, 2004; Raymond and Luecht, 2013; AERA, APA, NCME, 2014).<sup>2</sup>

The [Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing](#) state that “validity is the most fundamental consideration in developing tests and evaluating tests” (AERA, APA & NCME, 2014, p. 11). Strategies for validation that focus on content-related validity are emphasized in gathering evidence to support the use of licensure assessments (Raymond and Luecht, 2013).

Technical standards advocate that some form of a job analysis or practice analysis be conducted to identify knowledge and/or skills important for practice (AERA, APA, NCME, 2014). The *Praxis* program follows recognized methods of job analysis to define its assessment content domains. See Raymond & Luecht, 2013, for an overview of job analysis/practice analysis procedures.

### *Proper Uses of the ETS Educator Series Assessments*

This section describes the intended and acceptable uses of the ETS Educator Series assessments. It also describes technical requirements that may be needed to comply with proper assessment use.

#### *Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators Tests*

**Entry into Educator Preparation Programs.** The *Praxis* Core Academic Skills for Educators (Core) tests may be used by institutions of higher education to identify students (typically, rising juniors) with sufficient reading, writing, and mathematics skills to enter an educator preparation program. If an institution is in a state that has authorized the use of the *Praxis* Core tests for teacher licensure and has set passing scores, the institution may use the same minimum score requirement for entry into its program. Even so, institutions are advised to use other student qualifications, in addition to *Praxis* Core scores, when making final entrance decisions.

If an institution of higher education is in a state that has not authorized the use of the *Praxis* Core tests for teacher licensure, then that institution should review the assessment specifications to confirm that the skills covered are important prerequisites for entry into the program; it will also need to establish a

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<sup>1</sup> Kane, M. (2004). Certification testing as an illustration of argument-based validation. *Measurement: Interdisciplinary Research and Perspectives*, 2(3), 135-170.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond, M. R., & Luecht, R. M. (2013). Licensure and certification testing. In Geisinger, K. F., Bracken, B. A., Carlson, J. F., Hansen, J. I. C., Kuncel, N. R., Reise, S. P., & Rodriguez, M. C. *APA handbook of Testing and Assessment in Psychology, Vol. 3*.

American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education (2014). [Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing](#). Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association.

minimum score for entry.<sup>3</sup> These institutions, too, are advised to use additional student qualifications when making final entrance decisions.

**Teacher Licensure.** *Praxis* Core tests may also be used by the licensing body or agency within a state for teacher licensure decisions. The *Praxis* program recommends that before adopting the assessments for this purpose, the licensing body or agency review the assessment specifications to confirm that the content covered on the assessments is consistent with state standards and with expectations of what the state’s teachers should know and be able to do. The licensing body or agency must also establish a passing standard, or cut score.

### *Praxis* Subject Assessments

**Educator Licensure/Certification.** *Praxis* Subject Assessments may be used by the licensing/certifying body or agency within a state for licensure and certification decisions. This includes candidates who seek to enter the profession via a traditional or state-recognized alternate route and those currently teaching on a provisional or emergency certificate who are seeking regular licensure status.

**Entry into Student Teaching.** Institutions of higher education may want to use *Praxis* Subject assessment scores as one criterion for permitting students to move on to the clinical portion of their program — the student teaching phase. This use of the test is often based on the argument that a student teacher should have a level of content knowledge comparable to that of a teacher who has just entered the profession.

The *Praxis* program suggests that institutions consider the content knowledge a candidate must have to perform satisfactorily in the role of student teacher. The program can then review the *Praxis* Subject Assessment specifications to verify that the test adequately covers the content important for its student teachers. If the institution’s state does not require that students pass this content test for state licensure, the institution also will need to establish a minimum score for entry into student teaching.

The three scenarios involving the use of *Praxis* Subject Assessments for entry into student teaching are:

1. The state requires that all content-based requirements for licensure, including the identified *Praxis* Subject Assessment, be completed before student teaching is permitted,
2. The state requires the identified *Praxis* Subject Assessment for licensure, but not as a prerequisite for student teaching,
3. The state requires the identified *Praxis* Subject Assessment neither for licensure nor as a prerequisite for student teaching.

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<sup>3</sup> Institutions of higher education in states that have not adopted the *Praxis* Core for licensure can use the results of the multistate standard-setting study conducted by ETS to establish cut, or passing, scores for each of the three tests.

If an institution is in a state that uses the identified *Praxis* Subject Assessment for licensure (scenarios 1 and 2), additional validity evidence on the part of the program may not be necessary, as the state, through its adoption of the assessment for licensure purposes, has accepted the assessment's content as appropriate, has set a schedule for when content-based licensure requirements are to be met, and has already established the passing scores needed to meet its requirements.

If an institution of higher education wants to use the *Praxis* Subject Assessments, but is in a state that has not authorized use of the identified *Praxis* Subject Assessment for teacher licensure, that institution should review the assessment specifications to confirm that content covered on the test is a necessary prerequisite for entry into student teaching and that the curriculum students were exposed to covered that content. Institutions will also need to establish a minimum score for entry<sup>4</sup>; and they are advised to use other student qualifications, in addition to the *Praxis* Subject Assessment scores, when making final decisions about who may student teach.

**Entry into Graduate-Level Teacher Programs.** Graduate-level teacher programs most often focus on providing additional or advanced pedagogical skills. These programs do not typically focus on content knowledge itself. Because of this, such programs expect students to enter with sufficient levels of content knowledge. In states that use *Praxis* Subject Assessments for licensure, sufficient content knowledge may be defined as the candidate's having met or exceeded the state's passing score for the identified *Praxis* Subject Assessment. In this case, additional validity evidence on the part of the program may not be necessary, since the state, through its adoption of the assessment for licensure purposes, has accepted that the assessment content is appropriate.

However, if a graduate-level program is in a state that has not authorized the use of the identified *Praxis* Subject Assessments, that program should review the assessment specifications to confirm that the content covered on the test is a necessary prerequisite for entry into the program. The program will also need to establish a minimum score for entry (e.g., recommendation from a multistate standard-setting study), and it is advised to use other student qualifications, in addition to the *Praxis* Subject Assessment scores, when making final entry decisions.

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<sup>4</sup> Institutions of higher education in states that have not adopted a particular *Praxis* Subject test for licensure can use the results of the multistate standard-setting study conducted by ETS to establish cut, or passing, scores.

## The School Leadership Series

**School Leader/Administrator Licensure.** This series of assessments may be used by the licensing body or agency within a state for school leader/administrator licensure decisions. As with *Praxis* Subject Assessments, ETS recommends that the licensing body or agency first review the assessment specifications to confirm that the content covered by the assessments is consistent with state and/or disciplinary standards and expectations of what their school leaders/administrators should know and be able to do. A passing standard (cut score) will need to be established for such use by the licensing body or agency.

## The ParaPro Assessment

This assessment can be used by states and/or school districts as part of the process for qualifying instructional paraprofessionals. ETS recommends that the state and/or school district first review the assessment specifications to confirm that the content covered by the assessment meets the state's basic skills requirements for paraprofessionals. A passing standard (cut score) will also need to be established for such use by the state or school district.

## *Improper Uses of Praxis and Related Assessments*

As noted above, proper assessment use is defined as acceptability of the intended use combined with evidence to support the intended use. Two specific examples of misuse are listed below but are not inclusive of all possible instances of misuse

- **Employment Selection or Hiring.** ETS believes it is inappropriate for a state, district, school or other local education agency to differentiate among candidates who have all met or exceeded the state's passing score on an ETS Educator Series assessment for purposes of making a selection or hiring decision. These assessments were designed and intended to be used for credentialing, not for rank-ordering candidates or for making decisions that otherwise presume a predictive relationship between performance on these assessments and performance on the job.
- **Employment-Based Decisions Affecting Fully Licensed and Employed Educators.** ETS defines a fully licensed educator as one who has met all state licensure requirements and, therefore, is not practicing under a probationary, emergency, or provisional license. ETS believes it is inappropriate for school districts or other local education agencies to use ETS Educator Series assessment scores for terminating fully licensed educators, determining salaries, promoting or demoting educators, or completing performance appraisals/evaluations.

## *Closing Remarks*

This document is not intended to serve as a substitute for guidance on permissible or impermissible uses of assessments under federal and state laws. ETS offers technical assistance and advice concerning professional and legal responsibilities that relate to assessment use. However, states, agencies, associations and institutions of higher education are legally accountable for their use of an assessment; they must satisfy for themselves that their proposed use of an assessment is appropriate and supported by adequate validity evidence.

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