



STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

MOLLY M. SPEARMAN
STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

TO: Education Deans and Directors of Teacher Education
Educator Preparation Provider Certification Officers
Alternative Route Preparation Providers
District Personnel Administrators

FROM: Mary Hipp
Director, Office of Educator Services

DATE: August 16, 2019

RE: Certification Application and Fingerprint-based Criminal History Report Procedures

This memorandum is an updated version of correspondence disseminated in November 2018. In order to comply with requirements of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED), the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) Office of Educator Services has established procedures for certification applications and fingerprint-based criminal history record information. Section 59-25-115 of the South Carolina Code of Laws and State Board of Education Regulation 43-51 require all applicants for educator certificates to complete a fingerprinting process that is used to check the criminal history records of the FBI and SLED. Section 59-25-115 further requires educator candidates to complete this fingerprint-based clearance process prior to entering the full-time clinical experience. Updated requirements and procedures are outlined below.

- **Application Timeline.** An applicant for certification, including candidates applying for clearance to enter student teaching or clinical practice, must submit an online application to the SCDE *prior* to completing the fingerprinting process. FBI and SLED policies stipulate that an individual's application for certification authorizes the SCDE to receive criminal history record information for that individual. For this reason, an applicant must submit the online application prior to completing the fingerprinting process. The SCDE cannot accept or retain FBI and SLED reports for any individual who does not have an application on file in the educator certification system. As a result, any individual who fails to submit an application prior to completing the fingerprinting process risks having to repeat the process at an additional cost.

Information on [applying for certification](#) through the Certification Application Technology System (CATS) Portal is available on the SCDE website.

- **Fall Student Teaching/Clinical Practice.** Candidates applying for clearance to enter student teaching or clinical practice in the fall semester must have all required documentation on file with the SCDE no later than February 15 of that calendar year. For example, a candidate entering clinical practice in August 2020 must have all documentation on file no later than February 15, 2020. Required documentation includes the application, fee, and background reports.
- **Spring Student Teaching/Clinical Practice.** Candidates applying for clearance to enter student teaching or clinical practice in the spring semester must have all required documentation on file with the SCDE no later than June 15 of the previous calendar year. For example, a candidate entering clinical practice in January 2021 must have all documentation on file no later than June 15, 2020. Required documentation includes the application, fee, and background reports.
- **Fingerprinting Procedures.** SLED policy prohibits the SCDE from disclosing any specific information regarding the state-approved vendor that processes fingerprints until an individual has submitted the certification application. After submitting the online application through the CATS Portal, the applicant may then view all necessary information to complete the criminal records check. General information about the [fingerprinting process and criminal records review](#) is provided on the SCDE website. Educator preparation providers and school districts should not disclose to applicants any detailed information regarding the state-approved vendor and instructions to complete the fingerprinting process. Again, the SCDE will provide specific information necessary for completing the fingerprinting process *only after* an individual has submitted the online application.

Verifying Receipt of Background Reports. The SCDE Office of Educator Services typically receives federal and state background reports within two weeks of an applicant's completion of the electronic fingerprinting process or of the vendor's receipt of a fingerprint card from an applicant located out-of-state. Each applicant is responsible for verifying that the SCDE has received reports from both the FBI and SLED using the [CATS Portal](#) link on the agency website. If the SCDE has not received both background reports within thirty days of an individual's completion of the fingerprinting process, the applicant should contact Professional Practices Coordinator Katie Crews at kmcrews@ed.sc.gov and notify her of the missing report(s).

Again, these procedures are necessary for the SCDE to comply with FBI and SLED policies. I appreciate your help in ensuring that educator candidates and certification applicants adhere to these steps. For assistance with the application process, candidates may contact the Office of Educator Services Call Center at 803-896-0325.