Graduated responsibility supports the professional growth of teacher candidates by combining long-term experience in a clinical setting, incremental expansion of the candidate’s teaching role, and individualized support from a cooperating teacher and a supervisor. Graduated responsibility insures that guidance from experienced teachers shapes each candidate’s development, and it also allows the cooperating teacher and supervisor to share and refine their own practice. This structure encourages candidates to merge theory and practice in authentic ways by trying out ideas learned in university coursework and building a wealth of practical experience. Over time each candidate experiences an increasing sense of ownership for the teaching and learning in the placement classroom.

Principles of Graduated Responsibility

1. **Shared practice allows for an ongoing exchange of ideas about student learning.**
   As co-practitioners, the cooperating teacher and the teacher candidate frequently and systematically engage in conversations about student learning. The cooperating teacher and university supervisor help the candidate understand the guiding principles behind a teacher’s decisions regarding planning, instruction, and assessment. The quantity of time devoted to these discussions remains consistent throughout the year, though the focus of these discussions will shift as the candidate takes on greater responsibility, becomes more competent in certain aspects of teaching, and identifies new areas for growth.

2. **Support for the candidate evolves throughout the year according to targeted areas for professional growth.**
   The candidate, the cooperating teacher, and the supervisor jointly identify areas of growth for the candidate, and the cooperating teacher and supervisor tailor their support to match those needs. They recognize that the candidate’s development will not be linear but will ebb and flow as the candidate does more of the planning, instruction, and assessment. The candidate is responsible for using the feedback of the cooperating teacher and supervisor to make progress on his or her professional goals.

3. **Each candidate experiences an individual process of professional growth.**
   Graduated responsibility honors each candidate’s unique developmental trajectory as a novice teacher. Therefore, independent student teaching begins when the time is right, not at a pre-determined point during the school year. If a candidate may not be ready in time to fulfill the requirements for the duration of the independent student teaching period, then the supervisor and/or cooperating teacher will identify this concern in time to develop an alternative plan for the candidate.
Graduated Responsibility in Practice

This section suggests ways in which the principles of graduated responsibility might be enacted throughout the year in the relationship among the candidate, the cooperating teacher, and the supervisor. These descriptions are not meant to be prescriptive; rather, they provide suggestions about how each person’s role might evolve over time. The guidelines assume that reflection is an ongoing part of the candidate’s work and is a consistent focus of the conversations the candidate has with the cooperating teacher and supervisor about teaching and learning.

Early in the Year

Planning: The cooperating teacher is the primary architect of the unit and lesson plans and spends time discussing the design of these plans with the candidate. The cooperating teacher articulates and explains the learning goals and assessment plan and provides a rationale for the activities selected to support student learning. Over time the cooperating teacher gives the candidate responsibility for designing increasingly complex learning segments, leaving time to review the candidate’s plans before they are implemented. The supervisor supports the candidate and cooperating teacher in establishing a strong collaborative relationship.

Instruction: The candidate initially observes the cooperating teacher’s instruction, paying particular attention to student learning, and the cooperating teacher models a variety of pedagogical practices. The candidate and cooperating teacher reflect together on the outcomes of these lessons as the cooperating teacher shares the thinking behind particular instructional decisions. In addition, the candidate actively participates in classroom routines, such as taking roll, collecting assignments, and working with small groups and individual students. The candidate soon takes responsibility for short learning segments, such as introducing a lesson, giving instructions, or facilitating a brief discussion. The supervisor observes some of these learning segments and, together with the cooperating teacher, focuses the candidate’s attention on specific aspects of effective teaching.

Assessment: The candidate and cooperating teacher review student work together and discuss its strengths and weaknesses. The candidate records student responses when observing the cooperating teacher teach, after which they interpret this data together. With the guidance of the cooperating teacher and supervisor, the candidate designs and implements pre-assessments prior to a new unit of instruction. The candidate, cooperating teacher, and supervisor discuss how this information informs subsequent planning and instruction.

Communication with Families: The candidate attends parent conferences (including IEP and SST meetings) and Back-to-School events when possible. The cooperating teacher models communication with families and shares relevant school policies. The candidate makes positive phone calls home and may complete a home visit. The cooperating teacher and candidate co-write a letter to families to introduce the candidate’s role in the classroom.
Moving Forward

Planning: The cooperating teacher and candidate continue to co-plan, with the candidate taking more responsibility for the design of particular lessons rather than drawing primarily on the cooperating teacher’s lesson plans. The cooperating teacher and supervisor provide many of the resources for planning (texts, ideas, etc.) and offer feedback, but the candidate also begins to experiment with his/her own ideas, some of which will correspond to what s/he is learning in university coursework.

Instruction: The candidate implements learning segments of increasing length and complexity, which leads to the delivery of entire lessons and, in time, sequences of related lessons. With the support of the cooperating teacher and supervisor, the candidate tries a variety of instructional strategies, such as direct instruction, discussion, group work, and student-centered activities. The supervisor and cooperating teacher help the candidate negotiate the challenges of taking on more responsibility and balancing multiple aspects of the teaching role.

Assessment: The candidate and cooperating teacher read anchor assignments together to norm expectations for feedback, after which the candidate takes responsibility for responding to student work. The cooperating teacher reviews these responses and helps the candidate refine his/her formative feedback. The candidate also begins to develop and select assessments independently. The cooperating teacher and supervisor help the candidate to analyze whole-class assessments and then to use this information to modify instruction and address the needs of individual students.

Communication with Families: With the support of the cooperating teacher, the candidate increases communication with families, including calls and e-mails in support of students who may be struggling. When possible, the candidate continues to be present for meetings with parents and guardians.

Independent Student Teaching

Planning: The candidate has primary responsibility for planning. Drawing on what s/he has learned from both university coursework and experience in the field, the candidate hones his/her ability to organize instruction over several weeks. The cooperating teacher and supervisor continue to be key resources by keeping the candidate mindful of relevant curriculum standards, helping the candidate to anticipate scheduling issues in the school calendar, and providing feedback about the long-range planning.

Instruction: The candidate takes responsibility for all instructional time, using a variety of methods to meet student needs. The cooperating teacher and supervisor continue to provide regular feedback on the candidate’s instruction. The cooperating teacher moves in and out of the classroom and occasionally supports the candidate’s instruction by facilitating small groups or working with individual students as needed.

Assessment: The candidate takes primary responsibility for all assessments of student learning, keeping the cooperating teacher continuously informed about student progress and using the guidance of the cooperating teacher and the supervisor to refine his/her assessment practices.
Communication with Families: The candidate assumes responsibility for keeping families informed about student progress and may develop new ways to involve families in student learning. The candidate may initiate parent conferences and may also participate in a student study team meeting.

Graduated Responsibility Across Two Placements

STEP Elementary teacher candidates always have two placements during the academic year, and STEP Secondary teacher candidates occasionally change placements mid-year. Candidates enter a new placement with a wealth of experience and knowledge learned in their first setting. At the same time, it can take time to acclimate to changes in grade level, school, curricular focus and/or student population. Below are some ideas for how to begin in a new placement in ways that utilize the candidate’s strengths and provide opportunities for continued growth, while allowing time for the candidate to find his/her place in the new classroom. The integration plans for the winter/spring placements can also support the candidate’s transition into a new environment.

- Schedule a three-way meeting with the candidate, cooperating teacher and supervisor to discuss the candidate’s strengths and learning goals in order to formulate a plan for the first few weeks of the placement.

- Capitalize on the strengths of the candidate, but also recognize that the new placement is a new context. For example, the candidate might teach learning segments in areas that feel comfortable to individuals or small groups.

- Allow ample time for the teacher candidate to get to know the students. Consider how the candidate might work with individuals or small groups.

- Plan for time to discuss class norms, the curriculum covered in the year to date and future learning.