

# You & Your Certificate

Understanding Professional Educator  
Certification in Pennsylvania



September 2018



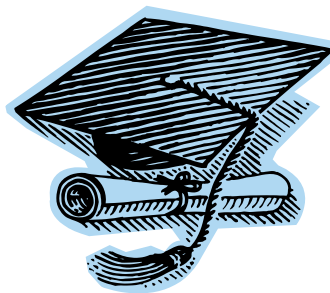
## Forward

Almost all professions require a license acknowledging the completion of certain professional studies and experiences. Education is no exception. In every state and U.S. territory and in many foreign countries, teachers and other education personnel are required by law to obtain a qualifying credential. In Pennsylvania we call it *certification*; in some states it is referred to as a license. While all jurisdictions in the U.S. require the licensing of basic education professional personnel, those required to hold it and the qualifications and standards of preparation needed to procure it may vary among states.

It is imperative that teachers and educational specialists (non-instructional, certified personnel) have a practical working knowledge of the state's certification regulations and their relationship to employment and marketability. A certificate offers its holder certain rights and demands certain responsibilities in return. For PSEA members, *You and Your Certificate* is intended to be a handy reference to help you understand these rights and responsibilities.

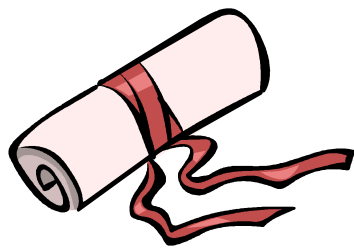
PSEA and the Council on Instruction and Professional Development (IPD) hope you find this manual useful. Any suggestions, questions, or concerns can be addressed to:

Pennsylvania State Education Association  
Education Services Department  
717-255-7008  
[cclayton@psea.org](mailto:cclayton@psea.org)



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# Types of Certificates

## 1) Who is responsible to identify the types, content areas, and standards of preparation for Pennsylvania certification?

The State Board of Education identifies the types of certificates required in Pennsylvania (instructional, educational specialist, supervisory, administrative, etc.). The Department of Education with the concurrence of the State Board of Education and the input of the Pennsylvania Standards and Practices Commission (PSPC) will determine the categories or specific content areas and the standards of preparation leading to certification.

## 2) What are the standard certificates issued for professional educators in Pennsylvania?

- **Administrative Certificates** are issued to persons whose primary responsibility is to direct, operate, supervise and administer the organizational and general activities of a school.
- **Educational Specialist Certificates** are issued to persons whose primary responsibility is to render professional service other than classroom teaching.
- **Instructional Certificates** are issued to persons whose primary responsibility is direct contact with learners in teaching and learning situations.
- **Supervisory Certificates** are issued to persons whose primary responsibility is to supervise educational programs and direct the activities of professional and nonprofessional employees in such programs.
- **Vocational Instruction Certificates** are issued to persons whose primary responsibility is vocational instruction within occupational/technical curricula.
- PDE also issues a **Teacher Intern Certificate** and a **Vocational Education Intern Certificate**, which each allow an individual enrolled in an approved preparation program to fill a full-time teaching position in the certification area.

## 3) Are there other categories of school employees not included above (#2)?

There is a category of school employees known as **Licensed Professionals**, individuals who work in school settings and are required to hold a license issued by the Commonwealth. This category includes positions as [Behavior Analyst](#), Orientation and Mobility Specialist, and School Social Worker. In order to qualify as a Behavior Analyst, an individual must hold a current Board-Certified Behavior Analyst certificate obtained through the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) or hold a current license for Behavior Specialist in the State of Pennsylvania. [See CSPG #203](#). In order to qualify as a [Orientation and Mobility Specialist](#), one must hold a current credential as an Orientation and Mobility Specialist issued by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) or the National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) issued by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB). [See CSPG #202](#). And to qualify as a [School Social Worker](#), an individual must hold and maintain a current license as a social worker (LSW) or licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) issued by the Pennsylvania Department of State. Individuals who were hired as School Social

Workers before September 2008 may continue in this capacity. [CSPG<sup>1</sup> 201](#) contains additional information about the School Social Worker assignment.

#### **4) What instructional certificate areas are available in Pennsylvania?**

Prior to January 1, 2013, Pennsylvania issued Instructional certificates in

- Early Childhood (grades N-3)
- Elementary (grades K-6)
- Middle Level (English, Math, Science, Social Studies grades 7-9)
- Secondary (grades 7-12 with content area)
- Specialized Areas (grades K-12)
- Special Education (grades N-12)

As of January 1, 2013, Pennsylvania began issuing Instructional certificates in

- Grades PreK-4
- Grades 4-8 (with concentration area(s))
- Special Education PreK-8 with dual certification in early childhood, elementary/middle, or reading specialist
- Secondary (grades 7-12 with a content area)
- Special Education 7-12 with dual certification in secondary content area(s) or reading specialist
- Specialized Areas (grades K-12)

#### **5) Are the types, grade/age spans, and content areas of certificates the same from one state to another?**

No. Certificates issued in other states may differ in their types, content areas, and/or in the range of grades. For example, some states issue one comprehensive secondary science certificate, while Pennsylvania issues five separate secondary science certificates for specific content areas. When such differences occur, transferring a certificate from one state to another can be very difficult because the preparation standards for the certificates differ significantly.

#### **6) What is and what must I do to apply for a Teacher Intern Certificate?**

A Teacher Intern Certificate is a temporary certificate (valid for three calendar years) issued by PDE that allows a certificate holder to work as a teacher in public schools to teach coursework in the academic area of studies within the scope of the Teacher Intern certificate while also attending a state-approved teacher intern preparation program at an institution of higher education.

The requirements for a [Teacher Intern Certificate](#) are:

- Be of good moral character
- Be at least 18 years of age

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<sup>1</sup> CSPG – Certification and Staffing Policy Guidelines are used by PDE, school district officials, and IU officials to aid in staffing and policy issues related to certification. Each CSPG contains information about specific certifications or about certification in general.

- Be a United States citizen or a legal permanent resident holding a valid green card
- Hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree
- Enroll in a Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) approved Intern program; a minimum 3.0 GPA is required to enter the program
- Secure a full-time or long-term substitute position in your content area(s)  
Meet all testing requirements
- Submit an online application through the [Teacher Information Management System \(TIMS\)](#)
- The PDE approved Intern program provider must verify program enrollment through [TIMS](#).

### **7) What is and what must I do to apply for a Vocational Education Intern Certificate?**

A Vocational Education Intern Certificate is a temporary certificate (valid for three calendar years) issued by PDE that allows a certificate holder to work as a teacher in vocational education programs while also attending a state-approved vocational teacher preparation program at an institution of higher education. The requirements for a Vocational Education Intern Certificate are:

- Acceptable evidence of four years wage-earning experience in the occupation to be taught;
- Acceptance for enrollment in a State-approved vocational teacher preparation program at one of the universities listed below;
- Passing the appropriate occupational competency examination, or evaluation of credentials for occupations where examinations do not exist;
- The recommendation for the Vocational Intern Certificate by the university at which they are enrolled or accepted; and
- Meeting all other requirements provided by law (School Code 1209 and Title 22, Pa. Code, Section 49.12).

### **8) What is an Emergency Permit?**

An Emergency Permit is issued by PDE for service in public schools at the request of the school entity to an applicant who is a graduate of a four-year college or university (except for vocational positions) and employed to fill a professional vacancy when a fully qualified and properly certified applicant is not available. The school district may direct the candidate to apply for the permit using TIMS or apply for the permit on behalf of the individual. An Emergency Permit is issued under the terms and conditions agreed to between the requesting school entity and the Department of Education. An emergency permit is not an emergency certification and individuals do not earn service credit while working on an Emergency Permit. There are several different types of Emergency Permits that apply to different situations. These are described fully in CSPG 13. (22 Pennsylvania Code §49.31; [see also CSPG 13](#)).

### **9) What is the lifespan of an Emergency Permit?**

An Emergency Permit is good for one school year, including summer school.

# Obtaining a Certificate

## 1) Who issues professional educator certificates in Pennsylvania?

[The Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality.](#)

## 2) How can I contact this agency?

Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality, PA Department of Education  
333 Market Street, Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333  
Phone: 717-787-3356  
Fax: 717-783-6736  
Website: [www.education.pa.gov](http://www.education.pa.gov)

## 3) What are the educational requirements for obtaining an Instructional or Educational Specialist I certificate in PA?

Certification applicants must secure the recommendation for certification by the college or university with an approved classroom teacher or educational specialist preparation program. This recommendation attests that the applicants have met all requirements of the [approved preparation program](#), the qualifying scores on the [required tests](#) and other requirements established by the State Board of Education.

## 4) How do I qualify for a Vocational Education Instructional certificate in PA?

Individuals qualifying for the Vocational Instructional I Certificate shall be authorized to teach in the occupational competency area(s) they hold.

The Vocational I certificate and the occupational competency areas are issued by the Department on the recommendation of a university having a Pennsylvania approved vocational teacher preparation program. The applicant must have:

1. A minimum of two years wage-earning experience in the occupation to be taught. A minimum of four years wage-earning experience in the occupation to be taught is required if following the intern route;
2. Passed the appropriate occupational competency examination, or evaluation of credentials for occupations where examinations do not exist;
3. Completed 18 credit hours in an approved program of vocational teacher education;
4. Presented evidence of having passed the basic skills tests in reading and writing (not required for a post-baccalaureate program);
5. Met all requirements provided by law (School Code 1209 and Title 22, Pa. Code, Section 49.12); and
6. Received the recommendation of the preparing Pennsylvania university.

IMPORTANT: [Vocational Instructional I certificates](#) issued on or after July 13, 2016 will be valid for eight (8) years of service. Vocational Instructional I certificates issued prior to July 13, 2016 that had six years of validity (under the 1999 regulations) and that are valid on July

13, 2016, will have a total of eight (8) years of validity. Vocational Instructional I certificates issued prior to July 13, 2016 that had seven (7) years of validity (under the 1987 regulations) and that are valid on July 13, 2016, will receive an additional one school term/year of valid service.

**5) Can any post-secondary institution prepare students for certification in PA?**

No, [preparing institutions must be approved by PDE](#) to conduct preparatory programs in specific content areas. The State Board of Education sets general and program-specific standards for preparing institutions to apply in identifying their courses and experiences for students and for managing and coordinating their programs. PDE's Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality oversees compliance with State Board of Education regulations.

**6) How can I obtain a list of Pennsylvania-approved educator preparation programs?**

Information is available on the Certification Preparation Programs page on [PDE's website](#) or by calling the Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality at 717-787-3470.

**7) Does my preparation program need to be accredited?**

In order for the state to recognize your preparation credits, your preparation program must be approved by PDE. While national accreditation is not required in Pennsylvania, some institutions are accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation ([CAEP](#)) or other accreditation organizations. Some employers may consider the accreditation of your program, but it is not a requirement for certification.

**8) Who is the certifying officer?**

The certifying officer is the person officially recognized by PDE in each approved institution who has the authority to sign off on the certification application of students. His or her signature attests to the fact that students have successfully completed the approved preparation program for certification.

**9) What are the non-educational requirements for Level I certification in PA?**

- Be of good moral character
- Be at least 18 years of age
- Be a United States citizen or a legal permanent resident holding a valid green card
- Hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree
- Complete a Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) approved preparation program with a minimum 3.0 GPA
- Meet all testing requirements
- Submit an online application through the [Teacher Information Management System \(TIMS\)](#)
- The PDE approved preparation program provider must verify program completion via [TIMS](#)

**10) Where can I get certification application forms?**

PDE no longer processes paper forms for certification. All applications for certification must be made through the [Teacher Information Management System \(TIMS\)](#). In order



to log in to the [TIMS](#) home page, click Access TIMS and then follow the directions on the web page. You will then be taken to your individual home screen, which contains information and links for Messages, Application(s) in Process, Profile & Settings, Permit Request(s), and Credential(s). You may initiate an application for certification here.

Several documents supporting your application may be uploaded directly to [TIMS](#). However, some supporting materials may need to be submitted in paper form. Once an application is submitted, you will receive a TIMS cover page with a barcode, a list of supporting documents needed, and an address where those documents may be sent. When sending those documents, include the TIMS cover page so that the materials can be appropriately matched to your TIMS file.

You may also submit payment for your application fee through [TIMS](#) using a credit card. Should you choose to send a money order to PDE for payment of the application fee, you should include a copy of the TIMS cover page with the money order.

### **11) What are the steps involved in applying for a Level I certificate in PA?**

The *in-state* candidate is required to complete and submit an application through [TIMS](#) accompanied by evidence of passing certification test scores, other pertinent documents as requested, and a fee to the Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality.

The *out-of-state* applicant must submit a completed application through [TIMS](#), documentation showing that he/she has completed an approved preparation program or holds comparable certification to the one sought in Pennsylvania, official college transcripts, evidence of passing certification test scores, paid a fee, and provided other pertinent documentation as requested.

### **12) What are the testing requirements for different types of certification in PA?**

#### **► Instructional I Certificates**

All undergraduate candidates seeking an initial state-approved Pennsylvania educator preparation certificate are required to pass a basic skills assessment as well as the corresponding subject matter test(s) related to the certification area. Post-baccalaureate candidates and advanced degree holders for initial teacher certification are not required to take a basic skills assessment. Post-baccalaureate candidates must take the subject matter area test(s) corresponding to the certification area(s) they are seeking. If you are already certified and adding another certificate, you only have to take the test(s) corresponding to the new certification area.

Passing the [Pre-service Academic Performance Assessment \(PAPA\)](#) is one means of meeting the basic skills requirement recognized by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The following [PECT](#) subject matter tests meet the testing requirements for the corresponding certification areas:

- [PreK-4](#)

- [Special Education PreK–8](#)
  - [Special Education 7–12](#)
- Initial certification for Grades Pre-K-4, Special Education PreK-8, and Special Education 7-12:
  - [Pearson: PAPA](#): Reading, Writing, and Mathematics
  - [Pearson: PECT](#) test(s) for the certificate(s)
- Initial certification for Grades 4-8:
  - [Pearson: PAPA](#): Reading, Writing, and Mathematics
  - [Praxis](#): Grades 4-8 Core Assessment Tests
  - [Praxis](#): Grades 4-8 Concentration Tests
- Initial certification for Secondary certificates (7-12):
  - [Pearson: PAPA](#): Reading, Writing, and Mathematics
  - [Praxis](#): Appropriate content area test(s)
- ▶ Educational Specialist Certificate
  - Elementary Counselor, Secondary Counselor, School Psychologist:
    - [Praxis](#): Appropriate content area test
  - School Nurse, Home and School Visitor, Instructional Technology Specialist:
    - Educational specialist candidates with a baccalaureate degree who hold a current and valid PA license as a counselor, dental hygienist, psychologist, registered nurse, or social worker may provide a copy of the license to PDE. Holders of these valid licenses are not required to take any tests to receive the related certification.
- ▶ Vocational Certificates
  - Vocational I:
    - [Praxis: PPST](#): Reading, Writing
    - Occupational Competency Assessment
  - Vocational II:
    - [Praxis](#): PPST Mathematics or the Vocational General Knowledge test (0890) if taken prior to 9/1/08 and within 10 years of date of application.

**13) Is there a fee to apply for certification?**

Yes. The state charges a processing fee for each certification application processed, whether it results in a certificate or not. Fees vary based on several factors. Check the fee schedule on [PDE's website](#) or contact the Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality, 717-787-3356.

**14) Is it possible to complete an approved program and not receive a certificate?**

Yes. Institutions have the right to withhold approval of certification for a variety of reasons, including outstanding fines, failing grades, poor performance, moral character considerations, and others.

**15) What are my options if my preparing institution denies my application for certification?**

State Board of Education regulations provide that any applicant denied certification shall have the right of appeal (See 22 Pa. Code §49.66 and §49.13(b)(9)). In a case in which the institution denies the certificate, an appeal should be registered in accordance with the institution’s official appeal procedure. An appeal may also be made to PDE. All inquiries regarding the appeal process should be made directly to the preparing institution or PDE.

**16) What are my options if PDE denies my application for certification or denies my appeal of my preparing institution’s decision?**

You may appeal to the Secretary of Education for review. All inquiries regarding the [appeal process](#) should be made directly to PDE at:

Certification Appeals Office  
Pennsylvania Department of Education, 9th Floor  
333 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17126-033  
(717) 787-5500

**17) What is meant by “alternate route certification?”**

Alternate route certification is a term used by many states and public policymakers to describe non-traditional entry into education certification. Alternate entry usually applies to those with college degrees who are interested in making a career change into education but do not wish to return full-time to college and/or take courses in the subject that may have been taken as part of the original baccalaureate. More detailed information on the types of alternate routes to certification in Pennsylvania can be found on PDE’s website:

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Educators/Certification/BecomeAnEducator/Pages/default.aspx>.

**18) In addition to having a certificate, are there other requirements for employment in Pennsylvania’s public schools?**

Yes. A [criminal background check and a child abuse clearance](#) are both required for employment in Pennsylvania schools.

**19) Can a non-U.S. citizen be certified to teach in PA?**

Yes, in limited circumstances. By law (School Code §1202), all standard certificate holders must be U.S. citizens. However, a foreign national may apply and be granted an Alien Provisional certificate good for six calendar years. The Alien Provisional certificate is issued to a foreign national who is legally authorized to reside permanently and seek employment in the U.S. and has filed a declaration to become a U.S. citizen. This certificate is converted to a standard certificate upon receiving official citizenship status. Failure to acquire such status within the six-year life span of the Alien Provisional certificate will result in the candidate’s inability to legally continue employment.

Non-U.S. citizen educators certified in a foreign language subject area may convert to a Level II certificate without becoming a U.S. citizen, but must meet all other regulatory requirements for conversion to an Instructional II certificate. Non-U.S. citizen educators certified in a subject area other than a foreign language cannot convert to a Level II certificate until they become a U.S. citizen. Satisfactory service on a non-U.S. citizen certificate (formerly titled an Alien Provisional certificate), will be charged against validity and credited toward Level II certification. See [CSPG # 7](#), (p. 7) for details.

Candidates who are not U.S. citizens must:

- Submit a photocopy of the front and back of your valid permanent resident immigration visa; and
- File a "[Declaration of Intent to Become a Citizen of the United States.](#)"

Citizenship documentation is not required for:

- World language instructional and emergency permit certificates;
- [Letter of Eligibility](#);
- [Commission Qualification Letter](#);
- [Commission](#); or
- Type 08 (Exchange Teacher, Cultural Exchange, or Visiting Scholar) Emergency Permit. ([See CSPG 5](#)).

For [foreign educator teacher certification applications](#), one must meet the following requirements:

- Earned a degree that is the equivalent of a United States baccalaureate degree or higher;
- Completed an educator certification program that meets Pennsylvania standards;
- Obtained satisfactory scores on the Pennsylvania Teacher Certification assessment(s);
- Demonstrated proficiency in speaking the English language if required
- Meets all other requirements. See:  
<https://www.education.pa.gov/Educators/Certification/OutOfState/Pages/Foreign-Educated-Teacher-Certification-Applicants.aspx>

**20) I qualified for a certificate many years ago but did not apply to receive one. I want to apply now. Will I qualify under current regulations or under those in effect when I graduated?**

You must meet the regulation and policy requirements in effect at the time of application.

**21) I have a baccalaureate degree from a Pennsylvania college but did not complete a teacher preparation program. Can I qualify for certification?**

You qualify for certification by demonstrating you have successfully met the educational and non-educational requirements for professional certification at the time of application. A baccalaureate degree will probably not meet all of the educational qualifications required, particularly those related to pedagogy. PSEA recommends you identify approved preparing institutions in your area and ask the certifying officers to review your background and prescribe what you need to meet the educational requirements for that

institution's approval for certification. It is advisable to "shop around," if possible, since institutions may vary in what they will accept. You may also want to consider the Teacher Intern Certificate (see the Types of Certificates section of this booklet for more information about the Teacher Intern Certificate).

**22) I am a resident of Pennsylvania but completed an out-of-state certification preparation program. Am I considered an in-state or out-of-state candidate?**

For certification purposes, you are considered an [out-of-state candidate](#).

**23) I completed a preparation program in an out-of-state institution. How do I obtain a Pennsylvania certificate?**

Contact the [Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality](#) to determine if Pennsylvania has an interstate agreement with the state where you completed your preparation program. Pennsylvania currently has interstate agreements with a majority of states for regular education instructional or teaching certificates only. See [CSPG # 18](#) for details.

**24) What is an interstate agreement?**

An interstate agreement between two certificate-issuing agencies means that they will mutually accept the other's preparation standards (the educational requirements). While this agreement simplifies the certification process for out-of-state candidates, it is not a pure *quid pro quo*. Candidates must meet all requirements, including passing the certification tests and all other non-educational qualifications prescribed by the jurisdiction in which they seek certification.

Pennsylvania has agreements with many jurisdictions but only for teaching certificates and only for certificates that are comparable to the ones issued in this state.

Information on other state requirements can be obtained from the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification ([NASDTEC](#)). See [CSPG #18](#).

**25) What qualifies an individual trained out-of-state for certification in Pennsylvania?**

- Hold a valid [National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Credential](#) comparable to a Pennsylvania certificate in subject and grade level scope; or
- Hold an [active/valid professional level out-of-state certificate with two \(2\) years](#) of successful classroom teaching experience (**Instructional** certification areas only); or
- Have [completed an approved preparation program outside of Pennsylvania](#).

**26) As an experienced out-of-state teacher will the time spent teaching in another state apply toward my Pennsylvania certificate?**

No, Pennsylvania does not count time teaching in another state as service time. Therefore, that time will not be credited toward conversion from a Level I to a Level II. [CSPG #7](#) mandates that service time accrued outside the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania does not count as creditable service time towards a Level II certificate. You will be issued a Level I certificate and need to meet all requirements for conversion to a Level II certificate in

Pennsylvania (see question #4 in the Maintaining a Valid Certificate section of this booklet and/or [CSPG 7](#)).

**27) Why, as an experienced out-of-state teacher, must I begin with a Level I certificate?**

The State Board of Education's regulations only permit candidates who hold National Board Certification to be issued a Level II certificate if all other qualifications are met (See 22 Pa. Code §49.65 (c)). All other candidates will be issued a Level I certificate.

**28) May I teach in Pennsylvania if I am not a resident of the state?**

Yes. There is no state residency requirement to teach in Pennsylvania. You must have appropriate Pennsylvania certification, however. You cannot teach on an out-of-state certificate in Pennsylvania at any time. Likewise, time teaching in another state will not count against the validity period of your Pennsylvania certificate (see questions #1 and #9 in the Maintaining a Valid Certificate section of this booklet and/or [CSPG 7](#)).

# Using and Maintaining Your Certificate

## 1) What do I do if I misplace my certificate?

Duplicate copies of your certificate can be downloaded and printed from the [Teacher Information Management System \(TIMS\)](#). Once logged in, then follow the directions on the web page. Each educator will then be taken to his or her individual home screen, which contains information and links for Messages, Application(s) in Process, Profile & Settings, Permit Request(s), and Credential(s). In the Credential(s) section, click [Print](#).

## 2) I want my name changed on my certificate. How can I do that?

If your name has been legally changed for any reason, you may request a name change on the [TIMS website](#). On the [TIMS](#) home page, educators should click Access TIMS and then follow the directions on the web page. Each educator will then be taken to his or her individual home screen, which contains information and links for Messages, Application(s) in Process, Profile & Settings, Permit Request(s), and Credential(s). In the Profile and Settings section, click [Name or SSN Change Application](#).

## 3) I recently moved. Whom do I contact to report the change?

It is your responsibility to update the Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality in writing to report a change to your permanent address. Failure to do so may result in not receiving pertinent information. Forms are available on the [PDE TIMS website](#). On the [TIMS](#) home page, educators should follow the directions on the web page. Each educator will be taken to his or her individual home screen, which contains information and links for Messages, Application(s) in Process, Profile & Settings, Permit Request(s), and Credential(s). In the Profile and Settings section, click [View and Update My Profile](#).

## 4) Can changes to rules and regulations governing certification validity and activity affect me even though I was awarded certification under a different set of policies?

If permitted by statute or regulation, yes. In the past, many changes in law, regulation, and/or Department policy grandfathered current certificate holders so that new provisions do not apply to those already holding a certificate. However, when a state law requiring ongoing professional education passed in 1999, it applied retroactively to all educators holding a PA certificate. Although it is rare, this is one example where a new rule, regulation or law impacted educators who received their certificate under a different set of requirements.

## 5) When is a certificate not usable for employment?

When it is invalid (time for conversion from Level I to Level II has expired) or when it is inactive (required professional development activities have not been accrued within five-year calendar years). An individual cannot work on an invalid certificate. However, one can substitute up to 90 days a year on an inactive certificate. See [CSPG #3](#).

## *Appropriate Use of Certified Personnel*

### **1) What legal restrictions, if any, prevent an educational entity from assigning someone to a position inappropriate to the scope of the certificate held?**

Section 1202 of the School Code (law) mandates that educational professionals be certified for the work they are assigned. It is, therefore, a violation of law to work in a position for which a certificate exists and to not hold that particular certificate or an Emergency Permit.

In cases where no certificate exists in an area of instruction, any Instructional I or II certificate is appropriate.

In addition, Chapter 235, Code of Conduct for Educators, 22 Pennsylvania Code §235.7 prohibits either accepting or assigning employment that violates the law about appropriate certification.

### **2) Who is responsible for assuring that the professional staff is properly credentialed and appropriately assigned based on the credentials they hold?**

It is the responsibility of the professional to know and understand the nature of the work permitted by the certification held. Additionally, the school district is responsible for deploying staff appropriately. Failure on the part of either party could result in loss of job for the teacher and/or a major fine for the district.

### **3) If I have been inappropriately assigned, can I use the time spent working in that improper assignment toward meeting the service year requirement for Level II conversion?**

No. (See [CSPG 7](#)).

### **4) Can I lose my job if I am inappropriately assigned?**

It is possible that you could be furloughed should an appropriate position not be available. Both the individual and the district have a responsibility to make sure that a person is not assigned, or knowingly accepts, a teaching assignment outside of his or her area of certification (Section 1202 of the School Code). Job jeopardy becomes an issue if you knowingly accept, or are inappropriately assigned outside of your certification area, and the district does not have an assignment appropriate for your certificate. If no appropriate assignment is available, the district could furlough you until one does become available.

### **5) Can I personally be fined by the state for working outside my certification area?**

No.

### **6) What should I do if I believe I have been assigned to a position for which I am not appropriately certified?**

You should contact your local association president and your UniServ, while also telling your administrator that you do not believe you have the appropriate certification for the



position. Should the administrator insist that you work in the position, do so, in order to avoid accusations of insubordination. Then, work with your local association president and UniServ to resolve the issue.

**7) How can I be sure that the work I am employed to do is reserved for my certificate?**

Contact your UniServ and request a copy of the position description from the district's human resources office. Your UniServ can work with the Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality to determine if you have been appropriately assigned. It should be stated that the vast majority of educators are assigned appropriately.

**8) What if I am asked to teach something for which no certificate exists?**

In order to give more flexibility to districts to provide extensive learning opportunities for students, the state allows the staffing of courses for which no certificate presently exists by anyone holding a valid and active Level I or II certificate and who has, according to the district, any other requisite qualification for the position. Teachers so assigned will receive experience credit for teaching. The state also has the option of issuing the district a Program Specialist certificate on behalf of the teacher. Either way, the teaching counts as service experience and may be used to convert a Level I to a Level II certificate.

**9) What are the consequences, if any, of accepting positions that do not require Pennsylvania certification?**

You can only accrue the required experience time needed for conversion to a Level II certificate working in an appropriate capacity that requires official Pennsylvania state certification. Service time will only accrue when working within your certificate area or when serving in a position for which no certificate exists (and thus any certificate can be used – see #8 above). At the same time, if a certificate is not required for the position, you are not using any service time allotted to your certificate.

## *Maintaining a Valid Certificate*

**1) What is a valid certificate?**

It is a certificate that has an allotted period of usable time remaining on it. The period of validity can be either based on calendar time (Intern) or service time (Instructional I, Educational Specialist I). See [CSPG #3](#).

**2) Can a certificate be valid but inactive?**

Yes. A certificate will be **VALID** for a given span of time – **six years of service time for a Level I** and **99 years of time for Level II** instructional and education specialist certificates. See #5 below for information on vocational certificates. A certificate will be **ACTIVE** for a **maximum of five calendar years** before having to be reactivated through an accumulation of continuing professional education requirements of six collegiate credits or six approved in-service credits or 180 approved activity hours or

any combination of hours and credits. For calculation purposes, one credit is equal to 30 activity hours. (See Maintaining an Active Certificate below).

### **3) Can I work on an invalid certificate?**

You cannot work in a non-charter public school on an invalid certificate. In some cases, it may be possible to work in a charter school on an invalid certificate.

### **4) How long is my Instructional I or Educational Specialist I certificate valid? How do I convert it to a Level II certificate?**

All teachers and specialists<sup>2</sup> begin with a Level I certificate which has a life of six (6) *service* years in Pennsylvania after which it must be converted to a Level II.<sup>3</sup> This is done by meeting certain state requirements:

- Three years (six semi-annual evaluations) of successful teaching in Pennsylvania attested to by a chief school administrator.
- Twenty-four post-baccalaureate credits. Six (6) of these credits must be associated with the area(s) of certification and/or designed to improve professional practice. See [CSPG No. 7](#).
- Completion of a Department-approved induction program.
- Complete and submit an application on [TIMS](#)

If you do not meet these requirements within the six-year service life of your Level I certificate, your license becomes invalid, making you ineligible for service. Once these obligations are met, the certificate becomes valid again, and you may return to service.

### **5) How long is my Vocational Education I certificate valid? How do I convert it to a Level II certificate?**

- Vocational Instructional I certificates issued on or after July 13, 2016 will be valid for eight (8) years of service.
- Vocational Instructional I certificates issued prior to July 13, 2016 that had six years of validity (under the 1999 regulations) and that are valid on July 13, 2016, will have a total of eight (8) years of validity.
- Vocational Instructional I certificates issued prior to July 13, 2016 that had seven (7) years of validity (under the 1987 regulations) and that are valid on July 13, 2016, will receive an additional one school term/year of valid service.

All vocational education educators begin with a Level I certificate which must be converted to Level II within the allotted amount service time. This is done by meeting the following state requirements:

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<sup>2</sup> The one exception to this statement is a newly certified educator in Pennsylvania who has moved from another state with current national certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. An educator in this situation will be issued an Instructional II certificate immediately.

<sup>3</sup> Service out-of-state does not count toward the six-year maximum.

The [Vocational Instructional II Certificate](#) shall be a permanent certificate issued to an applicant who has:

1. Completed three years of satisfactory teaching on a Vocational Instructional I Certificate attested to by the chief school administrator of the approved public or nonpublic school entity in Pennsylvania in which the most recent service of the applicant was performed;
2. Completed 42 credit hours in an approved university program in the appropriate field of vocational education;
3. Presented evidence of satisfactory ratings conducted by the public or nonpublic school entity;
4. Presented evidence of having passed the Vocational II assessment;
5. Completed a Pennsylvania Department of education-approved induction program; and
6. Received the recommendation of the preparing Pennsylvania university.

**6) Will service as a substitute teacher count as experience toward Level II conversion?**

Service as a long-term substitute may count as experience toward Level II conversion only if that service was:

- ▶ 70 days or more in a single assignment
- ▶ 50% or more of the school day or school week
- ▶ In the area of certification or under the scope of the certification.

Service as a day-to-day substitute will not. See [CSPG 7](#) for more information.

**7) Will service outside my areas of certification count toward Level II conversion?**

Service rendered in assignments for which a person lacks appropriate certification is not creditable toward meeting the experience requirement for permanent certification.

Likewise, this time is not charged against the validity period of the Level I certificate. See [CSPG 7](#) for more information.

**8) Will service at a private or nonpublic school count toward Level II conversion?**

Some service at a private or non-public school may count toward Level II conversion at the option of the certificate holder.

Service on a Level I certificate in the following types of schools/institutions may be credited toward Level II certification at the option of the certificate holder:

- ▶ Pennsylvania charter schools (except principals)
- ▶ Licensed Private Academic Schools
- ▶ PDE registered non-public, non-licensed schools
- ▶ Service in Head Start programs (with the exception of Pre-K Counts programs)
- ▶ Service in child care facilities that are a Star 3 or above
- ▶ Service in a Bureau of Corrections facility as a teacher of adult inmates. See [CSPG 7](#) for more information.

### **9) What service time is not creditable for Level II conversion?**

Service in the following categories is not creditable toward Level II certification or charged against the period of validity of a Level I certificate:

- Service rendered in assignments for which an educator lacks appropriate Level I certification.
- Service:
  - on emergency permits (all types even if serving 70 days or more);
  - on Intern certificates (Instructional or Vocational);
  - on temporary teaching permits; or accrued outside the mandated school year (summer school);
  - as a teacher of adult classes of persons 21 years of age or older (in non-Bureau of Corrections facilities);
  - in non-professional or paraprofessional positions;
  - outside the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Unsatisfactory service is not creditable toward the years of service required for a Level II certificate, however, it is charged against the period of validity of the Level I certificate. See [CSPG 7](#) for more information.

### **10) Are community college credits and continuing education units (CEUs) accepted for conversion credits?**

Community college credits and CEUs cannot be used to meet the requirements for conversion to a Level II certificate. **\*NOTE:** Community college courses that are accepted for transfer credit through the [Pennsylvania Transfer and Articulation Center \(PA TRAC\)](#) are acceptable for Level II as long as they meet the other credit requirements.

### **11) Must academic credits for Level II conversion be graduate level?**

Credits may be either undergraduate or graduate level but must be post-baccalaureate credits from a four-year, degree-granting institution. See [CSPG #7](#).

### **12) Are correspondence courses and courses taken as independent study acceptable for Level II conversion?**

They are applicable for Level II conversion. However, the credits must be earned at and appear as a passing grade on an official transcript of a state-approved, four-year bachelor's degree granting college or university. See [CSPG #7](#).

### **13) Do Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) approved in-service credits count toward Level II certification?**

Yes, as long as they are PDE-approved credits (not Act 48 hours) offered by Intermediate Units. However, in-service education course credits awarded by providers other than Pennsylvania intermediate units or approved by authorities other than PDE's Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality do NOT count. See [CSPG #7](#).

**14) Will credits completed at a state-approved seminary/school of theology, medical school, and/or law school be acceptable for Level II certification?**

Credits in the fields of law, medicine, real estate, and theology are not acceptable unless the certificate holder can satisfactorily demonstrate to the Department that these credits directly relate to the certificate held. It is best to obtain PDE clearance prior to taking such courses if you intend to use the credits to satisfy the 24 credits requirement for a Level II certificate. See [CSPG #7](#).

**15) I have more than one content area on my Level I Instructional certificate. Do I have to qualify to convert each content area separately? Do I have to meet continuing professional education requirements for every content area I hold?**

No. The act of converting one content area from Level I to Level II on the certificate converts all areas that appear under that certificate type to a Level II certificate.

**16) What are the requirements to convert a Level I to a Level II certificate?**

See #4 above.

**17) Can I renew a Level I certificate if I fail to meet the requirements in the allotted time?**

No. However, once all requirements for conversion from a Level I certificate to a Level II certificate have been met, you can apply for a Level II certificate.

**18) How can I confirm that my certificate is still valid?**

Level I certificates are valid for years of service, not chronological years. If you stopped working or never worked on your Level I, and, therefore, never used the six years designated as service years, your certificate is still valid. To officially confirm the validity status of your certificate, call the [Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality](#) at (717) 787-3356 and request a review of your work/school experience or ask your school district's office to conduct an unofficial assessment of your certificate's validity.

**19) My Instructional I certificate says that it is valid for six years. I earned the certificate five years ago but taught only one year. Will my certificate expire at the end of this year?**

No. Your Instructional I Certificate is good for six years of service, not six calendar years. The clock is only ticking when you are employed by a Pennsylvania public school entity. See above for additional information. See [CSPG #7](#).

**20) If I work in a position for which I do not hold the proper certification, will I jeopardize my certification status when seeking to convert my certificate?**

Any experience in a public school accrued in an assignment for which you are not properly certified cannot be applied to meet the requirements for conversion to a Level II certificate, nor will it count against the validity of the certificate. See the section on Appropriate Use of Certified Personnel in this booklet for additional information.

**21) If I work in an institution like a community college or a private licensed school where I am not required to have public school certification, am I using up service time on my certificate?**

No. See the Creditable Service section in this booklet for additional information.

**22) Who determines if my certificate is valid?**

The [Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality](#) in the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

**23) How long is a Teacher Intern Certificate valid?**

The Teacher Intern Certificate is issued for a period not to exceed three calendar years to qualify the holder to perform all the duties, functions, and responsibilities of the area(s) for which it is endorsed. The validity of the Teacher Intern certificate begins the month of issuance and expires 36 months later whether or not the holder has been continuously employed on the Intern Certificate by a public school. The validity of the Teacher Intern Certificate, whether issued in content instructional areas or for vocational education areas, is contingent upon:

- 1) the holder rendering satisfactory service to the employing school entity, and
- 2) maintaining continuing enrollment and making satisfactory progress within an approved teacher preparation/certification program leading to issuance of the Instructional I certificate or a Vocational Education I certificate.

**24) How long is a Vocational Education Intern Certificate valid?**

The Vocational Education Intern Certificate is valid for three calendar years.

**25) Can I renew a Teacher Intern Certificate or Vocational Education Intern Certificate if I fail to meet the requirements within three years?**

No, neither a Teacher Intern Certificate nor a Vocational Education Intern Certificate can be renewed.

*Notification to  
Certificate Holders*

One year prior to the active period expiring on a certificate, the Department of Education is obligated by law to inform a certificate holder of the time remaining and the number of credits and/or activity hours accrued to date.

*PDE has chosen to  
provide this notification  
electronically.*

It is your responsibility to access PDE's Act 48 Reporting System to monitor your progress and/or status.

## *Maintaining an Active Certificate*

### **1) What is an active certificate?**

It is a certificate whose holder has satisfied the state's continuing professional education requirements (sometimes referred to as Act [48 credits](#) or hours). See [CSPG # 8](#).

### **2) How do I maintain an active certificate?**

A holder of any type of Pennsylvania educator certificate is required by law (Act 48 of 1999) to complete continuing professional education credit hours. Everyone who holds a certificate issued by Pennsylvania is affected by [Act 48](#) whether they are employed or not; whether they are retired or not; or whether they hold a Level I or Level II certificate.

Those full-time tenured and non-tenured teachers in public school entities in Pennsylvania, including charter schools and their non-certified instructional staff, must meet the requirements of [Act 48](#) or forfeit the ability to work full-time. Others who function as substitutes or who do not work full time for any reason have three options:

- (1) they may choose to maintain an active certificate by taking the requisite credits and/or activity hours;
- (2) they may voluntarily inactivate their certificates by completing an application and submitting it to PDE via [TIMS](#) with a fee, or
- (3) they may let their certificates run out of active time. Whether they voluntarily inactivate their certificates or let them run out, they are able to substitute up to 90 days per year in the public schools.

Those who request voluntary inactive status will have the requirements of Act 48 suspended temporarily. To reactive a certificate, an educator must submit an application, through [TIMS](#), for removal of voluntary inactive status and evidence of 30 hours or one semester credit earned within the prior 12 months. Once active status is granted, an educator will have the balance of the original five-year period to complete the remaining hours to fulfill Act 48 requirements. Credits/hours taken during the inactive period (including the 30 hours for reactivating the certificate) may be counted toward Act 48 requirements.

Once an educator with an inactive certification has met the Act 48 requirements (i.e., the equivalent of 180 hours of continuing professional education or six collegiate credits) for the original Act 48 five-year period, when the hours or credits are reported to [PERMS](#), the system will automatically return that certificate to active status and will assign a new five-year compliance period.

Maintaining an active certificate means accumulating one or a combination of the following:

- Six credits of collegiate studies, or
- Six credits of Department-approved in-service courses, or
- One hundred eighty hours of Department-approved continuing professional development activities and experiences, or
- A combination of any of the above

### **3) Who approves continuing professional education activities?**

The Pennsylvania Department of Education and/or local school entities are automatically approved providers by law and can approve any other providers. The state does so by approving program proposals submitted by organizations and institutions; the local school entities do so by including providers in their continuing education plans.

The Department also approves additional providers of Act 48 hours. You may view PDE-approved providers by accessing the Act [48 Reporting System on PDE's website](#). PSEA is an approved provider of Act 48 continuing professional education, through its [PSEA Professional Learning Exchange](#).

### **4) Where can I obtain information about PDE-approved continuing professional education activity hours?**

Approved activity hours to maintain an active certificate may be earned through [PDE-approved providers](#), including PSEA. The Education Services Division of PSEA has a listing of PDE-approved [PSEA professional development offerings](#). PDE also has information on its website about its credit-bearing approved providers. PDE, through the [Standards Aligned Systems \(SAS\) website](#), also provides free online courses.

### **5) I have more than one content area on my Level I Instructional certificate. Do I have to meet continuing professional education requirements for every content area I hold?**

No, individuals who have multiple content areas on their certificates need only meet the continuing professional education requirements once during the five-year calendar period – i.e. six collegiate credits or six continuing professional development credits or 180 activity hours or a combination of hours and credits.

### **6) What do I need to do in order to ensure that I get credit hours for activities that are not officially transcribed, like in-service credits and/or professional development activities?**

You need to supply your name, employer (i.e., school district, IU, etc.), and PPID# to the organization providing the activity. The law requires the approved providers (PDE, school district, state-approved or regionally accredited institution of higher or post-secondary education, IU, or other organizations like PSEA and PFT) to electronically submit reports to the Department of Education confirming that individuals have successfully completed credit or activity hour bearing workshops and/or experiences.



**7) Who determines if my certificate is active?**

The [Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality](#) in the Department of Education.

**8) What happens if I fail to meet the requirements for an active certificate?**

Failing to meet the requirements for an active certificate makes the holder ineligible for employment in a public school. In order to reactivate a certificate, the holder must meet all of the continuing professional education requirements for each five-year period for which they have not completed the necessary credit hours. Holders may also request voluntary inactive status before their five-year period expires if they will no longer be working in a public school. By doing so, the holder is only required to accumulate 30 credit hours or one semester credit within the prior 12-month period in order to reactivate the certificate. Requests for voluntary inactive status can be made via [TIMS](#), which can be accessed through PDE's website:

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Educators/Certification/Application/Pages/default.aspx>

**9) If I am no longer working in a public school, will I still need to maintain an active certificate?**

Yes, if you plan to return to service in a public school at some point, you must remain active. There are two exceptions: if you request voluntary inactive status or if you retire. To request voluntary inactive status, you need to submit the request to PDE via [TIMS](#). The certificates of individuals who retire from employment in public schools will remain active without the need to accumulate Act 48 hours as long as the retiree does not return to service in a public school for more than 180 days.

**10) How can I confirm that my certificate is still active?**

Act 48 requires the state to maintain records of every certificate holder's continuing professional education status. We recommend that all certificate holders subject to [Act 48 check their status](#) at least twice a year. You can do this by accessing the [Act 48 Professional Education Record Management System \(PERMS\)](#). You will be required to enter your Professional Personnel ID (PPID). First time visitors will need to apply for their PPID by entering their name, social security number and date of birth.

**11) Can I work on an inactive certificate?**

You can substitute (day-to-day only) up to, but no more than, 90 days per school year on an inactive certificate. Retirees may substitute (day-to-day only) a cumulative 180 days on an inactive certificate.

**12) Can changes to rules and regulations governing certification activity affect me even though I was awarded certification under a different set of policies?**

If permitted by statute or regulation, yes. In the past, many changes in law, regulation, and/or Department policy have not applied to those certificate holders already in the "pipeline." However, Act 48 continuing professional education requirements apply to all educators regardless of whether the educator became certified before or after the passage of Act 48

## *PSEA's Professional Development Opportunities*

One of PSEA's Strategic Priorities is "Quality Education." This means that PSEA strives to make every public school and classroom an effective learning environment. PSEA works hard so that all members are recognized as providers of quality education services and as advocates for their profession by promoting high standards for licensure and professional development. PSEA strives to support these goals with the [PSEA Professional Learning Exchange](#).

Act 48 became effective on July 1, 2000, and mandates that all PA educators have continuing professional education. [PSEA's Professional Learning Exchange offers](#) a variety of professional learning options approved for Act 48 activity hours. Approved faculty consists of PSEA staff, and in some cases, selected PSEA members.

There is [web-based Continuing Professional Development Program catalog](#) detailing the opportunities.

### **1) How can I arrange to have one of these workshops in my school, district, or local?**

In most cases, you may contact the presenter directly after confirming the interest of your school, district, or local. You may also contact PSEA's Education Services Division at 1-800-944-7732 for assistance. Be prepared to provide the workshop title, date, location and an approximate number of participants.

### **2) Is there a cost to have one of these workshops?**

PSEA does not charge school districts for professional development offerings when districts collaborate with the local association to plan the offerings. However offerings presented at Region Continuing Professional Education (RCPE) events may be subject to a charge according to PSEA Board of Directors and/or region policies. Non-members may also be charged for attendance at a PSEA continuing professional education offering.

### **3) When are these workshops available?**

Unless otherwise noted, workshops are available weekdays, evenings and weekends. [Act 48-eligible training also is available online.](#)

Each PSEA region has a section on our website. You can obtain information on RCPE offerings held in your region by going to: <https://www.psea.org/about-psea/regionsandlocals/>

## *Additions, Deletions, and Letters of Equivalency*

### **1) Can I add new content areas to an Instructional certificate?**

Yes, you can add Instructional areas to your existing Instructional certificate.

### **2) How do I add content areas to an existing Instructional certificate?**

In many cases, adding another Instructional area to an existing Instructional certificate involves taking and passing the appropriate Praxis test(s) for the content area and completing an Add-on application in TIMS.<sup>4</sup>

Educators who hold any Instructional or Intern certificate may add most instructional content areas by testing alone with no additional coursework required. A PA instructional educator must take and pass the content area test for any [acceptable subject areas](#) to obtain additional certification areas.

After you have passed the appropriate content area test and confirmed it has been received by PDE under “View My Test Scores on File” from your TIMS dashboard, you must submit an application for the new subject area. Applications must be submitted through the [Teacher Information Management System \(TIMS\)](#).

The following excluded areas require the completion of a state approved certification program including testing:

- American Sign Language
- Cooperative Education
- Health and Physical Education
- Reading Specialist
- all Special Education areas

Educators must achieve the passing score listed on the [Certification Test and Score Requirements chart](#) (Excel). You may NOT use the GPA score options for testing add-ons.

### **3) Can I add an Educational Specialist, Supervisory, and/or Administrative certificate to an existing Instructional certificate?**

No, only Instructional areas can be added to an Instructional certificate. In order to obtain an Educational Specialist, Supervisory, and/or Administrative certificate, you must complete a preparation program and meet all qualifications and requirements associated with obtaining that certificate.

#### **4) Can I delete a content area from the Instructional certificate?**

Yes, content areas can be deleted from your Instructional certificate if you meet certain conditions. You should discuss any potential deletion with your UniServ before taking steps to have the area removed. Once the area is deleted, it can only be reinstated by meeting all of the educational and non-educational qualifications and requirements in place at the time of reinstatement. (See [CSPG 12](#)).

#### **5) What are the conditions necessary before I can delete a content area?**

1. Educators seeking to voluntarily delete any area(s) of certification from their Pennsylvania Professional Certificate should contact the Bureau of Teacher Certification and Preparation for specific application forms and instructions.
2. In all cases, holders of Pennsylvania Professional Certificates may request the voluntary deletion of any certificate area(s) between October 1 and December 31 annually. A moratorium for requesting voluntary deletions exists between January 1 and September 30 each year to allow schools the opportunity to plan for the assignment of their certificated staff in the ensuing school year.
3. All action by the Department to delete areas of certification is effective on the 30th day of June following receipt of the voluntary deletion application.
4. The Bureau will grant the voluntary deletion of any certification area(s) when either of the following conditions are met:
  - a. The applicant has possessed the certificate area(s) for which the voluntary deletion is sought for the previous five years and has not served in that area during that period of time, or
  - b. The applicant is not serving as a full-time professional or temporary professional employee in a public school entity.

If the educator does not meet either of the above conditions, school board approval of the voluntary deletion will be necessary.

5. When an educator submits an application for voluntary deletion of a certificate area directly to the Bureau, the employing public school entity will be notified. This will afford the employer an opportunity to contest the accuracy of the applicant's notarized statements. The voluntary deletion will be granted unless the employer has grounds to contest the deletion.
6. A deletion changing the grade level or subject area scope of the original area of certification will not be made when the certificate is comprehensive for a single curriculum area or specified school level.  
(See [CSPG 12](#)).

#### **6) What is a Letter of Equivalency?**

The Letter of Equivalency is for pay purposes only. It represents an accumulation of graduate-level credits but does not involve a formal graduate training program that would lead to a degree. The Letter of Equivalency is not transferable to any other state. An individual may earn a Letter of Equivalency for a Baccalaureate Degree (for

individuals with a Vocational certificate) or for a Master's Degree (for individuals with an Instructional certificate or Educational Specialist certificate).

### **7) What are the requirements for a Letter of Equivalency?**

A letter of Equivalency for Master's Degree is issued upon the completion of 36 hours of graduate-level credit. A minimum of 18 academic credits must be graduate credits earned at a college or university approved to offer graduate work in the content area of the applicant's primary teaching assignment.<sup>5</sup> A maximum of 18 credits may be earned through in-service programs approved by the Secretary of Education for meeting master's equivalency requirements.

A Letter of Equivalency for Bachelor's Degree is also issued to holders of Vocational certificates upon the accumulation of 90 college credits. A minimum of 18 credit hours of the final 30 shall be earned at a state-approved baccalaureate degree-granting institution. The remaining 12 may be satisfied in full or in part, through in-service programs approved by the Secretary of Education for meeting bachelor's equivalency requirements. In order to apply, one must submit an application for a new credential using the online [Teacher Information Management System, TIMS](#). See [CSPG # 10](#) for details.



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<sup>5</sup>PDE interprets the requirement that the credits be earned in the content area of the applicant's primary assignment to mean that the courses must be directly related to the course(s) taught by the individual. If you are unsure if a course will meet the requirements for "content" credit for the certificate area and current assignment, you are strongly encouraged to submit an official course description from the college/university course catalog of the course in question to the Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality. The course description should include the front of the catalog corresponding in year and semester to the course taken. You are encouraged to submit this information as soon as possible, as it may take several weeks for the Bureau to evaluate the course description.

# Professional Educator Discipline

In addition to keeping their certifications valid and active, professional educators are expected to follow the law and act in accordance with moral and ethical standards of professional practice. Certificate holders and charter school teachers are subject to discipline for professional misconduct, which may involve a reprimand or the suspension or revocation of a certificate.

The disciplinary process begins with the filing of a complaint with PDE. Any interested party can file a complaint. Once PDE determines that there is probable cause to support a claim of misconduct, it may file a notice of charges with the [Professional Standards and Practice Commission \(PSPC\)](#), which will determine whether grounds for discipline exist and the type of professional discipline that is warranted. The PSPC may conduct a hearing in cases where there is a factual dispute.

Misconduct that is actionable under the Professional Educator Discipline Act can involve criminal conduct or noncriminal conduct.

**Criminal conduct:** You may be professionally disciplined because you have been convicted of certain crimes as listed in section 111(e) of the Public School Code. Additionally, your certificate may immediately be suspended if you have been indicted for a crime listed in section 111(e). Crimes for which you can be disciplined include but are not limited to crimes involving **moral turpitude** (e.g. burglary, mail fraud, receiving stolen property, money laundering) and **section 111(e) crimes** (e.g. criminal homicide; aggravated assault; stalking; kidnapping; sexual assault; endangering the welfare of a child; corruption of minors; felony under the Controlled Substance, Drug, Device, and Cosmetic Act).

**Noncriminal conduct:** You may also be professionally disciplined for conduct that is not considered criminal. In such circumstances, the PSPC must determine if your conduct meets the grounds for discipline and the type of discipline you are to receive. In such cases, PSPC maintains full discretion in determining whether and what type of discipline should be imposed. Noncriminal grounds for discipline include **immorality, incompetency, intemperance, cruelty, and negligence**.

The PSPC may impose the following types of professional discipline:

- Private Reprimand – does not invalidate an educator’s certificate but may be used against him or her in future proceedings
- Public Reprimand – does not invalidate an educators’ certificate but may be used against him or her in future proceedings; notice is communicated through PENN\*LINK, PDE’s website, and released to other state departments of education
- Suspension – temporary invalidation of all certificates held by the educator; notice is communicated publicly
- Revocation - invalidation of all certificates held by the educator; notice is

- communicated publicly
- Surrender in Lieu of Discipline – the educator surrenders his or her certification; the effect is the same as revocation; notice is communicated publicly

### **1) If I have a police record, can I be certified in Pennsylvania?**

One of the non-educational legal requirements for certification in Pennsylvania is the “good moral character” provision (School Code §1209). Having a police record may not, in and of itself, preclude certification issuance, but will necessitate close scrutiny by the Department of Education for such factors as the nature of the violation(s), the applicant’s age at the time of the violation(s), and the personal record of performance and achievement following the violation(s). The health and welfare of public school students will be the determining standard as to whether to issue the certificate or not. If denied, the applicant has the right to appeal.

### **2) In what ways could I lose my credentials to teach in Pennsylvania’s public schools?**

Action can be taken against a certificate holder for cause (including incompetence, negligence, immorality, intemperance, and cruelty) and/or for crimes of moral turpitude in accordance with the authority vested with the [Professional Standards and Practices Commission \(PSPC\)](#) by the Professional Educator Discipline Act (24 P.S. §§2070.1-2070.18).

Failure to convert a Level I certificate to a Level II certificate within six service years will render the certificate invalid. Individuals may not teach with an invalid certificate. To have the certificate reinstated as valid, all requirements for conversion to a Level II certification must be met and application must be made to PDE. (See Maintaining a Valid Certificate).

Failure to complete 180 credit hours of continuing professional education every five calendar years will render the certificate inactive. Individuals with an inactive certificate may only serve as a day-to-day substitute for up to 90 days per year. To reactivate the certificate, an individual must complete the necessary credit hours. (See Maintaining an Active Certificate).

### **3) Am I entitled to due process in the event an action is taken against my certificate?**

Yes. The law requires the department to give certificate holders notice and the opportunity for a hearing before revoking a certificate or imposing other professional discipline (24 P.S. §2070.13).



## Glossary

<b>Act 48 — Continuing Professional Education Requirement</b>	Act 48, effective July 1, 2000, is a law that mandates all Pennsylvania certified educators to maintain an active certificate through continuing professional education activities. Anyone holding an Intern, Instructional I or II, Educational Specialist I or II, Administrative, Supervisory, Letter of Eligibility and all vocational certificates is affected by Act 48.
<b>Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality</b>	The administrative unit within the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) responsible to oversee compliance with laws, regulations, and administrative standards and policies surrounding the preparation, certification and staffing assignments of professional educator personnel in the public school entities of Pennsylvania.  Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality, Pennsylvania Department of Education 333 Market Street, Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333 Phone: 717-787-3356 Fax: 717-783-6736 TDD: 717-772-2864 Website: <a href="http://www.education.pa.gov">www.education.pa.gov</a>
<b>Calendar Time</b>	Calendar time refers to chronological time. In Pennsylvania, intern certificates and various non-standard issuances called <i>permits</i> have validity periods usually of one to three <u>calendar</u> years' duration and have either limited renewability or none at all. In addition, continuing professional education requirements must be met every five calendar years.
<b>Chapter 4, Curriculum, 22 Pennsylvania Code § 4.1 et seq.</b>	Regulations of the Pennsylvania State Board of Education governing curriculum, assessment and graduation requirements for regular and vocational education students in public schools.
<b>Chapter 49, Certification, 22 Pennsylvania Code § 49.1 et seq.</b>	Regulations of the Pennsylvania State Board of Education governing preparation and certification of professional education personnel.
<b>Chapter 354, General Standards for the Preparation of Professional Educators §354.1 et seq.</b>	General standards governing educator preparation programs in Pennsylvania.
<b>Certification Staffing Policies and</b>	CSPGs are published Department of Education policies advising school entities on how to comply with laws and regulations relating to certification and



<b>Guidelines (CSPGs)</b>	staffing assignments. The CSPGs do not, at present, constitute law or regulations themselves but do represent the Department’s interpretation of law and regulation concerning the proper deployment of professionally certified staff members and the scope of the certificates they hold. They are frequently used by the Department to determine the validity of certification audit citations conducted by the Auditor General’s office and therefore have more “authority” than normally attributed to “guidelines.”
<b>Content Area</b>	This is the type/subject area that appears on the face of your certificate. For example, Instructional/Social Science; Instructional/Office Technologies; Instructional/English; Educational Specialist/School Nurse; Educational Specialist/Home and School Visitor; Administrative/ Elementary Principal; Supervisory/Curriculum and Instruction, etc. The CSPG’s (see above) describe in detail what content area is necessary for which school assignments or, conversely, what assignments are within the scope of a specific certificate.
<b>Conversion</b>	Refers to the requirement of having to change the status of a certificate within a stated period of <u>service</u> time from Level I to Level II.
<b>Day-to-Day (Per Diem) Substitute</b>	Person (holding a standard certificate or an emergency permit) employed on an intermittent basis whose service does <b>not</b> exceed 20 <u>consecutive</u> days in a <u>single</u> assignment.
<b>Graduate Credit</b>	Graduate-level credit awarded by a state-approved graduate degree-granting institution.
<b>In-service</b>	Describes post certification status. It is a term commonly used to refer to continuing professional education activities.
<b>In-service Credit</b>	PDE approved professional development credit applicable to meeting state requirements to maintain a valid and/or active certificate and/or to satisfy 18 of the 36 graduate credits required for a Letter of Equivalency (formerly called Master’s Equivalency certificate).
<b>Interstate Certification Agreement</b>	Pennsylvania participates in an agreement with other states/jurisdictions based on mutually agreed-upon conditions that allow out of state certificate holders to obtain a Pennsylvania certificate. Please note this is not true reciprocity, and it depends on how another state’s criteria for certification compares with Pennsylvania. Applicants may need additional coursework, and candidates for Pennsylvania certification must complete the certification tests required in Pennsylvania.
<b>Level I Certification</b>	The initial standard certificate issued to those who complete an approved teacher preparation or educational specialist program and achieve the

	certification testing standards mandated by <i>Chapter 49</i> , of 22 Pennsylvania Code established by the State Board of Education. Both teachers and educational specialists are issued Level I certificates.
<b>Level II Certification</b>	Certification achieved by satisfying the education, service years, induction, performance evaluation with PDE approved evaluation forms and assessment requirements set forth in <i>Chapter 49</i> of 22 Pennsylvania Code by the State Board of Education. The assessment requirements are found in the State Board Regulations and affect Instructional and Educational Specialist Level I holders.
<b>Long-Term Substitute</b>	Person (holding a standard certificate or an emergency permit) who is employed as a substitute for <b>20</b> or more <b>consecutive</b> days in a <b>single</b> assignment. In order for time as a long-term substitute to count toward a level II certificate, the individual must serve for <b>70</b> or more <b>consecutive</b> days in a <b>single</b> assignment.
<b>Official Transcripts</b>	Unopened, sealed transcripts.
<b>Pennsylvania Code</b>	A set of codified state regulations that carries the force of law.
<b>Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE)</b>	The administrative agency in charge of overseeing compliance to educational statutes and regulations in the Commonwealth. PDE is not a constitutionally authorized agency but part of the executive branch of state government. Its chief executive officer is the secretary who is appointed by the governor with concurrence of the Senate and serves as a member of the governor’s cabinet.
<b>Pennsylvania General Assembly</b>	Composed of two houses: the House of Representatives, whose members are elected every two years; and the Senate, whose members are elected for four year terms. The Pennsylvania Legislature has been given the responsibility by the state constitution to “provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth.”
<b>Preservice</b>	The period of preparation time prior to initial certification.
<b>Professional Employee</b>	An employee who has been awarded tenure status as a result of completing established state requirements during service as a temporary professional employee.
<b>Professional Standards and Practices Commission</b>	A state commission, established by law, formed principally to advise PDE and the Pennsylvania State Board of Education on matters related to the preparation and certification of educators and to adjudicate cases involving alleged misconduct by certificate holders. Its members are

<b>(PSPC)</b>	appointed by the governor and approved by the Senate. PSPC has a majority of teacher members.
<b>Program-Approval Standards</b>	The Department of Education approves Pennsylvania’s educator preparation programs based on sets of general and specific standards called program-approval standards established by PDE and approved by the State Board of Education. These reflect the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for professional education certification.
<b>Provisional Certification</b>	Level I certification.
<b>School Code of 1949</b>	A compendium of most of the laws governing education in Pennsylvania.
<b>Service Time</b>	Time employed on a Pennsylvania-issued certificate in an approved Pennsylvania school entity relating to the education of pre-kindergarten through grade 12 students. The service time allotted to an Instructional Level I and Vocational Instructional Level I (teaching) and an Educational Specialist Level I (non-instructional, pupil personnel) is six years. Service time is calculated as the time spent actually practicing under the certificate and may not necessarily occur in a consecutive period of time. (CSPG #7 explains how PDE calculates time served).
<b>State Board of Education</b>	A Board, created by the General Assembly, consisting of 22 members that constitute a Council of Basic Education, a Council of Higher Education, and the State Board for Vocational Education. Seventeen (17) members are appointed by the Governor, four from the General Assembly, and one non-voting, ex officio member who is Chair of the Professional Standards and Practices Commission. The Board has the power and duty to review and adopt regulations that govern educational policies and principles and establish standards governing the educational programs of the Commonwealth. The State Board of Education added non-voting student representation on the Board. This includes one student member and one student member-elect to be added to each of the Council of Basic Education (high school) and the Council of Higher Education (college).
<b>Substitute Teacher</b>	A person holding a standard certificate or emergency permit employed to fill a position held by a temporary professional or professional employee on a temporary leave of absence because of illness, sabbatical leave, maternity leave, administrative leave, or suspension of service.
<b>Temporary Professional Employee</b>	A certificate holder contracted as an employee to serve in a vacancy created as a new position or by the resignation, termination, retirement, or death of an incumbent. The status remains temporary until the employee is awarded tenure status in accordance with law, normally three years of successful practice as a temporary professional employee.

**Tenure**

The status of being a professional employee. Tenure is not related to professional certification except that all temporary professional and professional employees must hold the proper credentials (certificate) for the position to which they are assigned.

To gain tenure, an employee must:

- Serve three years in a probationary capacity (i.e., a “temporary professional employee”);
- Acquire three years of service, including a satisfactory rating within the last four months of the third year; and
- Maintain the certificate appropriate for “temporary professional employee” status.



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