



**Testimony of the
Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA)**

**Public Hearing Regarding
22 PA Code Chapter 49:
Certification of Professional Personnel**

**Presented to the
Pennsylvania State Board of Education**

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By

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Good afternoon, Chairperson White and members of the State Board of Education. My name is Rich Askey. I am a music educator with over three decades of experience, most of which was spent teaching music to elementary students in the Harrisburg School District. Currently, I am the President of the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA), the state's largest union of educators and education support professionals. On behalf of PSEA's 180,000 members – including aspiring, active, and retired educators - thank you to Chairperson Dungee Glenn and members of the Teacher and School Leader Effectiveness Committee for providing me the opportunity today to share our organization's recommended revisions for Chapter 49.

Pennsylvania is facing a fundamental supply and demand problem in our preK-12 public schools. The need for qualified educators to support students continues to increase yet the supply of educators is on a steady decline – particularly in certain content areas, racial and ethnic minorities, and geographic locations. Pennsylvania has seen a substantial increase in the number of emergency permits issued, while enrollment in our teacher preparation programs has declined nearly 65% in the past decade. In many districts, the number of teachers eligible for retirement far outweighs the projected influx of potential teacher candidates coming into the profession.

This growing shortage has very real and concerning impacts upon students, educators, and communities across PA. And it comes at a hefty price – according to a 2016 Research Brief from the Learning Policy Institute (LPI), the projected national price tag for replacing teachers who leave the profession early (pre-retirement attrition) was *8 billion dollars* in 2018. Given that pre-retirement attrition is the largest driver of teacher turnoverⁱ, there is no question that helping educators thrive and remain in the profession would be a much smarter investment.

If the Commonwealth is serious about addressing our growing teacher shortage crisis and seeking the best and brightest into the profession, all while recognizing the importance of diversifying the educator workforce, then it must adopt a cohesive policy and resource framework aimed at addressing the four major factors that influence why teachers leave before retirement: 1) Compensation; 2) Preparation; 3) Mentoring and Induction; and 4) Teaching Conditions.ⁱⁱ

PSEA believes that the review of Chapter 49 and the ongoing implementation of the state’s Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Plan provide concrete opportunities for developing and advancing such a framework. We are eager to be a partner in this important work. We appreciated the opportunity to participate in the PA Department of Education’s Chapter 49 stakeholder meetings convened last year, and we support the six recommendations outlined in the facilitator’s final report.ⁱⁱⁱ PSEA encourages the Board to reflect the report’s recommendations, as well as our policy priorities outlined below, in its proposed changes to Chapter 49.

PSEA Priority | RESPECT for Pennsylvania educators

PSEA truly is a member-driven organization. PSEA’s primary policymaking body – our House of Delegates – convenes two times a year so that hundreds of members from every region of Pennsylvania can review, discuss, debate, and ultimately determine the priorities of our organization. During this past December’s House of Delegates, our members voted overwhelmingly to elevate respect for educators by advancing initiatives focused on addressing, at least in part, the factors impacting whether educators remain in the profession.

Certification of Qualified Personnel

One of the priorities supported by our Delegates in December was to seek certification for qualified school-based personnel, particularly those whose practice areas currently only require licensure.

In its 2018 report to the Board regarding Chapter 49, LPI acknowledged that references to non-teaching personnel in their recommendations was limited but they highlighted “... *a foundational principle in considering any changes to Chapter 49 is that all positions in Pennsylvania public schools should be filled with qualified professionals.* Specifically, the goal should be to provide the necessary supports and structures to ensure every individual working within the public school system has the requisite knowledge and skills to support each and every child. Underprepared or unqualified individuals in any position hinder schoolwide efforts to meet the needs of all students and can contribute to teacher attrition. *The skills and expertise of all staff should be effectively developed and utilized as part of a comprehensive vision for school and student success.*”

PSEA couldn't agree more.

There are “Specialized Instructional Support Personnel”^{iv} working in Pennsylvania schools every day with teachers, school support staff, parents, community members, and other education stakeholders ensuring students have the services they need to succeed both inside and outside the classroom. Yet some of these educators are not certified because the Department has not created a corresponding certificate for their professional services.

PSEA submitted written comments to the Department and the Board last September with specific recommendations for consideration as we collectively undertake this effort to update and improve Chapter 49.^v While there is a process in the regulations for the Board and the Department to receive requests for a new “type/category of certificate”, there is no such corresponding process for receiving requests specific to subject areas within the various categories of certificates. In our letter, PSEA strongly encouraged the Department to revise Sections 49.51 - 49.53 and create a structure to receive public requests for new, modified, or discontinued certification subject areas with a clearly defined and transparent process for reviewing and responding to these requests. Unfortunately, no such changes were proposed by the Department. PSEA urges the Board to address this serious concern in its proposed revisions to Chapter 49.

Professionals employed in our schools support the needs of the whole child and they deserve recognition and respect for the critically important work they do. Certification is foundational for developing that recognition and respect. But even securing certification is not always possible for professional educators given the fact that no objective, transparent, and timely process currently exists for the Department to receive, review and respond to public requests for new, modified or discontinued certification subject areas. The result is a system that neither approves nor denies requests from professional educators like school social workers who have sought certification *for over a decade*. This leaves school social workers not only without a certificate, but also with little to no guidance for how to proceed to secure one.

Simply having a Certification and Staffing Policy and Guideline (CSPG) issued by the Department recognizing that a professional with licensure *can* be employed in a school district is *not* certification. Our members – from social workers to occupational therapists and physical therapists and more – recognize and value the importance of certification for working in the prek-12 public school system. A certificate assures that licensed employees have not only the requisite content and practice knowledge, but also the requisite knowledge that is essential and specific to student needs, school system structures, policies, and pertinent laws. And perhaps most importantly, it provides clear recognition of their valuable contribution as qualified professionals within the school community. Ensuring an objective, timely, and transparent process for evaluating certification subject areas is critical to provide alignment between the current roles and demands of professionals working within our schools and how they are recognized at the state and local level.

In addition to improving the process for review and approval of certifications, PSEA encourages the Board to strengthen the connection between certification subject areas and high-quality preparation programs as governed by Chapter 354. The creation of certifications should reflect an intention by state policymakers to ensure that students have access to qualified personnel specifically trained to meet their unique needs. Therefore, once a certification is established, a clear pathway should exist for individuals to pursue it and vice versa. The alignment, however, between the creation of certifications and the preparation programs needed for them is not present across the board. For example, while our school social workers have developed a model curriculum and completed extensive outreach to numerous institutions of higher education to secure their interest in offering a preparation program, no corresponding Educational Specialist Certificate yet exists or has been created by the Department. But for professionals like dental hygienists who wish to obtain the already-established Educational Specialist Certification in their area of expertise, that is not possible since no education preparation programs specific to their certification currently exist. This lack of alignment should be addressed by the Board if possible, in its review of Chapter 49, and potentially a review of Chapter 354 in the future.

Definition of Professional Personnel

Another priority PSEA Delegates identified at our December House was the need to ensure that qualified personnel are considered “professional” personnel. PSEA will continue to advocate for the certification of professionals through an improved certification process in Chapter 49, but we also recognize the value of capturing those qualified personnel currently working in our schools and providing services as “professionals”. Therefore we request that the Board add language to the definition of “professional certified personnel” in Chapter 49 that reflects that intention such as: “...and individuals employed in professional positions that require a state or nationally-recognized license or other credential and that the Department of Education has determined and announced in a Certification and Staffing Policy Guideline do not require certification under Article XII for public school employment.”

Compensation

Supporting a cohesive framework aimed at recruiting and retaining our best and brightest into the education profession is critically important– and compensation cannot be overlooked as a key factor in these efforts. So, while compensation may not be directly governed by Chapter 49, I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to publicly thank Governor Wolf for his proposal to increase the required annual minimum salary for educators to \$45,000 as part of the FY19-20 state budget.

The required annual minimum salary has not been changed in 30 years. I can personally attest that the challenges and expectations for educators have grown significantly since I started teaching three decades ago. Teachers today face increasing continuing education requirements; more and more students with diverse and complex mental, emotional, and physical needs; intense pressures of high-stakes standardized testing and its impact on curriculum and creativity in the classroom; and, one of the more daunting new realities - keeping our students safe. Teacher salaries should be adjusted to meet these new and ever-expanding challenges. The Governor’s proposal to increase the minimum teacher salary will truly help demonstrate to current and future educators alike that their work is *valued* and *respected*.

PSEA Priority | Creating a more diverse teacher workforce

PSEA fully supports the intent of the state’s ESSA Plan to enhance supports for our teachers and leaders, including the major goal of improving the diversity of the teacher workforce to better reflect the growing diversity of the students we educate.

Currently students of color make up 33.5% of Pennsylvania’s public school student population, yet only 4% of our teaching force are teachers of color. Only 5 states have higher student/teacher racial disproportionality rates than Pennsylvania.^{vi} But to address this lack of diversity, state policymakers and stakeholders like PSEA must be consistent and intentional in our efforts.

Recognizing that improving diversity is a shared goal among many stakeholders, the real challenge now is operationalizing efforts to meet the goal. Ideally, Pennsylvania should be able to leverage existing policy initiatives – like ESSA and the revision of Chapter 49 – to maximize resources to achieve the greatest results. A critical underpinning for this work to be successful is ensuring stakeholders have the necessary data to make informed policy-making decisions moving forward. Therefore, we urge the Board to ensure improvements to data collection and reporting are contained in the final revision to Chapter 49.

In our letter to the Department and the Board last September, PSEA specifically requested that Chapter 49 be revised to require the Department to collect and analyze additional demographic data on certification candidates; measure the impact of current educator recruitment and retention practices on educator diversity; and provide annual reporting to the public on PA educator diversity, including specific programs focused on traditionally underrepresented groups.

PSEA appreciates that the Department laid the initial foundation in its proposed amendments to Chapter 49 for improved reporting and data collection along these lines, but we believe more can be done. PSEA urges the Board to include a requirement in Chapter 49 that the Department collect disaggregated data relating to our current and future educator workforce and that the information is ultimately shared with stakeholders in a manner that provides valuable insight for where improvements may need to be made. In addition, we encourage the Board to incorporate the recommendations specific to data in the LPI report for Chapter 49.

PSEA Priority | High-Quality Induction and Mentoring

Educator professional learning is a continuum that spans the entire career of an educator. Supporting our educators and helping them navigate through key transition points in the continuum is critical.

Educator preparation doesn't end upon graduation from the post-secondary program; it must extend into the first years of teaching as the aspiring educator transitions to the next phase in his/her continuum – the early career educator. Helping early educators navigate their transition from teacher preparation program to full responsibility in their classroom is pivotal. High-quality mentoring and induction provide evidence-based strategies to help educators bridge the knowledge gained during their preparation program, adding to their already practical experience through clinical residencies, and honing the necessary skills for engaging students in learning, managing the classroom, and maintaining a positive and safe classroom environment.

PSEA encourages the Board to use Chapter 49 as a policy lever to advance a more comprehensive approach to high-quality induction and mentoring for new teachers. Specifically, we offer the following recommendations for consideration:

- Amend Section 49.1 Definitions:
 - Define “mentoring”. A definition of the term could provide clarity for school districts as they develop their induction plans. The definition should reflect that mentoring is one-on-one support and feedback provided by an experienced teacher who has undergone extensive training specific to supporting a new teacher in developing skills and practice.
 - Expand the definition of “induction” to provide more specificity to terms like “professional support services” referenced within. The definition should include concrete examples of the system of supports that are expected to be put in place – i.e. ongoing professional development, curriculum planning, mentoring and orientation.
- Amend Section 49.16 Approval of induction plans:
 - Require more than one year of support for new teachers;
 - Clarify that local plans must reflect evidence-based strategies for high quality

mentoring and induction programs including the selection and training of mentors.

- Establish a process for ongoing stakeholder input, including the Board, for the Department’s development of plan guidelines and criteria for plan approval.

PSEA Priority | Improve Teaching Conditions

Supporting educators in their individual and collaborative efforts to build knowledge and improve their skills is one of the most important school-based factors for helping our students succeed. As noted previously, teaching conditions is one of the key factors influencing whether a teacher remains in the education profession. The teaching condition that is perhaps most relevant to the Board’s review and revisions for Chapter 49 is the need to ensure high-quality professional learning. PSEA urges the Board to amend Section 49.17 to adopt a broader vision of meaningful professional learning for teachers that incorporates 21st century professional learning standards, as well as the guidance and tools necessary for schools to design and implement personalized professional learning plans based on the needs of their teachers and their students.

Fundamentally, professional development does not exist in a vacuum; schedules, curriculum, student and teacher evaluations, school mission, goals, and expectations must all be aligned with professional learning in a coordinated system. Unfortunately, the current situation for most teachers in Pennsylvania does not reflect a collaborative, coordinated structure. Teachers take professional learning courses at the individual level and participate in professional learning activities sponsored by their employing school entity. Most professional learning then happens as one-time events after school, on in-service days, or during the summer. These characteristics create professional learning that does little to encourage, or provide the opportunity, for educators to apply their learning, sustain changes in their practice, or gain knowledge and skills that are personalized to their own needs.

PSEA strongly encourages the Board to incorporate into Chapter 49 professional learning standards such as those developed by Learning Forward for Professional Learning.^{vii} These standards focus on helping educators further develop their knowledge, skills, and practices for supporting all students. The Board should also include a requirement that the continuing

education plans submitted by school entities reflect these learning standards. At a minimum, Chapter 49 should incorporate guidance that ensures school entities enhance professional learning for in the following areas:

- Teaching practices that support social, emotional, and academic learning needs of all students;
- Trauma-informed education;
- School climate and culture;
- Equity – including an understanding of the impacts of every subgroup including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender express, gender identify, socio-economic status, and disabilities have upon an individual student as well as an understanding of equity as it relates to educational opportunities for all students; and
- Data-driven instruction and decision-making.

Professional learning should not only encompass the research behind why these elements are essential for learning – but also provide the tools and strategies for how educators, administrators and whole schools and districts can integrate the standards into their classroom. For educators, professional learning needs to deal with deep and useful content knowledge that educators can use in their instruction. High-quality professional learning is built on collegiality and collaboration among school staff to solve important problems and consistently recognizes that for professional learning to be effective, it is a school- and district-wide endeavor. Therefore, it is essential that when planning professional development, school entities should also take into consideration the supporting structures needed to ensure professional learning is successful. School leaders should develop systems to allow educators to observe and collaborate, alter scheduling so that key groups of teachers can have shared planning time, and use existing meeting time in new ways to foster professional collaboration. We encourage the Board to provide guidance to school entities so that their plans reflect how educators will be provided the time and supportive environment to implement the professional learning standards in a collaborative manner in the context of their school’s vision and plan.

PSEA appreciates the opportunity to share our priorities and recommendations, and we stand ready to partner with the Board and other stakeholders on this important work.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Learning Policy Institute, “A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.” September 2016

https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/A_Coming_Crisis_in_Teaching_BRIEF.pdf

ⁱⁱ LPI, 2016 Report

ⁱⁱⁱ Learning Policy Institute, “Examining Educator Certification in Pennsylvania: Research and Recommendations for Chapter 49,” September 2018

<https://www.stateboard.education.pa.gov/Documents/About%20the%20Board/Hearings%20and%20Roundtables/LPI%20Report%20Examining%20Educator%20Cert%20in%20PA.pdf>

^{iv} Every Student Succeeds Act/ESSA – definition of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel/SISP:

“(i) school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists; and (ii) other qualified professional personnel, such as school nurses, speech language pathologists, and school librarians, involved in providing assessment, diagnosis, counseling, educational, therapeutic, and other necessary services (including related services as that term is defined in section 602 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1401) as part of a comprehensive program to meet student needs.” (Note: SISP *are still referred to as "related services personnel" in the IDEA*).

^v PSEA, Chapter 49 letter to PA Department of Education and State Board of Education, September 2018

^{vi} Research for Action, “Patching the Leaky Pipeline: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color in Pennsylvania”

April 2018 <https://www.researchforaction.org/publications/patching-the-leaky-pipeline/>

^{vii} Learning Forward, “Standards for Professional Learning,” <https://learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning>