

FAQ about Chapter 49-2

1. How will Chapter 49-2 change teacher certification in PA?

The most dramatic change proposed by Chapter 49-2 is the elimination of the elementary certification (K-6). Currently an elementary certified teacher may teach in kindergarten through sixth (6th) grade. The proposed changes will split elementary teachers into two groups as shown in **Table 1** below. There is no overlap of certification for elementary, which could be problematic. A non-reading 4th grader would be in a classroom with a teacher who may not be prepared to provide instruction in basic reading and a gifted 2nd grader would have a teacher who may not be prepared in advanced content such as mathematics. Notice that the new certification (PK-3) will be required for preschool teaching in school district-sponsored preschool classes.

The proposed changes will also impact how PA certifies middle school teachers. The Middle School certification is currently one that is not “earned” but involves content testing of PA certified teachers, most often those with elementary certification. Middle School certification (in Pennsylvania) will be something new and should require additional resources. If PA is committed to quality middle level education it will require the teachers be prepared to work with young adolescents in addition to attention to content preparation.

The changes in special education certification are very dramatic. Currently, there is just one special education certification in PA but the proposed changes will result in two (2) distinct special education certifications (PK-8 and 7-12). The mandate of dual certification in special education will require specialization in early childhood education, middle level education or a content area. This proposed change would mean a significant increase in the total number of credits required to complete a special education certification.

Table 1 Comparison Certification Configuration in Pennsylvania			
Grade Level	Present	Proposed	Change
Early Childhood	N-3	PK-3 rd Grade	Add Pre-Kindergarten This certification <u>required</u> to teach at this level.
Elementary	K-6	NONE	Eliminated Completely
Middle School	NONE	4 th – 8 th Grade	Added with <u>very broad</u> age range
High School	7-12	7 th – 12 th Grade	No Change
Special Education	N-21 (age range)	1. Spec Ed-EC 2. Spec Ed – Elem/Middle 3. Special Ed - Secondary	Adds grade/age bands to the certification. <u>All Spec Ed teachers must hold DUAL certificates.</u>

2. What is the difference between the current N-3 Early Childhood Certification and the proposed PK-3 Early Childhood Certification?

PA has had an Early Childhood (ECE) Certification for more than thirty (30) years. Theoretically there should be minimal impact on preparation of teachers with an early childhood certification.

The proposed PK-3 Early Childhood Education (ECE) certificate has two (2) major differences from the existing ECE certification. It includes pre-kindergarten and will impact preschool programs which are sponsored by school districts. Secondly, and the change which will have a great impact, the ECE certification will be **required** in grades kindergarten through third grade and for anyone who teaches in preschool programs operated by a school district.

The existing ECE certificate is optional! Currently in PA, K-3 may be taught with a K-6 certificate or with an ECE certification.

3. What impact could Chapter 49-2 have on the supply of elementary teachers in PA?

Some individuals in leadership positions in PA teacher education anticipate that the split in elementary teacher certification as proposed in Chapter 49-2 will result in a shortage of educators prepared to teach in upper elementary (grades 4-8). Working with younger children is very attractive to novice educators. The history of teacher shortages shows that they tend to be in narrowly specialized areas. By limiting the grade levels in certifications, we could be creating additional teacher supply problems.

The state of Ohio adopted an elementary certification configuration similar to what is proposed for PA in the late 1990s. Ohio's upper elementary certification is grades 4-9 (PA proposes 4-8). Ohio is finding that more students are electing the Early Childhood option and that there are fewer students preparing to teach in the upper elementary grades. This could result in an oversupply of Early Childhood teachers and a shortage in teachers certified to teach in grades 4-8.

4. Could the split of elementary teacher certification as proposed by Chapter 49-2 create staffing problems for elementary schools in Pennsylvania?

There are 501 school districts in PA and the majority of those school districts are relatively small.

- 76% of the school districts (381 school districts) in PA (according to PDE statistics for 2004-2005) have less than 4,000 students in the district.
- 42% of the school districts in PA (210 school districts) have less than 2000 students.

Flexibility in teacher assignment is very important in smaller school districts. When there is a “bubble” (a sudden increase in number of students at one grade level) class – teachers may be reassigned from one grade level to another to level out class size. When enrollment decreases, flexible certification allows for retention of staff by moving to another grade level. Narrowing of the legal limits of teacher certification to a few grade levels could result in larger size classes for some students or the furloughing of teachers because their certification does not match the needs of the district.

Chapter 49-2 does allow for exemptions on a case-by-case basis but using this option to make staffing adjustments results in concerns about “highly qualified” teachers. See question 14.

5. What impact could Chapter 49-2 have on the supply of special education teachers in PA?

The mandated dual certification for all special education teachers will discourage students inclined to seek this certification – especially at the secondary level. Dual certification (elementary education or early childhood and special education) is presently common but the dual certification at the secondary level will be exceptionally difficult. Students will not be attracted to Secondary Special Education, which will demand a content certification plus preparation as a special education teacher. This would require a minimum of 150-160 credits and ten (10) semesters when the typical teacher preparation program is 120-130 credits and eight (8) semesters. Special education teachers are currently in short supply and Chapter 49-2 will exacerbate this situation.

6. Why are school administrators in PA seemingly unconcerned about the proposed changes for Chapter 49-2?

There are a great many teachers available in elementary education right now, because the state prepares so many more than we need. True, some of them go elsewhere to teach, but elementary teachers are less likely to leave than secondary ones and they frequently return to Pennsylvania after getting some experience. It seems that there is a near never-ending supply of elementary certified teachers.

Chapter 49-2 will impact teachers who earn certification **after** January 2012. The regulations “grandfather” all teachers with existing certifications and it allows school administrators to apply for exceptions to the revised certification regulations on a case by case basis.

There will be no teachers prepared under Chapter 49-2 regulations available for employment in schools until spring/fall of 2012. With current teachers “grandfathered” and exceptions allowed by request, it will be eight (8) years to ten (10) years (2014 – 2016) until the modifications of Chapter 49-2 would have any significant impact on schools.

This could explain the seeming lack of concern by PA school administrators.

7. What is the “medical model” of teacher preparation and how does it compare to the expectations of Chapter 49-2?

The “medical model” of teacher preparation operates on the premise that those preparing for a profession must have a solid background of general knowledge and content knowledge related to their profession. They proceed to “practice” their knowledge and develop their skills in the field. Finally, they specialize to enhance their ability to better perform in a more defined area or areas.

Teacher preparation includes emphasis on general knowledge, followed by enhancement of knowledge about the specific content of their area. This is maximized by skill development and clinical experiences related to their area. After they have some experience, they should determine a specialization and have advance preparation in that area.

In the preparation of elementary teachers, there is a body of knowledge related to teaching and learning that all elementary teachers need to know and understand. This knowledge is maximized by skill development and experience in the field under the guidance of knowledgeable mentors. After some experience, through clinical practice and employment, teachers will benefit from additional exposure to specialization in a more defined age-level.

As an alternative to proposed changes of Chapter 49-2, the medical model of teacher preparation would prepare teachers in the content and skills of elementary teaching (grades K-6). After they have some experience (as a classroom teacher), require entry-level elementary teachers to specialize in either early childhood or upper elementary grades! This advance specialization could be mandated as part of the PA required twenty-four (24) post-baccalaureate credits.

8. Could the changes in PA elementary teacher certification have a possible negative impact on student success?

Although there is a reasonably consistent elementary curriculum in this state (due to PA Academic Standards), this does not assure that all students are developmentally ready for a standard curriculum. Physical and cognitive development of children does not follow a strict chronological schedule. Children have a range of interests and abilities and it is logical to have teachers who are educated to understand that range. The Chapter 49-2 elementary teacher certifications will narrow their focus of preparation and thus create voids in the teachers’ ability to deal with student developmental needs. Students learn at different rates and concepts normally mastered in one grade may be grasped more easily at the subsequent grade by some children. Narrowing of teacher preparation expertise may find the student ready to learn the concept or skill but assigned to a teacher who is not as knowledgeable about that concept or skill.

9. Will the implementation of Chapter 49.2 bring about the discontinuation of positive programs such as Professional Development Schools?

The changes in elementary and special education certification could place fiscal and human resource demands on teacher preparation programs that could result in the discontinuation of programs that are of themselves demanding of resources. This could include the Professional Development School (PDS) model of teacher preparation, higher education support of teacher induction in basic education and delivery of meaningful programs related to Act 48.

These proposed certification changes are likely to have a dramatic negative impact on PDS work. The majority of elementary schools in PA are K-5 buildings. There are currently very few P-3 elementary schools. Professional development schools are intended to be an innovative approach that encompasses the elementary building as a whole. The whole school becomes a PDS. It will be extremely difficult to have a K-5 elementary PDS when the preservice teachers in grades 4 and 5 are in a different preparation program from the preservice teachers in P-3 and required to take different courses and have different types of field experiences.

It is important to note that the Governor's Commission on Training of America's Teachers endorsed PDS as a powerful model of teacher preparation.

10. Could there be a negative impact of the mandated extra emphasis on courses in teaching of "diverse learners" (special education) required by Chapter 49-2?

More knowledge about and preparation in the teaching of "diverse learners" is a very positive consideration and should be encouraged. The potential for negative impact would come from a mandate of a prescribed number of courses/credits in teaching of "diverse learners". The ideal way to enhance the preparation of teachers of "diverse learners" is to define the expectations for what all teachers should know and be able to do relative to teaching diverse learners. This along with accepted measures of competence in the teaching of "diverse learners" will improve teaching and learning.

Mandating that all students preparing to become teachers have additional courses in how to teach "diverse learners" could have a very negative impact on the quality of teacher preparation in Pennsylvania. Currently 44% of the teacher education graduates in PA are from the SSHE (State System of Higher Education) institutions. These are the fourteen (14) state universities such as Indiana, Shippensburg, West Chester and Millersville. The SSHE schools are under a mandate to limit their teacher preparation programs to 120 credits. What will they remove from the required coursework in order to comply with the Chapter 49-2 requirement that could be three (3) additional courses in the teaching of "diverse learners"? This credit limit is already very difficult to maintain. Many secondary content programs, such as mathematics education or biology education are more than 130 credits in other institutions. The quality of teacher preparation, in the SSHE system, could be seriously damaged if the mandate about "diverse learners" is interpreted to mean three (3) courses or

nine (9) credits. The real concern is the 120 credit limit – not the mandated extra emphasis on courses in teaching of “diverse learners.”

11. Could the Chapter 49-2 proposed changes in elementary teacher certification discourage or destroy the collaboration and collegiality that currently exists in the elementary setting?

One of most positive attributes of elementary teachers and schools is their collaboration and collegiality. They share a common purpose and openly exchange ideas, tips, and strategies that have a positive impact on their students and more importantly, on the learning of their students. These practices are encouraged by the fact that they hold a certification in common.

This camaraderie does not exist in most secondary schools. There is often a lack of awareness of the commonalities between and among content areas and an unwillingness to share and collaborate to enhance student learning.

This same segregation occurs with special education. Despite years of effort to encourage and even demand inclusion, there is still this “mind-set” that seems to believe that those with special education certification have a “secret recipe” that they use to teach students who require “specialized instruction” and therefore other teachers are not “qualified” to meet these educational needs. Creation of more narrow elementary certifications could have the same effect.

The Chapter 49-2 changes in elementary teacher certification will encourage teacher isolation. Encouraging specialization for teachers at this level does not seem to be in the best interests of students as they develop at different rates with a variety of skills and experiences.

12. Is there a match between the current set-up of school buildings and the proposed changes in elementary teacher certification?

Currently there are just over 1600 “elementary” school buildings in PA. **See Table 2.** The majority of them have grades K-5 or K-6 which matches the existing elementary teacher certification for PA. With the present elementary certification, anyone certified in elementary education could teach at any or all grade levels in the typical elementary school in PA.

If the elementary teacher certification is adjusted, as it would be under Chapter 49-2, there would not be a good match between the set-up of the grades in most PA elementary school buildings and the proposed PK-3 and 4-8 certification. Teachers certified at both PK-3 and 4-8 would be required to staff the majority of elementary buildings in Pennsylvania.

Current Grade Configuration in Pennsylvania School Buildings

Pennsylvania has 3,258 school building registered in the Department’s School Grade configuration file. **Table 2** shows the building/grade totals:

Table 2 Building/Grade Totals in Pennsylvania		
Grades of Students Served	# of Buildings	# of Students
K-5 th	1,100	300,474
K-6 th	439	196,373
K-8 th	99	82,580
5 th – 8 th	79	65,572
6 th – 8 th	302	200,162
7 th – 9 th	27	26,104
9 th – 12 th *	444	445,797
10 th – 12 th	58	58,375

* Also includes a few 9th – 11th schools.

PDE Information from Harriet Dichter, Director -- Office of Policy – December 2005

13. What will Chapter 49-2 do to the portability of Pennsylvania elementary teacher?

States on the eastern seaboard (**BOLD in Table 3**) with the exception of Georgia, have a K-6 (or very similar) general elementary certification in addition to the Early Childhood certification and the Middle School certification. In the changes proposed by Chapter 49-2 there will be no general elementary certification in Pennsylvania. This may limit the portability of PA certified elementary teachers. Currently PA graduates about twice as many elementary certified teachers as are employed each year in PA. Many of these PA graduates seek employment in states on the east coast of the United States. Often they return to PA after they have gained teaching experience and earned advanced degrees. Teacher education is a very strong positive economic force in PA. PA is sixth in the nation in the number of teachers prepared. If our graduates can not become employed in other states, it may discourage enrollment in teacher preparation institutions in this state.

SEE TABLE 3 ON NEXT PAGE

Table 3 Certificate Options for ECE, Elementary, Middle and Special Education Selected States				
State	ECE	Elementary	Middle	Special Education
Florida	Preschool	K-6th	5-9th	K-12
Georgia	P-5	4-8th	See Elementary	
Illinois	Birth – 3 rd	K-9 th		Endorsements
Maryland	Prek-3rd	K-6th	4-9th	P-12
Massachusetts	P-2 nd	1-6 th	5-8 th	K-12
Michigan	ECE Endorsement	K-6 th	6-8 th	K-12 added to El or Sec Ed
Mississippi	Prek-3 rd	K-3 rd	4-8 th	K-12 & K-8/Mild to Moderate & Severe
Nevada	None	K-8 th		K-12 plus El or Sec
New Jersey	P-3rd	K-5th	6-8th	Dual
New York	Birth – Age 6	2-6th	5-9th	B-2; 1-6; 5-9
North Carolina	B-K	K-6th	6-9th	K-12
Ohio	P-3rd	None	4th-9th	K-12 Mild/Moderate or K-12 Moderate/Intensive
Oregon	P-4 th	3-8 th	5-10	Special Ed after content
South Carolina	K-4th	1-8th	5-8	K-12
Texas	EC-4 th	4 th – 8 th	8 th – 12 th	K-12
Virginia	P-3rd	P-6th	6-8	P-12 or NK-12 ECE/Special Ed

14. Will the “exceptions” allowed in Chapter 49.2 be viewed as “emergency certificates” and thus impact on the “highly qualified” requirement by NCLB?

Since this situation could not exist until at least 2012, it is difficult to determine if teachers hired under exceptions permitted by Chapter 49-2 could be considered “highly qualified”. Possibly they would NOT be “highly qualified” and thus school districts who requested the exception would be mandated to follow the procedure to notify parents that students are being taught by a teacher that is not “highly qualified.”