



Professional Standards Commission  
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John W. Culbreath  
Chairman

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Executive Secretary

## MEMORANDUM

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**DATE:** December 6, 2001  
**TO:** Superintendents, Personnel Directors, RESA Directors, University Deans  
**FROM:** F.D. Toth, Executive Secretary  
**SUBJECT:** On-Going Certification Initiatives

I. Background.

Education reform efforts continue to result in a number of important changes in educator preparation and certification. While some parts of the Georgia A Plus Education Reform Act of 2000 (HB1187) have already been implemented, remaining elements of the bill as well as many additional initiatives will become effective in the next few months or be phased in over several years. The goal of all these initiatives is to put fully qualified, certified educators in all of Georgia's classrooms by the year 2006. The purpose of this letter is to provide an update on PSC activities and initiatives, clarify some of the "rumors" circulating in the field and outline specific procedures and requirements where they have already been established. Our intent is to provide the most up-to-date information currently available to the entire educational community. Your assistance is requested in passing this material on to all appropriate personnel within your organization. A copy of this document will be posted on the PSC website at [www.gapsc.com](http://www.gapsc.com).

II. PSC Relocation/Walk-in Visitor Policy.

- A. PSC will be moving out of the Twin Towers location in mid-January, 2002. Our new address will be: **Two Peachtree Street, Suite 6000, Atlanta, Georgia 30334**. While final details of the move are still being coordinated, we hope to keep disruption of access to our website and telephones to a minimum. More details will be provided as they become available.
- B. Because of the relocation to Two Peachtree Street, NO walk-in visitors will be seen by certification staff during the month of January, 2002. **Effective February 1, 2002** walk-in visitors to PSC needing to meet with certification staff will be seen by appointment only. Appointments, which must be made at least one day in advance, may be scheduled by calling (404) 657- 9389. Please help us get word of this new policy to your employees.

### III. In-Field Rules.

- A. **Minor Part of the Day Rule.** One of the critical objectives of the education reform initiative is to ensure that all our teachers are not only fully prepared to teach their subject fields, but are actually assigned only within their certification fields. For a number of years Georgia certification rules have included what is referred to as the “minor part of the day” rule. This allowed teachers to be assigned for less than one-half (usually two classes) per day in subjects in which they do not hold a certificate field, as long as they have 12 semester hours of coursework in that subject. Initially intended to provide local flexibility in classroom assignments, the rule has unfortunately become an open door to assigning teachers to any subject regardless of their coursework. As part of the education reform, Certification Rule 505-2-.09 In-Field Statement will be changed to eliminate “minor part of the day” assignments. We understand this change will significantly impact some schools, however the in-field issue must be resolved and we believe there are staffing or delivery options available. To allow time to meet this requirement, the proposed rule change will establish a phase-out period, beginning in School Year 2004-05, with the requirement of 100% compliance by School Year 2006-07.
- B. **PSC/DOE In-Field Committee.** To support the strengthening of the in-field rules, a joint PSC and DOE working committee is currently reviewing all DOE-approved curriculum courses in light of teacher preparation programs and certification requirements. The objective of the committee is to produce a document, tentatively known as Curriculum/Certification Staffing and Policy Guidelines (CSPGs), which will list all state approved subjects, courses, course numbers, brief course descriptions and in-field teaching certificates. The draft document, currently being developed, will be reviewed at several stages by a task force of teachers/administrators/higher education representatives prior to final approval. A target date for distribution to the field is not yet finalized, but should be in the Spring, 2002.

### IV. Middle Grades.

- A. Middle grades certification is another high-priority for the reform efforts. Traditionally, middle grades certificate holders have been considered “in-field” to teach all subjects in grades 4-8, regardless of their specific preparation coursework. Teachers prepared in language arts and social studies are routinely assigned to teach mathematics or science during these critical school years. While some good things certainly take place, evidence indicates that student performance on national tests declines during the middle grades, in part, as the result of weaknesses in academic content and inadequate teacher preparation. Certification Rule 505-2-.84 Middle Grades is being revised, with the most significant change being a phase-in of middle grades teaching assignments only in Areas of Concentrations specified on the Georgia certificate. The proposed rule change, which we plan to submit to the full commission in January 2002, calls for all middle schools to have 50% of their faculty only working in Areas of Concentration by School Year 2004-05, 75% by School Year 2005-06 and 100% in-field compliance by School Year 2006-07.
- B. So that middle grades teachers will know what Areas of Concentration they hold, the PSC is currently adding Areas of Concentration to the Middle Grades certificates. While we had hoped to have all of the more than 14,000 certificates annotated by the end of 2001, we did not meet that goal. We plan to apply additional resources to the effort beginning on or about March 1, 2002 and complete that effort as soon as possible, so that all middle grades teachers will know exactly where they stand. The basic criteria we use to determine each area for those who already hold a Middle Grades certificate will be EITHER four, transcribed content courses OR satisfactory completion of the new Middle Grades Praxis II area assessments (see paragraph D, below). The courses may be college credit courses or Staff Development Unit courses, as long as they meet our definition of content related. Courses in pedagogy, such as Methods and Materials for Teaching Mathematics, will NOT be accepted as content courses. Previous experience teaching middle grades will NOT

be accepted to determine Areas of Concentration, however, solid teaching experience may enable some middle grades certificate holders to pass the new Praxis II area test regardless of the number of hours reflected on transcripts.

- C. Appeals. Upon receipt of new certificates reflecting the Areas of Concentration, individual teachers or their employing system may wish to appeal the evaluation by sending an e-mail to [mgappeal@gapsc.com](mailto:mgappeal@gapsc.com), requesting that we re-examine the files. The e-mail MUST include: (1) applicant name, (2) social security number, (3) what other areas of concentration are thought to be earned, (4) reference to specific college or SDU transcripts, and (5) the course numbers and titles of content courses in each area of concentration. Based on recent experience, most appeal cases were due to the fact that recent transcripts were not on file with the PSC at the time of the evaluation. To speed up the process, we will accept faxed copies of official transcripts from employing school systems showing the additional coursework to be used to determine concentration areas. In all other certificate transactions, hard copies of official transcripts must be provided.
- D. New MG Praxis II Tests. Recent changes have taken place in the area of middle grades Praxis II tests. The following tests, each tied to an Area of Concentration, were validated by a task force of Georgia middle grades educators:

0049 Middle School English Language Arts;  
0069 Middle School Mathematics;  
0089 Middle School Social Studies;  
0439 Middle School Science.

For the period between July 1, 2001 and July 1, 2002, individuals applying for middle grades certificates may take EITHER the “old” middle grades tests (0146 Middle School: Content Knowledge and 0523 Principles of Learning and Teaching) OR the new tests specific to the concentrations they wish to earn. Also during this one-year transition period, middle grades certificate holders who wish to “test out” for an Area of Concentration may take the new tests referenced above. After July 1, 2002, test administrations for the “old” middle grades tests will no longer be accepted and all middle grades applicants (new certificates or adding concentration areas) must pass the new tests. Test information, study materials, etc. are available through normal PSC/Praxis channels.

- E. Teaching of Reading and Writing Concern. A current Department of Education rule on middle school funding requires middle grades teachers to complete coursework in “the teaching and evaluation of reading and writing”. Professional Standards Commission rules require a course in the teaching of reading for middle grades certification. To help resolve this and other issues, the State Board of Education and the PSC are reviewing the rules with the intent of initiating changes to bring the rules into alignment as quickly as possible. The PSC has formed a task force of middle grades and higher education representatives to review the question of writing skills, as well as several other preparation and certification issues. Should weaknesses in the teaching and evaluation of writing be determined, the PSC will initiate changes in all middle grades state-approved preparation programs.

V. Proposed Middle Grades Endorsement.

- A. An additional point of concern in teacher assignments has been in the area of secondary certificate holders (7-12) being assigned to middle schools. To address this problem, a new proposed rule will be submitted to the full commission in January 2002 to create an endorsement for middle grades assignments. If approved, this endorsement will allow holders to be assigned to middle grades (4-

8) to teach in their base field. As an example, this endorsement would enable a secondary math teacher (7-12) to be assigned to teach mathematics in grades 4-12.

- B. Proposed preparation requirements for the endorsement include 9 semester hours or 15 SDUs of credit in the following: nature and curriculum needs of the middle grades learner; teaching of reading (and writing?); a supervised practicum OR one year of acceptable teaching experience in grades 4-8. Certificated individuals already having completed these requirements will be awarded the endorsement upon application with supporting transcript documentation. At some point still to be determined, approved programs for the endorsement would be put in place and eventually replace the course-by-course transcript review process. While current policies allow secondary certificate holders with these courses to be assigned to middle grades, nothing is reflected on the Georgia certificate. We believe this endorsement will document the process and assist in the determination of in-field assignments.

VI. Elementary Certification (P-8).

- A. In 1977 Georgia stopped all state-approved certification programs in the field of Elementary Education and moved to programs in Early Childhood (P-5) and Middle Grades (4-8). However, even as we began to move away from the “generalist” certificates we continued to issue Elementary certificates to those coming into Georgia with out-of-state certificates in P-8. The continued issuance and validity of P-8 certificates is not in keeping with the current preparation and certification direction of increased content skills.
- B. As of **March 1, 2002**, all out-of-state applicants coming to Georgia who either hold professional Elementary certificates or have completed state-approved Elementary programs must choose EITHER Early Childhood OR Middle Grades certification. They will be required to satisfy the appropriate Georgia certification requirements for that field, which may include PRAXIS II content assessments and/or course work.
- C. For Georgia Elementary certificate holders, beginning with certificates **expiring 6/30/02** and after, at the time of renewal through ACRES the PSC will automatically delete the field of Elementary and replace it with Early Childhood **and** Middle Grades. No tests or course work will be necessary for the Early Childhood field. However, even though the educators will receive the Middle Grades certificate, they **MUST** establish Areas of Concentration in any or all of the areas of language arts, social studies, mathematics and science. These concentration requirements may be satisfied by four, transcribed Content college or staff development courses (12 semester hours or 20 SDUs), OR by passing the newly adopted concentration specific Middle Grades PRAXIS II assessments.

VII. Early Childhood (P-5).

The Governor’s Education Reform Study Commission strongly recommended that the Early Childhood certificate (P-5) be changed to P-3 and that preparation in the teaching of reading and mathematics be strengthened. The PSC has formed a Task Force, to begin meeting in December, which will provide recommendations on how and when to implement this recommendation.

VIII. Computer Competency Requirement.

- A. HB 1187 established a Special Georgia Requirement (to be met at the date for certificate renewal) for educators to demonstrate satisfactory proficiency on a test of computer skill competency. Successful completion of the phase one InTech model training at a state educational technology center or PSC approved courses or test-out option will satisfy the requirement. All Georgia educators must satisfy the requirement by 2006.

- B. Individuals with certificates expiring between now and 6/30/05 may renew their certificates without meeting the computer competency requirement. However, by 6/30/06 the expectation is that all educators holding Clear Renewable certification must have satisfied the requirement. Public school systems should be developing a local plan to ensure that all employees will have satisfied the requirement by that date.
- C. Information on the procedures for school systems, RESAs, colleges, etc. to apply for course and/or test-out option approval is posted on the PSC website under Educator Preparation.

IX. ACRES Renewal, January 2002.

A. As a Reminder.

1. The ACRES system will NOT be activated and available for use until February 1, 2002 due to the January relocation effort.
2. All public school employees must be renewed by the employer using the ACRES system. If you are a public school system and are not signed-up for ACRES, send an e-mail to [acresrenewal@gapsc.com](mailto:acresrenewal@gapsc.com) immediately, identifying your designated contact to receive password access and training.
3. All public schools must maintain documents on file locally to verify individual renewal status. What documents and how they are maintained is up to each local system. The overriding intent is that the system can verify that all renewal requirements have been completed.
4. Should one of your employees check "yes" on an affirmation question indicating prior arrests/convictions, GO AHEAD AND RENEW THROUGH ACRES and then mail the signed renewal application form and a statement from the applicant addressing the "yes" response to the PSC certification office.
5. Upon receipt of results from the state and/or federal background check, should an individual have a documented offense, REPORT THAT INFORMATION in writing to the PSC, ATTN: Educator Ethics Division, Suite 6000, Atlanta, Georgia 30334. For specific questions or guidelines, send e-mail enquiries to [pps@gapsc.com](mailto:pps@gapsc.com) .

- B. New Addition to the ACRES Screen. ACRES operators will see a new question on the screen, asking you to verify the applicant's responses to the Personal Affirmation questions on the application form. You will be required to verify whether all questions were answered with "no", or whether any were answered with a "yes". If the applicant checks yes, the ACRES operator should verify that response and then comply with paragraph IX.A.3. above.

X. New Provisional Certificate Requirement.

Effective January 1, 2002 all applicants for Provisional certification MUST HAVE PASSED the Praxis I to be eligible for the certificate.