



# Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

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**Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children  
IRRC Testimony  
David Callahan, Director of Government Affairs  
Diane P. Barber, Early Childhood Education Director  
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I am David Callahan, Director of Government Affairs for Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, and I am joined by Diane Barber, our Director of Early Childhood Education. PPC is a strong, effective, and trusted voice for improving the health, education, and well-being of the Commonwealth's children. Our vision is that by 2014, PPC will have helped Pennsylvania move into position as one of the top 10 states in the nation to be a child and to raise a child.

PPC endorses the State Board of Education's proposed revisions of its Chapter 49 regulations dealing with teacher education and certification. The Board received a lot of commentary and was highly responsive to it – including recommendations from you and the House and Senate Education Committees.

One of the primary areas of controversy in these regulations has been the proposed change in grade levels that can be taught by teachers holding different certificates. Today, a person with an early childhood certificate can teach children from prekindergarten through third grade; a person with an elementary certificate can teach children between kindergarten (or age 3, effectively including pre-K) and sixth grade; a person with a middle level certificate can teach children between sixth and ninth grades; and a person with a secondary certificate can teach children between seventh and twelfth grades.

The marketplace of school district hiring decisions does not support either early childhood or middle level teachers. Why would a district hire a second grade teacher with an early childhood certificate who can teach in only three other grades when it could hire an elementary teacher who can teach in six or seven? Why would a district hire a sixth grade teacher with a middle level certificate who can teach in only three other grades when it could hire an elementary teacher who can teach in six or a secondary teacher who can teach in seven? Most districts do not hire teachers with early childhood or middle level certificates.

The State Board's proposed changes are based upon years of increasingly convincing research about the developmental learning needs of children and should, therefore, promote higher levels of achievement by children. As you know, the Board has proposed that those with early childhood certificates be permitted to teach children in pre-K through fourth grade; those with elementary/middle level certificates be permitted to teach children in fourth through eighth grades; and those with secondary certificates be permitted to teach those in ninth through twelfth grades. All of this would begin in 2013, so current teachers and those in the collegiate pipeline would not be subjected to these restrictions. Please note that the Board provided for the fourth grade overlap of certificates and delayed implementation for a year in response to comments on the regulations as they were proposed previously.

The revised grade spans recognize convincing research about the developmental learning needs of children – especially our youngest learners and those in early adolescence. Because the current elementary certificate covers kindergarten (or pre-K) through sixth grade, programs often lack critical elements at both ends of that continuum. They do not sufficiently prepare teachers to teach young learners with a wide range of developmental and language and literacy acquisition needs. And they do not offer enough academic content to meet the needs of today's fifth and sixth graders.

The State Board's approach to this issue is a sensible one. It will result in more young children leaving third or fourth grade as good readers and good students, ready for the rest of their school experience. It will result in more middle level youngsters having the support they need to make the difficult transition through early adolescence without developing problems that lead so many today not to graduate.

Let us address some of the concerns that have been expressed about the proposed regulations.

1. Some argue that the proposed regulations will create serious impediments to school district hiring by reducing the grade span to which teachers can be assigned. It is clear that the change will be inconvenient when compared to the extraordinary flexibility granted by current regulations. That is why PPC strongly supports the provision in these proposed regulations permitting the Secretary of Education to grant both specific and general exceptions when they are justified by actual marketplace conditions.
2. Some argue that the proposal gives universities too little time to adjust their programs. That is why PPC supported the delay in implementing these provisions until 2012 and now supports the delay to 2013.
3. Some argue that the end result of these changes is that teachers will need to have dual certification or will need more than 120 hours to graduate. Many teachers today are graduating with dual certificates because they know that makes them both better prepared and more marketable. Somehow they and their universities have figured out how to do this.
4. Some argue that the proposed grade realignment will make it difficult for Pennsylvania graduates to find teaching jobs in other states. Important as it may be to prepare some of our graduates to work outside Pennsylvania, assuring that Pennsylvania's children have the best prepared teachers possible has to be a higher priority of state policymakers.

There is one other proposed change for which PPC expresses its support. We know that today's classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse. Almost every year, there are more children with special education needs and more children who are just learning to speak English. They are not just in our cities or in special schools or classes. They are in all of our communities, in all of our children's classrooms. The Board has proposed to increase the attention to teaching diverse learners in both the preservice preparation programs and in Act 48 professional development. Both are needed and should be strongly supported.

We hope that IRRC will approve the State Board of Education's proposed Chapter 49-2 regulations today. Thank you.