

# ACT 48 PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION PLAN GUIDELINES

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*February 2019*



**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

333 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333  
[www.education.pa.gov](http://www.education.pa.gov)



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## I. Introduction

Ensuring that all Pennsylvania children receive the high-quality education that they deserve requires an effective teacher in every classroom, as well as school and district leadership that is focused on raising achievement. The commonwealth's educators—from the classroom teacher to the district superintendent—are the most important components of Pennsylvania's strategy for educational success.

As professionals in an ever-changing knowledge-based society, the state's educators are required to continuously upgrade their skill-set—just as lawyers, doctors, accountants, and other licensed professionals are expected to do. Pennsylvania's educator professional development law, known as Act 48 of 1999, describes the requirements that apply to all certified educational professionals.

Act 48 of 1999 (24 PS §12-1205) established the requirement that all certificate holders must earn 180 hours of professional development every five years. Act 45 of 2007 (24 P.S. §12-1205.5) defines requirements for continuing professional education taken by Pennsylvania school or system leaders in specific covered positions (i.e., principals, assistant/vice principals, superintendents, assistant superintendents, intermediate unit executive directors, assistant intermediate unit executive directors, or directors of area vocational-technical schools).

Each school entity in Pennsylvania—including school districts, intermediate units, joint school districts, area vocational-technical schools, and charter schools—is required to submit a Professional Education Plan to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The Department of Education will approve or withhold approval for each plan; a plan that is disapproved must be revised and resubmitted. The Professional Education Plan sets out each school entity's strategy for training school personnel at all stages of their careers. School entities are required to examine their student-level data, determine their professional education goals from the data, design an action plan with activities that meet their identified needs, and then evaluate the effectiveness of the training.

The professional education plan of each school entity should be designed to meet the continuing education needs of that school entity and its professional employees, so that they may in turn meet the specific needs of students. Professional development must be based on sound research and promising practices of educator effectiveness, consistent with 24 P.S. §11-1123, and it must be part of an approved plan for building educators' skills over the long term. In addition the professional education plan must define certain terms used within the application as described in 22 PA Code § 49.17 (a)(2) see Appendix A.

All certified educators must then complete 180 hours of professional development every five years. This must be related to an area of the professional educator's assignment or certification (24 PS §12-1205.2(c)) and, if the educator is employed by a school entity, it must comply with the school entity's plan. This requirement can be met with six college credits, six credits of continuing professional education courses, 180 clock hours of continuing professional

education, or any combination of collegiate studies, continuing professional education courses or other programs, activities or learning experiences equivalent to 180 hours. For the purposes of calculating hours and credits, one semester credit of collegiate study or continuing professional education course is equivalent to 30 hours of professional development, while one quarter-term credit of collegiate study is equivalent to 20 hours of professional development.

Under Pennsylvania's teacher evaluation system, in accordance with Act 82 of 2012 (24 P.S. §11-1123), 50 percent of an educator's evaluation is comprised of multiple measures of student achievement. The Danielson Framework for Teaching, which is the observation/evidence instrument for Pennsylvania's new teacher evaluation system, is comprised of four domains, each with its own set of essential professional practice components, and is described in detail at <http://pdesas.org/instruction/frameworks>. All Act 48 professional development offerings must be aligned to at least one component of one of the four professional practice domains within the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

Professional development must also be aligned to the applicable learning standards. The Pennsylvania Academic Standards for core instruction have legal status as appendices to 22 Pa. Code Chapter 4 (Academic Standards and Assessment) and can be accessed on [PDE's Standards Aligned System \(SAS\)](#).

1. If the proposed offerings cover topical content related to the core academic content areas, they must be aligned by grade level to the standards. If the proposed offerings focus on social-emotional wellness, they should be aligned to the [American School Counselor Association National Standards for Students](#), also accessible via SAS.
2. If the proposed offerings are designed for early childhood educators, they must be aligned to the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards. The Early Learning Standards are meant to guide the development of pre-kindergarten programs and were developed by a task force consisting of early childhood practitioners and administrators, policy analysts and researchers, and university faculty.
3. If the proposed offerings aim to develop teachers' professional capabilities to use learning technologies or software, they should be aligned to:
  - a. [Partnership for 21st Century Skills Frameworks for Information, Media and Technology Skills](#); or
  - b. [International Society for Technology Education's National Educational Technology Standards for Students, Teachers, and Administrators](#)
4. Professional development activities that target educators working with special needs learners or students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) should reference the provisions and requirements of 22 Pa. Code Chapter 14 (Special Education Services and Programs), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), or 34 CFR Part 300. They provide educators with information on dealing with special conditions that impact student achievement (ADHD, autism, visual, auditory and speech limitations, disabilities that limit physical mobility, and intellectual disabilities).

These guidelines are intended to help school entities and educators meet the professional education requirements of Act 48 as required by the Pennsylvania School Code (24 P.S. §12-1205.2(d)) and—most importantly—to continue their professional growth in order to increase the achievement levels of the commonwealth’s students.

## II. Professional Education Criteria

In evaluating each school entity’s Professional Education Plan, the Department of Education will determine whether plans meet the following criteria:

**1. Professional development decisions are based on *student needs* and evaluated using student data.** Approved professional development:

- a. Uses *disaggregated student data* to determine educators’ learning priorities; and
- b. Is *evaluated* to show its impact on teaching practice and student learning, particularly with regard to closing the achievement gap.

**2. Professional development activities have *content* that will increase student learning.** Approved professional development:

*For classroom teachers, school counselors, and education specialists:*

- a. Enhances the educator’s *content knowledge* in the area of the educator’s certification or assignment;
- b. Increases the educator’s *teaching skills* based on research on effective practice, with attention given to interventions for struggling students;
- c. Provides educators with a variety of classroom-based *assessment skills* and the skills needed to *analyze and use data* in instructional decision-making; and
- d. Empowers educators to work effectively with *parents and community partners*.

*For school and district administrators, and other educators seeking leadership roles:*

- e. Provides the knowledge and skills to *think and plan strategically*, ensuring that assessments, curriculum, instruction, staff professional education, teaching materials, and interventions for struggling students are aligned to each other as well as to Pennsylvania’s academic standards;

- f. Provides leaders with the ability to *access and use appropriate data* to inform decision-making;
  - g. Empowers leaders to create a *culture of teaching and learning*, with an emphasis on learning; and
  - h. Instructs the leader in *managing resources* for effective results.
- 3. Professional development is provided through a *process* that is most likely to result in sustained school improvement.** Approved professional development is:
- a. Set out in a *plan that is updated annually* by the Professional Education Committee after the committee critically evaluates the prior year's
    - student data;
    - professional education activities; and
    - the feedback/evaluation of those activities;
  - b. Based on knowledge of *adult learning styles* as a basis for instructional design and delivery of the proposed offerings, including knowledge acquired through experience, goal and relevancy orientation, self-direction, motivational factors, and practical application of content; and
  - c. Tailored to each *stage of an educator's career*, differentiating between the needs of novice and experienced professionals.
- 4. Professional development activities are aligned to at least one component of one domain within the *Danielson Framework for Teaching*.**

Under Pennsylvania's teacher evaluation system, in accordance with Act 82 of 2012 (24 P.S. §11-1123), 50 percent of an educator's evaluation is comprised of multiple measures of student achievement. The Danielson Framework for Teaching, which is the observation/evidence instrument for Pennsylvania's teacher evaluation system, is comprised of four domains, each with its own set of essential professional practice components, and is described in detail at <http://pdesas.org/instruction/frameworks>. All Act 48 professional development offerings must be aligned to at least one component of one of the four professional practice domains within the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

**Domain 1: Planning and Preparation**

- 1a Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy
- 1b Demonstrating Knowledge of Students
- 1c Setting Instructional Outcomes
- 1d Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources
- 1e Designing Coherent Instruction

- 1f Designing Student Assessments

### **Domain 2: Classroom Environment**

- 2a Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport
- 2b Establishing a Culture for Learning
- 2c Managing Classroom Procedures
- 2d Managing Student Behavior
- 2e Organizing Physical Space

### **Domain 3: Instruction**

- 3a Communicating with Students
- 3b Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques
- 3c Engaging Students in Learning
- 3d Using Assessment in Instruction
- 3e Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness

### **Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities**

- 4a Reflecting on Teaching
- 4b Maintaining Accurate Records
- 4c Communicating with Families
- 4d Participating in a Professional Community
- 4e Growing and Developing Professionally
- 4f Showing Professionalism

## **III. Allowable Professional Education Activities**

In order to meet the content criteria outlined in Section II, a school entity's Professional Education Plan must comply with the following requirements:

- 1. Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Educators (including Special Education).** To receive Department approval, a school entity Professional Education Plan must include strategies for all classroom teachers to enhance their content area knowledge and pedagogical skills, with particular attention to the needs of diverse learners who are below proficient or below grade-level.
  - a. Content Area.** All early childhood, elementary, and secondary educators will be expected to participate in content-specific professional development within their area of certification or assigned work over the course of the Professional Education Plan. All teachers certified in Special Education are encouraged to obtain at least half of their required hours for Act 48 in one or more academic content areas.



*Examples of Acceptable Activities:*

- Building knowledge of language/literacy, mathematics, and science-specific content;
- Building knowledge of specific content in other areas covered by the Pennsylvania academic standards, for teachers who are assigned to those areas;
- Visits by educators to a manufacturing workplace for orientation and demonstrations to give the professional educator a greater understanding of job opportunities in manufacturing for students;
- Curriculum development aligned with Pennsylvania standards; and
- Data analysis training (all aspects of assessment and evaluation).

*Examples of Unacceptable Activities:*

- Courses taken outside of an area of certification or work assignment, except for school administration;
- Any courses/programs for personal growth or an alternative career;
- Repeat of awareness-level introductory courses, e.g., Introduction to Computers;
- Teacher/parent student conferences, grade book analysis, and preparation of report cards; and
- Repeating a course or program unless it has significantly changed its focus or approach.

**b. Teaching Practices.** All early childhood, elementary, and secondary educators will be expected to participate in professional development activities that advance high-quality classroom instruction over the course of the Professional Education Plan.

*Examples of Acceptable Activities:*

- Training in assessing students and analyzing student data to implement effective change in instruction;
- Observing exemplary school and classroom practices and collaboratively designing instructional strategies based on analysis of the observed experience;
- Training to align and embed literacy, mathematics and science standards and instructional strategies within other academic content areas;
- Acquiring technology skills and designing strategies to integrate technology into the instructional setting;
- Creating shared lessons that help students learn specific skills that assessments identify as weak or lacking;
- Acquiring secondary strategies to increase student engagement and personalize learning;
- Training in how to create safe and welcoming learning environments;
- Improving understanding of the academic, social, emotional and physical needs of all learners;
- Developing knowledge and skills in how to involve families and other stakeholders in the educational process;

- Training in dealing with non-academic issues that may affect learning (grief counseling, intervening in student-on-student harassment, etc.); and
- School or district-wide planning (strategic, professional development, induction, special education, gifted education, school improvement, interventions for struggling students, technology, student support, and wellness).

*Examples of Unacceptable Activities:*

- Instruction time, serving as a mentor or cooperating teacher;
- Attending administrative faculty meetings with superintendent or principal;
- Supervision of school field trips;
- Tutoring;
- Tours of school buildings;
- Preparing and presenting college course lessons; and
- Extracurricular assignments (coaching or advising of sports, drama, debate, clubs, or student government).

**c. Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners.** All teachers certified in early childhood, elementary, or secondary education (including special education) should participate in continued education focused on enhancing their ability to teach diverse learners in inclusive settings—with a focus on students who are below proficient or below grade-level—i.e., those who, because of gender, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, learning styles, limited English language proficiency or disabilities, may have academic needs that require varied instructional strategies to help them learn. An inclusive setting is the placement of students with disabilities and English Learners in a regular classroom setting.

**2. School and District Administrators.** Programs to prepare school or system leaders and for the purposes of issuing administrator certificates or letters of eligibility, as well as approved programs for the induction and continuing education of school or system leaders, must address the Pennsylvania school leadership core and corollary standards (24 P.S. §12-1217).

*Examples of Acceptable Activities:*

- Training to facilitate staff analysis of student work;
- Training related to strategies, curricula and programs that meet student academic needs;
- Effective coaching practices for proven strategies that boost student performance;
- Identifying the needs of student subgroups and effective strategies for meeting those needs;
- Training to implement state school improvement planning processes;
- Collaborative work with parents and community partners to develop collective efforts focused on the achievement rate of student subgroups;

- School- or district-wide planning (strategic, professional development, induction, special education, school improvement, interventions for struggling students, technology and student support, wellness);
- Training on legal issues, governance, and board/superintendent relationships; and
- College or university courses that are part of a PDE-approved Letter of Eligibility program.

*Examples of Unacceptable Activities:*

- IU superintendent meetings;
- Equipment expositions; and
- Undefined off-site retreats.

**3. School Counselors.** All elementary, middle, and secondary school counselors are expected to participate in content-specific professional development applicable to their assigned level of work over the course of the Professional Education Plan. This professional development should include studies to build capacity to address the needs of diverse learners who are below proficient or below grade-level—i.e., those who, because of gender, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, learning styles, limited English language proficiency, or disabilities, may have academic needs that require varied instructional strategies to help them learn.

*Examples of Acceptable Activities:*

- Advocacy processes needed to address institutional and social barriers that impede access, equity, and success for students;
- Training that provides an understanding of the cultural context of relationships, issues and trends in a multicultural, diverse society;
- Study of developmental disorders;
- Training to disaggregate data in relation to student achievement;
- Working with instructional teams to develop curriculum/lesson plans;
- Training that builds capacity to collaborate with teams of teachers, school leadership and parents;
- Design and implementation of a comprehensive, data-driven school counseling program;
- Training in the facilitation and evaluation of advisory programs;
- Training that deals with special needs such as homelessness, adolescent depression, etc.;
- Career development program: planning, organization, implementation, administration, and evaluation;

- Visits by educators to a manufacturing workplace for orientation and demonstrations to give the professional educator a greater understanding of job opportunities in manufacturing for students; and
- School or district-wide planning and team planning activities (strategic, professional development, induction, special education, gifted education, school improvement, interventions for struggling students, technology, student support, and wellness) with other professional employees, where those professional employees are receiving Act 48 credit.

*Examples of Unacceptable Activities*

- Undefined counselor workshops;
- Sheltered workshop visitation;
- Undefined district meeting;
- Sorting PSSA reports;
- Undefined hot topics seminar;
- Supervision of visits to career sites/colleges;
- Career Day monitoring;
- Parents Anonymous Meeting;
- Community center evening work; and
- Undefined independent studies abroad.

**4. Educational Specialists, excluding School Counselors.** Educational specialists, other than school counselors, must participate in professional development activities that enhance their ability to meet the demonstrated needs of the students and families they serve in order to increase the ability of students to succeed academically. Content knowledge for education specialists may include training in how to reduce health problems and prevent health risk behaviors that delay student learning.

*Examples of Acceptable Activities:*

- Identifying the health and social services needs and assets of students, families, schools, and communities by using various types of data;
- Training to acquire health risk reduction and prevention strategies;
- Study of school-based health programs at state and national levels;
- Student Assistance Program training;
- Learning how to implement school-wide programs and classroom management strategies designed to improve student conduct;
- Studies related to cross-organizational professional development on social and health services issues;
- Prevention training on contemporary health issues affecting school age children;

- Training for emergency preparedness: CPR/AED training and certification updates;
- Professional education programs that grant Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for purpose of licensure; and
- School- or district-wide planning (strategic, professional development, induction, special education, gifted education, school improvement, technology and student support, wellness).

*Examples of Unacceptable Activities:*

- Independent studies; and
- Union-related bargaining behavior studies.

## **IV. Preparing the Professional Education Plan**

**1. Professional Education Committee.** In schools where a School Improvement Committee has been established, the School Improvement Committee should provide input to the Professional Education Committee before the plan is submitted to the board of school directors for approval. The School Improvement Committee should be held responsible for ensuring that the plan is designed to achieve the school's improvement goals and that it is aligned with the strategies for improvement.

- a. Professional Education Committee Membership.** According to 24 P.S. §12-1205.1, a school entity's Professional Education Plan must be prepared by a committee consisting of:
- Teacher representatives divided equally among elementary, middle, and high school teachers, chosen by the teachers;
  - Educational specialist representatives, chosen by educational specialists;
  - Administrative representatives, chosen by the administrators of the school entity;
  - Parents of children attending a school in the district, appointed by the board of school directors;
  - Local business representatives, appointed by the board of school directors; and
  - Other individuals representing the community, appointed by the board of school directors.

The Department of Education recommends that the Professional Education Committee also obtain input from early childhood educators and community partners and, when applicable, representatives from tutoring programs.

- b. Professional Education Committee Responsibilities.** The Professional Education Committee is responsible for:
- Establishing operating functions/subcommittees;
  - Conducting a needs assessment and setting clear goals for professional education;

- Creating a delivery system for approved professional education that is designed to meet the identified needs of students;
- Signing off on the Professional Education Plan and submitting it for approval by the school board; and
- Reviewing the plan annually, making revisions as needed.

**c. Needs Assessment and Goal Setting.** The Professional Education Committee must assess the educational and staff development needs of the school entity and its professional educators, students, and the community. The needs assessment must be data-driven and identify the staff development needed to achieve the academic standards and goals of the entity’s strategic plan.

After the educational and staff development needs have been evaluated, goals must be established for the three-year Professional Education Plan. This includes setting goals for students and goals for staff that support achievement of the goals for all students.

**2. Developing the Professional Education Plan.** All professional development activities should be customized to meet the range of needs of the school entity and its professional employees, so that they in turn may meet the specific needs of students. Professional Education Plans must be created using the following steps, and each must be documented in the school entity’s submission to the Department:

- a.** Identify the student learning needs that the professional development will address:
  - Cite the specific student achievement data or other student/school/community data. For all classroom teachers and other certified staff who work directly with students in academic subjects, the minimally acceptable data are PSSA results in subjects and grade levels where they are available, and if available, associated benchmark assessments (e.g. 4sight). In other subjects and grade levels, the district will rely on other standardized tests, benchmark assessments, local assessments and, if necessary because other assessments are not given, classroom assessments.
  - Describe the need for professional development that is shown by the data, including which Professional Development Content Criteria the activity meets.
- b.** Indicate which groups of educators will participate in the activity.
- c.** Describe the proposed professional development activity, including the knowledge and skills that educators will gain. An activity could be a course, a multi-session program, or other specific planned set of activities or instruction—each must be documented.

- d. When the professional education needs, and goals have been identified, the plan to achieve the goals must be designed. The delivery system should create learning communities, be intensive, and be based on data that indicate it will lead to higher achievement. Opportunities for implementation of new knowledge and skills must be provided to ensure that they are mastered, applied, and result in student success. Options for professional education delivery may include, but shall not be limited to:
- Collegiate studies from nationally accredited colleges/universities;
  - Continuing professional education courses taken for credit; and/or
  - Other programs, activities or learning experiences taken for hourly reporting that comply with the requirements of these guidelines.

These options must be defined as stated in 22 PA Code § 49.17 (a)(2) see Appendix A.

If a school entity has a significant proportion of students with limited English proficiency and/or students who are English learners, the Professional Education Plan must include strategies that are designed to meet the needs of these students and that are demonstrated to be effective in the removal of language barriers.

Professional Education Plans that are focused, measurable and specific are most likely to achieve their goals. Therefore, action plans to achieve the professional education goals over three years should be developed and included in the plan.

- e. Describe the follow-up activities that will ensure successful implementation of the proposed offerings. Explain how participants will integrate the content of the course, program, or activity into their school-based professional practice.
- f. Provide the name of the professional development provider and whether the provider has been approved by the Department of Education. If the provider has *not* received PDE approval, then the Professional Development Plan will need to include a copy of the Pennsylvania Professional Education Provider Application (refer to the Act 48 Approved Provider Guidelines) approved by the school entity.
- g. Specify the method(s) that will be used for evaluating the effectiveness of the professional development activity in addressing the needs identified in under the Professional Education Criteria section on page 4, in order to determine impact on student learning, educator effectiveness, and/or school performance, consistent with PDE's Educator Effectiveness System (<http://pdesas.org/instruction/frameworks>) in accordance with Act 82 of 2012 (24 P.S. §11-1123).
- h. School entities must issue a certificate documenting earned continuing education hours to participating educators and keep a copy in each educator's personnel file. School entities must upload hours into the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Professional Education Records Management System (PERMS) system within 30 days.

- i. School entities must review Professional Education Plans annually and revise as needed. The review should include evaluation of the goals, activities, and delivery system, and attainment of the competencies for each activity. Use of the five levels of evaluation of professional development is also recommended. These include:
  - Student outcomes;
  - Participants' use of new knowledge and skills;
  - Participants' learning;
  - Participant reaction; and
  - Organization support and change.

Amendments to the plan should be recorded internally for future reference.

3. **Requesting an Application.** After reviewing the Professional Education Plan Guidelines, entities wishing to submit a Professional Education Plan should email the Division of Planning to request an application.

Email: [RA-EDACT48APP@pa.gov](mailto:RA-EDACT48APP@pa.gov)

Please include your AUN, Pennsylvania Department of State Entity Number, Entity Name, and that you are requesting a Professional Education Plan Application.

4. **Approval and Submission.** The Professional Education Plan must be approved by the Professional Education Committee and the board of directors of the school entity prior to be submitted to the Department of Education.

The Department of Education will review all Professional Education Plans and either approve them or require that revisions be made to ensure that all criteria are addressed. Plans that are returned for revision shall be amended and resubmitted for approval within 30 days. The provisions of section 2552 of the School Code (24 P.S. § 25-2552) regarding withholding of funds apply to any school entity that fails to submit a Professional Education Plan or that fails to achieve subsequent approval for a Professional Education Plan that is returned by the Department of Education.





## APPENDIX A

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
Professional Standards and Practices Commission  
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**22 PA Code CHAPTER 49. CERTIFICATION OF PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL**  
**Subchapter A. GENERAL PROVISIONS**  
**§ 49.17. Continuing professional education.**

(a) As required under § 4.13(a) (relating to strategic plans), a school entity shall submit to the Secretary for approval a 3-year professional education plan every 3 years in accordance with the professional education guidelines established by the Secretary and section 1205.1 of the act (24 P.S. § 12-1205.1). A school entity shall make its professional education plan available for public inspection and comment for a minimum of 28 days prior to approval of the plan by the school entity's governing board and submission of the plan to the Secretary.

(2) The continuing professional education plan must define terms used including, but not limited to, the following:

- (i) Professionally related graduate level coursework.
- (ii) Professionally related master's degree.
- (iii) Curriculum development work.
- (iv) Professional conferences.