

"The 175-Hour Requirement"

Professional development for certification, often referred to as "the 175-hour requirement", is an important issue from two perspectives for school leaders. First, building leaders and superintendents play a critical role in the planning, approving, and reporting of professional development (PD) hours for district employees subject to this requirement. Second, administrators who hold a School Building Leader (SBL) certificate at the Professional level have a personal responsibility to fulfill the required hours to increase their skill and to maintain their own certificates.

Briefly stated, all teachers and school leaders who hold a Professional certificate must complete 175 hours of professional development every 5 years to maintain the validity of their certificate. Also, staff who hold a Teaching Assistant III certificate must complete 75 hours of professional development every 5 years. Professional development periods run from July 1 through June 30 each year. A certificate holder's first PD period begins the July 1 following the effective date of the certificate and continues for five years. Five-year PD periods are continuous thereafter for as long as the certificate holder wishes to maintain the certificate, regardless of current assignment or employment status.

The earliest possible Professional and Teaching Assistant III certificates were effective September 1, 2004, with the first 5-year PD period starting for these individuals on July 1, 2005. To date, the Office of Teaching Initiatives has issued approximately:

11,000 Professional Classroom Teaching Certificates,
600 Professional School Leadership Certificates, and
3,000 Teaching Assistant III Certificates.

While the numbers are still relatively small compared to the total number of people employed in these categories, they are growing quickly; it is important to remember that the first cohort of certificate holders is more than halfway through this initial 5-year PD period.

The Office of Teaching Initiatives receives many inquiries from the field about this requirement. The following reminders for school districts are based upon the questions asked most frequently.

- ✓ Identify all district staff holding either a Professional or TA III certificate.

Districts are responsible for approving and reporting professional development hours for all staff who hold these certificates and who are employed for 90 days or more in a given year. This is true regardless of their current assignments. For example, the biology teacher who holds not only a Permanent biology certificate under which she is currently teaching, but also a Professional School Building Leader (SBL) certificate, must complete professional development to maintain the validity of her SBL certificate. An appropriate PD plan for this teacher would meet her professional needs, while aligning with district needs. In this example, the activities may focus on biology, leadership, pedagogy, and/or other areas as mutually agreed.

- ✓ Make widely known the name of the person(s) authorized to approve professional development activities.

The staff member authorized to approve professional development activities should be known to staff across the district and should be accessible to certificate holders as they plan their PD activities. This person is also the important first contact for teachers and teaching assistants who have questions about the PD requirement. Districts and certificate holders are encouraged to discuss individual plans in advance, so that there is a clear agreement as to which activities are approved to meet the PD requirement. It is also important to agree on the number of clock hours that will be credited for those activities that do not have an obvious number of hours attached.

There are many types of PD experiences that can serve both individual professional needs and district goals. Consider just some of these: individual research, providing mentoring, curriculum development activities, serving on a NYSTCE certification test development committee, sabbatical study, inservice workshops, work with professional organizations, college coursework, peer coaching, and membership on the State Professional Standards and Practices Board for Teaching.

- ✓ Report professional development hours for each certificate holder annually by June 30.

Districts report PD hours on the TEACH online system, which serves as the only official record of completed professional development and certificate validity. Reporting by June 30 each year ensures that all professional development completed is credited within the PD year. This is especially important in the last year of a certificate holder's five-year PD period so that, as of July 1, TEACH reflects that the requirement has been met and, therefore, the certificate remains continuously valid. Districts may employ various commercial or locally-developed professional development tracking systems, but it should be understood by certificate holders and administrators that the information recorded in these systems does not constitute the official TEACH record.

The Office of Teaching Initiatives is now working to make it possible for districts to report PD hours through electronic file transfer. This would enable local districts with electronic files on PD to prepare and transmit the needed data to the TEACH System electronically rather than entering data for each certificate holder individually into TEACH. This will greatly streamline the process, especially for large districts. We hope to be able to provide details on this sometime this summer/fall.

- ✓ Encourage certificate holders to establish their own TEACH accounts.

All New York State teachers should have a TEACH account. For Professional and Teaching Assistant III certificate holders, however, it is critical as it enables them to periodically check that their professional development records are accurate and up-to-date. Any problems can be identified early on and resolved with the district or OTI prior to the end of the PD period. Establishing a TEACH account is easy: Step-by-step instructions are provided on the OTI Web site at <http://www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/>.

The Office of Teaching Initiatives Web site is the most complete source of information about the professional development requirement and covers topics beyond the scope of this article, including: guiding principles for effective professional development, information on the failure to meet the requirement and due process, optional PD planning forms, and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). From the Home page, go to "Certification", then "Professional Development for Certificate Holders". Also, staff are available to answer your questions regarding the professional development requirement. For technical problems, please contact the TEACH Tech Help Line at 518-486-6041. For policy questions, contact the Policy Unit at 518-474-4661.