


MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 10, 2011
TO: Superintendents, HR Personnel, College Deans, RESA Directors,
MyGaPSC Account Holders
FROM: Kelly Henson, Executive Secretary GaPSC 
SUBJECT: GaPSC Certificate Upgrades

Effective December 15, 2010, GaPSC Rule 505-2-.41 *Educator Certificate Upgrades*, significantly alters our system of educator compensation based on completion of advanced degrees. While recent legislative action (HB455/923) restricted salary increases for “Unused Leadership Degrees”, the new GaPSC rule impacts upgrades in all other advanced degree fields. The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a brief background on the intent and requirements of the rule and to make you aware of important Guidelines and electronic tools now available on our website to assist educators in understanding details of the rule.

BACKGROUND:

Under the previous upgrade system, educators received salary increases for earning almost any advanced degree in virtually any subject (field). The institutions awarding those degrees were accepted based on accreditation from USDOE or CHEA. The new rule connects degree majors directly to certification and increases accreditation standards for the colleges. We strongly believe this system will provide continued opportunities for professional learning through advanced degree programs—with appropriate salary compensation—while strengthening the direct connections to teacher quality, student achievement and school improvement.

All certificate “levels” in effect on December 15, 2010, will remain in place and those educators will continue to be paid at that certificate level. A Grandfathering Period is established in the rule. Those electing to seek advanced degrees under the old rules must be **enrolled** (admitted and actively participating in coursework) in advanced degree programs on or before July 15, 2011, **AND successfully complete** the degree program by the following dates -- Master’s completed by Dec 15, 2014; Specialist completed by Dec 15, 2014; and Doctoral completed by Dec 15, 2016. Individuals meeting this Grandfathering timeline will be upgraded under the old rules.

For all educators not grandfathered under the old rule, in order to obtain a new certificate upgrade the advanced degrees must be either in the field of existing certificates or result in the addition of a new certificate field. In addition, the colleges awarding the degree programs must meet higher accreditation and program approval requirements. Depending on whether the degrees are In-Field or New Field and the colleges are in-state or out-of-state, the higher institution requirements range from state approved degree programs to accreditation by NCATE, or TEAC, or holding a Carnegie Research Classification of High or Very High. In addition to the information outlined in the upgrade rule, a closely related Transition Plan has been developed to establish three new

Georgia certificates. These will be P-12 Service certificates in the fields of Curriculum & Instruction, Instructional Technology and Teacher Leadership. During the time it takes to develop and implement these new certificates, there will be a timeline for enrollment and degree program completion which is extended beyond the timeline in the upgrade rule. Details are included in the Transition Plan, which is posted on the web.

ELECTRONIC GUIDELINES AND TOOLS:

To assist educators, school systems and universities in better understanding the rule and how to verify which advanced degrees and institutions meet the new requirements, an important link is now on the homepage of the GaPSC website in two different locations: the top of the “Message Center” and in the upper right column “Policies & Guidelines”.

CLICK [HERE](#) to go to these resources at

(http://www.gapsc.com/policies_guidelines/pg_certificateupgrade.asp)

The “Certificate Upgrades” page includes links to numerous documents and assistance tools directly related to the upgrade process. One of the more important links is to a 14-page “Guidance Document,” which addresses details of the new requirements, procedures and grandfathering periods. Within that document is an upgrade “flowchart” to help determine upgrade eligibility. Other links include: a list of certificate fields applicable to upgrades; contact information for state-approved programs in Georgia and other states; several tools to determine institution eligibility; and a powerpoint overview.

In addition to the web-based guidelines and assistance tools, the GaPSC Call Center, open on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 7:30 am to 5:00 pm, is available for telephonic inquiries at (404) 232-2500. Email upgrade inquiries should be sent to certupgrade@gapsc.com .

We are convinced that the conditions established by the new upgrade rule will greatly strengthen the impact of advanced degrees on an educator’s continuing professional development. More rigorous degrees, directly connected to Georgia certification – and supported by appropriate salary compensation – will now be more focused on student achievement and school improvement. If we can provide any additional information or assistance on this, or any other GaPSC issue, do not hesitate to contact this office.