

# Professional Learning Units (PLUs) Guidance

## *For Educators Whose Certificates Expire in 2020*

On December 4, 2018, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education voted unanimously to approve new educator certification regulations. These new regulations emphasize the importance of ongoing professional learning for all educators by holding educators with a valid Rhode Island certification responsible for completing Professional Learning Units (PLUs) as a condition of their certification renewal.

Educators who have certificates expiring on August 31, 2020 will be the first cohort expected to meet the new professional learning renewal requirements. As with any new change to regulations, there will be a gradual implementation process to phase-in these new PLU requirements. Therefore, please review the slide deck about the regulation changes posted on our [Certification webpage](#) to understand better the requirements for different cohorts of educators.

## Approvable Professional Learning Units

In order to support their educators in meeting this upcoming requirement, these regulations ask districts to create a professional learning plan in collaboration with their educators that will articulate the district's role in providing quality professional learning for their educators. RIDE understands that many districts may not yet have such plans in place and that's ok. Most districts *do* offer professional development opportunities within and beyond the contracted school day. These opportunities may include traditional professional development modules and sessions as well as the following kinds of site-based professional learning structures within the contracted school day which absolutely may count toward PLUs provided that they improve, enhance, or increase educators' knowledge, skills, or effectiveness. Examples might include: Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), lesson study, student work analysis / data team analysis, and coaching involving observation and feedback cycles. Other types of professional learning that fit within the guiding parameters of the regulations may also be approved for educators prior to the completion of a district professional learning plan.

To illustrate, detailed notes from a Common Planning Time (CPT) focused on collaborative lesson prep could be used as the specific learning activity where the notes capture the work of the team, identify the participants in attendance, and include a start and end time for the meeting. This example should count toward PLUs because it aims to enhance educator effectiveness through lesson design.

On the contrary, a CPT that deals with the logistics of scheduling a field trip, for example, should not count. While certainly an important and worthy activity, working out the details of a field trip would not meet the PLU requirement of an allowable professional learning activity as outlined in the regulations.

While there may be exceptions, one hour of professional learning is equivalent to one PLU. Therefore, we suggest that districts first determine which professional learning structures already exist within or beyond the school day to count toward their educators' PLUs. Next, we urge districts to think about additional activities that aim to improve, enhance, or increase any of the following:

- Subject matter / content knowledge and skills
- Pedagogical knowledge or pedagogical content knowledge and skills
- Curriculum implementation knowledge and skills
- Educator effectiveness

Additionally, educators may pursue other types of sustained professional learning such as university coursework, National Board Certification, and other third party facilitated workshops. *Ultimately, it is the districts' purview to determine which types of professional learning activities shall count toward their educators' PLUs as long as decisions are consistent with the types of activities outlined in the regulations.* Therefore, we urge educators to first seek approval from their districts before participating in professional learning activities for which they wish to receive PLUs. Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, any district-approved professional learning activity may count toward the PLU requirement for certificates expiring in 2020 and beyond.

## Tracking PLUs

Also, knowing that these professional learning plans will include both a mechanism for approving PLUs and a method by which educators will maintain them, RIDE suggests a process that allows for quick and easy "housekeeping." In this, educators should keep track of documentation that notes the specific professional learning activity, their participation, and the number of PLUs earned.

## PLU Submission Process

Beginning in 2020, educators will continue to submit an application for recertification; verification of PLUs will be completed by the district. The plan is for RIDE to build an electronic means for the sign-off and to have integration with the online certification process. RIDE will not collect all the individual PLU evidence, but educators should maintain their own records because RIDE will audit a certain percentage of educators as part of a PLU audit beginning in 2020.

## Supports from RIDE

RIDE is currently working on a strategy for supporting the development of professional learning plans, which are an integral part of the PLU process. Already, we have begun to collaborate with our national partners in

order to share and provide districts guidance, templates, and example(s) of professional learning plans that are grounded in best practices and meet the requirements as outlined in the regulations. We are hopeful that these resources will be available in late spring of this year. Concurrently, the Educator Course Network (ECN) is also set to “go live” in the springtime. With a listing of providers that will have been vetted to meet the professional learning requirements as outlined in the regulations, the ECN will identify varied professional learning opportunities that districts and schools can take advantage of, if needed.

## ‘All-Call’ for LEA Professional Learning Plans

RIDE is interested in learning from Rhode Island districts that already have Professional Learning Plans. We know there is great value in understanding the different ways in which districts are thinking about professional learning and supporting their educators. Therefore, please consider sharing your plan with us so that we may learn from you. Please send plans to [PL@ride.ri.gov](mailto:PL@ride.ri.gov).

In the meantime, please reach out to the Office of Educator Excellence and Certification Services at [egac@ride.ri.gov](mailto:egac@ride.ri.gov) for specific questions and concerns related to the new certification requirements.