

The Certification Advisor

The Work and Ministry of the Educator Certification Advisor

The Educator Certification Advisor provides a link between the Educator Certification Council, the presbytery, and educators seeking to become Certified Educators, Certified Associates, or Enrolled Educational Assistants. The Educator Certification Advisor is chosen in consultation with the AC and the presbytery. The Advisor works with the AC in relation to the certification requirements, and with the presbytery or its designated committee in relation to the support and accountability of the presbytery for the applicant's educational ministry.

The Educator Certification Advisor has a number of **key responsibilities**, including the following:

- To become and remain informed about the certification process, and to provide this information to educators, sessions and committees of the presbytery
- To meet with each applicant for certification or enrollment to review the process and the requirements, and to advise the applicant regarding appropriate level for which to apply
- To review with the applicant all applicable academic and experience qualifications, and to assist the educator in finding ways to satisfy unmet requirements
- To assist the applicant for certification in the selection of a Reference Group and to serve as one member of that Reference Group as the presbytery's appointee
- To (offer to) go to the Session or employing body, with the educator, to explain the process and to advocate for support (i.e., time and money) for continuing education and time for writing the exam
- To inform the AC that the Advisor is satisfied with the educators' readiness to proceed to the exam phase using the *Exam Readiness Form for Advisor Only*.
- To convene and moderate the Reference Group as it reviews and evaluates the educator's responses to examination questions, and to process the results of that review. **PLEASE NOTE: The Educator Certification Council will not accept exams for reading if they have not been approved by the Reference Group and the Advisor.**
- To obtain verification of employment of the educator when the examination or readings are completed
- To assist the educator in fulfilling other requirements and responsibilities established by the presbytery, which might include preparing and presenting a statement of faith, assisting in the writing of a position description of a call, and reviewing the adequacy of compensation with the employing body

- To plan with the educator and the presbytery an appropriate service of certification or to identify ways in which the educator can overcome deficiencies identified by the council upon receipt of the evaluation of the Educator Certification Council
- To function as an advocate for the certification process as a means for insuring excellence in the educational ministry of the church - especially for the presbytery's churches, ministers, and educators
- To fulfill any other requirements outlined by the presbytery

The person serving as the Educator Certification Advisor should be someone who thoroughly understands the Presbyterian system and knows both the structure and functioning of the particular presbytery in which he/she serves. It would be most helpful if the advisor has **direct and regular access to whatever committee of presbytery carries responsibility for the certification process**. The person will find it helpful to have a strong background in Christian education, to be certified or seeking certification, and/or be supportive of the concept and the process of certification. The person who undertakes this responsibility will need to be skilled in working with individuals, sessions, and committees, sometimes under awkward and potentially difficult situations.

The person who serves as the Educator Certification Advisor will maintain close contact with the AC and can expect support and counsel from the AC throughout the process.

Steps Along the Path Toward Certification/Enrollment

A. Application

The entry point for the advisor in his or her relationship with the educator is in the **application process**, especially in evaluating credentials and helping the educator to decide what level of certification or enrollment is the appropriate entry point. Educator Certification Advisors will be expected to confer with applicants as they decide what level of certification is appropriate for them. The Advisor may also be called upon to interpret to the Educator decisions by the Certification Council that educational preparation or work experience is not adequate for the level for which they believe themselves qualified. In consulting with Educators about the level of certification they should seek, please keep in mind that the validity of any certification process is the degree to which its standards are upheld. Regardless of which level of certification or enrollment the educator seeks, both the process and the title should be honored as a measure of attainment. Advisors should be ready to press Educators to seek the level that is appropriate or them. This may work either way: one person who applies as an Associate might well be challenged to work toward the Certified Educator category, whereas another person applying for the same level might be better advised to pursue enrollment as an Enrolled Educational Assistant. The very fact that the educator is open to subject his or her work experience and educational background to this type of evaluation is an accomplishment, and should be applauded by the Advisor, the presbytery represented, and the Session or employing body.

An important part of the work of the Educator Certification Advisor is assisting the

educator to recall and **evaluate academic preparation**. This includes helping the Educator to evaluate work already completed, identifying gaps in academic preparation, and helping the educator to find ways to fill those gaps. The key tool to do this is the Educational Requirements Worksheet prepared by the Educator. It should make it clear to both the Educator and the Advisor what the appropriate starting point will be. If there are doubts or if the Advisor and the Educator disagree, do not hesitate to forward the paperwork to the Associate for Certification for a decision. The Advisor role is to guide the Educator through the process, not to become the interpreter of standards. Defer that role to the Council.

B. Developing A Study Plan

An important step in the process is **planning a program of study**, which must be shaped by the advice and the requirements set by the Educator Certification Council. This is often a point at which great sensitivity on the part of the Advisor will be a critical requirement. Sometimes the applicant is seeking affirmation and approval of extensive experience in either academic or church settings. Many people have entered the field of Christian Education in spite of their lack of formal preparation because they were willing to respond to a critical need in a particular situation. Now, often many years later, they may feel under-appreciated because they are being asked to prepare themselves academically to do a job they have learned in "the trenches." In other instances, persons with advanced degrees in education often resist the idea that their preparation is lacking because it does not include religious education, Reformed theology, polity, and so forth. Some will, at first, deny the benefit of or the need for continuing professional development, often citing time or other pressures. Educators know the importance of continuing education for others, but sometimes forget their own need to keep growing through academic pursuit. There are those for whom applying for certification is a way of facing career goals in a new way. They may subconsciously be asking, "Is this the time to take a leap of faith — go back to school and get that degree? Has the time come to acknowledge the call of the church for excellence in education, and to commit myself to refining God-given talents in order to respond to that call?"

Words of encouragement from an Advisor, or willingness to do some of the work in finding opportunities and/or funding, ability to approach Sessions or other employing bodies with the Educator to explain this call, could make the difference both to the Educator and to the church. This is also a point at which to try to pick up signals of some **practical concerns** that may be on the mind of the Educator. For example, there may be concerns about the **cost of the program**. If costs of continuing education seem to be a concern to the Educator, the advisor may want to help by:

1. Identifying possible sources of funds in the presbytery or synod that can be used for continuing education for the Educator.
2. Speaking to the pastor of the employing church, or arranging to meet with the Session or other appropriate committee of the church, to emphasize the importance of their Educator's professional development to improving the ministry of their congregation, urging them to provide funds to defray some of the costs.

The Certification Advisor may also have a role in relationship to the Educator's Session or employing body. Its members may worry that their Educator's certification will increase the cost to the church or employing body or make him or her a candidate for leaving for a better situation. Either of these worries may make them less than

enthusiastic about certification. The Advisor may need to stress that there are usually benefits to the church when one's staff is engaged in meaningful continuing education.

In relation to **working with an educator's Session**, there are specific requests to be made and a number of "**common sense**" rules Certification Advisor's will want to follow.

Educator Certification Advisors should:

1. Encourage the educator to notify the Session of his/her intentions as early in the process as possible.
2. Serve as liaison/interpreter for the Session, if necessary, regarding the goals and process of certification.
3. Enlist the Session's participation in the process, encouraging them to appoint their representative to the Reference Group.
4. Enlist the Session's support in the process by encouraging them to provide adequate time and finances for Continuing Education and time for writing the exam.
5. Maintain contact with the Session's appointee to the Reference Group regarding his/her role, responsibilities, meeting times, etc.
6. Be responsible for obtaining a completed *Verification of Employment Form* from the Session.
7. Serve as interpreter to the Session if certification/enrollment is not immediately granted and additional continuing education is required.
8. Encourage the Session to recognize the Educator's certification or enrollment in a meaningful way.

During the study phase of certification, many educators become discouraged and are vulnerable to the temptation to drop out. Study can be a lonely process, especially when done at home in the midst of an already busy lifestyle with no colleagues with whom to share the experience. The advisor can play a crucial role as mentor, cheerleader, and attentive friend. Please stay in touch with the Educator, set goals for work to be completed by particular dates, and check off progress with him/her.

C. Forming the Reference Group

- Once a level of certification has been determined for the particular educator you are working with; and
- once a plan of study has been formulated; and
- when the Application Form, Educational Requirements Worksheet, transcripts and Tentative Academic Plan (if needed) have been sent to the AC, it is time to work with the educator towards the formation of the Reference Group. You will receive instructions from the AC.

The Reference Group consists of:

- A staff colleague (selected by the Educator). This individual should *not* be the spouse of the Educator;
- Another Christian educator, preferably certified, who knows the Educator's work (selected by the Educator);
- Representative appointed by the Session or employing agency/governing body to whom the Educator is responsible;
- The Educator Certification Advisor, who serves as moderator/convenor of the group;
- A representative from the appropriate committee of presbytery (if available)

D. Working With the Examination Phase

When all the educational requirements are completed, the Advisor must submit the *Exam Readiness Form for Advisor Only*, indicating the Educator's plan and readiness to move to the examination phase. Following acceptance by the AC, the Educator may move on to the final phase of examination.

When the educator's examination is sent, the Advisor will receive a notice that will include the date by which the examination, including the report from the Reference Group, must be returned to the office in Louisville. In consultation with the Educator, the Advisor is asked to set target dates for the completion of the first draft of the examination and a meeting of the Reference Group. It is recommended that the Reference Group review the first draft of the exam several weeks prior to the deadline to allow for revisions and reworking.

E. Verification of Employment

The certification process seeks to measure both academic preparation and professional experience. For that reason, a person cannot be certified without at least a year's effective performance as an employed educator. PLEASE NOTE: An application may be submitted at any time (even prior to the completion of one year's experience). The examination may not be requested until this experience requirement is fulfilled. In no way is the employment requirement intended to minimize the importance of volunteers in Christian Education. But the focus of the certification process is on the person who is accountable, by virtue of employment, to this denomination. While employment is not necessary to apply to begin the certification process, one of the responsibilities of the Certification Advisor is to verify one's employment prior to certification/enrollment.

1. Determining Years of Employment

In counting years of experience, which need not be in the PC(USA), determine whether employment was full-time or part-time.

For years in which the educator worked 25 or more hours per week, consider this full time, and compute experience on a one year = one year basis.

For years in which the educator works 16-24 hours per week, consider this half time, and compute experience on two calendar years = one year experience.

For years in which the educator worked less than 16 hours per week, consider this one-third time and compute experience on three calendar years = one year experience.

Intern experience does not count toward experience requirements for certification.

PLEASE NOTE: At the time of certification/enrollment, applicants for Certification as Christian Educators or Associate Christian Educators and Enrolled Educational Assistant must be employed for ten (10) or more hours per week in a church or agency of the PC (USA).

2. Determining Employment and "effective performance"

The Reference Group process will be the primary means of determining effective performance of an applicant. This group consists of persons who know first-hand the

work of the educator. The examination, including an autobiographical statement and a faith statement, will furnish a framework for conversations about the educator's work. The Reference Group will write evaluations on the educator, which will reflect their perceptions of the educator's effectiveness. The Educator Certification Council regards a positive evaluation by the Reference Group as a fulfillment of the requirement for "effective performance."

A *Verification of Employment Form* will be sent to the advisor along with the Reference Group materials. It is the advisor's responsibility to have this form completed and to return it to the AC with evaluation forms.

F. Tips for the Educator Certification Advisor

There are a number of resources that will be helpful to the advisor as you work through the examination and Reference Group phase of this process with the educator. Forms available in the "forms" section of this handbook and at www.pcusa.org/christianeducators include:

1. *A Certification Advisor Check List* for use in tracking the elements of the process
2. *Guidelines for Reference Group Meeting*
3. *General Reference Group Comments* and the *Advisor's Summary of Evaluation Forms*
4. *CCE and CACE Guidelines for Readers*. These guidelines are used by the Council and Independent readers to evaluate the exams and are for your information.

Make sure that **you** gather all the evaluations and relevant supporting papers and send them in to the AC.

G. Tips for Working With Presbytery to Support Educators

Some specific ways in which your presbytery might support the certification of Christian Educators are:

- If not already present, arrange for a fellowship group for the educators of the presbytery.
- Develop minimum salary requirements for the Certified Christian Educator and the Certified Associate Christian Educator, which include cash, pension coverage, Social Security, Unemployment Insurance, etc, G-11.0103n and G-14.0730b (2).
- Develop and maintain a role of Certified Educators serving within the bounds of Presbytery G-11.0407.
- Provide a way by which the presbytery recognizes the fact that an educator has **begun** the certification process. This may be in the form of taking the person under care of the presbytery, or it may simply be an expression of support and concern.
- Be certain that the Educator Certification Advisor assigned is willing and able to spend the time necessary to work with the educator.
- Identify sources of financial support both to help the educator complete certification requirements and to provide ongoing continuing education.
- Obtain and provide access to books on the *Enrolled Educational Assistant Reading List*. Consider gathering educators together in a reading group as they study these books.
- When an educator is about to be certified, arrange a meeting between the educator and the committee charged with the responsibility for care and oversight of educators, wherein they may discuss the process, complete any other requirements of presbytery, and hear and respond to the educator's statement of faith.
- Study the Recognition services provided in this handbook and at

- www.pcusa.org/christianeducators and adapt them to be specifically meaningful to the educator and to your presbytery.
- Make sure adequate time is allotted on the agenda when an educator is to be certified, and plan other ways in which the presbytery can participate in the celebration of this event. You may want to invite other educators who may not ordinarily attend presbytery to be present.
 - Develop a call form or a covenant, which includes a position description and details regarding salary, continuing education and other forms of the call. Require that the appropriate committee of the presbytery submit a completed form for approval.
 - Assure that the educator has access to the Committee on Ministry, as provided in the *Book of Order* G-11.0501a, G-11.0503, and G-14.0730b.

H. Preparing the Educator for Examination for Enrolled Educational Assistant

The process for enrollment as an Enrolled Educational Assistant is much less involved than for either level of certification. Since there is no Reference Group, the Advisor's primary role is to encourage the educator to complete the contact hours, the readings, and the written material for the Council. If the advisor is willing to do so, it is often helpful to do an informal review of his/her written materials with the educator prior to submitting the material to the Council. The advisor also is responsible to help obtain the *Verification of Employment* information.

