

MEMORANDUM

TO: Deans and Directors of Educator Preparation Programs

FROM: Mary Hipp
Director, Office of Educator Services

DATE: June 24, 2025

RE: Principal Certification Grade Span Changes in Regulation 43-64

During the 2024–25 legislative session, the General Assembly approved amendments to State Board of Education Regulation 43–64, *Requirements for Certification at the Advanced Level*. These amendments streamline the requirements for educators to become certified in leadership and administrative fields and will transition School Principal certification from elementary and secondary grade spans to Pre-kindergarten (PK)–Grade 12. This correspondence provides guidance for South Carolina educator preparation providers with approved principal preparation programs.

Currently, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) issues the following certification fields for school leaders: Elementary Principal (PK–Grade 8) or Secondary Principal (Grades 6–12). These grade spans have contributed to challenges for districts in recruiting, retaining, and staffing talented school leaders. Requirements for adding the complementary grade span are cumbersome and have created barriers for educators. To better assist districts and educators, principal certification will now encompass the grade span of PK–Grade 12. This transition reflects standards and best practices for preparing principals to serve across PK–Grade 12 settings and aligns South Carolina with the certification of school leaders in other states. **As a result of this change, South Carolina principal preparation programs must align coursework, field experiences, and internships with the PK–Grade 12 grade span no later than September 1, 2026.**

South Carolina providers with approved principal preparation programs must ensure that field and internship experiences encompass both elementary and secondary placements.

To document that preparation programs are consistent with the amended regulation, providers must submit the [Leadership Program Assurances Form](#) verifying alignment with the revised grade span. As noted previously, the amended regulation requires that principal preparation programs must be aligned with the PK–Grade 12 span no later than September 1, 2026. Providers are encouraged to submit the assurances form as soon as possible but no later than February 1, 2026. Once the SCDE has reviewed and acknowledged any programmatic changes and your institution has implemented these updates, you may recommend successful program completers for certification in the field School Principal: Tier 1 (PK–Grade 12).

The SCDE Office of Educator Services has communicated this grade span realignment for the preparation of school principals to the Commission on Higher Education (CHE). Please be sure to correspond with the CHE regarding any program updates because of this realignment.

Educators already certified as School Principal: Elementary (Tier 1 or Tier 2) or School Principal: Secondary (Tier 1 or Tier 2) may retain their current certification field or add the PK–Grade 12 certification field through one of the following options established in the amended regulation:

Option 1: Internship in the Complementary Grade Span

To gain certification in the full grade span through this option, the educator must successfully complete a graduate-level internship course in the complementary grade span. The internship must be completed at an institution with an approved principal preparation program meeting State Board requirements; successful completion of the internship must be documented on an official transcript and verification. This option will assist educators who are certified in Elementary or Secondary Principal but are not employed in an administrative role.

Option 2: Successful Administrator Experience in the Complementary Grade Span

This option is appropriate for an individual who will be employed as an assistant principal or principal in the complementary grade span. If needed, and at the request of the employing school district, the individual may be issued a one-year certification permit in the complementary leadership field. Upon successful completion of one year of administrator experience in the complementary grade span, the educator will be eligible to add the PK–Grade 12 leadership field in full upon recommendation of the employing district.

Please share this correspondence with faculty in your leadership preparation programs. For additional information concerning this transition in principal certification, please contact the Educator Preparation team in the Office of Educator Services: Jacki Walsh, jwalsh@ed.sc.gov, or Jessica McLees, jmclees@ed.sc.gov.