

How Pennsylvania Teachers Can Advance Their Salary Through Graduate Credits

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<https://www.modelteaching.com/education-articles/teacher-wellness/how-pennsylvania-teachers-can-advance-their-salary-through-graduate-credits>

Pennsylvania has one of the most varied school district landscapes in the country. With over 500 public school districts, each negotiating its own salary schedule, the path to salary advancement might look a bit different depending on where you teach, but the consistent trend among districts is that, in most cases, taking graduate-level credits helps you earn a higher salary. Teachers who earn credits beyond their bachelor's degree earn significantly more over the course of their careers, often earning six figures more in lifetime base salary.

This article will explain how a lane-change salary advancement works in Pennsylvania and provide some specific examples of districts across the state. It will also cover a plan for your own graduate credit accumulation that is the most strategic and cost-effective path forward.

How salary advancement works in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania does not have a statewide salary schedule. Instead, each district's salary structure is negotiated locally between the school board and the teachers' union. This means Pennsylvania teachers may face highly variable salary schedules across schools and districts. Like most other school districts across the country, teachers can advance in salary through steps, or years in service, or through lanes, which require additional education. While some districts use only three or four lanes based on traditional BA/MA increments, others may use six or more lanes with 15-credit increments. Some others might even use a more unique structure based on Pennsylvania's certification levels rather than traditional credit thresholds.

Some Example Pennsylvania Districts

Let's take a look at a few Pennsylvania districts so you can compare how accumulating additional credits can help improve your salary across a range of different schools. You'll

see that regardless of district, the sooner you earn extra semester units, the more wealth you will accumulate over your career.

School District of Philadelphia

Let's start with Philadelphia, the largest district in Pennsylvania, serving over 200,000 and employing about 13,000 teachers. The salary structure is quite simple in Philadelphia, with four lanes for salary advancement: a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, a master's degree plus 30 units/ credits, and a doctorate.

Compare a first-year Philadelphia teacher with a bachelor's degree. A teacher who stays in the bachelor's lane for the duration of her career reaches a salary of over \$83,000 at the top of her career, but a teacher with a master's degree plus 30 additional credits reaches over \$102,000 at the top of her career. A teacher who finishes her doctorate reaches a final salary of nearly \$107,000! At the extremes, the pay difference for those who take advantage of lane-change opportunities is around \$24,000 per year for the same years of employment. Imagine a teacher who earns his degrees and additional credits early in his career. The smaller investment in a degree and credits accumulation can lead to significant additional wealth over the course of a teacher's career.

<https://pft.org/salarieschedule2526>

Pennsbury School District

Now let's look at a smaller school district. Pennsbury School District serves approximately 10,000 students across 15 schools with more than 700 teachers, and it is known as one of the higher-paying suburban Philadelphia districts.

Pennsbury's salary structure is unique. Instead of the typical lane changes that look like BA / BA+15 / MA / MA+30, their salary schedule is based on certification levels and rank. Pennsbury Education Association (PEA) contract uses six lanes based on Pennsylvania certification levels and rank: R01 (Inductee), R02 (Instructor I), R03 (Instructor II), R04 (Professional Educator I), R05 (Professional Educator II), and R06 (Advanced Professional Educator, the top rank. Each of these levels and rank requires additional credits accumulation as well as accumulation of an advanced degree, with the number of credits required to advance to the next level varying. Over a full career, if a teacher advances all the way from R01 to R06, that can mean \$250,000 or more in wealth from increased salary levels!

https://cdns5-ss5.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_74529931/File/Departments/Human%20Resources/Collective%20Bargaining%20Agreements/PEA%20Scale%202025-2026_Website.pdf

Lower Merion School District

Finally, let's consider Lower Merion School District, another suburban district with a bit over 600 teachers employed. Lower Merion consistently ranks among the highest-paying districts in the entire state, and it uses a traditional six-lane structure BA, BA+24, MA, MA+15, MA+30, and Doctorate.

Because the district's overall pay scale sits so high, the rewards for advancing are pretty substantial. The difference between an entering teacher with a master's degree and a veteran teacher with a doctorate is over \$83,000 per year. Lane changes at mid-career are typically worth \$3,000 to \$5,000 a year. As with the other districts highlighted in this article, the sooner you earn your units and advanced degree, the more years you'll spend collecting those high-end paychecks. And with a school like Lower Merion School District, paying for credits to advance your salary is completely covered by the salary increase, with money leftover to spare.

<https://www.lmsd.org/uploaded/documents/Staff/OE25/ProfessionalSalarySchedules.pdf>

What a lane change is actually worth in Pennsylvania

The financial value of a lane change in Pennsylvania varies dramatically by district, but the long-term impact is consistently substantial. While in some districts, salary advancement by accumulating credits can add \$90,000 over the course of a teacher's career, other school districts allow for more than \$200,000 of additional earnings! If teachers can choose affordable education programs to accumulate their required credits and advanced degrees, their education can literally pay for itself.

Additional Needs and Requirements for Pennsylvania Teachers

Instructional II Certification

There's one statewide rule that is important to know outside of salary advancement. Pennsylvania requires 24 post-baccalaureate credits to obtain your permanent (Instructional II) certification, with 6 credits required to be aligned with your certification

area (<https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education/programs-and-services/educators/certification/help/certification-faqs/level-ii-certification#accordion-46a437987d-item-17b22fa799>) . Because of this rule, many Pennsylvania districts, like our example with Lower Merion, have built a "BA+24" or similar lane into their salary schedules to align with this state requirement and allow teachers to earn a higher salary after completing those credits. So the credits you take to upgrade your certification can also potentially trigger a lane change for your salary advancement. Regardless, if you are a Pennsylvania teacher, you will likely be considering 24 additional credits to obtain and maintain your Instructional II certification.

Act 48 License Renewal

Pennsylvania's Act 48 also requires teachers to complete 180 hours of professional development every five years to maintain their certification. The conversion is 1 graduate credit = 30 Act 48 hours, which means six graduate credits will satisfy the entire five-year Act 48 requirement, and those same credits can count toward a lane change. However, if you are not currently pursuing your Level II certification and do not need salary advancement credits, Model Teaching has made it easier and much less costly to complete your 180 hours of professional development. As an approved provider of Act 48 hours, if you do not wish to complete credit hours for license renewal, you can instead take our 180 hour bundle pack to take act 48, pd level hours for a significantly reduced price: <https://mycourses.modelteaching.com/product/build-your-own-course-bundle-180-hours>

How Model Teaching helps Pennsylvania teachers advance

Model Teaching offers graduate-level credit courses through regionally accredited university partners. Our courses are 100% online and self-paced, and they're accepted by Pennsylvania districts statewide for both lane change advancement and Act 48 continuing education hours.

For Pennsylvania teachers planning a lane change:

- **Do you need 24 credits for Instructional II certification AND a lane change?** Our affordable **24-credit Build Your Own Bundle** covers your Instructional II requirement and typically triggers a major lane change at the same time in many school districts. <https://mycourses.modelteaching.com/product/build-your-own-graduate-level-course-bundle-24-credits>

- **Do you need a different number of credits for a single lane move?** Perhaps a 15-credit or a 30-credit lane change is what you need. We provide credit bundles for any credit amount, allowing you to choose the exact credits you need for your lane change. <https://www.modelteaching.com/professional-development/build-your-own-graduate-level-credit-course-bundle>
- **If a master's degree is what you need,** 9 credits of any Model Teaching credit course can be applied toward an affordable Master's Degree in our partnership with Augustana University, meaning you can work toward a credit salary lane change while also applying some of those credits toward your advanced degree. <https://www.modelteaching.com/masters>
- Finally, if you don't currently need credits but still want to ensure you meet your requirement for your **Act 48 renewal**, you can choose our 6-credit bundle OR our more affordable PD level 200-hour **bundle that provides you with your Act 48 hours all in one place.** <https://mycourses.modelteaching.com/product/build-your-own-course-bundle-200-hours>

Model Teaching uses a pay-as-you go model for your credits that works a bit differently from other providers. You pay a small registration fee now to access your course and complete it. Then, once you are finished, you can pay for your credit processing in order to register yourself with your chosen university. This model allows you to pay as you complete each course so that you are not burdened with a large up-front fee to complete your courses. This model means you don't have to worry about payment plans or monthly contracts for payment, and you don't have to worry about your transcript being held until the end of a 12 month payment cycle. Also, you can submit your transcript to your district typically within weeks of completing your course, ensuring you meet your lane change deadline.

[Explore Model Teaching's Graduate Credit Bundles →](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a teacher lane change in Pennsylvania?

A lane change in Pennsylvania allows teachers to earn degrees or units/ credits in exchange for a permanent increase in their salary. Unlike a step increase that slightly improves your salary based on your years of experience in your district, a lane change allows you to accumulate credits and advanced degrees for permanent increases in salary, regardless of

number of years of experience. You can learn more about salary advancement options here to help you in your lane change: <https://www.modelteaching.com/teacher-salary-advancement-courses>

Will my Pennsylvania district accept Model Teaching credits for a lane change? Most Pennsylvania districts typically accept graduate credits from any regionally accredited university, and Model Teaching's university partners are all regionally accredited. We've helped thousands of Pennsylvania teachers complete lane changes successfully, but always confirm with your district HR department or union representative to find out their specific requirements for your lane change.

Will Model Teaching credits count toward Pennsylvania Instructional II certification? Yes, in most cases. Pennsylvania requires 24 graduate-level credits beyond your bachelor's, and our credits come on official transcripts from regionally accredited universities, exactly what the Pennsylvania Department of Education requires. Always verify with the PDE's certification office before starting if you have any questions.

Will Model Teaching credits count toward Act 48? Yes. The conversion is 1 graduate credit = 30 Act 48 hours, so 6 graduate credits = 180 hours = full 5-year Act 48 requirement. However, Model Teaching is also an approved Act 48 provider. That means that if you only need Act 48 hours and do not necessarily need to earn graduate-level credits, you can instead take our regular PD hour courses for a lower fee that still meets the same requirements for Act 48.

Can credits count for both Act 48 AND a lane change? Yes, if you earn credits to satisfy your act 48 requirements. The same credits that satisfy your Act 48 renewal can typically count toward lane advancement at the same time.

When should I submit my transcript to my district? Most Pennsylvania districts have annual deadlines of September 1 or October 1, but always check with your individual HR department in your district to determine your own deadlines. You can process your credits through Model Teaching as you complete each course, then submit your transcripts once you are ready. If you are on a tight deadline to complete your credits, Model Teaching can help guide you on when to complete your courses and assist you in quickly requesting your transcript to best meet your deadline.

Can I work toward a master's degree through Model Teaching? Yes. Up to 9 Model Teaching credits that you may be planning for your California lane change for salary advancement can also be applied toward Augustana University's Master of Education (M.Ed.) degree as part of Augustana's learner-designed concentration. You can find more here: <https://www.modelteaching.com/masters>