

# **Approval of Coursework for Certificated Salary Schedule Advancement**

Hart-Ransom Union School District

The district supports continual professional learning and growth for all of its teachers for the benefit of the students that we teach. This ongoing learning occurs in a variety of forms, including but not limited to:

- Professional development that is provided by the district and/or other entities
- Professional reading
- Individual research and study
- Collaboration with other teaching professionals that is focused on content and pedagogy and leads to effective and improved teaching and learning
- Testing new structures, strategies, and resources through practical application in daily instruction and assessment, and measured by valid data collection and focused analysis
- Graduate-level coursework, some of which may be eligible for salary schedule advancement

In order to understand the parameters and processes for selecting and proposing coursework for salary schedule advancement, teachers should refer to the provisions of the collective bargaining agreement in Article 9 - "Units Toward the Salary Schedule." As an additional resource, this document contains a summary of key ideas from Article 9, as well as additional perspective and information about the factors and criteria that are considered by the superintendent when evaluating and approving or disapproving of coursework that is submitted for salary schedule advancement.

Article 9 (Units Toward the Salary Schedule) of the collective bargaining agreement specifies that coursework that is approved for salary schedule advancement must be from an accredited college or university, and must apply to a higher degree, credential, or supplemental license/authorization, or must serve to augment, improve, maintain, and/or reinforce teaching skills. (There is also a limited provision for lower division coursework under certain circumstances.) Coursework submissions must include sufficient documentation of course content and course requirements for the superintendent to be able to make an informed decision about whether to approve or disapprove of the coursework.

The district is responsible to ensure that public funds are being spent appropriately, including any increases in teachers' salaries that are generated by coursework that is submitted, approved, and successfully completed for salary schedule advancement. In order for the district to commit funds (through salary schedule advancement) for professional development to improve teaching and learning for students, the district must be able to reasonably discern and ensure that appropriate value is being gained for the students through the successful completion of the coursework.

It should be noted that any units that are offered during a professional development opportunity are ineligible for salary schedule advancement if the district is paying for or otherwise providing that professional development opportunity. The district is certainly willing to pay for an appropriate opportunity to improve teaching and learning in the classroom, but the district will only pay for it once. To pay for the direct cost of professional development or coursework, and then to also pay for a salary increase that is generated by way of units earned through that professional development or coursework would constitute a double-payment for that particular benefit for students.

Article 9.5 of the collective bargaining agreement specifies the following:

*Approval must be received from the superintendent prior to taking a class for salary schedule advancement. An employee will submit a request for course approval on the appropriate District form to the superintendent, and should include sufficient documentation of course content and course requirements, which may include, but not be limited to, course outline(s), syllabus/syllabi, and/or written communication from the college or university specifying the course content and course requirements. If the request for course approval does not include sufficient supporting documentation, the employee will be notified and the submitted course(s) will not be considered. The request for course approval will be considered as being received when it includes sufficient supporting documentation.*

When the “documentation of course content and course requirements” is reviewed, the superintendent will be looking for information about course content and course requirements, as well as instructional delivery method(s), assessment methods, and work product requirements for students in the course. When evaluating and approving or disapproving of submitted coursework, the superintendent will consider a variety of factors about the coursework, including:

- Direct relevance and applicability to the teacher’s current teaching assignment
- Effectiveness in helping further the instructional goals of the district
- Appropriately rigorous content and accountability for learning
- Course structure, curricular content, scope and sequence, assessments, and/or objectives
- Other relevant characteristics or factors

In order to make a determination about the appropriateness of a particular course for salary schedule advancement, the superintendent needs to see that there is an established course outline or syllabus with specific course content that is relevant, rigorous, and appropriately applicable to the teacher's assignment. The superintendent also needs to see that appropriate and relevant learning is ensured through appropriate readings, lectures, guided research, and/or directed study. Additionally, the superintendent needs to see that there is appropriate accountability built into the course, which usually comes in the form of assessments, research papers, portfolios, and/or other clearly defined work products that demonstrate the acquisition and mastery of new knowledge and skills that will directly benefit the students in the classroom.

Types of coursework that are generally disapproved include, but are not limited to, courses that are not appropriately related to the teacher’s current assignment, courses in which credit is earned for performing functions that are already within the teacher’s required job duties (such as creating lesson plans), and courses that do not require the students to demonstrate their learning through appropriate assessments and/or work products.

If a teacher has any questions about the appropriateness or approvability of a particular course for salary schedule advancement, the teacher may consult with the superintendent about the course before submitting the request for course approval paperwork.