



Wisconsin Educator Licensing 1983- Present

This brief provides an overview of significant structural changes in the licensure of educators in Wisconsin.

Pre-1983

Prior to July 1, 1983, life licenses were issued to individuals who taught for six full semesters in a Wisconsin school district while holding a three-year educator license. Licenses of this type were no longer newly issued as of July 1, 1983. Educators who hold a life license issued pre-1983 now fall under current provisions governing lifetime licenses created in the 2017-19 biennial budget.

1983 - 2004

Licenses during this period were issued as renewable regular licenses to those who met all requirements for the full license (see the [historical Administrative Code PI 3](#)). Regular licenses were renewed if the applicant satisfactorily completed six semester credits or the equivalent of continuing professional education during the five years immediately preceding the application for renewal. The six semester credits or the equivalent had to be directly and substantively related to one or more of the licenses held by the applicant or to the applicant's professional competency.

Teaching licenses were issued as developmental level licenses with higher grade ranges associated with specific subjects. The range of the developmental levels changed slightly in 1992. Post-1992, those developmental level teaching licenses were early childhood (PK-3), elementary (1-6), elementary/middle (1-9), middle (5-9), middle/secondary (6-12), and secondary (9-12).

2004-2018

In 2004 educator licensing changed from a framework where regular licenses were simply renewed to one where licensing was used to demonstrate advancement in the profession (see [historical administrative code PI 34](#)). Under the new administrative code, full licensure was demonstrated in the acquisition of a five-year nonrenewable initial license (unless the individual was not employed as an educator for at least 3 years within the 5-year period).

The educator could advance their license to a five-year renewable professional license if they completed a professional development plan (PDP) that demonstrated increased proficiency as verified by a team. For teachers this team consisted of a teacher of the same subject or at the same level who is not the mentor and who is selected by teacher peers, an administrator designated by the district administrator subject to approval by the school board, and a representative of an institution of higher education.

Educators with a professional license could renew their professional license every five years by completing a PDP that demonstrated increased proficiency as verified by a team. Those who held a regular license under the prior framework (PI 3) were grandfathered into the new license structure at the professional educator level and were allowed to renew their licenses with six

semester credits or the new PDP. For teachers this team consisted of other licensed teachers selected by their peers. Alternatively, educators with a professional license could seek to advance their license to a master level license, which was a 10-year license available for those who passed the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) process or an equivalent process designed by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) for subjects not covered by the NBPTS.

During this period, developmental levels for teacher licensure were changed to include: early childhood and early childhood through middle childhood level; middle childhood through early adolescence level; early adolescence through adolescence level; and early childhood through adolescence level.

2018-Present

In the [2017-19 state biennial budget](#) changed the structure of licensure to create provisional and lifetime licenses. Additionally, in the nonstatutory provisions of the bill (Section 9135), the DPI was required to revise the administrative code (PI 34) governing licensure. The structure of the current [PI 34](#) administrative code is reflective of the requirements in the budget bill while maintaining a [tiered licensing structure](#).

Licensing is separated into four tiers.

1. Tier I consists of permits and licenses where an individual has not met requirements for a full (Tier II) license.
2. Tier II is titled provisional, but this is the first license applicants receive when they have completed all requirements for a full license, such as completing an educator preparation program. Tier II licenses are three-year licenses and are renewable. Those who held initial educator licenses in the prior licensing framework were transitioned to this tier.
3. Tier III licenses are lifetime licenses. They may be applied for after six semesters of successful experience in certain settings in the area of their Tier II license. While named lifetime, these licenses only stay valid if a license holder submits a background check every five years and verification of K-12 work experience during that same time frame. Those who held professional educator licenses under the prior licensing framework were transitioned to this tier.
4. Tier IV licenses are also lifetime licenses. They are master educator lifetime licenses and are available to those who complete the NBPTS process successfully or the corresponding DPI process for subject areas not available through the NBPTS. Those who held master educator licenses in the prior licensing framework were transitioned to this tier.

Within the tiered structure teacher licensure moved from developmental levels to grade bands to meet the budget bill's requirement to simplify grade levels. Grade bands for teaching licenses in PI 34 include birth to grade 3, K-9, 4-12, and K-12.