Good Moral Character (GMC)

1. What is the good moral character (GMC) process?
The Department of Education is required by law to only issue Pennsylvania certificates to applicants who possess good moral character (24 P.S. § 1209, 22 PA Code § 49.12). The good moral character requirement applies to all applicants.

Good moral character reviews are required when an applicant answers yes to one or more of the background questions listed in the Teacher Information Management System (TIMS) application but may also be initiated based upon independent information.

2. How long does the review process take?
The length of the process depends on a number of factors. These factors include, but are not limited to: receipt of all the required documentation, the accessibility of the references and the volume of applications.

3. What factors are considered in a Good Moral Character Review?
There are three areas of consideration:

- **Nature of the conduct**
  - Did the conduct involve sexual, physical, verbal or emotional abuse?
  - Was there a criminal arrest, charge and/or conviction?
  - Was the crime violent/sexual or otherwise serious crime?
  - Was the conduct an isolated single event or repeated action?
  - Did the conduct occur on school property?
  - Did it involve a student or child?
  - Was conduct associated with the educator's position within the school system?
  - Does the conduct suggest applicant is a threat to the welfare and safety of students?
  - What was the age and education at the time of the conduct?
  - What is the applicant's current age?
  - How recent or remote is the conduct?
  - Any evidence of other related conduct?

- **Applicant’s attitude towards the conduct**
  - Did the applicant acknowledge the conviction or conduct on the application?
  - Did the applicant adequately and reasonably explain the circumstances surrounding the conduct and his/her involvement in the conduct?
  - Did the applicant take responsibility and demonstrate accountability?
  - What are the applicant’s feelings or opinions about the conduct?
  - Has there been positive change in attitude from what existed at the time of the conduct?

- **Applicant’s rehabilitative efforts**
  - Did the applicant serve any criminal sentence, pay restitution, complete any and all probationary/parole period and/or successfully complete an accelerated rehabilitative program (ARD) if admitted into such a program?
  - What is the parole or probation officer’s opinion?
  - Was any action taken by applicant’s employer?
  - If conduct included drugs or alcohol, did the applicant demonstrate abstinence from such further conduct and/or complete court appointed or voluntary drug or alcohol
Does the applicant have adequate intervention and support systems in order to maintain recovery efforts?

What actions were taken by the applicant to prevent any reoccurrence of conduct?

What do the applicant’s professional and/or personal references say about the educator?

Has the applicant given personal assurances of a desire to conduct his/herself accordingly in the future?

Does the applicant have articulated career goals?

Is the applicant currently employed?

Does applicant currently hold a teaching certificate in Pa or any other state?

Any community service or volunteer work?

4. What happens if my application is denied?
You will be notified in writing. You may appeal the decision and request either a hearing or reconsideration of the record within thirty (30) days of the mailing date of your denial letter. The Secretary of Education will make the final determination.

5. What is the difference between a hearing and reconsideration of the record?
If you request a hearing, a hearing officer will be assigned. You can be represented by an attorney and bring witnesses to testify on your behalf. The hearing officer will make a recommendation to the Secretary of Education, who will decide whether or not you have provided satisfactory evidence of good moral character supporting the issuance of a certificate.

If you request reconsideration of the record, there is no hearing. The application and any provided supporting documentation are forwarded to the Secretary for review and a decision.

6. If I have a misdemeanor or felony conviction, will my application be denied?
Acknowledgment of a misdemeanor or felony is not an automatic denial of certification.

7. If I answer Question 1 regarding child abuse unfounded, founded, or indicated, what will I be required to do?
You are required to submit a current original Pennsylvania Child Abuse History clearance and a signed detailed letter of explanation regarding the investigation.

The Department may request additional documentation.

8. If I answer yes to any of the remaining GMC questions, what will I be required to do?
Initially, you will need to submit:
- A detailed letter of explanation
- Any public documentation related to the conduct that you are acknowledging
- Five letters of reference
- A resume

The Department may request additional documentation.

9. If I have a misdemeanor or felony conviction, what will I be required to do?
In addition to the items listed above, you are required to submit:
- Current FBI clearance or registration number
- Current PA criminal background check
10. What should be included in my letter of explanation?
Your letter should include, but is not limited to:
- A detailed description of the circumstances including dates, ages, etc.
- A detailed description of the criminal sentence imposed (if applicable)
- Actions taken by applicant to prevent recurrence
- How the applicant’s attitude and/or behavior has modified since conviction
- Rehabilitation measures taken

This explanation should be signed and dated. The letter of explanation is an important piece of the requested documentation and care should be given when detailing the incident.

11. What is a criminal conviction?
The term “criminal conviction” applies to both misdemeanors and felonies and includes the following: a verdict or finding of guilty, a plea of guilty, or a plea of nolo contendere (no contest).

12. Which criminal convictions are reviewed?
All misdemeanors and felonies, regardless of the year of occurrence, are reviewed.

Summary offenses are not.

13. Will a DUI conviction be reviewed?
Yes, DUI’s are classified as misdemeanors and require a good moral character review.

14. What is a summary offense?
A summary offense is any minor crime, initially heard and decided by a district justice.

Summary offenses include disorderly conduct, underage drinking, speeding, and first offense shoplifting.

15. How do I find out if my conviction is a summary offense?
You should contact your attorney. Usually, the letter “s” will follow the title of your conviction on your Pennsylvania Criminal History Background check.

16. What if I get charged or convicted while attending college?
Decisions related to program admission or retention are made by the college or university. Most colleges or universities have policies related to program admission or retention depending on the nature of the crime for which you are arrested or convicted. As soon as the incident occurs, you should contact your advisor. Charges or convictions for certain crimes could affect your ability to student teach or be issued a Pennsylvania certification.

17. If my GMC issue was already reviewed and approved by the Deputy Secretary, what do I need to do when submitting a new application?
You must submit a signed statement with your application acknowledging your conviction and indicating whether you have any new convictions or charges since the review. You are required to submit a recent FBI clearance or registration number.
If a new charge or conviction occurred since the last review, a second full review is required.

**18. How do I answer the question about criminal convictions if I successfully completed the Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition (ARD) program?**

If your ARD was successfully completed AND the charges were officially dismissed by the court, you can answer “no” to the question.

If the Department learns of the arrest, but is unaware of the disposition, you may be asked to submit court documentation affirming the completion of the ARD program. Likewise, if you acknowledge a conviction on the application, but you also state that you received ARD, you will be asked to submit court documentation verifying the disposition.

**19. If I am currently on ARD, what are my options?**

While on ARD, there has not been a conviction; however, the charges are considered pending until ARD has been successfully completed. Therefore, you must acknowledge the pending charges on the certification application. You may apply for certification while completing your ARD and continue through the good moral character review process; or, you may wish to apply after the terms of your ARD are complete and the charges have been dismissed.

Please understand that there is a strong presumption that applicants currently lack good moral character to receive a Pennsylvania certificate if they committed a crime resulting in placement in an Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition (ARD) program, or were convicted of a crime resulting in probation or parole and have not yet fully completed ARD, probation or parole.

**20. What are certified court documents?**

Certified court documents must be requested directly from the courthouse where you were convicted or your charges are pending. Typically, certified court documents have a raised seal and/or a colored stamp. Occasionally, the courthouse simply uses a cover letter with a gold seal as its certification.

**21. What court documents am I required to submit?**

You should request your entire file from the courthouse. The docket sheet by itself is not acceptable.

**22. How do I obtain certified court documents?**

You can obtain certified court documents by contacting the clerk of courts at the courthouse where you were convicted.

**23. What should I do if court documents are no longer available?**

You may submit a letter from the courthouse on letterhead indicating that the documents are no longer available.

**24. Will I be certified if my GMC issue is cleared?**

Your certificate will be issued if your credentials and qualifications meet all other Pennsylvania regulatory and statutory requirements.

**25. If I am granted certification, am I eligible for hire?**

Yes, you are eligible. Hiring decisions are at the discretion of the Local Education Agency.