

Remarks of Stacie D'Antonio
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Before the State Department of Education and State Board of Education
concerning the proposed changes to certification for Literacy Specialist.

April 29, 2010

Good Afternoon. My name is Stacie D'Antonio and I currently am a literacy specialist for Hamden Public Schools.

I am here to express my dissatisfaction with the state proposal to change certifications for reading/special education teachers in the state of CT. There are many reasons why the proposed changes are hurtful to our districts, schools and more importantly the students of CT. I would like to outline two of what I believe to be the most important reasons to reconsider the plans currently on the table for these teaching positions and to work collaboratively and cohesively with the CEA as we have for many years, knowing that on all counts we all have the best interest of our students in mind.

Financial Reasons

The proposed changes are not sympathetic to current fiscal conditions or the costs of college education. As a high school graduate in 1989 and a college graduate in 1993, one could not imagine my life today without being able to

obtain a job, after four years of college that could support me financially and medically. My parents were middle class, blue collar workers who paid my way through SCSU to help me achieve the goals that I set for myself to become an outstanding educator of our youth and achieve a part of the American Dream. The cost of college in 1989 per semester was considerably less than it is today. I remember the bill of \$767.00 for the fall semester that year. My parents had to sacrifice a lot to pay that bill and they did. Today just one semester of college at SCSU is approximately \$3,800.00 not including room, board, food or transportation. When I finished my full elementary education program, just four years later in May of 1993, after 8 semesters of full time increasing tuition payments along with three summers of additional cost for summer classes to finish in four years, my parents' funding was exhausted and so were my medical benefits according to my father's plan. I needed a full time job to begin to earn my way through life. Changing this certification would mean students would need to continue with full time schooling for approximately two additional years before being eligible to work in the field of their choice. Currently teachers are required to obtain a master's degree in order to receive professional status. This allows individuals an opportunity to work full time, obtain medical benefits and save to pay for their next degree.

Districts would be required to hire new teachers in these positions under master's level of pay. School budgets are in the worst conditions they have been in for years due to current economic conditions. Towns and Cities cannot possibly ask their community for more money and school districts already are reducing their operations to bare necessities which clearly have impacted the education of our students.

Asking people to obtain a master's degree before being eligible to obtain a full-time job is asking too much. We will lose many talented individuals to the field of education simply because the number of years needed to go to college and its expenses exceed the benefits of a salary six years later.

Knowledge & Expertise

Knowing that all people learn in a variety of ways, it is appalling to me that our state would recommend a change that could be devastating to the teaching profession. I have been a teacher for sixteen years and have worked seventeen years for Hamden Public Schools. The opportunities for professional learning that have been afforded to me under the supervision and direction of Hamden Public Schools have been outstanding. With a bachelor's in elementary education, a master's in special education, a PIMMS Fellowship and currently a 6th year degree

in Educational Leadership, I can unequivocally say that I am qualified to serve in my current position as a literacy specialist. The knowledge that I gained going to college was nothing compared to my on-the-job experience I have received working for Hamden Public Schools. I currently have training in Project CRISS, National Urban Alliance, Japanese Lesson Study, Thinking Maps, SRBI, Data Driven Decision Making and Haskins to name a few. My quest for knowledge reaches far beyond my contractual day and my supervisors are fully aware of my capabilities. I work day in and day out to meet the needs of all learners. I have a wonderful rapport with the professionals whom I support and do what is needed for all the students who are before me. On a daily basis I assist teachers with scoring and evaluating assessments, preparing lessons to support the needs of the children in their classroom and provide professional development through on-going discussions and support to push and extend the learning of students. It is these job responsibilities that go far beyond the education that is obtained through a specific degree. These real experiences happen with the training, expectations and self-drive of the individual. Districts should be allowed to develop and utilize the strengths of the professionals they choose to meet the needs of the students in their community. No specific degree alone prepares these professionals for work that must be done to leave no child behind.

I am a dedicated professional and leader in my field and it would be harmful to Hamden and any district to lose knowledgeable and professional educators such as myself if this proposal doesn't change. My supervisors are fully capable of evaluating my work ethic and skills that I perform on a daily basis. Professional development, reading and discussing current research, attending, participating and presenting conferences help us to obtain the qualifications we need to hold jobs such as literacy specialist and special education teachers. It is simply not the degree that makes us who we are. It is a much larger quest for knowledge and the satisfaction of knowing that we change the lives of children every day and are ready, willing and able to share this knowledge and expertise with fellow co-workers, children and parents alike.

I urge you to reconsider the proposed actions to reconfigure certification requirements. Thank you.