

Remarks of Maureen Honan
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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education
Concerning the proposed changes to certification in special education

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Good afternoon. My name is Maureen Honan and I'm a special education teacher at Pomperaug High School in Southbury.

I'd like to comment on two major inconsistencies I believe there are in the proposed special education certificate. The first is the requirement to hold a teaching certificate in another content area. The SDE has stated that this will do two things for the prospective teacher: (1) it will give the special educator knowledge and experience in the general education curriculum, especially in the areas of literacy and math; and (2) this will assure the special ed teacher is highly qualified, as required by law. The inconsistencies I see are these: if a teacher is first certified in some areas, such as music, PE, or health, the teacher won't have the background a special education teacher needs in literacy or math, so to say that this certificate will provide that experience is a misnomer. Second, special education teachers have to be HQ in either math, science, or reading/language arts if they are hired to provide direct instruction in two or more content areas, but not if they're hired to work in a co-taught classroom. Holding a prior _____ certificate in any other content area won't satisfy the requirement. This rationale

for requiring a prior certificate is weak, and prospective teachers would gain more from having 2 student teaching experiences – one in a resource room and one in a co-taught room.

The second inconsistency centers on the statement made by the SDE that, the role of a special educator requires a high level of experience and expertise in special education, general education, and especially literacy & math, so should require a master's level program. The weaknesses in this rationale are these: first, if a teacher goes through an undergraduate program, earns a certificate in another content area, then goes directly into a master's level program for special education, this doesn't mean that brand new teacher has a high level of experience and expertise. She or he has no full-time teaching experience; more book learning in the area of special education doesn't make him or her an expert in the area. Second, not all teachers would earn a first certificate in math or reading/language arts, so they wouldn't necessarily have the background a special education teacher needs in those areas. Third, under the law that becomes effective this July 1 a person can take and pass the Praxis II exam in a shortage area in lieu of coursework. If that person already holds a bachelor's degree and enters a master's program for special education certification, this will allow some people to enter the profession without ever having, at minimum, student

teaching. Clinical experience is not the same as student teaching. This new teacher definitely won't have a "high level of experience and expertise."

There are too many inconsistencies in the proposed special ed certification to assure that future special educators are well prepared. I urge the SDE to listen to what practicing teachers are saying is needed to prepare future special educators.