

Remarks of Diane Marinaro  
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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education  
Concerning proposed changes to certification in Literacy Specialist

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Good afternoon. My name is Diane Marinaro. I'm an 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies teacher in Hamden Middle School, and president of the Hamden Education Association. I'd like to comment on the proposed literacy specialist certificate, disparities I see between the proposal and current practices, and concerns this causes my colleagues and me.

For the past several years, districts have employed certified teachers to work outside the classroom with students, providing early intervention in reading and language arts. These students are often not remedial students, in that they don't function that much below grade level. They are, instead, going through the normal developmental process of learning and refining literacy skills, and have met a challenge along the way. They receive short-term extra help to grasp the concept and continue along their path as readers. The help they receive is akin to the extra help a parent will provide one's child in learning how to tie a shoe that another child of theirs didn't need.

Hamden's literacy specialists have received extensive professional development training provided by the district in programs such as Haskins, Project CRISS (Creating Independent Student Owned Strategies), Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Thinking Maps because that is what the district felt would best meet their needs. Some have been trained in Reading Recovery. Others have chosen to earn the reading teacher certificate (102). Several years ago,

the State Department of Education (SDE) took the position that, any time a student received extra help outside of the classroom, it was considered 'remedial,' and the teacher providing it had to hold the 102 endorsement. The proposed change to certification would require any teacher not grandfathered – and it's very clear that many reading teachers would fall under this category – to transition to the literacy specialist certificate, which has more stringent requirements than the 102 certificate. To follow this path of thinking, then, any teacher who works with students outside the regular classroom, providing even normal developmental early intervention, would be required to be a literacy specialist and hold that certificate.

The advent of SRBI appears to have changed this. The SDE document providing 'guidance' to districts about SRBI responsibilities and certification states that a teacher with *any* certification can provide SRBI interventions to students at tiers I, II, and III, and that this intervention can take place in a 'general education area' within the school. That includes outside of the regular classroom. This means, evidently, that those teachers don't have to be literacy specialists and hold a reading certificate or the proposed literacy specialist certificate. This is contradictory to what the SDE has said, and continues to say, about holding the 102. It's no wonder teachers and districts find ways to circumvent certification regulations.

The proposed regulations for the literacy specialist certificate also greatly expand the roles the specialist can play by holding just one certificate, which is unrealistic, and requires districts to hire starting at the master's level. If a literacy specialist with this endorsement is the only reading person in the district who can provide both reading and 'administrative' service, districts will be less inclined to hire them to provide service to students. The unintended consequence could be inequitable service to students across the state.

Teachers want students to be taught by professionals with appropriate training and experience, but when the SDE allows disparate practices while trying to create more stringent standards and certification, confusion results. The proposed literacy specialist certificate really needs to be discussed with practicing teachers, rethought, and resolved so students and teachers both benefit. Thank you.