

Remarks of Ellen Miller
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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education
Concerning the proposed changes to certification in Special Education

April 29, 2010

Good afternoon. My name is Ellen Miller. I am a learning disabilities specialist. I am speaking on behalf of the special education staff at The Peck Place School in Orange.

Our team is extremely concerned about the inconsistencies and unclear information that we have read concerning the changes in the various proposals of the special education certification. I would hope that before the State Department of Education upsets people any further and impacts programs, that they would clarify their positions and be definitive about the changes in this certification. At the least, the SDE should be embarrassed about sending such unclear and contradictory statements. This is highly unprofessional. My colleagues and I represent over 100 years of combined experience working in our special education programs. We need and deserve clarification on the Connecticut State Department of Education's intent to change our roles.

I can honestly and proudly state that at The Peck Place School, we, the regular and special education team, have been successful in guiding and enabling our children to learn and meet their potential for many, many years.

Since there is so much confusion with the explanations of the proposed changes, there are many questions that need to be asked and qualified.

For example:

1. Which special educators would be grandfathered? What does grandfathered mean?
2. Who would need more courses for certification?
3. How does one person handle all the responsibilities? Training paraprofessionals, serving as case manager, being an IEP facilitator, etc.
4. How can new teachers consult effectively when they have not yet experienced the teaching profession?

Before I leave you, I would like to tell you a story about a little boy who entered our first grade this year. I feel this will put so much into perspective in terms of what my team (which includes-classroom teacher, reading consultant, speech pathologist, and paraprofessionals) has achieved. The recipient of their knowledge and experience is the little boy I am going to tell you about.

Mark (not his real name) came to our First Grade in September 2009. It was obvious from day one that he was not ready for First Grade. Mark was not only academically, socially, and emotionally immature for First Grade, but he had an I.E.P. Our team decided to meet as we had to devise an appropriate educational plan of action. He would have an individualized reading and math program at his instructional level. Mark would work with both the reading consultant and the resource room teacher for his reading program. His math program would also be taught to him in the resource room. Mark would receive paraprofessional support in both the classroom and the resource room. In conjunction with his learning needs, behavioral issues were clear and apparent. We needed an individualized behavior plan as well.

Within a couple of months, we were proud to say we were seeing a different child. Mark's behaviors lessened and he was learning his sounds, letters, and numbers. He has become a happy little boy because a team of people all worked together to honor his instructional level. This is education at its best.

This story is one of many.

We feel strongly that the State Department of Education must not only listen, but truly hear, what all the experienced professionals, the individuals who work with children on a daily basis, have related to you sincerely, accurately, and with passion. Thank you.