

Remarks of Rae Baczek
Math Teacher
Greenwich High School, Greenwich, CT

Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education concerning
proposed changes to certification in Special Education

April 12, 2010

Good afternoon. My name is Rae Baczek, and I'm a math teacher at Greenwich High School. I have taught for over 30 years. This week we are on spring break, but I felt the need to come here (a 2 and ½ hour drive each way) to speak today against the proposed new Special Education Teacher and Intervention Specialist certificate. I am not sure if you have ever been in a public school and seen what a special education teacher does. Even though I am a regular classroom teacher I have had many special education students in my class. This year I have an autistic student in one of my classes, and in my other classes I have a total of 12 special education students ranging from those with ADDHD to those who are emotionally disturbed. The excellent special ed. staff I work with is highly qualified to do the job that they do. There are no issues with literacy or numeracy weakness as I have heard mentioned in a previous hearing. My students that go to the resource room have courses that range from algebra to statistics. Yes, not everyone is familiar with statistics, but then they come to me for clarification.

As a building representative and past president of my Association, I don't know of any staff that works as hard as they do - from resource room to writing and monitoring Individualized Education Plans to modifications for courses to collaborations with the classroom teachers. This is a job that is very taxing, but this staff is dedicated to the "Nth" degree. I wonder sometimes how they have the energy and drive to continue, but their dedication is so obvious.

The proposal you have presented has the following problems:

1. Yes, all teachers should have a Master's degree, but to require it before you can even get a certificate flies in the face of absurdity. I am not sure if you are aware how hard it is to recruit staff to fill these positions now. If you require a Master's degree, many teachers will not be able to meet that requirement before they have a job. It will be costly, and to be honest, the training that our teachers get now in the Bachelor's program is excellent. All of our school districts are working in a time of financial crisis at this time, especially with the economic situation. How will they be able to hire only teachers at the Master's Level for this position? Will there even be enough staff to fill these positions, with the projected exiting of staff over the next few years?

The SDE has pretty much said that what higher education does now at the bachelor's level isn't any good and expertise comes only through a master's

level program. I have news for you. Expertise in teaching only comes through actual teaching!!

This leads me to my second point:

2. According to your proposal, the preparation program you propose would not require student teaching. That is the most illogical idea I have ever heard of. It is only through the student teaching part of any education program does a student know if he or she will actually not only like to be in the classroom, but find out if they are going to be good in the classroom. Clinical practice is not student teaching. That is like going to medical school, reading books and then getting a degree without ever having worked on a live person before. Would you want this person to operate on you?

3. Your proposal would also require a minimum of 75 hours of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) in areas specified by the State Department of Education to advance to the professional certificate. There is no other teaching certificate that has this requirement. Actually there is no requirement to earn CEUs for any professional certificate.

4. Lastly, this combination certificate would be overwhelming to staff. There is a mixture of services that would be included in this new certificate – from servicing students in the classrooms and resource rooms to teaching to training paraprofessionals to diagnostics to facilitating PPTs, and so on and so on. It seems to me that there would be more “sliding across the surface” and not “sticking your feet in the water and jumping in” to get the full experience of what the job would entail.

In my high school we have about 25 special ed. teachers (our student population is approximately 3,000). As I approached them they were overwhelmed and frustrated at this proposal. They can't be here today so I am here for them. I ask you to listen closely to all the testimony. This comes from our years of experience, our fountain of experience and our hearts. Please reconsider this proposal. Thank you.