

Remarks of Robin Farquhar  
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Region 8

Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education  
Concerning the proposed changes to Reading Specialist and Reading Consultant  
Certification

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Good afternoon. My name is Robin Farquhar and I have been a Reading Specialist at Gilead Hill School in Hebron for 11 years. I am opposed to the changes in certification to combine Reading Specialists and Reading Consultants. I would like to tell you why:

1. I am a Reading Specialist by choice. I did not choose to train or work as a Reading Consultant. I prefer to work every day with children who have learning difficulties. This is hard, often laborious work and I do not work alone. My work involves collaboration with teachers, other specialists, reading paraprofessionals, administrators and parents. My work is the daily “nitty gritty” of building literacy skills. It is the explicit instruction that teaches young children the foundational skills for reading; phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency and reading comprehension. This work requires alternative teaching methods, daily re-teaching, repetition, and lots of patience. A Reading Specialist is not a “consultant”. I am a teacher.

2. Reading Specialists should remain teachers. We collaborate with the Reading Consultant, and at my school the reading department works as a team to meet the needs of the entire school community. However the consultant has additional leadership responsibilities for the entire school, testing, diagnosis, teacher training, curriculum planning and school-wide progress-monitoring - to name just a few. How can a coordinator teach full time those students with the greatest need?

3. Response to Intervention, and Connecticut's SRBI initiative, require that the "most qualified" teachers work with the students who are at the greatest risk of failure. In the area of early literacy research, there is a broad consensus (see attached) that our students need explicit, systematic, corrective skill-based instruction, delivered by the most qualified teachers. Reading teachers are trained in this specialized instruction. We need to be teaching reading every day, supporting teachers in the classroom and monitoring student progress very closely. If we are also expected to serve as consultants, our duties will become less focused, and our time will be divided.

4. For teachers within five to 10 years of retirement, the additional coursework required for the new certification creates difficulties. Although I am always interested in learning more about my craft, now is not the time for me to be obligated to do more graduate courses to fulfill requirements for my certification. I regularly attend workshops, professional conferences, prepare and participate in my school's

professional development programs, and stay current with research. With the proposed changes I would be forced to pay for and take coursework to maintain my certification.

5. If consolidation of professional duties and tasks is demanded of reading teachers, why not in other curriculum areas as well? Logically, one could imagine the merging of music and art, requiring two teachers go back to an additional master's program to become Art/Music consultants. Or how about science/math consultants? ESL and Spanish consultants?

Do the proposed changes for Reading Specialist and Reading Consultant certifications enhance learning for the children of Connecticut? I say No!

Thank you for your attention.