

Remarks of Susan Hackel
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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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My name is Susan Hackel and I'm a reading specialist at Sarah Noble Intermediate School in New Milford, CT. I would like to express my concerns about the certification proposal concerning literacy specialists.

I have been working as a literacy specialist for the New Milford Public Schools for 13 years. This was a career change for me. I received my masters in literacy education at the College of New Rochelle at the age of 45. Although my bachelor's was in Elementary Education, and I worked for five years as a teacher after graduating from college, I left the field to pursue other career options.

In my position as a literacy specialist, I have worked with students receiving remedial reading from grades 2 through 6, though since the year 2001 I have concentrated on students in grades 4-6. In my position I have acted as a resource for classroom teachers. Over the years, I have given model lessons, served on curriculum committees, evaluated materials and resources, presented many workshops, attended

professional development seminars and conferences on a variety of topics, written curriculum units and assisted teachers with best practices of literacy in their classrooms.

It took me 10 years to repay a loan over \$14,000. As a single woman, aged 58 years old, it would be an extreme hardship for me to return to school, and get in over \$8,000 of debt at 62 years old, when I am saving for a house and for retirement. As it is, since I started my career late, and I have no spouse to support me, I will be living in hardship upon retirement if I am unable to work until the age of 75 at which time I would have had my 30 years. At 62 years old, having to drive 1.5 hours to the nearest university to take four courses over a two year period would be extremely difficult for me. I pour every ounce of energy into my day as a teacher.

I would not have any energy left to do the drive, not to mention all the studying and work that would have to be done in addition to my heavy workload as a reading specialist.

In addition, it would greatly affect the students I teach, since I would have to be canceling instruction in order to leave work early to attend classes, and would affect the teachers I work with as well, as I would not have time to plan lessons for them and act as a resource.

The most distressing thing is that I do not want to act as a reading consultant and take on administrative duties. I only want to work with students and act as a resource to my teachers. To have to take these four extra courses to prepare me for a role I do not want, nor a role I need in my district, is a waste of time, money and energy. Also, the amount of information and knowledge I would be gaining in the extra 12 credits would be so watered down that it would be useless to me if I did have to assume new administrative responsibilities.

I am not against learning, nor am I against becoming a better literacy professional. If I was younger, and had years ahead before retirement, it would be easier. I could pay off the loan and still save towards retirement and not be as affected. This proposal is an extreme hardship for me. It is both unnecessary for me as a teacher and would have a devastating effect on my life personally. As it is, I do not have much of a nest egg toward retirement, starting my career late, being single with no spousal support and earning a teacher's salary, which does not make me wealthy in retirement.

I believe in two tiers of certification. I also believe that should these changes go through for any reason, that those teachers who are above a certain age be "grandfathered" in. To make a 62 year old person, who already will have 17 years of experience as a reading specialist jump through these hoops is bordering on ludicrous. Especially since this person in question, (me) does not need these additional credits to

perform my duties professionally. I am already respected in my field and have contributed towards the professional development of the teachers at Sarah Noble School.

I am strongly against these proposals, but most adamant that those already holding a valid certificate as a reading teacher be allowed to continue their career without having to take extra credits.

Thank you for listening and for your consideration.