

My name is Karen O'Connell and I am the President of the East Hartford Education Association, representing 620 educators. I am presently a literacy coach, having taught for 35 years as a regular classroom teacher. I am extremely familiar with the challenges faced by my students, both regular and special education teachers, specialists, and parents when a child experiences learning disabilities, difficulty reading or severe emotional problems.

Requiring the proposed certification changes for special education and reading professionals will do little to improve our ability to deal with these issues, or close the achievement gap in urban schools like ours, particularly for our most needy students.

Therefore, I ask you to reconsider these proposals in light of three basic concerns:

First, we cannot continue to ignore the fact that classroom teachers cannot be all things to all students. If a person has a specific illness or disease, that person immediately gets referred to a medical specialist, because that individual needs and deserves the care that only a more highly trained person can provide. Why in education are we moving more and more toward a consultative model, where the actual services are provided by generalists, and less and less by those who have a rich background and are specially trained??? These proposals would only move us further away from where we need to be.

Second, while these proposals may make the job of administrators easier because the new certifications provide

more “flexibility” in assigning staff, this does not mean they are best practices for students who require teachers who have achieved higher level skills and practical classroom experience in order to address specific individual needs. In fact, in the case of the special education proposal a person could become a special education teacher without ever having student taught! I find it hard to believe that anyone would propose that!!

Lastly, by requiring a master’s degree, the costs to our school districts will only exacerbate the teacher shortages we now face as well as the lack of funding we are all experiencing. I urge you to reconsider these proposals, and do what’s best for students and educators .Consider the options CEA has presented – create two levels of reading and two levels of special education certificates and thus have the best of both worlds.

Thank you for your time and consideration.