

Remarks of Bruce Yarnall
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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education
Concerning the proposed changes to certification in Special education

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Good afternoon. My name is Bruce Yarnall and I'm a Special Education Teacher in Stonington, CT. I have worked as a special education teacher for the past 14 years at the high school and middle school level. I am very concerned about the proposed changes for the special education certificate.

As I am sure you are aware, there is a shortage of special education teachers in the state of Connecticut, so I am confused as to why the state feels the need to make it harder and more expensive for people to want to become special education teachers. I will focus on two main areas of concern that will have the biggest effect on my students and my school; the preparation program being too broad and the lack of student teaching.

The most useful coursework I had at Southern in my day-to-day work with students was in how to teach reading. In order to do this effectively I have to correctly identify the problem or problems and then design instruction to remediate these weaknesses. The proposed changes do not require nine credits in reading instruction. This is a huge mistake; whether I am working with 11th graders or 5th graders, the need to teach them how to be effective readers remains the same. Special

education teachers need to be versed in techniques to teach phonemic awareness, phonics, sight word acquisition, syllabification, and comprehension strategies.

In order to learn these techniques and skills, aspiring special education teachers need direct instruction in these instructional strategies. They cannot be learned in one or two courses. Three courses or nine credits at a minimum are necessary to be effective in the classroom and to increase student learning.

In order to be an effective special education teacher, two different skill sets in the classroom are necessary; one working with a general education teacher in a co-teaching model, and another working with a student on small groups or one-on-one. The proposed regulations only cover one skill set – working with students in a small group setting. The state is going toward, actually demanding, movement toward an inclusionary model of special education. To have special education teachers start their first jobs without any experience working with general education teachers in the classroom is setting the special education teacher, the general education teacher, and most importantly, the students, up for failure.

Instead of the proposed changes, I recommend that aspiring special education teachers be required to complete two teaching experiences; one in a co-teaching model and another in a clinical, one-on-one or small group setting, as those two experiences most closely mimic what they will do day in and day out in their job.

I also recommend that at a minimum that special education teachers be required to complete at least nine credit hours in reading instruction. Special

education teachers deal with reading problems everyday. The most common weakness students' exhibit is in reading, so it makes sense for new special education teachers to be trained and ready to deal with the difficulties their students will face.