

Remarks of Emily Johnson
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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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Good afternoon, my name is Emily Johnson and I'm a reading/language arts teacher in Barkhamsted. I am very concerned about the proposed changes to the certification for language arts teachers and consultants. As a reading specialist myself, I know that teaching struggling readers and overseeing language arts programs involve different skills and knowledge. Some individuals are interested and capable of doing both, but many would prefer to work with students without moving into a position of leadership and supervision. I have known talented teachers who have a gift for helping students who struggle with reading. These teachers attend graduate school so that they can concentrate on teaching reading. Not all want to become administrators who oversee an entire school or district language arts program.

I myself was one of those teachers. In fact, I went back to school after college to get my teaching certification because I had already discovered, as a volunteer tutor, that I loved teaching reading more than anything I had ever done. I had no interest in supervising a language arts program; I only wanted to work with children who had trouble with reading.

Recently, I had a conversation with a first-year teacher in my school who reminded me of my younger self. She was just laid off and is thinking of starting a master's degree in reading because she loves working with the students in her class who have a hard time with reading. She said, "I don't want to be a language arts consultant. I just want to work with students." Then she asked about the proposed changes in certification and if she should hurry up and finish her degree before the requirements changed. I couldn't bear to tell her what was coming.

Many teachers are passionate about teaching struggling readers. That is what they want to study and that is what they want to do with their lives. If we want RTI and other early intervention programs to work, we need these teachers. If they are forced to continue taking courses (involving much more time and

expense), I am afraid that many will not bother to get literacy certification at all. They will stay in the classroom where they *can* teach reading and writing.

Meanwhile, who will teach the struggling students? Paraprofessionals or non-certified tutors, supervised by literacy specialists who are stretched thin by their multiple responsibilities? Research shows that struggling students make the most progress with skilled teachers. We need *more* reading teachers, not fewer.

Please preserve a separate certification for those who want to teach, rather than supervise. Thank you.