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April 30, 2010

Ms. Georgette Nemr  
Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification  
PO Box 940471 – Room 243  
Hartford, CT 06115 – 0471

Dear Ms. Nemr,

When I began my career in special education so many years ago, the norm was for newly certified special education teachers to accept assignments to a “self contained” classroom, and aspire to a resource room position. This arrangement made sense because the self contained teachers were trained to teach students with specific disabilities, and were well versed in curriculum.

Once special education teachers were trained at the Master’s level, and had received coursework in assessment, special education law and perhaps reading, assignment to a resource room position was appropriate. Over time, the paradigm shifted, and self contained positions were eliminated. Newly certified special education teachers were assigned to positions which required skills in assessment, and instruction in reading. New teachers, trained at the Bachelors level were not adequately prepared for these responsibilities.

As the IDEA and Connecticut Regulations guide us to SRBI, we further adjust the model to allow for such practices as co-teaching, regular education resource rooms, and tiered interventions. My reading of the proposed certification regulations for classroom teachers indicates that newly certified teachers will be able to provide all students instruction in these settings. Specifically, the language proposed for certification of an elementary education teacher addresses these areas of instruction;

“This endorsement, or another appropriate endorsement, shall authorize the teaching of all elementary academic and all level subjects to all students, including students with disabilities, in any general education setting within a school, but shall not authorize the teacher under this endorsement to be the sole provider for art, health, music or physical education. An elementary teacher in the employ of a board of education may provide in part but may not be the sole provider of instruction in art, health, music, and physical education. A teacher certified specifically in these subject areas shall also provide substantive instruction, support or co-teach with the elementary teacher in these curriculum areas.”

The proposed language addressing special education certification elevates the position of special education teacher to that of a specialist. This is important as the role is changing to one of a teacher who can step in when a student has not responded to SRBI and the interventions which may have been delivered by a reading specialist. This teacher steps in when the co-taught option has not allowed the student to succeed, the regular education resource room did not provide sufficient support, and the student now has services with an IEP which specify that a special

education teacher deliver the services. The role also requires adequate training in assessment and identifying disabilities in determining student need. Other, more specific responsibilities are delineated in the language, which certainly exceed the level of training a teacher receives at the BA level.

I am aware of the difficulty this change will, on the surface, pose for the self contained programs which depend on newly certified BA level staff to educate the students placed into their care by districts such as the one I represent. The proposed language will eliminate their applicant pool, and increase costs for districts placing students. I am also appreciative of the efforts of your department in meeting with representatives from the RESCs and members of CAPSEF in developing certification requirements for teachers of intensive needs students. I am hopeful that this will serve two purposes. The first is to create a candidate pool for self contained programs. The second is to create a means for the many un-employed or under-employed elementary education teachers to gain employment through a cross endorsement process. Direct experience during the day, along with coursework in the evening would provide an extended training that could actually be rigorous and intensive in content, providing an avenue toward that endorsement.

Given the current SRBI mandates in the state of Connecticut, it is essential that special education teachers enter the work force well versed in specialized teaching strategies especially in the area of reading. I urge stakeholders in the state certification office to mandate this requirement to insure our students have highly trained and qualified special education teachers.

In closing, please let me offer my support for the proposed regulations for Special Education Teacher and Intervention Specialist PK-12 which requires master's level training.

Sincerely,

Brian Farrell  
President, ConnCASE