

Written Testimony for Certification changes hearing

Kristen Bickel

Special Education Teacher- CES, Therapeutic Day Program

The proposed certification changes will directly impact the special education students and the teaching profession for which we have all made our career. By imposing higher and stricter standards for special education teachers we will change the face of the field of special education. By requiring a Master's degree for initial certification in Special education we will be limiting the pool of candidates for which special education may be an option. I always knew I wanted to be teacher and went to the University of Delaware to be an elementary education teacher. When the option of a double major with special education became an option I decided to do it. When I returned to Connecticut and was given an opportunity to be a special education teacher at Cooperative Educational Services, I decided to go back to school and get a Master's Degree in Special Education. Had I not been given the opportunity to be a Special Education Teacher at the Bachelor's level, I would not have sought a Master's Degree in Special Education. Expecting that Special Education teachers receive a higher degree than other certification areas will limit the pool of potential candidate. This will drastically affect the number and quality of potential candidates. As a shortage area for many years, it seems foolish to further restrict the pool.

In the field of education, we appreciate new ideas and fresh perspectives. As a veteran teacher I seek opportunities to mentor and support beginning teachers and often learn from these experiences. My experiences at Cooperative Educational Services have afforded me opportunities to serve as a teacher leader. The proposed certification changes would not allow for these opportunities without advancement in certification. As we all know, certification advancement comes with an expense to the teacher. In a specialized environment like ours, the experience in our past makes us the best leader of our peers. The division between the special education teacher and the special education specialist does not honor the experiences of teachers, merely of the their education and CEUs earned. As we move towards a world of collaboration we should afford the opportunities of current teachers to work with beginning teachers reward them with additional opportunities.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. We are hopeful that we be able to improve education for students and teachers in the future.