

Salvatore J. Corda, Ph.D
Associate Professor, Dept. of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Southern Connecticut State University
Comments on Proposed Certification Regulations

To: Hearing Administrators

From: Sal Corda

Re: Proposed Certification Regulations

My name is Sal Corda and I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Southern Connecticut State University and a former superintendent of schools with twenty years experience. Please note my comments are my own and do not reflect that of the Educational Leadership and Policy Department, the School of Education, or the university.

I offer the following for consideration:

I. As I understood the representatives from the State Education Department, the proposed certification was developed in order to address the disparity between the number of teachers who actually possess the 092 certification and the number of teachers who are actually pursuing administrative positions. Districts are reporting a dearth of qualified candidates such that they are requesting the State Education Department to issue a DSAP in order to enable positions to be filled. This problem is being addressed by the State Education Department by creating an opportunity for a teacher to pursue the teacher leader certification as a terminal program thereby leaving only those who are genuinely interested in administrative positions to continue on in an 092 certification program. I respectfully submit that this response does not connect to the real reasons why there is reluctance to enter the field of administration, e.g., disparity in compensation between teacher and administrator salaries, expectations of the work week, pressures for performance, etc.

I do not understand how developing and requiring a teacher leader certification will increase the qualified candidate pool for administrative positions. More often than not, my students in the administrator certification program have reported that their entry in the program has been because they are *exploring* whether or not they wish to go into administration. Besides, they tell me, even if they decide not to become administrators, the credits they are earning are moving them along in the salary schedule so there is no downside to their investment of time and money.

Question - If this certification is planned as a solution to increasing the candidate pool for administrative positions, what evidence suggests that this purpose will be accomplished by this strategy?

II. The requirements of the Teacher Leader certification are directly related to the skills necessary to implement the CALI model for school improvement. This model clearly contains the elements necessary for school and systemic improvement. The model

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also makes clear that school districts need to develop the capacity internally to develop teams of teachers who are able to engage each other about issues related to instructional practice and to provide widespread opportunities for teachers and administrators to engage in learning walks, data teams, and district and school improvement planning. These practices need to become a regular part of a teacher's participation in the life of the school or district. While outside help may be useful in developing this capacity, the ultimate goal should be to develop a culture in a school district that encourages and develops teacher leaders through the professional development and practice that occurs regularly in the district. By creating a separate certification process, the work of teacher leadership will be viewed as the province of the select few who have the teacher leader certification.

Current thinking, research, and the practices of high performing schools suggest that the leadership teachers provide is significant in learning organizations that are committed to systemic growth. In contrast to reinforcing that leadership roles ought to be a part of every teacher's regular practice, this certification strongly suggests that the role of teacher leader ought only to be assumed by those who have a special body of knowledge acquired through university study. It is antithetical to creating a culture that suggests that leadership skills can, and ought to, be nurtured and developed in a variety of places and assumed by a variety of teachers, learned in communities of practice where leadership is everyone's responsibility. While the new certification only applies to those who are in a 'leadership' position for forty percent of their time, nevertheless, a mind set will be created about this differentiated role that does not encourage all teachers to participate in the learning communities that are necessary in today's schools. In my informal conversations with practicing administrators, admittedly with a small number, this seems to be the general belief.

Question - What inquiry or assessment has taken place of administrative practitioners about the implications of a teacher leader certification program as it relates to encouraging distributive leadership across schools and districts?

III. Most often those with some level of experience as a teacher assume leadership roles. These teachers have already completed their master's degree and, perhaps, further study. Under the proposed regulations, if a district is in a financial position to create a position identified in the certification¹, the applicant pool must be restricted to those who have the required certification. This means that experienced teachers, who have already completed advanced degrees, will have to undergo the expense of graduate tuition as well

¹ Teacher leader, team leader, content coach, curriculum specialist, or any other similar job title, with responsibility in one or more of the following areas: school-level coordinator of a curriculum area or department, a school-level coach to teachers, developing teacher skills through coaching, assisting, supporting and modeling instruction,

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as the time necessary to complete the certification, a process that may take up to two years, in anticipation of such positions being created.

Question - What is the probability of attracting a qualified candidate pool for this certification since experienced teachers, who have already earned their master's degree, may not wish to pursue additional course work without any certainty that positions will be available? What inquiry or assessment has been done of experienced teachers, who may be the most desirable candidates for teacher leadership, to determine whether or not there will be interest in pursuing this certification? Is it not more likely that a District, anxious to capitalize on the skills of experienced teachers already in unofficial positions of leadership and faced with the constraints of the teacher leader certification and with the financial resources to support such positions, would create two positions not exceeding the 40% requirement rather than one position where certification would be needed?

IV. If a teacher is expected to spend the time and money necessary to obtain this certification, it is reasonable to assume that negotiating demands will include additional compensation for teacher leaders that reflects this type of investment. Since most column changes in salary schedules are framed in increments of thirty additional credits, will this certification increase the pressure on negotiations to develop new compensation mechanisms? In a negotiating environment, which is beginning to emphasize reducing the number of columns in a teachers' salary schedule, this new certification may have a significant impact on the bargaining process.

Question - What inquiry or assessment has been done of Boards of Education, Board attorneys, superintendents, and Human Resources personnel to discuss the impact of this new certification on collective bargaining?

V. The teacher leader certification program focuses on specific course work that may be broadly identified as providing instructional leadership. These include:

- (A) Instructional leadership (e.g., adult learning, coaching, reflective practice, etc.);
- (B) Developing measurable school goals, school culture, assessing and overcoming barriers to school change, implementing collaborative practice with teachers, administrators and the learning community;
- (C) Best practices in instruction and student assessment including evidence-based instruction in reading;
- (D) Using assessment data to monitor student progress and design and implement remediation, interventions or enrichment to meet the diverse learning needs of students; and
- (E) Developing standards-based elementary or secondary curriculum and monitoring implementation and evaluation of curricular programs.

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Yet, the requirements for a certificate in administration and supervision do not contain these requirements, only the broadly stated, “School improvement issues including but not limited to: evaluating student performance data, strategic planning, parent and community relations, and diverse learners, and evaluation and supervision of teachers and other staff.” Elmore (2000) maintains, “Principals who develop the skills and knowledge required to actually do instructional leadership in a serious way do so because of their personal preferences and values, often at some personal cost to their own careers, not because they are expected to do so as a condition of their work.”² It is the truth of this observation that is prompting efforts in the field to develop the instructional leadership skills of principals.

Question - Will the proposed new certification for teacher leader further or hinder these efforts to ensure that principals are instructional leaders? If a high level of achievement for all students is indeed the goal of the State, then all aspects of the work of schools should be coherent with that mission. Might Connecticut students not be better served by stating specifically in the regulations for the certification of administrators and supervisors that the work of school administrators is primarily the improvement of instruction and indicate the requisite course work to enable that to happen? What message does the new certification in teacher leadership (clearly devoted to the improvement of instruction) and the lack of this specificity in the requirements of administrator certification convey about the expectations that building administrators need to be instructional leaders with an emphasis on improving classroom practice, developing instructionally focused teams, and creating and nurturing learning organizations?

VI. Conclusion – From a policy perspective, this proposal warrants a good deal more inquiry and discussion before any decision about implementation is made. I do not believe this certification will address the problem for which it has been created. As part of our collective responsibility to further good and powerful administrative training policy and practice, I believe it is imperative to research the implications of this initiative in much greater depth before the State Department gives any consideration to implementation.

² Elmore, R. F., (2000) *Building A New Structure for School Leadership*. Washington D.C., The Albert Shanker Institute: 7.