

Remarks of Rose Tiernan  
Reading and Language Arts Consultant  
Fairfield Warde High School, Fairfield, Connecticut

Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education  
Concerning the proposed changes to certification in Literacy Specialist

April 6, 2010

Good Afternoon, my name is Rose Tiernan and I am a reading and language arts consultant in Fairfield. I would like to make two points:

- 1) If the proposed changes in certification for literacy specialist go into effect, a group of currently certified remedial reading teachers and reading and language arts consultants may be placed in unfair, counterproductive, and educationally unsound situations.
- 2) Literacy in Connecticut will not improve if changes are made only to literacy certification requirements, because such changes do not focus on, and may distract from, the necessity for changes in the certification requirements for administrators.

Point One. Highly effective, experienced remedial reading teachers will be expected to earn the credits for a certificate they may not want. The expense and time commitments of gaining the new certification may be impossible for some teachers to undertake. What is more troubling is the possible scenario in which the remedial reading teacher may be expected to not only begin the required course work, but also to begin taking on the responsibilities of the literacy specialist. Coursework and

increased responsibilities may distract the remedial teacher from his or her important work with struggling readers. Teachers may find themselves in a situation where they are expected to teach their remedial reading students, as well as provide training for paraprofessionals, in addition to serving as consultants to teachers in the content areas. Adding to a teacher's work load by placing him or her in a role for which he or she is not qualified does not help students or teachers.

Reading and Language Arts Consultants who have many years of experience as remedial reading teachers and as consultants will be expected to earn another certification, if there is to be no "grandfathering". At least some of the present Reading and Language Arts Consultants may have already taken all the graduate courses available in this area. Will these certified teachers be asked to repeat courses they have taken earlier in their academic careers? Will these teachers be asked to attend classes taught by individuals who have less experience and knowledge than they have? Have the universities and the State Department of Education jointly developed the coursework for the competencies that will be expected of the graduate students working toward this new certificate? Some of these professionals already hold endorsements in other areas such as special education and elementary education. What would be the rationale for sending these professionals back to graduate school?

Point Two. There may indeed be a serious need for change in certification; however, reading teachers and consultants who are teaching at different levels and different environments deserve the professional respect to be more actively involved in the decisions about responsibilities presently covered by each level of certification. When we read "administrators don't understand the difference between them [the two levels of certification], and use educators interchangeably," we can see one of the reasons for teacher resistance to any changes: administrators who should have been trained can, and do, make misguided decisions when it comes to the best literacy policy for the students in their schools.

In a joint Position Statement on the Reading Summit (February 2008) Connecticut Reading Association (CRA) and Connecticut Association for Reading Research (CARR) Board members wrote: "Our research has shown that there is no shortage of certified reading/language arts consultants but many prefer to remain in the classroom because of lack of support for the position." If certified reading/language arts consultants do not currently feel support for their position, why would these individuals want to return to graduate school and face additional and as yet not clearly defined responsibilities?

CRA and CARR, in the abovementioned position statement, do recommend one certification for the position of literacy specialist in a leadership capacity, but these organizations also make strong recommendations for administrators: "Principals should have training in supervising classroom teachers in reading instruction and also

how to use literacy specialists effectively. . . Administrators can provide the organizational conditions that facilitate and support an effective consultant role." In over 30 years of teaching, I have seen very few administrators, including those recently certified, who have an adequate understanding of reading instruction and literacy.

If the Department of Education is serious about improving the literacy of the students in Connecticut, it would seem prudent to first put into effect the proposed certification legislation that will include the recommendations of the International Reading Association (IRA): "The State Department of Education should adopt and recommend to the legislature regulations for administrator certification that include in the master's degree program coursework in reading as a necessary component of instructional leadership." (IRA's Proposed Six Standards for Administrator Candidates). If the changes proposed by the State Department of Education are put into effect, and administrators are no better prepared than they are now, more problems may be inadvertently created, especially in regard to the wider range of responsibilities that may be given to holders of the one certificate. A more certain path to improved literacy education may be found in the two levels of literacy certification, as proposed by the CEA, and in the improved training of administrators, as proposed by CRA and the IRA. Thank you for considering my comments.