

Special Education Teacher/ CESEA President  
Cooperative Educational Services, Trumbull CT

Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education  
Concerning the proposed changes to certification in special education

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Good afternoon. My name is Stephanie Wanzer and I'm a special educator and union president at C.E.S. in Trumbull.

As the CESEA Union President and a special education teacher, I have concern about the proposed certification changes. I am especially concerned about those changes that limit the capability of schools to hire any teacher at the Bachelor's level for self-contained special education classrooms. I have a bachelor's degree in political science from Manhattanville College in Purchase, NY. Like many colleagues at Cooperative Educational Services, I decided to continue my education and get a certification in special education on the Bachelor's level and continue to work at C.E.S. I have worked as an Educational Instructor and Job Coach prior to my acquisition of my Bachelor's Degree in Special Education. I have had the opportunity as a professional working at C.E.S. to be supported and trained in the most innovative and specialized areas in the special education field. C.E.S. is a special place. It distresses me that I would not have been able to begin my career in education without a Master's degree and would have lost the valuable years of experience I have earned at C.E.S. because of these proposed changes.

The staff at C.E.S. went through the HOUSSSE process when it was mandated that we become highly qualified. The staff worked together to ensure success in this process. We wanted to ensure challenging students were educated in the best possible environment given their challenging individual needs and that our staff was prepared to meet the Connecticut teaching competencies for a diverse student population. Despite these efforts, once again it appears that special education teachers are not considered highly qualified.

The impact of this change will not allow agencies like C.E.S. to hire Bachelor level candidates for the self-contained classrooms in our school based programs. Given that special educators must receive a higher form of education will also limit the pool for potential educators in this field and further add to the existing shortage of personnel

seeking to work in settings like C.E.S. I see the strain of educational costs on my members and how they struggle to pay off their initial Bachelor's level expenses. As the union president, I see the impact in cost on the salaries to the agency and in bargaining if the Bachelor's option is removed.

I encourage you to reconsider the State's position on eliminating the Bachelor's option for certification and limiting hiring for self-contained classrooms for students with severe disabilities to solely those with Master's degrees in Special Education. It is unclear to me at this time whether special educators holding a Bachelor's level K-12 degree will be grandfathered under the proposed changes. I think that this needs to be clarified in writing so everyone understands their obligations. On behalf of my colleagues and I, I continue to ask that you consider ways to allow individuals who wish to teach in public or private educational settings like C.E.S. be allowed to continue to have these opportunities.