

Remarks of Michael Freeman
High School Social Studies Teacher
Stonington Public Schools

Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education
Concerning the proposed teacher leader certificate

April 12, 2010

Good afternoon. My name is Michael Freeman. I'm a social studies teacher at Stonington High School, and I'd like to comment on the proposed teacher leader certificate.

Teacher leadership itself isn't a new concept; it's just now becoming a buzzword as schools and districts begin to look at ways to differentiate staffing in hopes of retaining experienced teachers who want to use their extensive skills in a wider range of roles. For years districts have had teachers serve in positions such as team leaders, curricular area coordinators, curriculum specialists, or coaches. Districts have provided training and support to these teachers so that the teachers further develop the skills the district needs them to have. Understandably enough, the needs of the districts across the state differ, so the training and support they offer teachers differs, too.

When I read more closely the regulations for the proposed teacher leader certificate, two things struck me: first, this is a one-size-fits-all model for defining what a teacher leader knows, and second, it appears to be another attempt by the State Department of Education (SDE) to take greater control over how districts do business. Let me expand on this a bit.

Proposing 12 graduate credits in the areas specified assumes that all teacher leaders are, or will be, in positions that require them to have this broad range of knowledge. However, not all teacher leaders evaluate curricular programs; not all teacher leaders develop measurable school goals (school administrators do this), and not all teacher leaders coach teachers. In addition, for a teacher leader to become proficient in all of the 5 areas of study outlined in the regulations would take much more than the 4 courses that come through 12 credits, so this 'preparation' will only result in teacher leaders who have a knowledge base that's a mile wide and an inch deep. Districts have done much better training their teacher leaders over the years than the proposed 12 credits would do.

The proposed regulations also state that the certificate would be required of anyone employed by a board of education and holding a title that includes, but isn't limited to, "*teacher leader, team leader, content coach, curriculum specialist, or any other similar job title.*" The last phrase – "*any other similar job title*" – clearly is a catch-all phrase that allows the SDE to decide, at will, when a teacher would be required to hold this certificate. It allows the SDE to decide who is designated as a 'teacher leader' and who isn't. This is a responsibility districts have handled well over the years, and should continue to handle. The SDE shouldn't be empowered to dictate to districts what roles their teacher leaders can play and what preparation they should have to fill those

roles.

Teacher leadership is a concept that should be promoted, not regulated or licensed by the SDE. Districts, professional organizations, and teacher unions have been promoting teacher leadership for years; they understand what makes a teacher a leader, and what roles teacher leaders play. Any move toward offering a certificate that recognizes teachers as leaders should start with discussions with teachers who currently are in teacher leader roles and other educators they work with. Any resulting certificate should be optional for teachers to earn, and districts should be allowed to continue to train and employ teachers as leaders without having to play the game of giving them a title so they don't fall under state regulations that make no sense. I urge the State Board of Education to reject the proposed teacher leader certificate until these steps are taken.