

Remarks of Sherrie Horstmeyer
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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education
Concerning the proposed special education and literacy specialist certificates

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Good afternoon. My name is Sherrie Horstmeyer. I'm a fifth grade teacher in Canterbury, and I'd like to comment on the proposed special education and literacy specialist certificates and the expanded responsibilities of these educators that would come with the new certificate.

In a district as small as Canterbury, we rely on our special educators to support regular classroom teachers and the students with special needs who are in them. Each of our two special educators works with teachers and students in two grade levels. Because so much of their time is spent writing reports, attending PPTs, and doing testing, we often receive much less support in our classrooms than we need. Add to that the additional demands of SRBI on both regular and special education teachers, and our limited resources stretch even further the support our special education students receive.

My concerns relate to the expanded roles for both the special education and literacy specialists under the proposed certification regulations. Currently, our specialists focus as much of their time as possible working with students and teachers in their classrooms. The proposed regulations would expand those roles – for both special educators and reading teachers - to include a number of responsibilities for training and providing professional development for educators. Currently, these responsibilities are handled by the Director of Pupil Services and/or the school principal. Expanding the special educator's potential list of

responsibilities to include these, and others, raises concerns. Handling those responsibilities well takes time, but there is a limited amount of time in every day, week, and month. The more time our specialists would take to perform training and PD tasks, the less time they would spend providing direct service to students and support to teachers. Training and professional development are important, but cannot, and should not, take time from supporting students and teachers in their classrooms.

Additionally, not all teachers are effective trainers, nor do they want to be placed in that role. Being an effective trainer requires high-level skills, and the willingness to develop those skills. The proposed preparation program for both the special education and literacy specialists includes coaching as an area of study, but that's not how one learns to coach. New special education teachers, who have just completed a certification program, won't have the teaching experience and perspective to be effective trainers in the beginning of their careers. New literacy specialists, who will have some experience teaching, but won't necessarily have ever taught adults, will also need to 'settle in' to the position of literacy specialist before being able to be an effective trainer. All of that assumes, of course, that those teachers would want to be trainers of other educators. To try to force the issue is a mistake. Again, in a district as small as Canterbury, we can't afford to spend time being 'trained' by specialists who aren't ready to take on that role.

The proposed changes to special education and reading certifications need to be rethought. The added expense for a future teacher to earn a master's degree in special education will drive teachers from the profession. The resulting mandate that districts hire new teachers at the master's level would have severe repercussions for a district as small as

Canterbury, which is already stretched too thin financially. Because districts in CT range from being as small as Canterbury to being as large as an urban like Bridgeport or Stamford, the regulations that govern the roles educators play have to be flexible. Trying to create one level of certification that includes all the roles an educator could possibly play, and offers only one level of certification, won't serve small or large districts, teachers, and students well.