

Remarks of Gretchen Noonan  
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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education  
Concerning the proposed special education certificate

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Good afternoon. My name is Gretchen Noonan. I'm an elementary level special education teacher in Stonington, and I'd like to comment on the proposed preparation program for special educators.

This proposal incorporates 13 areas of study for a 30-credit program. Twelve credits are specified to be in two areas of study leaving 18 credits, which is 6 courses, to cover 11 different areas of study. This is simply too much to expect in one preparation program, no matter how much the program tries to mesh and embed skills and knowledge into those 6 courses. In addition, there is one critical area that appears to be missing.

It appears that specific coursework focused on the 13 areas of disability that fall under special education isn't included in the areas of study. Such a course would include, for example, what the 13 disabilities are, how each displays itself in a student, how a disability 'looks' when the student is in different school settings, and how a disability displays itself differently as the student grows and changes intellectually, socially, emotionally, and sometimes physically.

We might assume that study of the 13 disabilities is embedded in the other areas of study, but can we be sure of that? The first area of study listed is "*developmental reading in typical students;*" study of disabilities won't be embedded there. The next two areas of study are "*Using evidence-based instructional strategies, interventions, and assessments in literacy*

*and numeracy.*' I would assume that the focus here would be on how to use the strategies with students with different disabilities, but that doesn't necessarily teach the learner about the disabilities themselves. In the next area of study – "*Designing and implementing differentiated instruction, accommodations or modifications for students with learning challenges or identified disabilities*" – I would again assume that the focus would be on how to design and implement instruction for students with learning challenges, which again, is different from studying the disabilities themselves. Will this area of study even touch on all 13 disability areas? It's hard to say.

As I review the list of areas of study....

- Using curriculum-based and diagnostic assessment....
- Planning and developing individualized education programs (IEPs)....
- Identifying strategies and resources for collaboration....
- Developing strategies and skills to work with families....
- planning and implementing specialized services and instruction for students with intensive needs....
- Providing instructional leadership....
- Federal and state education laws....
- Developing measurable school goals....

....I have to ask myself how the State Department of Education expects a prospective special educator to learn about the 13 areas of disability without specific, focused study of those areas. The teacher simply can't learn the basics about the disabilities by embedding the study into the proposed program, especially since many of the topics don't easily lend themselves to such

blending. To learn how to modify instruction for students with various disabilities requires a special ed teacher to have a strong knowledge base about the disabilities themselves, which comes only through focused study about the disabilities.

This is one good example of why any proposed changes to special education certification should be discussed with practicing special education teachers, so the resulting program can reflect what new special educators really need to be prepared for working with students. The proposed special ed preparation program misses the mark.