

Remarks of Sara Schmidt
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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education concerning
proposed changes to certification in Special Education

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Good afternoon. My name is Sara Schmidt and I am a reading teacher in Killingly. I have taught in CT public schools for 24 years. I cannot remember a year when I did not have a working relationship with the grade level special education teacher. For the past four years I have taught in a 6th grade inclusion classroom in which I have partnered with the grade level special education teacher to meet the needs of our students. I have relied on his knowledge of students' disabilities and how to best modify the curricula to meet their needs. These four years have been very similar to the past 20 in terms of my relationships with my Special Education colleagues. They have been the sounding board when I have had difficulty reaching a student, regular or special education. They have helped me modify work, find alternative resources, and most importantly, understand and work with my students' individualities. I have worked with many Special Education teachers over the years. They have all been an invaluable resource, only one of them has had a master's in Special Education. Their undergraduate special ed. programs have served both me and my students well. I have to question whether or not the master's is necessary.

Trying to impose a requirement for a master's degree in special education in order to first become certified will drive teachers away from our profession. With the rising cost of a college education, we can't expect that those who want to teach special ed. will go directly from a bachelor's to a master's program. If those teachers teach another subject area for a few years, there's a good chance their interest in teaching special ed. will wane, and we'll lose them as potential special educators. Small, rural districts have enough difficulty attracting special educators due to lower salaries and more remote living areas. Having to hire at only the master's level will increase that difficulty, and our students will suffer the consequences. We cannot afford to lose qualified, dedicated teachers, especially in Special Education.