

Remarks of Linette Branham
Education Issues Specialist
Connecticut Education Association

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

April 27, 2010

Good afternoon. My name is Linette Branham. I'm an Education Issues Specialist at the CT Education Association, here to comment about the proposed teacher leader certificate.

The State Department of Education (SDE) has proposed a certificate for a teacher leader, which would be required of teachers holding a wide range of positions, some of which have not even been identified, and with a wide variety of responsibilities. It's a catch-all certificate required of teachers who spend more than 40% of their time in these positions. CEA believes in teacher leadership.....we promote and support the concept in many ways through our work with teachers. But we also believe that it is very premature for the State Board of Education (SBE) to adopt a teacher leader certificate for 3 primary reasons, outlined here.

1. There is no solid basis on which the certificate is built. At the January SBE meeting, the

SDE stated the following :

"...there's a consortium of 5 states that has already implemented this endorsement, formal training, and there are national standards in this area..... what ETS has done with this consortium of 5 states is, indeed, create a performance assessment around teacher leadership."

CEA has confirmed three points with ETS that directly counter that statement: (1) there is no 'formal training' available through the work of that consortium for CT educators to participate in; (2) there are no national standards for teacher leaders; and (3) ETS has not created a performance assessment for teacher leaders. While there are a few states, such

as Kansas and Ohio, that have teacher leader endorsements, those are optional endorsements, not required, as the CT SDE has proposed. Where might this idea that there are national standards, formal training, and a performance assessment for teacher leaders have come from? Perhaps the following: In 2009 five states – Kansas, Ohio, Delaware, Alabama, and Kentucky – worked through the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) with funding from the Wallace Foundation to develop courses that institutions of higher education (IHEs) might use to train teachers as teacher leaders. The end result of this endeavor is a series of courses for interested institutions of higher education within these five states to utilize. To think of this as ‘formal training’ available on a nation-wide basis is unrealistic. ETS was **not** involved in this endeavor in any way. Last year ETS began an exploratory initiative to delve into the area of teacher leadership. After working with a small group that included national organizations, teachers, principals, and some IHEs, the group decided to expand, and is currently working on a set of model standards for teacher leaders. The intention is that these standards would be a *starting point* from which states could develop their own set of teacher leader standards, **not** that these would be ‘national’ standards. In essence, there are **no national standards** for teacher leaders. On the final point regarding a performance assessment: ETS has confirmed that they have *facilitated the work* of a group of teachers, administrators, and higher education institutions in Kansas to develop their own performance assessment for the optional teacher leader certificate. That assessment is being piloted this spring, and is based on the teacher leader standards that Kansas has developed for their own use. Neither the standards nor the assessment are meant to be deemed as ‘national’ documents. ETS has pointed out that their role is to

facilitate the work of states that want to develop any assessment of educator practice, **not** to develop the assessment for them. ETS assures that the process educators use is reliable, valid, and fair; the educators themselves develop the assessment based on their state standards.

2. The SDE ignored the recommendation of its own 2008 certification review committee.

When presented with the SDE proposal for the teacher leader certificate, this committee clearly stated that this was unnecessary. Districts have trained their teacher leaders to have the skills and knowledge they need for the positions the district assigns them to. The proposed preparation may not fit the district needs, and may, in fact, limit districts' ability to continue to train their own teacher leaders. Teachers and/or districts will be reluctant to pay for university courses, or PD programs, and spend the time to complete them, if the content of those programs doesn't match what the district needs. There was no discussion among this committee about the roles and responsibilities of teacher leaders, what preparation they need, and whether or not that should or could come through a more general pathway. Instead of taking the advice of the committee and not pursuing this certificate, the SDE has continued to push for its adoption.

3. The SDE has shown a lack of respect for the concept of 'teacher leadership' by not initiating discussions about the topic with teacher leaders themselves. The SDE has followed the traditional route to creating change, using a top-down model, when the concept of teacher leadership *advocates the opposite*. This disregards the experience and knowledge teacher leaders can bring to the table to create change. It presumes that those who create policy know what's best for those who implement practice.

How does this all compare to the proposed teacher leader certificate and CT's readiness for it? Obviously, CT has a long way to go. The SDE has proposed the adoption of a teacher leader certificate based on national standards that don't exist, an option to pass a performance assessment that doesn't exist, and a set of preparation pathways that have yet to be aligned to the non-existent standards. This is putting the cart before the horse.

We need to take several steps before talking about a possible teacher leader certificate: (1) gather information about what roles and responsibilities teacher leaders currently play in CT, and how these might change in the future; (2) determine, from this, the preparation teacher leaders might need, and how they might best be prepared for their roles; (3) study the work that other states are doing; (4) study the model teacher leader standards being developed by the ETS/NEA work group; and most importantly, (5) include teacher leaders in CT in all of these processes, and any design of a teacher leader certificate. Once we do this, we'll have a solid base from which to move forward, if deemed appropriate for our state.

Does CEA want to move forward and work with the SDE and other educators to promote teacher leadership? Of course we do. But we can't do it by supporting the proposed teacher leader certificate, since we strongly disagree with what has been proposed. We believe the State Board of Education should not adopt the current proposal, and should direct the SDE to work with CEA and a small group of other key educators to take the steps outlined above.

Rather than push meaningless change through quickly, we'd urge the SBE to do it right, with the result of change that will better serve teachers and students.