

Remarks of Heidi Degree
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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 Heidi Degree and I am a special education teacher in Region #4 (Chester, Deep River and Essex). I have been a special education teacher for 23 years. My daughter, Laura has also decided to become a special education teacher.

She has a bachelor's degree in History from the University of Connecticut. She applied and was accepted into the graduate school at Southern CT State University. She was exempt from the Praxis I test due to her high SAT scores. She is in the process of taking the 30 graduate credits in special education. She will student teach for 12 weeks this fall in two separate locations so that she has a diverse experience. She will take the Praxis II in which she will demonstrate her specific knowledge in the discipline of Special Education. If she is fortunate enough to get a teaching position as soon as she graduates, she will teach for three years before these proposals come into place. And yet, according to these proposals, she may not be able to retain her certificate to teach in CT because she will not have held a certificate in another subject area, and her current preparation program does not include all of the required areas of study under the proposed regulations. I find it unbelievable that after six plus years of

college, she will face additional requirements if she wants to be certified in the state of CT.

Special Education is a shortage area in the state. Elementary Education is not. In my district this year, we have seven openings in elementary education across our towns. We received 450 applications for these jobs. And many, many school systems in Connecticut are facing job cuts. Where are the future special education teachers going to find their general education experience so that they can finally become special education teachers? .

I have been active in the mentoring system in the state of CT in special education for many years and I know many special education teachers across the state. It is my experience that special education teachers are proud and of their field, the students that they work with and knowledge in their discipline of working with children with special needs. They work in the regular education classroom along side general education teachers but they are not general education teachers who have decided to do something else. Their field is special education. Special education is their niche, their place in teaching, their love and vocation. As an experienced special educator, I know that the most important thing a teacher brings to our field – the knowledge of special education and how to work with students with special needs – can be effectively gained through a well-designed program at the bachelor's level. I hope you'll listen to what special educators say about this issue, retain certification at

the bachelor's level, and work with us to change certification so it will help future teachers work more effectively with students. Thank you.