

Remarks of Nancy Wilcox

Special Education Teacher

Naugatuck High School, Naugatuck, CT

Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education

Concerning the proposed changes to certification in Special Education

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Good Afternoon. My name is Nancy Wilcox and I am a special education teacher in Naugatuck, CT. I am writing to address the proposed changes to special education teacher certification in Connecticut. Currently a special education teacher with K-12 certification in special education, K-8 certification in regular education, and HOUSSE certification in high school reading and math, I hold a BS in special education from CCSU and 30 graduate credits from SCSU and the University of Bridgeport, also in special education and school psychology. When the legislation was first proposed, I looked into a Master's in special education. I already had all the courses. I was accepted into a graduate level program at Sacred Heart University for the 092 certification, but was unable to proceed because I did not have a Master's degree. I am currently working on a Master's in Educational Leadership. The funding for all of these courses is and continues to be supplied by me. I was not reimbursed by any school system. I put myself through college and graduate school, supported two children financially through University of Hartford and University of Connecticut, and I am now paying for a master's degree of my own. I have 28 years of teaching

experience at levels K-12 and have been a full time teacher for the past 20 consecutive years. Retirement is not in my near future. I do not wish to retire, I am not old enough to retire, and cannot financially afford to retire in the next eight to ten years.

I have had extensive coursework and experience in all special education disability categories, diagnostic testing (both standardized and informal), curriculum modification, reading, and developmental and educational psychology. As part of my job description, I am required to set up and run Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, conduct educational evaluations and explain them, write IEPs, and collect data. I have continued to update these areas of expertise with CEU credits. In the past five years, I accrued almost 200 CEU credits. I served as a Master Mentor under the BEST program and I have been scorer for special education under NBPTS. Under the proposed legislation, I would not qualify as a specialist because I do not hold a degree in a subject area even though I have dual certification. I student taught three times, twice in special education and once in regular education. I would not longer be qualified to do the job I have already been doing under the proposed legislation.

The legislation states that the role of the special education teacher will be expanded. I currently assist students with regular education content and understanding, provide direct instruction in academic and study skills, self-advocacy, and transition services, and teach all subject areas including reading, English, math, science, social studies, and health. I conduct educational evaluations and data analysis. I have done this at all

levels, K-12. I do understand that special education teachers are becoming involved in SRBI under regular education. I also currently co-teach a literacy class with a reading specialist and a geometry class with a math teacher. I have been involved in pilot programs and subsequently worked in after school sessions in mathematics. I also supervise paraprofessionals working in regular education classrooms with special education students. I understand the implications of NCLB on inclusive education, but feel that special education under IDEA will still exist. I do not feel that a master's in special education will qualify a regular education teacher to address the needs of special education students in totality. Our roles may be evolving, but all the reason more to keep bachelor's level dual certification as the standard.

The legislation should keep the current bachelor's level certification in tact but require dual certification, which could be in a particular subject area. The legislation, if changed, should include a grandfather clause for anyone currently certified under special education and continue to require a master's or 30 graduate level credits in special education. Completed CEU units could also be included as a provision. The legislation should not require additional praxis testing for subject areas if HOURSSE experience or practical experience qualifies a teacher to teach the subject area. I am currently both a special education teacher AND a special education specialist, assisting regular education teachers and supervising paraprofessionals in classrooms. Therefore, there is no need for two levels of certification. Thank you.