

Remarks of Ann Cavanaugh Grosjean, PhD  
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Before the State Department of Education and State Board of Education  
concerning proposed changes to certification in Special Education

April 12, 2010

Good afternoon Madame Assistant Commissioner, Members of the State Board of Education and Members of the State Department of Education. My name is Ann Cavanaugh Grosjean and I am the parent of two daughters who receive special education services and a first grade teacher with three special education students included in my class. I am testifying in opposition to the new proposed special education certificate. The special education teachers are crucial to the success of the inclusion of special education children in our classrooms and in guaranteeing that all children are able to succeed to the best of their abilities. My three special needs students could not be in my classroom daily if it were not for the close collaboration I have with the two special educators (and speech therapist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, music therapist, psychologist, and the Board of Education Services for the Blind!). We are already experiencing a teacher shortage in the area of special education, and requiring special educators to have a master's degree will increase that shortage. At the very least, special educators with a BA in special education should be grandfathered. It is not fair to change the requirement for

teachers or current special education college students who have chosen a career path by requiring them to spend the money and time to earn an extra 30 credits, often beyond their master's, to retain their certification. Fewer teachers will therefore choose special education and the shortage will increase even more.

Special Education encompasses many exceptionalities and the teachers require vast training and experience to work successfully with students with different disabilities. Each student requires an IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) developed by the PPT (Planning and Placement Team). These are just a few of the complex terms and processes the special educator must be familiar with to test, write reports, develop, implement and evaluate plans and to consult with the classroom teacher to successfully include the students in our classrooms.

There are thousands of special educators in CT who do this each day with both bachelors and masters degrees. We would be doing a huge disservice to special education in our state to eliminate even one of these teachers because they do not hold a master's in special education.

I am very thankful for the many special educators who have supported my daughters, who I adopted from Romania as babies, in their educations. Starting with the Birth to Three program, difficulty with early reading, and then test taking in high school, each special educator at each level knew just how to help them. It takes a team and each team is as individualized as each child. Special

Educators also do a very different job in preschool, elementary, middle and high school and the post-high school to age 21 program, and their training needs to reflect this. We need to find ways to support and increase the number of special educators to meet the needs of our many special needs students in Connecticut; not make it more difficult for them and make the field less inviting. Perhaps you could consider having two levels of certification: special education teacher (BA); and special education specialist (MA); and involve special educators who currently teach at different levels and in different environments, to determine required educational levels and to design responsibilities covered by each level of certification. Whatever is decided, it is crucial to grandfather certification for those special education teachers currently certified. Thank you for your attention.

Respectfully submitted,

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