

Remarks of Beth Horler  
parent  
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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 Beth Horler and I'm a teacher in Groton Public Schools. More importantly, I am a parent of two children who attend Ledyard Public Schools with my oldest child being a special needs child. He has attended special education programs in both Groton and Ledyard since he was 4 years old. I believe I offer a unique insight about special education certification being both a teacher and a parent.

My son's diagnosis has been what I affectionately call alphabet soup. He has CAP-D (central auditory processing disorder), sensory defensiveness, ADD, temperature control issues, language impairment in both receptive and expressive domains, LD and has been placed on and off the autism spectrum three times now. Currently, he is back on the spectrum as PDD-NOS (Pervasive Development Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified). Our journey has been a long one and I am proud to say that my son will graduate, on time, this June. He will continue on to a tech school in the fall. This is a far cry from the first doctor who diagnosed my child and advised that we should start looking for institutions and group homes for MY child. Needless to say, that advice wasn't taken and I began utilizing the expertise of the school system.

My son's teachers have uncovered ways to reach him and tap into learning styles that aren't found in theory class. My son isn't a text book case study; my son is a human being. He is a living breathing young man who is unique just as you and I are. My son

has gone from a child who could not sit still for 7 seconds to a young man who is on the honor roll. He and children like him deserve a teacher who is prepared not just with course work but actual hands on experience. His teachers have their bachelor's degrees in special education. I believe this should still be the requirement. The course work, field experience, and most importantly student teaching are a key pieces for future educators to be sure this field is where they want to be in. I believe the student teaching requirement is the key. Teaching candidates need to experience the real classroom and student situations for many reasons. The primary one is a reality check. Like I have said before, textbook learning is one thing, but a hand on experience is the reality. I would rather a potential teacher, especially a special education teacher; work side by side with an experienced teacher to find out if this is the field for them. Once again, these are real children they are teaching – real children, with real needs. In the classroom, a potential teacher can see the reality of children having a meltdown, being disengaged, or one of the myriad of things that happen that never appear in a textbook. In fact, I believe that special education teachers should have two student teaching experiences. There are such a wide range of disabilities. Special education teacher candidates should have multiple experiences in different settings which would enhance their ability to reach more children. Waiting until the master's degree level to delve into the wide range of disabilities and how to reach those children without practical experience will severely limit our children's future learning. My child had access to wonderful teachers who I often refer to as 'my son's miracle workers'; all special needs children deserve the same. Please do not make getting certified as a special education

teacher onerous – please remember that these teachers are keys in the lives of living,  
breathing children who are the most vulnerable in our society.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you today.