

Remarks of Robert J. Slajda  
English Teacher, Coventry High School  
President, Education Association of Coventry

Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education concerning  
proposed changes to certification in Special Education and Teacher Leader

April 12, 2010

Good afternoon, my name is Robert Slajda and I am an English Teacher in Coventry.

As a local president, I am often in conversations about how to save teaching jobs and save student services in this economy. Raising the initial certification requirement for special education to a master's and then requiring course work to become a professional educator will cost real money for school districts. This will lead to fewer teachers being hired and therefore fewer services for students.

I have also been a cooperating and mentor teacher under the BEST program. New teachers need classroom experience before deciding if they are truly 'cut out' for teaching. "Many are called but few are chosen" applies to more than just the clergy. Good special educators are both called and chosen. You would now be asking more of an investment from beginning teacher before they can be in the classroom and decide if it is for them. Requiring a master's immediately, determines what area they will stay in before they truly discover where they are gifted.

In this economy, this is simply a bad idea. It raises the required investment of the new teacher in their education. It raises the required investment from the Local Education Associations in their new teachers. Unless you can provide the funding for this, it becomes an unwanted economic burden during an economic downturn.

On a personal note, I can be sympathetic to new teachers. I was the first in my family to graduate from college, and I did this with my sweat and a considerable debt. I emerged from college into the economic downturn of the 70's when teaching openings were rare. The current economy and employment situation is very similar to the situation. By raising the bar, you will bar those whose achievements could inspire their students.

Please find some sympathy for new teachers who wish to be special educators.

One recent positive development for veteran teachers has been the increasing use of their experience to train new teachers and shape curriculum. The proposed teacher leader certification would inhibit this.

For example, in my small district, several team leaders and department chairs have been freed from a class assignment to work on a major curriculum project for several years. It is nearly complete and these teachers will be returning to their classrooms or

retiring. It has provided a neat capstone to their careers and a cost effective curriculum project for the district. This has been a win-win situation.

With their supervisory and curriculum responsibilities, they have been spending slightly more than 40% of their time outside of their classroom. The proposed certification change would have made this impossible. This proposed change stifles innovation and increases costs. It is simply unnecessary.