

Sue Sumberg testimony

As a literacy coach in the Bloomfield public schools, I have read with interest and great concern the proposal for a Teacher Leader certificate that would be required of teachers like me who work to model and plan lessons with teachers, observe and support their efforts to try new strategies in the classroom, and provide professional development for teachers. My understanding is that no teacher who currently holds such a position would be grandfathered; we would all be required to earn an additional 12 graduate credits in order to be issued the certificate and retain our positions. Being able to go through a pre-approved 180-hour professional development program is, in essence, the equivalent of 12 graduate credits, so my remarks about the 12 credits also pertain to the alternative professional development. Future teacher leaders would be required to earn the 12 credits in areas the State Department of Education has deemed 'necessary study' for all.

This makes no sense. Let me start first with teachers currently working in teacher leader positions. To say that as of July 1, 2014, we're suddenly not qualified to do our jobs, which many of us have been doing for years, is an insult. Teachers in our positions have been carefully selected by our districts to take on these roles, and supported through ongoing professional development. We've become stronger leaders because we *are* leaders, using our leadership skills every day, in a variety of situations. We couldn't *do* our jobs effectively if we didn't already know how adults learn, how to coach, how to promote collaborative practice, and what best practices are in our fields. Requiring us to take 12 additional credits assumes that we know nothing about these topics; the SDE is wrong in this assumption. In addition, what our districts want and need us to be knowledgeable about and skilled in is what matters most, as teacher leader responsibilities vary widely from one district to another. There is no 'typical' teacher leader, and to impose a one-size-fits-all model of preparation is inappropriate.

Future teacher leaders will also be in the same position we're in now. They, too, will be carefully selected and trained by their districts so their knowledge base and skill set matches what the district needs. Not every teacher leader may need to know how to "develop measurable school goals," or "monitor implementation and evaluation of curricular programs." Whether or not they need to know these things will depend on what role they play in their districts. Requiring future teacher leaders to take 12 credits in areas the SDE has deemed necessary assumes that districts can't or don't provide appropriate training for leaders. Nothing could be further from the truth. Often, the most valuable teacher leader training takes place on the job, as the teacher leader learns from working with other district leaders, attending professional development with them, and then using that knowledge and skill in their daily tasks.

Requiring the certificate, rather than making it voluntary, also limits the ability of districts to recruit and train future leaders according to district needs. Few, if any, teachers will spend the time, money, and effort to take courses for a certificate if they'll also have to participate in training the district will require for them to hold a leadership position. There just isn't enough time to do it all. Districts certainly won't want to pay for the coursework the certificate would

require. Teachers who *already have* a master's degree will be a lot less likely to want to move into leadership roles if they will be required to pay thousands of dollars for another 12 credits. Teachers who *have yet to earn* a master's degree will be less likely to want to move into leadership roles if they have to take courses for graduate credit that wouldn't fit into the master's program of their choice. Overall, districts, schools, and students will lose the talents teacher leaders could bring to leadership positions.

The proposed Teacher Leader certificate obviously hasn't been well thought out. Rather than push this through, the SDE should speak with teachers who are in a wide variety of leadership positions to learn more about the roles and responsibilities they play in their schools and districts. They should then use that information to help districts *support* leadership roles, as the districts see appropriate, rather than impose additional, unnecessary restrictions.