

Remarks of Susan J. Brooks
Science Teacher
Wamogo Middle/High School, Region 6 School District

Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education concerning proposed changes to certification in Literacy Specialist

April 27, 2010

Good afternoon. My name is Susan Brooks and I teach in Region Six. As a middle school and high school science teacher, my own certification is not affected by any of the changes currently proposed by the Connecticut State Board of Education. However, my ability to work productively with my students will be affected by each of these ill-advised proposals. I will let those who are more directly involved as special educators, teacher-leaders, and teachers and consultants of literacy comment on the specific details in each proposal.

I do feel compelled, however, to comment on one of the rationales given for combining the certificate for remedial reading and language arts teacher and the certificate for reading and language arts consultant into a single certificate. At the State Board of Education meeting in January, the certification bureau chief justified this proposal with the statement that, "administrators don't understand the difference between them, and use educators interchangeably."

By way of analogy, my students struggle to understand the difference between "mass" (the amount of matter in an object) and "weight" (the force of gravity acting on that object), and they use the terms interchangeably. Does that mean I should just combine them into one term ("wass" or "meight" perhaps???) and forget about the important applications that

require knowledge of the differences between the two? Of course not! My job is to find a way to help my students understand the differences, so they can correctly apply their understanding to further learning.

If administrators do not understand the differences between literacy teachers and consultants, it should be the job of the State Department of Education to find a way to help them understand the differences. As outlined in the counter-proposal from the CEA, there are separate and distinct roles for literacy teachers and specialists. Combining the two certificates into one will not serve the educators like me, who rely on the expertise of teachers to remediate our students in the single most important skill needed to function in our classrooms. More importantly, it will not serve our students, who will need that skill to function in an information-driven world.

From my perspective as a science teacher with 15 years of experience, reading teachers and special educators, with the expanded roles proposed by the State Department of Education would have significantly less time to work directly with students and provide support to classroom teachers. As a direct result of this reduction in contact time with professionals specifically trained to deal with learning differences, some of my science students will be deficient in the literacy skills needed for careers in science and will choose other career paths. Our country will see a reduction in the pool of capable candidates for important jobs in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, commonly known as "STEM." President Obama has recognized the urgency in improving STEM education and stated in a

November 2009 press release, “Reaffirming and strengthening America’s role as the world’s engine of scientific discovery and technological innovation is essential to meeting the challenges of this century....That’s why I am committed to making the improvement of STEM education over the next decade a national priority.” The certification changes proposed by the Connecticut State Department of Education will impede, rather than augment such improvements in STEM education.

Please do not combine the two existing reading certificates into one. We need literacy teachers who are trained for and dedicated to working with students, and we need literacy specialists who are trained for and dedicated to working with teachers and administrators, to be sure that our students leave our care with the ability and love of reading. The proposed changes in certification will have ripple effects throughout our national education system that I believe will negatively impact the learning of all students. Thank you.