

Remarks of Mary Loftus Levine
Director, Policy & Professional Practice
Connecticut Education Association

Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education
Concerning the proposed certification changes

April 27, 2010

Good afternoon. My name is Mary Loftus Levine, and I'm the Director of Policy and Professional Practice at the CT Education Association. Over the past two years, we at CEA have had numerous meetings and participated in many forums held by the State Dept. of Education to create a robust proposal on special education certification.

Today is the 4th of five hearings across Connecticut. Hundreds of our members have shared their perspectives on this and other proposals. Last Spring, we went out and talked to teachers in focus groups across CT. We heard the same concerns that have been stated over and over at these hearings. But as the policy department, we did not stop there. We wanted to be absolutely certain that we were on firm ground and in our quest to develop an alternative proposal, we commissioned Abacus Associates, a well respected, Massachusetts-based, independent public opinion and strategic research firm to conduct a survey of 350

randomly selected special educators in CT. Our goal is not to just say no—but to ask our members, “What are you for?”

The Abacus survey revealed several points supported first by our focus groups, and now again in these hearings, in written testimony and comments submitted to you at the SDE. Here are some facts based on the data we collected:

1. Almost 2/3 of those surveyed do not believe a special education teacher should be required to first hold a certificate in something else to be effective and successful.
2. 78 percent believe that a special education bachelor’s level degree program should require two student teaching experiences—one in a co-teaching classroom and one in special education.
3. Because almost 2/3 support two level of special education certification, that is why CEA is here to advocate for that model.
4. Lastly, within the one third supporting a single master’s level special education certificate, the survey results showed they did not agree with the components of the SDE model.

In addition, this survey was done prior to and without our members knowing what the specific proposed regulations would look like. So, if one considers the data of the survey, the comments, the testimony, the hundreds of teachers who have attended these hearings to show their support, and the written remarks, we can only come to one conclusion: Those in the field, who now have an even clearer picture of the special education proposed change, would like to see the Department rethink this proposal so teachers can be more prepared and better qualified to serve the students they teach each day. Thank you.