

Remarks of Lynn Rice Scozzafava
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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 Lynn Rice Scozzafava and I am a Language Arts teacher in Litchfield. In my sixteen years of teaching at Litchfield High School, I have come to depend heavily on the Special Education teachers with whom I work every day. They are consummate professionals with much practice in dealing with our students, teachers, parents, and administrators; their many and varied responsibilities include assisting students with every subject, from biology to culinary arts, collaborating with regular education teachers to accommodate students with mild to severe disabilities, connecting sometimes daily with our students' parents, and attending PPTs, developing and maintaining IEPs, and coordinating services and opportunities outside of the school environment.

I am concerned with several details of the State Department of Education's proposal for Special Education certification, but I will address only two of my concerns here. My first thoughts concern the revocation of the student teaching experience. Across the board, my teaching colleagues chose this vocation with

one primary goal: to work with children. My special education colleagues chose to teach students with disabilities, and their desire to do so was affirmed by their student teaching experiences, where direct contact with students with special needs proved both challenging and rewarding. I cannot imagine entering any classroom without the solid experience of working directly with students. This idea to eliminate student teaching stands in direct contrast to all educational theory (and practice) that suggest that teachers' direct contact time with students matters greatly to student progress. In addition, to certify a special education teacher to train classroom teachers, without having any classroom experience him or herself, is a recipe for professional disaster. I concur with CEA's proposal, based on conversations with current teachers, to encourage a dual student-teaching experience, including co-teaching with a regular education teacher. Only through student teaching will a future teacher know for sure he or she has chosen the right path. Only through student teaching will a future teacher gain invaluable hands-on experience with students. And only through student teaching will that future teacher's professors and mentors be able to guide him or her to improvement and recognize his or her good work.

The other concern I would like to address today is the level of certification the SDE is proposing for Special Education. To eliminate certification at the

Bachelor's level is foolhardy. Even for people who desire to work with children, the proposed requirements for Special Education certification are daunting. If I were entering teaching again, and wanted to teach Special Education, I would be faced with more than four years of school at a much greater cost than my peers just to receive my initial certificate. Add to this inequity between teaching paths the lack of a student teaching experience, and I would be extraordinarily hesitant to sign on to this program. How would I pay for the required Masters degree? How much training in Special Ed. would I get in the preparation program? And how could I be sure I'd chosen the right career (after five or six years) without any classroom student teaching experience?

The State Department of Education's proposals for changes to Special Education certification could very easily lead to a greater shortage of Special Education teachers in Connecticut. Because of the demands and requirements of a program that far exceed those of regular education concentrations and certifications, those who want to teach could be less inclined to choose Special Education. And in these times of increased accountability, no one wants to see our students deprived of the programs and educators they so rightly deserve. I thank you for the time to speak with you today, and I urge you to consider the many repercussions of the SDE's proposals. Thank you.