

Remarks of Melissa Stevenson

Literacy Support Teacher

East School, Torrington, CT

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

April 27, 2010

Good afternoon, my name is Melissa Stevenson and I am a Literacy Support teacher at an elementary school in Torrington. There are hundreds of teachers across our state, like me, who offer early intervention services for students. Our districts have trained us and chosen us because they feel we are qualified to do the job. Some of us may have our elementary education certificate, others a remedial reading certificate or a literacy specialist certificate. In any case, our districts have decided that based on our training and experience, we are able to meet the demands of the specific challenges we face.

First, I hope that districts will continue to be permitted to decide which staff members are best suited for which positions. By not allowing those of us with our elementary certificate, in particular, to continue to offer extra support is doing a huge disservice to the children. In many cases, we were first classroom teachers. We bring a valuable perspective to our literacy positions which should

be respected. Part of our job is to also collaborate with classroom teachers and offer suggestions as to how to best meet the needs of our students in a whole group setting. This can best be done by having had personal experience in the classroom.

If the State does deem it necessary to rework the 097 and 102 certificates, it would make the most sense to keep it as two different certificates. The certificate proposed by the State Department of Education is much too broad, in my opinion. It isn't necessary for someone who is offering extra support for young readers to also be trained in all areas suggested by the state. When the specific graduate courses are considered, there is much too much for one person to be able to do and do well. The course study includes all grades (pre-k through 12th) and all areas, including children with learning disabilities, English as a second language, reading in the content areas and technology. I don't think it is realistic to expect any one person to be an expert in all of these areas, even within one school level, never mind across 14 grade levels. When courses that have to do with adults are also factored in, such as Instructional Leadership, one has to wonder how anyone would ever be effective in their job.

On a personal level, if I have to go back and take specific classes it will devastate my family financially. I also have young children and do not have the time and energy it would take to complete these courses. I got my Master's Degree in Reading and Language Arts, as well as my Reading Recovery Certification, prior to starting my family. I knew that I would not have the time or money to do it while raising my own children. I have given up my classroom position to take on my Literacy Support position. If there are not any classroom openings, I am not sure where that would leave me. I have been doing my job well, and I implore you to not send me back to school so I can have a piece of paper that says I am qualified to do what I have already been doing well for several years.

Thank you for your time.