

Remarks of Phil Apruzzese
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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education
Concerning the proposed changes to certification

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Good afternoon. My name is Phil Apruzzese and I'm a 5th grade teacher and president of the Connecticut Education Association.

Changing the requirements of teacher certification is serious business, and as Allan Taylor, chair of the State Board of Education has said, rather than do it quickly, it's more important that it be done right. It was also stated at the January State Board of Education meeting that the State Department of Education (SDE) wants to work with CEA and AFT so that the proposed regulations are something we can live with. Since last fall, the proposals have moved through the process quickly, but have not resulted in a product we can all live with.

One of the most significant impacts of the proposed certification changes will be financial in nature. The financial impact has the potential to drive teachers away from the areas of special education, literacy, and teacher leadership. Let me explain in cold hard numbers, by way of 3 very plausible scenarios.

Susan Jones is an undergraduate student at one of our state universities. She has 2 areas of great interest: biology and special education. She thinks that, if she pursues special education, she'll get her undergraduate degree and initial

certification in special education, then a master's degree in either reading or special education, with a focus on autism. If she pursues biology, she'll consider a teaching certificate for the secondary level, but also look at other careers in which she would use that interest and knowledge. The SDE is proposing that, in order to become certified as a special ed teacher, Susan would have to earn a certificate in *any other* subject area first, then earn her master's degree in special ed before she can get her initial certificate in special ed. Since Susan is putting herself through school, she investigates the cost, and based on current prices, estimates that the cost to become a special educator will range from approximately \$13,000 to \$19,000 *beyond her bachelor's degree*. To pursue her full plan for an advanced degree in either reading or a specialized area of special education, she would have to earn either another master's degree, or a 6th year certificate, which would add a minimum of another \$15,000 - \$20,000 to the cost. She decides it's more than she can handle, considering the student loans she has to repay for her undergraduate education. Instead, she chooses biology as a major and plans for a different career.

Ben Johnson is a high school English teacher, who is interested in earning his master's degree in an area in which he can also earn another teaching endorsement. He considers reading and literacy.....until he looks at the cost to

earn his initial certificate. The 30-credit master's program will cost him between \$13,000 and \$19,000, based on current graduate credit costs. The proposed regulations would also require that he take a course in children's literature (which would cost between \$1,200 and \$1,800), a course in curriculum development (which would also cost between \$1,200 and \$1,800), and a course in adolescent literature, which he's already had at the undergraduate level, so wouldn't have to take again. After spending a minimum cost between \$15,400 and \$22,600, beyond his bachelor's degree, he would be able to apply for his initial certificate as a literacy specialist. However, he then realizes that, in order to earn the professional level of certificate as a literacy specialist, under the SDE proposal, he would have to earn another 12 credits, at a cost ranging from \$4,656 to \$7,140. This amounts to 18 credits *beyond* his master's degree, an additional cost ranging from \$6,966 to \$10,710. On the other hand, if he earned his master's degree in another content area, such as social studies or school library media, he could also earn another endorsement, without the additional cost of the 18 credits beyond the master's degree he'd have to take for the literacy specialist certificate.

Tanya Minor is a math specialist in her elementary school. She holds an elementary education certificate, and a bachelor's and a master's degree in math education. She taught full time for 17 years in the classroom, teaching a variety

of grades K-8. Recognizing her expertise in math, and her excellence as a teacher, her school district has placed her in an assignment for the past 6 years in which she works 100% of her time outside the regular classroom. In her position, she works in classrooms with other teachers to help them refine their skills for teaching math, and to implement the district math program. Tanya also provides early intervention to students on a short-term basis when they struggle to understand new concepts and just need a bit more help. The district has invested time and money to send Tanya to a variety of conferences, workshops, and in-depth training programs that enhance her ability to do her job. However, the district has just heard that the SDE has proposed a 'teacher leader' certificate that Tanya would be required to hold in order to remain in her position. Tanya would have to take 12 credits in a variety of areas of study specified by the SDE to earn the certificate. The cost, based on current graduate credit cost, would range between \$4,644 and \$7,140 (not including other university fees), even though the coursework doesn't necessarily match the skills the district wants Tanya to maintain or develop. Tanya has a child about to enter college and can't afford the additional cost of the 12 credits, especially since her husband was recently laid off from his job. The district can't afford, either, to pay the \$42,000 - \$64,260 cost

for Tanya and the other 8 math specialists in other schools to go back and earn the 12 additional credits.

When we consider the sheer cost in dollars that teachers would be required to pay to earn certificates that CEA believes are not well designed, it's understandable that teachers will turn away from earning endorsements in the areas of special education, literacy specialist, and teacher leadership. Rather than impose requirements that discourage teachers from pursuing certification, we need to design certificates based on roles and responsibilities that make sense, and enable teachers to earn a certificate at a level that is financially feasible. Until we do that, the roads to certification won't be something we can all live with.