

**COOPERATIVE
EDUCATIONAL
SERVICES**

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April 5, 2010

Georgette Nemr
Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification
P.O. Box 150471 – Room 243
Hartford, CT 06115-0471

Dear Ms. Nemr:

As the Director of Special Education for Cooperative Educational Services, one of the six Regional Education Service Centers in the State, I have concern about the proposed certification changes, particularly those that limit the ability to hire any teacher at the Bachelor's level for self-contained special education classrooms. As you know, there are students with significant disabilities that require placement options outside of their public schools. This small but very needy portion of the special education population generally requires highly structured, self-contained classrooms that specialize in specific disability areas. This is anticipated in federal statute (IDEA) with a requirement that a continuum of services be available for students with disabilities. In fact, in its comments on the education of students with disabilities, the CT State Board's position statement on the Education of Students with Disabilities states that "the Board presumes that these goals are best achieved in the child's local school, although it recognizes that some children who present significant and/or unique needs require placement in alternate settings to achieve those goals".

This need is in spite of the efforts made and interventions/supports provided students within their local schools and districts. These separate/segregated settings require teachers who have very special skills as well as a strong commitment/dedication to deal with students with rather challenging behavioral and developmental needs. This commitment and skill generally grows over time via direct experiences with these students.

While on first appearance one might say that this need would require staff to have their Master's Degree as is currently proposed in the new certification regulations, my 30+ years of experience here at C.E.S. tells me differently. I have seen a great many individuals grow into superb teachers because they worked in settings like ours prior to and just after getting their Bachelor's Degree in Special Education. The acquisition of their Master's Degree is secondary to their commitment and experience.

The present proposed certification regulations will impede the ability of educational systems like C.E.S. to hire BA level staff for their self-contained classrooms. It will also call for the elimination of the present K-12 special education endorsement at the Bachelor's level. Despite a Master's track being available for individuals seeking to focus on a career in special education, the elimination of the BA level endorsement may further add to the existing shortage of personnel seeking to work in settings like ours.

Although a desired goal may be to have all students educated in the most inclusive placement option, the reality is that some of the students with significant disabilities will necessitate a self-contained option with staff who are dedicated to their specialized instructional needs. This takes, from my extensive experience,

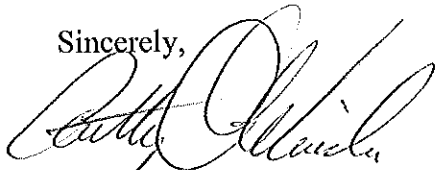
professional nurturing that often begins with student teaching experiences and initial beginning teaching experiences at the BA level, an option that will be eliminated in the current certification proposal.

As has been previously indicated, 60% of our new hires in recent school years have their Bachelor's Degree from Connecticut or out-of-state colleges/universities. Frequently, many of these staff have spent an appreciable amount of time working for us as non-certified staff or student teachers in our RESC special education programs, a career pathway that will not be very attractive to them if they are unable to secure positions in such settings after completing their initial Bachelor's level training as teachers.

Faced with an already difficult time finding teachers due to a shortage of Special Education personnel, the primary concern about the proposed certification changes will only further contribute to this problem. The intent of the newly proposed changes should be to respond to existing concerns not add to them. The shortage of special education personnel for specialized settings like ours has been well documented in recent years and despite this evidence a change is being proposed that will only make it far more complex to develop and find candidates for the most challenging disabled students in our public school systems.

Although in the weeks ahead meetings are planned with various groups including the RESCs to address this matter, this letter is being written to make sure that the concern expressed about the proposed changes are documented in case a viable solution cannot be determined in the allotted time span for these modifications. Although I can be supportive of many of the changes being proposed, the actual regulations fail to fully embrace the needs of all students with disabilities and staff who choose to work with them. I encourage you to reconsider the State's position on eliminating the Bachelor's options for certification and limiting hiring for self-contained classrooms for students with severe disabilities to solely those with Master's Degrees in Special Education. I ask that you consider ways to allow individuals who wish to teach in public or private special education settings to have a cost and time-effective alternative to this career pathway.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Maida', written in a cursive style.

Anthony Maida
Associate Executive Director/
Director of Special Education