

Remarks of Vincenza Mazzone-McNulty
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Before the State Department of Education and State Board of Education concerning
proposed changes to certification in Special Education

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Good afternoon. My name is Vincenza Mazzone-McNulty. I am a high school teacher currently in my 36th year in the classroom. I teach French and Spanish to students in grades 9-12. I am here today to testify about the proposed Special Education certification changes and how they impact my students and me.

My multi grade classes are composed of students of varying ability levels. Some of my students have diagnosed learning challenges and have an IEP (individualized educational plan) to help them learn to the best of their ability. This is a legal document that I must follow to insure that these students can learn to think, process, speak, read, and write in another language. Many of these language skills transfer to other areas of study and assist my students in learning at a higher level. My students are able to meet the high standards set for them by the state and local curricula.

For my students with special needs, I rely heavily on my special education colleagues. They assist me in understanding a particular diagnosis that a student has and how best to help him/ her learn. They are the “experts” in this area and know best how to modify the teaching and assessments to help these students achieve. They

also help me help my students in reducing the tension and anxiety associated with meeting difficult challenges. This all takes place in a classroom of 20 or more students. Without my special education colleagues' support and suggestions, my job would be more difficult and my students learning would be compromised.

At the high school level in Connecticut, all subject areas are shortage areas. If the proposed regulations are implemented it will be ever more difficult for teachers to be certified as special educators. The proposed program requiring a master's degree to earn an initial certification will mean fewer special education teachers will be available. There is a higher cost to the teacher to earn this degree as they must now begin at the graduate level. The state is proposing that 18 credits cover 11 areas of Special Education. This is a more cursory preparation as there are too many areas to be studied in such a short time. The teacher needs more in depth training to meet the needs of their students.

Requiring a master's degree for initial certification forces the districts to hire at the MA level. This is much more expensive for the districts in a very difficult economic time. Fewer teachers will be hired. Districts will have even fewer teachers to meet their students' needs as well as to help their students pass the CAPT and other state and national assessments.

I respectfully request that you do not implement these special education certification changes. The children of Connecticut need the best teachers available to educate them and prepare them to become responsible citizens of our state and the

world. Together we can provide the best educational environment to help all students learn and achieve their personal best.