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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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As an elementary education certified, library media specialist certified and special education certified teacher of 16 years I am greatly concerned about the proposed changes to teacher certification in CT.

These changes will serve only boards of education looking to decrease special education staffing and save money in the education budget. It is following the trend of the 21st century: Do More with Less. It is a typical business approach to decrease costs, to produce more for higher profits. This often is successful in the business world. In the world of public schools, the goal isn't going to get us "more", it will deliver less and less for decades to come and will impact not only the children now, but all of us who are in their communities and live among them. We will be the inheritors of a citizenry that is not working to their potential in a global market that is expecting more from them and so different from today that we can't even begin to envision it clearly.

Making a two year special education master's degree program a requirement to

become a classroom teacher will open the door for all special education students to be considered for full instruction in typical classrooms by these dual certified teachers.

That is the whole idea behind the proposed changes in the certification and will negatively affect the students receiving special education services, students receiving regular education services and their teachers. It is an attempt to shift the burden of highly specialized teaching into the typical classroom which is not the least restrictive environment for the majority of students. Nor is it possible to do effectively. This would allow districts to decrease the amount of teachers overall, saving on staffing costs. I graduated magna cum laude from Fairfield University with a MA in Special Education to successfully challenge and pass the National Teacher Exam in this specialty. My two years of intense and highly specialized preparation are essential to teaching students with diverse learning needs. The state of CT should not even consider diluting this program of teacher preparation in special education because of the breath and depth of the diversity of students it allows a special education teacher to serve pre-K through age 21. It is not remotely possible to condense a program of teaching such a wide range of ages and disabling conditions into the course load of a regular education degree program and drastically increases the cost of teacher preparation.

I speak of these proposed certification changes from the perspective of direct experience because I am also certified to teach grades K-8 in CT, and have been a typical classroom teacher. The social, emotional and academic needs of a classroom

of 20 more learners cannot be met by a teacher who must also deliver an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) simultaneously. IEPs are meant to be delivered in small groups and/or small settings with a high level of teacher interaction for the student to be successful. Neither the small setting nor groups of children with similar needs are found in the typical classroom.

Paraprofessional support would not remediate this problem, as they are not allowed to develop lessons for special education students; they may only deliver them with supervision of a special ed. teacher, and the work load increase for the classroom teacher would more than triple with the responsibility for delivering an IEP program and supervising a paraprofessional in concert with countless other teaching tasks associated with 20 plus learners in a typical classroom.

Education is NOT a for-profit organization and needs to stop making decisions based on this business model. We don't create products; we educate individual children to achieve their potential as they go through the changes of their unique development mentally, socially, emotionally, physically and academically. Each day they arrive as a culmination of their experiences, different from the day before and even different from themselves as they grow and change. Only an adequately prepared and supported teacher can evaluate the student, program for them and deliver those programs successfully. This can only be done with a realistic amount of children to instruct who are ready to learn. We don't have classrooms of 50 children or 100 because we know that it will negatively impact the time to work with

individuals, or even small groups of children due to their lack of independence until around adolescence. All students prior to adolescence require teacher time to grow and class size studies have proven this time and time again. By adding students who require an individualized program to the typical classroom without the specifically prepared staff to teach that child as they learn, with a slower pace and specialized materials and often with modified expectations in social and academic performance, you will compromise the education for all students in that class. Also, you will find that very good teachers will leave the profession because we want our students to succeed and when we can't make an impossible situation work, we find other professions to contribute our talents to.

In a classroom of 25 students, teachers are expected to teach all subjects to all levels with modifications, monitor for bullying, child abuse & social progress, modify and guide behavior through developed systems, perform all clerical tasks, communicate and collaborate with peers, parents, the community and continue with their own professional development in our field, our profession, related professions, as well as keep pace with the rapid changes in technology as it relates to children and instruction. It is simply too much to ask ANY teacher to do all this, and more, for a child found needing special education services as well.

If all children with special needs have only the option of learning in a classroom of 25 or more typical learners that fall across the typical bell curve of learning and development, as well as have a multitude of learning styles, these children will receive

one of the two following educations: they will be given inadequate delivered individualized educational programs and teacher attention because of the daily logical needs of the rest of the class who will progress at a typical grade level pace. They not only will fall behind their peers, but will never catch up the deficit of their skills without specific teaching to their strengths, intense instruction in compensating for their learning weaknesses at their level and ability.

After six years in self contained special ed. classrooms, special education resource rooms, and typical elementary classrooms I now have all students come to the library. Without the support of the special educators in our building to provide directed & highly individualized teaching, strategies, materials and support for these students they would not be successful in my setting. My background is helpful when I work with these students, but I cannot follow the modifications required by their IEPs without the special educator's specific work with these students so they may learn the vital related skills in small groups or as individuals prior to, or after, coming to the library. I have assisted them with my expertise in reading, literature, research and related topics to make our students successful and a part of the learning process even when they drastically lag behind their peers. Assisted only, not directly delivered specialized services. There have been students I have had to work with one to one at times, without their classmates in the library, and these exceptions have made all the difference in being able to produce grade typical learning experiences and products for these students.

I have elementary education certification and have taught in a typical elementary level classroom. Several students requiring special education services were placed in my regular classroom and DID NOT receive special education instruction from me. In a resource setting, my students received tailored instruction with unique individualized materials that I did not have in my teachers' manuals. They were evaluated on a criterion referenced tool, not a standardized tool because of their unique receptive, processing or expressive needs, including the ways in which they were evaluated. They were able to be in my classroom for part of their day and succeed only because of this atypical support and programming delivered by a highly trained special education teacher.

In conclusion I must state the obvious: changing certification will not serve students in regular or special education. It must not be considered as option as it will negatively impact all students in CT. Thank you.