

Special Education Certification Comments received by CEA

I have been a special education teacher in the Vernon school district for the past 10 years. I already have my Masters degree and have co-taught, taught a resource room, a self-contained alternative education, and also do testing with a case-load of up to 15 students. I already have a student loan in excess of \$50,000 as I put myself through college. I cannot afford to go back to school at this time for dual certification. Further, I have two children, one with special needs, and they need me at home after school. With budget cuts and doctors bills I do not have enough time or money to return to school. I am afraid with all of my experience that I could not be grandfathered in and will have to make a major career change. I am unable to do so at this time, further, I do not want to! I am able to see both the school side and the parent side as I am a parent of special needs child.

Please do not allow changes to certification to affect our lives!

Amy C. Szydlowski, Vernon Public Schools

I just read over the new proposals and I have concerns. I have been teaching for 35 years. I was blessed to have been trained under Dr. Gallistel (Gallistel-Ellis Reading and Spelling test author) at Southern back in the 70's. I know how important teaching phonics is to helping students decode and encode words. In order to address the needs of the students with learning disabilities, we need to know how to teach phonetic analysis skills and so we are trained at the University level related to this skill. Special educators are trained in the procedures of teaching phonics as well as interpreting errors and then using the prescriptive approach to lesson planning, instructing the student teaching the student skills, teaching compensatory techniques, and assessing their progress. After reading the proposal, it looks like part of our job will be training paraprofessionals. My concern is that if the state believes that paraprofessionals should be trained and then teach the special education students while the special education teacher serves more of a secretary/administrative role, then how do we justify the fidelity of instruction? I know that if it was my child, I would want the special education teacher to instruct my child knowing that it is that individual who had the specialized instruction in teaching the skills that my child needs in order to read and write. I would not want a substitute for the teacher like a paraprofessional doing the instruction after a few workshops or training sessions. We are facing a teacher shortage. After reading over this proposal I believe that we will have a significant teacher shortage in special education. Parents are very aware of their rights, and rightfully

so. They get advocates from LDA (Learning Disability Association) who make sure the school and parent are doing the best for the student based on student need. With a teacher shortage, there may be more law suits because there will be fewer teachers to implement programs effectively and using tutors to provide the instruction will not be acceptable.

Hopefully you have asked for input from special education teachers teaching right now in developing your proposals. If not, you should.

We need to make sure we meet the needs of the students, enable them to not be disabled, and teach them the skills they need to know in order to read, write, and perform math operations that are necessary to live independent adult lives.

Please review your proposal and ask yourself if these changes will enhance the field of special education and the students or will these changes have a negative impact.

Joan Hancock Laskowski, Newington Public Schools

My concerns about the proposed changes to the Special Ed. Certification stem from the additional changes being made with the introduction of RTI/SRBI. As a regular education teacher, the new process requires more support within the classroom to meet the needs of the students. Additionally, the SDE's position with regard to levels for the high school requires more Special Ed support in more classrooms as students are disseminated throughout different classes. Adding changes to the Special Ed Cert on top of these initiatives will harm the effectiveness of the programs. If the support from Special Ed teachers is not there as they are given too many responsibilities, or there are not enough Special Ed teachers to hire, then these programs will not improve student learning through increased differentiation.

Audrey Breen, Cromwell Public Schools

As I understand it, there is no provision for grandfathering in anyone. This is not only a mistake in terms of continuing services to children with qualified and professional special educators, but it is patently unfair to those of us who went into this branch of education with a genuine concern for every child to get a quality education, who worked and continue to work hard to become and remain qualified and up to date on legal issues and teaching methods, and who perform our jobs at a high level every day and every year.

Also, if I understand them correctly, the two levels that are being proposed for special educators do not make sense. I suggest that real life practitioners (i.e., teachers, especially special education

teachers) be consulted for any changes to levels of certification. It makes no sense to me, a special ed. teacher of children from grades 8 to 12, with whom I have to cover a wide variety of learning needs and all the subjects that are covered in those grades and levels, that a special ed. teacher who is responsible for the greater needs children would be ranked higher in importance or responsibility than I. We both serve an important need, but one of us is not in any position to be the supervisor of the other.

Hartford County teacher

I am in my 14th year of teaching special education. The proposed changes to the certification may not affect me in all areas; however, I do have strong concerns over these proposals. First, my 4 year degree states that I am certified and qualified to teach special education. It's been appropriate for the past 14 years, so why would it change now? I did not get my Master's Degree in special education, as I felt the need to "branch out," because I don't realistically see myself teaching special education for 35 years. I will be too burnt out, so I got my Master's Degree in another area, so I would have options.

The high number of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) is ridiculous given the amount of in-service time we have built into our ever-so demanding jobs. When do you think we can get all this training in? The workload and demands of special education teachers continues to add up every year. We don't need more educating units added to our workload. We need to focus on the children, not the state requirements of teachers. Do you want us to put aside teaching responsibilities to make time for more training? Something's got to give and my increasing work load and working day continue to increase. It's not the time with students, but all this unnecessary paperwork, in-service, etc. Want to leave a bad taste in a beginning teacher's mouth? This will definitely affect the number of new teachers. After all, I'm not a beginner teacher, and it has already left a taste of disgust in my mouth!

Michelle Provencher, Enfield Public Schools

I thought when we got rid of BUSH his 'No Child Left Behind' nonsense would go with him! I am not a Special Education Teacher but I might as well be. I have two special ed. students identified in my classroom this year, and that is the norm. The special ed. room is across the hall but

the teacher is tapped out. Can somebody who knows what they are speaking about, represent us? Yes, I'll admit, there are some bad teachers out there, but the majority of us give our all. I'm sick to death of the idea it is the teachers fault. Who in their right mind would take this job? Only people that truly care for our children and their future would do so. It certainly is not for the money.

Carol Mello, Windsor Public Schools

Many schools have cut their special education staff due to budget reasons. This makes it difficult to service the needs of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). These proposed changes to certification will create more obstacles to helping students work to their potential. In addition, because special education students will require more of the teachers' attention regular education students will also be affected. These changes are not in the best interest of the students we are trying to help.

Charlene Kilcomons, Simsbury Public Schools

After viewing the CEA slide presentation on the proposed certification changes for special education teachers, I am perplexed. The implication of the need to make these changes seems to be that the current practice of training and preparing special education teachers has been inadequate. It also implies that despite having completed a graduate program and been a qualified professional in my learning community for 16 years, I may not really be qualified to provide high quality instruction for my students. It also implies that the 10 hour work days that I typically serve in order to participate as completely as I possibly can in my professional learning community (lesson planning, collaborating, committee work, extra curricular activities, parent meetings, and professional development) are still not enough.

I wonder if parents have been included in this process of surveys and hearings and proposals. If you ask the parents of the children that I have serviced over the last 16 years whether or not their children have made adequate yearly progress on their academic goals, whether or not they have progressed in their social development, whether or not they have gained independence and are better prepared to participate in the world at large, whether or not their child's teacher is qualified to educate their children, their response would be a resounding "yes." I am well prepared. I am highly qualified. I am a valued member of my educational community. Why, then, make recommendations to make me change--or worse, to get rid of me?

Changes are required when systems are not working or are inadequate. Where is the evidence to support such an overhaul? Where are the egregious weaknesses and lack of preparation? Deal with those programs and situations specifically instead of a taking hatchet approach to one of the most dedicated and abused sectors of public education.

Tracy McConnell, Simsbury Public Schools

I am in my 17th year of teaching Special Education. I hold a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Florida. I completed the credit requirements and testing to earn a Special Education certificate in Florida then in Connecticut after I moved to Connecticut almost eight years ago.

In order to improve and enhance my teaching, I have continuously participated in various professional development opportunities. In my 17 year teaching career, I have seen the proverbial educational pendulum swing. For every "new" method or initiative introduced, I have adapted whether I agreed with the process or not.

I am concerned that I may not be "grandfathered in" with the proposed changes. I am confident that I have the experience and qualifications to be a Special Education teacher and specialist.

Erin Eilerman, Vernon Public Schools

I am writing because I am concerned about the proposed changes to special ed. certification. I have been a special educator for 30 years and have worked mostly with students with severe disabilities. I was dually certified in elementary/special education as an undergrad and then went on to get my Master's Degree in Special Education with a minor in the education of the severely handicapped. I feel strongly that requiring a Master's Degree to teach special education is going about it the wrong way. You will create a shortage of special educators. I have watched many of my colleagues over the years LEAVE special ed. for elementary ed., NEVER TO RETURN. We need to find ways to ENCOURAGE more people to go into special education, not make it more difficult. I agree we need to have special educators better prepared for the responsibilities of their jobs. They need to spend MORE time with experienced special educators while student teaching, 8-16 weeks is NOT enough! I spent time in classrooms starting my freshman year in college. I have had over 20 student teachers and their preparation has changed little over the years. They need to spend MORE time in classrooms. That is where they learn the most! When a first year teacher gets a job as a

special educator it is highly likely that their mentor will be a GENERAL education teacher. We need to find a way to ensure their mentor is another special ed. teacher even if that teacher is in another building! Since Connecticut requires a Master's Degree anyway, why not have a dual certification program for elementary/special education for undergraduates so they get the level 1 certification? Then if they want to remain a special educator they get their Master's Degree in special education and get level 2 certification. What will you expect of current special educators? Will you be requiring some to go back to college? Who will pay for that? What do you think they will learn in college that they could not learn better while teaching? I am not sure if you have consulted the many special educators that are in the state, but the majority would tell you they learned the most while in classrooms teaching! We need to find ways to encourage more students to go into special education, but prepare them better! Why has student teaching not been extended over the last 30 years! Teachers say it all the time, but nothing changes! Teachers do not need more courses, they need more classroom experience. I am hoping you will carefully consider the consequences of not grandfathering present sped teachers! With the present economic crisis in this country affecting all of us, it is not the time to require more coursework! More training provided on staff development days would serve the purposes of updating special educators; this can be provided by the state at little cost. I hope that you hear from the many experienced special educators in the state and can come up with a proposal that is fair to all and that will not cause severe repercussions to students with disabilities.

Sue Lavigne, East Hartford Public Schools

A State identified shortage area! These impending changes make entrance into a most difficult teaching career more obstructive. Or, is there an underlying consequence that reduces the number of special education teachers needed? It is incongruous not to grandfather those teachers who presently and successfully do the job for which these proposed changes seek to ensure be successfully done.

Richard Terino, Southington Public Schools

I am concerned that the planned changes will eventually eliminate the position of Special Educator, and place unreasonable demands upon the classroom teachers.

I predict that this will happen because of the prolonged period of expensive/extensive training that will be required to acquire a Special Educator's certification. The effects will be that fewer education degree candidates will pursue this route, and those that do will find getting hired at the master's level to be very difficult, especially with towns being financially strapped.

Even with more training in Special Education coursework, I predict that mainstream educators will find meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse population of students, without the support of Special Educators, very, very difficult and increase the rate of teacher burnout.

And, ultimately, the students who need additional support will lose out. The absence of Special Educators, and mainstream teacher burnout will take its toll.

Pat Chaterdon, Portland Public Schools

I am a special education teacher for the Bloomfield Public Schools. I am very concerned with the proposed changes to the special education teaching certificate. These changes would not only create a short term shortage due to the proposed requirements and a lack of grandfathering, but I believe also a long term shortage. Teacher candidates will shy away from the special education field because of requirements in degree and CEUs that do not apply to any other teaching area. This will be detrimental to all students in the long-run. I support the CEA's proposed changes to create a tiered certification. This will avoid further shortage and ensure that all students are receiving the best support possible by assigning teachers responsibilities according to their level of expertise, but still allow teachers to get into the field immediately without extra expense.

Melissa Rosa, Bloomfield Public Schools

Change is something we are all in need of and change can be good. However, change with Special Education Teacher certification should be looked at long and hard before it is made. I have been a Special Education teacher for 30 years. I have done the whole thing from preschool speech and hearing handicap, middle school severe learning disability and socially maladjusted, to high school working with autism, learning disability, emotional disturbed, and socially maladjusted. No matter what, paperwork has been the crutch of the problem. The amount of paperwork along with dealing

with parents or not dealing with parents' apathy becomes an everyday occurrence for all Special Education teachers.

With the financial hardships in this day many districts would be limiting qualified Special Education teachers. Also, limiting Special Education teachers could pull them away from working with students to do other duties. The emphasis should be on working with students not having them do other tasks as training paraprofessionals or facilitating PPT's. What it comes down to is we should be looking at the impact that this would have on students, not money. I find it interesting that proposals are made with out really looking at the long term. Has someone done resource and given the statistics of what the outcome in areas would be if this change occurs? We are in an age of resource and data within schools. Where is the data and resource supporting this?

Maribeth F. Sarnacki, Cromwell Public Schools

I am deeply concerned over the proposed changes to the Special Education certification process. There is already a shortage of qualified teachers in this area. The proposed changes will further decrease the number of teachers interested in becoming certified in the area. There is no incentive for new teachers to become certified in two areas and be paid for one. Current Special Education teachers, such as myself, will be driven to explore career interests in other areas as we are already offered very little support for some of the most difficult jobs in education. Ultimately, children with special needs will pay the price as they will lose qualified educators and not have access to new ones as the pool of incoming teachers to the area becomes smaller and smaller.

Regular education students will also be impacted as regular education teachers struggle to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of Special Education students that are placed in their classrooms without the adequate support of a Special Education teacher. Students will lose critical opportunities for individualized help. Overall this legislation has crushing implications for all teachers and students.

Wendy Shepard-Bannish, Bloomfield Public Schools

I am a second and third grade Special Education Teacher in Vernon, CT. I love what I do and the population that I work with. The changes that you propose would take me out of the classroom from working with students who really need me and have me spending more time doing paperwork.

Also, by going through with the proposed changes you will discourage future Special Education teachers from wanting to enter the field. Making seasoned teachers go back to school for a second master's is crazy and will do nothing to help the field. I hope that you rethink your changes.

Sarah Shapiro, Vernon Public Schools

I have held my K-12 Special Education Certification for over 20 years. I feel it is unfair to not grandfather in existing teachers who have been certified for many years and require them to continue taking courses. You will LOSE valuable teaching staff. You will create great teacher shortages. CHILDREN WILL LOSE IN THE END!!! Please do not include the grandfather clause; it is simply not fair to many!!

Susan Biederman, Suffield Public Schools

I cannot express how deeply I am opposed to these proposed changes in certification. As a high school teacher, I well know how important it is for subject area teachers to have strong knowledge in their subject area--whether they are working with high achieving or struggling students. While I can see how, on paper, adding a special education certification requirement to everyone's certification may look appealing, such a change will take away from the amount of time and effort prospective teachers can spend on their chosen area of expertise. Furthermore, in the classroom, it is far more effective for subject area teachers to work with special education teachers in a co-teaching or support environment than to wear both hats at the same time--and I say this with the students' best interests in mind, for students with special education needs benefit from the close attention a special education teacher can give them. Putting the special education onus on the traditional subject area teacher only spreads that person more thinly among all of his/her students, rather than amplifying the quality of education of the students with special needs.

Amanda Greenwell, Avon

It is concerning that the proposed level of education for a new special education teacher is a Master's degree. In my district most teachers begin at the Bachelor's level and quickly advance to the Master's level. I believe there will be a quick shortage in some Special Education areas, especially if

current teachers are not grandfathered. The current proposed education program appears rather broad. There also appears to be a question about teachers having actual in class training. In addition there does not appear to be an emphasis on the reading area, which I have seen recommended highly in past proposals. The current proposal appears to leave districts open in terms of short term teaching needs and leaves young teachers with the dilemma of spending extra money and student hours to gain a position that is paid the same as the their colleagues in regular education.

Nancy Wilcock, Newington Public Schools

The proposed special education certification change will cause a decrease in quality of special education services.

Experienced special education teachers should be grandfathered. Special education teachers provide valuable assistance to regular classroom educators.

The requirements to become a special education certified teacher necessitates that a student teaching experience be required. This is equally as important as that of a regular education teacher. A focus on reading skill development accompanied with specific content areas of study will serve to provide the needed preparation.

To meet the shortage of special education teachers, we must retain the specialists we have, and support people who will be entering the profession. In short, provide a manageable workload for interested future teachers, do not expect new special educators to be "qualified" to train others, and provide a supportive atmosphere to people wanting to join, or stay in, the profession. The students deserve a quality, and committed staff. Teachers need to feel that they are valued.

Barbara Palenscar, Windsor Public Schools

I am in opposition to the proposed special education certification changes. Changing the requirements will impact schools significantly. It WILL result in a shortage of special educators, thereby changing the way that they are able to service children. I am a school psychologist who came to CT from PA due to the incredible way that special education was delivered. In PA, special ed. was a one-size-fits-all model, with a tremendous amount of pull-out services. CT attracted me due to the high rate of inclusive practices. Should changes such as those proposed be implemented, special educators will not be able to service children inclusively. Inclusive practices impact all involved in a positive manner. To pass these changes would be a STEP BACKWARD in education.

As a card-carrying member of CEA, I cannot sit back and watch this injustice happen. DO NOT PASS THESE CHANGES!!!

Heidi McDonald, Granby Public Schools

If we are indeed about teaching children and using our preparation in direct service of children's education, then we must keep Special Education certified teachers in the classrooms where they belong. The new certification will turn them into glorified paper pushers and expect regular ed. teachers to take over their jobs. This is not what each group signed up to do! We deserve the right to follow our chosen vocation, profession, calling without the State changing the playing field in mid career. Vote against the proposed certification changes in fairness, in service to the children, and in the best interests of Connecticut public education!

Eileen Stack Moreno, Stratford Public Schools

I am a 29 -year teacher and former administrator who believes this proposal, while well intentioned, is not well conceived. I understand that the proposal generally:

- Eliminates initial certification through bachelor's level program
- Requires master's degree for initial certification, ***but not student teaching***
- Requires prior certificate or passing Praxis II in any content area
- Requires minimum 75 hours of Continuing Education Units in areas specified by SDE to advance to professional certificate
- (Special Education) is the **only** teaching certificate that would have these requirements

Impact on teachers & students

- Unclear if all special educators would be grandfathered
- Cost to meet requirements for *initial* certificate increases by **thousands of dollars**
- Districts would be forced to hire at master's level –financially hard for many districts, so would limit number of special educators hired
- Broad range of responsibilities allowed under one certificate is too much for any teacher to handle, and still service students well
- Districts might focus assignment of special educators to deal mostly with tasks other than direct service to students; e.g., training paraprofessionals, diagnostics, facilitating PPT's, etc.

- Will take longer to prepare special educators -may create greater shortage of special ed. teachers
- Preparation program too broad for 30 credits –results in underprepared teachers
- Special educators from out of state are not certifiable unless they have master’s in special ed; further decreases number of special educators in CT

CEA proposals for Special Education certificate:

2 levels of special education certification:

Teaching-level 1; preparation to work with students with mild to moderate disabilities (regular classroom or resource room)

Specialist-level 2; preparation to work with students with severe disabilities, and for other responsibilities

Must hold teaching certificate before advancing to specialist certificate

I strongly support the Connecticut Education Association's version of proposed changes for special education certification. Please, let's not shoot ourselves in the foot yet again, especially when current SRBI initiatives seek to decrease the SPED burden on the schools. Ratcheting up the SPED certification now is five years too late, it will cost good people jobs, increase the tax burden on towns already reeling, AND cost teachers far more money to acquire. Please reconsider!

Frank E Gawle, Wilton High School

I am writing in regards to the proposed certification changes in the field of special education. I am a special education teacher at CES in Trumbull, CT. I have a master’s degree in reading at Southern CT State. I have been teaching special education for seven years, and have never wanted to teach anything else. I’m writing because I’m extremely concerned about the proposed changes to the certification process. I work in a highly specialized field- autism and ID. I work in a self-contained room with extremely low-functioning students. I have been doing this for six years and feel that I am in this field for the long haul, as this is what I truly love. I already have my master’s degree, but it is not in special education, because I wanted to learn about something different and meld my special education knowledge and experience with research-based best literacy practices. I now feel that this is going to seriously damage my career as a special education teacher.

I am very hurt and confused at the possibility that I could be told that I am no longer qualified to teach special education. I take the students that no one else can handle and work with them to become more adjusted and better able to control their emotions and feelings. I deal with potty training and bathroom accidents. I work with behavioral issues and get pinched, scratched, hit, kicked, and pulled by the hair, and come back in the next day smiling and ready to work again. I teach academics to students who are so stuck inside their own worlds that they can barely carry on a conversation. I teach students to become problem solvers and independent thinkers, when they can barely make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. And you know what? For the most part, I succeed. I do all this all day, every day, and now, I'm told that I might not be able to keep doing this.

So who are they going to find to take my place? Many people I work with have been teaching for 15, 20, 30 years in special education and are still going strong. Will they be forced to go back to school at their age, when they have their own life and their own family? Will my hard work in my own master's degree count for nothing? Will I be forced to spend more of my own money and time to learn a career that I've been doing for years?

I'm worried that this will make many people in the special education field leave in droves. People will simply retire. In this day in age, we need special education teachers more than ever. How is SRBI/RTI going to work without people trained for the tier 3 instruction or the special education level? The ones with all the experience and know-how will leave, and then the schools will be a mess because no one knows what goes in the special education department.

If the state is so concerned about having the best possible candidates teaching education, shouldn't the ones who have been doing it the longest be at the top of the list?

Kate Mundy, CES Trumbull

As a teacher and the parent of a special education student I am distressed by this proposal. By making such demands and not grandfathering in current educators, we will in effect hurt the students who most need our support. There will be a shortage of eligible special educators. Special educators make a huge difference for their students. I have seen firsthand how they can turn learning situations around and help at risk and in need student become productive self directed learners. They are vital to our community. Do not go forward with this proposal.

Virginia Zimmermann, Fairfield Public Schools

The proposal to change special education certification requirements, including requiring teachers to have 75 hours of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) prior to earning a professional certificate and only allowing teachers with master's degrees in special education to remain in their special education positions would be destructive for the well being of Connecticut's students and teachers. Proposed changes should be made in consideration of existing teachers and their current positions in helping their students. This proposal seems experimental and not researched. Does the state realize how many well-experienced special educators would potentially lose their jobs due this possible change in certification requirements? I would be one of these special educators. Having to pay for tuition myself, I would have to stretch out taking courses for at least five years. I did so when I earned my masters in remedial reading. This, along with having to gain 75 hours of CEUs, would not allow me to obtain a second master's degree by the year 2014. I would be set up for failure unfairly. Since 1998, I have worked a very fulfilling career, working with students to make wonderful progress. My day-to-day experiences have accounted for my journey of learning and growing. To have that taken away from me for a "let's-see-how-this-works" proposal is a severe disgust. I know this would happen to several other special education teachers who make tremendous differences in their students' progress. I, like them, have worked so hard for a long time and have enjoyed my accomplishments in this challenging field of teaching. Please do not punish me or them for doing our duties progressively. If changes are to be made, take into consideration those of us who are outstanding in what we have been doing for years, knowing we continue already to grow. Thank you in advance for taking my thoughts and feelings into consideration.

Crissa Greene, Danbury Public Schools

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I would like to comment on the proposal for new certification guidelines for special education certification. Special education is an area that has historically had a shortage of qualified teachers. By imposing these changes it just ensures that it will continue to be an area that will not attract the best teachers for a very difficult job.

By insisting that a beginning teacher have a master's degree the new proposal puts an unfair burden on the special education teacher. No other position is requiring this be necessary, so why is special education singled out?

A special education teacher must be able to adapt and modify all subject and content areas as well as provide specialized instruction. In addition, the special educator's caseload can vary greatly from year to year, so a dual certification in one content area might not actually be used or drawn upon at

all. I might be dually certified in history, but spend most of my time in a resource classroom along with teaching collaborative math and science. Asking a special education teacher to be certified in another content area makes no sense. The logic to require the dual content area certification is not there.

The requirement for 75 hours of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) in areas specified by SDE is also putting an unfair burden on special education teachers. The institutions that offer these specific CEUs may not be close to the teacher and may incur an undue financial hardship. Again, this is singling out the special education teacher, and when faced with the decision to become a regular educator or special educator many more teachers may be forced to choose a regular education certification. This would reduce the number of special educators even further.

Special education is a difficult field that already requires the teacher to be more versed in different academic areas than our colleagues. Add to the legal burden of the special education paperwork and you've created a position that is fraught with burnout. By instituting these certification changes, it is punishing the teacher who chooses to go into this field. It will create a permanent shortage of special educators in Connecticut.

Nancy M. Pennell, Westport Public Schools

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I am a tenured Special education teacher with a master's in Learning Disabilities and I am currently completing the final semester of the Educational Leadership Program at SCSU including my 6th year certificate.

I am opposed to the change in certification as I believe strongly that the field of special education requires a carefully guided program with a specific focus from educators at the Masters level to ensure levels of expertise needed for a complex field. The needs of the students are very specific to their challenges yet unique to the individual. Field work and intense mentorship in the specialized field is essential.

Over generalizing will lead to untrained and less passionate teaching when those who have a very broad credential educationally can step into a classroom where a level of expertise is essential.

Teachers who have the natural desire and personal characteristics to be with the more severely challenged students should be receiving preference to jobs in this realm, while those with less experience and training are provided with opportunity to work with students not requiring such a specific focus-It is not enough to say pass the test in some part of the field of education and then

teach where we need teachers. We owe it to the children to be prepared academically and motivationally. I do not support the proposed changes.

D. Di Noto, Wilton Public Schools

I am writing to express my concern and disappointment that the State of Connecticut would consider changing certifications of teachers that have already graduated and passed all of the stringent requirements to be certified in their field. I am specifically familiar with the Special Education Certification. My daughter completed her bachelor degree program at Southern Connecticut State University just three years ago. She was enrolled in a new program that allowed her to be certified in both Elementary Ed and Special Education. Our State University system also required Education majors to complete an additional major outside of education, so she graduated with an additional undergraduate degree in Psychology. This was an unbelievable amount of work, but to have a passion and love for special education children was her driving force. Financially and time wise this was also a sacrifice but she felt that it was important and valuable to go through this comprehensive program. Now after three very successful years as a Special Education teacher in Milford, the State is thinking of eliminating her certification because she doesn't have her Master's degree. She is currently taking evening classes and working towards her Masters in Special Education but it will take a few more years. I hope that her dedication and hard work has not been wasted and that if changes need to be made that those teachers who are already teaching be allowed to continue and be grandfathered into any certification changes. Our young teachers should be encouraged and rewarded for the incredible job that they do. They should not be penalized. Special Education teachers are truly very "special."

Karen Musante, Fairfield Public Schools

I am a second-career teacher who has been teaching for almost 8 years. I went back to SCSU and got my undergrad in Special Ed and 18 months later my Masters in Reading - thus I am both a certified Special Ed. teacher and certified Remedial Reading and Language Arts teacher. Yet you think I should go back to school and get certified in a content area? You think I should have to pay for another college education just to be qualified to do what I have been doing for 8 years? Are you out of your mind?

Many teachers probably didn't respond because it is such a stupid idea. We are busy with a thousand things to think about related to the education of our students - yet I have to take time out to address this ridiculous issue - you people are not addressing the real issues – and you want a scapegoat for unsatisfactory test scores. Well, look at the basics related to our students - before they even GET to school. Don't blame the individuals who withstand endless criticism from parents and the government - all who want to make teachers responsible for student progress - not parents.

Jackie Scaringella, Wilton Public Schools

Do you honestly think you are going to get more young men and women interested in becoming special education teachers by making the process more difficult? Don't we have a shortage of special education teachers already? Changing the certification requirements will not affect me personally; however I feel it is an awful way to attempt to recruit young teachers into the field. I work with high school students everyday and if these certification changes go through, I will steer any student interested in becoming a special education teacher in another direction. My job as a teacher/coach/mentor is to provide the best advice possible to these young men and women regarding their futures, and becoming a special education teacher in the state of Connecticut would not be in their best interest.

Richard Cable, Stratford Public Schools

I would like to comment on the proposed changes for special education teacher certification. As educators, learning is the cusp of all we do and believe. As any teacher can attest, what is learned in undergraduate and graduate classrooms is valuable, but the essential learning occurs when information is applied through student teaching experience and teaching every day. To propose removing student teaching as a requirement to become a special education teacher would result in underprepared and unqualified teachers. Student teaching is used to assess a future educator's ability to manage students, and in this case it is essential for cooperating teachers to ensure that this is an individual able to connect with a diverse population that require the utmost care and specialized support. In addition, the opportunity for a teacher with their initial certification to teach and attend graduate school is priceless. The carry over into the classroom is essential. It provides the opportunity for authentic dialogue and experiences to carry over from professional learning to student learning. Important to mention is also the economic factor-- we spend thousands of dollars

pursuing our graduate degrees, it is extremely costly and teachers rely on their own income to fund their higher learning.

Another note, the responsibility we have daily to our students, the commitment, the legal requirements, paperwork, parent involvement, consultation, curriculum development, program development, behavior management, technology enrichment, and on and on, require so much of our time that we happily give because we love what we do. We attend as much professional development as we can within district, our individual buildings, within department and then outside. It is unreasonable to require such an excessive amount of CEU credits.

Deborah Czupkowski, Wilton Public Schools

I am writing to let you know that I oppose the proposed changes in certification for the special education endorsement. I am a special education teacher in the Fairfield Public School System. I teach students with a wide variety of disabilities who are included in the general education classroom. As a teacher with 25 years of teaching I am opposed to the elimination of the initial certification through a bachelor's level program. I think it is imperative that teachers get into the classroom and gain experience through actual working with students, not just a theoretical situation that most colleges provide. I do believe that the two student teaching experiences students take part in as undergraduates provides a good basis for a teacher to begin his/her career. I would encourage you to keep this system in place.

Donna Spigarolo, Fairfield Public Schools

I have been a special education teacher for the past thirty years and I am appalled at the current proposal for special education certification. First, we are already in a shortage area. These changes in certification would be costly to new teachers as well as very time consuming. With the economic status of this country right now, I believe we would be discouraging teachers from entering the field of special education. Second, the range of responsibilities under one certificate is too much for any teacher to handle and still service students well. Finally, districts would be required to hire at a master's level. We all know that in these economic times cutbacks are a reality. How disappointing to finally complete all the requirements and then not be hired because you would cost too much. We have more and more needing students entering our public schools. Please do not make it any harder to get qualified and dedicated teachers to meet their needs.

I am a third year Special Education teacher in Killingly, CT. My bachelor's degree left me dually certified in both Elementary and Special Education. I received it at Saint Joseph College which is a top school for Education. I feel my education has prepared me well for the Special education position I have today.

This coming school year I am taking a leave of absence to obtain my M.Ed. in Deaf Education, Aural Habilitation at the University of Hartford. I was told that this would fit into the proposed changes to the certification. It is considered a special education area. If the proposed changes do not go through though, I will be extremely upset. No one can tell me if the certification changes, as they stand now, would let me continue teaching with a master's since it is not in Special Education but in Deaf Education.

Deaf Education is something I have been interested in since working with a few students who were Hard of Hearing and one with down syndrome who I taught American Sign language to so he could better communicate. This is my love and passion, and I was so excited to find a program that matched my interest. This is the last year the masters program will (most likely) be running due to financial strains. Even though it cannot be guaranteed, I have decided to take the plunge and get my master's in something I truly love.

I do not understand how getting your Master's in Special Education is better than getting it in a specific area of Special Education. With the 30 credit proposal and no student teaching for this "Special Education" masters program, I do not see how someone can become a "Master" in ALL disabilities. New students going through this process right now (if the proposed changes do not pass) won't be teaching until they get their master's. Experience does matter.

All of the certification changes and proposals are hard to take in. I am still confused about the proposed two levels of certification. I feel that my master's degree should make me a level 2. The proposal is unclear about this though. "Master's degree work could be in either special education (leading to specialist certificate), or another field related to students' disabilities." Does that second part mean I would be able to have a specialist certificate? Or is it that I could get my masters in another relevant area and still be considered a level 1? Thanks for listening to my concerns.

I am writing to express my concerns over the potential changes to our certification. While I can see they would want us to have additional coursework beyond our masters' degree, the question has to be asked, "Who will be paying for the additional coursework?" In many other professions, when people are being asked to continue their education, they are reimbursed. In teaching, the burden is always placed on the teachers who are already overloaded as it is with their daily responsibilities to the students we are educating. I think we need to stop putting the burden on the teachers. Thank you.

Elisa Pitoniak, Region 17 Schools

I have been a special education teacher at the elementary level for thirteen years. I became a teacher as a second career, earning my master's in education from the University of Connecticut, with a dual certification in both elementary education and special education. When I graduated I had earned 65 graduate credits, all in the field of education.

I consider myself to be an exceptionally effective resource teacher. The skills I have acquired since I graduated are much more important than those I learned as a student. Experience and collegiality along with attending workshops very specific to the needs of my student population have provided me with the skills I rely on daily. A master's degree in Special Education will not provide the same background to a new teacher.

During the past 13 years I have taught moderately to severely dyslexic children to read. This took the expertise I learned at workshops and experience I acquired over time. The current expectations placed on classroom teachers are already overwhelming, and even unrealistic. Without resource room teachers, districts might save some money, but the number of students that fail will grow. In addition, typical education students will likely lose instruction time by the classroom teacher, when that teacher is instructing special education students.

To pass this law without guaranteeing that special education teachers will be grandfathered is wrong. There is no evidence that we are not competent. We should not be held to new standards—especially standards that have not been proven to be necessary or effective.

I urge you to listen to teachers before you make decisions that will impact all the students in Connecticut.

Diane Hall, Region 8 School District

I am a Special Education teacher and must speak out against the new certification design. I have entered teaching to work with children. This new design should grandfather current Special Education teachers. It should also continue to have Special Education teachers work with all classifications and in the inclusionary classes.

Cecilia Brown, New London Public Schools

I am a Speech/Language Pathologist working in the CT public schools for 30+ years. I am NOT opposed to the changes in certification for NEW special education teachers. I am opposed to CURRENT Special Education teachers NOT BEING GRANDFATHERED into the certification they currently hold. I moved to CT from NJ because CT required all school-based SLP'S to hold a Health License. The requirements for this license were a Master's degree, 300 Clinical hours, passing a national examination and nine months of supervised work experience. In my position I work with many highly qualified SPED teachers. Their experience in the "trenches" should allow them to continue to hold their certifications. NEW SPED teachers, however, would certainly benefit from the knowledge gained through Master's level work.

Barbara Jacobowski, Groton Public Schools

Please discourage changes in teacher certification that would combine special and regular education. This would allow much too large a range of responsibilities for one teacher, especially new teachers. It seems as though proponents are trying to save money by combining two positions without regard for our children.

Andrew Wainacht, Killingly Public Schools

I am responding to the information contained in the State Department of Education Proposal for new Special Education Certification. While there are many missing details, it seems that this will do the following:

Install a new layer of pseudo-administrators who will tell me, as a classroom teacher, how to do my job. Except, in this case, it is not clear if any of these newly certified people will have EVER set foot in a classroom, special ed. or otherwise. At least our current administrators are required to teach for 5 years before they get to tell other teachers what to do.

In some districts, new plans for special ed. have removed special educators from classrooms and turned them into “case managers” who do little or no actual educating. The explanation is that there is so much paperwork to do, compliance issues, etc. etc. That may be true, but it leaves classroom teachers responsible for more and more with less support. While the specialists are managing cases, who is going to do the special education, which is more time consuming and difficult to implement in mixed ability classroom?

Teaching is rapidly becoming less and less feasible as a way to make a living every time the next great thing comes along. I am just about done!

Karen E. Culver-Rymsza, Plainfield Public Schools

As a regular classroom teacher, I greatly depend on the know-how and expertise of my school's Special Education Teacher. Her many years of specialized learning allows me to find quickly proven solutions and strategies to student problems. She finds answers to daunting questions that I ordinarily would not be able to do on my own. In addition, she enhances the learning of special needs students on a one to one basis with precise lessons that are most beneficial to each individual.

I depend on her to guide me in the class room, so that a special needs student will benefit fully from required curriculum. A Special Education Teacher is the one true expert on purposeful, differentiated learning. School systems would fray at the seams and eventually fall apart without the presence of these gifted people.

M.L. Hall, Norwich Public Schools

Simply, this will make it difficult to address the needs of Special Ed. students under the guide lines of IDEA & NCLB. As History will show Education has a habit of coming around full circle and regardless if NCLB is still around, the need for Special Ed. teachers will remain a huge asset to all school systems with in the State. Why take away any opportunity for Special Ed students to succeed as viable members of their communities. Thank You.

P. Aubin, Plainfield Public Schools

I am writing to express my dismay at the State Department of Education's plans for changing the certification for Special Educators. Classroom teaching should be an absolute requirement of all Special Educators; otherwise, how can they advise their regular education counterparts in how to

provide students, under SRBI, with appropriate modifications and/or accommodations? Also, some changes to the certification program might be desirable, but it sounds as if you're sending Special Ed. teachers out of the classroom and into the back rooms. Please consider the options the CEA is proposing. Finally, why should Special Educators be required to acquire a Master's degree when regular educators are not? Under SRBI, regular educators need to know much of what a Special Educator does.

Mark Chuoke, Woodstock Public Schools

It is with great concern that I write urging that the proposed certification change for special education—as it stands—be stopped. As a veteran Teacher of the Deaf (currently 35 years total with 26 years in CT), I am appalled that in these economic times, there is a proposal that would cost both the individual educator and the individual districts monies that are not available. The proposed change would conceivably add thousands of dollars to student loans. Districts around the state are laying off teachers at unprecedented rates. School library funding and the arts are on the chopping block. The University of Connecticut needed to increase tuition, to say nothing of other state colleges and private colleges/universities in Connecticut. Why would our next generation of educators want to teach in Connecticut? The proposed change will make it next to impossible for new educators to teach here, especially if they are coming from an institution or state that doesn't adhere to the same guidelines. New educators who haven't student taught will have no idea what to expect in the field. Under the proposed change, CT would have new educators with no experience who are overwhelmed with loan payments and are expected to teach students with a multitude of handicapping conditions, yet are well-versed in none. How is that enticing to the next generation? It won't be. Consider the CEA proposal~ it will give special educators (veteran and novice) a chance to do what we do best - teach and help shape those who are our future, teach so that equality isn't just a word of the past, teach so that today's students want to be tomorrow's educators, teach so that the memories of school are of positive experiences, and teach so that the passion (and flame) are not quenched.

Paula Rosenberg Bell, M. Ed., Groton Public Schools

I have been working as a special education teacher for the past 27 years in Stonington, Connecticut.

The proposed changes to the certification requirements for special education teachers are excessive. Many highly qualified people interested in pursuing the field of special education may be prevented from doing so due to the requirement of having a master's degree. In my experience the best training for special education is not solely additional coursework and degrees, but practical experience working with children. The preparation program of 30 credits over and above courses required for a prior certification do not begin to address the various needs that a special education teacher have to successfully teach children with such a variety of needs and concerns. It is unfair for special education teachers to be the only teachers that must meet these certification requirements. Hence there will be a shortage of special education teachers. In a field where burn out frequently occurs because of the many demands placed us, these certification requirements will even further decrease the number of highly qualified special educators in Connecticut. What happened to the process we had to go through previously to become highly qualified? Are we no longer highly qualified just because the requirements of the law change? A good teacher is a good teacher. It matters not what the certification requirements are.

Robin Bressette, Stonington Public Schools

I believe that the new Requirements for Special Education are unnecessarily stringent and will result in an even greater shortage of Special Education teachers than we have now. But the worst part of the plan is that it ends up costing districts more money for Special Education teachers by requiring every district to have all Special Education teachers at the Master's pay level. Districts are already strapped for funding and this new mandate is not necessary.

Andrew Walsh, Stonington Public Schools

The reason for my email is to express my deep concern regarding the proposed certification changes. I am a Special Education teacher at a High School. I find the proposed changes disturbing. I believe that these proposed changes will force many good, qualified teachers to leave the field altogether. I also firmly believe that this will make it nearly impossible for future students who want to be educators. If college students take a good hard look at what is proposed and what is coming down the pike, I bet there would be many, many students that would forgo the profession altogether. I think the proposed changes are over the top, and would do damage economically and are unsound. I believe that teachers would much rather take less paying jobs than and be content

than have to continue to “flex” and change to different and new legislation that keeps and continues to change. Being a happy employee at Target doesn’t sound so bad after all. We enter the profession because we love what we do. We have a sincere passion for learning and teaching, not because we make lots of money, not for perks, or anything else. We do what we do because we care and we want to quite simply. Please reconsider.

Teresa Gonzalez, Plainfield Pubic Schools

I have been working as a special education teacher for the past 10 years. I am currently certified as a dually certified regular and special education Pre-k-3. I have a master’s in elementary education. I hope those of us who have proven ourselves worthy of our positions will be grandfathered into their current positions/certifications. In the current economy, the proposed changes will create an extreme hardship to schools and staff. This is another stress we do not need in these difficult times.

Tina Champagne, Plainfield Public Schools

The proposed changes to the special education certification borders absurd. First of all, I am a 23 year veteran science teacher who just spent the last year in an intensive program sponsored by the State of Connecticut to become special ed. certified. The time and money spent on accomplishing this while working full time was unbelievable. To now be told that I might not be able to get a position as a special educator is unfair. In addition the proposed changes create too broad of a range of responsibilities allowed under one certificate for any one teacher to handle, and still service students well.

Lastly, districts never interpret what is determined at the state level the way it is intended. This being said, districts might use the services of the special educators to work on things not related directly to student achievement. Those of us who have spent years as classroom teachers and special educators have done so to work with students and assist them in becoming the best they can. Continuing to badger teachers, especially those wanting to become and currently are special educators, will continue to push qualified candidates out of the teaching career. Special educators should be left to do what they have been trained to do.....teach.

Cheryl Dias-Kohler, Fairfield Public Schools

As an educator in Bridgeport for the past 33 years, I have witnessed the benefit of Special Education teachers working with the identified special ed. student in the regular classroom. In Kindergarten, for example, I teach 25 students. Two of these students have Individualized Education Plans and are developmentally delayed. The Special Education resource teacher works with those students in a small group to give them the extra support they need on difficult skills.

Also, the Teacher Leader who is our Literacy Coach has worked with small groups of students who have not reached the D.R.A. benchmark. This teacher leader was able to boost these students D.R.A. scores. These educators are a valuable resource to the Regular Education teacher and students she/he teaches.

Diane Coleman, Bridgeport Public Schools

I'd like to express my feelings about the proposed changes to the Special Education Certification. I am a fourth grade classroom teacher at South Street School in Danbury. In the past eleven years I've worked also in first and second grade classrooms. Every year I've had from one to seven special education/resource students in my class. The students' disabilities have ranged from learning disabilities to severe cases of autism, OCD, CF, etc. I have had to work closely with the Resource or Special Ed teachers to best service the needs of these students. Based on the information I've seen and the proposed changes listed on the Internet, I am seriously concerned. It appears that with the new certification requirements, Special Education teachers will begin working with students without any student teaching experience. Coursework and observations are necessary and vital to the education process of an educator, **but** the extended practical experience gained through student teaching is the most valuable and necessary component of any teacher preparation program. Please do NOT eliminate the student teaching requirement which is absolutely necessary to give new teachers the tools and experience to work with students. Thank you.

Pat Seeley, Danbury Public Schools

I am writing in response to the proposed changes in the Special Education certification. I think that earning CEUs is difficult enough considering many districts can no longer afford sending teachers to specific trainings. Requiring teachers to earn 75 before receiving their professional certificate is somewhat unrealistic. I think that teachers are already multi-tasking roles and responsibilities as being a special education teacher. I know for myself, I schedule PPTs, write Individualized

Education Plans, make modifications in the classroom, and instruct both regular ed and special education students.

Andrea Perugini, Torrington Public Schools

During these hard economic times, why is this be even considered? College tuitions have increased all across the United States. If a special education teacher needs to continue going to college to get her master's, the extra cost would be difficult and a heavy burden to carry. There are many teachers now who are paying for some of their children's college education. How can they afford to go back to school if they need to? What about the struggling districts who can not afford to hire these teachers at master's levels? They will hire less staff. I think this proposal will also create a shortage of special education teachers. Any way you look at it--the students will suffer drastically if this change comes about. We need to think of our children....our future.

Julie Pagano, Torrington Public Schools

I am opposed to the changes in the Special Education certification!!!! You need to rethink this idea. It will become a great problem for our current and future teachers!!! Stop it NOW!

Susan Palomba, Thomaston Public Schools

It concerns me that student teaching may not be a requirement to obtain initial certification for special education due to the need to be in a mentor teacher role to gain perspective and experience necessary to become a quality special educator. If student teaching to obtain special education certification becomes obsolete, then the soon to be teacher misses out on the opportunity to work with a mentor, someone with experience, and in my opinion, the chance to become a quality special educator. It would also be upsetting to learn that all of my experience would not necessarily be grandfathered in and that I may be assigned to deal with training of paraprofessionals, diagnostics, and facilitating PPT's RATHER THAN working with students directly.

I have worked hard to get to the place that I am in, with many valuable experiences. It would be an upset to loose it all due to a new certification model. Quite honestly if it were that much of a change and that difficult to continue teaching students directly and watching their growth, I would leave education altogether.

Carol Parker Sprankle, East Haddam Public Schools

I am in my third year teaching as a Special Education teacher. I graduated from Southern Connecticut State University in 2007 with a dual certification in Elementary Education and Special Education. I went to school longer to attain this dual certification and have put in countless hours doing so. I was told at the time the State of Connecticut was moving towards an Elementary and Special Education combined certification so even though it was more costly and time consuming I went this route to further my education. I do not feel this new certification change is the right thing to do. I have worked extremely hard and passed both Praxis exams as well as the BEST portfolio. I attend numerous professional development workshops and seminars and earn many Continuing Education Units each year. I am currently taking classes and working towards my Masters degree in Special Education, at Southern Connecticut State University, but because of my own budget it has taken me some time. I do not feel I should have my certification revoked after working hard all these years.

Christy Musante, Milford Public Schools

I'm a special education teacher with 31 years of experience, all in special education. I also have a reading degree. I plan to work 5 more years, but not if I have to redo my certification or take new courses to re-qualify. If we are not grandfathered in, I believe you will lose many experienced teachers in a critical shortage area. I know I will take early retirement.

Dorothy Bates, Region 12 School District

I am writing in response to the SDE proposal for new special education certificates. I have been a Special Education teacher in the State of Connecticut for 23 years. I have many concerns and questions about this proposal. My concerns are as follows:

1. If I wanted to be an administrator then I would have gone to school for my 092 however my choice was to become a teacher and work directly with special education students. I have no interest in becoming an administrator.
2. Student teaching: This was the time when I received the most hands-on experience. This was the time when I learned what teaching was all about and how to deal with the students because of the hands-on. Had I not had student teaching my choices may have been drastically different. Student teaching provides an abundance of learning tools and strategies for the new teacher and should not be eliminated. This is real world experience.

3. Master's Level: Teachers will be overpriced and the chance of them being hired as a special education teacher may be minimal. This may in effect create a shortage of special education teachers. Interestingly there is already a shortage of special education teachers. You may not find many teachers with a bachelor's degree that want to pursue the special education field. Do not eliminate the bachelor's level program.

4. Continuing Education Units: To obtain the 75 hours and only those that are specified by SDE is ludicrous. This means time away from your students and your job. Those specific courses or classes may not be available within the professional development from the school district so this will increase the time away from students. Courses/programs are offered to broaden or strengthen areas, to teach you new skills and to expand upon those skills. Teachers should have that opportunity to investigate and learn about new ideas or techniques that are other than special education related.

Here we have yet one more educational change. Is this another way to scare off prospective teachers? The changes in this proposal are too numerous. I am proud to say that I love my job, my students and that I am a great teacher! I would prefer to remain a special education teacher without all of these unnecessary changes. This proposal needs some serious rethinking and restructuring!

Betsy O'Neill, Region 12 School District

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It really saddens me to hear the new changes being made to the system yet again. It appears to me the idea to reform education keeps hurting the children and putting them last. This seems to be very prevalent in certain areas that have higher percentages of students receiving services. In my classroom I have students that suffer from severe learning disabilities, but because of the grand idea of inclusion, those students are placed among the students considered general population. I have a paraprofessional that comes 3x a week for approximately 30 minutes because there are so many students in the building that need aid. I am sure there are no Special Ed. teachers with the required certifications for the new agenda being proposed in my building. This means with all the gains my class has made on standardized tests, on-line assessments, class assignments, etc., without the assistance of the Special Ed. teachers in my building, it can all be gone in a flash. I wonder if this is the best idea for the students that need more help than others. What arrangements will be made to accommodate them? I also wonder what will happen to those teachers that applied for those positions in hopes of completing other degrees to assist the students. People wonder why many

people are discouraged by this profession. I believe it has more to do with the business than the children. The increase of students with learning disabilities is on the rise, but we are taking the resources. I wonder, does this make any sense if we want to make progress continue?

Sharisma Simmons, Bridgeport Public Schools

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I have been working as a special education teacher for 28 years and I am concerned about the provisions for grandfathering all special educators. I am also concerned about the changes, the preparation of a special education teacher, and the requirements for an initial certificate. Student teaching is a valuable experience for all educators and should be required. The State Department of Education needs to realize that students are allowed to attend their neighborhood schools. Services need to be available to all that require assistance or a modification within their regular education program. We cannot determine the needs of all the students prior to their arrival, but we can have a group of educators that work together and follow a building procedure that assist the regular education teacher in supporting and determining the needs of students.

Suzanne L. Cicale, Bridgeport Public Schools

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I am writing to let you know that I oppose the proposed changes in certification for the special education endorsement. I am a special education teacher in the Fairfield Public School System. I teach students with a wide variety of disabilities who are included in the general education classroom.

As a teacher with 25 years of teaching I am opposed to the elimination of the initial certification through a bachelor's level program. I think it is imperative that teachers get into the classroom and gain experience through actual working with students, not just a theoretical situation that most colleges provide. I do believe that the two student teaching experiences students take part in as undergraduates provides a good basis for a teacher to begin his/her career. I would encourage you to keep this system in place.

Donna Spigarolo, Fairfield Public Schools

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I have been a special education teacher for the past thirty years and I am appalled at the current proposal for special education certification. First, we are already in a shortage area. These changes in certification would be costly to new teachers as well as very time consuming. With the economic

status of this country right now, I believe we would be discouraging teachers from entering the field of special education. Second, the range of responsibilities under one certificate is too much for any teacher to handle and still service students well. Finally, districts would be required to hire at a master's level. We all know that in these economic times, cutbacks are a reality. How disappointing to finally complete all the requirements and then not be hired because you would cost too much. We have more and more needing students entering our public schools. Please do not make it any harder to get qualified and dedicated teachers to meet their needs.

Vivian Sweeney, Fairfield Public Schools

The proposed changes to the special education certification borders absurd. First of all, I am a 23 year veteran science teacher who just spent the last year in an intensive program sponsored by the State of Connecticut to become special ed. certified. The time and money spent on accomplishing this while working full time was unbelievable. To now be told that I might not be able to get a position as a special educator is unfair. In addition the proposed changes create too broad of a range of responsibilities allowed under one certificate for any one teacher to handle, and still service students well.

Lastly, districts never interpret what is determined at the state level the way it is intended. This being said, districts might use the services of the special educators to work on things not related directly to student achievement. Those of us who have spent years as classroom teachers and special educators have done so to work with students and assist them in becoming the best they can. Continuing to badger teachers, especially those wanting to become and currently are special educators, will continue to push qualified candidates out of the teaching career. Special educators should be left to do what they have been trained to do.....teach.

Cheryl Dias-Kohler, Fairfield Public Schools

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Also, the Teacher Leader who is our Literacy Coach has worked with small groups of students who have not reached the D.R.A. benchmark. This teacher leader was able to boost these students' D.R.A. scores. These educators are a valuable resource to the Regular Education teacher and students she/he teaches.

Diane Coleman, Bridgeport Public Schools

I am a seventh grade social studies teacher in my second year of teaching in Connecticut. I am writing today to express my concerns regarding the proposed changes to certifications for special educators and literacy specialists. As a regular educator, I work hand-in-hand with the special education teachers and reading specialists to develop the best instructional plans for our students receiving services. Our special educators work diligently to meet these students' needs and to provide assistance to teachers like myself who do not have the specific training for the multitude of special needs and abilities.

Under the SDE's proposed changes, these teachers would be required to take on additional duties such as training of staff. These duties will have an immediate negative impact on their ability to provide timely and quality services to our students. The budgetary constraints of these new proposals may also impact my ability to teach effectively because if my district cannot afford to pay these teachers at the new mandatory level of holding a Masters Degree, then there may be fewer specialized teachers servicing our student population. This ultimately puts the burden on the regular classroom educator (me) who has not received significant training in special education or remedial literacy.

I understand that the goal of these changes is to improve student learning but these changes will only negatively impact the learning environment for all students.

I urge the CEA to push the Connecticut legislators to rethink their original proposals and to adopt the changes suggested by the CEA.

Cynthia McManaman, Vernon Public Schools

I cannot attend the hearing, but I have a few comments about the proposed changes to special education certification. It is shortsighted to make it even more difficult to attain special education certification in the future. To allow certification only after attaining a Master's degree means ultimately that fewer certified special education teachers will be available to fill the many openings

that continue to exist in our state. This is already a shortage area. Why make it an even greater shortage area? This idea is grossly unfair to the many students who need the full support of legally mandated special education services. As an experienced special educator, I also find it unfathomable that there is no assurance that all special educators will be grandfathered into the new regime. If they are currently certified in special ed. they should be allowed to teach special education. As a long-time mentor, I find it amazing that in the new certification plan no student teaching will be required. Real teaching experience in special education is absolutely necessary for a new teacher to do a good job in his/her special education position. There is no adequate substitute for actual teaching experience. Furthermore, it is illogical and would be very detrimental to expect new special educators, without experience, to train staff. One does not know how to teach special education students until one has done it and done it well. Please consider these concerns for my beloved profession and, most importantly, for my students. Thank you.

Elizabeth Gray, Chaplin Public Schools

The proposed changes to the Special Education certification will leave gaps in service to students, our most important concern!!!!

Please take under advisement that students still need the time to catch up on skills they do not have. The changes being recommended will not allow them to learn in an educationally conducive environment. If it was your child would you consider not allowing him/her to get the skills needed in the appropriate setting required for his/her development? I ask that you rethink the model of service delivery based on these certification requirements. Also consider the financial responsibilities of persons seeking this new certification.

Gwendolyn Montgomery, New London Public Schools

I have been a special education teacher for approximately 17 years in many districts. I feel the certification changes facing special education teachers is one more hoop we must jump through in this turbulent profession where little is done to help these teachers master all areas of the curriculum. The new proposed certification changes will influence who chooses to stay in the special education field, and this will most likely deter new educators from choosing this area of teaching. What other tenured teachers have to take the Praxis in their area of study following permanent status in a school system? The special education requirements are constantly evolving,

but very little is done to provide these teachers with paid college courses that would help to enhance their skills in all academic areas. States should pay for these teachers to be educated in the areas they co-teach in before demanding they take the Praxis exams.

The proposed certification changes also affect the steps special education teachers have to take to get to the top step of their special education degrees. Do regular education teachers have to go through extra steps beyond initial educator status to professional status? Why are special education teachers being singled out? Why aren't regular education teachers asked to take intense special education classes to enhance their abilities to differentiate their delivery of services in their classrooms?

Lisa Holmes, Region 12 School District

I am a speech language pathologist who has worked in the area of special education for 27 years. I am concerned that by requiring a master's to become a special education teacher the state will create a greater shortage of special education teachers than we already have at this time. I think some teachers who are interested in special education may not pursue a master's in the field because they will want to start work with a bachelors degree which will place them in the field of regular education where some may be inclined to stay. I'm also astounded that there would be no student teaching experience what so ever, yet the SDE would require 75 hours of CEUs to advance to a professional certificate. I think teachers will be discouraged, not encouraged to enter the field of special education.

I see the need for today's special educators to become well versed in the regular education curriculum, however I believe the CEA's proposal for two levels of special education certification makes more sense.

Abbie McGough, Region 12 School District

As a Special Education teacher, I am writing to express my concerns about the proposed special education certification changes in our state. I feel that it will not enhance the preparation of new special educators but rather reduce the numbers of students choosing this field of education. It seems to punish just the special educators in requiring a master's degree. The most troubling is the

lack of mandatory classroom experience- in no other field is this more important than in special education! The plan seems not completely thought out but rushed. Also, I understand there is no allowance for “grandfathering” those currently holding certification. These are just some of the reasons I am opposed to the proposed changes. Thank you for listening.

Mary Tague – Regional District 11

As a co-teaching classroom teacher, I feel that changing the special education requirements would be a direct disservice to both general and special education students. Co-teaching works extremely well and is a valuable and collaborative way to teach students. The general ed. and special ed. teachers work together to plan and implement effective lessons that meet the needs of all learners. It is an example of collaboration at its best!

Kim Ricci, East Hartford Public Schools

I am surprised and dismayed that the SDE has considered changing the certification requirements for special education certification. I completed my undergraduate and graduate degrees at the University of Connecticut and have been teaching for almost 13 years. I taught for five of these years under my special education certification. I am very disappointed that the education I acquired at our state college and my five years of experience in which I was trained in techniques such as ABA and Let's Read, may not be adequate for maintaining a certification in special education.

Finally, I have a number of questions regarding clarification of the SDE's guidelines. For example, I currently hold a professional certificate and I am wondering what degree of "grandfathering" this entails. Does this mean that I need to complete more coursework to renew my professional certificate in 2012 when it expires? Further, is it necessary to have a Masters degree specifically in special education, or just a major in special education, which I had at the University of Connecticut? Thank you for your time and consideration.

Darlene Torrant, Litchfield Public Schools

I am concerned about the proposed changes to special education certification. In particular, I feel that requiring a Master’s degree for certification will create many problems for school systems. First, in a time of tight education budgets, it will increase the cost of special because all special education

teachers will enter at a higher salary. With many communities already questioning the cost of special education, this increased cost exacerbates the problem. In addition, I believe this will decrease the pool of certified teachers because of the added time and expense to become certified in special education versus all other teaching certifications. Lastly, I am extremely concerned with the elimination of the student teaching requirement. It is a critical component of teacher training.

Wendy Brachfeld, Fairfield Public Schools

I am a recently retired teacher from the Torrington School district. I am writing in regard to the proposed changes in Special Education certification.

As a high school math teacher, I co-taught with a member of the Special Education department for several years. His knowledge and expertise in this area was helpful to me and also allowed students to function successfully in the mainstream classroom.

Should these proposed changes in Special Ed certification be implemented, the number of qualified Special Ed. teachers will be limited. The impact of needing a Master's degree will discourage new teachers from pursuing this career choice. For many, both the time and the cost will be prohibitive.

Boards of Education in Connecticut are now struggling with budget issues. The salaries for Special Ed. teachers will force districts to reduce the number of these teachers, thus adding to the responsibilities of the remaining educators. With larger case loads and more meetings to attend, the Special Education teachers will have less time to spend in classrooms working with students who need their help.

Lisabeth Milewski, Torrington Public Schools (Retired)

I am currently a regular education 6th grade science teacher in Groton, and I want to write to express my concerns about the Special Education Proposal.

While I support the mentality of holding teachers, including special education teachers, to a high standard, I think this proposal goes about it all wrong. I truly believe the best way to learn is to do. I myself went through a Master's program immediately following my student teaching, and

actually felt less prepared after my master's to enter the classroom. Truth be told, none of my bachelor's or master's classes prepared me as well as actually being in the classroom, putting my knowledge into practice, and having support around me of those that had been in the profession for countless years. I do not think requiring special education teachers to get a master's prior to entering the field will have any benefit to them if they cannot take part in the education process at the same time to apply their learning. I believe it would be better to have those educators in the classroom, and as they gain more experience and demonstrate their learning, allow them to reach higher certification. Furthermore, many master's programs, including mine, require and are based upon doing educational research, an entirely different realm than teaching, and again would actually be less helpful than the time in the classroom itself.

In addition, I believe the financial burden and time it would take to get a master's would discourage many from going into the special education field and that would be devastating to teachers and students. I could definitely not do my job without the help of a wonderful special education teacher. I have several students with disabilities (Down syndrome, autism) this year who have needs that I could not meet on my own. Those students rely heavily on the support of their special education teacher, and I strongly believe that if those individuals are not there, those students will fall through the cracks. I simply cannot support a proposal that would discourage or remove special education teachers from the field. Again, I think that applying and demonstrating their skills within the field is a far better indicator than a master's.

I sincerely hope that instead of this proposal, you would allow these teachers to stay in the classroom, and have their education happen there. Many professions allow for an "intern" phase during the first years where the employee can learn about the profession, gain knowledge, and demonstrate their learning. I support the CEA's proposal of having two levels of certification that would allow for this growth without removing these teachers from the classroom, and I hope you will too.

Laura Brink, Groton Public Schools

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My name is Rebecca Elliott and I am a special education teacher in an elementary school in Waterbury. I am writing in regards to the proposed changes in the special education certification proposal.

I am very concerned about the move to require a master's degree for special education teachers to become a licensed teacher. At this time many young people are already struggling to get their

undergraduate degree and pay off their student loans, and now you would like to make it impossible for them to have a job after those four years because they aren't going to be certified to do anything? If I were just starting out I would have to completely disqualify the idea of being a special education teacher (a job I LOVE) simply because I wouldn't be able to look at a future of six years of student loans and part-time jobs. I am sincerely concerned about a decrease in the number of special education teachers that will be entering the field if they are required to hold a master's degree prior to teaching. I would anticipate that a decrease in special educators will increase case load size, and my ability to meet all of my students' educational needs would be impossible.

If a change in certification is necessary, I think a better option would be for there to be tiered levels of readiness. When you graduate with your undergraduate degree you would be a tier 1 special education teacher, and when you graduate with your master's degree you could be a tier 2 special education teacher. Instead of having the differentiation of the tiers based on "mild/moderate disabilities" and "severe disabilities" perhaps it would be better if tier 1 would be entirely inclusion based teaching and co-teaching and tier 2 would be inclusion, pull-out and PPT facilitator. It should be based on responsibilities as a teacher instead of student needs.

Rebecca Elliott, Waterbury Public Schools

I am currently teaching within the Waterbury School District as a Special Education teacher with a provisional certificate. I also hold provisional certificates in Elementary Ed and as a Remedial Reading and Language Arts teacher. I teach special education students using both my SPED and Reading certificates.

I have been a certified teacher since 1983, hold a Master's degree in Reading and completed the PRAXIS II exam requirements in April 2009. As a 48 year old woman with two of my three children in college, going back to school would be financially prohibitive. I can't imagine that getting a Master's in Special Education would teach me anything I don't already know or can access easily through research on my own. I'm appalled to think that the SDE would basically see me as unqualified. The Waterbury School District would no longer have a hard working, dedicated AND effective teacher if I could no longer be employed there due to the new regulations. Would I be grandfathered in? It is not clear. Will I go back to school? Absolutely not! I already have 38 upper division credits beyond my Master's. I think I'm through with college at this point in my life unless I'm a professor at one!

Sandee Hyde, Waterbury Public Schools

I am writing this to share some of my concern about proposed certification changes in the area of special education in Connecticut. I am dually certified in the areas of special education and hearing impairment. My master's degree is in deaf education. I feel that acquiring a master's degree in special education would not be as valuable to me as the 25 years I have spent teaching in the field, attending professional development, and sharing with colleagues. Not every student with a hearing loss has additional special education issues but many have specific learning difficulties, emotional issues, or additional physical or cognitive challenges. An additional master's degree may provide me with more generalized knowledge but not the specific background necessary for individual student needs. I feel that requiring an additional degree from a veteran teacher would not provide increased benefit for students. I feel "grandfathering" current teachers is appropriate. There continues to be a shortage of qualified applicants for special education positions and requiring a master's degree at this point will make the shortage worse. My friend, also a veteran teacher of twenty plus years, completed the Alternative Route to Certification in special education last summer. Will her certification be considered valid?

Susan Oates, SCHOOL DISTRICT

I began my teaching career as a Special Education Teacher 33 years ago, prior to Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and all of the state and federal mandates that are required. I have been a School Psychologist for the past 18 years, I am still very much aware of the requirements and responsibilities that Special Education teachers must accomplish on a daily basis. Many very good Special Ed. teachers have moved over to regular education. The amount of paperwork and constant changes that the state mandates without training or time, i.e. changes in CMT/CAPT/MAS that must be done quickly. At this time, agencies, courts, state, parents are turning to Special Education to service children due to emotional, criminal, attendance, learning and behavioral issues. More and more Special Education has become the answer for any child who is having difficulty, yet we have experienced Special Ed. teachers leaving this area. Special Ed. teachers are required to evaluate, do IEPs, progress reports and PPTs that are not required of others. By changing the certification process, it would foolhardy to become a Special Education teacher.

Laurel Killough, Connecticut Education Association

I am opposed to the proposed certification changes if ALL current Special Education Teachers are not grandfathered.

Elise M. Fox-Leggiadro, Stamford Public Schools.

I'm a special education teacher with 31 years of experience, all in special education. I also have a reading degree. I plan to work 5 more years, but not if I have to redo my certification or take new courses to re-qualify. If we are not grandfathered in, I believe you will lose many experienced teachers in a critical shortage area. I know I will take early retirement.

Dorothy Bates, Region 12 School District

I am writing in response to the SDE proposal for new special education certificates. I have been a Special Education teacher in the State of Connecticut for 23 years. I have many concerns and questions about this proposal. My concerns are as follows:

1. If I wanted to be an administrator then I would have gone to school for my 092 however my choice was to become a teacher and work directly with special education students. I have no interest in becoming an administrator.
2. Student teaching: This was the time when I received the most hands-on experience. This was the time when I learned what teaching was all about and how to deal with the students because of the hands-on. Had I not had student teaching my choices may have been drastically different. Student teaching provides an abundance of learning tools and strategies for the new teacher and should not be eliminated. This is real world experience.
3. Master's Level: Teachers will be overpriced and the chance of them being hired as a special education teacher may be minimal. This may in effect create a shortage of special education teachers. Interestingly there is already a shortage of special education teachers. You may not find many teachers with a bachelor's degree that want to pursue the special education field. Do not eliminate the bachelor's level program.
4. Continuing Education Units: To obtain the 75 hours and only those that are specified by SDE is ludicrous. This means time away from your students and your job. Those specific courses or classes may not be available within the professional development from the school district so this will

increase the time away from students. Courses/programs are offered to broaden or strengthen areas, to teach you new skills and to expand upon those skills. Teachers should have that opportunity to investigate and learn about new ideas or techniques that are other than special education related.

Here we have yet one more educational change. Is this another way to scare off prospective teachers? The changes in this proposal are too numerous. I am proud to say that I love my job, my students and that I am a great teacher! I would prefer to remain a special education teacher without all of these unnecessary changes. This proposal needs some serious rethinking and restructuring!

Betsy O'Neill, Region 12 School District

It really saddens me to hear the new changes being made to the system yet again. It appears to me the idea to reform education keeps hurting the children and putting them last. This seems to be very prevalent in certain areas that have higher percentages of students receiving services. In my classroom I have students that suffer from severe learning disabilities, but because of the grand idea of inclusion, those students are placed among the students considered general population. I have a paraprofessional that comes 3x a week for approximately 30 minutes because there are so many students in the building that need aid. I am sure there are no Special Ed. teachers with the required certifications for the new agenda being proposed in my building. This means with all the gains my class has made on standardized tests, on-line assessments, class assignments, etc., without the assistance of the Special Ed. teachers in my building, it can all be gone in a flash. I wonder if this is the best idea for the students that need more help than others. What arrangements will be made to accommodate them? I also wonder what will happen to those teachers that applied for those positions in hopes of completing other degrees to assist the students. People wonder why many people are discouraged by this profession. I believe it has more to do with the business than the children. The increase of students with learning disabilities is on the rise, but we are taking the resources. I wonder, does this make any sense if we want to make progress continue?

Sharisma Simmons, Bridgeport Public Schools

I have been working as a special education teacher for 28 years and I am concerned about the provisions for grandfathering all special educators. I am also concerned about the changes, the

preparation of a special education teacher, and the requirements for an initial certificate. Student teaching is a valuable experience for all educators and should be required. The State Department of Education needs to realize that students are allowed to attend their neighborhood schools. Services need to be available to all that require assistance or a modification within their regular education program. We cannot determine the needs of all the students prior to their arrival, but we can have a group of educators that work together and follow a building procedure that assist the regular education teacher in supporting and determining the needs of students.

Suzanne L. Cicale, Bridgeport Public Schools

I am writing to let you know that I oppose the proposed changes in certification for the special education endorsement. I am a special education teacher in the Fairfield Public School System. I teach students with a wide variety of disabilities who are included in the general education classroom.

As a teacher with 25 years of teaching I am opposed to the elimination of the initial certification through a bachelor's level program. I think it is imperative that teachers get into the classroom and gain experience through actual working with students, not just a theoretical situation that most colleges provide. I do believe that the two student teaching experiences students take part in as undergraduates provides a good basis for a teacher to begin his/her career. I would encourage you to keep this system in place.

Donna Spigarolo, Fairfield Public Schools

I have been a special education teacher for the past thirty years and I am appalled at the current proposal for special education certification. First, we are already in a shortage area. These changes in certification would be costly to new teachers as well as very time consuming. With the economic status of this country right now, I believe we would be discouraging teachers from entering the field of special education. Second, the range of responsibilities under one certificate is too much for any teacher to handle and still service students well. Finally, districts would be required to hire at a master's level. We all know that in these economic times, cutbacks are a reality. How disappointing to finally complete all the requirements and then not be hired because you would cost too much. We have more and more needing students entering our public schools. Please do not make it any harder to get qualified and dedicated teachers to meet their needs.

Vivian Sweeney, Fairfield Public Schools

The proposed changes to the special education certification borders absurd. First of all, I am a 23 year veteran science teacher who just spent the last year in an intensive program sponsored by the State of Connecticut to become special ed. certified. The time and money spent on accomplishing this while working full time was unbelievable. To now be told that I might not be able to get a position as a special educator is unfair. In addition the proposed changes create too broad of a range of responsibilities allowed under one certificate for any one teacher to handle, and still service students well.

Lastly, districts never interpret what is determined at the state level the way it is intended. This being said, districts might use the services of the special educators to work on things not related directly to student achievement. Those of us who have spent years as classroom teachers and special educators have done so to work with students and assist them in becoming the best they can. Continuing to badger teachers, especially those wanting to become and currently are special educators, will continue to push qualified candidates out of the teaching career. Special educators should be left to do what they have been trained to do.....teach.

Cheryl Dias-Kohler, Fairfield Public Schools

As an educator in Bridgeport for the past 33 years, I have witnessed the benefit of Special Education teachers working with the identified special ed. student in the regular classroom. In Kindergarten, for example, I teach 25 students. Two of these students have Individualized Education Plans and are developmentally delayed. The Special Education Resource teacher works with those students in a small group to give them the extra support they need on difficult skills.

Also, the Teacher Leader who is our Literacy Coach has worked with small groups of students who have not reached the D.R.A. benchmark. This teacher leader was able to boost these students' D.R.A. scores. These educators are a valuable resource to the Regular Education teacher and students she/he teaches.

Diane Coleman, Bridgeport Public Schools

I am a seventh grade social studies teacher in my second year of teaching in Connecticut. I am writing today to express my concerns regarding the proposed changes to certifications for special

educators and literacy specialists. As a regular educator, I work hand-in-hand with the special education teachers and reading specialists to develop the best instructional plans for our students receiving services. Our special educators work diligently to meet these students' needs and to provide assistance to teachers like myself who do not have the specific training for the multitude of special needs and abilities.

Under the SDE's proposed changes, these teachers would be required to take on additional duties such as training of staff. These duties will have an immediate negative impact on their ability to provide timely and quality services to our students. The budgetary constraints of these new proposals may also impact my ability to teach effectively because if my district cannot afford to pay these teachers at the new mandatory level of holding a Masters Degree, then there may be fewer specialized teachers servicing our student population. This ultimately puts the burden on the regular classroom educator (me) who has not received significant training in special education or remedial literacy.

I understand that the goal of these changes is to improve student learning but these changes will only negatively impact the learning environment for all students.

I urge the CEA to push the Connecticut legislators to rethink their original proposals and to adopt the changes suggested by the CEA.

Cynthia McManaman, Vernon Public Schools

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I cannot attend the hearing, but I have a few comments about the proposed changes to special education certification. It is shortsighted to make it even more difficult to attain special education certification in the future. To allow certification only after attaining a Master's degree means ultimately that fewer certified special education teachers will be available to fill the many openings that continue to exist in our state. This is already a shortage area. Why make it an even greater shortage area? This idea is grossly unfair to the many students who need the full support of legally mandated special education services. As an experienced special educator, I also find it unfathomable that there is no assurance that all special educators will be grandfathered into the new regime. If they are currently certified in special ed. they should be allowed to teach special education. As a long-time mentor, I find it amazing that in the new certification plan no student teaching will be required. Real teaching experience in special education is absolutely necessary for a new teacher to do a good job in his/her special education position. There is no adequate substitute for actual teaching experience. Furthermore, it is illogical and would be very detrimental to expect new special

educators, without experience, to train staff. One does not know how to teach special education students until one has done it and done it well. Please consider these concerns for my beloved profession and, most importantly, for my students. Thank you.

Elizabeth Gray, Chaplin Public Schools

The proposed changes to the Special Education certification will leave gaps in service to students, our most important concern!!!!

Please take under advisement that students still need the time to catch up on skills they do not have. The changes being recommended will not allow them to learn in an educationally conducive environment. If it was your child would you consider not allowing him/her to get the skills needed in the appropriate setting required for his/her development? I ask that you rethink the model of service delivery based on these certification requirements. Also consider the financial responsibilities of persons seeking this new certification.

Gwendolyn Montgomery, New London Public Schools

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Sandee Hyde, Waterbury Public Schools

I am writing this to share some of my concern about proposed certification changes in the area of special education in Connecticut. I am dually certified in the areas of special education and hearing impairment. My master's degree is in deaf education. I feel that acquiring a master's degree in

special education would not be as valuable to me as the 25 years I have spent teaching in the field, attending professional development, and sharing with colleagues. Not every student with a hearing loss has additional special education issues but many have specific learning difficulties, emotional issues, or additional physical or cognitive challenges. An additional master's degree may provide me with more generalized knowledge but not the specific background necessary for individual student needs. I feel that requiring an additional degree from a veteran teacher would not provide increased benefit for students. I feel "grandfathering" current teachers is appropriate. There continues to be a shortage of qualified applicants for special education positions and requiring a master's degree at this point will make the shortage worse. My friend, also a veteran teacher of twenty plus years, completed the Alternative Route to Certification in special education last summer. Will her certification be considered valid?

Susan Oates, Torrington Public Schools

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I began my teaching career as a Special Education Teacher 33 years ago, prior to Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and all of the state and federal mandates that are required. I have been a School Psychologist for the past 18 years, I am still very much aware of the requirements and responsibilities that Special Education teachers must accomplish on a daily basis. Many very good Special Ed. teachers have moved over to regular education. The amount of paperwork and constant changes that the state mandates without training or time, i.e. changes in CMT/CAPT/MAS that must be done quickly. At this time, agencies, courts, state, parents are turning to Special Education to service children due to emotional, criminal, attendance, learning and behavioral issues. More and more Special Education has become the answer for any child who is having difficulty, yet we have experienced Special Ed. teachers leaving this area. Special Ed. teachers are required to evaluate, do IEPs, progress reports and PPTs that are not required of others. By changing the certification process, it would foolhardy to become a Special Education teacher.

Anonymous

I write you as a Social Studies Teacher for the Stamford Public Schools, and I am also certified in Special Education, where I've taught most of my career. I am concerned by proposed changes in special education certification requirements.

One proposal that will be particularly damaging would be the requirement that to be certified in

special education, a candidate must have a Master's degree, which would be an exclusive requirement for special education only. Not only will this be costly to those seeking certification, but it will deprive candidates of something that is invaluable, lack of experience in the subject. I do not mean to denigrate the importance of an advanced college education, however, it cannot substitute for real-life experience. The most likely result that will come from this proposal is that less and less teachers will pursue a degree in Special Education, further limiting an already shallow pool of qualified candidates. The ones who will lose out if this proposal goes forward are districts that cannot afford hiring an initial educator with an advanced degree, and the children we serve, who likely to receive less of the services and resources they need to succeed in school. I see this resulting in exacerbating an already growing achievement gap between special education students and their general education peers, and will likely deprive children of the opportunity they need, and should have.

I strongly urge you to reject this proposal because it will be devastating to the education of students in Connecticut. In place of this draconian policy, I propose changes that will actually improve the quality of special education. I propose certifying teachers in special education for a specialty area, such as mild and moderate disabilities, while another certification area could be set aside for severe disabilities. This practice is already done in several states, and will improve the quality of education because teachers in special education would be placed according to areas they have been specifically trained for. In addition, I support a measure which would allow special educators to hold a teaching certificate before moving onto a specialist certificate.

Special education appears to be unfairly targeted for additional requirements that other content areas do not have. The proposals made by your Department will only further limit candidates from pursuing a teaching career in special education, and does not improve the quality of teaching. The ones who lose out are the ones we care most about, our students.

Adam Silver, Stamford Public Schools

