

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION
MEETING OF JULY 29, 2009

MINUTES

(adopted August 19, 2009)

Commissioner of Education Mark K. McQuillan called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

In addition to Dr. McQuillan, the following committee members were present: Dr. Louise Feroe, Sr., Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, Connecticut State University System; Ms. Janet M. Finneran, Vice Chairperson, State Board of Education; Mrs. Patricia B. Luke, State Board of Education; Dr. Maureen McSparran Ruby, Assistant Professor, Eastern Connecticut State University; Mr. Michael Meotti, Commissioner Department of Higher Education; Dr. Yuhang Rong, Assistant Dean, School of Education, University of Connecticut; Dr. John Voss, State Board of Education

Others in attendance: Deputy Commissioner George A. Coleman, Dr. Carlotta Schechter, Department of Higher Education; Dr. Christine Thatcher, Department of Higher Education; Attorney Jennifer Widness, State Department of Education; Associate Commissioner of Education Marion Martinez; Assistant to the Commissioner of Education Pamela Bergin; State Department of Education Consultant Georgette Nemr; State Department of Education Bureau Chief Nancy Letney-Pugliese.

On a motion by Dr. Rong, seconded by Dr. McSparran Ruby, the committee unanimously approved the minutes of the June 25, 2009, meeting. Mrs. Luke requested that the minutes include all questions raised by the members.

Commissioner McQuillan noted that the committee provides a forum for discussion of the issues concerning the revised regulations, prior to the State Board declaring its intent to amend the regulations at its October 2009 meeting. He stressed the importance of a joint discussion of representatives of higher education and PK-12 with regard to the implications of the revised certification regulations. Dr. McQuillan noted that the committee may need to meet after the regulations are promulgated, in order to consider comments made at public hearings, by the State Board of Education, etc., and how the regulations impact legislative proposals for consideration by the 2010 General Assembly.

Nancy Letney-Pugliese, Chief of the Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification, reviewed the document titled "Connecticut's Assessment Requirements for Certification" and the "Educator Continuum Initiatives and Programs Under Development."

Education Consultant Georgette Nemr distributed draft regulatory language for elementary education K-6 and secondary academic subjects, Grades 6-12, as well as portions of the current regulations (copy in official file).

Commissioner McQuillan asked the committee to consider two matters:

1. Whether there should be an overlap of Grade 6 in certification; and
2. the merits of, or concerns with, an "integrated certificate."

Mrs. Luke asked for the definition of "overlap" and a summary of what was being proposed in the "new" regulations.

Ms. Letney-Pugliese explained that we currently have certification for Grades PK-3, 4-8, K-6 and 7-12. Due to the overlap in these grade configurations, very few candidates pursue the Grade 4-8 certification. After reviewing several models, the Advisory Committee on Certification felt strongly that the K-6 certificate should be continued. The new regulations propose a K-6 and 6-12 certificate, with Grade 6 overlapping. The Advisory Committee agreed with this recommendation in that it allowed for a mix of teachers in Grade 6 whose training focused on developmental needs of students at the middle grades and rigorous content instruction. Ms. Pugliese added that this model allows flexibility for the more than thirty ways that districts across Connecticut have structured their middle grade schools.

Mrs. Luke stated that this might not be ideal for the education of middle grade students, particularly sixth grade students. She thought that teacher candidates who pursued certification in Grades 6-12 preferred to teach at the upper grades, not at the 6th grade level. She also stated that she does not believe that sixth grade should be departmentalized.

Mr. Coleman stated that he views the inclusion of subject area teachers at the middle grades as a complement to the quality of middle-level education, integrating their expertise into the strengths of the faculty.

Mr. Meotti discussed the transition from a "generalist" at the early grades to a teacher with a focus on a specific content area, and questioned whether we should allow flexibility to afford districts to hire a generalist or a "math teacher," depending on their needs.

Ms. Nemr noted that the proposed regulations are not intended to set policy for the structure of middle schools in the state. They are intended to address the preparation gap that exists in teacher training programs, by requiring teacher training programs to focus on preparing teachers to teach at both the middle and high school.

Dr. Voss favored Grade 6-12 certification without an overlap, as most middle schools have teams with content expertise. The exception, he noted, is a Grade K-6 school.

Dr. McQuillan asked the committee if it felt that Grade K-5 should be separated from Grade 6-12. The effect of doing so might be a greater emphasis on content rather than the developmental needs of sixth graders, where we originally intended to allow greater flexibility. We need to determine if it is no longer practical to offer middle school certification and whether we need to build more content into middle school instruction.

Discussion ensued. Committee members commented on whether an exception for elementary schools with a sixth grade should be allowed; the need to be flexible so as not to dictate to districts what is best for students in their schools; the need to consider the developmental needs of middle school students; whether teacher preparation programs can prepare teachers well for a Grade 6-12 span; the long-term implications of the regulations that are promulgated; what is most educationally sound for students – rather than being flexible to accommodate administrators; the need to review research regarding this issue; teacher preparation and the need to expose candidates to all grade levels in their field work.

The Committee will revisit this topic at its next meeting, after having had the opportunity to review related research.

Commissioner McQuillan introduced a discussion of certification of regular and special education teachers at the K-6 and 7-12 levels.

Dr. Martinez stated that there is agreement around the need to strengthen pre-service preparation in literacy, special education, working with ELL students, etc. Initially, it was thought that such training would enable teachers to work with students in a resource room. Dr. Martinez stated that the concern was whether that training would be adequate to meet students' special education needs. After much thought, it was agreed that while that training is crucial, it would not adequately prepare teachers for a resource setting.

Ms. Pugliese added that it would be unreasonable to complete all the credit requirements needed to gain that level of expertise, so instead we focused on special education competencies which would allow teachers to work with students with special education needs in an integrated classroom or in small groups. In addition, a certificate in special education would move from a bachelor-level degree to a master-level degree. Special education is an advanced endorsement, requiring a content endorsement first at the secondary level.

Dr. Rong noted that at the secondary level, six years would be required to complete these requirements, given all other requirements affiliated with content areas. Dr. Nemr agreed that it would be a 6th year specialist endorsement.

Dr. McQuillan asked committee members to review the other items that appeared on the agenda. In addition to a few issues raised by Jay Voss and Janet Finneran with regard to administrator certification, the committee will place on its next agenda "Guidelines for Teacher Evaluation and Professional Development." The committee will look at research by the National Association of State Boards of Education regarding middle school education.

Next Meeting: August 19, 2009, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., Room 307, State Office Building, 165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut.