

Remarks of Barbra Guillotis
Special Education Teacher, Amity Middle School – Bethany
Concerning Special Education Certification
April 29, 2010

Hello. My name is Barbra Guillotis. I've been a special education teacher for 21 yrs., and 16 of those years have been vested in CT public schools.

As a former resident of Massachusetts, I completed my undergraduate coursework at Fitchburg State College, earned 4.0's in student teaching, and graduated in 1989 with honors.

When I began teaching in CT, there was much expected of me before I could obtain professional certification:

- I took and passed both CONNTENT & CONNECT
- I passed the BEST program – at the time that assessors still visited the classroom
- I earned 30+ credits beyond a Bachelor's degree – **all in Special Education**, though not in a Master's program. This was simply because I couldn't decide what area of special education I wanted to specialize in.
- I completed 3 consecutive years of successful teaching experience

I did everything the Department of Education asked of me to obtain certification, as well as maintain it. Now, because I graduated from an out-of-state college and do not have a Master's degree, I might lose my job.

With the economy being so poor, going back for a Master's degree would pose a financial hardship on my family. I'm not alone in this claim. Boards of Education across the state cannot provide tuition reimbursement, and colleges don't offer reduced tuition rates for teachers.

Your expectation of having highly qualified teachers is understandable, but the method you've selected to meet this goal is unrealistic and has dire consequences:

- ❖ According to the San Francisco Chronicle, approximately two-thirds of college graduates use student loans to help finance their education, incurring an average of \$23,000 in debt. As college costs continue to soar, that figure is likely to keep rising. Accumulating more debt to earn a Master's degree is simply not feasible.
- ❖ On April 1, 2009, Commissioner of Education Dr. Mark McQuillan sent a memo to the CT State Board of Education regarding certification shortage areas. Special Education teachers were ranked 3rd on the list, with 566 total positions to fill, 398 1st year holders of CT teaching certificates, and a low applicant quality rating.

- ❖ The financial burden on districts to hire special education teachers ONLY with Master's degrees, especially those with more experience, would be onerous.
- ❖ The idea of student teaching not being required for initial certification defies logic. You would never want to have surgery performed by someone who lacks experience.

Please reconsider your proposal. Not only will qualified teachers lose their jobs, our students will pay the price educationally... and ultimately, so will we.

Thank you.