

Remarks of Mary Loftus Levine
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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education
Concerning the proposed changes to certification

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Good afternoon. My name is Mary Loftus Levine and I'm the Director of Policy and Professional Practice at the Connecticut Education Association. I'd like to comment on the proposed certification regulations pertaining to special education, literacy, and teacher leadership as they pertain to making policy in tough economic times.

Last week the lead story in the Hartford Courant was about the anticipated layoff of 2,000 teachers in CT. The message of the story was that districts are doing everything they can to work with smaller budgets but still keep their teaching staffs. They've cut programs, paraprofessionals, and other support personnel, but know that, in the best interest of children, they need to keep as many teachers in the classroom as possible. The story also pointed out that the situation will be worse in the next few years because we won't be able to rely on the federal stimulus money we've had the past two years to help supplement district budgets.

How does this relate to certification policy and regulations? Simply put: good policy supports the outcomes you desire, and poor policy makes those outcomes harder to achieve. The proposed certification regulations may appear to have good intentions by raising the standards for certification for special educators, literacy specialists, and teacher leaders, and supposedly producing better prepared professionals who will be hired by districts. But they're not good policy, in that they make the bottom-line outcome - well prepared teachers - harder to achieve. The additional cost to earn a master's degree in order to obtain the initial certificate in special education and literacy, and overloaded preparation programs will drive prospective teachers from pursuing those areas to teach in.

This policy will also force districts to hire new teachers, with little or no experience, beginning at the master's level. Let's look at special education as an example. In a small district like Putnam, which has 3 schools, and the pay differential for a new teacher with a bachelor's versus a master's degree is roughly \$2200. If the district has to hire 3 new special educators in one year, the additional cost to the district will be \$6600. In Waterbury, which has 31 schools, where the pay differential is roughly \$3000, if the district has to hire 12 new special educators in one year, the additional cost to the district will be \$36,000.

And in Greenwich, which has 15 schools, where the pay differential is roughly \$5200, if the district has to hire 8 new special educators in one year, the additional cost to the district will be \$41,600. In these economic times, districts simply can't afford it, will hire fewer teachers, and service to students will be decreased.

Since January 22, Connecticut newspapers have run more than 172 stories about the budget challenges districts are facing, and the news is the same. The money just isn't there. Instituting state policy that pretends otherwise, or sends the message that districts will just have to work it out themselves, is bad policy. Good policy looks for the 'win-win,' the ways in which we can assure that teachers are well prepared, and districts can afford to hire them. In the case especially of special education and literacy, a 'win-win' can include two levels of certification, one a teaching certificate, and the other a specialist or consultant certificate. This is also more affordable for districts, resulting in the hiring and retention of more teachers, and hence, more service to students. We need to focus on good policy that looks for the 'win-win.'