

Remarks of Virginia Dimmock
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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education concerning
proposed changes to certification in Literacy Specialist

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Good afternoon. My name is Virginia Dimmock and I am a Reading/Language Arts Consultant in Coventry. As a veteran Language Arts/Reading Consultant with twenty-one years of service in the state of Connecticut, I have some serious concerns about your plans to change certification requirements for remedial reading teachers and language arts consultants. Reading is, without a doubt, the most important subject a student has to master. If a child cannot read, his ability to excel in any other area of the content is seriously hampered, putting success out of reach in an era when having a higher education is absolutely critical.

Further, the stages of development a child has to go through to become a proficient reader require a very wide range of varied instructional strategies. To expect one person under a literacy specialist certification to be able to master the knowledge needed to ensure success to a beginning reader as well as to a struggling middle school reader or high school student is a sure way to guarantee mediocrity at best. Not only are the instructional strategies very different, but the diagnostic tools a specialist uses at either end of the spectrum also vary. It takes years of practice for the specialist to

become truly proficient at mastering these tools individually, let alone to have a thorough understanding of all of them. What a disservice we would be doing to our students by not giving them the best we have to offer!

The state of Connecticut prides itself on working to make sure its teachers have access to the most current educational standards available. I take pride in that fact as well. The newest standards raise the bar for learning for all of our students. I want to raise the bar for each and every student I touch as well. With these raised ideals, we are expecting our teaching professionals to be the best they can possibly be. The only way to ensure this is by keeping the word 'specialist' pure. A specialist is one who is devoted to a particular branch of research. Reading comprises an entire tree of research. We must consider, not only those students needing assistance, but those who need enrichment at the higher end of achievement; not only the developmental arenas of young readers, but the developmental issues surrounding adolescent readers. One person simply cannot master it all. In fact, I would like to see the certifications broken down even further than they are now. There should be reading specialists devoted to grades K-3, 4-6, and 8-12. Also, all teachers, including special educators, should be required to take more than just a survey course on teaching reading. This would include a class on the developmental issues surrounding reading acquisition.

We need to do more for our children – not less. By combining the two existing certifications into one, we would be watering down a critical area of expertise rather than enhancing it.