

Rita Holby testimony

Good afternoon. My name is Rita Holby, and I teach kindergarten in the Bloomfield public schools. I also hold a master's degree in special education, but have chosen not to seek the endorsement in special education for several reasons. I'm here today to speak about why I oppose the proposed changes to the special ed certificate.

Special education is a very complex field, and becomes more complex the more we learn about disabilities, how students learn, and what we, as educators need to do to help students with special learning needs succeed. When you add the 'politics' of special ed to the fray, the field becomes overwhelming.

I chose not to apply for the special education endorsement largely because I wanted to focus my energies on working directly with the students in my classroom who have special needs. If I worked as a special education teacher, even though I may have worked with those same students, I would have also had a wide range of responsibilities that took time away from directly working with students.

The proposed certification adds to that "list" of responsibilities a special educator would have, which will take more time that the teacher would spend directly working with students. Classroom teachers and paraprofessionals can't, and shouldn't be, expected to do more with children with special needs than they are already doing. When a regular classroom teacher has to devote more time to one child, and do that on a regular basis, the other children have even less attention from the teacher. That's just not fair. When a special ed teacher spends less time working with teachers and students in the regular classroom, or less time with students in the resource room, and depends on paraprofessionals and regular classroom teachers to pick up the slack, that's not fair. But this is what is happening already. If the proposed special education certificate is adopted, this will be exacerbated. We should all be opposed to that.

The State Department has said that special education is "such a large body of understanding," and this is why it requires study at the master's level for initial certification. This rationale misses the point for 2 basic reasons. First, a special educator has to learn the basic principles of the field, just as in any other field of teaching, like math, English, or health. Whether you learn the basic principles at the undergraduate or graduate level is irrelevant....the basic principles remain the same. We don't require master's level study for initial certification for math, English, health, and other fields, so why would it be required for special ed? Second, if special education is "such a large body of understanding," why would we expect a teacher to grasp most of it in one preparation program? Cramming it into one program, for one certificate, will result in a knowledge base that is a mile wide and an inch deep. We should all be opposed to that.

It's well known that special education has become a much more complex field, requiring deeper knowledge and higher levels of skills in order to provide appropriate service to students and support for teachers. Why, then, would we expect one type of special educator to be able to

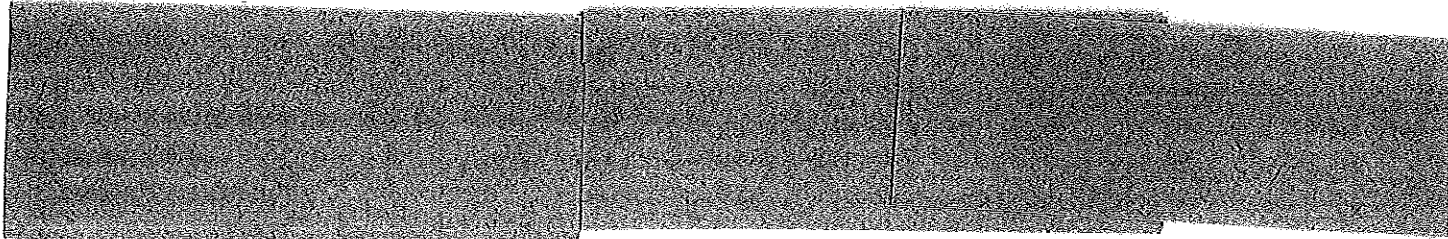
do it all? There's simply too much to know and do. The medical field wouldn't dream of expecting all doctors to be able to treat all diseases and maladies...that's why there are specialists. In special education, we need to think along those same lines. Classroom teachers are already doing their share. The very least we should do is offer two levels of special education certification – one for a special education teacher and one for a higher-level special education specialist. We should all support that.

Trying to create special education teachers who know it all and can take on a very wide range of responsibilities, right from the completion of a 30-credit program, is unrealistic. This move will drive teachers away from becoming certified to teach special education. Those who, like me, want the background so they can serve their students better, may continue to earn a master's degree in special ed, but won't take the steps to become certified. A greater shortage of special educators will be the result, our students won't get the services they need and deserve, and you'll be scratching your heads trying to understand why. Listen to what practicing teachers say, and include us in the conversations and decisions so we can help shape certification changes that will make sense.

Rita Holby talking points
Proposed special ed certificate

Good afternoon. My name is Rita Holby, and I teach kindergarten in the Bloomfield public schools. I also hold a master's degree in special education, but have chosen not to seek the endorsement in special education for several reasons. You have my written testimony, so I'd like to elaborate on one specific point that will exemplify why I oppose the proposed changes to the special ed certificate.

1. Special education is already complex and becomes more so all the time (This is commonly due to the 'politics' of special ed in towns across the state.)
2. Proposed cert changes add more responsibilities to list of requirements that a special ed teacher can do.....this will lead to less time for working with students and teachers.....more demands that are piled on the regular educ teacher and/or paras.....the proposed plan is unfair to all.
3. All teachers already face an overwhelming number of tasks that weren't part of our jobs 10 or more years ago...My first example based of a teachers' decision to leave special education teacher who is one who is now working at a BIG Y market due to the overwhelming demands both in her classroom and the mounting demands of her district with designing behavior plans, teaching spec. educ students and planning & working alongside regular education teachers all while putting out fires of students with social/emotional issues. My own personal story is the counseling I am providing for a sped. teacher who wants to leave this year at the end of 15 years and knows this will have a negative impact on both her income, her students and her team. She cannot leave school before 7-8 pm and continues to work on sped paperwork when she arrives home. I also have more paperwork and school work to complete along with the sped teacher in order to meet the demands of my classroom and her caseload which we both share. Quality collaboration takes time.

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5. Proposed cert seeks to create a 'super-teacher' through a 30-credit programunrealistic this, with more paperwork and 'politics' of special ed to deal with, will drive more teachers from special ed, rather than attract them to it.....*I have spent time working with student interns who imagine themselves as a special education teacher after completing coursework in a university. After witnessing months of how the special education program needs to be implemented with testing, assessments and is both physically and emotionally demanding, interns often decide to pursue another degree (reading certification or counseling or in one case, pharmacy & medical technician) Smart interns in all cases who knew it would be an impossible task to be a special education teacher.*
 6. One solution.... Since special ed is so complex, consider breaking it down into 2 different certificates...one a special ed *teacher*, the other a special ed higher-level *specialist*.
 7. The State Dept. of Education should listen to what practicing special ed teachers say. Your proposed changes will not attract and or retain teachers currently in this field.