

Remarks of Phil Apruzzese
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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 Phil Apruzzese and I'm a 5th grade teacher and president of the Connecticut Education Association.

In the process of changing the certification regulation, which will impact thousands of teachers and students for years to come, we at CEA would like to see that the change be done right, rather than quickly, and that the result is something we can all live with. To date, we haven't reached that point. We'd like to see the mistakes made in 1998, the last time changes in certification regulations were proposed, be avoided this time around. Those mistakes all had to do with not listening to what stakeholders were saying.

The regulations that were implemented in 1995 changed elementary certification as of July 1, 1998. That change eliminated kindergarten from the certificate, making it a grades 1-6, rather than K-6, certificate. In 1998, the SDE proposed to split special education certification into two levels, and require special education teachers to have a content area major. The elementary special education certificate would not include PreK and K. Together, these changes meant this: teachers who wanted to teach kindergarten would have to hold an

early childhood certificate. Despite testimony and reasonable explanations from educators in districts, the State Department of Education (SDE) made no changes to their proposals, and the State Board adopted what the SDE proposed. The change eliminating K from the elementary certificate went into effect in July 1998; the others would have gone into effect in 2003. Anticipating a change in certification requirements, SCSU had redesigned their teacher preparation program for special education.

By September, it was obvious that the elementary certification change was a huge mistake. Superintendents couldn't find enough teachers who held early childhood endorsements, creating a panic and rush to obtain DSAPs so they would have kindergarten teachers with some kind of valid certificate. The adopted certification regulations had already been filed with the State. In order to reverse them, the SDE had to approach the legislature to pass legislation that would repeal the 2003 certification regulations, and reinstate kindergarten into the elementary certificate.

Those certification problems could have been avoided, just as we now hope to avoid certification problems that could result from the adoption of the currently proposed regulations. Teachers and administrators know best what is needed to prepare educators for the complex and changing roles they play today.

I urge the State Department of Education and State Board of Education to work with all stakeholder groups to design certification changes that make sense, so we don't repeat the mistakes made more than a decade ago.