

Remarks of Kristina Carnevale  
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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education  
concerning the proposed changes to certification in Special Education

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Good afternoon. My name is Kristina Carnevale and I'm a special education teacher in Somers. I am writing this in response to the dramatic changes to certification that the State Department of Education is proposing and to encourage the State to reconsider these changes. As a special education teacher supporting students with social and emotional disabilities, I see the importance of special education every day. I truly love the students I work with and the career path I chose. This is why I so strongly oppose the State of Connecticut's proposed changes to special education certification. These plans for special education will without doubt turn good educators away from a wonderful career, leave beginning teachers highly underprepared, and force teachers to rush into a Master's Degree before finding an area they are passionate about. Please consider these points and work with CEA to develop a better certification plan for current and future special education teachers.

First of all, the planned certification changes to special education will most certainly turn good educators away. Many graduates like me, who have a Bachelor's degree, truly need to work after those four years in college to begin paying college loans. The longer time and greater cost of initial certification into special education will cause many prospective teachers to choose another job. Furthermore, the increased workload that will be expected of special

educators will be another reason for teachers to find better paying jobs with less amounts of extra work. Especially with the economic issues of today, many potential teachers would not be able to afford what it would cost to become an educator.

Also, the proposed requirements for a teacher preparation program are simply inadequate. With no student teaching requirement, first year teachers will be flat out unprepared to deal with what truly goes on in a classroom. It was Education Secretary Arne Duncan who recently stated on CNN that future teachers need “less theory, more hands on experience.” I certainly agree with this point, as I feel that the most knowledge I acquired was from my student teaching experience. It provided me with real life situations that no text book could ever amount to. By not requiring student teaching, beginning teachers will be underprepared and overwhelmed.

Finally, it is extremely important that the State of Connecticut allows teachers time to teach in schools before being required to work on their Master’s Degree. I know this first hand due to my own personal situation. This last year I have had the wonderful opportunity to work with children with Autism. Though I had known a great deal about Autism, I now find myself completely fascinated in working with students with this disability. This fall I am beginning my Master’s Program in Autism studies. I look forward to touching the lives of many students with Autism, as well as helping my colleagues with their understanding of the disability. My time teaching after I acquired my Bachelor’s Degree was critical for me to figure out which area of special education I was most interested in. We need special

educators to be fascinated, interested, and passionate about they do. Please do not take this opportunity away by forcing special educators to acquire their Master's Degree first.

While I am greatly opposed to the State of Connecticut's proposed special education changes, I strongly support CEA's proposed changes. The two levels of certification in special education make perfect sense. Special educators should be teachers of students with disabilities first before they are considered a specialist. I urge the State Department of Education to work with CEA and the educators around the state to develop more appropriate and fitting certification requirements in the area of special education. We are the ones in the classrooms every day, teaching, listening, and caring for the generations of tomorrow. We know what is best for education, so please listen. Thank you.