

Remarks of Beth Michalec
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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education
Concerning the proposed literacy specialist certificate

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Good afternoon. My name is Beth Michalec. I'm a second grade teacher at East School in Torrington. I'd like to comment on the proposed literacy specialist certificate and the impact I see it may well have on my newer colleagues.

With the increased emphasis on literacy skills, and the need to have these skills taught by well-qualified teachers, I'm concerned about the State Department of Education's (SDE) plan for what they call 'grandfathering' reading teachers who hold the 102 endorsement, and for the future ability to attract teachers into the area of reading as a specialty.

My understanding is that the SDE has stated that if a teacher holds a professional level 102 certificate by July 1, 2014, she or he will be grandfathered and will not have to do anything more. That's all well and good in theory. For those teachers who hold a 102 that is new, however, this has the potential to have a big impact on them in several ways. If a teacher is to reach the professional level by July 1, 2014, she or he will have to begin teaching under the

provisional level 102 no later than the 2011-2012 school year in order to meet the experience requirement. That also means that a teacher who recently received his or her 102 would have to begin teaching under the initial certificate no later than this coming school year. The first concern, then, is that in these hard economic times, when districts are laying off teachers, there will be many fewer openings for reading teachers, and teachers will not be able to meet the experience requirement by July 1, 2014. It seems unfair that they'd be qualified for the certificate according to the current requirements, but not qualified for the new certificate with new requirements simply due to the passage of time and unfortunate employment circumstances.

Those teachers who are lucky enough to be able to teach under their current 102 certificates and just meet the employment requirement by July 1, 2014, have, however, another requirement to meet to be eligible for the professional level 102 certificate by that date. They have to have completed their master's degree. Since those teachers already took the 21 credits required to earn the 102, finishing their master's degree within the next few years might be do-able, since only another 9 credits are needed. However, that also assumes that the teacher can pay the cost, which, at today's graduate course cost, will amount to several thousand dollars. Whether or not teachers can afford the cost

over a shorter period of time will depend on other economic and personal factors the teachers face. In essence, if many teachers want to work to be grandfathered into the 102 certificate – if the SDE is going to practice grandfathering as it's always been practiced – they have to squeeze finishing their master's degree into a shorter period of time, at a cost of several thousand dollars, during which they can't be assured of retaining their positions due to decreased district budgets. Somehow that doesn't seem fair.

There are other questions that still need to be answered about the proposed literacy specialist certificate. However, one thing remains the same: The SDE would find teachers much more supportive of making changes if the changes made sense, and teachers had a voice in creating the changes before they're presented as proposals. I urge you to listen to what teachers are saying. Thank you.