

Remarks of Herman Stargardter
Special education teacher
Coventry Public Schools

Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education
Concerning the proposed changes to certification in special education

April 12, 2010

Good afternoon. My name is Herman Stargardter and I'm currently the eighth grade special education teacher at Captain Nathan Hale Middle School in Coventry, CT. I have held a special education certificate for 10 years, but have worked in special education environments for almost 20 years. I have certainly witnessed and participated in the evolution of our specific niche in our profession, as well as the sweep of current educational trends.

I have felt compelled to speak out concerning some of the proposed changes in special education certification. Most of what we do depends on consensus, as special educators. We co-teach in somebody else's classroom, co-parent somebody else's child, and co-administrate in somebody else's building. Looking for agreement among multiple competitors is our daily adventure and challenge, but more importantly, the consensus process leads to thoughtful policy that takes into account all of the concerns that make for our better lives...and the betterment of the lives of the children we serve.

The proposed changes in special education certification are ones I find alarming, ones I hope were just proposed to allow more thoughtful and cooler heads to come to a reasonable consensus on what would be a more considered evolution of certification policy. Here are some of my concerns in special education.

The current proposal does not (as far as I can see) address whether or not teachers will be grandfathered or will have to leave their positions in order to attain the possible new requirements. I am of the belief that experience (especially long experience) is a far better test of competency than is training. There is nothing like the daily reality of a real classroom to prove and approve the competence of a special educator. A caring professional changes almost automatically to meet the changing needs of the students. My coworkers' alarm over their possible removal from our profession because of changes over which they have no control is disheartening. It is just these people who are the backbone of our everyday response to our challenging students and environments. They are invaluable assets to all of us who care about how our children can face the difficult challenges their education has become for them.

I realize that with RTI and the changes that it brings are adding complexity to the role of the special educator. What concerns me about these changes is the

lack of the role of consensus in these changes. Appropriate and thoughtful changes need at least two perspectives, one from thoughtful and wise administrators and policy makers, and one from current practitioners. Without the broad perspectives of one and the ground floor experience of the other, real effective policy change cannot be implemented. Let us teachers have a voice in creating changes that will be most beneficial for the children we serve.