

Remarks of Kendra Bria
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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 Kendra Bria and I'm a Special Education Teacher for the Stamford Public School district.

This is my fourth year as a special education teacher. In my short time in this field, my job, my students and my requirements have all been constantly changing. I have taught in two districts under different conditions and roles, all with inner city children with special needs. As much as I love my job, I am disheartened by the lack of respect my students get and now us as their teachers are receiving by the state.

There are two points in the proposed new certification I would like to speak about in this testimony. The first is the lack of study that would be required by changing the certificate to a candidate receiving a thirty credit master's degree instead of a one hundred and twenty credit undergraduate degree. The second point is the state's refusal to grandfather in special education teachers who are currently working in the field with these struggling students.

I received an extensive one hundred and twenty credit undergraduate degree in special education in order to prepare me for the position I teach today. Not only did I complete two student teaching rotations, one in a resource room and one in a regular education classroom. I also spent almost every semester from my sophomore year on in a classroom setting learning and practicing with senior, experienced and hard

working teachers. I was able to work in different types of settings, with a variety of students with and without disabilities. In my four years, I worked in a fourth grade classroom as a regular education teacher, tutor, and took on the role as a special education resource teacher. I worked in a specialized school, the Gengras Center, with teenage life skills students, and with students with severe emotional needs. I also worked one on one with students in this school as a tutor. I also volunteered in a Kindergarten, first, third and fifth grade classroom. This was all before student teaching in a K-6 resource room and then a Kindergarten classroom. I also was an active member of the CEC and Best Buddies Organization. Between my classes and work study, I was well prepared to take on my own classroom of students of ANY kind. I do not believe all this could be accomplished in a 30 credit master's program. This kind of background and skill takes time to develop and practice. 30 credits is not nearly enough.

Second, refusing to grandfather current special education teachers' certificates would be a HUGE detriment to all the students in our state that currently receive services through an Individualized Education Plan. The on-the-job experience we have received is more of an education that a classroom or professor can give us. Further, many of us, if not all, are still in graduate school of some sort to further our repertoire of skills and experience. Currently, I am in school to receive my master's in Reading. This directly benefits all my students. I teach them reading skills on a daily basis. This degree has been much more beneficial to me than any masters in special education would be. I have learned the pedagogy, disabilities and strategies for special education. Learning new strategies, assessments, and instructional practices for teaching Reading in a systematic, researched way has helped EVERY student I come into contact with.

In conclusion, I wish the state would understand and respect how hard teachers work every single day and let us teach. By adding more education requirements, C.E.U. hours, and making it cost more money is only going to deter people away from our challenging and rewarding field. We need all the help we can get to help our students succeed. Further, if this legislation goes through teachers who are currently in the career, are going to find other avenues to earn income. Teachers work day in and day out, they take work home, they don't make a lot of money and they continue their education through their entire career. Let us teach, let the students learn. Concentrate your money and time on helping us, not "challenging" us on our credentials. Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.