

Remarks of Jennifer Hankla

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Before the State Dept. of Education and State Board of Education concerning
proposed changes to certification in Literacy Specialist

April 6, 2010

Good afternoon. My name is Jennifer Hankla and I'm a literacy specialist in Ridgefield. I have been a teacher for 17 years. Twelve of those years were spent in the classroom and the past five have been as a literacy specialist. While I thoroughly enjoyed teaching first and second grade, my passion is the teaching of reading. Because of this love, I earned a Master of Education degree with a concentration in Reading and English. Over the past 17 years, I have attended countless workshops and seminars dealing with reading education, including several summers at the Reading and Writing Institute at Columbia University and the Teacher's College Coaching Institute as well. I put in hundreds of hours of practicum work to become a fully certified instructor of the Wilson Reading Program. I have led professional development in my district in phonological awareness, reading comprehension, fluency, and the reading workshop model of teaching. I assist teachers on a daily basis with their planning, instruction, and assessment of reading. I provide research-based reading interventions for all students, K-5, who fall below the districts benchmarks for reading, and the data that I collect reflects the success of those

interventions. In my building, I manage the Early Intervention Team, the grade level data teams, and all of the progress monitoring of our struggling and at risk readers. I am a master mentor for the TEAM program. Despite all of this, I am in danger of losing my position if this proposed change takes effect.

I do not argue that it is crucial that our literacy specialists should have special training and be highly qualified. My concern is that the proposed legislation does not allow for highly qualified current literacy specialists such as myself to be “grandfathered” in. It is shortsighted to assume that holding a certain endorsement on one’s teaching certificate inherently makes one a better reading teacher. By not taking into consideration the training and qualifications of all the current literacy teachers, the state threatens to wipe out the strong intervention programs that already exist. Of the nine literacy teachers in my district, only one of us holds the certification that the state is proposing that all reading teachers and coaches should possess. If a nearly complete turnover of literacy specialists were to occur, it would take years for districts such as mine to rebuild our programs, leaving the children who need help the most to suffer the consequences.

Please reconsider this legislation through the lens of what is in the best interests of the children of Connecticut. Should they have access to the most trained and qualified reading instructors possible? Of course! However, there should be a way to determine if teachers who are already serving in the capacity of literacy specialists are

indeed those highly qualified reading teachers. Rather than wipe out the literacy programs in countless districts in one fell swoop, find ways to fairly evaluate the teachers who are serving as literacy specialists, allow them to continue to do the outstanding job that they are doing, and use changes to build the programs for the future rather than destroying what we have. Thank you.