

Remarks of Denise Rose
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Before the State Department of Education and State Board of Education
concerning proposed changes to certification in Special Education

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Good Afternoon. My name is Denise Rose and I am a 5th grade teacher in Glastonbury. Thank you for the opportunity to present my concerns about the proposed changes to special education certification.

My first concern is the impact of the master's requirement on undergraduate education students currently majoring and graduating with degrees in special education. With no clause for grandfathering, the special education degree of these students is made worthless. Now they will be required to immediately return to school for a master's degree and additional 75 Continuing Education Units (CEUs). This is an overwhelming financial burden for these education students. Those who choose to go this route, will graduate with no classroom experience other than eight weeks of student teaching, but are now qualified to train paraprofessionals, schedule students, and run Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. These young teachers would have no full time experience in classroom teaching, making any of their suggestions to experienced staff not credible.

In addition, current teachers with special education certifications and master's degrees in other academic areas are now in jeopardy of losing their jobs. These are the teachers who for years have been supporting regular education teachers with direct student support and team teaching. You are about to eliminate the experienced teachers in an ever more complex field.

By requiring a master's degree prior to becoming a special education teacher, you are eliminating the valuable experience a teacher gains in classroom work. To skip the classroom experience (which is what many new teachers would do, and what would be the case with career-changers) and jump to scheduling, training paraprofessionals, and running IEP meetings, creates a huge gap in a teacher's learning experience. It takes classroom experience working with regular education teachers to gain the needed understanding of the challenges of working with special education students in the mainstream classroom.

In the end, the proposed degree process would discourage many teachers from entering special education. The expense and length of time required for a certificate would significantly decrease the number of special educators entering the field. This degree further removes a teacher from working directly with students, which is the main reason teachers enter the teaching profession.

I would ask you to review the unintended consequences of the current special education certification proposal. You will be losing valuable teachers currently in the field, and eliminating the special education undergraduate program that is the foundation of special education teaching. Teachers need preparation that begins with undergraduate work before moving on to the master's degree level. Thank you.