



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

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November 5, 2009

To: CEOs/Presidents of Institutions of Higher Education with Teacher Education Programs
Deans and Directors of Teacher Education Programs
New York City Department of Education
District Superintendents
Superintendents of Public Schools
Nonpublic School Superintendents
Administrators of Charter Schools
School Personnel Administrators
New York State United Teachers
United Federation of Teachers
Commissioner's Advisory Panel for Special Education Services
Other Interested Parties

From: Joseph P. Frey

Subject: Recommendation on Certification Structure for Teachers of Students with Disabilities

I ask for your assistance and recommendations regarding options for the State's special education teacher certification structure. The current four-tiered structure was developed to focus on student developmental levels and academic content areas to ensure that students with disabilities have continued access to teachers academically prepared to teach them. Over time, the Department has closely monitored supply and demand of students with disabilities (SWD) teachers. There is a shortage of SWD teachers to fill special education positions, especially at the middle and secondary levels.

For the past 30 months the Department has been developing proposals, based on recommendations from the field, research, and meetings with institutions of higher education, professional organizations and others to resolve the issue of restructuring special education certification. The Department has sought formal feedback from the field twice, in January and October 2008, and your recommendations and thoughts have shaped our recommendations to the Board of Regents. Thank you for those comprehensive and thoughtful remarks.

Your feedback suggests there is broad support in two areas: increasing training in special education programs to develop knowledge in the importance of, and the skill in, ensuring collaboration between general and special education teachers to provide access to the

curriculum; and highly qualified content area teachers for all students. This preparation will be partnered with similar curricular adjustments in general education programs to increase the special education pedagogical knowledge and skills in general education teachers. Although not supported as widely, there is much support around eliminating the SWD 5-9 certificate, using supplemental certificates at adjacent levels for certified special education teachers and developing a middle/high school SWD Generalist.

In October 2009, the Board of Regents continued its discussion on this matter and again asked that I seek your input on options for amending the structure of special education certification. The October 2009 Regent’s item is located on the Department’s Web site at: www.regents.nysed.gov/meetings/2009Meetings/October2009/1009hed3.htm. The chart below identifies the current structure, the one proposed to the Board this month based on prior feedback (Option 1) and a second option suggested during the Regents meeting (Option 2). Also, for your consideration is Option 3, other suggestions from the field.

| Developmental Level | Current Structure | Option 1 | Option 2 | Option 3 |
|----------------------|--|---|---|------------------------|
| SWD Early Childhood | SWD Birth – Grade 2 | SWD Birth – Grade 3 | SWD Birth – Kindergarten | |
| SWD Childhood | SWD Grades 1 – 6 | Age 3 – Grade 6 | Age 3 – Grade 5 | Kindergarten – Grade 6 |
| SWD Middle Childhood | SWD Grades 5-9 Generalist and SWD 5-9 Content Specialist | Eliminate | Eliminate | |
| SWD Adolescence | SWD Grades 7-12 Content Specialist (multiple titles with no Generalist option) | SWD 7-12 Generalist with required collaboration with a general educator to teach a special class. The content specialist dual certificate remains as an option. | SWD 6-12 Generalist with required collaboration with a general educator to teach a special class. The content specialist dual certificate remains as an option. | |

Additionally, the Board requested that we seek your feedback on how to better prepare special education teachers who become certified through an alternate pathway. Without discouraging entry into the field, what can the Department do to ensure that teachers prepared through alternative routes are equipped to be highly effective special education practitioners?

Please review the options for the structure of special education certification and discuss improving special educators prepared via alternate routes with your colleagues and provide us with your feedback using the attached form by November 25, 2009. You may send your feedback electronically to hedepcom@mail.nysed.gov, with Special Education Restructuring in the subject line, or in hard copy to:

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Attachment

cc: David Steiner
John King