

March 16, 2009

Testimony concerning certification for teachers in the arts

Senator Gaffey, Rep. Fleischmann, members of the Education Committee, my name is Dr. Dolores Garcia-Blocker. I am the principal of the Cooperative Arts & Humanities High School (Co-Op), an interdistrict magnet high school in New Haven. I fully support Section 5 of House Bill No. 6666, AAC Teacher Certification.

Co-Op is a full-time interdistrict magnet high school, one of only two full-time creative and performing arts high schools in Connecticut. We moved into our new facility in downtown New Haven in January of this year. Of Co-Op's current 446 students, 60.5% are from New Haven and 39.5% are from 21 area towns. Enrollment will increase from 446 to 650 in the next few years. Co-Op was one of two New Haven and 16 Connecticut high schools to receive a "silver" designation as one of the nation's top high schools in U.S. News & World Report's annual analysis last December.

One quarter of each school day is devoted to students' chosen art disciplines, which include:

- creative writing (poetry, prose, playwriting, journalism),
- dance (African, ballet, modern, and jazz),
- music (instrumental, vocal and strings, as well as, theory and composition),
- theater (acting, movement, voice, Shakespeare, technical theater), and
- visual arts (drawing, painting, photography, ceramics, graphic design, and video production).

Existing arts program partnerships include: Neighborhood Music School; Yale Art Gallery; Creative Arts Workshop; Yale School of Music; Yale Repertory Theatre/School of Drama; Shubert Theatre; Long Wharf Theatre; Beineke Library; Peabody Museum; New Haven Ballet; Gateway Community College; Yale Center for British Art; and Center for Creative Youth.

As Co-Op expands by 200 students, our vision for its teaching – which involves required high school curriculum as well as arts – includes the use of part-time professional artists/musicians as well as full-time teachers, some of whom also are professional artists/musicians. We are interested in linking our students with people involved in the arts industries, and we believe these links could provide valuable educational experiences in arts related career paths for some of our students.

As we seek to implement that vision, we struggle with how to meet certification requirements. Below are our suggestions for certification requirements for full-time and part-time teachers:

Full-Time Teachers:

The alternate route to certification would be acceptable, with 12 credits in their subject area and success in the Praxis II exam. Nonetheless, in some areas there is NO applicable Praxis II exam. Therefore, in those situations we suggest that the certification requirement be success in the Praxis I exam plus a district-designed course in partnership with a higher education institution, measuring an ability to create and deliver curriculum and possibly factoring in years of experience in the particular field.

Part-Time Teachers:

In several areas we may be seeking **part-time** teachers, who have specialized expertise and may not be able to meet current certification requirements. This would be going beyond “artists in residence” status.

Given this, we fully support Section 5 of House Bill No. 6666. There is one additional concern not addressed by the bill. Many dancers do not have bachelor’s degrees and thus Section 5 of the bill does not help us hire them. We suggest revising Sec. 10-145f(b)(4) of the general statutes – which appears as Section 6 of HB 6666 – to include the arts as trade-related or occupational subjects, under certain circumstances. We propose that such teachers be limited to a maximum of two courses per day (assuming 90-minute time blocks), and that those courses be limited to areas where there is no such certification (for example, some types of dance or even electrical engineering), or where there is a one-year offering. Finally, we would like to offer seminars taught by arts professionals. For example, we want to offer a seminar on architecture taught by the school’s world-renowned architect, Cesar Pelli of Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects, whose office is two blocks from the new school. Such a seminar would be ideal in our visual arts program; yet, we do not believe certification should be required for Mr. Pelli.

We have the facilities for the arts. Our new 140,000 square foot school contains a 350-seat multi-purpose theater, a black-box theater, a scene shop, an 83-seat lecture/film viewing hall, two dance studios, 2D and 3D arts studios, creative writing labs, a video production studio, choral and instrumental rehearsal spaces, individual practice rooms, a recording studio, a music theory lab, a photography lab, seminar rooms, a cafeteria, a library and a gymnasium, all on the lower level or first and second floors. The top two floors include other academic classrooms. Now we seek your help in using our facilities to their maximum potential as we strive to inspire our students. We appreciate your support. Thank you.