

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Education Committee
March 16, 2009

**TESTIMONY OF
MARK K. MCQUILLAN, COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION**

ON

RAISED BILL 939

AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION

The Department of Education supports Raised Bill 939. For the past few years, the Department of Education has been actively involved with a number of stakeholder groups in developing recommendations to update Connecticut's statutes and regulations concerning the certification of educators and their professional development. Those recommendations have resulted in the legislative changes proposed in Raised Bill 939, which are the first step of many needed to bring regulations, still under review, forward for adoption in 2010.

The proposed statutory amendments are based on the overarching principle that the development of high-quality educators, from pre-service to career, is grounded in competency-based completion standards that are embedded in teacher preparation coursework. The proposals establish the statutory framework upon which revisions to the certification regulations can be made in accordance with this principle.

One of the important changes proposed in this bill is the movement away from the traditional coursework of preparation programs (e.g., special education, elementary reading, foundations of education, etc.) to courses addressing essential competencies (e.g., differentiating instruction, teaching English Language Learners, adapting curricula to diverse student populations, etc.) described in the Common Core of Teaching. Under the new scheme, such competencies will be infused into conventional--and in some instances new courses--and preparation programs will show demonstrable evidence of candidate competency in these current statutory areas as well as more specific areas related to instruction, developmental reading, student assessment, classroom management and professional responsibilities.

Another significant change is to shift from continuing education units (CEUs) based on seat time to comprehensive and ongoing professional development activities that are team-based, school-based and directly focused on student learning and the analysis of student achievement data. Professional development guidelines will provide broader options for designing and documenting CEUs for team-based activities relating to school improvement. This new emphasis will provide a more coherent structure for prioritizing professional development requirements for school districts and educators.

Additionally, under this proposal the State Board of Education will have the authority to review and approve local teacher evaluation and professional development plans and to hold districts accountable for ensuring high standards for classroom supervision. As conceived here, the State Board may require

districts to upgrade the quality of their supervisory and evaluation practices as a condition for meeting the accountability requirements for schools in "corrective action" or undergoing "restructuring" under the terms specified by the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

To increase the recruitment and certification of teachers from other states, the bill proposes to expand interstate reciprocity for the awarding of educator certificates by giving the Commissioner of Education the authority to establish or join interstate agreements.

Finally, to ensure the safety of students and update the denial and revocation procedures, it is proposed that (1) boards of education report to the Commissioner of Education when an employee with a certificate is dismissed from employment for cause, (2) persons whose certificate, permit or authorization has been denied, suspended or revoked be prohibited from being employed in a public school, (3) fingerprinting and criminal background checks be required of non-certified persons in schools when those persons are student teachers or interns completing educator preparation requirements.

Raised Bill 939 is a comprehensive bill, and the proposals described above are some, but not all of the changes in it. Also, much of the bill makes changes that will be effective in 2014, by which time the Department plans to have new regulations in place to implement these statutory provisions. Since the initial drafting of this bill, concerns have been expressed to the Department about the timelines for the changes to the teacher preparation program requirements, i.e., some students in teacher preparation programs take more than four years to

complete their programs and it may be difficult for them to comply with the requirements to be effective July 1, 2014. Consequently, in order to address that circumstance, the Department recommends adding some language to Raised Bill 939 to permit the State Board of Education, for a two-year period from July 1, 2014, to July 1, 2016, to issue the current certificates to individuals who have been enrolled in teacher preparation programs for four years and who are not able to complete the requirements in that time. If the committee would like additional information or if there are questions, the Department is happy to respond.

The Department, and many others, have worked long and hard on developing these initiatives. Changes to the state's certification statutes and regulations have not been made since 1988. Now is the time to bring them up to date and address issues that will improve the training and professional development of Connecticut's educator workforce. We urge your support for this first step to that end.