STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Testimony by the Connecticut Department of Higher Education

Before the Education Committee

1:30 p.m. – LOB Room 1E - March 16, 2009

SB 939 (Raised) AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION

The Department of Higher Education shares the following observations regarding the editions that are proposed in this bill:

Section (8) on page 3 refers to a "temporary ninety-day certificate" which is contradictory to the proposal of raised bill no. 6654 to establish a full year resident teacher certificate. DHE is generally in support of a resident teacher certificate per the information provided in testimony applicable to that bill.

Section (B) (iv) on page 7 states the following per the new recommended language:

"Has successfully completed an alternate route to certification program provided by the Department of Higher Education or other public institutions of higher education, regional educational service centers or private teacher or administrator training organizations and approved by the State Board of Education."

DHE strongly feels that it should be noted that all ARC programs be approved by the State Boards of Education and Higher Education. On a national level, alternate route to certification programs are administered for different purposes and differ in quality as far as teaching standards are concerned. Connecticut has an exceptional national reputation in regards to alternate route preparation and we should assure that policy is written in a way to protect the success we have recorded over the past twenty years. It is also noted that all teacher preparation programs already obtain dual approval through DHE and SDE; therefore, in an effort to maintain the same standard of quality for teacher preparation in our state the approval of ARC Programs should involve a strong collaboration among both state education entities. Such collaboration when affirmed through a regulatory process demonstrates that our State adheres to an approval process for alternate route to certification programs that works to promote a consistent, high quality standard for a selective admissions process, curriculum design and overall program implementation of ARC Programs. Furthermore, implementation of ARC Programs should meet specific state needs, and thus, require quality control via Connecticut's K-12 and IHE administrative units.

Section (C) (2) and (3) on page 8 also refers to a "temporary ninety-day certificate. Please refer to the comments provided regarding general support for a resident teacher certificate.

HB 6654 (Raised) - AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHER CERTIFICATION

The Department of Higher Education is generally in support of a resident teacher certificate for individuals enrolled in an alternate route to certification program as per the following:

Overall, a full year resident teacher certificate will allow for a more supportive first year of teaching, and a more efficient and resourceful processing of credentials for teacher applicants, district personnel, and state department of education consultants.

a.) If such credential replaces the temporary 90-day certificate referenced in 10-145d-414 of the certification regulations, it will give new teachers prepared through alternate route to certification programs a full year of induction support and professional development opportunities to support their transition into teaching.

b.) A full year resident teacher certificate will also eliminate the risk of lapsed certification and stress associated with such risk due to the timing of the application process for the conversion of the temporary 90-day to the initial educator certificate. Such applications are submitted at the midpoint of the school year, and require district recommendations. There have been cases when deadlines were missed and certificates have lapsed in the middle of the school year leading to a variety of issues for the teacher and employing district.

c.) Teachers hired for positions that are considered less than full-time (.4 or less) would no longer have to teach with two consecutive 90-day certificates, but rather one full-year credential.

d.) A full-year resident teacher certificate is more appealing to the clientele who seek alternate routes to certification as it implies employment in a first position of hire for the duration of a full school year.

e.) Per the new competencies that are proposed for the certification regulations that will go into effect in 2014, a full-year resident teacher certificate for candidates enrolled in alternate route to certification programs will allow for more flexibility and programming options for institutions offering alternate route programs. Institutions must redesign preparation efforts to assure candidates are prepared to meet the various competencies that have been proposed, and specifically the more extensive training necessary for special education and integrated certification preparation. A credential that may be issued for up to two years will allow such teacher candidates to work in schools while receiving such training and support and will hence, support the career changers who must rely on income and steady employment to facilitate their entry into teaching, and who typically seek alternate routes to certification as their program of choice for teacher preparation.

There are some points of clarification that must be addressed with this particular bill and such points are raised for further discussion as follows:

1) Per section 1 of the proposed language, an alternate route to certification candidate will be issued a resident teacher certificate per the possession of an appropriate bachelor's degree, a cumulative grade point average of 2.75, the completion of the appropriate State Board of Education assessments, and enrollment in an approved alternate route to certification program. The following should be clarified and/or considered as part of the revisions to the language:

(a) Under this credential an alternate route teacher certified under a resident teacher certificate will be the recipient of a contracted salary and benefits as applicable to the position of hire and not a stipend. Being identified as the "teacher of record" implies such, but it should be noted since this is an important criterion for those who seek alternate route programs, and since "resident teacher" can be interpreted as a position that is similar to an intern or graduate assistant, whereas such roles are compensated with stipends. School districts may feel they can offer long-term substitution rates with no benefits during this timeframe, which would be very unfair to teachers who are assuming the responsibilities of a teacher-of-record. It would also discourage career-changers from becoming teachers.

(b) While enrolled in an alternate route to certification program, including those candidates in a national corps' of teachers' training program, the teacher candidate be eligible for receipt of a Durational Shortage Area Permit (DSAP) with no more than six (6) credits of content deficiency in the applicable content area for which the resident teacher certificate is being sought if such is needed during the initial year of teaching while enrolled in an alternate route program. Such candidates must also pass the approved subject area assessment(s) for their content area and complete the final (6) credits before a resident teacher certificate may be issued. The DSAP may only be issued one time, with the exception of subject areas that have extensive requirements per the approval of the State Department of Education. Finally, alternate route providers should be able to authorize a DSAP for the initial year of teaching for an employing school district if individual accommodations are made to expand student teaching requirements in an effort to provide more time for training and demonstration of teaching competencies, when all other training components of the program have been completed by the candidate.

(c) Confirmation that an alternate route provider will still have access to policy and process as approved by the State Department of Education to approve GPA waivers in extenuating circumstances where life and professional experience support the presentation of academic performance.

(d) Different content standards should not be regulated for candidates being prepared in a national corps' of teachers' training program. The candidates who are typically prepared in this type of program are recent college graduates with little or no professional experience. To reduce such content requirements through the issuance of a durational shortage area permit with "at least twelve semester hours of credit or have passed the assessment approved by the State Board of Education in the subject area they will teach" to facilitate faster entry into the classroom is a disservice to the students they will be teaching, and contradicts the requirements and policies currently in place for other alternate route to certification programs preparing career changers for certification. Hence, item (b) should be considered for candidates who are prepared via alternate routes to certification. The national corps' of teachers' training program is identified as an alternate route to certification and should meet the same content standards.

HB 6666 (Raised) AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHER CERTIFICATION

Section (1) The Department of Higher Education does not support Section 1 of this bill. Teacher candidates should not be issued certification in a specific content area, whether in a shortage or non-shortage area, due to their sole performance on the standardized assessment approved by the State Board of Education for their content area(s). We should not consider such drastic compromises to our regulatory process at a time when teacher quality and high standards are more essential than ever to support the development of our nation's next workforce.

Section (5) The Department of Higher Education does not have any issue with an adjunct instructor certificate to support artists who teach part-time in interdistrict magnet schools. Such individuals are hired for the sole purpose of teaching their specific artistic talent on a part-time basis and the language that supports their qualifications to receive an adjunct instructor certificate is appropriate.

Section (6) – 10-145 (f) Per the language on page 11, the Department of Higher Education supports the waiver of the competency examination and the subject matter assessment for out-of-state candidates who transfer to Connecticut as described except that such candidates must have taken some equivalent of a competency examination and subject matter assessment in their respective state to align with the high standards of our teaching requirements.

Section (7) The implementation of another type of special education support by local and regional boards of education during the current state of the economy will severely impact the budgets of our K-12 school districts. It is not an appropriate time to introduce a new special education mandate. Teacher preparation programs that offer integrated certification and/or special education programs should continue with their own development of curriculum to support students identified with special needs, and in particular, those students who are identified with autism spectrum disorder.

We would be happy to discuss these issues further if you so desire.