

AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHER PREPARATION

SB 928

Testimony, February 17, 2012

Senator Bye, Representative Willis, members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee....

Thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of Bill No. 928, an act concerning teacher preparation. My name is Harriet Clark. I speak to you today as a retired special education teacher, a vocal advocate for improved literacy services for children, and an active volunteer in numerous literacy projects and non-profit organizations for over 30 years.

Two years ago, the State Board of Education imposed a new certification requirement for teacher candidates because of concern over disappointing CMT reading performance in state elementary schools. Graduates now must pass the Foundations of Reading exam to be certified to teach in Connecticut. The pass rate for 2010 ranged from 60% to 91%. Some teacher preparation institutions changed their curricula to make sure their students were ready for this rigorous test. Others complained that the test was unfair.

In the area of reading, brain research reveals that neural pathways respond favorably to appropriate instruction, even in students with reading disabilities and dyslexia. We are fortunate to have Dr. Ken Pugh at the Haskins Reading Laboratories in New Haven leading this research effort. Appropriate instruction with measurable results must be the gold standard for instruction in our public schools.

The National Reading Panel in 2000 reported its results from a scholarly, thorough review of over 10,000 thousand articles on reading instruction to cull the five essential and effective components of reading instruction – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Twelve years later, this scientific research-based knowledge is not universally available to classroom teachers both seasoned and new.

SRBI (scientifically research-base instruction, Rtl in other states) is now implemented in all Connecticut schools, to varying degrees and with varying degrees of success. SRBI requires that curriculum used to teach skills be based on scientific research, not publishing company promotions. It requires teachers to identify struggling learners, provide intervention, collect and analyze data on a weekly or biweekly basis and to measure student progress toward an identified target, implementing further interventions as needed.

These changes in the classroom require that prospective teachers receive high-quality instruction that is more intensive, more demanding, more research-based, more analytical. They deserve to be fully armed with many tools in their teaching kit to address the demands of the classroom. Their students are more diverse than ever, representing many cultures and languages. Special education students, ranging from those with intellectual disabilities and autism, are an integral part of every classroom. Teachers graduating from the Connecticut Higher Education system have a right to be prepared for their roles.

Improving teacher preparation in our public higher education institutions is a state and national priority. Our nation is losing ground in reading, math, and science in comparison to students in many other countries. Please see the attachment from the National Center for Education Statistics. Bill Number 928 will study (1) course requirements for teacher candidates and consistency among the public institutions; (2) training of higher education teachers employed in the higher education system; (3) implementing research-based reading instruction at the college/university level as well as research-based instruction in other subject areas; and (4) assuring that graduates of the CT higher education system are indeed prepared to teach.

The times have changed. Business as usual is not sufficient to meet the needs of our state. Thank you for your attention and anticipated support of this legislation.

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