

Remarks of Maria Manso Garcia
Spanish teacher
Trumbull Public Schools

To the Program Review and Investigations Committee
November 14, 2011

Senator Fonfara and Representative Rowe, and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee:

My name is Maria Manso Garcia, and I teach Spanish in Trumbull High School. Like many others, I believe that educator certification in Connecticut should be a function of an independent educator professional standards board. If practicing educators had handled certification when I first came to the United States ten years ago, I'm sure I would not have gone through what I experienced this year.

On June 12, 2001, I was selected as a potential teacher in a CT school as part of the Connecticut/Spain Partnership program, which recruited teachers from Spain to help alleviate the shortage of teachers in CT. I received a letter the SDE had sent to my potential employer, stating that, in their view, I had the equivalent of a master's degree from an American university, and 28 credits toward my doctorate. The SDE didn't request that I have a foreign credentials review done by an outside agency, as is the case with most teachers entering CT from another country. The SDE gave me an interim initial certificate, which could be renewed every year for up to three years, after which time they assumed I would return to Spain.

In my second year of teaching, I was required to complete the BEST portfolio. Prior to my portfolio being scored, I received a letter from the SDE telling me I should apply for the next level of certification – the provisional – to assure no lapse in certification. When the SDE scored my portfolio, and determined I had passed, I was automatically issued a provisional certificate, valid for eight years. To move on to the next and highest level of certification – the professional – I would have to teach for a minimum of three years, and earn either my master's degree or 30 credits beyond my bachelor's degree. I already had a master's degree, which the SDE confirmed in the letter I received in 2001, so I assumed I was well on my way.

My provisional certificate was due to expire in August of this year, so in April I applied for my professional certificate. In mid May I received a letter from the SDE stating that I needed to have a foreign credentials review done by an outside agency to show that I had earned a master's degree or 30 credits beyond my bachelor's. When I asked why, I was told that the letter the SDE had sent to my potential employer, stating that I had a master's degree and 28 doctoral credits was sent 'for employment purposes,' and wasn't an 'official' review. They said that once I decided to remain in the US, I was "treated just like any other teacher" and since certification regulations required a foreign credentials review, I would have to have one done.

I submitted my credentials to one of the four agencies on the list the SDE had given me. The agency made mistakes in reviewing my transcripts, and wouldn't follow through in trying to contact the university in Spain to determine how much credit some of my training would yield. Their incomplete review stated that my bachelor's degree, master's degree, and 28 doctoral credits would be the equivalent of a bachelor's degree and 21 credits beyond it; my teacher training program was never taken into account. It looked as though I would have to earn nine credits before August 23 in order to be eligible for the professional certificate. I called on my association for help, and was directed to CEA for assistance.

CEA worked with me and sent a letter on my behalf to the SDE, asking for an extension of my provisional certificate for two years, in case I had to earn extra credits. They also asked why the SDE had never required a foreign credentials review before, when it should have been required when I first applied for my provisional certificate. The SDE's reply was that this was the first time I had applied for a certificate that required a credentials review. That, however, is not accurate.

In order to be eligible for a provisional certificate, a teacher has to have met the requirements for an initial certificate, which includes holding a bachelor's degree from an American university (or its equivalent). *The SDE had never determined, eight years previously, that I had met that requirement, and issued me a provisional certificate anyway. Had they requested the credentials review eight years ago, I would have known that I would have to earn nine*

additional credits to get my professional certificate, and *would have had eight years, rather than a few months*, to do so.

The SDE took no responsibility for this error, and would only grant an extension of 16 months. To add insult to injury, they would charge me \$250 for the certificate extension, because they wouldn't admit this was their error. They suggested that I take some CLEP exams, which grant course credit for knowledge and waive taking the course itself.

Thanks to the perseverance of CEA, they were able to locate the (retired) world language consultant who had recruited me through the Partnership program, to ask her advice. She informed CEA that I would be eligible for course credit – similar to that through the CLEP program – for the superior score I had earned on the competency exam I was required to take to earn my initial certificate. *Why didn't the certification consultants at the SDE know and suggest this?* Again, because of the prompt action taken by CEA, the agency that grants credit for the competency exams, and Charter Oak College, I was able to apply for the credit, have it granted, and have the transcript sent to the SDE two days before my provisional certificate was to expire.

My situation was quite stressful, but ended well. I believe the SDE was negligent in how they handled my certification over the course of several years. Those working in the BEST program and in certification obviously didn't communicate about whether or not I had met the education requirement for the provisional certificate. If the certification 'consultants' were truly *consulting* educators trying to earn certification, I believe they would have known that I could receive course credit for my performance on the competency exams.

I don't believe my nightmare, and perhaps other certification challenges educators have had, would have happened if certification was handled by professional educators. Professional educators have a vested interest in both upholding high standards for the profession while *servicing* those in it. Doesn't it stand to reason that this type of important work is best left in the hands of professional educators who understand who it takes to be an effective educator?