

Remarks of Michele Ridolfi O'Neill  
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Before the Education Committee  
On Senate Bill 24, Section 28  
Teacher Certification Requirements

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Good afternoon Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Michele Ridolfi O'Neill, and I'm an education issues specialist with the Connecticut Education Association. I'm here today to comment on Senate Bill 24, Section 28, that would eliminate the requirement that all teachers have advanced education for certification.

Some people proclaim that 'research says' that a master's or higher level degree has little or no impact on teacher effectiveness. This is, quite simply, not accurate.

- Research done in 1996, sponsored by the Brookings Institution found a positive relationship between student learning and teachers holding subject-specific degrees.
- Research done in 1997 and 2000 showed that secondary level students of teachers who held advanced degrees in math and science achieved higher than students whose teachers had only a bachelor's degree. This concept was confirmed in at least one more study done that same year.
- In a 2006 review of state policy, Linda Darling-Hammond cited research she conducted that showed that students learned significantly less from teachers who are not prepared in their teaching area.
- The 2011 NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) report also shows that, in every test administration since 2005, in grades 4 and 8 reading, there is a significant difference in student achievement among those whose teachers hold a master's degree, as compared with students whose teachers do not.

National reports have stated time and again that a highly qualified teacher is a necessity for every student. One factor in being well qualified is having deep knowledge of the subject you teach. A bachelor's degree alone provides only a certain depth of knowledge, especially on the

secondary level. For elementary teachers, having a master's degree in an area that supports the teacher's instruction may look very different than a master's degree in a specific content area.

The problem with our present system of requiring advanced education is that the state has allowed any master's degree to be used to meet the requirement. This sometimes results in a teacher having a higher degree in a subject or area that has little or nothing to do with what is taught.

Senate Bill 24 has gone to the extreme in two ways in attempting to solve this problem. First, it eliminates the requirement for teachers to hold a master's degree unless they choose to apply for the optional 'master' certificate. It would be more appropriate to redesign the parameters of master's degrees that would be accepted to meeting a requirement for an advanced degree. Second, the bill *does* tighten the parameters of master's degrees, but has gone overboard in doing so. It states that, if a teacher is required to earn a master's degree to renew the professional certificate, or to be eligible for a 'master' level certificate, the degree must be "evaluation-informed." There is no definition for this term given in the bill. We might assume that 'evaluation-informed' means that the area of the degree has to be determined by the teacher's needs that are identified through the evaluation process; that approach, too, has many inherent problems.

In short, there are many more valid reasons for requiring all teachers to hold master's degrees than there are reasons to eliminate the requirement or apply it to only an optional certificate. Perhaps the most important reason is this: What does it say about the value we place on education if we don't require professional educators, who are preparing students for college and careers that require higher education, to have more than a basic-level college education themselves?

I urge you to reject this proposal in Senate Bill 24. Thank you for your time and consideration of this perspective.