

*Remarks of Peg Curtis
Sixth Grade Teacher
Willington Public Schools*

**Before the Education Committee
On S.B. No. 24, AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS
Sections 28 Teacher Certification**

February 21, 2012

My name is Peg Curtis, and I'm a sixth grade teacher in Willington. Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee, I would like to comment on Senate Bill 24, Sections 28 and 30.

I truly believe that high quality teachers are the greatest asset in our schools, but what makes a good teacher? There are quite a few qualities that I think make a high quality teacher, but I want to focus on one important factor, education. High quality teacher preparation programs make a huge difference. I graduated from the University of Connecticut in 1977, with a degree in Biology. I then worked for many years as a systems analyst before deciding to return to the university to get a teaching certificate. I served as a PTA president, a nursery school president and volunteer in my children's classroom. I was elected to the Board of Education in Columbia. As much as thought I was well prepared to enter the classroom, I found a massive task in front of me.

Learning about teaching methods and spending time in many master teachers' classrooms helped prepare me for the classroom. But I believe that the master's degree helped prepare me to be a leader in the classroom.

As a teacher in a small district, I am responsible for creating curriculum and the lessons to implement the curriculum. I have learned that my science students benefit most from hands-on inquiry based learning. So for example to learn about density, we float Coke and Diet Coke and wonder why Coke sinks and Diet Coke floats. We then test a variety of objects to see which float and which sink and then find their densities. We discover that objects less dense than water float. We find the density of gummy bears, rocks and boxes of sand. You get the idea, we practice and ask questions. Then the students test out what they are thinking.

I have to carefully balance the needs of my learners, with the objectives that I need to teach. Not every student learns at the same rate or in the same way. Lessons need to target the skills and concepts that students have; while building those that need to be learned. For one lesson, I may have students accomplishing the same goal many different ways. So for example, today my students were challenged to decide which object was denser, a rock or a box. Some students received an outline of their lab. Some students needed more guidelines so they received a series of questions that would help them. Other students struggle to write, they used computers. A second language learner dictated his ideas to a classroom aide. All students were solving the same problem and will get similar results. They just took many roads to get there.

This is a huge juggling act. It requires careful planning and a lot of confidence to get the best performance from my students. How did I learn to teach in this manner? I learned in graduate level courses and continuing education. I am thankful that I was required to get a master's degree, because I know it has made me a better teacher.

When considering the Education Bill in front of you, please do not devalue the importance of preparation and continuing education. Great teachers have lots of special qualities, but they need to be prepared for the tasks ahead. Modifications to the certification system should not diminish basic qualifications; rather help them to continually improve.

I would like to urge the committee to support teachers in the difficult task they perform daily. Do not change the certification requirements as proposed.