



*Testimony of Linette Branham
Director of Policy, Research, and Reform for the Connecticut Education
Association*

*S.B. No. 1098 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHER CERTIFICATION
REQUIREMENTS FOR SHORTAGE AREAS, INTERSTATE AGREEMENTS FOR
TEACHER CERTIFICATION RECIPROCITY, MINORITY TEACHER
RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY
INSTRUCTION.*

*S.B. No. 1102 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING CERTIFICATION
REQUIREMENTS FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATORS.*

*H.B. No. 7021 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHER PREPARATION
PROGRAM EFFICACY.*

Before the Education Committee

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**Connecticut Education
Association**

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Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. I'm Linette Branham, the Director of Policy, Research, and Reform for the Connecticut Education Association, here to comment on Raised bills 1098, 1102, and 7021. There are several provisions in these bills that CEA supports or has no opposition to, some areas that raise concerns and questions, and some that CEA can't support.

The two provisions of Raised Bill 1098 that CEA can't support pertain to expanding the Alternate Route to Certification (ARC) program. Sections 1 and 6 expand ARC programs to teaching shortage areas, including TESOL, bilingual education, and early childhood, and to school administration and the superintendency. Teaching is a complex process that requires deep knowledge of the content being taught, how to teach it, and of the students one teaches. Bilingual education is even more complex, in that the teacher must be fluent in the language in which the instruction will be taught; have deep knowledge of the content, which at the elementary level focuses on reading/language arts, math, science, and social studies; and be proficient in being able to teach bilingual students. In an early childhood program, the teacher is prepared to teach both regular and special needs students from grades K through three. While CEA supports efforts to create preparation programs for bilingual teachers that will be effective, yet not burdensome, and help assure that bilingual teachers are qualified, we believe the *current* structure of the Alternative Route to Certification program, with a very abbreviated teacher preparation period, especially considering that some student teaching takes place in a summer school program, is inadequate for preparing teachers for these complex responsibilities.

Our concerns about *requiring* the implementation of an ARC program to administrators at all levels are greater. The first question raised is *why* there should be an ARC program for school and district administration. The ARC program was first created to provide an alternate pathway into the teaching profession in large part to help fill teaching shortage areas. Is it true that we have a shortage of qualified administrators? According to the State Department of Education, we have many educators who hold an administrative certificate but who aren't working in such positions. We should examine the reasons for that, rather than assume that providing a fast track to administration will add more effective administrators.

Another question that must be raised is what the structure of an ARC program for administration would be. The current structure of the ARC program simply doesn't provide enough time for preparation. The premise of an alternative route to certification program is that people with experience that's generally related to teaching and learning can easily learn to transfer their skills to a school or district setting. That premise works in some fields, especially fields in which the 'product' one works with is constant and doesn't vary much. That premise, however, is very different when it comes to teaching and learning, where the 'product' is a child who changes every day, and brings new experiences, feelings, and challenges into the classroom every day. Working with students in a classroom and a school is not something one can learn quickly.

The best administrators understand teaching and learning, and have extensive experience in the classroom, in schools, and in a district. They're much more than managers. They've transferred the skills they've learned over time as a teacher - through working with curriculum, students with a wide range of abilities and challenges, other colleagues, and parents - because they've participated in a structured, sustained preparation period over time. They've taken their classroom experience into the preparation program, and what they've learned in administrative preparation back to their classroom and school, a bit at a time. They've tried out newly-learned skills, received feedback in both formal and informal ways, analyzed their actions, and slowly learned how to use their skills in new situations.

The term 'alternative route to certification' implies that there are different preparation *pathways* to learn what it takes to be an effective school or district administrator. Unfortunately, the term has come to mean a 'fast track' into administration, based on administrative experience in another arena. The current structure of the ARC program would enable anyone interested in obtaining certification as an administrator, and hence, taking an administrative position, to have bypassed the deep and rich experience of teaching, and traditional administrative preparation that builds on that experience. We believe this is a mistake. Our schools, teachers, and students deserve leaders who have a deep understanding of teaching and learning, based on experience in the field.

CEA has no opposition to the following provisions in Raised Bill 1098:

1. For teachers from out of state who hold National Board Certification and seek certification in Connecticut, reducing the teaching experience requirement from three to two of the previous ten years.
2. Eliminating the requirement for TEAM program completion for a teacher who seeks Connecticut certification, has taught under a valid certificate in another state, and has shown effectiveness as a teacher. The one question this raises is what that 'demonstration of effectiveness' would require of the teacher. Care must be taken not to make it so onerous as to be a deterrent for prospective teachers.

3. Allowing a pre-service teacher to take and pass an appropriate subject matter test in lieu of taking a course in US history in college give an appropriate alternative and allows the student to take other coursework that may be more applicable to what she or he plans to teach.
4. Blending instruction in cultural competency into teacher preparation coursework or teacher and district professional development plans.
5. Allowing alliance districts to offer financial incentives to a greater number of prospective teachers, and to prospective teachers from out of state.

CEA also believes there are two provisions of this bill that raise questions. The first is in Section 2, which eliminates the current statutory language that requires teachers seeking certification in CT through an interstate agreement to pass the assessment exams other teachers must take and pass. States have different requirements for certification, and CT has used assessment exams as one measure to assure that teachers meet CT standards and are highly qualified. We need to make sure that teachers coming into CT continue to meet these standards.

The second area of caution in Raised Bill 1098 is in Section 3, which would eliminate participation in the TEAM mentoring program for a teacher in a non-public school who seeks a regular certificate, even if that teacher has only one year of teaching experience. TEAM is a valuable program for new teachers, and caution should be taken to assure that teachers making the transition from non-public to public schools get the support they need.

Raised Bill 1102 contains three provisions that CEA supports. The first is that the one-year, non-renewable temporary certificate for bilingual education that teachers coming from another state can apply for can be extended for up to two years by the State Board of Education, if the teacher is working in a bilingual program for a local board of education. This makes sense, since the requirements for a bilingual certificate are complex and can take more time to complete than those for another endorsement area. The second is that the teacher must demonstrate written competency in English and both written and oral competency in the language in which instruction is delivered. The third is that six credits in teaching English as a second language (TESOL) *cannot* be substituted for coursework in bilingual education. This, too, makes sense, since bilingual education and TESOL are two very different areas.

However, CEA has concerns and questions about 2 areas of requirements for bilingual educators, where wording in the bill is unclear. The first area is testing. While the bill states that competency in both languages must be written and oral (now done through the Praxis I reading and writing tests, and the ACTFL oral and written competency exams), it then goes on to state that an applicant for a bilingual certificate must successfully pass exam requirements for bilingual education. Is this redundant? Are the exam requirements assumed to be only the Praxis I and ACTFL exams? The Praxis II exams in elementary education and the subject area for a secondary teacher appear to be eliminated, which needs to be questioned. The Praxis II exams are currently used for the certificate candidate to show his/her knowledge about teaching the subject in a range of grade levels.

The second area where concerns and questions arise pertains to coursework required. The bill begins by stating that those who seek a certificate to teach bilingual education at the elementary or secondary level must meet coursework requirements. It then goes on to state that, in order to be eligible for a professional level bilingual certificate (which is the third level of certificate) a teacher who holds a provisional level certificate (which is the second level of certificate), must meet certain 'coursework requirements.' On the elementary level, the teacher must have 15 credits in bilingual education, and 15

credits in language arts, reading, and math. On the secondary level, the teacher must have 15 credits in bilingual education, and 15 credits in the subject they teach. What, then, are the coursework requirements for those who seek the *initial* and *provisional* (first and second levels) bilingual education certificates, either at the elementary or secondary level? How many courses in bilingual education, elementary education, secondary education, and a subject area are needed? Can the prospective teacher take and pass the Praxis II exams in elementary education or the secondary subject area, in lieu of the required courses, as can other teachers who seek a certificate in other shortage areas? Is professional preparation, including some type of clinical experience and student teaching, required? The answers to these questions are unclear.

CEA urges caution regarding the requirements for a certificate to teach bilingual education. This is an area in which a teacher must be competent in English and the language in which instruction is to be delivered, as well as the subject matter. There's a lot to know. While we don't want to see prospective bilingual teachers overburdened with coursework and testing in order to enter this field – which is always a shortage area – we believe coursework and testing requirements need to be more clearly delineated. This will help assure that students in our schools are being taught by teachers who are well prepared for the task.

CEA has several concerns about the requirements of Raised Bill 7021 and the unintended consequences that can result.

The first set of concerns center on the reporting requirements about teacher preparation programs. Judging the success of the program on retention rates of the graduates and certain types of employment data brings in factors over which the institution of higher education has no control. The employment status of new graduates immediately following graduation is impacted by a number of factors over which universities have no control, such as decisions to continue as full-time students in another degree program, movement out of the state, and teachers' own preferences for districts they want to work in. Teachers in their first through fifth years of teaching leave the profession for reasons usually unconnected to the quality of their teacher preparation program. Great caution must also be taken with evaluating the institution based on the student achievement levels of recent graduates. Measures of student learning and achievement aren't designed to evaluate the quality of the teacher preparation program. There are so many other factors that contribute to student growth and success that the quality of the teacher preparation program becomes too far removed to be of significance.

CEA's bigger concern, however, is that this bill would require field or clinical experience, or student teaching to take place *specifically* in an alliance district school. Teacher preparation programs currently work to provide pre-service teachers with experiences in a variety of settings, but this requirement places an undue burden on CT's 30 alliance districts, schools, and the teachers within them. Alliance districts already juggle a multitude of problems absent in other districts, and frequently offer to work with pre-service teachers. *Requiring* them to do so, however, will result in an alliance district being forced to direct additional resources to training and supporting a greater number of cooperating teachers. Unless there is significant funding to support alliance districts in this work, it becomes another unfunded mandate. Teachers who are already overwhelmed with classroom, school, district, and their own family responsibilities, may also be pressured to take pre-service teachers into their classrooms when they simply can't add another thing to their plates. This isn't beneficial for the pre-service or cooperating teacher, or for the students in the alliance districts.

If one purpose of this bill is to help build a pool of teachers who want to work in alliance districts, there are better ways to do that, including, for example, an optional pre-service preparation pathway that truly focuses on preparing teachers to work in low-performing districts. Rather than add another

mandate to alliance districts and their teachers, invite them to become part of the solution to teacher preparation that will be more beneficial to them and their students.

The issues brought forward in Raised Bills 1098, 1102, and 7021 are complex and need purposeful thought. Thank you for your consideration of our perspective on these important matters.