

**TESTIMONY OF AFRIKA LYONS, M.S. Ed, ACSP, NCSP
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST**

**S.B. No. 379
EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

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Good Afternoon Everyone:

My name is Afrika Lyons, I am a school psychologist, and I reside in the Hartford area. I want to thank you all for providing the platform for me to speak this afternoon. I would like to suggest that the education committee look upon all aspects of our educational system, and the barriers which not only affects teachers, but, barriers which are put in place for other educators such as school psychologists like myself.

Before I begin, I would like to provide you all with a brief background history about myself: I hold a master's degree in education: school psychology, I have an additional advanced degree in school psychology, and I am also a Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP). I graduated with high honors from my school psychology program, and I am a member of Kappa Delta Pi: the International Honor Society in Education. Previously, I've worked as a research assistant on several community projects in the Brownsville, Flatbush, and Canarsie neighborhoods in Brooklyn, New York. In addition, I have letters of professional endorsement from esteemed university professors and doctors of education in New York as well as urban supervising school psychologists in Connecticut.

With that said, in order for me to be certified in the state of CT, I must pass the TEACHER Praxis I certification test. In my questioning about such requirement, I have been told by various persons that it's a simple "basic reading, writing, and math test" put in place to assess my reading, writing, and math skills. The mere fact that I hold a master's degree in my concentration is a clear indication that I can read and write because the majority of our domain is centered on conducting cognitive, academic, and social emotional assessments as well as writing thorough psycho-educational reports and clinical case conceptualizations. However, because I have not earned a set score on a math exam irrelevant to my field, I am told that I am not eligible to practice school psychology.

My thought process centered on this issue started from how such an unfair process can exist in our state, and then my thoughts gravitated to how sad that this process does exist in our state. Committee members, please take a minute and process what I am saying: Connecticut continues to bar talented and accomplished school psychologist professionals from not practicing their trade and obtaining certification based upon a math test score. This math test focuses upon skills that most professional individuals in the field have been away from for 8-10 years, do not use in day-to-day practice, and has absolutely zero bearing on the field in which the individual school psychologist practices. When a graduate level school psychologist with a record of expertise in the specialized practice area can be deemed ineligible for certification based upon random math achievement based tasks, our State Board Of Education (SBOE) should begin to consider policy and practice improvements within our state. Furthermore, the fact that Connecticut elects not to assess in the specialty area of school psychology when providing SBOE certification endorsements only puts our state and school districts at risk of not certifying truly competent individuals, but only individuals who may be great at solving calculus, geometry, and algebraic equations.

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Just so that you all are aware, CT is the only state, which requires school psychologists to pass this examination in order to be certified in the state. In fact, NY, NJ, MA (only requires Reading and Writing Skills Test), MN, VT, PA, and NH all provide a sensible pathway (which does not include any examinations) for school psychologist certification. It is also important to mention, that CT graduate school psychology programs are NASP (National Association of School Psychologists) approved. In order to obtain the NCSP credential, CT's graduate programs require a passing score on the Praxis II (School Psychologist Test). Even with this requirement in our state, the SBOE still does not recognize or provide licensure to persons who hold the NCSP. In my case, despite the fact that my academic credentials exceed CT's school psychologist requirements for certification, the SBOE only certifies school psychologists based on passing a teacher's certification exam.

What is further displeasing is that a young talented female as myself, who brought diversity to the profession of school psychology, had no recourse despite the fact that I am certified in another state. Within the Hartford school district, there are about 30 school psychologists, out of those 30; there are 2 African American and 4 Hispanic school psychologists. While working in the district, I was the youngest, out of all my colleagues. In a district where the population is majority Black and Hispanic, it's very important that the staff is reflective of the population. This is particularly important because Black and Hispanic youths are being placed into special education at disproportionate rates, and as a result, the achievement gap continues to grow which also contributes to the school to prison pipeline system.

When an unfair process is in place that continues to exclude the wrong people, policy and practice improvements are necessary. In this given situation, qualified educators are being excluded, and Connecticut is doing a disservice not only to the school psychology profession, but also a disservice to a population who matters the most: students across CT who desperately needs our services.

In my opinion, if an individual like myself has met all of the requirements related to their area of expertise, there should be no reason why they should not be certified by our SBOE. If other educators in our state can obtain a license based on successfully passing a Praxis subject test related to their specific domain, then school psychologists should also be afforded the same privilege. Furthermore, as of February 3, 2016, the SBOE finally added School Psychologists to the "Designated Shortage Area" for the 2016-2017 school year. In order to be proactive and reduce the vacancies in this shortage area, our SBOE should therefore consider accepting the NCSP as an alternate route to the school based licensure.

In addition, if the committee is looking for suggestions for properly certifying school psychologists, attached to my testimony is a chart outlining other states requirements for the school psychologist certifications.

Thank you for your time and all the best.

Regards,

Afrika Lyons

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Table 1: School Psychologist Qualifications in other States

<i>State</i>	<i>Statutes / Regulations</i>	<i>Qualifications</i>
Maine	20-A MRSA § 13022	<p>Must meet at least one of the following:</p> <p>graduate degree from an accredited school psychology program approved by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)/National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education or the American Psychological Association in School Psychology,</p> <p>graduate work that the education commissioner deems substantially similar to those described in (1), or</p> <p>valid license from the State Board of Examiners of Psychologists with demonstrated competency in the area of school psychology as established by the state board</p>
Massachusetts	MGL 71 § 38G and 603 CMR 7.11	<p>Initial license requires at least:</p> <p>master's degree in school psychology, approved by NASP,</p> <p>advanced practicum of 1200 hours, 600 of which must have been in a school setting, and</p> <p>passing score on the state's Communications and Literacy Skills test</p>

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New Jersey	NJAC 6A:9B-12.9	<p>For a standard educational services certificate with a school psychologist endorsement:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">master’s degree or higher from a regionally accredited college or university,</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">department-approved graduate program or at least 60 graduate credits in:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">educational foundations/school psychology practice and development (at least 12 credits),</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">education of students with disabilities (at least 6 credits),</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">assessment, intervention, and research (at least 18 credits),</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">human behavioral development (at least 12 credits), and</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">electives (additional study in the above four areas),</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">300-hour practicum, and</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">1,200-hour externship in the area of school psychology</p>
New York	Commissioner of Education’s Regulation 80-2.3	<p>For a provisional certificate, at least:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">bachelor’s degree from a regionally accredited institution of higher education or an institution approved by the department,</p>

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60 graduate credits in psychology, and
college-supervised internship in school
psychology

(exemptions to these requirements are outlined
in the regulation)

Pennsylvania PA Code
49.102 and
354.33

Educational Specialist I Certificate will be
issued to those applicants who have:

successfully completed a Department of
Education approved educational specialist
preparation program,

satisfactorily achieved in the prescribed
assessments, and

a recommendation from the college or
university preparing program.

School Psychology certification requires:

completion of a preparation program that
educates the applicant in five specific academic
foundation areas for providing school
psychological services for grades K-12,

completion of a 1000-hour internship, one
half of which must be in a supervised public
school setting, and

exhibition of knowledge and competency

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		that fosters professionalism in four specific areas.
Vermont	Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators, Rules 5440-66	<p>NASP-accredited Specialist Level (60 graduate credits in school psychology) or Doctoral (90 credits in school psychology) degree in or an American Psychological Association (APA)-accredited doctoral degree in school psychology, or the equivalent</p> <p>NASP-approved internship, APA accredited internship, or an internship of at least 600-hours in a supervised school setting with students under the supervision of a licensed or certified school psychologist with at least three-years post-degree experience</p> <p>Be a Nationally Certified School Psychologist or demonstrate knowledge of school psychological skills and concepts in 11 specific areas and meet performance standards in 10 specific areas</p>