

November 28, 2006

State Board of Education  
Jim Buckheit, Executive Director  
333 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Dear Mr. Buckheit,

The elimination of certification for elementary education (Grades K-6) is a step backwards for public education in the Commonwealth. The establishment of a middle level certificate is a step forward. I suggest that the current elementary education certificate remain (K-6), add a middle level certification (5-8), and retain secondary certification for grades 7-12. This change would be educationally sound and provide the essential flexibility in staffing for local school districts. The two-grade overlap would meet the developmental needs of students who are a year or two above or below grade level. In addition, effective instructional "looping" programs such as those at grades 3 and 4 could continue to exist.

The current proposal would destroy portability between states with Georgia as the only state along the East Coast lacking the current elementary education certification (K-5 or K-6). In an age of increasing mobility, teachers should have the opportunity to employ reciprocity between states. In addition, Ohio, a state with a somewhat similar format (grades 4-9) as the current proposal, is experiencing a surplus of early childhood teachers and a shortage of middle level teachers. The proposed changes will have a negative effect on the promising Professional Development School approach to teacher education that has been advocated by recent reports such as the Governor's Commission on Training America's Teachers (June 2006) and the PA State System Of Higher Education's Task Force on Teachers for Tomorrow: Recommendations for the Preparation of Highly Effective Elementary Teachers (April 2005).

As a current teacher educator in an institution of higher learning for the past nine years and a former teacher/administrator in public schools for thirty-three years, I cannot support these proposed changes. I believe an extension is needed for compliance with 49-2. Our education department must meet in June of 2008 to schedule our future teachers for the class of 2012. New courses must go through many channels including department approval, faculty committee approval, Provost and University President support and then recognition by the Board of Trustees. Guidelines for the new programs have yet to be promulgated. The current deadlines will definitely have a negative impact on the quality of teacher preparation in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely Yours,

H. George Bonekemper,  
PDS Coordinator

CC. Independent Regulatory Review Commission

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