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PA. STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION

Albright
COLLEGE

State Board of Education
Jim Buckheit, Executive Director
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November 28, 2006

To Whom It May Concern:

The undersigned members of the faculty and administration of Albright College wish to express concern about Chapter 49-2 and its potential negative effects on public education and teacher preparation programs in Pennsylvania.

Preparation to teach the span of K-6 includes a broad understanding of child development and curricular content. Chapter 49-2 will result in a narrowing of teacher preparation expertise which may result in a student who is ready to learn a concept or skill being assigned to a teacher who is not knowledgeable about that concept or skill. Narrowing the focus of preparation under Chapter 49-2 could also create voids in teachers' ability to deal with student developmental needs.

The elimination of the K-6 Elementary Education certification will also limit the flexibility currently enjoyed by Pennsylvania teachers and administrators. The K-6 range of the current elementary education certification produces benefits that Chapter 49-2 will eliminate. Across one's career, the ability to shift to a new grade level of instruction can be energizing for a teacher. Teachers who teach at different grade levels bring the benefits of cross-grade curricular understanding to their instruction. Understanding a span of developmental considerations can also contribute in a positive way to the implementation of differentiated instruction.

For administrators, their ability to shift teachers to adjust to enrollment changes and to fill short term openings will be severely limited under the new certifications. Within a K-5 building, an enrollment bubble in the fourth or fifth grade may create serious employment problems when shifting of teachers is limited. And if the projected shortage of middle level educators ensues, the problem of filling short-term positions will be exacerbated. The new grade levels to be established by Chapter 49-2 do not match the organizational grade spans of elementary and middle schools in Pennsylvania. The proposed K-3 and 4-8 certifications will produce administrative problems in terms of hiring personnel and conducting professional development.

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Chapter 49-2 could result in a shortage in teacher candidates preparing for upper elementary or middle level teaching. From our experience in teacher preparation, the majority of our elementary education candidates enter the program with a passionate desire to teach at the primary level. However, through program field experiences, many candidates develop an interest, competency, and confidence at the upper elementary level. By the conclusion of the certification program, a balanced number of candidates search for positions at all levels of K-6 instruction. Without the programmatic exposure to middle level instruction, however, we worry that fewer candidates will seek 4-8 certification.

Many teacher certification programs like the one that we offer here at Albright College, emphasize the preparation of broadly educated elementary education teachers, an aspect of teacher preparation that currently makes Pennsylvania teachers highly qualified and highly desired by employers both in and out of the state. Chapter 49-2, by requiring three additional courses focusing on diverse learners would negatively impact this valuable aspect of current teacher preparation programs. To maintain programs in which candidates can complete preparation within a reasonable time frame, content and liberal studies may be sacrificed. We suggest that the standards for preparing teachers to instruct diverse learners be established and that the discretion for implementation of those standards across course work be determined by the teacher preparation institution.

Teacher preparation programs and their partners in public education have developed learning communities in the form of Professional Development Schools that may be jeopardized by the unusual grade spans of the proposed certifications. When the grade spans of the certification programs do not match the grade spans of the PDS, professional development collaborations become problematic. We are concerned that Chapter 49-2 may have a negative effect on PDS relationships.

Many teacher certification candidates enrolled in Pennsylvania institutions like Albright College are preparing to teach in locations out of state. The proposed certifications will not match certifications in states that employ graduates of Pennsylvania institutions. Chapter 49-2 will therefore limit the portability of teacher candidates to other states, seriously affecting enrollment in Pennsylvania teacher preparation programs.

Finally, we are concerned that Chapter 49-2 will exacerbate the current short supply of special education teachers due to the credit requirements for dual certification. In particular, the supply of middle level and secondary special educators may be seriously jeopardized.

We suggest that the Board of Education consider the far-reaching ramifications of Chapter 49-2 on teacher certification programs, public education, and ultimately the achievement of the children in Pennsylvania. The proposal may have very costly effects on all three.

Respectfully,

Albright College Department of Education

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