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Central Pennsylvania Holmes Partnership  
Elementary Professional Development Schools
 2006  
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December 6, 2006

Members of the State Board of Education:

I am writing in reference to the proposed adoption of Chapter 49.2 of the School Code regarding teacher preparation in Pennsylvania. I am a faculty member at Penn State University though the opinions expressed in the letter are my own. I have been a teacher educator in Pennsylvania for more than twenty years and serve as the Co-Director of the Penn State-State College Area School District Elementary Professional Development School Collaborative. Our PDS has won two national awards in teacher education, one from the Association of Teacher Educators in 2002 and one from the Holmes Partnership in 2004.

I believe that the proposed separation of elementary certification into a P-3 and a 4-8 certificate is ill advised and will be detrimental to students in both basic education and higher education. In terms of children in basic education, I believe that the proposed changes will be particularly harmful to students in grades four through six. Currently, teachers who instruct students in those grades receive a broad elementary preparation program. As a result, they understand child development from kindergarten through sixth grade. They also understand how to teach beginning readers as well as readers who are already skilled and can now begin to concentrate on developing strategies to use reading as a tool for learning. As you know, not all children learn at the same rate. Some children in fourth grade read at a first, second or third grade level. Some are just beginning to master the initial reading process. Fourth, fifth and sixth grade teachers must be familiar with beginning reading. Conversely, some first, second and third grade students read at the fourth, fifth and sixth grade levels. They need teachers who can teach them at the appropriate level. The same is true for mathematics. All elementary teachers should understand how to teach both basic elementary math as well as more advanced elementary math. The hallmark of excellent elementary teaching has been the ability to meet a child wherever that child might be and to move that child along to greater levels of success. The proposed split in certification will result in teachers of the future who will be equipped to teach only some of the students who sit in front of them. All children deserve excellent teachers who know how to work with them effectively. As I see it, the current proposal attempts to improve P-3 education but does so by ignoring the needs of students in upper elementary grades.

This proposal also would harm those students who choose to attend a college or university in Pennsylvania and pursue elementary teacher certification. They would find themselves clearly disadvantaged by having a certificate that is narrower than the elementary certification offered in approximately 45 of the 50 states. Currently,

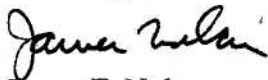
Pennsylvania prepares teachers who teach in a wide variety of states. The Governor's Commission on Training America's Teachers saw the preparation of teachers for other states as a clear economic strength for Pennsylvania. Chapter 49.2 as proposed would negate that strength and make it almost impossible for PA. graduates to find jobs in many other states.

I strongly support the goal of strengthening the preparation of P-3 teachers, but I believe there are better ways to accomplish that goal without harming students in basic or higher education. I would suggest two possible alternatives:

- A) Retain a broad P-6 elementary certificate but stipulate that each elementary teacher must have a specialization (approximately 18 credits) in either P-3 or 4-6 education;
- B) retain the broad P-6 elementary certificate and stipulate that for elementary teachers, they must earn 18 post-baccalaureate credits in either P-3 or 4-6 education as a requirement for obtaining instructional two certification.

I strongly urge you to consider these options that will achieve the goal of strengthening P-3 education without harming education in grades 4 through 6.

Sincerely,



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