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December 7, 2006

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

Dear Jim,

Please share the following with Jim Fogarty, the other members of the Committee on Chapter 49, and other interested members of the State Board.

As president of the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators (PAC-TE) throughout the whole time Chapter 49-2 was being developed, I was intimately involved in the process that led to its eventual passage. As a result, I think I have a fairly clear understanding of the exchanges and compromises that led to its current form, and I continue to be deeply appreciative of the collaboration among all parties throughout its development. Because of this familiarity, I would like to take advantage of this one additional time to offer comment on the language of the Chapter, and I will try to do so in a concise form.

Frankly, I am tired of the debate over the merits of the 12 hours and/or 360 credits required by Section 49.13. No one can deny that this would be beneficial for its specific goal. Many will make the case that there are better or more flexible ways to accomplish the same purpose. My real concern is over what will be displaced when 12 additional credits are forced into an already overloaded program. Primarily, I am concerned that content coursework will be sacrificed to credit or hours-related understandings that could just as effectively be learned during the early days of one's career when the laboratory door is wide open. To teach more responsively when one has less to offer seems to be a shallow and short-sighted victory.

It is easy to understand why early childhood education should be taken even more seriously than we had done before, even though it already was a separate certificate. I don't know of anyone who has a problem with this, and many are rightfully excited about it. There should be little doubt that elementary education content and pedagogy will have to have a place in such programs. In that sense, it is a modest change over what we had before.

The secondary area also remains unchanged. That arrangement has served us well over the years, so not many are bothered if it stays as it is. At the same time, though, the current 7-12 emphasis always has been done at the expense of middle level education. Few institutions have taken the middle level seriously because the state has never set meaningful standards for it. Here many new middle school teachers have learned on the job about this period of development and

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of the needs of students of this age. They have made themselves good teachers of young adolescents by working hard at it from the modest start their preparing institution might have given them. If that proves anything, it is that teachers can develop and grow professionally while in place in a professional position. If secondary education remains the primary route to middle level teaching, something more should be done.

No one yet has to demonstrate that the new grade level limitations for grades 4-8 make any sense at all. They do nothing useful for reciprocity, either for those leaving or entering the state. They complicate program design, requiring a dual major that now needs to be fit with as many as twelve other credits of new requirements. The new grade level limitations do not make clear the content mastery needed for highly qualified teaching for grades seven and eight. They make a 4-8 certification less appealing to many of the prospective teachers needed at this level. Finally, they complicate teacher assignment for administrative leaders. Someone does need to be prepared seriously to deal with middle level students. This, however, does not seem like a logical and workable path to that. A grade 2-6 elementary certificate would make infinitely more sense. It would be even more reasonable if there were serious attention to the middle level included in some other way, perhaps through secondary certification.

There is no reason to suspect that the Special Education/Secondary certificate will be appealing to many preservice teachers. Requiring it will complicate the highly qualified teacher problem, not help correct it.

Finally, giving the Secretary the right to grant exceptions puts all of the good work on this in jeopardy. It's as if the Commonwealth passed a new drunk driving law and then said that if you can't find a sober driver you should get the least drunk driver you can find to fill in. Each defeats the purpose of the new provisions. Each is equally important. Exceptions should not be allowed for either.

I know how hard the Committee and Board have worked on Chapter 49-2. I respect the direction, intensity, openness, and collaboration of the process. Recycling the document with some changes, however, will only make it all the better. I am hopeful that such thoughts will be entertained, and I would be happy to be of assistance.

Sincerely,



Terry W. Blue, Ph.D.
Senior Research Associate
Certification Officer