

Buckheit, James

From: Prudhoe, Catherine [CPrudhoe@wcupa.edu]
Sent: Thursday, December 07, 2006 12:58 PM
To: JBuckheit@state.pa.us
Subject: Chapter 49-2

Dear Mr. Buckheit,

I have attached my letter of support for the changes to Chapter 49-2. The Pennsylvania Department of Education and the State Board of Education have developed new regulations for teacher certification that will enable colleges and universities to prepare the best teachers for children in the Commonwealth.

Thank you,

Catherine Prudhoe

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

December 4, 2006

Dear Mr. Buckheit:

I am writing in support of the proposed changes for teacher certification as specified in Chapter 49-2. The Pennsylvania Department of Education and the State Board of Education developed Chapter 49-2 based on sound educational research and in response to legislative and legal mandates. The No Child Left Behind legislation and the Gaskins decision require that the Commonwealth staffs its classrooms with highly qualified teachers.

The 2005-2006 PSSA results were recently published. While progress has been made, much more is needed. According to the report, 67% of fifth graders scored as proficient or advanced in math, and only 61% were proficient or advanced in reading. Sixty-two percent of eighth graders were proficient or advanced in math, while 71% were proficient or advanced in reading. Only 52% of eleventh graders were proficient or advanced in math, and 65% were proficient or advanced in reading. We are far from the mandated 100% proficient ratings required by 2014.

Current Pennsylvania certification allows individuals to obtain an Elementary certificate that spans grades kindergarten through sixth (with the option to teach 7th and 8th grade if teaching in a middle school). This suggests that they are highly qualified to teach at least seven and as many as nine grade levels. Past and current PSSA scores would indicate otherwise. Research shows that the developmental and educational needs of kindergarten through third grade students are much different than that of intermediate and middle school students. Early Childhood Education prepares teachers specifically for pre-kindergarten through third grade. Individuals with Early Childhood certification learn about the developmental and educational needs of pre-primary and primary grade students. They focus on the developmentally appropriate pedagogical strategies and techniques in their field experiences in classrooms that make them particularly adept at teaching young children. The proposed stand alone Early Childhood Certificate for pre-kindergarten through third grade is essential if Pennsylvania is to have highly qualified teachers in these grades.

The proposed Elementary certification for 4th through 8th grade will allow Elementary Education programs in colleges and universities to focus on the pedagogical and content knowledge necessary to have highly qualified teachers in these grade levels. Under the current certificate, Elementary Education faculty have to sacrifice depth in content knowledge and pedagogy in order to cover the breadth of the grade levels under the

Elementary certificate. Many Elementary Education programs do not address the special needs of middle school learners. Teachers in these grade levels are not prepared to meet the developmental and academic needs of seventh and eighth graders. Current and past PSSA scores attest to this failing. With the proposed Elementary certificate, the focus will be on the particular educational and developmental needs of fourth through eighth graders. With increased preparation in content knowledge and pedagogy, Pennsylvania's intermediate and middle school grades will be staffed by highly qualified teachers.

The diversity of students in terms of language and abilities in Pennsylvania classrooms is a well-known fact. Teachers across the state have students with disabilities included in their classrooms. Many teachers also have students who are English language learners. The proposed requirement for preparation in special education and teaching English language learners for all certifications is crucial. I strongly urge the State Board to mandate that three credits of preparation in teaching English language learners and nine credits of preparation in special education be taught by experts in those disciplines. Infusion of this important content by faculty who have no special preparation or training in these areas will not lead to improvements in the pre-kindergarten – 12th grade classrooms. Pennsylvania's students with disabilities and those for whom English is a second language deserve to have highly qualified teachers.

It is human nature to resist change. Many of my colleagues in Elementary Education at West Chester University and across the state will argue against the bifurcation. Others will argue against the specialized preparation in special education and teaching English language learners. But I have great faith in my colleagues' abilities to make adjustments and develop excellent programs once the new regulations become effective. It will take hard work, but we all are able to do what is necessary to implement these changes in our curricula. Just because the changes may be difficult, that doesn't mean they shouldn't occur.

In summary, I strongly support the bifurcation of the Early Childhood and Elementary certificates. In narrowing the certificates, teachers will be better prepared to teach the children in their classrooms. I also support the inclusion of specific content on teaching English language learners and students with disabilities. I further suggest that this content be taught by faculty with specialized education and training in the disciplines in order to improve the quality of teachers in Pennsylvania's pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade classrooms. Our children deserve no less.

Sincerely,

Catherine M. Prudhoe, PhD
Professor, Early Childhood Education