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From: Marie Conti <marie@wetherillschool.org>
Sent: Wednesday, January 13, 2021 2:02 PM
To: ED, State Board of Ed
Cc: Diane Force
Subject: [External] Public Comment Period on Proposed Amendments to Chapter 49 (Regulation #6-346)

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I am submitting public comment below regarding the State Board of Education's proposed rulemaking #6-346, containing proposed amendments to Chapter 49 (Certification of Professional Personnel), that was published in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin* on December 19, 2020.

January 13, 2021

[The Pennsylvania Montessori Alliance \(PMA\)](#) was formed to advocate for Montessori education in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Our current goal is to find a pathway in PA for accredited Montessori Teacher Education Programs (TEPS) to serve as alternative program providers to strengthen the certified teacher pool, and enable growth in public and private Montessori schools in PA as 10 other states have done in recent years, or to have the Montessori teaching credential recognized as equivalent with Pennsylvania teaching certification.

In an effort to attain recognition of a Montessori Teaching Credential from any teacher education program accredited by the [Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education](#), PMA began inquiries with the Department of Education by initially attending public hearings of the Teacher and School Leader Effectiveness Committee during their review of the Chapter 49 amendments proposed by Secretary of Education Rivera in 2019. Montessorians across the Commonwealth shared their opinions at all 4 of the meetings.

Subsequently our PMA board members Diane Force, Marie Conti and Erin Conway, accompanied by the Executive Director of the Montessori Public Policy Initiative (MPPI), Wendy Shenk-Evans, Denise Monnier, Director of State Advocacy for MPPI and Rebecca Pelton, President of Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) were invited to attend a meeting at PDE on June 28, 2019 with:

Karen Mulchanow, Executive Director of the Board of Education
 Thomas Howell, Deputy General Counsel, Governor's Office of General Counsel (Counsel to the State Board)
 Dr. Christina Baumer, Higher Education Program Manager, PDE, Division of Professional Education and Teacher Quality, Office of Postsecondary and Higher Education
 Dr. Debra Heath-Thornton, Director, Bureau of School Leadership and Quality, PDE
 Mark Zaccarelli, Senior Assistant Counsel, PDE
 Sean Fields, Counsel, PDE

At this meeting, we discussed the possibility of Montessori Teacher Education Programs (TEPS) as alternative program providers. This discussion led to an additional meeting held on July 25, 2019 with Bureau of Certification staff: Dr. Baumer, Jamal K. Wakeem, Higher Education Associate, and Dr. Debra Heath-Thornton to review the process Montessori TEPS would be required to complete in order to be approved as alternative program providers. This meeting was attended by Diane Force, Marie Conti, Marjorie Horton of Chestnut Hill College Montessori Teacher Education Program Director (Philadelphia), Kathleen Anderson, Assistant to the President for Special Projects Chestnut Hill College, and Rebecca Pelton, President of MACTE. The review of the PDE process demonstrated that the MACTE accreditation process for Teacher Education Programs is parallel to the alternative program provider approval process. Therefore, we

suggested that MACTE serve as the approval organization for Montessori TEPs as it is a USDE recognized accreditor, rather than requiring that all Montessori TEPs (over 100 across the U.S. alone) complete the PDE process. PDE staff did not believe this would be a viable method of approving Montessori TEPs. We were informed by Dr. Baumer that a “larger discussion would have to happen with senior leadership –the Secretary of Education or Dr. Volkman.”

Because the Chapter 49 Amendments did not seem to be a viable method for the Montessori teacher credential to gain recognition, we approached Senator Langerholc’s staffers and met with them to discuss our request. On September 5, 2019 we were able to meet with Secretary Pedro Rivera in the office of Senator Martin in Lancaster, PA. At this meeting, the Secretary requested a crosswalk of PA teacher certification requirements and the MACTE requirements. These documents were later shared with the Secretary through his staff liaison along with a crosswalk of the PA learning standards with Montessori curriculum and standards. The Secretary informed us that final approval of Chapter 49 Amendments to Teacher Certification would take approximately two years and there would be time to review our proposal. However, we became aware that they were on the agenda of the July 2020 board meeting, in which we participated via Zoom. The above comments were made verbally at that board meeting during the public comment period. We reached out to PDE staff members, Dr. Garcia and Dr. Heath-Thornton in November and December 2020 to try to arrange a meeting with the new Acting Secretary Ortega but have not received a reply. We are now submitting this comment once again, as we believe that this pathway to licensure will be crucial as Montessori programs for early childhood through adolescent struggle to recover from the effects of the pandemic and serve the children and families of PA.

We would be happy to discuss this possibility further and provide any supporting documentation requested.

Sincerely,
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