

Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
House Education Committee  
The Honorable James Roebuck, Chair

I want to thank the chair and the committee for providing the opportunity to gather additional information regarding the certification changes in the Commonwealth. The reasons for these changes are still a mystery to most of us...it was our belief that we were doing quite well with the certifications we use currently...our graduates were getting jobs in Pennsylvania and across the country with little or no difficulty. In fact, at Slippery Rock University, our spring teacher education job fair draws school districts as diverse as Los Angeles County, California and the State of Hawaii. We pride ourselves that our graduates and those of our sister institutions, both public and private, are among the most sought after teacher education graduates in the country.

The rationale behind the elimination of the K-6 certification, scheduled to take place in 2013 is a mystery to all of us. Currently, we offer the K-6 certification as well as an early childhood certificate for our candidates, an approach which, to me seems to be the best of both worlds and the best to help our candidates acquire employment and for small school districts to staff their schools within our state.

The establishment of the upper elementary/middle level certificate is also puzzling. As a former principal of a grade 6-8 middle school, I actively sought faculty with elementary certification to staff grade 6, a blend of elementary certified and secondary certified for grade 7 and secondary certified individuals for grade 8. To prepare for today, I contacted the Pennsylvania Middle School Association and asked them to email four questions I had developed to their members who are middle level administrators and/or superintendents. Their responses are attached.

Nonetheless, the certifications have been passed by the State Board of Education and the Department has developed guidelines for programs to implement so candidates will be certified in the new areas beginning in 2013. However, the manner in which these guidelines were developed leaves many of us feeling like we were "steam rolled."

As the guidelines were being formulated, the Department held meetings in various regions of the state. The meetings I and my department chairs attended were held in the Pittsburgh area. At these meetings, representatives from the Department presented the guidelines and then asked for input, a procedure that should give everyone an opportunity to voice support and concern. However, the comment made at the close of one of these sessions in western Pennsylvania summed up the feeling of all of us who attended...following one hour and thirty minutes, one of those providing "input" remarked that no one from the Department was seen taking one note and that there were no recording devices observed. The question was posed...how will you know what was said when you get back to Harrisburg? The answer: "We'll remember it."

Perhaps the two most disturbing issues of the new guidelines are the prescriptive nature in which they are addressed and the faculty qualification matrix. In the State System, all education programs MUST be accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). In addition to the 14 PASSHE institutions, six additional universities also have this accreditation. To acquire NCATE accreditation, programs generally are "nationally recognized" by their respective specialized program areas (SPA's). These SPA's establish nationally recognized standards of excellence in each of the certification areas. Then along comes PDE who develops prescriptive guidelines about courses, what these courses are to include and the qualifications of those who teach them. Cases in point...the National

Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Council for Exceptional Children, and the National Middle School Association are not prescriptive. Because of the prescriptive nature of the PDE guidelines, we, at Slippery Rock, have been forced to re-write our Early Childhood program and our Special Education program to conform to PDE guidelines EVEN THOUGH we have acquired NAEYC and CEC national recognition. It would seem to me that if our programs are nationally recognized, they should be acceptable to PDE.

As for the Upper Elementary/Middle Level certificate, while applauding the fact that Pennsylvania is finally acknowledging that a middle school certificate is important, many of us with middle school backgrounds provided input to PDE that there are some important areas that are conspicuously absent. In particular these courses are: middle school philosophy, middle school curriculum, and middle school organization. Having done my post doctoral study in middle level education under the guidance of Dr. Alfred Arth at the University of Wyoming, I was quick to point this out to the Department at one of their "input" meetings. However, I was told that they had talked to Dr. Ken McEwin, Appalachian State who was instrumental in writing the middle school standards, and that he had supported the developed standards. I know Ken quite well and in an email I received from him on Tuesday, he confirmed my comments that these elements are missing (his email is attached). In addition, it is my understanding that some of the impetus for this new certificate level, grades 4 - 8, is to increase the number of science and math teachers in these grades. If a candidate is required to take 30 credits (10 courses) in math, does anyone really believe that students will opt for teaching grades 4 - 8 when they could take the same content courses and teach grades 7 - 12? And what about science? When 30 credits (10 courses) are required for a concentration, does anyone realize how many advanced math courses are needed for students to be successful in science? Will these requirements entice students who will also be highly qualified to teach grades 4 - 6, into the program?

As for the faculty qualification matrix, the question begs "since when can PDE dictate to a university who to hire?" To maintain our NCATE accreditation, we insist that all faculty have a minimum of three years public school experience when they are hired, we do national searches when vacancies occur, and we fill those vacancies with the best in the field; yet PDE is forcing a faculty qualification matrix. How will we know faculty qualifications from transfer institutions...either two year or out-of-state institutions? Does PDE trump NCATE accreditation or does it comply within NCATE guidelines for accreditation?

In conclusion, the Commonwealth is to be commended for recognizing the need for an upper elementary/middle level certificate; however, given the prescriptive nature of the guidelines for all three certificate areas (early childhood, upper elementary/middle level, and special education), I recommend that, to attain program certification, institutions provide evidence that they subscribe to and are nationally recognized by the specialized program areas (SPA's) based on competencies their candidates achieve rather than credit hours accumulated or that they provide evidence that their candidates meet the competencies or credit hour requirements as set forth by PDE.

Thank you.