



State Board of Education
Hearing on Implementing Revisions to
Chapter 49, *Certification of Professional Personnel*

Testimony prepared by:

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November 13, 2008

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the implementation of the revised Chapter 49 as it relates to the requirements for programs preparing teachers in the Commonwealth. With our roots in the preparation of teachers for the Commonwealth and with nearly 30,000 education majors across our 14 universities, PASSHE has been actively engaged in substantially changing how we prepare teachers to ensure that they will support students throughout the Commonwealth to achieve at even higher levels.

In May of 2006 we provided testimony on the then-proposed changes to Chapter 49 to the State Board of Education, stating “many of these changes are long overdue—given the realities of our classrooms—but that does not mean that they will be easy to achieve”. Universities in PASSHE have put in the effort to significantly change their teacher preparation programs from re-conceptualizing their approaches to complete reorganization of their programs. In real ways, this has provided universities with the opportunity to completely re-think and re-design their teacher preparation programs; for many of our universities and faculty, this opportunity has been long overdue.

Scores of administrators and hundreds of university faculty have been hard at work and are submitting new proposals, consistent with the revised Chapter 49 and the guidelines

of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), with the intent to offer these newly designed programs to students beginning in either fall 2009 or fall 2010. Their work has been hard, but for most quite satisfying, and I personally want to commend our faculty for the incredible work they have done to create these new academic programs.

Thirty months ago we stated that “research has demonstrated that the broad scope of the elementary education certificate— K through 6th grade—is not serving students well”. We noted that “students in the early elementary years need teachers who are better prepared to teach reading and in the upper elementary years, greater content in mathematics, science and other disciplines is necessary to enable students to reach their potential”. The guidelines developed by the Department, in consultation with teacher educators, now in place will enable us to achieve those goals. PASSHE institutions have moved forward to meet all of the guidelines and competencies set forth by PDE.

There is no doubt that the process of moving from regulation to implementation has taken somewhat longer than anticipated or desired on everyone’s part. The process of employing study groups to develop the guidelines and an iterative process of gaining clarity about the guidelines has been a dual-edged sword: more input from the field required more time to finalize the details of the guidelines. Such a process inevitably placed considerable demands on our faculty, not only in developing programs, but in continuing the careful, deliberative process of reviewing courses and curricula at the department, college, university and system levels designed to assure academic quality. In many ways, we have been fortunate that our staff in the Office of the Chancellor, university, deans and faculty have been in constant communication with one another to help guide the way, provide feedback to the Department of Education, and to adapt to changes in the process as additional information and clarifications have emerged. As a result, institutions have been able to move forward to prepare for our new class of students.

Certainly one of the toughest challenges our faculty faced was integrating new requirements with existing university requirements and accreditation standards. Faculty

worked to carefully understand all of the required competencies, and how new and revised courses would enable students to meet those competencies. Throughout this process we were ever mindful of the need of students to complete their programs in four years. By documenting that sufficient credit hours are associated with each of the competencies as defined in departmental guidelines we assure that sufficient time will be spent with teacher candidates to develop *understanding* of content and not just *familiarity*. We believe that specific credit hours must be devoted to professional competencies as well as subject-matter content to assure adequate preparation. To date, our universities have been successful in course and program re-design to both address the competencies and to adding no or very few additional credits.

Similarly, many of us wrestled with the best ways to document faculty qualifications; that is, demonstrating that faculty teaching new and revised courses have sufficient depth and breadth of understanding of the course and its learning outcomes to be effective. This has become a more common practice around the country and in certain professional fields. Quite frankly, we are finding that the faculty qualifications matrix included in the current application recognizes that there are multiple ways that faculty will be able to verify their qualifications. We have confidence in our ability to show the public that our faculty is highly skilled, competent and able to meet regulatory or accreditation standards designed to ensure quality. For example, all PASSHE universities are nationally accredited by the National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education-NCATE.

In the development of our curricula, we are also continuing to meet with community colleges to work towards new articulation agreements for each of the majors and certification programs to enable students to successfully transfer into our institutions. We think that this is important since 25% of our transfers are in education and we see transfer as one strategy to help diversify our teacher workforce.

We still have much work to do. We already have received several proposals from our universities to review before submission of the materials to our Board of Governors and then to the Department. These proposals have been through universities committees and

sparked discussions, debates and compromises typical of any major changes in programs. However, throughout all of these discussions and reviews we have kept foremost in our efforts the intent and purpose of these revisions and the need to ensure that students tomorrow have even more competent and skilled teachers than they do today.