

TESTIMONY
HOUSE EDUCATION HEARING ON CHAPTER 49
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Good morning Chairman Roebuck, Chairman Stairs and members of the House Education Committee. I am Dr. Donna Patterson, Associate Dean of the College of Education and Human Services at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. I am pleased to be here today and to testify in support of the implementation of Chapter 49-2. This is a much needed revision in the requirements for teacher education programs in Pennsylvania.

My purpose this morning is to specifically address my support for the inclusion of the faculty matrix and the credit requirements for the new certificate programs—precisely those areas that some of my colleagues have criticized. First, let me preface my remarks with a brief overview of my professional experience. This is my thirty-eighth year in public education in Pennsylvania. My first twenty years were in public schools as a teacher, guidance counselor, and administrator. Then I moved into higher education at Edinboro University, first as a faculty member, then as an administrator. Six years ago, I moved into my present position at Clarion University.

One of my charges as the Associate Dean is to direct the Office of Field Services. This Office is responsible for the placement and supervision of all senior field and student teachers in all teacher preparation programs. Through this position, I communicate regularly with regional teachers, principals, and superintendents regarding the preparation of our soon-to-be teachers. I see the changes in curriculum at the public school level and try to revise our teacher education curricula to meet these changes. And, although we all like to think that we are always ready to change, it has been my experience that change only comes when it is required by a higher authority.

Three years ago, we at Clarion University heard the discussion about change. We, both faculty and administration, attended many PDE-sponsored meetings and learned about the new guidelines. Realizing that change does take time in higher education, we started our process for change, knowing that whatever was finalized would be close to what we were doing.

Our initial steps were to align our curricula to national standards for our four main professional accreditation bodies, i.e. the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). We also aligned our curricula to the Praxis II tests for each major. What we found was more than surprising.

Our standards and curricula matrices showed that our curriculum included significant repetition of some standards across many courses. This meant that we were, in essence, spinning our wheels in too many classrooms over multiple semesters. We also discovered holes where some standards were not being taught. This exercise told us that we had to change, whether or not the new guidelines were ever adopted. Thus, three years ago, our faculty across the curriculum

began to write new courses to align with both our national accreditation standards and the Praxis II test topics.

Writing new courses brought us to another realization. We did not have to offer as many professional core courses to meet the new standards. This was particularly helpful in our dual major programs, e.g. Early Childhood and Special Education or Elementary and Special Education. Prior to the changes in Chapter 49-2, our dual major programs often totaled as many as 150 credits and took a minimum of five years to complete. Seeing how the new standards now fit easily into new courses brought these dual programs well within the 126 to 135 credit range. Our single major programs fit into the 120 credit, four year plan with room for course concentrations that had been unwieldy in the past.

When the new Chapter 49-2 Guidelines came out, we were pleased that our programs were already very close to the new regulations. The credit requirements for the new certificate programs provide clear direction for how to structure the curriculum to meet the standards. This specificity is quite helpful. If it had been present in the old guidelines, the duplication that I mentioned earlier would not have evolved over the years, increasing credit requirements and expenses in higher education. In Chapter 354, section 25, paragraph 2, it states, "the preparing institution shall ensure that the preparation program curriculum does not include unnecessary duplication of coursework and strives to create efficient professional educator preparation". In my opinion, the new program credit requirements serve to ensure that there is no duplication and that standards are met.

Some say that that these new guidelines are too specific and violate institutional autonomy. However, I sincerely disagree. It is important that these guidelines communicate clearly and detail the criteria against which each program will be judged. This has not been the case for quite some time. Now that the credits are identified, programs can better identify the standard placement within the course sequences.

I strongly support the faculty matrix in the new program guidelines. Just as any job description identifies the qualifications needed for instruction, this matrix identifies faculty qualifications needed for standards-based education. Chapter 354 does require the university or college to hire qualified education faculty. However, in the past, the qualifications were not as detailed as they are now.

The matrix provides an objective structure through which faculty can meet the qualifications in several ways. For example, in the past, someone with a doctorate in curriculum and instruction may be hired to teach educational curriculum without any expertise in specific curriculum areas. Thus, faculty could be teaching specific grade level curriculum in which they themselves never had experience. The matrix ensures that faculty will have related experience.

Our public school teachers are required to complete professional development. This matrix now provides a way for higher education faculty to show qualifications through professional development related to their teacher education courses. Some may argue that faculty are required to do this for evaluation or promotion in an institution. But there are so many different ways to accomplish this that, without direction, a professor may never get what is needed for the

program. This matrix simply provides better direction through which to identify faculty qualifications.

Pennsylvania is nationally known for preparing very good teachers. Pennsylvania teachers are educating students in public schools throughout this country. It is our duty to continue and improve our teacher preparation programs by making sure we use best practices and meet our standards.

I would be happy to take any questions that you might have.