

Testimony Supporting H.B. 6666 and H.B. 6654: Acts Concerning Teacher Certification

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Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Education Committee:

We testify on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

Connecticut Voices for Children supports H.B. 6666 and H.B. 6654: Acts Concerning Teacher Certification. Passage of these proposals would address the state's troubling teacher shortage by promoting the recruitment of quality teachers within Connecticut schools.

HB 6666 and HB 6654 amend existing teaching certification mandates with the intention to make it easier for alternative certification programs to recruit and certify teachers to fill shortage areas. HB 6666 removes the requirement that all persons have a degree in the area that they want to teach. The proposed legislation mandates that potential teachers pass a subject area exam. The act would also allow artists and musicians and others with specialized training or expertise to become certified if they have three years of appropriate work experience and hold at least a bachelor's degree. The bill also allows persons who hold or have held, within the past year, a teaching certificate from another state to teach without taking the Connecticut state competency exams.

HB 6654 also makes it easier for interested and skilled persons to receive certification to teach within the state. This legislation would amend existing regulations to allow any person with a bachelors degree or higher, (and an appropriate grade point average) who is enrolled in an approved alternative certification program, to receive a resident teacher license valid for 3 years.

The state of Connecticut currently is experiencing a shortage of teachers in vital areas such as math, science, art and language.¹ At last count, more than 300 teaching positions remain vacant in the state of Connecticut because no applicants could be found that met the necessary certification and education requirements.² For several years, the state has relied on various alternative teacher certification programs like Teach for America and the Connecticut Alternative Route to Certification (ARC) to meet the demand for teachers in these shortage areas. Unfortunately, existing State Department of Education certification requirements make it difficult for persons interested in entering the teaching profession via alternative education programs to fill shortage areas. The statutory amendments that are created as part of HB 6666 and HB 6654 would remove certification barriers and would increase the ability of alternative certification programs to recruit teachers to fill vacant slots without compromising the desired quality of instruction within Connecticut schools.

The Current Restrictive Certification Requirements

Connecticut currently has a three-tiered certification model that begins with the issuance of an initial certificate³ to teachers with less than three years of teaching experience. The current requirements state that in order to qualify for an initial certificate, a person must have at least a bachelor's degree and have majored in the subject area that they wish to teach.⁴ Unfortunately, many would be teachers who possess useful skills do not have college degrees in the specific area that they would teach. For example, many professional artists and musicians may lack music degrees but may have years of professional experience that would be useful in a classroom. Even Bill Gates would be unable to teach computer science under the Connecticut requirements because he failed to complete his degree in computer science.

After a teacher has completed one year of teaching under an initial certificate and has completed the state's support program for new teachers (the BEST program), they may apply for a provisional certificate that is valid for eight years. The most advanced certification level is the "professional certificate" that is issued to teachers with at least three years of teaching experience who have earned at least 30 hours of graduate credit and 90 hours of professional development experience.

The Existing Shortage

In 2007, the state of Connecticut had 5,349 open teaching positions to fill.⁵ The state department of education has examined school data to identify which areas are most in need of teachers; the subjects that are currently identified as "shortage areas" by the state include:⁶

- Bilingual Education
- Special Education
- Math
- Music
- Science
- World Languages
- Technology Education

When ranking subject areas in terms of teacher shortage, the state concluded that world languages, science, math and special education were all among the top five subject areas with the greatest degree of teacher shortage.⁷ Unfortunately, the problem of teacher shortages shows no sign of abatement. Comparisons of trend data⁸ reveal that in some areas, like bilingual education and world education, the rates of vacancies are increasing over time.

The following chart illustrates the extent of specific shortages over time⁹

SUBJECT	POSITIONS AVAILABLE 2003	POSITIONS REMAINING VACANT 2003	VACANCY RATE 2003	POSITIONS AVAILABLE 2005	POSITIONS REMAINING VACANT 2005	VACANCY RATE 2005	POSITIONS AVAILABLE 2007	POSITIONS REMAINING VACANT 2007	VACANCY RATE 2007
Bilingual Education	65	22	34%	34	14	41%	41	18	44%
Special Education	492	48	10%	615	52	8%	511	41	8%
English	317	11	3%	403	11	3%	348	15	4%
Intermediate Administrator	165	10	6%	261	20	8%	268	14	5%
Library Media Specialist	43	2	5%	63	7	11%	74	14	19%
Math	286	18	6%	376	32	9%	321	20	6%
Music	175	10	6%	151	9	6%	175	11	6%
Science	265	11	4%	322	8	2%	319	18	6%
Language Pathologist	95	16	17%	118	30	25%	133	30	23%
Technology Education	52	7	13%	47	3	6%	63	6	10%
World Languages	204	13	6%	310	10	3%	239	22	9%

From the SDE Data Bulletin¹⁰

The Need to Fill Vacancies

When a teaching position remains vacant, school districts have several options at their disposal--all of which have the potential to reduce the educational opportunities and learning environments for students. When vacancies are not filled, administrators can cancel certain courses if they are not mandated graduation requirements. For example most schools in the state¹¹ do not require completion of a language course for graduation, so schools only need offer language courses as an elective. If a teacher cannot be found to teach a language, the school may elect to cancel the course entirely.

In other instances, administrators may choose to address teacher shortages by combining classes. When classes are combined, class size increases threaten to reduce the efficacy of teaching. The famous "Tennessee STAR" experiment proved that smaller class sizes are positively correlated with gains in student achievement.¹² This landmark study is most relevant to Connecticut's current situation in that it proved that small class sizes have profound impact on raising student achievement in inner city classrooms.¹³ Connecticut's greatest teacher shortage is greatest in inner city districts located within the district reference group "T"¹⁴. This means that inner city schools, already plagued with low test scores and many other problems, are most likely to increase their class sizes as a result of teacher shortages; an action that is counterproductive to achieving academic gains in struggling districts.

Teach for America and ARC Program Models

Two programs that have been strong parts of Connecticut's solution to the teacher shortage are the national "Teach for America" program and the local "Alternative Route to Certification" program.

Teach for America is a national program that is part of the AmeriCorp program. Teach for America began in 1990 as the brainchild of a recent college graduate Wendy Kopp. Teach for America recruits recent graduates who have demonstrated exceptional academic aptitude and whom are interested in public service. Through Teach For America, these recent college graduates undergo an intensive summer preparation program and are then placed in schools of need throughout the nation for two years. Over the past two decades, more than 20,000 young persons have taught in schools across the nation as part of the Teach for America program. Teach for America teachers have a strong presence in Connecticut districts like Hartford and Fairfield. Unfortunately, existing certification requirements that a person must have a degree in the subject that they teach limit the ability to use otherwise skilled Teach For America teachers to fill existing vacancies.

Like Teach for America, the Connecticut Alternative Route to Certification (ARC) program brings bright talented people with no formal teaching experience or education into classrooms. The ARC program was created in 1988 in response to teacher shortages in certain subject areas.¹⁵ Mid career professionals who have earned at least a bachelor's degree may participate in this program. ARC participants prepare for teaching either through an intensive nine week summer session or through participation in a series of weekend seminars. ARC participants must take the Praxis and content exam as would any teacher entering the classroom through a traditional collegiate teacher education program.

The Proven Results

Empirically, the use of teachers who participate in alternative certification programs like Teach for America has had no adverse impact on student learning and in some instances is actually correlated with increases in student achievement compared to systems that only use traditionally trained teachers. One study that analyzed test data between over 1000 students randomly assigned to classrooms taught by either Teach for America or traditionally prepared teachers actually found that "students in TFA (Teach for America) classrooms outperformed control students in mathematics."¹⁶ The same study also found smaller gains between reading scores for students in TFA classrooms and students in non-TFA classrooms.¹⁷ Teach for America teachers and ARC teachers are also paid on the same salary scale as traditional teachers meaning that the school districts don't lose money by hiring an alternatively certified teacher over a traditional one. Such data illustrate clearly that alternative education teachers not only produce the same level of student achievement as their peers but they also in some instances possess a unique ability to produce higher levels of student achievement.¹⁸

The state of Connecticut already participates in and supports alternative routes to certification. Unfortunately, the potential benefits like smaller class sizes and gains in student achievement that are derived from using alternatively certified teachers to fill shortage areas are limited by the current certification requirements. Existing requirements prohibit a skilled person from receiving alternative certification in an area if they have not majored in that area. The status quo prevents professional musicians from teaching music if they lack a music degree. The current system prevents engineers from teaching math if they do not have a math degree. Adoption of bills HB 6666 and HB 6654 would greatly support the innovative alternative certification programs already in use in the state,

increase the capacity of these programs to fill shortage teaching areas, and ultimately increase the educational experiences and opportunities for Connecticut's schoolchildren.

Thank you for your time and please contact Connecticut Voices for Children for more information on this issue.

¹ The office of Legislative research noted at the end of 2002 that: "*Although the teacher shortage has eased temporarily because of the state's slow economy, the age of the state's teacher workforce; the need for minority teachers and teachers for inner city schools and subjects like math, music, world languages, and special education; and a new federal law increasing required qualification*" Lohman, Judith.

"Major Issues for 2003." http://search.cga.state.ct.us/dtsearch_olr.html

² As reported by the March 2008 data bulletin that cited a vacancy count for the previous year as 313 because "no qualified person could be found" "Designation of Teacher Shortage Areas 2007-2008." Data Bulletin: Fall Hiring Report. (March 2008). P. 1 http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/databulletins/db_fall_hiring_2007.pdf

³ As explained in the OLR brief "Educational Requirements for Professional Educator Certificate" by Judith Lohman in 2008 (September 2008)

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ As reported in the March 2008 data bulletin which compiles survey data from local school districts collected by the State Department of Education. "Designation of Teacher Shortage Areas 2007-2008." Data Bulletin: Fall Hiring Report. (March 2008). P. 1 http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/databulletins/db_fall_hiring_2007.pdf

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ *ibid*. Report includes rankings as calculated by SDE. P. 3

⁸ As indicated in the State department of education Data Bulletin Brief "Designation of teacher shortage areas 2007-2008". 1 http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/databulletins/db_fall_hiring_2007.pdf . P.2

⁹Rate Data calculated by Lauren Velazquez from Connecticut Voices for Children using raw vacancy data from State Department of education Data Bulletin "Designation of teacher shortage areas 2007-2008". 1

http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/databulletins/db_fall_hiring_2007.pdf . Positions available data and positions remaining vacant data were taken directly from data bulletin.

⁹ *ibid* ⁹Rate Data calculated by Lauren Velazquez from Connecticut Voices for Children using raw vacancy data from State Department of education Data Bulletin "Designation of teacher shortage areas 2007-2008". 1

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¹¹ As reported in state compilation of district specific graduation requirements found at

http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/hs_redesign/HSgraduationRequirements06.pdf

¹² As reported in the final summary of the State of Tennessee's Student Teacher Achievement Ration (STAR) Program. Word, Elizabeth et al. and the Tennessee State Department of Education. "The State of Tennessee's Student Teacher Achievement Ration (STAR) Program Final Summary Report 1985-1990." P. 11 <http://www.heros-inc.org/summary.pdf>

¹³ As noted in the Tennessee STAR factsheet published by the Health and Education Research Operative Services. <http://www.heros-inc.org/factsheet.htm>

¹⁴ As noted in the data bulletin collected by the State Department of Education. "Designation of Teacher Shortage Areas 2007-2008." Data Bulletin: Fall Hiring Report. (March 2008). P. 1

http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/databulletins/db_fall_hiring_2007.pdf

¹⁵ <http://www.ctdhe.org/ARC/default.htm>

¹⁶ Glazerman, Mayer and Decker, Steven, Daniel and Paul. "Alternative Routes to Teaching: The Impacts of Teach for America on Student Achievement and Other Outcomes." Journal of Policy Analysis and Management 25:1 (2006) P 76.

¹⁷ *Ibid* p. 85

¹⁸ One study using data from the 1990s found a negative correlation between gains in SAT scores and usage of "under certified" teachers. The author chose not to use data from this study ("The Effectiveness of Teach for America and Other Under certified Teachers on Student Academic Achievement: A Case for Harmful Policy." Education Policy Analysis 10:37 ((2002))) because it did not use original data and was a metanalysis of data that was collected as TFA was just being rolled out and only looked at SAT scores. This study also is not applicable to this testimony because under the proposed legislation, teachers would receive certification and have to pass the same exams as other teachers and would not be considered "undercertified"