

Testimony of
Elizabeth Sked
Connecticut Education Association
Before the
Education Committee

HB 6879 An Act Concerning Teacher Certification
SB 1199 An Act Concerning Equity in Education

March 15, 2023

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. I am Elizabeth Sked, education issues specialist for CEA. I have served as an elementary school teacher and instructional coach in New London for over 25 years.

CEA testifies today in support of adding kindergarten to the elementary education endorsement and the workforce development proposals included in HB 6879. CEA also supports establishing the apprenticeship and aspiring educators programs proposed in SB 1199.

HB 6879 addresses the imminent shortage of kindergarten teachers on the horizon due to the elimination of the 013, K-6 certification and the implementation of the 305, 1-6 certification. The number of teachers who hold the 013 and are certified to teach kindergarten is diminishing rapidly. Currently, in order to teach kindergarten, one must hold either the 013 (which is no longer issued) OR the 113 Integrated Early Childhood/Elementary Education N-3 (which served (nursery to Grade 3) and Special Education N-K (nursery to kindergarten).

However, this certification does not attract aspiring educators. Many teachers choose to teach in a regular education classroom and do not obtain the integrated certification because it could result in a teacher being assigned to a Special Education setting – especially given shortages in that field. Teaching special education has simply become less desirable due to unwieldy caseloads, excessive administrative burdens (e.g., CT-SEDS), and overidentification resulting in a lack of resources to address students' needs.

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has already recognized this pending shortage and currently allows for a kindergarten waiver for a year, which may be renewed for a second year if the teacher enrolls in a program of study to obtain the proper kindergarten

certification. In addition, CSDE has put into place the emergency generalist certification (202 PK-8). Both serve as temporary solutions to address the shortage of kindergarten teachers. Kindergarten classrooms often include children aged 4, 5, and 6 in the same room.

Correspondingly, first-grade classrooms include 5-, 6- and 7-year-olds. The broad developmental range of children this young, coupled with intensified rigor and academics having been pushed down into kindergarten from the upper grades, has created a kindergarten setting pedagogically divergent from pre-kindergarten settings. As a result, a kindergarten teacher's duties and roles look increasingly like those of a first-grade teacher. Consequently, we believe it is more appropriate for the kindergarten certification to be included in the general education endorsement rather than the pre-K or nursery certification.

Reinstating the K-6 endorsement will eliminate the need for these Band-aid fixes and provide a long-term solution to a growing problem.

Additionally, we support proposals to pay students for their student teaching experience. Students undergoing student teaching are often prohibited by their program from holding outside employment. There are also additional costs for student teaching, including tuition and housing costs, investing in a professional wardrobe, transportation costs, the cost of both edTPA and the multiple assessments one must pass to gain certification, as well as paying for an initial certificate. The significant financial burden associated with student teaching dissuades college students from pursuing a career in teaching and creates a system biased against individuals who do not have other sources of financial support, such as family wealth.

We also support establishing an apprenticeship program as proposed in SB 1199. We hope that when developing the participation guidelines, consideration will be given to ensuring that all traditional educator preparation programs as well as residency and alternate routes to certification programs can leverage federal funds to provide expanded opportunity and access to a diverse pool of aspiring educators.

We look forward to being part of the conversation as this program is developed.

Regarding the provision enabling districts to hire adjunct faculty, we thank the committee for ensuring such a person is part of the collective bargaining unit for teachers and that the hiring of an adjunct does not supplant an existing certified teacher. However, consistent with how 10-145j(b) treats durational shortage area permits, we believe that hiring adjuncts should only be permitted "where no certified teacher suitable to the position is available."

Regarding section 11 of SB 1199, we are concerned about the proposal to expand credit recovery programs. Credit recovery programs should meet the same criteria outlined in 10-22a(g)(6) for online courses of credit. These require, among other criteria, that the coursework is planned and comparable to courses taught in a traditional setting, that it includes student-teacher interaction, and that it is taught by certified teachers appropriately trained in the program's particular mode of instruction.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our comments.