



September 11, 2017

Mr. Ralph A. Rossi, II
SUNY Charter Schools Institute
41 State Street, Suite 700
Albany, NY 12207

Dear Mr. Rossi:

We are writing to submit our formal comments on the draft regulations SUN-30-17-00024-P which relate to teacher certification qualifications in certain charter schools. We collectively represent parents, teachers, school administrators, business officials and other educators from across the state and are writing to express our deep concern over the pending draft regulations for teachers in charter schools.

We are deeply concerned that SUNY with its great tradition of rigorous teacher preparation programs is considering these regulations. We object to them in the strongest possible terms and urge that they immediately be withdrawn from consideration.

These regulations, if enacted, would significantly undercut the quality of teaching in charter schools by permitting unqualified individuals to educate large numbers of high needs students. Further, these regulations would have the effect of creating a fake “certification” process that would not be valid for employment in public school districts, charter schools authorized by the Board of Regents, or in schools located in other states.

Justification

The proposed regulatory change presupposes documentation of need and interventions taken to date. We question both the documented need for this proposal and note the lack of other actions taken to date. A comprehensive review of the problem at hand, data to support the need for the regulatory change and a thorough review of the actions steps to alleviate any shortages should be available for public review. It is quite possible that alternative options would be revealed by a thorough examination of a problem.

SUNY System

New York State has a rich tradition of high quality teacher education programs and is well regarded for its rigorous teacher certification requirements. SUNY is the largest single producer of graduates from teacher preparation programs in the state. These teacher education programs are the basis of the “normal schools” that became the foundation of the SUNY system and date back to the mid-19th century. If the Board of Trustees adopts these regulations, they will be turning their backs on over 150 years of high quality teacher preparation. How can an entity that has teacher preparation programs at 17 schools graduating over 5,000 teaching candidates annually enact regulations that establish a process whereby charter school teachers earn a substandard certification without meeting the same rigorous standards required for New York State teacher certification?

Teacher Certification Requirements

The SUNY draft regulations circumvent many of the established criteria for teacher certification set forth by the regulations of the Commissioner of Education and the Board of Regents for teacher preparation. For every other public school teacher in New York, the certification process requires a series of coursework and testing requirements. These regulations provide that teachers must meet the following academic criteria for initial certification.

“(2) General requirements. All candidates seeking to fulfill the education requirement for the initial certificate...

(i) Degree completion. The candidate shall possess a baccalaureate from a regionally or nationally accredited institution of higher education, a higher education institution that the commissioner deems substantially equivalent, or from an institution authorized by the Regents to confer degrees and whose programs are registered by the department.

(ii) The candidate shall complete study in child abuse identification, school violence and harassment, bullying and discrimination prevention and intervention, as prescribed in sections 80-1.4 and 80-1.13 of this Part.

(iii) General education core in the liberal arts and sciences. The candidate shall complete 30 semester [credit] hours of coursework that includes study in each of the following subjects: artistic expression, communication, information retrieval, concepts in history and social sciences, humanities, a language other than English, scientific and mathematical processes, and written analysis and expression, except as otherwise provided in this subparagraph.

(iv) Content core. The candidate shall complete 30 semester [credit] hours of coursework in the subject area of the certificate title, which may include no more than six of the 30 semester [credit] hours in a cognate, meaning a related field as determined by the department.

(v) Pedagogical core. The candidate shall complete 18 semester [credit] hours of pedagogical coursework as prescribed in clause (a) of this subparagraph and teaching experience as prescribed in clause (b) of this subparagraph.

(a) Coursework. The candidate shall complete 18 semester [credit] hours of coursework that includes study in each of the following subjects:

(1) human development and learning, including but not limited to the impact of culture, heritage, socioeconomic level and factors in the home, school and community that may affect a student's readiness to learn;

(2) teaching students with disabilities and special health-care needs to develop the skills necessary to provide specially designed instruction to students with disabilities to participate and progress in the general education curriculum, three semester [credit] hours;

(3) teaching literacy skills, three semester hours;

(4) curriculum, instruction, and assessment, including instructional technology; and

(5) foundations of education (historical, philosophical, sociological and/or legal).

(b) Teaching experience.”

In addition to completing the requirements listed above, applicants for New York State teaching certificates must also successfully complete specific examinations for certification. The examinations are designed to ensure that all applicants for certification have professional knowledge and skills to teach all students effectively. Required examinations include:

- **Educating All Students:** this exam tests professional and pedagogical knowledge necessary to successfully teach students from diverse populations, including English language learners and students with disabilities, as well as the teacher’s responsibility regarding student interactions and home and school relationships.
- **Teacher Performance Assessment, edTPA:** the edTPA is a student-centered performance assessment of teaching skills. The exam requires applicants to develop a portfolio that includes a videotape of the applicant actually teaching, and is assessed by trained evaluators that include higher education faculty and K-12 practitioners.
- **Content Specialty Tests:** each certificate title in NYS (mathematics, chemistry, childhood education, etc.) has its own content specialty test designed to ensure that the applicant has sufficient content area knowledge to successfully teach students. The mathematics exam, for example, tests the applicant’s knowledge in: number and quantity, algebra, functions, calculus, geometry and measurement, statistics and probability, and how to teach mathematics.

In place of these existing certification requirements, these regulations establish a process whereby the SUNY Charter School Institute is authorized to approve instructional programs with as few as 30 hours of classroom instruction and only a couple of weeks of field experience. A candidate seeking certification through this process can certainly not receive the proper training in such a short amount of time. Further, the regulations provide that training can be delivered by a variety of instructors which include uncertified teachers. Allowing uncertified teachers to train teachers for certification is irrational.

No other licensed profession in New York State has any analogous process. There is good reason for this – individuals who are licensed to practice in a profession need high quality training – not training delivered by untrained administrators or uncertified teachers.

While New York has a rigorous process for becoming a certified teacher – it is also a flexible process with many paths available to become certified. New York currently allows for individuals with strong content area knowledge and/or experience to obtain a state teaching certificate and begin teaching – otherwise known as a transitional teaching certificate. As the name implies, the transitional certificate allows individuals from careers and fields other than teaching to transition into a teaching position after completing some coursework through a state-approved teacher education program.

Available transitional certificates include:

- Transitional A: for specific career and technical subject applicants
- Transitional B: for individuals with a bachelor's degree who want to teach in any K-12 subject area
- Transitional C: for individuals with advanced degrees who want to teach in K-12 subject area
- Transitional G: for higher education faculty in math and sciences who want to teach in NYS public schools

Transitional certificate holders then have up to three years to complete additional preparation through an approved teacher education program. During this time the transitional certificate holder is required to have direct support from the teacher education program.

TeachNY

These proposed regulations also directly conflict with the TeachNY initiative which Chancellor Zimpher has undertaken over the past three years. SUNY and Chancellor Zimpher have been engaged with the TeachNY Committee whose stated goal is to increase the quality of teaching applicants and build better P-20 partnerships to improve the quality of teacher prep programs. Instead, these draft regulations privatize the "certification" process for teachers in charter schools and completely disconnect the training of these applicants from teacher preparation programs with no involvement from the State Education Department or institutions of higher education.

The SUNY TeachNY website states: "Each year, SUNY prepares nearly a quarter of New York State's teachers, and New York is a key provider of teachers for our nation. But the demand for – and the demands on – teachers have changed dramatically. The quality and diversity of teacher candidates and the extent of preparation they receive is not sufficient for what our students and communities need today, nor in the future. Through the many changes and challenges schools face, one thing remains constant: teachers are the number one in-school factor for student success."

The same website states: "SUNY has the opportunity to impact education for all students in New York by focusing its considerable resources on continuous improvement and excellence in educator preparation. While attracting and retaining excellent teachers and leaders is a challenge for all New York State, indeed, the entire nation, SUNY is uniquely positioned to address the challenge at an unmatched scale... SUNY has the capacity to reach into communities to expand the relationships and further develop the partnerships that are necessary for change."

We strongly agree with the sentiment in the preceding two paragraphs and we know the SUNY Board of Trustees also agree because in June they adopted a resolution that approved the TeachNY policy. This resolution endorsed TeachNY and made numerous statements in support of teacher preparation programs. The resolution stated: "teaching is a practice profession requiring study that is academically rigorous, clinically based, content-rich, and informed by research, preparing candidates to apply the science and art of teaching and learning. Teacher quality is the number one in-school factor contributing to student academic success; therefore, the preparation of, support for, and access to excellent teachers who inspire all students to learn, prepare them for college and career, and empower them to positively contribute to a democratic society as engaged citizens must be shared priorities and responsibilities."

The resolution resolved to promote “Preparation of Excellent Educators through Rigorous Academic Study and Clinical Practice” and to “D[develop candidates] deep content and pedagogical knowledge and skills, scaffolding learning throughout the curriculum (including foundational courses offered by community colleges) in the context of accomplished practice via rigorous clinical experiences with culturally and academically diverse students, across a range of educational settings.

The pending draft regulations are completely counter to the spirit and letter of the resolution which was adopted in June.

Teaching as a Profession

The diminution of the current certification requirements takes a backwards step to promoting teaching as a profession. Professions regulate themselves and hold to standards appropriate to the field of expertise. Abandonment of strong standards negates the ability of the profession to monitor itself and ensure that practitioners meet high standards.

Fake Certification

The “certification pathway” detailed in the draft regulations is not a certification at all. New York State certifies teachers and alternative pathways exist but all of these are connected with nationally accredited institutions of higher education. A state certification allows a holder of the certification to undertake professional activities across New York in the relevant field for which the person is licensed. However, the process authorized by the draft regulations would result in a document that would only be valid at SUNY authorized charter schools.

Therefore, the piece of paper given to a person who completes the process contained in these regulations amounts to a coupon that is only redeemable for employment at SUNY charter schools. As a result, this person is not certified to teach and cannot be employed in a teaching capacity in public school districts, charter schools authorized by the Board of Regents, or schools in other states.

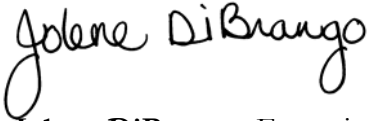
This issue is compounded given the high teacher turnover rates at charter schools in New York State. SUNY– authorized charter schools have teacher turnover rates that exceed 30% during the first five years of employment. One in five SUNY-authorized charter schools has five year teacher turnover rates in excess of 50%. Employees who leave (both voluntarily and involuntarily) these charter schools and have used these draft regulations to gain their employment will be unable to pursue positions in other education institutions except other SUNY authorized charter schools. This creates a great disservice to young teachers who are beginning their careers in education and will leave many of them unemployable in the teaching field.

Impact on Public Schools

Children move between the public school and charter school sectors on a regular basis. Children who are taught by functionally uncertified teachers in charter schools as a result of these regulations will be put at a disadvantage in the classroom. Further, when these children exit the charter school and return to their public school building, that staff and school districts will be faced with the prospect of educating children who have been given substandard instruction by unqualified staff. This will have significant negative implications on those districts, many of whom lack fiscal capacity to fund additional programs that will be required if these regulations are enacted.

For all of the reasons stated herein, the SUNY Board of Trustees should immediately remove these regulations from consideration. The education of our children depends on it.

Sincerely,



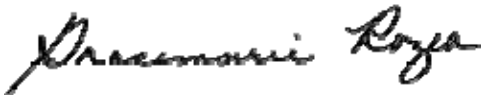
Jolene DiBrango, Executive Vice President
New York State United Teachers



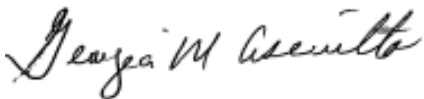
Kevin Casey, Executive Director
School Administrators Association Of New York State



Michael J. Borges, Executive Director
New York State Association Of School Business Officials



Gracemarie Rozea, President
New York State Congress Of Parents And Teachers



Georgia Ascuitto, Executive Director
Conference Of Big 5 School Districts

cc: Members of the SUNY Board of Trustees
Chancellor Nancy Zimpher
Commissioner MaryEllen Elia
Members of New York State Board of Regents