

Representative Genetski,

Today we got an e-mail from our union rep that talked about your recent introduction of bills to eliminate the need to receive higher education requirements, which are currently required to move between a provisional certificate and a professional certificate. If you don't mind, I would like to share my point of view on this. My wife and I are currently both teachers who are in our fourth year of teaching. My wife teaches special education in a local elementary, while I teach special education at a local high school. My wife and I are both Young Life leaders in the community, I coach three different sports teams, as well as lead our schools sports training program in the summer. We give up enormous amounts of our time for our schools and the students we work with on a daily basis. We both love our jobs immensely, and can't imagine doing anything different.

Currently, at the end of a teacher's sixth year of teaching experience, they are required to obtain 18 graduate level credits in order to move from a provisional certificate to a professional certificate. The only option that we have in order to modify this tract is to file for a three year extension (there is a chance I may have to apply for this). Within the past five years, a requirement was also added to take a literacy course within the graduate level tract (why????) on top of the normal master's degree credit requirement.

In order to qualify for financial aid for these classes, both my wife and I need to be taking two classes, for a total of 6 credits each. In order for the financial aid to continue seamlessly from semester to semester, we need to take these classes continuously, without a break in order to avoid having to pay on the loans immediately. My wife and I have found it impossible to keep up with all of our teaching requirements, and take two graduate level courses at the same time. That means that we are ineligible for financial aid, and as a result this makes it extremely difficult to pay for these classes out of pocket. The current rate per three credit graduate class for my wife is \$1,353. She is currently seeking her degree through an online university in the state of Michigan. For my wife to obtain her master's degree, this comes at a cost of just under \$14,000. My current rate per three credit graduate class is nearly \$1,900. Due to the time requirements I currently have (father, teacher, coach, YL leader), I am taking my grad classes online through an out of state university. To obtain my master's degree, it will cost us nearly \$19,000. That comes to a total cost between the two of us at nearly \$34,000, not including books and all of the new fees universities have instituted. With very little financial aid assistance, this total will nearly be paid all out of pocket.

My wife and I are not only struggling financially to pay for this current requirement by the state of Michigan, but it also takes away from our ability to be the best teacher we can be. On top of the financial stress, this requirement takes away a substantial amount of time away from our ability to spend more time working on our lesson plans, communicating with parents, finishing student reports, and so on. This requirement takes a considerable amount of our time, money, and energy away from our family and students, when these scarce resources could be better devoted to more meaningful opportunities within our community. I often stay up until midnight or later working on my grad work, which isn't until after I do my grading, IEP's, and all of my other school work for the night.

I support your legislation to remove this requirement, and encourage the state of Michigan to move to one form of certification. I have spent countless hours during my undergraduate degree to become what the state currently labels a highly qualified teacher. I took class after class to learn and grow, and to work hard to become the best teacher that I could be. With the current requirements as they are, our state's young teachers are forced to select an area of interest in well before they are ready. At this point in my career, I just wasn't sure what I wanted to do, but I was forced to make a decision that I wasn't ready to make. I truly believe this causes our state to lose some very talented and hardworking future administrators. Often times, because this decision has to be made so early, many people will find a program that they feel is easier, and something that they can just get through easily.

The reason I am writing this to you is to encourage you to fight hard for this legislation to pass. I saw that there was another piece of legislation that was similar to yours, and I am really hoping that you can get some momentum rolling for these bills to pass. The young teachers in the state of Michigan are counting on you to make these changes, which puts the focus of our state's teachers back in the classroom. Please let me know if there is anything additionally that I can do. For the sake of my wife and I, we are hoping that you can make this change affective to all current teachers in the state of Michigan today and tomorrow.

Thanks,

Nate Vande Guchte