

Senate Testimony - Dr. Rae White, President OAPCTE

December 6, 2017

Senator Lehner and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you, Chair Lehner and Vice Chair Huffman as well as Ranking Member Sykes, for the opportunity to address you regarding Senate Bill 216. I am speaking not only for the Ohio Association of Private Colleges of Teacher Education but also for the State University Education Deans and for the Ohio Association of Colleges of Teacher Education. (Introduce SUEd and OACTE representatives in attendance.) It is our collective intention that by speaking with one voice, our input will be most helpful.

We recognize the current challenges faced by districts to secure and retain professionally trained, appropriately licensed, and effective teachers. We appreciate the issues captured in Senate Bill 216, however, would like to present a balanced perspective on what may likely be unintended consequences of some language in this proposed legislation in its current draft.

Sec.3319.22 (A) 1 Line 3868 proposes the broadening of the grade bands which were established over 20 years ago when we responded to the strong research that was conducted with input from various stakeholder groups. As a reminder, the current grade bands of PreK-3; 4-9 and 7-12 were established in response to the critical importance of specialized preparation for middle level teachers. By eliminating the current emphasis on the grade band pre-kindergarten through grade three it deconstructs the strong bridge between the earliest educational experiences to kindergarten. Additionally, the PreK-3 band allows the emphasis on preparation required to support the Third Grade Reading Guarantee which could be diluted when included across a wider band of preparation. The elimination of a license band that has "Pre-kindergarten" would marginalize these early childhood teachers at a time when many (including legislators) have advocated for the expansion of early learning when children's brains are

developing rapidly and they need effective instruction and positive, nurturing environments.

Middle Level Teacher Preparation and Licensure in Ohio was enacted to ensure that students in grades 4-9 have the best opportunity to gain the in-depth knowledge, skills and dispositions provided by appropriately and professionally trained middle level educators. These are foundational years for young learners where the building blocks of content knowledge must be established. Preparation program elements specifically outlined in the Associate for Middle Level Education research are the following:

- 1) Young Adolescent Development: successful middle level teachers *must* have the expertise of the physical, mental and emotional changes unique to these students and have solid grounding in their developmental stages;
- 2) Middle Level Philosophy and Organization: young adolescents are different from their counterparts of young children and high school levels; a trained middle level teacher knows the importance of flexible grouping, social learning, an interdisciplinary approach, and focus on students' interests helps to establish a successful environment;
- 3) Middle Level Curriculum: content and discipline-specific curriculum honors the unique approaches for this grade band; curriculum should be challenging, exploratory, integrative and relevant;
- 4) Subject Matter Knowledge: by emphasizing deep knowledge in two middle level content areas, this ensures teacher confidence and background to teach these grade levels;
- 5) Middle Level Planning, Teaching and Assessment: should accommodate diverse skills, abilities and prior knowledge cultivate multiple intelligences and draw upon students' individual and digital tools;
- 6) Middle Level Field Experiences: currently the context to provide experiences ensures students and teachers are engaged in active, purposeful learning; organize information into useful and meaningful constructs; promote long-term cause and effect relationships as students are ready and able to play a major role in their own learning and education.

Think of first graders who are 6 or 7 years old, and compare them to 8th grade students who are 13 or 14 years old. Would they learn in the same ways? Do they respond to the same stimuli or depth of content? Do they require the same teaching and learning

methods? If the answer to these questions is yes, then the licensing band K-8 has no impact. However, if the answer to any of these questions is no, does it begin to show it would have a significant impact?

If the proposed grade band is broadened to K-8 it would require a college student to need more courses (to cross all these grade levels and specialized professional associations with national standards) and for teacher candidates to incur more time and debt to be prepared to enter into the teaching workforce. Currently each teacher candidate can select his/her preference of early childhood, middle childhood or adolescent/young adult. By reducing the choice of licensure to K-8 or 7-12, it not only dilutes the importance of each unique developmental level, but could create an issue and an inconsistency in the degree of student content knowledge. This would also impact the level of success for middle school students passing state achievement tests – especially in reading and mathematics.

The proposed changes in SB 216 regarding the collapsing of teacher grade bands and decoupling prekindergarten from licensure, would have real impact on classrooms, educator preparation, but most importantly on the quality of learning for our PK-12 students as it minimizes the focus on a strong knowledge-base, the quality of developmentally appropriate preparation, and therefore the effectiveness of teachers.

We advocate for a focus on PK-12 student learning and maintaining the current grade bands.