

Opponent Testimony for HB 33
Senate Education Committee
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Chairman Brenner, Representative Edwards, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to provide written testimony. My name is Lisa Harrison. I am a former middle school math teacher, now serving as interim dean of the Patton College of Education at Ohio University where I previously served as the Middle Childhood Education Program coordinator for 10 years. I earned my Ph.D. in Middle Grades Education from The University of Georgia and have published three middle grades education specific books and numerous other research-based articles. Currently I serve as the chair of the Board of Trustees for the Association of Middle Level Education (AMLE) and co-editor of *Middle School Journal*, a peer reviewed journal offering research-based articles for practitioners that promote quality middle level education and contribute to an understanding of the educational and developmental needs of young adolescents. I also served on the committee tasked with creating the 2022 revised middle level teacher preparation standards that sets research-based guidelines on what skills, dispositions, and knowledge preservice teachers need to best support positive educational outcomes for young adolescents.

I am writing today to oppose the inclusion of changes to grade band licensure that were added to HB 33 and originally proposed in HB 9. I am advocating for the removal of the grade band licensure changes indicated on pg. 1356, lines 41655-41672 as such a significant change in teaching licensure drastically limits teacher education programs' ability to adequately prepare preservice teachers to meet the educational needs of students. Furthermore, it is highly concerning that the outcome of teacher licensure within the state of Ohio would be determined by a few lines included within a budget bill instead of in consultation with the appropriate education committees and various experts in the field of education.

A fundamental understanding within teacher preparation is that the content and pedagogical knowledge and skills that educators need to successfully support teaching and learning are different based on students' age and the content that is being taught. However, the proposed change in grade band teaching licensure goes against what research indicates is best for preparing highly qualified educators. "Specialized middle grades preparation helps educators appreciate the uniqueness of young adolescents, realize their intellectual capabilities, and utilize discipline knowledge in meaningful ways to support student learning, while increasing persistence and commitment to working with young adolescents" (Bishop & Harrison, 2021, pg. 27).

This proposed change in licensure will result in a reduction of coursework as teacher preparation programs revise the curriculum to accommodate for the expansion in licensure certification within a 4 year, 120 credit hour program. "Essential elements of middle grades professional preparation programs include a deep understanding of young adolescents, their development, and their diverse identities; middle school philosophy and organization; knowledge of the content

area(s) taught; middle school curriculum; middle grades planning, instruction, and assessment; and opportunities to demonstrate professional roles and ethical behaviors” (Bishop & Harrison, 2021, p. 25). It would be impossible to include these essential elements while also expanding to incorporate the vastly different curricular needs to prepare preservice teachers to work with young children as outlined in the Professional Standards and Competences for Early Childhood Educators (NAEYC, 2020).

While the concept of expanding teacher licensure grade bands might seem like a good solution to address concerns of a teacher shortage, ultimately this change will result in future educators’ decreased likelihood of having prior field experience in the grades that they will eventually teach, having less content knowledge within the discipline in which they will teach, having a less in-depth understanding of the developmental and cultural needs of students they will teach, and having a more limited understanding of the pedagogical knowledge needed to ensure student success. Simply stated, such a change comes with a great loss in which students will suffer the greatest consequences. Preparing less qualified teachers is the opposite of what is needed during a time when there are increased rates of young adolescents who have attempted suicide and experience childhood trauma (Curtin et al., 2022; Geiger & Davis, 2019), and as schools grapple with supporting students academically after the global pandemic (Office for Civil Right, 2021). Furthermore, teachers who do not adequately feel prepared to work with students do not stay within the teaching profession. Thereby, while a change in teacher licensure might seem like a viable solution to the teacher shortage issue, it rather exacerbates teacher retention and perpetuates teacher shortage (Hurd et al., 2023). In addition, a reduction of coursework will likely result in students having a hard time passing licensure content exams: math, science, language arts, and social studies; pedagogy exams; plus all other requirements in law that must be met before a teaching license is granted. This creates another potential obstacle as a result of this proposed licensure grade band change.

Teachers who work with young adolescents should possess the specialized skills, dispositions, and knowledge needed to build meaningful relationships with students, plan and deliver lessons that are engaging and responsive to students, and cultivate positive classroom communities that attend to the needs of all students within their classrooms (Bishop & Harrison, 2020; Brinegar et al., 2019; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014). They commit to adapting key middle level organizational structures (e.g., advisory programs, common planning time, interdisciplinary teaming) across varied learning spaces, including virtual spaces, to foster the academic and personal development of young adolescent learners (AMLE, 2022). Furthermore, teachers need to know their students well, be prepared to discern their learning needs, and be capable of providing targeted instruction and supports to address those needs (AMLE, 2022).

Young adolescents deserve educators who are prepared and deeply committed to working with them. The proposed change in grade band licensure found in HB 33 and originally proposed in HB 9 would adversely impact this outcome. It is within this realm that I am sharing this written testimony to remove the grade band licensure changes indicated on pg. 1356, lines 41655-41672.

Thank you for your consideration,
Lisa

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