

Senate Bill 219, by my understanding, seeks to reverse the impending change to licensure grade bands for K-12 educators in Ohio. I support this, because I fear that changing the system to only two grade bands will have the opposite desired effect and actually EXACERBATE the teacher shortage. You see, as a teacher myself who finished college just a few years ago, I can tell you that people who study education generally have an idea of what they want to teach. Specifically, a 2-3 year grade band (and often EXACTLY one grade in particular they want). The current system of K-3 (with the opportunity to work extra for a 4-5 licensure if wanted), 4-9, and 7-12 is great because it allows college students, or "preservice teachers" (which I will refer to as PSTs henceforth), to focus more on the exact grades they care about. For example, if a PST knows they'll want to teach Kindergarten or 1st grade, then studying K-3 is perfect. They don't need to seek the 4-5 licensure, and they can focus their energy on perfecting their understanding of those very early years of cognitive and social development. In light of the current teacher shortage, we know that sometimes teachers are getting reassigned to try to fill gaps... If a Kindergarten teacher is reassigned after 20 years to 3rd grade, it's going to be a rude awakening and probably not a good fit. This will adversely affect the students, not to mention the teacher. So already, our system with 3 grade bands has the potential to be problematic, but generally speaking allows people to "stay in their lane" where they are happy and more productive.

Now picture a two-band system involving K-8 and 6-12... There is a SIGNIFICANT difference between 2nd graders and 8th graders. I absolutely cannot fathom how an individual can, in four years of college, learn how to adequately support students in learning reading, writing, math, history, science, health, social skills, and all other content from Kindergarten through 8th grade. Instead, what will happen is we'll churn out terribly underprepared teacher candidates who will damage the school system with their mile-wide inch-deep understanding of education. Right now, under the K-3(4-5), 4-9, 7-12 system, if a teacher prefers elementary they can guarantee they'll stay there by taking up K-3(4-5). If they prefer high school, they can take up 7-12 and hope they're never transferred down to a middle school. And if they prefer middle school, they will probably study 4-9 and hope they are never transferred to an elementary. Our system isn't perfect, but I think honestly the focus should be less on how to give teachers more grade bands to fix the teacher shortage and more on how to make sure there isn't a shortage in the first place... I assure you that if PSTs know they will have to study and obtain licensure for K-8 when they only want to teach K-2 or K-3, they will be less likely to study the degree at all and will instead leave education.

In my five years of college (obtaining a Bachelor's and then Master's Degree, plus helping teach undergraduate courses for two different professors) I encountered countless PSTs, especially elementary-focused, and I saw firsthand how easy it is for them to overlook something significant that will negatively impact students one day. Many elementary PSTs in particular are focused on Literacy in their studies, and let things like math (especially 3rd grade math and beyond) sort of fall by the wayside. It's one thing to be able to DO math; it's another to be able to support students in exploring it so that they truly UNDERSTAND it and can be prepared for future years of it. The university I attended did an outstanding job of trying to make sure PSTs didn't overlook this by the end of their four years, but it was a difficult task to cover every content area for every grade in the elementary grade band. By decreasing the number of licensure

grade bands available, you increase the size of those bands and therefore increase the chance that a teacher will end up teaching something they didn't truly learn how to teach well.

So not only will SB 219 help re-motivate students to study Education and obtain licensure, but it will help ensure PSTs have deeper understandings of specific grades they want to teach so they are more effective educators for our students. This doesn't just affect elementary; as a high school teacher I see all too often the effects of poor math instruction at the elementary level. As I started to say earlier, the conversation shouldn't be "Could we change the licensure grade bands to fight the teacher shortage?", it should be "What can we do to prevent teachers from leaving in the first place? What's wrong with the current system that is driving passionate professionals away?" If you really think a licensure grade band would help, I would actually suggest making FOUR or more grade band options, so they could each be even smaller and teachers could be even more well-versed in the specific grades and content they are going to teach. Or perhaps, one-year grade band licensures that don't take four years to study (this may motivate more people to study education if they can obtain licensure in fewer than four years).

I have so much more to say, but I know you have a lot of testimonies to read and, much like a teacher, probably insufficient time to get everything done in a day. I appreciate that you've read this far, and I hope you will effectively advocate for the passage of SB 219. Not just for our teachers and PSTs, but for the countless students across the state of Ohio that it will benefit in the long run.

Thank you for your time,  
Chris Irick