

**Opponent Testimony for S.B. 219**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
**Tuesday, May 7, 2024**

**Dorothy Erb, Ph.D.**  
**Dean Emeritus, Education Department, Marietta College**

Dear Chairman Brenner and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for considering my written testimony. My name Dr. Dorothy Erb. I am the Dean Emeritus of Teacher Education at Marietta College. My former experiences include serving as an elementary teacher and teaching literacy education courses to teaching candidates at Marietta College. I have been trained in scientifically based reading instruction and am a strong advocate of Governor DeWine’s initiatives to ensure that the science of reading is implemented with fidelity in Ohio’s schools and teacher preparation programs.

**Purpose:** I would like to discuss Senate Bill 219, which would allow the current grade bands for Ohio teacher licenses to remain as pre-kindergarten through grade five, grades four through 9, and grades seven through twelve.

I recognize the current challenges faced by districts to secure and retain professionally trained, appropriately licensed, and effective teachers. While I understand the origins of the changes in licensure bands passed in House Bill 33 last year, I would like to present to you a perspective on what may likely be unintended consequences of the change in grade band to pre-kindergarten through grade eight.

**Concerns:** I join my fellow teacher educators who have expressed their concern about the array of unintended consequences that the change to the current grade bands would have.

- **Middle school kids are different, and have unique cognitive and developmental needs that teachers need to be trained for.** As my colleague Nicole Whitaker noted in her testimony “The middle school years represent a distinct developmental period whereby students are expected to develop a firm sense of self, establish and maintain a positive social support network, and effectively balance social, academic, and personal demands. For many students, the transition to middle school is a particularly daunting event because of the shift in emphasis from the supportive, mastery-based orientation typical of elementary schools to a performance-focused setting characterized by increased expectations for academic productivity, more intensive and teacher-directed instruction, and a greater focus on normative comparisons and high-stakes outcomes (Eccles et al., 1993; Midgley & Edelin, 1998; Schunk & Miller, 2002; Zimmerman, 2002).” (Cleary, 2009, p. 292)

- **The change will dilute reading instruction for all student populations but most significantly on grades preK through 3.** A primary concern I have is focused on adequate preparation to teach reading when the grade band is so broad. We are at a place where we know that scientifically-based reading instruction in PK-3 is a game changer for the ability of kids to succeed academically as they move to demanding texts in the upper grades. At Marietta College, our current PK-5 teacher candidates complete two in-depth reading clinical experiences implementing science of reading informed instruction with primary grade students prior to their full-time internships with science of reading trained teachers. We feel that this strong focus on early literacy and clinical experience enables our teacher candidates to hit the ground running to ensure that all children experience instruction that will allow them to be proficient readers by grade three. With the addition of grades six through eight, we will need to place heavier emphasis on adolescent literacy and reading in content areas with clinical experience in these grades. To find space in the curriculum (and the clinical placements) to provide candidates with both early literacy and adolescent literacy experience, we will need to cut back on clinical requirements in the early grades and condense our literacy coursework. This will run the risk of having teacher education candidates who are less proficient in implementing science of reading instruction that is needed in the early grades.
- **The same teacher who is magical with a preK student is not always the right fit for a middle school classroom (and vice versa).** Yes, the principal or superintendent has more flexibility in placing teachers, but teaching outside of their desired grade band is likely to lead to frustration, burnout, or even more personnel issues and/or teachers leaving the profession if they are not comfortable with teaching above or below their desired grade levels. My years as a teacher educator and dean of a teacher education program allowed me to see that teacher candidates were drawn to either the primary or middle childhood program largely due to the enjoyment they experienced with the age level of the students.

### **Dual Preparation Concerns:**

I am sure others have spoken to you about the concerns mentioned above. In addition to these concerns, I would like to point out the unintended impact that the grade band change would have on dual preparation programs. Marietta College is one of many institutions across the state of Ohio that have redesigned their curriculum to focus on Inclusive teacher preparation programs leading to dual licensure in general and special education. This approach produces stronger teachers that have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work to address the needs of all students within a specific developmental level of learners. Dual licensed teachers are better able to meet the developmental needs of EACH child, increase content knowledge among diverse learners, and differentiate instruction based on student needs. Teacher candidates earn both a grade-banded Intervention Specialist (special education) license and a general education/content-area license (PK-12, Grade 4-9, or Grade 7-12). Teacher education programs with dual license programs have seen an increase in the number of special education

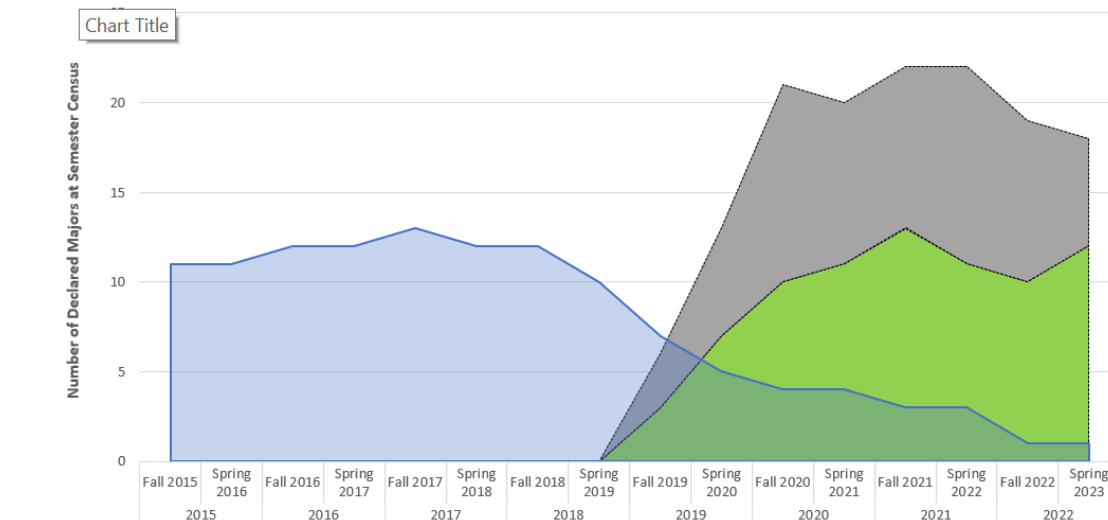
graduates as well as an increase in job satisfaction of those graduates. We believe that dual preparation makes these teachers better able to handle the challenges they might face in a classroom of students with diverse needs.

Dual programs are large due to the need for additional coursework and clinical experiences to adequately prepare teacher candidates for the roles of both general and special education teacher. The addition of courses that would be required to cover the increased number of grades in a PK-grade 8 band might mean that dual programs would be unable to exist as 4-year degree programs. This would add to the already alarming shortage of special education teachers in Ohio.

**Marietta College Example:**

Marietta College has shifted all of its licensure programs to a dual, or blended, license. Our candidates engage in the coursework and clinical experiences to receive licenses in PreK-5 Primary AND PreK-5 Intervention Specialist; 4-9 Middle Childhood (2 content areas) AND 4-9 Intervention Specialist; and grades 7-12 in specific disciplines (English/Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Biology, Chemistry Earth/Space Science, and Physics) AND 7-12 Intervention Specialist. As you can see in the graph below one of those programs, Middle Childhood, has increased steadily since we introduced the dual middle childhood program in 2019. The vast majority of our graduates take intervention specialist jobs right out of College. This year 85% of our May graduates have taken positions in special education classrooms. **I know that flexibility is incredibly important to superintendents and districts as they try to find qualified personnel for their classrooms. The flexibility that dual licensure provides is a better solution to address the shortage and preserve effective instruction by preparing teacher candidates to address the specific developmental needs and transitions that happen between each grade band.**

Number of Middle Childhood Education Majors & Middle Childhood Special Education Majors by Academic Year and Semester, Marietta College, Academic Year 2015 - 2023



**Summation:**

The collapsing of current teacher grade bands 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. It will also risk the unraveling of dual preparation programs that prepare teacher candidates to reach and teach ALL students by having them prepared to be a general educator and intervention specialist at the current grade band. The shortage of special educators will increase significantly if dual programs are compromised.

**I am advocating for a continued focus on PK-12 student learning and the whole child by reversing the changes to licensure grade bands to preK-5, 4-9, and 7-12. Please support S.B. 219.**

Thank you.

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