

Proponent Testimony for S. B. 219
Senate Education Committee
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Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair, O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee

Thank you for allowing me to share my testimony with you today. My name is Emma DeWeese

I am a sophomore teacher candidate at Marietta College. I am majoring in Middle childhood education and Special education and minoring in coaching; I am also studying to obtain my teacher leadership certificate through Marietta's McDonough Leadership program.

I am here to testify in favor of reversing the grade band changes established in Sub. H. B. 33.

Growing up in a household with two special needs siblings, I saw firsthand the stress that our school system placed on my parents. My mom would often say "I am so tired of fighting". Seeing the need for teachers who are passionate about serving all students is what inspired me to pursue education. When I learned that Marietta College offers a dual licensure program where I can major in both middle childhood education and special education, I knew it was the school for me. After graduation, my goal is to establish an integrated classroom where students of every ability feel welcome and are challenged to reach their full potential.

If the grade bands were expanded to pre-k to 8th and 6th to 12th, dual licensure programs like Marietta College's would be discontinued. This is due to the wide content that will be needed to prepare teachers to teach content for such a wide range of ages and grades. This discontinuation would be detrimental to our schools. According to the Ohio Special Education Profile 2022, "over one in seven students has a documented disability" (Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities). Ohio's large special needs student population needs teachers with the ability to serve their needs. Rather than expanding the grade bands; there needs to be a focus on a well-rounded higher education for teachers. By providing teacher candidates with the tools to work with all learners, there will be a greater understanding of how to succeed and less burnout.

In High School, my teacher Mrs. Rivero started a program, Supportive Peers. The program matched high school students with students with disabilities throughout the district. I was paired

with a student who would split his school day between an intervention room and a general classroom. When beginning to work with him, he struggled to communicate his feelings and needs to his teachers and peers. The constant transition between the two classroom settings was often upsetting to him. When he began to spend more time in the general classroom setting, I noticed he was learning to advocate for himself and was modeling positive behaviors that he saw his peers doing. For many students with disabilities, consistency is key, and an integrated classroom environment is a great way to ensure a stable environment. Ohio needs more teachers who are capable of providing this security and the loss of the dual licensure programs would negatively impact this movement.

When I tell other people that I am studying to teach middle school I often am told “Good luck” and that I am crazy. The idea that it takes a special type of person to teach middle school is true. If I was asked to also study the elementary or high school grade bands, I would reconsider pursuing a degree in education. I chose to study middle childhood education because I was gifted with the empathy and perspective to understand this age group better than I understand the other age groups. As a student who struggled with mental health and establishing a sense of belonging in middle school; I remember how hard it was and I am dedicated to helping my future students feel like they are never alone.

Middle school is a challenging time due to developmental and cognitive changes that other grade bands don't see and can be an overwhelming challenge for many people. Ohio must ensure that the people teaching middle school are truly dedicated and thoroughly prepared to serve this age group; a grade band expansion risks exposing students to teachers who are disinterested in their needs and challenges.

I am here to advocate for the passing of S. B 219. It is to Ohio's benefit that the grade bands be broken into three different age groups; it ensures a prepared workforce of educators who are highly knowledgeable not only on content but the needs of their students.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for your attention, I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.