

Proponent Testimony
SB 219 – Educator License Grade Bands
May 7, 2024

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and other members of the Senate Education Committee,

I would like to begin by thanking Senator Ingram for sponsoring SB 219. In her introduction of this bill a couple of weeks ago, she gave compelling arguments for the need for teachers who thoroughly know their content and that continuing with the grade band changes of HB 33 would make teacher shortage and placement issues worse, not better.

As a faculty member at Youngstown State University, I have been teaching Mathematics and Mathematics Education courses there for over 30 years. In 1998 when Ohio replaced the comprehensive Grades 1 – 8 licensure with separate licensures for grades P-5 and 4-9, I helped to develop both of those programs at my university. Those separate licensure programs thoroughly prepare teacher candidates in content, curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment techniques specific to the grade levels and contents included in their licensures. To revert to a comprehensive P-8 license would essentially be combining 3 separate university degrees: P-5, 4-9 (Math/Science), and 4-9 (English/Social Studies).

If the P-5 and 4-9 grade bands are replaced with a P-8 licensure, candidates will get approximately 1/3 of the content knowledge they could have gotten. For example, a Grades 4-9 Math/Science candidate at YSU currently takes 25 s.h. of Math content and 29 s.h. of Science content. To accommodate additional subjects and additional grade levels, a P-8 candidate would take only about 8 s.h. of Math and 9 s.h. of Science. Also, methods classes that now specifically focus on the grade levels in a P-5 or 4-9 license would need to be broadened to encompass the additional grade levels. It is not possible to thoroughly prepare candidates to teach all the subjects at all the grade levels in a comprehensive P-8 license.

Furthermore, I've been working with some faculty at other universities to see what reaction teacher candidates would have to this change. We found that across the state approximately ¼ of the population of future teachers would have left the state of Ohio to get a degree in the contents and grade bands they desire or would have left education entirely rather than to get a P-8 comprehensive or 6-12 single subject degree. With an already declining population of teachers and a national teacher shortage, Ohio simply can't afford to lose that many teacher candidates.

Another factor that comes into play is prerequisite requirements and higher-level course requirements. At my university, a P-5 candidate can enroll in the first math course for P-5 teachers with a much lower score on a placement exam than is needed for the first math course for a grades 4-9 candidate with math as one of their areas. A P-8 candidate would need to satisfy the higher placement requirement and take the higher-level course. Many students who would have been successful in the P-5 program will not be admitted or be successful in a P-8 program when that program includes higher level courses than the P-5 program.

In our survey we found that approximately 40% of current middle grades candidates expressed that they would have changed to a 6-12 program. However, most current grades 4 – 9 candidates would not be successful in a grades 6 -12 program. For example, Calculus is often the last math class taken by a middle grades candidate, but it is the first math class taken by a high school math teacher candidate. In all my time of teaching courses in the middle and high school programs, I've known exactly 2 people who began in the middle program and successfully transitioned to the high school program. I've known dozens who began in the high school program and who had to transfer to the middle program because they struggled in the higher-level math courses in the high school program.

It is my understanding that supporters of the HB33 Grade Band Changes proposed those changes to get more flexibility in the placements of teachers and to address teacher shortage situations. However, if these changes are not reversed, the significant decline in numbers of graduating teachers and the decline in content preparation will make shortage situations and placement issues much, much worse, not better.

Please consider supporting SB 219 to reinstate the P-5 and 4-9 grade bands. There are other ways to deal with placement and shortage issues that could and should be considered.

Thank you,

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