

Proponent Testimony for S. B. 219

Senate Education Committee

Tuesday, May 7, 2024

Tanya Judd

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Dr. Tanya Judd. I am the Dean of Education at Marietta College. I am here today to thank you for considering reversing the grade band changes established in Sub. H. B. 33 indicated on pg. 1356, lines 41655-41672, and for your willingness to discuss and deliberate these changes as an education committee, with the best interests of Ohio's children as the primary focus. I am neither a literacy specialist nor a special educator, but as Dean, I have become deeply involved in the implementation of both dual preparation of Intervention Specialists and the Science of Reading in our curriculum and have quickly become a zealot. I am sure that may come through today.

Our Education program has a core philosophy that ALL teachers need to be prepared to teach ALL children. To that end, we have built a program in which all of our licensure pathways are dual preparation, meaning that they will be certified in both general education and special education at their grade band. Our philosophy also brought us to align with the Science of Reading starting 3 years ago as we know that the research about the way that children acquire the ability to read will significantly impact their success in all disciplines. We are deeply concerned that the change in licensure band will negatively impact our ability to prepare ALL teachers to reach ALL students through producing well prepared general education teachers, while increasing the number of program completers

licensed in special education, and in our ability to address the Science of Reading in the meaningful way we are currently in our program.

We are fortunate to have had a close relationship with Michelle Elia, who had been one of two Ohio Literacy Leads for the Department of Education (now the Department of Education and Workforce). Michelle provided extensive training in the Science of Reading through LETRS to some of our faculty, several of our local teachers, and helped us align our literacy courses to the Science of Reading 3 years ago. This year we managed to convince Michelle to move to higher education, further increasing our ability to ensure that all preservice candidates were well prepared to teach all students to read using evidence-based language and literacy practices.

When the grade band change was initially proposed, our faculty discussed the implications in a variety of contexts. Our initial thought was that perhaps that one positive of this change would be that all preservice teachers would be mandated to take the four core reading courses. However, after discussion, particularly with our literacy specialist at the time and Michelle Elia, we recognize that secondary teachers have a far heavier load in their content areas, and they need this expertise to prepare students to be college and career-ready. One of the tenets of MTSS (multi-tiered systems of support) is that students should receive core instruction at grade level, maintaining rigor of that grade level, with interventions in their areas of need (including reading) in addition to, not instead of, core instruction. Secondary teachers, therefore, need to build expertise in content area instruction and have pedagogical knowledge of universal design for learning and differentiation to ensure that all students can access the core instruction. This requires a deep understanding of their content area(s) and the skills that undergird it to allow for classroom scaffolds to be implemented to allow for equal access to grade-level rigorous content. We do not want secondary teachers teaching foundational reading skills in their content area classes. Instead, we want **content-area literacy to be implemented across disciplines** to build the students' literacy skills within each discipline. The updated ODHE standards for the content area literacy course will ensure just that. This content area literacy course will also provide an overview of reading development (to avoid pitfalls or

confusing language), but the primary focus is teaching reading across content areas through vocabulary, language comprehension, and knowledge. For adolescent students who cannot read at grade level, a framework for MTSS provides that reading interventions are offered in addition to the core instruction, focusing on specific areas of need, by trained literacy specialists. These specialists can be licensed in special education or have literacy endorsements and / or dyslexia certification in addition to their adolescent/young adult licensure. Keeping the current grade band will allow secondary (High school/AYA) candidates to have the **option** to pursue dual licensure in special education as an additional license, as they can at our institution currently, therefore taking the literacy core and preparing them to provide literacy interventions. They also have the option to pursue the reading endorsement and dyslexia certification, via graduate-level coursework, in addition to their current license to become secondary reading specialists. These specialists provide the tier two and tier three interventions necessary to teach older students to read.

While I recognize the need to ensure all educators understand the Science of Reading, I also recognize the nuanced nature of literacy across grade bands and the need for all students to access quality core instruction in the content areas. This necessitates that teachers in the upper grades do not have to take the four courses for the reading core and instead focus their limited undergraduate hours on their content areas and critical concepts such as universal design for learning, instructional pedagogy, and differentiation. At this level, literacy is not foundational literacy, but literacy across content areas.

Again, I am testifying today affirming S. B. 219, reversing the grade band changes outlined in Sub. H. B. 33 and originally proposed in H. B. 9. The proposed changes will NOT resolve the teacher shortage, and it will not improve the state's literacy outcomes. The current grade bands for elementary, middle, and adolescent/young adult will ensure that educators at each grade band understand the differences in literacy instruction from emergent/early literacy to conventional and adolescent literacy as outlined in Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement. Furthermore, adding certification in special education through dual licensure programs at the undergraduate level or through pursuing additional licenses (reading endorsement or dyslexia certification) in graduate school will benefit teachers by

adding to their credentials (and eventually their paychecks) rather than watering down their current curriculum to allow for foundational literacy instruction. The additional certification for those who want to teach adolescents and young adults to read is available but not necessary for all secondary teachers. Secondary teachers that pursue dual licensure in general education and special education will have exposure to the entirety of the literacy core as well as their content, but do so without the emphasis on their rich content knowledge that is needed at those grade levels. I advocate for continuing the successful trajectory for literacy that the state has pursued and leveraging the content area literacy course for AYA as a means of embedding evidence-based literacy practices across content areas while maintaining content area specialization and expertise critical for rigorous core instruction.

I do not want to see literacy courses or content area coursework watered down in an attempt to streamline the teacher preparation process. We want both literacy and content experts with knowledge of the pedagogical and developmental needs of students in their grade band and mastery of the content area and literacy components of that grade band. This necessitates the four core reading courses for teachers in elementary and middle childhood, but not for those in adolescent / young adult, unless they are providing the interventions necessary in addition to core instruction.

Literacy is critical, but literacy instruction changes over time in core instruction, and we have an obligation to ensure foundational reading skills are taught well at the foundational grades while also ensuring students can become masters of critical content to prepare them for twenty-first-century learning; this requires secondary educators with different skill-sets. The current licensure structure does just that.

Our alignment to the Science of Reading and our dual preparation programs have led to an increase in the number of teacher candidates we prepare and graduate. Each piece allows us to prepare teacher candidates to meet the needs of ALL students. My fear is that by changing the grade bands programs will be producing fewer teachers, particularly licensed special educators, and those that we produce will be less prepared to meet the needs of our P-12 student population as a result. The new grade bands could very well exacerbate the

teacher shortage rather than serve as a solution, and it could actually limit the success of the recent strides we have taken in Ohio toward fully implementing the Science of Reading.

Please consider my testimony and pass S. B. 219. Thank you Chaiman Brenner and members of the committee for listening, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you,

Dr. Tanya Judd