

Proponent Testimony for S. B. 219

Senate Education Committee

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Chairman Brenner, Senator Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Michelle Elia.

For the past 4 years, I worked as one of two Ohio Literacy Leads for the Department of Education (now the Department of Education and Workforce), developing and presenting professional development in the science of reading for educators across our state. I was also one of the original 16 Regional Literacy Specialists for Ohio's State Systemic Improvement Plan, which preceded Ohio's Dyslexia Laws and was one of Ohio's original statewide implementations of evidence-based literacy practices grounded in the science of reading. I am a licensed special education teacher, grades k-12, with a teaching background in preschool and high school special education. This is my first year teaching at the collegiate level in teacher preparation. I intentionally made this move to higher education to ensure that all preservice candidates were well prepared to teach all students to read using evidence-based language and literacy practices. I know, first hand, that for teachers to be prepared to teach reading, they need to be taught, in teacher preparation, the evidence base that we call the science of reading. The learning should not end there, as the "science of reading" is just that, a science that changes and develops with new research. Therefore educator knowledge should continue to be built through high quality professional learning throughout the school year. My career paths allow me to provide instruction in both of these endeavors, as a college professor and a national science of

reading expert. As the president of Ohio's Chapter of The Reading League, a nationally respected nonprofit organization devoted to reading science, I can support teacher preparation, educator professional learning, and building family awareness of evidence-based language and literacy practices to ensure successful reading outcomes. Finally, I am a doctoral student at Mount St. Joseph University, in the 3rd cohort of the only Reading Science doctoral program in the nation. I am devoted to ensuring that all children learn to read. It is in everything that I do.

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 appreciate the statewide support from the Governor and the legislature for updated literacy standards in teacher preparation, mandates for implementing evidence-based language and literacy instruction grounded in reading science, curriculum approval, professional learning, and the ban of harmful instructional practices associated with three cueing and MSV. Our state is a leader in the country in supporting literacy endeavors grounded in reading science.

With my expertise in reading science, one would think that I would fully support the licensure changes to prek-8 and 6-12 grade certification, as this means that all preservice teachers will be mandated to take the four core reading courses. This is not the case. As a literacy specialist, I 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. (I am proud to co-author those and the state's core literacy course standards.) 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 / AYA candidates to have the **option** to pursue dual licensure in special education as an additional license, 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.) After graduation, educators in grades 6-12 will build on the knowledge of the content area literacy through Ohio's Science of Reading Course and Dyslexia Course specifically targeted to the needs of professionals at the adolescent level.

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.

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 or additional licensures (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 can pursue the additional content hours in reading as part of this licensure. 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 within an already limited 120 hours. 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.

Please consider my testimony and pass S. B. 219.

Thank you,
Michelle Elia