

Interested Party Testimony for S.B. No. 219
Senate Education Committee
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Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, it is a privilege to provide interested party testimony on S.B. No. 219, which is aiming to restore the three teacher licensure grade bands that were established in 2018 (prekindergarten to grade 5, grades 4 to 9, and grades 7 to 12), thereby replacing the two grade bands (prekindergarten to grade 8, and grades 6 to 12) that were signed into law in 2023 through H.B. 33.

My name is Ivory L. Kennedy Jr., and I have had the privilege of both teaching middle school students and training future middle school teachers. I am writing to advocate for the restoration of middle childhood education licensure. The expertise that these specialized programs cultivate is crucial for the effective education and development of students in grades 4-9. The recent legislative changes threaten not only the quality of education but also the stability of our educational programs and the future of our educator pool.

Middle childhood education programs, such as mine, are designed to prepare preservice teachers with the unique skills and knowledge necessary to address the distinct needs of students in this critical developmental stage. These programs emphasize:

Developmental Understanding

Teachers gain a deep understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and social changes that occur during middle childhood. This knowledge allows them to create age-appropriate learning experiences that foster academic and personal growth.

Curriculum Expertise

Middle childhood educators are trained to deliver a curriculum that bridges the gap between elementary and high school, providing continuity and building foundational skills for future learning.

Classroom Management

Teachers develop strategies tailored to manage the behavior and learning environment of middle school students, who often exhibit a unique blend of independence and need for guidance.

If eliminated:

Disruption of Programs

Educational programs like mine, which have been meticulously developed to train middle school educators, would face significant disruptions. The undoing and redoing of multi-layered processes would affect curriculum planning, course offerings, and accreditation standards, leading to a chaotic transition period.

Enrollment Decline

The uncertainty surrounding the licensure process is already discouraging prospective and current students from pursuing a career in middle childhood education. This decline in enrollment could result in a shortage of qualified middle school teachers, further exacerbating the challenges faced by our educational system as a whole.

Loss of Expertise

The elimination of specialized licensure diminishes the expertise within the teaching workforce. Teachers who have dedicated their careers to understanding and improving middle school education would be sidelined, and their valuable insights lost.

The Need for Educator Involvement in Decision-Making

It is imperative that teachers, who are intimately familiar with the day-to-day operations of classrooms and the needs of their students, are involved in legislative decision-making processes. The landscape of education is complex and constantly evolving, and policies should be informed by those with firsthand experience, in a collaborative sense rather than the reactionary spiral that changes like these cause.

On-the-Ground Perspective

Educators provide a practical perspective on how policies will affect classroom dynamics, student engagement, and learning outcomes. Their involvement ensures that legislation supports rather than hinders educational progress.

Holistic Approach

Teachers who have committed their lives to improving students' lives bring a holistic approach to education. They understand that student success is not solely based on academic achievement but also on emotional, mental, and physical well-being.

On behalf of myself and my colleagues who teach and train future middle school educators, I urge you to restore and maintain middle childhood education licensure. This licensure is essential for preparing teachers who can meet the diverse needs of middle school students and ensure their success. We need legislation that supports, not undermines, the efforts of dedicated educators. Let us work together to create a robust educational system that benefits both teachers and students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.