

1 Capitol Sq
Ste 2, Columbus, OH 43215
(614-466-5980)
ingram@ohiosenate.gov



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State Senator Catherine D. Ingram

9th Senate District
136th General Assembly

Sponsor Testimony – Senate Bill 144, Education Committee

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, and esteemed members of the Senate Education Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 144, which reintroduces Senate Bill 219 from the 135th General Assembly. This bill seeks to restore the grade bands in place before H.B. 33, which removed a critical compromise from 2018 that better addressed the needs of early childhood, middle-grade, and special education learners.

In 2018, the **Enact Public School Deregulation Act** aimed to grant more autonomy to local education authorities by consolidating licensure bands to Grades 1-8 and 7-12, diverging from Ohio's existing bands of PK-3, 4-9, and 7-12. However, concerns from educators and higher education institutions regarding the loss of focus on early childhood education and middle-level learners led to a compromise. This compromise established licensure bands of PK-5, 4-9, and 7-12, with authorized superintendents allowed to temporarily assign teachers one grade level above or below their licensure band. This compromise was approved by the legislature and Governor Kasich in August 2018.

Unfortunately, H.B. 33 removed this compromise. While the consolidation of grade bands may seem efficient, it risks diluting specialized teacher preparation for distinct age groups. Tailored preparation for early childhood and middle-grade students is critical, as it covers essential areas like child development and specific instructional strategies. A broad PK-8 license could result in weaker content knowledge and less effective teaching, particularly for middle-grade students who have unique developmental and academic needs.

One year after the changes under H.B. 33 were implemented in October 2023, we continue to hear concerns from professors, colleges of education, and current teachers about the ongoing impacts. The shift is still being felt across teacher preparation programs and classrooms statewide, and the consequences are becoming more apparent.

A recent survey of preservice teachers highlights significant opposition to these changes, with troubling results that have persisted even after a full year. Two key questions were posed: one gauging support for the licensure changes, and another exploring how these changes might have influenced their decisions when choosing their college programs. The results were concerning. Overall, 63.8% of participants opposed the changes, with 34.4% strongly opposed and 29.4% opposed. Opposition was high across all grade bands: 66% of primary preservice teachers, 65.1% of middle-grade candidates, and 58.9% of secondary candidates expressed opposition.

What is particularly alarming is the impact these licensure changes have had on future teachers' career paths. When asked how the new licensure structure would have influenced their decision-making, 23.4% of respondents indicated they would have pursued alternatives to becoming classroom teachers in Ohio. This includes 9.5% who would have avoided the education field, 10.6% who would have sought education programs

outside Ohio, and 3.3% who would have pursued different PreK-12 licensure programs, such as special education.

The most significant impact was seen among primary grades preservice teachers (PreK-5), with 28.4% reporting they would have chosen to study outside Ohio (14.4%) or not pursued education at all (14%). In the middle grades (4-9), 42.4% expressed a preference for secondary education, and 39.5% for primary education under the new system. Alarming, 15.7% indicated they would have sought education programs outside Ohio or pursued non-education majors.

This potential attrition, particularly in an already strained teacher workforce, is deeply concerning. It highlights the need to prioritize the recruitment and retention of teachers specifically trained for early and middle-grade education. The shift to a broad PK-8 licensure could exacerbate existing shortages and further undermine the quality of education for our students.

Additionally, the current uncertainty surrounding the grade bands directly impacts dual programming for special education, potentially putting these alternative pathways to create more intervention specialists at risk—an area where Ohio already faces a significant shortage. Special education teachers require targeted, specialized training, and the broad PK-8 licensure threatens to undermine this focus. Without clear distinctions between general and special education, teachers may not receive the necessary preparation to effectively serve students with disabilities.

Even more concerning is that the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce still has not set teaching standards for the new grade bands. When the grade bands were last changed in 2018, the Ohio Educator Assessment wasn't updated until August 2024—over five years later. If we change grade bands again, we risk repeating these same challenges.

Implementing such a change requires significant time, resources, and effort to revise pedagogical standards, teacher preparation programs, and licensure tests. Rushing this process, as we've seen over the past year, has led to unintended consequences and further strained an already burdened education system.

Rather than focusing solely on restructuring grade bands, we must address the broader, more complex barriers to becoming and staying a teacher. By providing more comprehensive support for educators and addressing the issues raised in previous hearings, we can create meaningful and lasting improvements to our education system.

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, and members of the Education Committee, thank you for your attention. I am happy to address any questions you may have.