

Honorable Senators,

As both a school board member in Southwest Ohio and a professor at a local university teaching preservice teachers, I fully recognize the teacher shortage challenge we are facing across the state. We certainly need to seek solutions to help ensure that our teachers are well-trained to be ready for this tough position and to provide support in the early years of teaching to improve retention in the field.

With this said, the answer is not expansion of grade bands to include a prek – 8th grade band as part of S.B. 144. Although this may, on initial glance, provide administration with more flexibility in placement, it has negative unintended consequences. First, this would negatively impact teacher preparation. It is already tough to prepare teachers well for all of the varied aspects of the work (from literacy to numeracy to content to behavior management and effective instruction) within four years. Increasing the grade band requires providing instruction in all these areas across a larger range of developmental levels, thereby allowing less time to do it well. Consider how literacy instruction looks in kindergarten (per Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement and the Third Grade Reading Guarantee) versus 8th grade English Language Arts. To not just gain knowledge to do this well, but also skill through practice and feedback requires time and focus. This time and focus will be diluted by increasing the licensure grade band. If teacher preparation programs had to extend beyond four years, this would likely drive more potential teachers away from entering the field, the opposite of the intended impact.

Further, after decades in education, it is abundantly clear to me that teachers find their grade-level niche. Primary-level teachers love their young kids and could not imagine tackling middle school. Similarly, middle school teachers bring a unique skill set building relationships with adolescent learners, but have no desire to teach 5-7 year olds. Expanding the licensure band might allow administrative flexibility, but making such drastic moves against teacher wishes will lead to less satisfaction and possibly even lower retention in the field.

I would respectfully request and encourage you to consider the alternate proposal to adopt grade bands: PreK–5, 4–8, and 7–12 as part of S.B. 144. These bands better reflect aligned knowledge and skill focus to be able to prepare teachers well for the field, including continued focus on the Science of Reading, particularly in our elementary grades. This decision would protect the integrity of teacher preparation within a four-year time period. These grade bands would also ensure that teachers choose a grade-band aligned with the ages of children they wish to teach, facilitating teacher happiness and increased likelihood of remaining in the field of education.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge your support for the adoption of PreK–5, 4–8, and 7–12 licensure grade bands. Our Ohio children are our greatest asset. We must provide them with an educational environment in which they can thrive. This can only happen if we protect the integrity of teacher preparation by not extending beyond reasonable licensure bands.

Thank you for your commitment to Ohio's educators and children.

Sincerely,



Wendy Strickler, PhD
VP School Board, Forest Hills School District
Associate Professor, Mount St. Joseph University