

Senate Testimony

February 7, 2018

Proposed Changes to Ohio's Teacher Licensure Bands

Submitted by the State University Education Deans (SUED)

Senator Lehner and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you, Chair Lehner and Vice Chair Huffman as well as Ranking Member Sykes, for the opportunity to address you regarding Senate Bill 216. I am Dr. Joseph Keferl, Chair of the State University Education Deans (SUED), and Dean of the College of Education and Human Services at Wright State University. I am accompanied by Dr. Mary Murray, President of the Ohio Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (OACTE), and Associate Dean of the College of Education and Human Development at Bowling Green State University. We provide today's testimony with the intention of offering an informed, balanced, and positive solution to the issue of proposed changes to existing grade bands. Our proposal has been informed and influenced by conversations and listening sessions with multiple stakeholders, including the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), Superintendents from partner school districts from across the State, faculty engaged in our educator preparation programs, and others. SUED is continuing to collect this valuable input, and anticipate that this proposal may indeed be further strengthened as we continue to incorporate this critical feedback.

STATEMENT OF ISSUE

Senate Bill 216 (sponsored by Senator Matt Huffman, District 12) has generated a great deal of discussion on many important issues in education. In particular, the proposed changes in teacher licensure bands would have a significant impact on Ohio's teacher education programs. The recently accepted sub. bill, changes the grade bands to grades pre-kindergarten through 6 or grades 5 through 12. While this change from the bill as initially introduced now includes pre-kindergarten licensure for teachers at the preschool level that helps to support and strengthen readiness of young children for early grades, the sub bill does not address concerns regarding the elimination of the middle childhood licensure band, making Ohio one of only five states that would not have a special licensure option that addresses the unique needs of early adolescence.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Members of SUED have engaged in numerous conversations with PK-12 partners to gauge their response to SB 216 and to better understand the concerns that might be driving the proposed changes. While not unanimous in support of SB 216, it is clear that many of our PK-12 partners support increased flexibility in licensure bands and increased authority at the local level in order to meet the immediate and unique needs of their districts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In an effort to support our PK-12 partners and balance what teacher educators know to be evidence-based practices in educator preparation, SUED members are recommending an alternative to the proposed changes. Instead of returning to the previous grade bands that existed under Ohio's teacher certification model, we recommend:

- Expanding the existing Early Childhood (Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 3) licensure band to Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 5;
- Maintaining the existing Middle Childhood licensure band (Grades 4-9);
- Maintaining the existing Adolescence to Young Adult licensure band (Grades 7-12);
- Creating additional Intervention Specialist licensure options for Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 5, Grades 4-9, and Grades 7-12 to support dual-licensure programs (General Education and Special Education), while maintaining the current Kindergarten through Grade 12 Mild-Moderate and Moderate-Intensive Intervention Specialist licensure bands;
- Giving superintendents authority, based on their professional judgment, to assign an experienced teacher (with three or more years of experience) within one grade of their licensure band without additional endorsements for a period of up to two years.

SUED's recommendations reflect a recognition of the challenges faced by our PK-12 partners, as well as the significant costs and disruptions that would be created should the grade bands revert to the pre-1998 reforms that created the existing licensure band structure. In addition to the fact that teacher education programs have been organized around the existing licensure bands, many school districts have also been structured along similar lines in order to ensure that their curriculum, culture, expectations, and support systems are developmentally appropriate and able to meet the unique needs of learners at every stage. SUED recognizes, however, that the expansion of the Early and Middle Childhood licensure band may make it even more difficult to effectively prepare future teachers in the 120 credit hours recommended by the Ohio Department of Higher Education, meaning that some flexibility for those degree programs may be required.

We hope that our proposal will be considered by this committee as a productive compromise achieving added flexibility for school districts, while ensuring that Ohio students are afforded the best possible education. We will continue to collect and incorporate feedback, and look forward to presenting to this committee a finalized proposal for your consideration.

Thank you for your time, and this opportunity to engage in these important conversations. My colleague and I would be happy to respond to any questions.