



**The Association for Middle Level Education
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May 5, 2024

Testimony of Stephanie Simpson, CEO, on behalf of the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) to the Ohio Senate Education Committee, Andrew O. Brenner, Chair, re: Senate Bill 219:

The Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), a professional membership association domiciled in Ohio, testifies in strong support of the proposed change to teacher licensure grade bands which would reinstate the middle grades 4-9 license option and provide flexibility in hiring within 2 grade levels.

We support the specialized preparation of middle level teachers at the preservice and graduate levels. It is through specific preparation that educators understand the developmental characteristics of young adolescents and appropriate curriculum, instruction, and assessment strategies that engage students and provide significant academic learning experiences. During the young adolescent years, ages 10-15, individuals go through more rapid changes than at any time of their lives other than from birth to age two. The extreme changes in physical, intellectual, psychological, and social-emotional development that students experience make it imperative that educators are trained to understand young adolescent development and create educational experiences that are respectful of students' developmental needs.

AMLE does not believe that the Ohio legislature's action in 2023 to eliminate the middle grades licensure band made any impact on easing the national teacher shortage. Instead, it might actually have served to exacerbate it through reduced retention of teachers ill-prepared to meet the demands of such a wide grade span. During a time when the U.S. Surgeon General has issued a rare public health advisory calling on the nation to respond to the growing mental health crisis impacting adolescents, we should be especially cognizant of the importance of these youth being educated by teachers who understand their developmental characteristics and are prepared to teach them.

We know that this is so fundamental to student success that the tenet, *"Educators are specifically prepared to teach young adolescents and possess a depth of understanding in the content areas they teach,"* is included as one of 18 research-based characteristics of successful middle schools outlined in AMLE's landmark best practice publication, *The Successful Middle School: This We Believe*. And in its recently published, "Position Statement on the Professional Preparation and Credentialing of Middle Level Teachers" (2022), AMLE states, "The specialized professional preparation of teachers of young adolescents must be a high priority of teacher preparation programs, colleges and state certification agencies."

AMLE appreciates school leader's desire for flexibility in hiring the best candidates. We believes the proposed language in Senate Bill 219 provides that while maintaining the middle grades band needed to ensure teacher education programs across the state are able to continue offering specialized preparation for middle grades educators. As state departments of education and institutions of higher learning develop programs and requirements for teacher and administrator preparation and licensure, it is critical that the middle grades receive distinct and separate attention.