



Ohio Middle Level Association

Educate, Advocate, Celebrate

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 219

May 20, 2024

To: Members of the Senate Education Committee

From: Kelli Cogan

Position: President, Ohio Middle-Level Association

Subject: Support for Senate Bill 219 and Changes to Grade Band Specifications for Educator Licenses

Chair Brenner, Vice-Chair O'Brien, and members of the Senate Education Committee thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony supporting Senate Bill 219. I am Kelli Cogan, President of the Ohio Middle Level Association. I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed changes to the grade band specifications for educator licenses.

Overview of Senate Bill 219

Senate Bill 219 proposes amending the current structure of educator licenses to establish new grade bands: pre-kindergarten through grade five, grades four through nine, and grades seven through twelve. This change aims to better align educator preparation with students' developmental stages and instructional needs.

Rationale for Supporting Grade Band Changes

Middle-level students, typically in grades 4-9, are at a critical stage of development, facing significant physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. Having teachers with focused certification in this grade band, as opposed to a broad certification covering pre-kindergarten through grade 8, is crucial for addressing the unique needs of these students.

1. Developmental Needs

- Adolescent Development:

- Students in grades 4-9 are in a transitional phase known as early adolescence. They experience rapid physical growth, hormonal changes, and cognitive development during this period. Teachers with a focused certification in this grade band are trained to understand and address these changes, which is not typically the focus of training for educators certified to teach a broader range, including early childhood.

- Emotional and Social Challenges:

- Middle-level students often face heightened emotional and social challenges. They are developing their identities, navigating peer relationships, and seeking independence. Educators trained specifically for this age group are better equipped to support students through these challenges with appropriate strategies and interventions.

2. Academic Needs

- Specialized Instructional Strategies:

- Teaching strategies that are effective for younger children may not be suitable for middle-level students. Teachers with focused certification in grades 4-9 are trained in developmentally appropriate methods for early adolescents, including differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and collaborative activities that engage students and cater to their learning styles.

- Curriculum and Content Knowledge:

- Middle-level education requires a depth of knowledge in specific subject areas combined with the ability to teach these subjects in an age-appropriate manner. Focused certification ensures that teachers have the necessary expertise in their content areas and understand how to deliver this content effectively to middle-level students.

3. Research Evidence

- Impact on Student Outcomes:

- Research indicates that middle-level students benefit significantly from educators with specialized training in middle-level education. For example, Jackson and Davis (2000) in "Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century" found that students taught by teachers with middle-level certification show improved academic performance and engagement.

- Research published in the "Journal of Educational Psychology" (Wigfield et al., 2006) indicates that middle-grade students show improved academic outcomes and engagement when taught by teachers with specialized training in adolescent development and middle school pedagogy.

- Research underscores the importance of having teachers who are specifically trained to work with middle-level students. According to the Association for Middle-Level Education (AMLE), students in grades four through nine experience unique developmental challenges and require teachers who understand these specific needs and can implement appropriate instructional strategies.

- Addressing Diverse Needs:

- Middle-level students present various abilities, interests, and learning needs. Teachers who are specifically trained for this grade band are better prepared to implement inclusive practices

and create learning environments that accommodate diverse student populations. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) highlights that educators trained in middle-level education are more adept at fostering inclusive, supportive classrooms.

4. Teacher Preparedness and Confidence

- Professional Confidence:

Teachers with focused certification in grades 4-9 are more confident in their ability to meet their students' needs. This confidence translates into more effective teaching and better classroom management. Educators who feel well-prepared are more likely to remain in the profession, reducing turnover and providing students with stable, experienced role models.

- Professional Development:

Focused certification encourages targeted professional development. Teachers continue to hone their skills and stay updated on the latest research and best practices in middle-level education, further enhancing their effectiveness.

Conclusion

Middle-level students require educators who understand their unique developmental, emotional, and academic needs. A focused certification in grades 4-9 ensures that teachers are specifically trained to meet these needs, leading to better educational outcomes and overall student well-being. Broad certifications, such as pre-kindergarten through grade 8, do not provide the same level of specialized training, which is essential for effectively educating middle-level students. Thus, supporting the move to more focused certification bands, as proposed in Senate Bill 219, is crucial for the success and development of our middle-level students.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,
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