

Senate Testimony

December 6, 2017

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. Rae White and my current roles are serving as the President of the Ohio Association of Private Colleges of Teacher Education (OAPCTE), and the Chair of the Muskingum University Educator Preparation Program. My background educational experiences include: Ohio Department of Education assistant director in teacher preparation and licensure, district curriculum coordinator, Title I reading teacher, middle level educator in English language arts and social studies, and teacher of high school English. Today I am speaking not only for the OAPCTE, but also for the State University Education Deans and for the Ohio Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. (Introduce SUEA and OACTE representatives in attendance.) It is our collective intention that by speaking with one voice, our input will be most helpful as interested parties.

We recognize the current challenges faced by districts to secure and retain professionally trained, appropriately licensed, and effective teachers. We appreciate the issues captured in Senate Bill 216, however, would like to present a balanced perspective on what may likely be unintended consequences of some language in this proposed legislation in its current draft.

The suggested changes in SB 216 regarding the collapsing of teacher grade bands and decoupling prekindergarten from licensure, would have real impact on classrooms, educator preparation, but most importantly on our students as it minimizes the focus on a strong knowledge-base, the quality of developmentally appropriate preparation, and truly the effectiveness of teachers. Therefore we advocate for a focus on student learning and maintaining the current grade bands.

To support this notion, consider the fact that across the nation there are 45 states that do specify a middle level certification or licensure for teachers. Only five states (CA, CO, ID, MT, UT) do not specify a license and preparation that honors this unique developmental stage in life (AMLE website).

Sec.3319.22 (A) 1 Line 3868 proposes the broadening of the grade bands which were established over 20 years ago when Ohio responded to the strong research that was conducted with input from various stakeholder groups. As a reminder, the current grade bands of PreK-3; 4-9 and 7-12 were established in response to the critical importance of specialized preparation for middle level teachers. Eliminating the current emphasis on the grade band pre-kindergarten through grade three deconstructs the strong bridge between the earliest educational experiences to kindergarten. Additionally, the PreK-3 band allows the emphasis on preparation required to support the Third Grade Reading Guarantee which could be diluted when included across a wider band of preparation. The elimination of a license band that has “Pre-kindergarten” would marginalize these early childhood teachers at a time when many (including legislators) have advocated for the expansion of early learning when children’s brains are rapidly developing and they need effective instruction and positive, nurturing environments.

Middle level teacher preparation and licensure in Ohio was enacted to ensure that students in grades 4-9 have the best opportunity to gain the in-depth knowledge, skills and dispositions in the areas of mathematics, science, languages arts and social studies. These are currently provided by appropriately and professionally trained middle level educators. The pre-teen years are foundational for young learners where the building blocks of content knowledge must be established. Preparation program elements specifically outlined in the Association for Middle Level Education research are the following:

- 1) Young Adolescent Development: successful middle level teachers *must* have the expertise of the physical, mental and emotional changes unique to these students and have solid grounding in their developmental stages;

- 2) Middle Level Philosophy and Organization: young adolescents are different from their counterparts of young children and high school levels; a trained middle level teacher knows the importance of flexible grouping, social learning, interdisciplinary approaches, and focus on students' interests which help to establish a successful environment;
- 3) Middle Level Curriculum: content and discipline-specific curriculum honors the unique approaches for this grade band; curriculum should be challenging, exploratory, integrative and relevant;
- 4) Subject Matter Knowledge: by emphasizing deep knowledge in two middle level content areas, this ensures teacher confidence and background to teach these grade levels;
- 5) Middle Level Planning, Teaching and Assessment: should accommodate diverse skills, abilities and prior knowledge, plus cultivate multiple intelligences and draw upon students' individual and digital tools;
- 6) Middle Level Field Experiences: currently preparation program experiences have a range of contexts to ensure students and teachers are mutually engaged in active, purposeful learning; these experiences are designed to organize information into useful and meaningful constructs; these experiences also promote long-term cause and effect relationships empowering students to play a major role in directing their own learning.

Think of first graders who are 6 or 7 years old, and compare them to 8th grade students who are 13 or 14 years old. Do they learn in the same ways? Do they respond to the same stimuli or depth of content? Do they require the same teaching and learning methods? Of course, the answer to all of these questions is "No". Research on developmental learning clearly suggests that a change in licensure bands like what is being proposed would have a significant and detrimental impact on students.

Additionally if the proposed grade band is broadened to K-8 it would require a college student to need more courses (to cross all these grade levels and specialized professional associations with national standards) and for teacher candidates to incur more time and debt to be prepared to enter into the teaching workforce. Since 2009 there have been efforts hosted by the Ohio Deans Compact (with state financial support) to promote the formation of inclusive teacher preparation programs leading to

dual licensure in general and special education. Presently over 17 institutions of higher education have designed creative programs that are preparing general and special education teachers to meet the instructional needs of an increasingly diverse student population (e.g. range of abilities, adverse childhood experiences, English language learners). Although unintentional, these dual licensure efforts will be impacted by SB 216 with the proposed alteration of licensure grade bands.

Currently each teacher candidate can select his/her preference of early childhood, middle childhood or adolescent/young adult. Reducing the choice of licensure to just K-8 or 7-12, not only dilutes the importance of each unique developmental level, but could also create an issue and an inconsistency in the degree of student content knowledge. This would also impact the level of success for middle school students passing state achievement tests – especially in reading and mathematics.

The proposed changes in SB 216 regarding the collapsing of teacher grade bands and decoupling prekindergarten from licensure, would have substantial impact on classrooms, educator preparation, but most importantly on the quality of learning for our PK-12 students as it minimizes the focus on a strong knowledge-base, the quality of developmentally appropriate preparation, and therefore the effectiveness of teachers.

We advocate for maintaining the current grade bands that focus on what is best for Ohio's students.

References:

AMLE website links

<http://www.amle.org/AboutAMLE/ProfessionalPreparation/Certification-LicensurebyState.aspx>