



## Illinois P-20 Council Grade Span Configuration Meeting Recommendations to Illinois State Board of Education June 8, 2012

### History and Purpose

As part of overall reform efforts, including Public Act 97-0607, Illinois is reconfiguring the educator licensure system in an effort to simplify and strengthen the process for qualifying educators. In order to ensure that teachers are rigorously prepared to meet the needs of students, Illinois will develop new standards for endorsements previously covered by other certificates in alignment with other state initiatives such as adoption of the Common Core, adoption of the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards (IPTS), and Illinois Social-Emotional standards.

Through the work of the Elementary/Middle School Advisory Group (EMAG) and Early Childhood Advisory group (ECAG), Illinois has been developing new content standards for teachers (based on Common Core, IPTS, and Social/Emotional Standards) and to recommend options for potential grade span configuration. ISBE requested that the Illinois P-20 Council convene a meeting of a wide group of Illinois stakeholders, including districts, higher education, advocacy groups, professional associations, researchers, and others in order to build on that work and advise ISBE on options that will best address the needs of students, educators and administrators.

A one-day meeting was held on June 8, 2012 at the ISBE offices in Springfield. The meeting allowed for public comment period. Minutes from the meeting as well as written comments are posted on the P-20 Council web site at: <http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Pages/COMM9.aspx>

### Impact of Grade Span Configuration

Illinois teachers need to be more rigorously prepared to address the development needs of students, understand the content they are teaching and apply best practices in pedagogy. The new grade span configuration has implications for teacher preparation, district staffing and employment processes, program design and teacher candidate recruitment. These impacts include:

*Content Knowledge and Alignment to the Common Core.* Teachers need increased depth in their knowledge of content and related pedagogy that aligns with the Common Core and with respect to how students learn and apply skills. Potential program length and cost make it prohibitively difficult to provide the wide range of content needed for both self-contained elementary classrooms along with the deeper content specialization required for middle school departmentalization.

*Development Needs.* Students across age spans have unique development needs. There is national recognition of the importance of the developmental continuum from Birth-Age 8 to address the specific needs of young learners which is critical to later school success. Grade span configuration needs to ensure that teachers of early elementary grades have a depth of understanding of early childhood development and developmentally appropriate practices. Likewise, a focus on the developmental needs of middle grade students and early adolescents is also critical to ensure that teachers in all grades can address the needs of students through developmentally appropriate practices.

*District Staffing and Employment.* Districts and schools will be affected by the new grade span configuration in terms of teacher hiring, reassignment and reductions in force (RIF) requirements due to SB7. Districts need flexibility in attracting and assigning teachers, especially in smaller schools or rural districts. And although current teachers will be grandfathered, it is important that ISBE recognize and monitor the impact of grade span configuration changes on how RIF requirements are applied.

*Program Design, Length and Availability.* Programs must be designed that can balance the need for rigorous preparation and clinical experiences with what can reasonably be addressed a typical 4-year program. In addition, universities have scarce resources that must be considered. With too much overlap or too narrow specialization, some programs, such early childhood or middle school programs may become less attractive to both universities and students based on trends in student preferences, enrollment and resources/faculty available. This could have an adverse impact on the future availability of highly trained teachers.

### **Options for Grade Span Configuration**

While a consensus for recommendations was not reached at the Illinois P-20 Council Grade Span Configuration meeting, two options are presented that help address these concerns outlined, along with challenges ISBE should recognize in considering rules for implementation.

#### **Grade Span Option 1:**

**Early Childhood:** Birth-Grade 3

**Middle School:** Grades 6-8

**Elementary:** Grades 2-6

**High School:** Grades 9-12

- *Strengths:* Guarantees that the teachers in early grades have strong foundation in early childhood education from Birth-grade 3. Some overlap between Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle School and High School acknowledging the range of diverse developmental and academic needs of students in a given grade. Allows for some flexibility for districts and schools.
- *Challenges:* Too much specialization could have a negative effective on teachers pursuing middle school endorsement reducing the number of those teachers.

#### **Grade Span Option 2:**

**Early Childhood** Pre-K-Grade 2

**Middle School:** Grades 5-8

**Elementary:** Grades 1-6

**High School:** Grades 8-12

- *Strengths:* Wider range of grades in elementary with more flexibility for programs and districts. Pre-K starting point versus Birth is more reasonable in what can be reasonably covered in a program (even though courses could cover development from Birth-Age 8). Overlap ensures greater knowledge of range of diverse student developmental and academic needs in a given grade. Encourages collaboration between different programs in providing robust coursework within their education programs.
- *Challenges:* Somewhat inconsistent with developmental research which supports continuum from Birth- Age 8 (Grade 3). Overlap of Middle School endorsement for Grade 5 could only be for departmentalized grades. Likewise, Elementary endorsement covering Grade 6 could be for self-contained classrooms only. Significant differences in standards and curriculum between middle school and high school resulting in challenges in preparing teachers adequately for a high school endorsement.