

**P-20 Council
Grade Span Configuration Meeting
June 8, 2012
Illinois State Board of Education, Boardroom
Springfield, IL**

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Chair/Facilitator: Lizanne DeStefano, P-20 Council

Co-chairs: Erika Hunt and Audrey Soglin

Attendees: Jan Fitzsimmons (ACI), Luisiana Melendez (Erikson), Jane Quinlan (ROE), Vicki Chou (UIC), Linda Tomlinson (ISBE), Vickie Phillips (ISBE), Angela Hubbard (Ounce of Prevention), Aimee Atkins (IACTE), Nancy Latham (IAECTE), Darryl Morrison (IEA), Joni Scritchlow (INCCRRN), Carlene Lutz (IFT), Rich Voltz (IASA), Christine Robinson (Voices for Illinois Children)

On Phone: Walter Taylor (CTU)

9:00 a.m.–10:00 a.m. Public Comment

Before the meeting began, several committee members and other stakeholders spoke on the issue of grade span configuration. Their position letters to the committee will also be posted to the P-20 website. This included Angela Hubbard (Ounce of Prevention), Aimee Atkins (Illinois Association for Early Childhood Teacher Educators, Carlene Lutz (Illinois Federation of Teachers), Kristy McIntyre (Southern Illinois University), Joyce Visnichek (Milliken University), Darryl Morrison (Illinois Education Association). The committee also received written comments from The Illinois Department of Human Services and Gateways to Opportunity.

10:00 a.m.–10:15 a.m. Welcome and Introductions (Lizanne DeStefano)

Lizanne DeStefano, P-20 Council Coordinator, introduced the purpose of the meeting which is to provide recommendations to ISBE on the grade span configuration for the new educator licensure structure. The P-20 Council was asked to create a P-20 Educator Licensure Steering Group representing stakeholders across Illinois to advise ISBE on issues related to rules and implementation of the new licensure system. This committee will be chaired by Erika Hunt (Center for the Study of Education Policy/ISU) and Audrey Soglin (IEA) who chair the Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Committee.

10:15 a.m.–11:00 a.m. Overview of Current Work on Educator Licensure Restructuring
(Linda Tomlinson, ISBE)

Linda Tomlinson gave an overview of the changes to the current licensure structure which will result in a single educator license with multiple endorsements for grade span and subject area. The licensure structure will be implemented this fall. The rules for grade span configuration will need to come out this fall. This is an urgent issue due to Race to The Top and also has implications for other initiatives such as teacher preparation program redesign, Common Core,

Teacher Performance Assessment from the Teacher Performance Assessment Consortium (TPAC) and others. Current educators will be grandfathered into the new educator licensure system, so these grade span configurations will apply to new teachers only. She also discussed the work completed to date on grade span configuration through Elementary/Middle School Advisory Group, which developed draft content standards and the Early Childhood Advisory Group who made initial recommendations. All Teacher Preparation Programs will also have to align to the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards (IPTTS), Illinois Social-Emotional Learning Standards, Common Core Standards and Program Standards such as those from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or the Association of Childhood Education International (ACEI).

11:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. Group Discussion: Questions and Concerns in Response to the Overview and Public Comments

Lizanne asked the group to consider the following after hearing Public Comments and Linda's overview.

- 1) What are the major lessons learned from the work on education licensure restructuring?
- 2) Where are there gaps and what work still needs to be done?

Several considerations were raised by Steering Group Members.

Impact on Program Design and Resources

Vicki Chou raised the impact on programs due to the many changes currently underway, limited time and resources within Higher Ed and the impact on Early Childhood programs, depending on the recommendation, not being as viable. Linda Tomlinson emphasized that the longer program redesign takes, the longer it will be before teachers graduate prepared under the new standards and that teachers need to be well-prepared to meet the needs of students.

Content, Pedagogy and the Developmental Needs of Learners in Teacher Preparation

There was a deep group discussion on the impact of the need to align around the Common Core, increase teacher content knowledge, strongly consider the developmental needs of the learner, and pedagogy in terms of natural breaks in how teachers should be prepared and how much each should weigh in this discussion. For example, there was a natural break suggested in the Common Core Standards and the developmental research that led to the proposed Middle School grade span. Nationally, the research and movement is for Early Childhood to go from Birth-Age 8. Group agreed that all three are critical in effectively preparing teachers and that teachers need to have stronger content and developmental knowledge and that any grade span configuration will need to ensure this. Development is a major concern of early childhood, but also should be major concern of elementary, middle school and high school programs as well. It also needs to consider how much can be taught in 4-year program to truly prepare that teacher and how much programs can realistically teach. There is also alignment to other programs such as the Infant/Toddler Credential.

Impact on Staffing, Hiring and Employment Processes

The group brought up other states' configuration but there is not a lot of research or longitudinal data within Illinois or nationally. There was also a discussion of the variety of configurations of schools in Illinois, and the impact of the grade span configuration on staffing and hiring for those schools as well as the mobility of teachers within grade levels. This has an effect, especially in very small schools. It also will impact how teachers are categorized for the purposes of Reductions in Force (RIFs). There is a need for them to be fair but also serve the child. Teachers may not be highly effective, and this would impact what RIF groups teachers may be placed in and this is an important issue to consider. Districts can also add additional requirements, under SB7, beyond certification/endorsement requirements for teachers that are grandfathered that may affect their ability to be hired. Because of SB7, this impact, due to new licensure requirements, was not originally considered and its impact is unknown and should be explored. While a pilot approach is not feasible according to ISBE, that was another recommendation along with some sort of phase-in.

Potential Impacts of the Overlap of Grade Levels Between Endorsements

The question of whether there should be overlap or not overlap in grade levels covered by an endorsement was also discussed at length. There is a risk to program viability if there is too significant an overlap. Also not having overlap continues the compartmentalization of programs and programs being very siloed. We should be encouraging greater collaboration between programs.

There is also an impact on the workforce and potential teachers entering programs when they are choosing certain grade levels. Many students do not know the exact grades they would like to teach and many learn through the clinical experiences in their programs. This may have an impact on middle school programs for example, as they are typically not as popular with students and enrollment may suffer if the grade spans are too narrow. This may also impact early childhood programs if the overlap is too great as students may choose the broader elementary grade span which may be seen as providing greater flexibility. A broader grade span in general is more marketable.

12:00 p.m.–12:30 p.m. Lunch

12:30 p.m.–1:30 p.m. Group Discussion: Potential Configurations and the Benefits and Challenges Associated with Implementation
 1) Based on what we heard, what are some viable configurations?
 a. What are the strengths and challenges of these configurations?

Lizanne asked the group to recommend some potential configurations based on the recommendations from EMAG and ECAG and their discussions. The group recommended a variety of initial options:

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
Early	Birth-Grade	Birth-Grade	Birth-Grade	Birth-Grade	Pre-K- 3	Birth-

Childhood	3	3	2	3		Grade 3
Elementary	2-6	2-6	3-5	K-9	4-8	4-8
Middle School	6-9	6-8	6-8			
High School	9-12	9-12	9-12	9-12	9-12	9-12

The group agreed that each recommendation should be considered based on the following factors and associated strengths and challenges and discussed each again:

- Potential overlap
- Alignment with Standards
- Content/Pedagogy/Developmental Needs of Learners
- Perspective of Preparation Programs (e.g. strengths, content, program length, etc.)
- Perspective of Administrators
- Teacher Candidate Perspective

1:30 p.m.–2:00 p.m. Public Comment and Reflection

Lynn Smith (SIU - Carbondale) expressed concern about narrow grade ranges spreading faculty too thin and the potential for program elimination. Luisiana Melendez (Erickson) said that Erickson strongly recommends keeping early childhood from Birth-Grade 3 and that overlap between grade levels in endorsements should be avoided/minimized. Walter Taylor (CTU) brought up that CTU was open to grade span configuration options, but asserted that options should be broad. He also urged the Steering Group to ensure current teachers, and National Board Certified teachers, in particular, are not adversely impacted. Loyola University’s representative asked the Group to consider diversity of school configurations in the state and to be careful of being too narrow. She also encouraged consideration for how teachers could reasonably earn additional endorsements for additional grades. Jan Fitzsimmons (ACI) asked the Steering Group and ISBE to consider what impact the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards will have on student achievement and what else needs to be strengthened. Carlene Lutz (IFT) commented that too much specialization was not recommended and recommended that ISBE maintain the current grade span configuration.

Linda Tomlinson replied to comments that courses between programs can definitely overlap, and that there should be connections between programs so teachers are only completing what they need as they pursue additional endorsements. She emphasized the focus on reading, assessment, instruction, meeting the needs of English Language Learners (ELL), Special Education students and use of differentiation in instruction to meet the needs of diverse students.

2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m. Group Discussion: Recommendations to ISBE

Lizanne asked the group to choose what they thought was best option from what was initially recommended above and what the worst option was. Based on a poll of the group, #6 was highly favored and next was #2 with #3 and # 4 the least desirable. Two additional recommendations

#7 and #8 (below) were also offered and considered. Though all recommendations were considered, the discussion primarily focused on these options based on the criteria the committee had established:

Configuration	Strengths	Challenges
<p>#6 Elem: Birth- Grade 3 Elem/MS: Grades 4-8 HS: Grades 9-12</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less specialization • Pools strengths of all programs • Early childhood focus • Broader grade spans has flexibility for teachers and schools • Students span a wide range of development and this grade span reflects that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ISBE pointed out this would not work due to current requirements for departmentalization in content area required for middle school and need to also be trained in all content areas for self-contained classrooms for grades 4-5 as well. • Could not align with ACEI. • These considerations tabled this as options
<p>#2 Birth-Grade 3 Grades 2-6 Grades 6-8 Grades 9-12</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guarantees that teachers in early grades have strong foundation in early childhood from Birth-grade 3 based on research • Some overlap between Elementary and Early Childhood, Middle School and High School acknowledging range of students up/down and some flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in overlap between middle school and high school and the resulting standards in preparation • 6-9 Teachers could only teach 9th grade in HS which is impractical • Too much specialization could have a negative effective on teachers pursuing middle school endorsement reducing the # of those teachers •
<p>#4 EC:: Birth-Grade 3 Elementary: K-9 High School: 9-12</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains what is current • Broad grade range with the most flexibility for teaching students and schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not specialized enough and will be challenging to adequately prepare teachers based on new standards • No specific Middle School endorsement • Does not reflect split of Common Core (K-5 and 6-8) • Cannot adequately prepare

		teachers in depth based on developmentally appropriate practices.
#7 EC: Pre-K-grade 2 Elem: 1-6 Middle School: 5-8 High School: 8-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider range of grades in elementary with more flexibility • Pre-K start versus Birth is more reasonable in what can be covered in a program (even though courses could cover B-3) • Overlap ensures greater knowledge of students needs up/down • Encourages collaboration between programs in coursework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ends Early Childhood at Grade 2 when national movement and research is to Grade 3 • Overlap 5-8 could only be for departmentalized grades and Elem for self-contained 6th grade
#8 EC: Birth-Grade 2 Elem: 2-6 Middle School: 5-8 High School: 8-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same strengths as #7 • Acknowledges Birth-Pre-K as essential to Early Childhood • Ensures early elementary grades are consistent with developmental focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as #7 • Smaller range for Elementary creates less flexibility for schools • Many elementary teachers are just as effective in the early grades

Based on consideration of the strengths and challenges, the committee was polled again on all recommendations presented so far (#s1-8) and three of the options were recommended: #2, #4 and #7 with fairly even distribution. All agreed that there was no perfect solution.

The final recommendations should provide enough information for ISBE to consider as they finalize a recommendation and rules for implementation.