



Illinois Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

www.ift-aft.org

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Dr. Chris Koch, State Superintendent
Illinois State Board of Education
100 North First Street
Springfield, IL 62777

Dear Dr. Koch,

On behalf of the 103,000 members in the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT), I am writing to provide our organization's recommendation on the grade spans for the early childhood endorsement. The IFT is providing this recommendation as a result of Public Act 97-0604 which outlines a new teacher certification structure that will grant a professional educator license to all teacher candidates with specific endorsements covering age/grade levels and content areas aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Illinois Professional Teaching Standards (IPTTS), Illinois Social Emotional Learning Standards, and other national professional standards. The IFT is also providing this recommendation as a result of our participation on the Early Childhood Advisory Group (ECAG) of stakeholders, which ISBE convened in December 2011 and February 2012.

IFT Recommendation

The early childhood endorsement on the new educator license should remain birth through 3rd grade.

Rationale for IFT Recommendation

Birth to grade three experiences are foundational to all subsequent learning. Thus, the IFT makes this recommendation for the following reasons, which are in keeping with a focus on district flexibility in staff assignment, federal and national organizational focus, and current research, which recognizes this age/grade range as a separate and discrete developmental stage.

- Research shows that early childhood is a developmental period spanning birth through 3rd grade. This requires that teachers be expressly trained to engage young learners throughout this period, and ISBE has recognized this for many years through its current Type 04 certification.
- Gains made by children in high-quality birth-to-five programs are sustained when early learning programs and K-3rd have integrated structures including consistent instructional approaches, learning environments, and academic and social goals. Alignment is more effectively accomplished when early childhood and early primary teachers have similar preparation in using and adapting curricula, assessments, and learning guidelines with young children.

- Teachers must have knowledge of child development and learning. They should be familiar with appropriate curriculum and assessment approaches and should have in-depth knowledge and skills in at least two of the three periods: infants/toddlers, preschool/pre-kindergarten, and early primary grades.
- Students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma. Early learning teacher preparation programs emphasize foundational and emerging language, literacy, and reading skills. They are the teachers best prepared to help those students.
- Close to half of children who are classified in Illinois as English Language Learners or Dual Language Learners (DLLs) are between 0-8 years old. When DLLs enroll in early childhood classrooms, they come with a wide range of development in both their home and second languages. Research has shown that developing a strong academic background in English, which is essential for the school success of DLLs, takes between five to seven years. Teachers with in-depth understanding of the birth through eight continuum are in a particularly strong position to assist these students.
- The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) Standards and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards both require attention to child development, content standards, and instructional strategies that promote self-empowered learners. The US Department of Education Office of Early Learning supports a birth to age 8 continuum of early childhood education.
- Keeping the grade spans as broad as possible will afford the most flexibility for teacher assignments. Small schools and districts will benefit from these allowances for grade overlap. Additionally, if the grade level configuration were to narrow, new changes recently enacted through PA 97-0008 (the result of Senate Bill 7) could further limit districts in placing their currently qualified teachers or even disqualify teachers from the positions they currently hold in the event of layoff and recall under the new law.

Thank you for this opportunity for IFT to provide our recommendation on the grade span configuration. The IFT appreciates the State Board's inclusion of IFT and other stakeholders in this process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel J. Montgomery". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "D" and "M".

Daniel J. Montgomery
President