

## **Position Statement on House Bill 1386, Printer's Number 4070**

*Issued October 4, 2018*

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### **Position**

*The Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children (PennAEYC), Trying Together and First Up: Champions for Early Education are neutral on House Bill 1386, PN 4070 as provisions were removed that would have negatively impacted developmentally-appropriate classroom instruction for our youngest learners.*

### **Bill Summary**

- 1) HB 1386, PN 4070 : Combines the two special education spans and age levels into one and eliminates the requirement for dual certification.
- 2) Requires the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to notify teacher preparation programs, individuals enrolled and future enrollees and those that currently hold the early childhood certificate that they may add on grades 5 and 6 to their certification by attaining qualifying scores on the assessment made available by PDE. Note that the add-on is already an option.
- 3) Requires PDE to post information on their website and issue a report on certification data beginning on March 1, 2019 and every year thereafter.
- 4) Mandates the Joint State Government Commission to conduct a study and issue a report on the fields of certification, including grade span and age level limitations by June 1, 2019.

The bill is effective immediately.

Provisions were removed which made additional changes to the existing grade spans. Specifically, the K-6 grade span which was proposed, overlapping the current pre-k-4 span, was eliminated from the bill.

### **Background**

Changes to instructional certificate grade spans and age levels were adopted in 2007 and became effective in 2013. These grade spans and age levels are as follows related to early childhood, elementary and special education, as outlined in regulation (22 Pa. Code, §49.85):

*Early Childhood:* Pre-kindergarten through fourth grade, ages three through nine

*Elementary/Middle:* Fourth through eighth grade, ages nine through 14

*Special Education:*

- Special Education – PK-8 – Pre-kindergarten through eighth grade, ages three through 14
- Special Education – 7-12 – Seventh through twelfth grade, ages 11 through 21
- Special Education PK-8 and 7-12 require dual certification in early childhood, elementary/middle, secondary or reading specialist as appropriate per the age group.

Current spans and age levels recognize the importance of the teacher/child relationship in early childhood. Preschool education has been deemed a critical period for cognitive development, school preparation and success, language development and learning motivation, as well as for developing children's social and emotional competence<sup>1</sup>. During this period, teachers are the second most influential force in the development of children, after their parents. The teacher is defined as the person whom a child will face

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<sup>1</sup> Yoleri, Sibel, "[Teacher-child Relationships in Preschool Period: The Roles of Child Temperament and Language Skills](#)", International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 2016, Cited from Essa, 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Huffman, Mehlinger, & Kerivan, 2000; Vasta, Miller, & Ellis, 2004.

and who will influence them in their life the most after their relatives/parents. The teacher has a critical role in causing the child to enjoy school and in introducing work habits in the child<sup>2</sup>.

The regulations were adopted in part to ensure children had teachers in the classroom that were prepared with backgrounds in early childhood. The timing of the changes aligned with the creation of Pre-K Counts and the regulation applies to pre-kindergarten teachers in school and community-based settings, such as high-quality child care programs. The goal of the regulation was to create a highly-qualified pre-kindergarten workforce.

## **Recommendations and Rationale**

*Keep the current instructional certificate structure to ensure teachers trained in early childhood are instructing our youngest learners and pre-kindergarten teacher pipeline is not weakened. The current version of the bill was amended to support this recommendation.*

New America's research paper, "One Size Doesn't Fit All: The Need for Specialized Teacher Licenses in the Early Grades"<sup>3</sup> highlights Pennsylvania and makes the case for an early child educator license without overlap of a broader elementary license for the following reasons of which we concur:

- **Teaching effectively in the early grades requires understanding of child development and the need for licensing structures to align with developmental science.** Young children need creative instruction and hands-on activities to link current learning to past experiences. They learn best by interactions that have meaning and connect. In addition, younger children will be guided by their teachers in learning social skills like sharing, taking turns, and communicating appropriately, which are the foundations for all learning and differ from what and how older children learn. The Education Commission of the States further backs this position, stressing the need for a pre-k to three or kindergarten to three teacher preparation program and licensure requirements<sup>4</sup>.
- **K-6 training programs tend to focus on older grades, which will leave teachers unprepared to instruct younger children in a developmentally-appropriate way.** Teachers without strong early childhood backgrounds could be placed in the younger grades with broader elementary instructional certificates. In addition, it is possible administrators will place stronger teachers in older grades that focus more on required state testing. The report cites that professors in teacher training programs report broader licenses lead to programs that cover too much and cannot adequately focus on the developmental needs of younger children.
- **Broader licenses are likely to be chosen by prospective teachers over more narrow ones, resulting in a reduced pipeline of pre-kindergarten teachers.** The report notes that if there were a choice between a pre-kindergarten to third grade and kindergarten to eighth grade license, prospective teachers may decide to earn the broader license. It is understandable that an individual would choose the certificate that provides them with better marketability to school administrators. The previous version of HB 1386 would likely have this result as the early childhood certificate would remain at pre-kindergarten to grade four, but the new elementary license would be from kindergarten through grade six, only eliminating the option of teaching pre-kindergarten.

**In addition, existing grade spans and age levels recognize the importance of the kindergarten transition and need for alignment between pre-kindergarten and early elementary years.** The federal Every Student Succeeds Act recognizes the importance of the pre-kindergarten through third

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<sup>2</sup> Yoleri, Sibel, "[Teacher-child Relationships in Preschool Period: The Roles of Child Temperament and Language Skills](#)", International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 2016, Cited from: Pianta, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Jackson, Sarah, Orenstein, Natalie and Bornfreund, Laura, New America, "[One Size Doesn't Fit All: The Need for Specialized Teacher Licenses in the Early Grades](#)", June 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Atchison, Bruce, Diffey, Louisa and Workman, Emily, Education Commission on the States, "[K-3 Policymakers' Guide to Action: Making the Early Years Count](#)", November 2015.

grade continuum. Both the federal law and the Pennsylvania state plan prioritize the transition to kindergarten as a way to support our youngest learners. The transition to kindergarten marks a critical moment in a young child’s educational journey – both pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers play a significant role in the transition to elementary school. Coordination between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers help children’s ability to function successfully within a new classroom environment, setting the stage for future school success. For the impacts of high-quality pre-kindergarten to reach their full realization, educators must provide high-quality and developmentally appropriate early learning experiences, particularly in kindergarten through third grade.<sup>5</sup> Policies and practices for young children, including teacher licensing regulation, should strengthen the connections and alignment between preschool and the early elementary grades. The current instructional grade spans and age levels promote alignment in the licensing of early childhood educators that acknowledge the importance of continuity in the transition from preschool to elementary school.

***The exemption process provides the opportunity for individual schools struggling to meet current requirements to request relief.***

While broader licensing structures allow school administrators more flexibility to move teachers and address teaching shortages, they are not in the best interest of the children as indicated by the research cited in this position paper. However, it should be recognized that specific school districts may experience issues with regulatory compliance. Current regulation at 22 Pa. Code, §49.85(d) allow for the Department of Education to grant exceptions on a case-by-case basis. It is better to address specific district and building issues through the current process rather than making sweeping changes to the certificate spans that could be detrimental to young children.

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<sup>5</sup> Stipek, Deborah, et al., “[PK-3: What does it mean for instruction? Society for Research in Child Development](#)”, 2017.