

Testimony Concerning HB 0476 Education - Certification in Secondary Education
Content Areas - Expanded Grade Range
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Position: Support

With student enrollment increasing throughout the state and a teacher shortage becoming increasingly severe, it is time for Maryland to make common-sense changes to teacher certifications that will help ensure highly-qualified teachers are educating the young people of this state. In just five Maryland counties this summer over 5,500 teachers were needed to be hired. With a lack of highly-qualified teachers, many classrooms are staffed by long-term substitutes or teachers that lack certification.

In Maryland, Elementary Education certifications qualify a teacher to teach first grade through sixth grade. Most secondary certifications qualify grades seventh through twelfth. Most elementary schools, however, run from Pre-Kindergarten or Kindergarten through fifth grade and most middle schools start in sixth grade. The misalignment between certification and schools makes it challenging for administrators and recruiters to fill sixth-grade positions.

Last summer a sixth-grade science position opened at my school. As I browsed the shortlist of possible candidates, one resume stood out. An experienced educator that moved here from a different state, a background in science and an exceptional academic record. I quickly scheduled interviews and was ready to offer the position to this candidate that was clearly the most qualified. Unfortunately, she declined. While she was excited about joining our team and teaching 6th-grade science, she would have had to become certified in elementary education before the end of the year to be assured that she could stay in the position. She was certified to teach 7-12th grade science, but to teach 6th-grade science she had to have an elementary certification.

Eventually, the school system assigned us a retired/rehired teacher that was certified in Elementary Education. While that retired teacher is doing an excellent job, she is on a one year contract and we will have to look again next summer for an elementary certified teacher with an interest in science and desire to teach middle school.

In school systems with significantly more applicants than openings, I'm sure this is a minor inconvenience. In school systems that struggle every year to fill classroom teaching positions, this is the difference between having a long-term sub and a highly-qualified teacher, which could have years of impact on student's and their achievement. The teacher shortage is a real and impactful problem throughout the state of Maryland. While a small change in what grades are covered by certain certifications will only be a tiny step in fixing this problem, it is none-the-less a step in the right direction. A step in the right direction that is simple, justifiable, and could have a lasting impact on the achievement of students, especially in STEM-related classrooms.