

Grade Band Workgroup

October 6, 2026

Agenda

- Implementation Timeline
- Introductory Framing
- Where the Work Stands
- Summary of Changes
 - Part 20
 - Part 26
 - Part 25
- Implementation Timeline
- Next Steps

Implementation Timeline

Summer–Fall 2026

Grade Band: Alignment work including higher education faculty and district personnel. Focus on identifying early childhood/elementary preparation overlap, play-based learning, family engagement, health/safety/nutrition, and field experiences

Microcredential: Requirements for MC are identified

July 1, 2027

Grade Band: Anticipated effective date for new grade-band rules

Microcredential: Entities can apply for ISBE approval to offer the K only MC.

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Fall–Winter 2026

Proposed modifications go through the rulemaking process for **Grade Band modifications** and **MC** as a means to obtain a subsequent endorsement. .

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3 Year Post-Rule

Programs must submit evidence of alignment to new grade bands.

Introductory Framing

- Before ISBE moved to a system of licensure from a system of certification, early childhood certification covered birth–grade 3 and elementary certification covered K–grade 9.
- Within a Professional Educator License (PEL): Early Childhood covers birth–grade 2; Elementary covers grades 1–6.
- The narrower bands creates an assignability gap.
- District and hiring leaders identified this as an issue beginning in 2014.
- Since 2015, short-term approvals (STA) are available in PEL endorsement areas.
- The STA is valid for three years and is non-renewable.
- ISBE added a K-only STA on July 1, 2025.
- The K-only STA is a bridge, not a permanent fix.

Introductory Framing cont.

- In fall 2024, district and building leaders raised the assignability issue with ISBE.
- Their request: restore the previous grade bands to Birth – Grade 3 (ECE) and Kindergarten through Grade 6 (ELEM).
- Meetings With stakeholders beginning in the late spring of 2025 led to the identification of two work streams to construct a durable response.
 - Grade Band Modification Work Group
 - K-Only Microcredential Work Group
- Between June 2026 and October 2026, the Grade Band Work Group, Consisting of Practicing educators and faculty from institutions of higher education met to determine revisions to the standards in Parts 20 and 26 needed for the new grade bands. Partner modifications were also made to Part 25.

Summary of Changes — Part 20

- Grade band becomes kindergarten through grade 6
- Literacy standards carry most of the change
 - Play added as a basis for language development
 - Phonological awareness expanded — rhyming, initial, middle, ending sounds
 - Print concepts, text awareness, and fine motor development added
 - Writing extended to pictures, dictation, drawing, early scribbles
 - Assessment adds observational and performance-based measures
- Mathematics begins with kindergarten number sense
 - Inquiry-based experiences and purposeful play added

Summary of Changes — Part 26

- Grade band becomes birth through grade 3
- Content standards extended to grade 3
 - Literacy — disciplinary foundations and complex comprehension
 - Mathematics — toward formal reasoning through grade 3
 - Science — aligned to Next Generation Science Standards
- Assessment revised most heavily
 - Observational, play-based, and authentic methods named
 - Communication now to families and caregivers
- Planning and delivery name play, inquiry, and exploration
- Mental health, trauma, and resilience added on the elementary side

Summary of Changes — Part 25

- Early childhood endorsement: birth through grade 3
- Elementary endorsement: kindergarten through grade 6
- Bands updated in both section titles and section text
- Elementary mathematics specialist band moves with it
- New requirement for elementary candidates
 - At least one field experience in kindergarten, grade 1, or grade 2
 - May be satisfied through student teaching
- Three year ‘on ramp’ to move from B-2 and 1-6 to B-3 and K-6

Implementation Timeline Revisited

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Next Steps

- Fall 2026 and winter 2026/2027
 - Rules are presented for approval to release for public comment
 - Public comment opens (45 days) — open to any Illinois stakeholder
- Spring 2027
 - ISBE responds to public comment
 - Rules are submitted to JCAR subsequent to Board approval
- Target effective date: July 1, 2027