

Ohio House Education Committee

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House Bill 322 – Proponent Testimony

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Good afternoon Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Emily Russ and I am currently teaching my 8th year of 8th grade science. Thank you for allowing me to come here today and provide my testimony as a proponent of House Bill 322.

To provide a little background on myself, over the last two years I have designed and implemented an accelerated course that covers all of the 8th grade integrated science and 9th grade physical science standards. Prior to teaching this current course, I collaborated with a team of two other teachers to completely recreate a new 8th grade science curriculum when the new standards were adopted in 2012. My pedagogy is rooted in relationship building, data analysis, and reflection; all based on best-practice research.

According to OTES evaluations and growth data, I have been considered an accomplished teacher. Last year, 100% of my students earned at least a proficient score on the 2019 AIR test, 95% of our entire 8th grade had a passing score on the 2019 AIR test. My OTES evaluator has 40 years in the education field and has considered me an accomplished teacher and an instructional leader in the building. I value his opinion and am honored that he trusts me to lead the science department of our middle school.

Despite my strong record as an educator, the Resident Educator Summative Assessment (RESA) remains on my mind. I was marked “Not Passed” on my first attempt for the video lesson cycle #1 of the RESA. I received no further feedback regarding this notification that I had “Not Passed.” This experience and my subsequent teaching career demonstrate the random nature of the RESA and how this unfair and ill-conceived “assessment” threatens to deny good teachers a career in the classroom.

I strongly support HB 322 and the elimination of the RESA because of my personal experience, as well as the stories I have heard from other early career educators. The RESA

was supposed to afford the opportunity to reflect on teaching practices using objective feedback¹.

But based on my experience, the RESA had absolutely no positive impact on who I am as a teacher. It distracted me from doing aspects of my job and forced me to contrive a 20 minute video clip and written responses to character-limited writing prompts to demonstrate my ability to effectively educate the wide range of students in my caseload. The program did not create opportunities for professional development and growth. Any time I met with my mentor, we mainly focused on what I needed to do for the completion of the RESA tasks, many of which involved discussions around technological challenges with submitting information. This further removed time for mentoring and student-focused growth.

HB 322 would eliminate the RESA and instead implement a two-year Resident Educator program focused on mentoring and professional development supports for early career educators. The current Resident Educator license should also become a two-year license, renewable if necessary for more time to complete mentoring and professional development programs.

Mentoring and professional development supports are currently expected to be a part of a teacher's first two years, but are often sidelined by the heavy focus on the RESA tasks that are typically completed in a teacher's third and fourth year. As a result, the important role of mentors is often shifted towards being a facilitator for submitting the RESA tasks. HB 322 would refocus early career support on a two-year Resident Educator program that is meant to assist beginning teachers with focused mentoring, feedback and professional development that is the key to improving teacher retention, enhancing teacher quality, and raising student achievement.

My most stressful year of teaching was not my first, it was my third year when it came time to submit my RESA tasks. By my third year I was already creating a whole curriculum from scratch due to new standards, was participating in a full OTES cycle, pregnant with my first child, and helping a long-term substitute teacher on a daily basis while my science department team member and support system was on maternity leave. I was only the second cohort to submit their RESA tasks and my mentor teacher was not sure how to help me except to be available to record my videos. Essentially, I needed to figure it out on my own, but I thought I had created two engaging video lessons that would meet the criteria from both the OTES and the RESA rubrics.

¹ "Ohio RESA." <http://www.ohioresa.com/>. Accessed 15 Nov. 2019.

Despite my existing teaching experience and related professional commitments, I had to spend countless hours working on the RESA video tasks and responding to various writing prompts in an attempt to explain my teaching and reflection process to an anonymous person within a 200 word limit. These RESA requirements left me no way to avoid taking time away from doing the components of my job that benefit my students and school.

Further, I was frustrated that I had to make multiple compressed responses about something as important as the thought process that informs my teaching. I have since learned that each limited response may not be read by the same evaluator, so my responses may have seemed incomplete. This raised my concern that I was being graded on my ability to respond to prompts and not my ability to create and implement relevant learning experiences for my students. Despite hours and hours of tedious work in completing the RESA tasks, I never actually received feedback for why I passed one of my video lessons, but not the other.

When I called ODE and asked if another evaluator could grade the RESA assessment I had “Not Passed,” I was told that because it was only the first time I failed that I would just have to reattempt the task. I was extremely frustrated because now there was a risk that I would not get to move on to my professional license in the event that I failed the task repeatedly, again not knowing why I failed.

I had invested thousands of dollars into my education, passed all of my licensure exams, had professors from an accredited teacher preparation program evaluate my readiness to enter the education field based on my experience as a student teacher, my building principal evaluated me with an accomplished rating on the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System, and I taught a tested subject in which 96% of 8th grade science students were proficient or above on the 2015 PARCC. I had exceeded standards to become a teacher through more than one avenue, yet I was at risk of not getting to stay in the profession. All this was put at permanent risk because of the deeply and inexplicably flawed RESA. Thankfully, on my second attempt I passed the RESA task I had for some reason previously “Not Passed.”

This experience proved to me that I was not the failure, it was the RESA that was a failure. The RESA does not assess what it sets out to. Ohio’s teachers and students do not benefit from the RESA. Just the opposite, the RESA distracts new teachers from their students while failing to provide a beneficial service.

As a result, I became highly involved in the formation of Ohio’s New Educators (O.N.E.). We had a mission to offer support to early career educators and we had the opportunity to survey teachers across the state regarding their RESA experience. The results were

unanimous in stating that the RESA tasks were a source of undue stress, the tasks themselves lacked opportunity for authenticity, and that the time involved in completing the tasks switched the focus away from the students. The only positive we found was that when there was a good mentoring program in a district, it helped the process of getting inducted into the field. This is what Ohio should be focused on for their new teachers. Creating a mentoring model that helps support teachers to better serve their students, not a mentoring program on how to pass the RESA.

In supporting HB 322, I believe the elimination of the RESA will allow for a quality, focused mentoring program for new teachers to be emphasized. Strong mentoring programs include a focus on coaching new educators in personalized areas of professional growth and affording opportunities to attend professional development programs that address those specific areas of growth. Such mentoring programs, implemented by well-trained mentors, will have far more beneficial impact on enhancing teacher quality and retention than a subjective and punitive evaluation like the RESA.

In closing, when teachers feel supported by a system that allows for reflection and focused growth, they are better equipped to serve their students. I am extremely appreciative that the co-sponsors of HB322 recognize that the RESA does not accomplish what it was intended to do. I think that the passage of this bill will be beneficial to teachers and students and I thank you for taking the time today to consider supporting the passage of HB 322. I am available for any questions you may have.