

June 10, 2020

Chairman Jones, Vice Chair Manchester, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to House Bill 322.

My name is Linda Palombo-King, and I have had the privilege of being an educator for the past 26 years. During this time, I've had the honor of working with exceptional educators, support staff, and principals. Along with this, I have worked in multiple grade levels, subject areas, and with diverse scholars of all ages, academic levels and races. I've also worked with local university students as a Mentor Teacher while they were completing their Student Teaching and Practicum experiences. Currently, I am a Resident Educator Teacher on Assignment working with teachers new to the profession. This position is very unique, as it offers me the opportunity to be a Teacher on Assignment, serving as a full-time mentor, as opposed to a full-time classroom teacher. My role is to provide frequent and ongoing support in hopes that the novice teachers will become successful members of the community.

During these critical times and uncertainties in our educational system, having a strong, formal and systematic mentoring program for our new teachers is more dire than ever before. This is especially important due to the fact that the college Practicum and Student Teaching experiences were cut short due to the current state of events. Next year's new classroom teachers have missed out on many aspects of the profession which in turn may hinder them when beginning their teaching careers. This is also true for the many current novice classroom teachers, who were not able to complete a full first year. Due to this, a continued mentoring program is essential.

I believe strongly that the Resident Educator Program has a positive impact on new teachers just starting in the profession. Being a Mentor Teacher allows me to build trusting, confidential and nurturing relationships with my mentees. Along with this, I am able to help with giving opportunities for professional growth while assisting, coaching and consulting in a non-evaluative way. This has proven to be especially important for the new teachers who are often times isolated, timid and anxious when beginning their teaching experience. Guidance and encouragement along with the providing of necessary resources, expertise on educational best practices, high-quality feedback and opportunities for safe, non-judgmental self-reflection opportunities, has made the mentoring program critical in not only teacher retention, but also teacher satisfaction, quality instruction, and most importantly student success.

Being a mentor on assignment has allowed for me to also intervene, when necessary, with intensive interventions as well as, model teach, assist with classroom instruction and make provisions for visiting exemplar classrooms in order for the new teacher to observe specific grade levels and/or content areas. Without this program, the new teacher would not benefit from the resources I am able to provide and may remain in a constant state of stress, worry, and tension. This could inevitably lead to poor quality instruction and lack of student progress.

The Resident Educator Program allows for new teachers to receive quality and much needed mentoring from experienced teachers. The program is outlined in a way that covers all the necessary components of being a successful teacher. Some of these areas include lesson planning, assessments, differentiation, rigor, resources, collaboration, communication, and professionalism. With this, the teachers can examine each area as it pertains to their own classroom and teaching philosophy. The RESA program allows for the teachers and mentors to explore and reflect on their practice and work closely at making improvements. The process of completing the RESA is structured in a way that allows for honest reflection as the novice teacher examines their own teaching. The teacher can question choices, techniques, practices, etc., and think about what they could do to improve, change or simply tweak. This is critical in not only improving their practice, but also honing in on areas that need refinement. Completing the RESA early in their careers leads to high-quality teaching, impacting their future years in the profession.

As a mentor teacher for my school district, I am able to support educators from a variety of grades, ages and content areas. I truly believe that guidance, support and honest feedback is the best way for new teachers to strengthen their craft. The Resident Educator Program allows for this process to happen, starting with year one. By year three, the teacher should have a toolbox of strategies and knowledge of best practices. The RESA assessment is a great way to determine if the teacher has reached this point. I have seen considerable value in this, as it ensures that every student in Ohio has an effective teacher.

I realize that many may say that new teachers have too much on their plates already and that the state evaluation system is an adequate way to assess teacher competence. However, I feel the RESA is much more of a learning process used for thoughtful self-reflection. The RESA pushes them to raise the bar high and create an environment where all students are engaged in the learning process. With mentor support, I have seen our teachers adequately handle and successfully complete the RESA assessment in a positive manner as well as show substantial growth in the teaching profession. Throughout the years, I can honestly say that the RESA process has been an essential component to producing highly qualified teachers, and I think it would only serve as a disservice if the RESA were eliminated.

In conclusion, I would like to share several quotes from new teachers that I have had the privilege of working with:

“My mentor has been the most critical resource to me so far this year. She has helped me keep my sanity, improve my teaching and classroom management practices, and encouraged me to keep going in what is proving to be a difficult year. She is the only resource I have that is able to come into my room in a non-evaluative way and give me practical, non-punitive feedback to support my growth as an educator. She is also the only resource I have that is able to come into my room, work with students, and demonstrate lessons and model best teaching practices for me. She constantly makes herself available to me at all hours to work with me to find solutions to problems, and to help prepare me for future hurdles as a first year educator. I am eternally grateful to have her support this year.” (4th Grade Teacher)

“I cannot tell you enough how much you helped me this past year. Meeting with you was always the highlight of my day/week.” (Middle School Teacher)

“Thank you for your unwavering support! You are one of the most enjoyable presences I can recall from my first year of teaching.” (High School Math)

“As my first year teaching, the mentoring program has been very helpful. As my Mentor, you provide many resources especially when I was just getting started. If things get hard, I am able to come to you to get a different perspective on how to handle certain situations. I feel good about moving forward from now until the end of the year and even better for next year!” (3rd Grade Teacher)

“My mentor visits me each week. She allows me to voice my opinions and frustrations. She has sat down multiple times and let me cry as she listens to everything I say. She never judges, she just listens. I am comfortable and honest with my Mentor. I’ve talked to other teachers who do not have this same relationship. She visits often and is always very supportive.” (Middle School Math)

“I like how my mentor is able to stop by at any time to help me. My mentor has been super helpful which I found has been so important for a first year teacher. I am especially grateful for all the resources she is able to provide.” (4th Grade Teacher)

“I am so thankful for YOU. I don't know if I would've made it this far without you. Enjoy your week!” (Librarian)

“Thank you for the kind words, I’m grateful to be in this position. Thank you for all the support and resources, it’s really helping a lot.” (P.E. Teacher)

I feel these quotes say it all! Unfortunately, Substitute HB 322 requires mentors to be classroom teachers, so I would be prohibited from serving as a full-time mentor, which gives me the flexibility and time to visit my mentees’ classes as well as provide additional supports, resources, professional development, interventions, modeling, and co-teaching opportunities. These are to name a few. This program has proven to be very successful due to the fact that mentors who don’t have their own classes are able to dedicate their time, attention and expertise to supporting teachers in the RE program. It takes years to build a strong mentoring program, and this bill would needlessly eliminate it as well as restrict how we create a new one. This bill would also do away with the RESA, a measure that allows teachers to really look closely at best practices in education as well as reflect on their own teaching practice. This program helps ensure that every Ohio student has an effective, quality teacher, which is essential for our students to show academic growth. Substitute HB 322 would negatively impact the teaching profession in Ohio, so I strongly urge you to oppose it.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Linda Palombo-King