Written Testimony on SB 216 to the Senate Education Committee

Submitted by: Ann Brennan, Executive Director

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Thank you Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Minority Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Education Committee for this opportunity to provide written testimony highlighting the Ohio School Psychologists Association’s (OSPA) concerns regarding SB 216. I am Ann Brennan, and I am the Executive Director of OSPA, the statewide organization representing school psychologists working in Ohio’s school districts. School psychologists provide a wide variety of services to students and families. They are highly trained professionals with expertise in the multi-layered area of educational assessments, including selecting diagnostic assessments to best determine students academic level and progress; assisting school –based evaluation teams in interpreting assessment results; and using data gleaned from assessments to both design interventions and monitor student progress during the intervention period. Additionally school psychologists are skillfully trained school-based mental health professionals, adept at assisting school districts in developing multi-tiered systems of supports for students’ social and emotional learning needs and mental health related prevention and intervention strategies.

My purpose in this written testimony is to share with you several concerns OSPA members have regarding SB 216. Our over arching concern pertains to our strong belief in retaining high standards for all educational professionals. We believe that highly trained teachers, with particular expertise in both content and educational practices relevant to the grades and ages of students are fundamental to student success. Children learn very differently at differing stages of their development, in order for student progress to be maximized, classroom management practices, as well as instructional best practices must be specific to the various developmental stages of children. For this reason we have serious concerns about the proposals in SB 216 that would result in diminishing or eliminating Ohio’s high quality educator licensure standards and requirements. OSPA supports retaining existing educator licensure requirements, as well as retaining existing grade band requirements. Additionally we support retaining current educational aide permit and paraprofessional license requirements. SB 216 also allows nonteaching employees with no qualifications to serve as substitute educational aides to work one-on-one with students; we do not support this provision.

It is our view that SB 216 places students at risk when current high quality licensure and permit standards are reduced. Teachers as well as educational aides and paraprofessionals should hold high quality credentials, especially those serving students with significant learning needs. We also support retaining existing substitute teacher license requirements. Also impacted buy these provisions are ODE’s ability to require background checks on these individuals.

In addition to our concerns regarding the diminishing of educator quality standards and licensure requirements we have remaining concerns about the following provisions related to state testing and accountability:

* Elimination of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment.
* Elimination of kindergarten diagnostic testing for the Third Grade Reading Guarantee.

Although we are aware of districts concerns regarding the administration of the KRA, we also support the revision to it, which improves the measurement assessment. OSPA believes that a universal kindergarten readiness assessment is absolutely necessary and beneficial to districts and students. Many students enter kindergarten without the readiness skills essential for learning how to read. The KRA provides valuable diagnostic information for the design of reading interventions for these students, and also provides uniform benchmark data for districts and ODE.

Lastly we also are concerned about increasing the “ n-size” to 30 in a subgroup in order for student report card data to appear on the report card. This increase will leave out data in smaller size districts for many student groups where the subgroup category does not equal 30. Not only is this inherently inequitable, it also may have the effect of allowing these districts to have a higher report card score when these subgroups of students, such as students with disabilities and minority students could be underperforming. Parents and community members should be able to access this information for all students, it can and does motivate districts to assure that all students are receiving needed supports to assure they are successful.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our views. If I can be of further assistance, please feel free to call or email me.

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