**Resident Educator Testimony (May 24th, 2017)**

By: Anders Miller

Thank you Chairman Hite, Vice Chairman Sykes, and the whole subcommittee for my testimony today. My name is Anders Miller and I am a high school English teacher just finishing my second year. I have found myriad successes and struggles in my short time as an educator, However, there is one struggle that has been in the forefront of my mind as this year comes to a close: the Resident Educator Program and the Resident Educator Summative Assessment. On the surface, this program appears to be supportive of teachers like me, but I hope this testimony will shed some light on the concerns my colleagues and I have based on our experiences with the program during the past six years. I want to discuss how the mentorship did not support us, and in most cases, had the opposite effect. Further, the discussion will touch on the near-ubiquitous negative views and experiences that Resident Educators have of the program. Lastly, it will shift to the summative assessment’s key role in this negative experience.

 The Resident Educator program has made a failed attempt with an unfunded mandate with the mentoring of early-career educators in our school districts. While the Ohio Department of Education’s (ODE) website claims that the Resident Educator Program provides “support and instructional guidance to new teachers” with mentors “through regular, ongoing interactions,” the experiences I have had have not fulfilled this promise. Now, do not interpret this statement as an issue with my mentor; my mentor Laura is one of the most skilled teachers and mentors in my building and supported me during some of the lowest moments in my first year. However, these moments of support never happened during the “regular, ongoing interactions;” they were during our planning periods, lunch, and before or after school. During the RE meetings, we had to go over paperwork and writing that took a few hours to complete so I could practice for the “Resident Educator Summative Assessment.” We discussed what the graders were looking for instead of what I needed help with to adjust into the role of a classroom teacher. It came to a head at the end of the year when Laura decided she couldn’t be a mentor any longer. She did not believe her time was worth the stress it caused in her mentees and could no longer be a part of a program that did nothing to actually support these new teachers. This view is why other experienced, skilled educators are no longer mentors, or worse never were mentors, in the Resident Educator Program; the mentorship is about how to pass a test and fill out paperwork, not the everyday needs of the mentee.

My second year mentorship consisted of four district wide meetings held with the other educators in their 2nd year of teaching and one district staff member. These meetings were a great opportunity to share our successes, failures, and strategies with others and our mentors. But instead of capitalizing on this opportunity, our meetings were about the Resident Educator Summative Assessment and how to make sure we passed it in our 3rd year of teaching. Instead of sharing strategies on how to differentiate for a student who’s behind in reading, we looked at rubrics and how to answer convoluted questions to show that we know how students learn to a random grader looking at our summative assessment who has never seen us teach in the classroom in person. Just like the first year of “mentoring,” it did nothing to help me create a stronger learning environment for my students and, in fact, it made that effort more difficult due to the time required to complete those irrelevant tasks.

These experiences with the Resident Educator Program are not exclusive to me. They are shared by nearly all of the Resident Educators, our mentors, and our colleagues in the state. University of Findlay’s Dr. Nicole V. Williams and John C. Gillham published a study last year researching whether Resident Educators believed that the Resident Educator program “improved their ability to meet the Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession (OSTP).” (Williams and Gillham) The survey showed that Resident Educators overwhelmingly believed the program did not assist them in their ability to meet those standards, with roughly 65%-75% disagreeing. In their written responses, out of the 456 total written responses, a mere 10 were positive. That is a 2% positive feedback rate for the program. If we, the professionals who are going through this program, so overwhelmingly disapprove of it, we must ask the question of what is wrong with it. The program said it is meant “to guide and support Resident Educators over time and move them more deeply into the process of being an effective teacher.” What is creating the disconnect between intention and reality? My answer from my experience and the experiences of those around me is simple: the summative assessment.

The Resident Educator Summative Assessment is duplicative of what we completed in our teacher-preparation programs when we received our degrees and licensure, and this time-consuming task creates havoc in our personal and professional lives, which makes the work we do for our students more difficult.

All graduating teachers are required to take the Ohio Assessment for Educators in the content areas we wanted to teach in and in our pedagogical knowledge. In addition to the OAEs, the edTPA was another requirement, I had to complete to graduate with my teaching license. It is a project where we had to provide lesson plans, videos, student work, and follow up analysis with justification of our methods and evidence to demonstrate a deep pedagogical knowledge, understandable when one must prove that they are qualified enough to be an educator when one is a student. RESA, as we call it, requires us to do the exact same thing, but in our 3rd year of teaching. Which leaves us to question why, as professionals, we should be subject to it again? How is it helping us be stronger educators for the students we serve?

The Resident Educator Summative Assessment is not merely burdensome to new educators, it is destructive. As educators, we work long hours by necessity. I teach high school English and have around 150 students. 6 out of the 8 periods of my day are spent in the classroom teaching. One 50 minute period for planning or grading. One 50 minute period for lunch, but in those 50 minutes I’ve learned how to eat and plan at the same time pretty well. Furthermore, while many of you are sitting down to a family Sunday dinner, I have been planning for my week for multiple hours. I know the experiences of my colleagues are similar, and we do this because it is what we must do to be effective teachers. A colleague of mine, Sarah, told me she formally logged 81 hours of extra work for RESA, but said she knows she did not log additional work sessions. 81 additional hours on top of all the other responsibilities she has as an educator.Where would I find any time in my day to do this assessment? Afterwards, I asked her how it affected her and I saw pain mixed with the tiredness you feel at the end of a year of teaching high school. She said that it has done irreparable harm to her family, forcing her to miss out on some of the milestones of her two-year-old’s life and her husband taking nearly all the household responsibilities because she was working on that assessment. That pain also stuck when she mentioned her students. She said she was not a good teacher during that year and deeply regretted that she could not be there for some of them when they needed it, and that is my last concern: what will I do next year when I have to complete this assessment? How will my teaching suffer?

Our state’s students are suffering as their teachers are being required to do more work to prove something they have already proved before. They aren’t in the classroom because they have to take multiple personal days so that they will not miss the deadlines for the assessment. The students are the reason I am in education, the reason the vast majority of teachers went into teaching, but this program prevents us from doing what we want to do and what we are experts in: educating our young people. This point is best emphasized by a respondent in the aforementioned University of Findlay research project:

“I really dislike the fact that I have to choose strongly disagree for all of the items, because I am open to continued learning and experiences but as far as the Resident Educator program goes, this is not how I improved my abilities as a new teacher. I actually felt like the Resident Educator program was unfair to my students … taking away valuable time from [them].”

 The Resident Educator Program is one of the most well-intended programs for supporting young and early-career educators to come from the legislature. The reality is much darker though. Distinguished research from our state has illustrated how Resident Educators overwhelmingly, near ubiquitously, state that the program does not assist them in their growth towards the standards that will help them be an effective educator and advocate for their students. This dark reality stems from the Resident Educator Summative Assessment, a duplicative, overwhelming, time-consuming, and destructive requirement that does nothing to help teachers, me, my colleagues, serve our students more effectively, in fact achieving the opposite. While I am unsure about the amount of testimony you have received from educators regarding this assessment, I know from the conversations I have with my colleagues that it is one of the issues that - unfortunately - binds us all together. We want to be treated as the professionals we are so that we can best serve the people who will be standing where I am, sitting where you are, in a matter of time: our future, our students.

Thank you Chairman Hite and Vice Chairman Sykes for the opportunity to speak today. I welcome any questions you may have for me.

Sources:

<http://www.mwera.org/MWER/volumes/v28/issue3/v28n3-Williams-FEATURE-ARTICLE.pdf>