

Testimony of Vanessa Shrontz
Master Teacher at the A. Sophie Rogers School for Early Learning
Ohio State University
Finance Committee
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“trauma story”

Thank you Members of the Finance Committee for the opportunity to testify today in support of Ohio Senate Bill 246. My name is Vanessa Shrontz, Master Teacher at the A. Sophie Rogers School for Early Learning at the Ohio State University working with children three-five. Today I will be speaking on behalf of myself and not the School or The University in support of Ohio Senate Bill 246.

My current work supports children in preschool classrooms within the Weinland Park neighborhood in Central Ohio. Weinland Park has historically been an area deemed in need for supportive services and at the A. Sophie Rogers School, we work closely with children and families to provide these services. We have adopted a policy that prevents children from being expelled from our School even during the most challenging of situations by using positive behavior supports, along with consultation from our administrative staff, researchers, other experts and community mental health supports.

In my experience as an educator, I have worked with children from a range of socio-economic and culturally different backgrounds all of whom have endured adverse childhood experiences. These children have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect, parents and other family members incarcerated for short or long periods of time, children who are exposed to first and secondhand drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, parent absenteeism (separation, divorce, death), job insecurity, food scarcity and chronic toxic stress at home to name a few. Some children are very resilient and have the ability to make gains in school even when faced with these challenges but many have not developed the skill set and often act out thus “asking for help”. These are the children who do not need to be removed from our schools but need the most attention and individualized instructional and social emotional support.

Trauma in young children results in:

- Attention seeking behavior
- Escape behavior
- Destructive behavior
- Trust issues
- Inability to focus and sit still
- Inappropriate language
- Constant state of fight or flight – even the simplest request (to put on a jacket to go outside) can turn into a child screaming, yelling, running, biting
- Hunger – does not want to leave breakfast or lunch room
- Withdrawn, tired and unwilling to participate in classroom activities and lessons
- Hyperactive behavior

One of the jobs of an Early Childhood Educator is to prepare children for lifelong learning success and love of school. With the added demands placed on teachers, children who experience trauma need more support and this bill will allow teachers to receive the Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports that they need to fully educate the whole child and help them to reach their greatest academic and life-long potential. Children who experience trauma and are removed from a loving classroom environment begin to have negative associations made with school and will not seek out trusted adults in times of need. These children often need routine built into their lives and time to practice the expectations required of school. When they are removed from the school, they begin to associate inappropriate or escape behaviors with ways to get out of school expectations. I have often seen an increase of problematic behaviors from children who have been removed from school settings. Due to the nature of my current school's zero expulsion policy, families will seek out our school and I teach children who have been expelled from multiple preschool settings before they turn the age of 5. Teachers need to be equipped with the tools to support children in trauma and to continue their educational learning.

I have personally witnessed many children who have experienced trauma that affects their abilities to function in a classroom setting. I have Masters' degrees in both Applied Developmental Psychology and in Social Work. Even with almost a decade of experience working with children and families in traumatic situations, the need for additional training and collaboration with other experts, is needed and would be welcomed in my teaching practice. I believe that Ohio Senate Bill 246 will begin the foundation for this practice. I encourage the members of the Senate Finance Committee to support and pass this legislation to lay the foundation for young children's lifelong success and learning. Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.