

House Primary and Secondary Education Committee

HB 322 – Proponent Written Testimony

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Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 322. I teach 5th grade Language Arts and Social Studies in Reynoldsburg City Schools.

Around this time of year, us teachers are beginning to select students for superlative awards. This is something I always struggle with because I see so much growth in each of my students. I work with students who all start in different places and have different burdens, and all year I coach and challenge them with encouragement and feedback to grow as scholars and people. That’s why I teach; to be a consistent encouraging adult presence that appropriately challenges students to look at themselves, see both the greatness within and potential for further greatness and then to help them develop on that path. I teach this way because this is how all people grow, including teachers like me.

This, I think, is why certain aspects of the Resident Educator program seem not just unfair but also directly unhelpful to early career educators and the profession as a whole, which is why I urge the passage of HB 322. Specifically, the program would be refocused on the most vital part of OTR: The mentorship. Mentorship cultivates authentic growth, reflection, and development. In addition, I support eliminating measures of progression, specifically the year three summative task, which dilutes the value of the first two years of mentorship. The year three summative task not only does nothing to promote early career retention in a profession that desperately needs to recruit, retain, and develop new teachers, the task is a wholly inauthentic assessment, assesses writing more than teaching, takes time from the real work of educating, and discourages teachers from pursuing professional development in areas that directly benefit students. Simply put, years 3 and 4 of the program use high stakes in place of rigor, challenge, and true teacher development.

My story with the program is a perfect example. I am fortunate that Reynoldsburg prioritizes and empowers strong veteran teacher mentors. For example, my amazing mentor, Jennifer Summers, engaged me in conversations about how to start my career successfully before my first year even began. She took time to get to know me and challenged me to explore my strengths and weaknesses. We met and talked multiple times a week; she observed me and gave me feedback far more than the number of times required. She helped me identify areas that I was passionate about growing and then connected me to people already doing those things well so I could work with them to immediately apply the knowledge in practice. She even helped me identify a strength and passion for an area of focus, gifted education, and encouraged me to pursue a Gifted Intervention Specialist endorsement, an area of certification in high need in our district.

I applied and was accepted to the graduate Gifted Certificate program at the University of Cincinnati last summer. However, the RESA year three task loomed overhead. The anxiety of knowing I needed to film just twenty minutes of teaching that could impact my ability to stay in the profession should a stranger judge them inadequate was a prominent factor in a difficult decision, the decision to postpone my program start date.

Now, a year later, I’ve passed RESA, but I haven’t taken classes that I could use to apply advanced practice knowledge with all students or to fill vacancies that would increase gifted education access in my district. My calculus, which did nothing more than allow me to simply stay in the profession and teach the students I love, also required that I sacrifice something that could benefit these same students. It is a bargain that I shouldn’t have had to make.

I know several other educators who have delayed professional development or taking on more responsibility that could benefit students due to the year 3 task. By eliminating the measures of progression and summative assessment and refocusing the program on mentoring, HB 322 would allow the Ohio Teacher Residency to actually accomplish its goal: To support the development of excellence in new educators in every district in Ohio and retain that talent.

With urgency and concern for students, new teachers, and the profession, I ask you to pass HB 322 to revise the resident educator program.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your consideration. I am available to respond to any questions you may have.