

June 10, 2020

Chairman Jones, Vice Chair Manchester, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in opposition to House Bill 322.

My name is Carol Theis, and I am a retired educator. I spent my entire teaching career at the Solon City Schools. I have a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership with a focus on Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development. From the initiation of the Resident Educator Program in 2009 until my retirement last year, I was the program coordinator and served as a mentor and facilitator. I am passionate about working with teachers and helping them to become the best they can be.

I retired from the classroom in 2009, and all the educators who have worked as mentors and coordinators for Solon's Resident Educator Program have been retired classroom teachers. Retired classroom teachers have the time, interest, and experience that is so beneficial to beginning teachers. Even though I retired from working as a mentor and coordinator, I still care deeply about the program, and this bill is alarming since it would destroy Solon's program and every other program that relies on retired classroom teachers to serve as mentors.

The Ohio Resident Educator Program has evolved since its inception through extensive feedback from all stakeholders. It has been refined and streamlined yet still includes the accountability so necessary to guarantee that all Ohio students have competent teachers. It has always included what I consider to be the building blocks of good instruction: planning, implementation, and reflection of lessons and assessments. These elements are incorporated into the Resident Educator Program as well as the RESA Assessment.

In my years of working with these programs, I became very aware of the different pre-service experiences that new teachers have. They run the gamut, and I quickly learned which universities were better than others in their teacher preparation. Since beginning teachers start their careers with very different levels of preparation, it is important for districts to have strong mentoring programs for beginning teachers. Good teachers evolve over time; they benefit from good mentoring and being able to hone their skills. The Resident Educator Program and the RESA are excellent tools to assure that all licensed Ohio teachers have successfully demonstrated these skills.

I am particularly dismayed by the requirement that mentor teachers must be classroom teachers. Some of the best Resident Educator Programs in Ohio have been headed by full-time mentors, coordinators, and retired teachers. This change makes no sense. Such individuals are able to spend much more time in observing and supporting beginning teachers in their classrooms since there are no personal classroom schedule constraints. These mentors have also chosen to work in this capacity and care deeply about helping beginning teachers. A comment that we have frequently heard from the teachers was "We like that you know the ins and outs of the Solon Schools, but you have no horse in the race." They knew that we were there for them and them alone! Requiring that mentors be current classroom teachers makes no sense.

I do not understand why the legislature would consider eliminating an excellent Resident Educator Program that already exists and mandate the individual Local Professional Development Committees (PDCs) to reinvent the wheel. Please maintain the current Resident Educator Program and the RESA, so Ohio can continue to develop excellent teachers and all Ohio students will experience quality instruction in their classrooms. I urge you to oppose House Bill 322.

If you have any questions, I would be more than happy to discuss the Resident Educator Program with you. Please feel free to call me at 330-562-4957 or email me at caroltee1@aol.com.

Sincerely,  
Carol Theis