



**Senate Education Committee
Sub. SB 102 Testimony
Buckeye Association of School Administrators
Ohio School Boards Association
Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators
January 28, 2020**

Good morning, Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding Substitute Senate Bill 102. My name is Kevin Miller, and I am the Director of Governmental Relations for the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA). Joining me today for this testimony are Will Schwartz, Deputy Director of Legislative Services for the Ohio School Boards Association, and Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators Advocacy Specialist Barbara Shaner.

Our organizations represent superintendents, public school district boards of education, and elementary school principals from around the state. We are here today to provide feedback for Senate Bill 102, which would establish the Dyslexia Screening Program to require all public schools to conduct screenings of all children before first grade and provide intervention services for those displaying risk factors for dyslexia.

Our organizations support the notion that all students receive the services needed to help them succeed. We believe Ohio does need to take steps to better serve students who are dyslexic. However, the solution should be deliberate, well thought out, and structured in a way that allows districts the capacity to serve students with dyslexia.

Changes included in Substitute Senate Bill 102 are positive steps toward ensuring that school districts can successfully screen and serve students identified with issues of dyslexia.

First, the substitute bill clarifies the previous version of the bill by specifying that the program applies only to students actually enrolled in a school district or other public school and that a district or school must screen students at least once prior to first grade.

Second, the latest version denotes that the guidelines and procedures established by the state Superintendent are done by administrative rule, making it easier to make changes as needed in the Dyslexia Screening Program.

And third, the substitute bill permits the state Superintendent to include stakeholders in the establishment of an advisory committee. We believe that the guidance of organizations such as the International Dyslexia Association is important, but also crucial to the process is ensuring the inclusion of K through 12 practitioners and higher education representatives in the development of a statewide plan.

Of concern is the Fiscal Note and Local Impact Statement developed for Senate Bill 102. We believe it underestimates the finances and personnel needed to implement an effective Dyslexia Screening and Service program. The document notes, "School districts and community schools will likely incur additional costs to provide intervention or special education services if the bill's required screening program increases identification of students with dyslexia." Districts which have developed programs will verify that additional costs are more than a likelihood—they are a certainty. These additional costs include professional development for classroom teachers and full certification in research-based structured literacy programs for reading specialists and intervention specialists. Districts will also see an increase in personnel needed to provide tier II interventions focused on strategic, small group reading intervention and tier III interventions focused on individualized, intensive instruction.

The Fiscal Note states that higher costs may be partially offset by an increase in state foundation aid for students receiving special education services; however, not all students with dyslexia are identified as having a specific learning disability, and thus, the district does not receive additional funding for those students. Even for students who are identified as having a disability, most districts do not receive full funding for their special education services. Further, it would be unfair to districts to assume the formula will cover costs for additional mandates. For example, the current funding formula is frozen at FY 2019 levels so no new state money is available for new educational services. Likewise, in previous years, many districts were capped in the amount of growth in state funding they could receive, regardless of any increase in required services.

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (or DIBELS), is pointed out as an effective screener at \$1 per student, or an annual cost to the state of about \$177,000. However, this cost does not take into consideration the variety of screeners available, some which may be preferred more than others by practitioners, nor does the estimate take into consideration the expenses incurred by districts to train personnel on the use of the screener and the time necessary to apply the screener and interpret results.

Other increased expenses will include additional time for Special Education Supervisors, Curriculum Directors, and building principals to oversee the set-up, implementation, and ongoing evaluation of their district's programming. The identification of students with dyslexia will also lead to increased demands of time for already over-burdened School Psychologists.

While early screening and services for students with dyslexia may reduce expenditures for services down the road, there is currently little to no data to support this assertion. Long-term savings do not negate up-front costs that school districts must bear in order to comply with the bill's requirements.

There are districts in Ohio that have established effective programs to identify and serve students with issues of dyslexia or phonemic awareness. However, their numbers are few. While districts have reading intervention programs in place, most of those programs are not effective in addressing dyslexia. For the past nine years, it was my honor to serve as superintendent of Ottawa Hills Local Schools in Toledo. In 2015, we started our journey to screen our students for dyslexia and provide services for identified students. Since that time, the district has spent well over \$400,000 to implement dyslexia programming. And we were fortunate. Because Ottawa Hills is a high-wealth district, we already had several components in place, such as key personnel. However, we still found that we had to increase personnel to adequately serve identified students. We also realized increased costs for materials and training. When it comes time to implement the requirements of Senate Bill 102, many districts will struggle to fund the necessary resources and increase qualified personnel.

We come today to offer to work collaboratively with you to develop a plan forward to better serve Ohio's students with dyslexia. Before requiring districts to screen for dyslexia and serve those students, we need to establish the infrastructure necessary in order for districts to successfully meet the components of this legislation.

That planning includes:

1. Working with the state Superintendent to:
 - a. Establish state-wide screening instruments to which all districts have access;
 - b. Determine research-based, structured literacy programs aimed at assisting students with dyslexia; and,
 - c. Develop state resources to assist with the availability and cost of materials, training, and updates;
2. Aligning the education programs within the state's institutions of higher education with K-12 policies on dyslexia;
3. Incentivizing individuals to become trained in research-based programs that address the needs of students with dyslexia;
4. Providing resources for districts to pay for staff needed to work one-on-one and in small groups with dyslexic students;
5. Building upon Ohio's Dyslexia Pilot Project, which recommended continuing the program to adequately determine the impact on special education costs; defining a clear model for teacher professional development; and developing a statewide network of qualified trainers to provide on-site teacher professional learning opportunities.

Chair Lehner, thank you for this opportunity to provide input regarding Senate Bill 102. We will be happy to address your questions.