

Thank you, Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird and Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, for the opportunity to address you today regarding House Bill 497.

My name is Carrie Sanchez.

This month I am completing my 26th year as a public school educator here in the great State of Ohio.

I am the president-elect for the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators.

I am an Adjunct Instructor for the Graduate School of Teaching and Learning at Bowling Green State University.

In 2019 I received the Debra Kasak National Distinguished Leadership Award for Excellence in Educational Leadership.

And most importantly, I have had the honor of serving as the principal of Port Clinton Middle School, in Port Clinton, Ohio for the past 13 years. A school in Ohio that has been named and redesignated as a National Forum School to Watch as well as a National Model School by the International Center for Leadership in Education.

I know education.

I know teaching and learning.

I know students.

House Bill 497 is addressing the retention clause of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee and that is the focus of my testimony today.

Teaching and Learning is about helping students become productive citizens of society. Martin Luther King, Jr wrote: The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society.

I understand the original thinking behind the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. I genuinely do. In many school districts across Ohio, third grade is a bridge between primary and intermediate school. For lawmakers, this then may seem like a logical time to identify academic deficiencies. This may seem like the ideal time to "fix" something "before it's too late". I want you to understand that I am not completely opposed to the fundamental idea of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. As an educator, I have devoted my life to helping children succeed. But I

would like to take a deeper dive with you into what the Third Grade Reading Guarantee has turned into ~ from the perspective of a veteran educator and school leader.

When students enter Third Grade they have been students in formal education for approximately 540 academic instructional days. That is assuming they have not been sick, or no one in their family has been sick, or there has not been a residence relocation, or a divorce, or trauma. 540 academic instructional days is the absolute BEST case scenario before they participate in the Third Grade Reading Guarantee assessment. And also, as a side note, this 'best case scenario' also includes that mom had adequate prenatal care, the child was properly nurtured as an infant and toddler and entered kindergarten having successfully participated in a preschool program where he/she learned all of their letters and colors, were potty trained and knew how to functionally socialize with peers.

No one comes to school wanting to struggle. No one comes to school wanting to fail. Especially when they are 8 years old. If a child is struggling academically, should we punish them or help them? Is retention a punishment? Adults can try to rationalize this ~ but what does an 8 year old think to be true if he or she is retained?

I sat down with some third grade students when preparing to talk with you today. They were fantastic and I think you will enjoy some of their insight.

I asked a group of students: What do you like about school? Their responses included "I like everything about science" and "reading and math" and "learning cursive" and "fun stuff" They were also very honest and included "lunch" and "recess" and "seeing my friends". When I asked them about what they did NOT like about school, I was pretty surprised that the majority of students said "nothing!" Then one smaller voice stated firmly "I don't like when school gets frustrating or stressful." I thought that was pretty great insight from a student who is now 9 years old.

My final question to these children was "What should schools do if students are NOT learning what they are supposed to be learning?" There was a TREMENDOUS amount of advice from these young students so I will only share a few highlights. "Schools should ask kids why they are not learning, the reasons might surprise them" and "Schools should teach parents how to help their kids, because parents don't know how to be teachers" (interesting) and finally, my favorite response came from a little girl with big tousled blonde curls and wide brown eyes

"Maybe schools could ask the kids who DID learn why they did - and maybe those kids could help the other kids and the teachers in different or new ways."

There is no one in education who is opposed to high expectations and challenging students and growing learners and holding schools accountable. Retaining 9 year old children does not solve any of the issues surrounding learning deficiencies. Repeating the same grade level and hoping for different results is the definition of insanity.

HB 498 does not change any of the provisions of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee that require school districts to identify struggling readers and helping them to succeed. It does remove the punitive, potentially harmful requirement that third grade students be retained. Decisions about retaining students should be made on a case-by-case basis by the parents, the teacher and the school administration.

This concludes my testimony. I urge you to support HB 497. I will be happy to answer your questions.