

Katie Baker
HB 497 Proponent Testimony

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and fellow Members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for your time today and for your consideration of House Bill 497. This piece of legislation would positively change Ohio's Third Grade Reading Guarantee Law by removing the consequence of mandatory retention, as well as eliminating the fall administration of the Ohio State Test in English Language Arts for third grade students. My name is Katie Baker, and I come before you today as a mom of two boys- one now in fourth grade and my youngest will enter Kindergarten next fall.

Ohio State Test in English Language Arts:

At approximately 3 am on October 27th of last school year, my then third grade son came into my room because he was having a bad dream. He began to explain that his dream was about the Ohio State Test, and in a matter of hours he would be taking Part 1. He was fearful that he would run out of time, not be able to answer all the questions, wouldn't be able to type his responses, or that his score wouldn't be high enough. Kids at school were talking about the test, and it was clearly on his mind. After calming his nerves enough to allow him to fall back asleep, I spent the next several hours awake and alarmed by this new profound angst my son displayed.

The week prior to this nightmare, my son came home from school each day telling my husband and me that he needed to learn how to type. He spent each evening on our computer playing typing games so that he could learn how to type quickly in order to prepare for the upcoming test. He informed me that he would only have 90 minutes to read two passages, answer 15 multiple choice questions which required him to go back into the text to find the answers, and then he would need to type a multi-paragraph essay. I'm left to wonder if this online test is a true and valid measure of my son's reading ability?

My son has never received formal typing instruction. He repeatedly told my husband and me that he knew typing was going to slow him down so he wanted to practice. Ironically, my husband and I have been pleading with our son to slow down since he came into this world 10 years ago. We've been encouraging him to take his time so that he can produce work that matches his capabilities and quality that would make him proud.

My son made it through two days of testing for the Ohio State Test in English Language Arts that week. He came home relieved, and I didn't have the heart to tell him that he would have to take this same test again in the spring.

It also should be noted that during this same week in the fall of 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics declared childhood mental health a National Emergency in our country. And just this year, Governor DeWine made mental health a major focus in his State of the State address.

The results of the October OST are not available to teachers until late December, and ODE doesn't release the family letters until nearly three months later in January. The results are not timely, and therefore not usable to guide instruction and intervention. My son's teacher was not able to use his score to determine how to intervene and what support she should provide. The results were simply scores and by the time they were received the data was old.

The latin root for the word assess, means "to sit beside." That's exactly what my son's teachers do in order to learn about him as a reader. That's exactly what I do each night in order to support my son's progress at home. With ongoing communication and progress monitoring of his reading growth, his teachers and I both determined his test scores were not an accurate measure of his reading achievement. Knowing that I did not have any rights as a parent to overturn mandatory retention within the current Third Grade Reading Guarantee Law concerned me significantly. I continually question if the OST is an accurate measure of reading achievement, or does it more accurately measure the ability for an 8 year old to navigate a computer and type?

I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to thank this committee and Senator Blessing for sponsoring Substitute Senate Bill 229 which created emergency language to protect last year's group of third graders from retention. My son included. My family received an early Christmas present last year when Governor DeWine signed that bill into Law on December 14th of 2021. From that moment on, my family no longer focused on tests that are not an accurate or valid measure of my son's reading ability. We no longer feared consequences of retention for not meeting a score on a high stakes test. My son began to pick up books independent of my urging, and his resistance to reading slowly diminished. I often imagine what his life would be like now had his score required mandatory retention. Would he be willing to continue to put forth strong effort or would there be a sense of defeat knowing that his efforts were strong, but not good enough? Would his teacher have sent me an email with a positive progress update similar to the one I received last week from his current teacher?

Substitute Senate Bill 229 was a good band aid to the problem. But you don't fix a broken leg with a band aid. The mandatory retention requirement of the Law is the broken leg of Ohio's elementary education system. Now here we are a year later, and the Senate now has the authority and responsibility once again to make permanent change.

Crane Center of Early Childhood Research and Policy (OSU):

The Ohio State University's Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy released a report in 2019 regarding the effectiveness of Ohio's Third Grade Reading Guarantee Law.

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Despite retention being a key component to this law, the study found that long term reading achievement for Ohio students has not changed. Some may claim that there was a slight “up-tick” in reading performance after the onset of the law; however, it is hard for me to rationalize that this slight increase was due to retention and not the reading interventions, Reading Improvement Monitoring Plans, and consistent communication with parents. All of those factors are a proactive approach to increasing reading achievement and will remain a part of the law.

I want to be very clear. I am in full support of ensuring that all students are able to read at the highest levels of achievement. HB 497 does not change that expectation.

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Diagnostic Testing:

Testing requirements within the Third Grade Reading Guarantee Law are significant. Every year since Kindergarten, my son has taken 3 computerized reading diagnostic tests; one administration in the fall, winter and spring.

My son’s district, like 40% of Ohio districts or 730,000 of Ohio students, use the Measures of Academic Progress diagnostic test, also called the “MAP” test, which is published by the Northwest Evaluation Association, or NWEA.

This is a test aimed at measuring both reading proficiency and growth. According to the NWEA website, this Common Core Standard aligned test reveals how much growth has occurred between testing events and shows projected proficiency in reading. In Ohio, our students are taught the Ohio Learning Standards, as Ohio is no longer a Common Core State.

By September 30th of every school year since my son started kindergarten, we have received a letter letting us know if my son was “on track” or “not on track” to meeting the promotion requirements of the law based on his score for the fall administration of the MAP reading test.

By the end of last school year, my son took 15 total tests related specifically to the Third Grade Reading Guarantee Law- MAP and State Tests combined, and it would have been 16 had schools not closed during his first grade year in the spring of 2020.

Effect Size of Grade Level Retention:

Researcher John Hattie published the book *IMPACT: Teaching Literacy in the Visible Classroom, Grades K-5.* The book serves as a resource for educators, and in this case legislators, to analyze various practices that can impact student achievement. Hattie wanted to understand which variables were the most important. Although “almost everything we do improves learning,” why not prioritize the ones that will have the greatest effect?

The database looks at the effect size a given practice has on changing achievement. Knowing the effect size of a practice can help us decide if the practice is worth the effort to implement.

“John was able to demonstrate that influences, strategies, actions and so on with an effect size greater than 0.4 allow students to learn at an appropriate rate, meaning at least a year of growth for a year in school” (Fisher, Frey & Hattie, 2017, pg. 2).

Within the book, John Hattie ranks 150 different educational influences that can impact student achievement. These practices are ranked by effect size.

In Hattie’s original work, grade level retention was ranked 148th out of 150, with an effect size of -0.13. Yet, after continued analysis, in 2017 Hattie released a more extensive third version titled “Visible Learning Plus,” and retention is ranked 244th out of 252 influences, with an effect size of -0.32. Some may claim that there is limited data on retention or that the data is older. Perhaps there is “limited data” because retention is outdated and an ineffective intervention to be using in 2022?

House Bill 497 does not remove the mandatory reading interventions, the Reading Improvement Monitoring Plans, the ongoing communication with parents regarding their child’s progress, the mandatory reading endorsements and additional teaching credentials for 3rd grade teachers; or any of the aspects in the recently passed reading Dyslexia law, including mandatory professional development, screening and research based interventions. And the newly added amendment continues to take a more positive approach to supporting students regardless of grade level. House Bill 497 eliminates the component of the Law that is harmful to Ohio’s Students.

Parent Rights:

My husband and I are our sons’ most important advocates. However, the Third Grade Reading Guarantee Law does not provide parents any rights to object or disagree with the consequence of retention. My children do not meet any of the exemptions under the law, and Ohio does not have a testing “opt-out” choice. Therefore, according to page 15 of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee Guidance Manual, if my children do not take the state tests, they will not have a score and thus be automatically retained until a promotion score is reached. Parents deserve a seat at the table, and should have the right to voice their refusal of retention. In all other retention situations, parents have the ultimate decision as to whether their child will be retained. I’m asking the committee today to provide me with this right as it relates to the Third Grade Reading Guarantee.

My husband and I have provided the following to our boys that has directly impacted their academic achievement:

- Proper prenatal care and nutrition,

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- An extensive home library with rich stories and nightly reading since birth,
- 3 years of private preschool,
- Financial ability to hold our children from entering Kindergarten until they were 6 years old, ensuring their brain development was ready for the academic demands,
- All day, everyday Kindergarten,
- Financially able to provide daily tutoring and home instruction during the various learning modes and closures within the 2020-21 school year,
- Explicit phonics instruction programs used at school and reinforced at home,
- A home computer, additional technology and reliable internet access,
- And both my husband and I have attended every single parent-teacher conference that has been offered or requested.

Despite all of this, my husband and I are still not able to fully participate in the decisions made about our boys' education. I also ask, how equal is the playing field for Ohio's students?

Your office has received countless calls and emails from parents, grandparents, educators and administrators from all over the state with the ask that you place this bill on tomorrow's Committee agenda for a third hearing and a vote. The Dyslexia Law and the amendment added to this bill put pieces into place that will support reading achievement growth in this state. As you consider your next steps, it is my hope that you remember my son and the countless other 8 and 9 year old students who carry the burden of adult accountability on their backs. Let's humanize the data because all of the scores were earned by young children in Ohio. Let's focus on increased support and interventions rather than consequences placed on children who come to school each day to learn and grow to the best of their abilities.

Thank you for listening to my testimony and for favorably considering House Bill 497. And again, on behalf of last year's Third Graders in Ohio, thank you for the passage of Substitute Senate Bill 229. At this time, I'm happy to answer any questions from members of the committee.

Sincerely,
Katie Baker

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