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House Higher Education Committee
June 12, 2024
Proponent Testimony on HB 572
Jennifer Glenn, OSPA President

Chairman Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the House Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 572.

The Ohio School Psychologists Association (OSPA), which represents more than 800 school psychologists across Ohio, is a strong proponent of this bill. OSPA, along with the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), affirms that psychological well-being and the prevention of and early intervention for mental disorders are essential in promoting student behavioral and mental health, and that school systems must provide these services. Schools are the “front line” when it comes to identifying and addressing behavioral and mental health concerns for children and adolescents. School psychologists “are committed to strengthening the infrastructure for culturally responsive school-based prevention and wellness promotion programs, [and we advocate] for the use of multi-tiered prevention, early intervention, and wellness promotion models that devote school mental and behavioral health services to the needs of all students through increasingly intensive levels of support” (NASP, 2023).

School psychologists, in collaboration with others, promote preventive and responsive services that enhance learning, mental and behavioral health, and psychological and physical safety and implement effective crisis prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery. One of the main ways we do this is through consultation with classroom teachers about trauma-informed classroom management, behavioral health, and mental health interventions. Post-COVID, the need for these types of supports has increased exponentially. However, the level of educator preparedness to address these concerns has not kept pace (Reddig & VanLone, 2024, p. 20). As of 2023, less than half of the Ohio educator licenses required preparation in



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social-emotional learning and/or Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports, despite the fact that PBIS is required by law in all K-12 schools (Ohio Department of Higher Education, 2023). None of the classroom teacher licenses require competency in trauma-informed pedagogy. Ohio also adopted social-emotional learning standards for students, but they are not required to be taught. So the timing for this bill could not be better. We need a comprehensive understanding of how educators are being prepared in these areas, and standardization of minimum competencies, so they are adequately equipped to handle the needs of the students in their classrooms, and to teach the competencies the State has found it important to adopt.

Research during and after the COVID-19 pandemic already shows that young children are experiencing high rates of distraction, clinginess, irritability, and fear (Garfield & Chidambaram, 2020). In past pandemics globally, children in quarantine have exhibited stress levels four times higher than children in normal routines (Araujo et al., 2020). These behaviors are evident throughout the school day. In addition, for many children, COVID has been added to their list of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Children who have experienced trauma often operate in a “survival mode” of fight, flight, or freeze, even well past when the actual traumatic situation occurred. These responses can cause students to have behavioral outbursts, be disruptive to the learning environment, or appear to be passive or distracted; teachers may see these behaviors as defiance or disrespect, or as signs of ADHD or other behavioral disorders. But if the teacher doesn’t fully understand the reason, or function of the behaviors, they won’t be able to effectively intervene.

Trauma-informed pedagogy has been shown to benefit the social, emotional, mental, and academic well-being of children who have experienced trauma. Historically, it has been utilized with students of color and students living in poverty, including those in urban and rural environments, who have been more likely to experience childhood trauma (Blitz et al., 2016). In Columbus City Schools, where I work, educators have been trained in trauma-informed practices during professional development days, but it has not been systematically implemented. A survey of teachers using trauma-informed pedagogy in schools in rural Appalachia found that teachers felt more confident and competent when dealing with classroom behavior and decreased their use of punitive behavior management strategies. Students in these classrooms



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showed increased resiliency and improved classroom behavior (Shamblin et al., 2016). In my experience, trauma-informed pedagogy should be employed within a Multi-tiered System of Support where Tier 1 requires universal staff training and trauma-informed classroom environments, Tier 2 requires intervention from school-based mental health staff, such as school psychologists, counselors, and social workers, and Tier 3 requires intensive support from outside mental health and community services.

Educators need to be equipped to recognize patterns of student behavior that can signal a need for increased support, and they need to be empowered to provide tiered supports, just as they do when a student requires academic support. HB 572 would provide a pathway to ensuring that our state's educators are adequately prepared to do so.

Respectfully submitted,

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