



*The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.*

**House Bill 117: Proponent Testimony**  
**House Primary and Secondary Education Committee**  
**Tuesday, May 2, 2023**

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jeff Wensing. I currently serve as Vice President of the Ohio Education Association (OEA). On behalf of the 120,000 members of OEA, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of House Bill 117. This bill would eliminate mandatory student retention under the Third Grade Reading Guarantee and reduce the number of required state tests by limiting the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade ELA achievement test to a single administration.

I would like to begin by thanking the joint sponsors of the bill, Representatives Manning and Robinson, for once again bringing this bill forward and for their continued advocacy for Ohio's students. Last session, the Ohio House passed a similar bill (HB 497) with broad, bipartisan support (82-10). Unfortunately, it was not passed by the Senate.

House Bill 117 would allow educators and parents to make decisions regarding student retention. Elementary school teachers across the state often share their frustration about the amount of testing our students endure. Our members are also in strong opposition to using test scores to make high-stake decisions about students.

OEA's legislative policies, which our members adopt, state opposition to using standardized testing as the decisive factor in decisions to promote or retain students. Retention or promotion is a serious decision with an enormous impact on the student and should not be based solely on a test score. Teachers have access to more information and have a deeper understanding of a student's classwork and abilities. Educators and parents should be empowered to make these decisions.

I will note that the bill maintains the focus currently in state law to identify struggling readers early, inform parents, and provide appropriate intervention services. Literacy is the foundation of learning, and we must continue to focus on literacy. However, basing high-stakes decisions on test scores is improper and not in the best interests of our students.

Because HB 117 would do away with the retention of students based on their score on the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade ELA test, the bill also reduces this test to a single administration during the year. Under current law, the test is administered in the fall and the spring. OEA supports this reduction in state-mandated



testing as it will provide some relief from testing requirements and allow additional time for teaching and learning in the classroom.

Teachers will still have all the necessary information about a student's ability to read based on diagnostic tests, in-class work, one-on-one instruction, and other assessments. This information is timely and allows educators to identify student needs and individualize instruction—unlike the results of the state tests.

Once again, I urge support for HB 117. This bill eliminates the punitive policy of mandatory retention based on test scores. It does not take away any of the important supports and interventions in place to aid struggling readers. Most importantly, HB 117 puts educators and parents in the driver's seat to make educational decisions in the best interests of students.

Chair Bird, this concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer questions from the committee.