

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

My name is Faith Elleman, and I am an ESOL Specialist for Lebanon City Schools. This is my 22nd year as a public school educator, and the entirety of my career has been teaching 3rd and 4th grade students. I am speaking today in support of HB 117. I appreciate this opportunity to speak on behalf of educators, and most importantly, on behalf of students and their families.

I have many concerns about standardized testing in public education, especially for our elementary school students. The 3rd Grade Reading Guarantee negatively impacts our students and it is imperative that we make changes to this education law. HB 117 is a positive step in that direction. It will eliminate the retention requirement in the 3rd Grade Reading Guarantee and it will reduce the number of state tests our 3rd graders are required to take.

As the 3rd Grade Guarantee currently stands, 3rd graders who do not achieve the required standardized test score will have to repeat 3rd grade. This will disproportionately affect my students in particular—those who are not yet proficient in the English Language. Too many English Learner students are in jeopardy of being retained due to the 3rd Grade Guarantee. These are students who have been in U.S. schools since kindergarten and have received ESOL services for 3-4 years. However, research shows that it takes an average of 5-7 years to become proficient in academic language. Given the amount of time students need to attain English proficiency, English Learners should not be subject to the retention requirement of the 3rd Grade Guarantee. In fact, no student should automatically be retained based on test scores. This is not a practice supported by solid research, and the long term effects of retention are especially bleak for English Learner students.

Another aspect of standardized testing that disproportionately affects English Learner 3rd graders is the sheer number of hours spent on this testing. I have a list of standardized tests our 3rd grade English Learners are currently required to take. These are either state tests or fulfill state requirements in some way. Most of these tests take about an hour to complete; sometimes less, but sometimes more. This does not include the time spent on practice tests or the preparation required for students to become familiar with the testing format and style of questions they will have to answer.

I would like to read to you the testing schedule of a 3rd Grade English Learner.

Fall:

NWEA MAP Reading

MAP Math

AIMS Web Comprehension

AIMS Web Fluency

AIMS Web Vocabulary

Ohio State Test ELA, Part 1

Ohio State Test ELA, Part 2

Possible OELPS, if the student is new to the state or country

Winter:

MAP Reading

MAP Math

AIMS Web Comprehension

AIMS Web Fluency

AIMS Web Vocabulary  
OELPA Listening  
OELPA Speaking  
OELPA Reading  
OELPA Writing

Spring:  
MAP Reading  
MAP Math  
AIMS Web Comprehension  
AIMS Web Fluency  
AIMS Web Vocabulary  
Ohio State Test ELA, Part 1  
Ohio State Test ELA, Part 2  
Ohio State Test Math, Part 1  
Ohio State Test Math, Part 2

That is 26 state-required standardized tests for English Learner 3rd Graders. Since January, I have proctored more than 70 separate test sessions.

I have had students arrive to the U.S. during test season, having no prior exposure to English. I am unable to provide these students with vital support and instruction because so much of my time is monopolized administering state-required tests to small groups or individuals. The time spent administering tests is time taken away from our students, time when we should be teaching and they should be learning.

By the way, these 8 year-old newcomer students were required to take standardized tests within the first few weeks of arriving in the U.S. These tests included the OELPS test, the Ohio State Math Tests parts 1 and 2, and the English Language Arts Tests parts 1 and 2. They were required to take these tests not knowing any English and having just come from rather traumatic experiences in their home countries. This was their welcome to American schools.

The current testing requirements are stifling the ability of educators and families to make decisions that are best for each individual student. It is important to make data-based decisions for our students. However, the current 3rd Grade Guarantee takes away our ability to use data in conjunction with many other factors that tell the story of a student's progress.

We must also be careful that the data we use is accurate. When tests are inequitable and developmentally inappropriate, it is not a valid measure of a student's reading ability. For the Ohio State Tests, students have 90 minutes for each ELA test. A 9 year old must focus for 90 minutes. A 9 year old must compose a multi-paragraph essay on a topic that might be brand new to them. A 9 year old must do all this under the pressure of knowing that if they fail, they will not get to move on to 4th grade with their friends.

It is essential that education policies benefit our students and further their literacy development. The 3rd Grade Reading Guarantee is detrimental to that. We must reduce the number of tests our students are required to take, and we must allow educators and families the ability to make decisions that are best for each individual student. Hopefully this information has been insightful in understanding why HB 117 is necessary. Reduce the number of tests. Remove the retention requirement. And provide safe harbor for our current third grade students.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.