



May 2, 2023
House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
HB 117 Proponent Testimony
Presented by Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and Committee members thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 117 which would no longer require that third graders be retained based on their third-grade English Language Arts assessment score. I am Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT). OFT represents teachers in traditional and charter schools, support staff, higher education faculty and staff, social workers, library employees, and other public employees across Ohio.

As a library media specialist, I have always valued literacy and found pleasure in connecting students with books. I have seen struggling readers transform when they have the right books put into their hands and are given the interventions they need to make the words make sense. I have also seen students start to think of themselves as failures and give up when they can't keep up with their peers and are held back. While retention might sometimes be the best path for a student, it should be a decision that is made by educators, in consultation with parents, rather than based on a test score. Removing the retention requirement and adding more years of intervention, as proposed in this bill, and providing resources to support teachers in the science of reading techniques, as proposed in the budget, will have a more positive long-term impact on students than the current retention policy.

Under the current retention policy, Ohio averages more than 3,600 third graders held back for failing the test each year. Only 15% of those third graders who repeated the grade were deemed proficient in reading after a year, and only 8% were considered proficient by the time they were in fourth grade. Now those students must face the adverse harm caused by retention.

According to a November 2022 EdWeek article, research by Shane Jimerson from the University of California Santa Barbara, who looked at twenty studies published between 1990 and 1999, found that the studies "fail to demonstrate that grade retention provides greater benefits to students with academic or adjustment difficulties than does promotion to the next grade." In fact many of the retained students had worse academic performance and social-emotional outcomes than students who were not.

The same article also states that researchers at Texas A&M University and the University of North Texas evaluated 22 studies published between 1990 and 2007 in a 2009 meta-analysis. They also did not find positive impacts either and concluded that "these results provide little support for proponents of grade retention."

In addition to not having a positive impact, a study cited in a 2018 article in the Journal of Educational Psychology found that retention increases the odds that a student will drop out before receiving a high school diploma. The negative effect of retention was strongest for African American and Hispanic girls.

We hope similar language in the House passed budget stays. However, if it doesn't stay in the Senate budget, OFT supports the passage of HB 117, as it did a similar bill in the last General Assembly that overwhelmingly passed the House. I welcome any questions, you may have.