

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

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

**My name is Heidi Berardinis. I am a Third Grade English/Language Arts Teacher at Wayne Local Schools.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 117. This bill will eliminate mandatory student retention under the Third Grade Guarantee. I firmly believe that high-stakes decisions about students should not be made based on a single test score. HB 117 allows educators and parents to determine the best course of action for our students.

I have had to enforce the third grade reading guarantee. It is a very uncomfortable position to put regular classroom teachers in with little gain for students.

First, analyzing if students are on track or not at the start of every school year based on one score on one day, is not a positive way to start our partnership with parents. I have had many parents become angry just for placing them on a Reading Intervention and Monitoring Plan. This puts the parents on the defensive, angry, and anxious about their child, which then has a negative influence on the third grader. It is all focusing on one test on one day. True educators will take kids wherever they are and help them learn and grow in the year while they are with us.

I have taught third grade for 28 years. Since the establishment of the Third Grade Guarantee, all we have been doing is teaching to the test. It is the dirty secret in education that we aren't supposed to admit to, but unless we want four extra classes of third graders every year, and if we don't want to be put on the hot spot by the administration about our scores, teaching to the test is what we do!

Also, in order to make us look successful, we give alternative tests to get every kid to pass one way or the other. Some students have sat with me on the first day of summer vacation for the administration of the Terra Nova, and have had to read the test orally to me in order for them to pass the test.

In short, with all laws there are loopholes. We have found them and will continue to use them, because retaining a student over one test on two days is not fair to a nine year old. This law is not creating stronger readers. This test only causes stress, teaching to the test, and disharmony between the teacher and the parents.

The tests are also developmentally inappropriate. Making a kid sit quietly and stare at a computer screen for 90 minutes is overwhelming. It is creating a negative attitude towards reading. Many students start off trying to read the first passage, and then become overwhelmed and just start clicking buttons in order to be finished. They are also required to type a multi-paragraph essay, so now the reading test has become a writing and typing test.

I always note how long my students have spent on the test, so that when parents question why their child can have an A or B in my class, but have failed the third grade test and are in jeopardy of failing the third grade. I can let the parent know that it is not necessarily their child's reading skills, but their attention to the task, their ability to navigate the testing site, and their ability to type an essay on a computer. During our fall administration the average time spent was 41 minutes of the 90 minutes allotted.

After taking the fall test, they feel defeated and it is only October. Then when you are told in December that you might be separated from your friends next year they feel anxious and scared. Research shows that students' mental health can impact their academic performance. Our state is contributing to their stress and anxiety.

When some parents hear that their child may be retained they go off the deep end. They often request an IEP. When a parent makes this request we are by law required to meet and discuss their child's progress. Oftentimes, the classroom teacher's data shows that they are making progress and that their child would not qualify for an IEP. This is not a good use of our resources.

We do need to identify students early in their school career that need assistance with literacy. We need to reach the caregivers of children from birth to Preschool population with modeling and opportunities for early literacy. We need to continue Title 1 reading services into the upper elementary grades to help children improve their reading skills without experiencing the shame and embarrassment of being held back from their peer group.

You really should get on the Ohio Department of Education's website and take a practice test yourself. Then, think about how we are asking eight and nine year olds to do this year after year!! All we are doing is creating a generation of students that have lost their willingness to learn, because it is all about the test. We wonder why America is so far behind in education.

Once again, thank you for the chance to provide my thoughts. I urge support of this important bill and do what is best for our students in Ohio.