



**House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
House Bill 117 Proponent Testimony
Buckeye Association of School Administrators
Ohio Association of School Business Officials
Ohio School Boards Association
Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators
May 9, 2023**

Good afternoon, Chairman Bird Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of House Bill (HB) 117. My name is Barbara Shaner, representing the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators. Joining me for this testimony is Katie Johnson with the Ohio Association of School Business Officials, Jennifer Hogue of the Ohio School Boards Association and Paul Imhoff from the Buckeye Association of School Administrators.

As you know, our organizations represent public school district superintendents, treasurers/CFOs, business managers and other school business officials, boards of education, and elementary school principals from around the state. HB 117 proposes a positive change for many young students, and on behalf of our members, we wish to thank Representatives Manning and Robinson for introducing the bill.

HB 117 removes the legal mandate under the Third Grade Reading Guarantee (TGRG), that third grade students be retained if they do not achieve the required score on the third grade English language arts assessment. We believe this is a positive step that is in the best interest of students.

The bill does not remove school districts' obligation to provide the necessary instruction, intervention and remediation services to students reading below grade level. However, the bill recognizes that holding a third grader back regardless of the wishes of the parents and the professional view of the teacher, has the potential to set that student up for future failure. Under current law, parents have no choice in the matter.

Opponents of the elimination of the TGRG mandatory retaining provision have asked for assurances that schools be accountable for making sure students will learn to read. They've expressed fears that without the statewide mandate to retain students who fail the third grade test, the result will be the social promotion of students with no incentive for schools to do better.

HB 117 ensures that students will not be socially promoted and forgotten. While we believe school leaders and educators are already laser focused on helping students succeed in reading, the bill requires that provisions from the TGRG, such as the requirement for Reading Improvement and Monitoring Plans for students identified as reading below grade level, will stay with struggling readers at least through fifth grade. The bill extends the focus on phonics and other evidence based teaching tools beyond third grade.

Our members have pointed out they believe the new dyslexia laws that are currently in the implementation process will have a positive impact on student achievement in reading. We agree. Further, Substitute HB 33, the proposed biennial budget bill, includes significant changes for Ohio around the Science of Reading. Those changes will serve to set up a system which will strengthen the goals of the TGRG. This coupled with the elimination of the mandate to retain struggling third graders will provide the flexibility needed for educators and parents to do the right thing for students. Individual students will receive services and support tailored to their specific needs.

Ohio law has helped to make significant progress in meeting the needs of struggling readers. HB 117 continues that progress and ensures that parents are included. Requirements would not be relaxed with HB 117's removal of the mandate to retain third graders. While it may be necessary to hold back a student based on other factors, retaining a student based on a high stakes test appears to be a punishment rather than a solution.

We have appreciated the flexibility afforded districts by the legislature during the last three school years. It has allowed educators, school leaders, and parents to decide what was best for students on a case-by-case basis as to whether or not to promote students to the fourth grade. This flexibility would be continued through HB 117, giving those closest to the children the ability to make decisions based on what is best for them.

We urge the committee to approve HB 117 as a positive step for students across Ohio. This concludes our testimony. We will be happy to address your questions.