

Thank you, Chair Bird, for the opportunity to share testimony today regarding House Bill 117.

My name is Carrie Sanchez.

Last year I presented testimony on behalf of HB 497 and my emphatic support for eliminating the retention provision of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee.

I am the president for the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators.

I am an Adjunct Instructor for the Graduate School of Teaching and Learning at Bowling Green State University.

In 2019 I received the Debra Kasak National Distinguished Leadership Award for Excellence in Educational Leadership.

I had the honor of serving as the principal of Port Clinton Middle School, in Port Clinton, Ohio for 13 years. A school in Ohio that has been named and redesignated as a National Forum School to Watch as well as a National Model School by the International Center for Leadership in Education.

I am now the Director of Leadership and Learning for the North Point Educational Service Center where I now serve, lead and coach educators and administrators in 24 districts.

I know education.

I know teaching and learning.

I know students.

House Bill 117 is addressing the retention clause of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee and that is the focus of my testimony today.

Teaching and Learning is about helping students become productive citizens of society. Martin Luther King, Jr wrote: The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society.

I understand the original thinking behind the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. I genuinely do. In many school districts across Ohio, third grade is a bridge between primary and intermediate school. For lawmakers, this then may seem like a logical time to identify academic deficiencies. This may seem like the ideal time to “fix” something “before it’s too late”. I want you to understand that I am not completely opposed to the fundamental idea of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. As an educator, I have devoted my life to helping children succeed. But I would like to take a

deeper dive with you into what the Third Grade Reading Guarantee has turned into ~ from the perspective of a veteran educator and school leader.

When students enter Third Grade they have been students in formal education for approximately 540 academic instructional days. That is assuming they have not been sick, or no one in their family has been sick, or there has not been a residence relocation, or a divorce, or other trauma. 540 academic instructional days is the absolute BEST case scenario before they participate in the Third Grade Reading Guarantee assessment. And also, as a side note, this 'best case scenario' also includes that mom had adequate prenatal care, the child was properly nurtured as an infant and toddler and entered kindergarten having successfully participated in a preschool program where he/she learned all of their letters and colors, were potty trained and knew how to functionally socialize with peers.

No one comes to school wanting to struggle. No one comes to school wanting to fail. Especially when they are 8 or 9 years old. If a child is struggling academically, should we punish them or help them? Is retention a punishment? Adults can try to rationalize this ~ but what does an 8 or 9 year old think to be true if he or she is retained? Retention is education inflicted trauma to students. It is punitive. Retention is punishment to a child.

I sat down with some third grade students when preparing to talk with you last spring. They were fantastic and I think you will enjoy some of their insight and I think their thoughts are worthy of sharing again..

I asked a group of students: What do you like about school? Their responses included "I like everything about science" and "reading and math" and "learning cursive" and "fun stuff" They were also very honest and included "lunch" and "recess" and "seeing my friends". When I asked them about what they did NOT like about school, I was pretty surprised that the majority of students said "nothing!" Then one smaller voice stated firmly "I don't like when school gets frustrating or stressful." I thought that was pretty great insight from a student who is now 9 years old.

My final question to these children was "What should schools do if students are NOT learning what they are supposed to be learning?" There was a TREMENDOUS amount of advice from these young students so I will only share a few highlights. "Schools should ask kids why they are not learning, the reasons might surprise them" and "Schools should teach parents how to help

their kids, because parents don't know how to be teachers" (that is very interesting) and finally, my favorite response came from a little girl with big tousled blonde curls and wide brown eyes "Maybe schools could ask the kids who DID learn why they did - and maybe those kids could help the other kids and the teachers in different or new ways."

There is no one in education who is opposed to high expectations and challenging students and growing learners and holding schools accountable. Retaining 8 or 9 year old children does not solve any of the issues surrounding learning deficiencies. Repeating the same grade level and hoping for different results is the definition of insanity. If a child has not met the expected achievement level, he or she has not failed, the adults in their lives have failed them. The research is prevalent ~ students who are retained in elementary school and middle school are more likely to drop out of high school, more likely to have low-self esteem, more likely to have poor peer relationships and develop negative attitudes toward school in general.

HB 117 does not change any of the provisions of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee that require school districts to identify struggling readers and help them to succeed. It does remove the punitive, harmful requirement that third grade students be retained. Decisions about retaining students should be made on a case-by-case basis by the parents, the teacher and the school administration and it should be rooted in a myriad of data and information ~ NOT the results of a standardized assessment.

This concludes my written testimony. I urge you to support HB 117. I apologize for not being physically present for today's hearings, however I welcome further discussion with you and your convenience. I can be reached at: [csanchez@npesc.org](mailto:csanchez@npesc.org) or 419-341-5245.