

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 on Senate Bill 168. My name is Dr. Mary Heather Munger, here today representing the Ohio Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (OACTE). I am also an associate professor at the University of Findlay; I've spent over 30 years in the field of education. With me today are two students from the University of Findlay, Emma White and Landyn Dotson.

OACTE's testimony as an opponent today is focused squarely on two provisions of the legislation and not on the larger body of policy changes in the bill. OACTE understands the challenges faced by schools to address the educator shortage and wants to be a supportive partner with them and with the General Assembly to ensure both high-quality and properly trained professionals are educating our children. In fact, there are several provisions of SB 168 that OACTE and its members are in support of, including the new provision that creates a one-year out-of-state educator license. This will ease the ability for teachers to return to Ohio who went to college elsewhere and for experienced teachers to move to Ohio.

OACTE is opposed to the provision in SB 168 that allows schools to employ an unlicensed individual as a teacher if they have a master's degree, complete an exam in the area in which they will teach, and complete 15 hours of coursework every five years. Teachers need specific pedagogical knowledge and skills to perform their duties. Lowering standards for the teaching profession when students are already struggling is not in their best interest or the best interest of the profession. While experience in any field is valuable, it cannot replace the research and standards-driven curricula used in institutions of higher education to prepare educators for students in our schools. Research repeatedly reveals the value of this training.

OACTE is also opposed to lowering the standards for several licenses for educators and administrators. Educators and leaders in these positions need specific and advanced knowledge and skills to perform their duties. While experience in any field is valuable, it cannot replace the research and standards-driven curricula used in institutions of higher education to prepare leaders in these positions. Research repeatedly reveals the value of this training. While it might seem that these items make the path to employment simpler, we believe they will decrease the expertise and knowledge expected of experienced teachers and administrators and complicate the shortage issue rather than help.

Rather than triaging the current shortage, we believe a renewed focus should be given to two new areas to better address the root cause of the shortage: (1) bringing new educators

into the pipeline and (2) incentivizing currently licensed teachers to both stay in the field and return to work if they have left before retirement.

According to data from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, there were more than 43,000 individuals in the 2021-22 school year with active teaching credentials in Ohio (excluding substitute licenses) who were not employed in a public school as a teacher or other staff member. The teacher shortage problem is not the result of too few licensed individuals, but rather the result of a multifaceted issue that requires a multifaceted solution. Teachers who completed university-based teacher-prep programs had a 24% higher retention rate than those who went through alternate-route programs. Moreover, despite growing enrollment, the number of students completing non-IHE alternative certification programs declined by 10 percent from the academic year 2010-11 to 2018- 19, illustrating that the expansion of this sector has not alleviated the United States' teacher shortage. Research indicates compensation, unreasonable expectations, and an inability to protect their own well-being were cited as the top reasons teachers leave the profession.

To address specific shortages, we propose an alternative path forward based on the shared expertise of professionals in the field who think together about the needs of students and districts in Ohio. We recommend that legislators assist with the following:

- Support pathways to robust preparation and credentialing
- Financially support those who seek to fill positions temporarily to complete proper credentialing in a reasonable timeframe through an educator preparation program
- Continue and deepen the state's investment in scholarship funding for high school students who commit to the teaching profession
- Provide no-interest loans to individuals who would pursue teaching and advanced professional certificates in high-need areas and become employed
- Increase the minimum salary for all Ohio teachers
- Establish a guaranteed minimum career ladder to provide basic equity across the state
- Allow teachers with expired licenses to continue working while demonstrating progress toward license renewal
- Invest in mental health support services for teachers and students
- Increase school safety by providing grants, incentives, and model programs to districts to address issues related to this topic
- Foster supportive work environments by articulating the value and professionalism of our teacher workforce

By focusing on improving working conditions, providing competitive compensation, and enhancing professional development opportunities, we can address the educator shortage issues and ensure that all educators serving Ohio students are well prepared. We strongly encourage lawmakers to champion policies that prioritize investments in education rather than considering measures that may lessen the requirements for becoming an educator.

We would like to thank Senator Reynolds for her willingness to work with our association on this legislation, and we look forward to working with her and the General Assembly on this critical issue.

I will now turn the floor over to Lauren Dotson, who will speak to how the Science of Reading Efforts are impacted by this legislation, and then to Emma White who will address the legislation's potential impact on dual licensure programming.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for your time and attention.