

Katie Baker
Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee
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Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and fellow Members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today related to acceleration of learning for Ohio's students. I come before you today as a parent of two young boys, but also as a professional in the area of mathematics intervention.

For years, Ohio's legislature has been debating the topic of educational proficiency. As far back as 2012, the state adopted the Third Grade Reading Guarantee Law which was aimed at ensuring all students are able to read at proficient levels by the end of their third grade year. We now know that the law fell short of the positive impact we had hoped for. Prior to the pandemic, the reading achievement of Ohio's fourth graders remained stagnant.

A major component of the law focuses on mandatory retention for any third grader who does not meet the promotion score on at least one standardized test during their third grade year. To put it bluntly, kids in Ohio are held back with the goal of catching up.

If we stop and think about that idea for a moment, we might realize the shortcomings of that plan. Our system holds back kids who were already behind, thus denying them access to 4th grade content, while their peers continue on to the next grade. Ultimately, while well intended, we created a structure in Ohio's schools that perpetuates the achievement gap.

There has been significant conversation and research regarding the effectiveness of a remediation approach such as this, versus an approach aimed at accelerating the learning growth of students. Remediation and Learning Acceleration are not the same, as the approaches used in each model are vastly opposite. Many states across the country have published research and guidance on learning acceleration, yet unfortunately Ohio hasn't made this shift. Moving forward, we must realize that in order to catch kids up, we can't withhold access to grade level standards. We must instead be able to diagnose and address any unfinished learning that directly relates to the current academic content standard of that particular grade level and subject area.

When providing interventions in an acceleration model, we need to focus on a "just in time" diagnosis of a student's understanding and determine how that relates to a learning progression. We then understand where a child's current understanding relates to the grade level standard. Explicit and targeted interventions are designed to provide the student with additional opportunity to build skills and understanding so that they have greater access to the

grade level work. These interventions are systematic and cumulative as they follow a specifically designed learning progression aimed at ensuring the student will continue to make progress toward grade level mastery.

In short, Remediation is a mistaken belief that a student must master all previous learning before they are able to learn grade level material. Our interventions should always keep the grade level learning expectation in mind as the goal. Learning Acceleration allows the student to build immediate foundational skills that directly relate to the current grade level learning.

Our Ohio Learning Standards are designed for such work and intervention related to acceleration of growth. The standards connect and build upon each other to ensure that prior knowledge can be utilized to support new learning.

We can utilize an acceleration approach in both literacy and mathematics that will support all students, regardless of race, color, ethnicity or economic status.

There has also been significant brain research that has impacted what we know to be true about learning. Specifically, we know that students who are learning new information must make connections to previous knowledge. The more connections they can make, the stronger and more likely they will be able to retain and recall the information at a later time when needed. Thus, as an education system, we also have to shift our lens to diagnosing strengths in kids, or what they do know as compared to what they are lacking. Students are not able to connect new learning to something they do not already know.

As this committee begins to dig into House Bill 33, I want to draw your attention to an amendment that was added which focuses on removing mandatory retention within the Third Grade Reading Guarantee law. If we want to ensure that Ohio's students are able to make progress toward mastering grade level standards, then Ohio's students must learn within an education system that promotes acceleration of learning over remediation.

The pandemic has provided an amazing opportunity for Ohio to reflect and reevaluate the way in which we support students. As a mom and professional, I ask that you support the amendment and that it remains in House Bill 33.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions at this time.

Thanks,

Katie Baker

