



May 3, 2023

**House Constitutional Resolutions Committee
HB33 Testimony on Literacy Concerns**

Presented by Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Education Committee, I am Melissa Cropper, President of the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT). OFT represents teachers in traditional and charter schools, support staff, higher education faculty and staff, social workers, library employees, and other public employees across the state of Ohio. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss with you the literacy components of the Budget Bill.

I want to be very clear in stating up front that OFT supports and appreciates Governor DeWine's focus on literacy, the emphasis on the science of reading, and the Governor's proposed resources for professional development and curriculum resources. AFT, our national union, has long been a proponent of the science of reading and has offered professional development for at least the past twenty years. As educators, we believe that it is important to understand the research, follow the science, update our teaching skills, and provide the best teaching possible to our students. We understand the critical importance of having a solid foundation in reading and want our students to be successful. The unilateral rollout of this policy by Governor DeWine was a missed opportunity to bring educator's voices to the table. This would have allowed this policy change to be a collaborative effort rather than yet another political mandate imposed on educators without input or respect for our professional expertise.

We do have some concerns that we want to elevate and work with you to address. They are as follows:

- **Reduction in funding to subsidize the cost for school districts, community schools, and STEM schools to purchase high-quality core curriculum and instructional materials in English language arts and evidence-based reading intervention programs.** The House reduced Governor DeWine's proposal of \$64 million to \$44 million. Part of the problem is that there have not yet been any analyses done to determine how many districts will actually need to purchase new curriculum and materials; however, we do know that we cannot have a successful transition without the appropriate resources so it is imperative that enough money is appropriated to cover the costs.
- **Reduction in funding for professional development/stipends** - The House cut the Governor's proposed funding amount in half (\$43 million to \$21.5 million) and simultaneously reduced by half the stipend amount proposed for teachers. Professional development is essential to a successful transition. As of now, ODE has not yet determined how many hours will be required; however, we have heard estimates of 30-35 hours depending on a teacher's level of expertise. These are hours that will happen

outside of a teacher's workday and should be compensated at a rate comparable to a teacher's daily rate. In order for this to happen, the budget will need to provide districts with the funds for this compensation.

- **Banning instructional methods** - Already implicit in the language of this bill is the mandate for schools to use reading instruction methods that align with the science of reading. This is reinforced by the requirements to take professional development on the science of reading and buy curriculum and materials that align with that methodology. Banning other methods only adds a nuanced political element that creates anxiety and divisiveness in a situation where everyone should be pulling together. It says to the public that you do not trust teachers to use the best teaching methods possible even when they have been given the research and resources to do so. It puts the public "on guard" to be watching for their teachers to do something wrong. This is not the kind of tension we need in our classrooms especially at a time when such a high percentage of teachers are considering leaving the profession. Making a transition of this magnitude is already stressful enough. Teachers do not need the added element of distrust. Mississippi has been held up as the prime example of gains in reading that can be made by using the science of reading methods, yet Mississippi did not include a ban in their statutory language. Neither did most other states who have passed similar laws.
- **Requiring all teachers to take professional development in the science of reading** - We do not believe that it is a productive use of time for content area teachers at upper levels to take this professional development. Their continuing education needs to be in areas that will directly relate to their classroom instruction. Instead, we propose that funds be allocated for more specialists at the middle school and high school levels who can help students who are struggling with content area reading.
- **Literacy Coaches** - We fully support funding one hundred literacy coaches across the state; however we are concerned about losing high quality teachers to these positions. We strongly urge that these literacy coaches remain in their current districts when at all possible. We support that the coaches work at the direction of the Ohio Department of Education and have whatever qualifications and training determined appropriate; however, we request that these coaches remain employees of the districts where they currently are employed. As such, they are already familiar with the staff, students and culture of the district and can remain there as a resource to the district instead of creating another vacancy in a time of teacher shortages.

This concludes my testimony on the literacy portion of the budget. I am happy to answer any questions.