



# Jennifer L. Bindus

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Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify related to the importance of adopting the provision in HB 33 that removes mandatory retention from the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. Last December, I testified here in Committee as a classroom teacher of twenty-seven years with twenty-four of those years spent teaching third grade. My testimony centered around the idea that mandatory retention based on a single measure is wrong and how it, from a practitioner's point-of-view, affects teaching. I also stated that Ohio's educators can provide effective reading instruction, deliver targeted interventions and stay accountable to stakeholders without the threat of student retention. Today, I'd like to share more in-depth information that focuses on how schools can grow readers without the threat of retention. There are four main components that I'd like to address: using multiple measures over time, the need for multi-tiers of in-house support, effective Tier I instruction and the delivery of targeted interventions.

Instead of making a single assessment the benchmark, how Ohio uses the Ohio Grade Three English Language Arts assessment, school districts should be permitted to use multiple measures over time to effectively deliver and analyze the impact of instruction, interventions and student promotion. The school where I work administers nationally-normed assessments at least three times per year to assess students' vocabulary, comprehension, oral reading fluency and reading level. Every single data source used in-house can be analyzed immediately, even the same day, to inform instruction and determine interventions. Third-grade teachers could *possibly* use the Ohio test as an additional data point, but it is very challenging for the following reasons. First, scores are delivered to districts about two months after test administration, close to the end of the first semester or at the end of the school year. Second, teachers receive little information that helps to remediate students in specific skill areas. Teachers can tell if a student performed poorly, say, on the literary section, but that is a very broad area covering multiple standards. Does the student not understand characterization? Story structure? Using text evidence? Using vocabulary in context? Interpreting poetry? Comparing and contrasting two or more stories? It is very challenging for teachers to deliver targeted interventions, on a test that retains students, when teachers cannot tell what to specifically target. However, in-house assessments can drill down to identify exactly which part of a skill needs remediation, quickly and effectively.

Students can grow as readers when they have a strong system of in-house support. Ohio's dyslexia modules present the federal definition of Multi-Tiered System of Support, (MTSS), as "a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students' needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision-making". The goals of MTSS are prevention and intervention and offers a three-tiered model of support. Tier I holds core curriculum and instruction, Tier II offers an initial level of intervention and Tier III offers the most intensive form of intervention. Schools form a multidisciplinary team to support screening, intervention and results. For example, the school building where I work has two MTSS teams. The first is the multidisciplinary team made up of the following school professionals: classroom teachers, reading specialists, speech & language, occupational and physical therapists, coordinator of MTSS, school psychologist, district literacy coach, building administration and assistant superintendent. This team gathers each November, January and March. Teachers submit names of students with whom they have concerns, the team discusses each student in-depth and analyzes current interventions for progress or recommends new ones. The second MTSS team is a smaller version of the first which is used for short check-in meetings in October, December and February. Meeting with the MTSS team affords teachers, and ultimately students, the opportunity to implement interventions over time and the chance to analyze expected growth. With such a massive team of school professionals supporting teachers, little goes unnoticed - even circumstances that may be beyond our control as school professionals.

A strong Tier I, or daily classroom instruction, should account for most students meeting grade level expectations without the need for additional intervention. For example, I deliver whole group, small group and individualized instruction on a daily basis. The most significant part of my reading block is devoted to meeting with small groups of students. Based on school-wide assessments, in-class screeners, formative and summative assessments and my own observations, I'll group my students in as many as three different configurations that meet multiple times per week. I hold phonics, strategy, intervention and leveled reading groups. The groups are fluid as students are able to move in and out as performance necessitates. This allows me to deliver the instruction each child needs to grow as a reader and intervene when appropriate. Overall, multiple measures across time will analyze if my instruction and interventions are working, or if specific students need to meet with me more often and/or with greater intensity.

There are times when classroom instruction and intervention are not enough for readers. The school's MTSS team would be called on to support teachers and students as they work through potential recommendations for Tier II and/or Tier III intervention services. In the school where I work, Tier II and Tier III services take place with specialists from outside of the classroom and are in addition to interventions delivered by classroom teachers. The interventions are targeted, explicit and systematic and students are regularly progress monitored. Results of progress monitoring are then analyzed after a set amount of time and the next steps are identified. The student may have closed learning gaps or may continue to need intervention. There may even be reasons for retention, but this should be done only with a school and family consensus and with the use of multiple data points. The end goal of both classroom instruction and intervention is the same: to ensure student success in mastering grade level expectations.

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to highlight the importance of adopting the provision that removes mandatory retention from the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. I'd like to close by reassuring you that students can make growth in reading through using multiple measures over time, multi-tiers of support, effective Tier I instruction and explicit interventions - not the threat of retention. I urge you to take a deeper look within Ohio's schools to see that educators are providing effective instruction and targeted interventions for struggling readers. Students are making growth and perhaps could make more gains given additional time and resources from lawmakers. Please help school districts obtain resources such as early literacy development, professional development for teachers, literacy coaching, intervention supports and extended school year opportunities as well as helping to coordinate wrap-around services instead of imposing negative consequences for factors that may be out of their control. It was my honor to speak before Committee today, Chair Brenner, and I thank you again for this opportunity. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.