

Senate Education Committee  
House Bill 33 Proponent Testimony  
Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators  
May 10, 2023

Submitted by: Scott Emery, Director of Elementary Education, New Albany-Plain Local Schools

Good afternoon Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share my views in support of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee changes proposed in Substitute House Bill 33, which would no longer require that third graders be retained based on their English-Language Arts assessment score.

My name is Scott Emery, and I am the Director of Elementary Education for the New Albany-Plain Local School District in Franklin County. This is my 31st year as a public educator in Ohio, and my 26th year as an administrator, including serving as an elementary principal for the Dublin City Schools, Granville Exempted Village Schools, Gahanna-Jefferson Public Schools, as well as my current district, New Albany-Plain Local Schools.

I proudly display my great great grandfather's Ohio teaching certificate in my office. It is the original document from 1886 that allowed him to teach the boys and girls of Marion County. His charge was straightforward -- teach reading so his students could comprehend the Bible, teach math to help keep the family farm running, and teach writing so the students could correspond with distant loved ones.

I realize our scope has expanded, and rightfully so, from the one room schoolhouses in our state from over a hundred years ago. But I've never forgotten why my great great grandfather's neighbors made the shared sacrifice to pool their collective resources together to hire a teacher. They believed a trained professional could do the important work to teach the core academics needed for their children to become educated citizens for the common good of their community, their state, and their country.

I share this background because I want you to know that I strongly value the teaching and learning of reading as part of my heritage as an Ohio educator. I also value and accept the accountability that comes with being a professional that parents trust to educate their children.

I was an elementary school principal in 1997 when Governor Taft enacted the Fourth Grade Reading Guarantee law. While I appreciated the intent of the law, which was to ensure students were reading at grade level, I worried at the time the accountability of the law was being misdirected at the children as opposed to the adults being trusted to teach reading.

Fortunately, Governor Taft and the Ohio General Assembly revisited the requirement that fourth grade students be retained based on state test scores before the Reading Guarantee went into effect. You now have the opportunity to revisit the current Third Grade Reading Guarantee law to decide if retaining students based on test scores is an appropriate accountability measure.

With the Third Grade Reading Guarantee waivers you graciously allowed us during the pandemic, I witnessed the same intensity of supporting at-risk students with interventions, but without the stress on

eight and nine year old children feeling as though they are going to be held back in third grade. Unfortunately, with the Reading Guarantee back in effect this school year, I have again witnessed the same stress on the students this year.

There is much for our state leaders to be proud of in regard to literacy. You have created a consistent system across the state for reading diagnostic testing and reading improvement plans, as well as parental notification requirements for those students not reading at grade level. These processes start in the earliest months of kindergarten.

You have passed legislation that requires professional development for teachers to support children who struggle with reading due to dyslexia.

You passed a revision to our Local Report Cards that requires the adult educators in schools and districts to be held accountable to our communities for early literacy success through a five star rating system.

I am not asking for any of these items to be revisited. These laws are focused on adults and our responsibilities to teach children to read successfully. It is strictly the required retention component for third grade students that is based on test scores that I respectfully request you reconsider.

Substitute House Bill 33 will address this concern. In addition, the bill allows students retained in third grade for the 2023-2024 school year based solely on the Reading Guarantee to be promoted to the fourth grade. This aspect of Substitute House Bill 33 would support this year's third grade students who were impacted by House Bill 497 not reaching the Senate in the last session.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to address your questions.