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Senate Education Committee

Testimony on Senate Bill 162

Lisa A. Gray, Ohio Excels
October 24, 2023

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 162 (SB 162). My name is Lisa Gray, and I am the President of Ohio Excels. We are a non-partisan, non-profit organization created by leaders of Ohio's business community who are committed to helping improve educational outcomes for Ohio's students and ensuring that all K-12 schools prepare students for success in the next step of their lives, whether it is higher education, the military, or the workforce.

This committee has debated reading interventions for our youngest students at great length over the past few years. While Ohio Excels still supports retention as an intervention, the newest test data and research on student outcomes requires us to expand our scope to include grades above third and mathematics.

Vladimir Kogan, a researcher at Ohio State, conducted [an analysis](#) on student test scores in a report he released a few weeks ago. He compared the test scores from the most recent school year to pre-pandemic scores. While the research shows English language arts scores are approaching pre-pandemic levels in many districts, math scores are still significantly behind, especially in the middle grades.

This is why we strongly support SB 162. Starting next school year, SB 162 would require that all public schools provide evidence-based academic intervention services, free of cost and aligned to core instruction, to all students scoring at the lowest performance level on state tests: Limited. This applies to students in any tested grade and both English language arts and mathematics.

Schools can provide these services directly or through a contracted vendor. Schools have the flexibility to provide a wide variety of interventions, including tutoring and additional instruction time. Schools can customize the interventions to the student's needs and school's context. However, SB 162 wisely requires that any reading interventions be aligned to the science of reading. The bill also requires schools to notify parents that their children

need extra support, inform parents what that support will be, and share with parents how they can help their children improve.

Another strength of the bill is the department review process. Each year, the Department of Education and Workforce will review the intervention programs of a small, random sample of schools. This will allow the department to identify and highlight schools that are making great progress or employing innovative strategies. The review can also help schools that are not making progress through specific recommendations from intervention experts working with the department.

The Governor and General Assembly made historic investments in literacy through the state budget, including aligned instructional materials, literacy coaches, professional development, and a commitment to using the strategies associated with the science of reading. The General Assembly also directed \$26.1 million in GEER funds to support the implementation of high dosage tutoring programs. We see this bill is an opportunity to continue that momentum and to help more students accelerate their learning in the wake of the pandemic.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 162, and we encourage the committee to support this bill as well. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.