

**Senate Finance Committee
House Bill 33
Proponent Testimony
Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators**

May 31, 2023

Good afternoon,

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee changes proposed in Substitute House Bill (Sub. HB) 33. My name is Julie Lather, representing the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators (OAESA). I am a member of OAESA, district liaison to OAESA, a former ESB member, and a principal at Olentangy Local School District. I have been an educator for 35 years serving as an administrator for over half of those years.

OAESA represents elementary school principals from around the state. I am testifying today on behalf of my OAESA colleagues to show support for some important education policy changes proposed in Sub. HB 33. The 3GG law provided the requirement but not the funds, resources, or instructional framework to obtain the ultimate goal--all students reading by the end of third grade. The dyslexia law emphasized what is considered high quality and research-based instruction. This legislation allowed school districts to utilize their funding for the resources that matter in Kindergarten, 1, 2, and 3 grades.

There are three themes that I will address in my testimony: 1-high-quality research-based reading instruction, 2-student well-being, and 3-research on retention. On a positive note, the 3GG law has brought focus to high-quality, research-based instruction in reading to the forefront. Students are tracked with a Reading Improvement Monitoring Plan (RIMP), supported with interventions, and assessed for growth. These practices are good teaching and should be employed. However, the piece of the legislation that should be reconsidered is the requirement to retain students in third grade.

First, it is the responsibility of the educators in Ohio to provide high-quality reading instruction for all students. If we truly have effective reading instruction, then students are provided research-based interventions, progress monitored using research-based assessments, and given adequate time to build foundational reading skills. The dyslexia law emphasized what is considered high quality, research-based instruction. Using this framework, elementary teachers are receiving professional development in the Science of Reading and students are reaping the benefits of effective instructional intervention strategies. In addition, parents are involved in conversations at the beginning of a child's educational journey allowing for collaboration between home and school. The collaboration makes parents an active part of the

process rather than a spectator on the sidelines. Furthermore, the dialogue may uncover external factors that are playing a part in a student's success.

A second factor is the well-being of the student who is required to be retained in third grade. The retention requirement causes undue stress on students, parents, and educators. Specifically, it increases anxiety in 8- and 9-year-old children. Society agrees that mental well-being is important and poor mental health contributes to other big problems. Every day that students are threatened with retention due to test performance is a day that further deteriorates the mental health of our vulnerable students.

Third, research on retention does not support it as an effective intervention. Retention could be helpful for one year. However, in subsequent years, it does not appear to close the gap. Retention is a misplaced consequence on the child rather than the district.

“Critics...contend that retention leads to lower levels of student self-esteem, more negative attitudes toward school, and difficulties adjusting to new peer groups. They note that some children report feeling embarrassed about being separated from their same-age peers and are often stigmatized by teachers and parents as failing (Intercultural Development Research Association, 2018; Mariano et al. 2018; Lynch, 2017; Özek, 2014; Rose & Schimke, 2012; West, 2012; Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011).”

Districts will need to strongly consider what funding is going toward high-quality resources for the teaching of early reading skills as well as the assessment and progress monitoring tool used to ensure growth is observed and instruction is effective. Funding tied to this plan will hold districts, not students, accountable.

Furthermore, the Ohio Department of Education states, “A successful language and literacy framework is built on five interrelated components—teacher capacity, shared leadership, multi-tiered systems of support, parent partnerships and community collaboration” (ODE, 2023).

The Science of Reading is the convergence of evidence from multiple scientific fields that describe reading, reading acquisition, assessment and intervention. Includes the Cognitive, Neuroscience, Linguistics, and Education Research. It is a body of evidence from research. It is not a program or philosophy or something we do. It informs structured literacy. We use the science to check our practice.

Word recognition and language comprehension are both necessary for reading comprehension. Structured literacy includes evidence-based elements and evidence-based principles that together yield effective reading instruction that is diagnostic, systematic, cumulative, and explicit (Cowan, 2016).

Orton-Gillingham is an example of a structured literacy program that uses a multisensory approach. Olentangy Schools is an accredited Orton-Gillingham Training Program by the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators.

In conclusion, the answer to the question, “What can provide the outcome of a student’s’ reading success without the need to penalize the student? I strongly believe the answer is providing early intervention when the opportunity presents itself and the time is ripe for change. Then, *before* the window for growth closes and that child is penalized, we guide the student’s journey in a positive direction to reading success. The tough conversations and challenging logistics of possible retention for a student takes away time from focusing, providing, and implementing the necessary support.

Ohio law has helped to make significant progress in meeting the needs of struggling readers. Sub. HB 33 continues that progress and ensures that parents are included.

We urge the committee to approve these positive education policy provisions in Sub. HB 33 as a positive step for students across Ohio.

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