



# Jennifer L. Bindus

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Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance 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. My name is Jennifer Bindus and I am honored to stand before you in my greatest roles: wife, mom, classroom teacher, and a champion for all children. I've spent most of my twenty-seven years in the classroom with third graders; twenty-four of those years to be exact. I've had the privilege of calling over 1,400 students, "my kids". During the months of August to May, there is no place I'd rather be than in Room 5 at Leighton Elementary School in Aurora, Ohio. You might say that it's my home away from home and those who know me well, know I'd not have it any other way.

This is my fifth trip to the Statehouse to testify as a proponent for removing mandatory retention. I've been to the House and Senate Education Committees twice each and held individual meetings with House and Senate members. My prior testimony told my story, from a practicing teacher's point-of-view, of the seemingly unintended consequences as well as the positive, lasting changes that have come from the Guarantee. My testimony called for lawmakers to see 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 explain to you how Ohio's schools can grow readers without the threat of retention. There are four main areas 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. I'd also like to highlight what students and teachers will gain if the mandatory retention clause is removed.

The first area I'd like to discuss is the absolute need for using multiple measures over time. Instead of making a single assessment the benchmark, as in 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 that can be challenging. 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.

The second area that is necessary for student growth in reading is a strong system of in-house support, currently known as Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) in school districts. Ohio's dyslexia training modules present the federal definition of 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.

The third area needed for reading growth is a strong Tier I, or daily classroom instruction. This should account for most students meeting grade level expectations without the need for additional intervention. For example, my Tier I consists of 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 Tier I instruction and interventions are working, or if specific students need to meet with me more often and/or with greater intensity.

Finally, I'd like to discuss the next steps for when Tier I classroom instruction and intervention are not enough for some 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 Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to highlight the importance of removing the mandatory retention from the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. Although this provision calls for the removal of the mandatory retention clause, it puts much more in place. In short, schools must extend "Reading Improvement and Monitoring Plans" and intervention services through fifth grade. The State Board must prescribe

standards for the teaching of phonics through fifth grade and also must provide in-service training programs for teachers on the use of phonics as a technique in the teaching of reading. 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. Students do not effectively grow as readers through 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 Dolan, and I thank you again for this opportunity. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.