Hannah Elhard

3rd Grade Teacher, Columbus Ohio

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Testimony on BILL [19]

Chair Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony today on SB19. My name is Hannah Elhard and I am here because I am an elementary school teacher in Ohio who would be directly impacted by this bill's passage.

This is my twelfth year teaching elementary school. I've taught Kindergarten, 2nd grade and 3rd. This year, I'm a proud 3rd grade educator in the largest district in Ohio. I previously served as my school's math lead teacher for many years. Last year, 65% of my students scored proficient or above on the third-grade math OST, which was significantly the district and state averages.

I'm glad we share a goal of improving Math achievement for Ohio's children. Math is my favorite subject to teach, and I believe it deserves far more attention than it currently receives in elementary classrooms. The concerns that motivated this legislation are real, and I appreciate your effort to address them.

However, based on my experience in the classroom, I do not believe math improvement monitoring plans will meaningfully improve math outcomes for students.

My primary concern is how these plans would apply in practice in elementary math, particularly at the beginning of the school year.

In reading, if a third-grade student begins the year testing at a second-grade level, that appropriately triggers a reading improvement plan. Reading skills build in a relatively continuous progression.

Math does not work the same way.

In third grade, students are introduced to entirely new concepts they have never learned before, including multiplication, division, and several other new domains. Because of

that, it is very common—and completely appropriate—for students entering third grade to initially test at a second-grade level in math. That does not necessarily indicate that the student is behind. It often simply means they have not yet been taught the third-grade material.

In my own classroom, when I see a student enter third grade testing around a second-grade level in math, that is not automatically a concern to me as a teacher with more than a decade of experience teaching the subject. It usually indicates a student who is ready to learn new third-grade material that they have not yet encountered.

However, if the same type of cutoff score used for reading plans is applied to math, many of those students would automatically be placed on math improvement monitoring plans simply because they have not yet learned the new content. In practice, this could result in a large percentage of students being placed on monitoring plans even when they do not need intervention.

When large numbers of students qualify for monitoring plans, teachers must spend significant time completing documentation and compliance paperwork. That time does not improve instruction. Instead, it reduces the time teachers have to plan lessons, analyze student work, collaborate with colleagues, and provide the targeted instruction that actually helps students improve in math.

Another challenge we face is misalignment between curriculum pacing and state testing. Math domains assessed on the state test are often not taught until after testing occurs due to the curriculum schedule. As a result, students may be assessed on material they have not yet been taught, which can artificially lower scores and does not accurately reflect student ability or instructional effectiveness.

Research consistently shows that strong math instruction depends on teachers collaborating in professional learning communities, often referred to as PLCs. In such settings we get to analyze student work, discuss instructional strategies, and adjust teaching based on what students need. However, much of the professional development we currently receive focuses on implementing curriculum as an exact script rather than examining student thinking or improving instructional strategies. High-quality math instruction requires flexibility, professional judgment, and collaboration among teachers.

If the goal is improving math outcomes across the state, policies that support teachers' instructional capacity would likely have a greater impact. Here are a few suggestions: increasing dedicated instructional time for math in elementary grades, providing protected time for teachers to collaborate and analyze student work, and offering professional development focused on strengthening math pedagogy rather than curriculum compliance.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to reconsider whether math improvement monitoring plans would meaningfully improve math outcomes for students and to focus instead on policies that strengthen math instruction itself.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to improving education for Ohio's students. Thank you also for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have. I'm also happy to meet individually or with the committee at a later date. Thank you again for the opportunity and for your commitment to our students.

Hannah Elhard

3rd grade teacher, hmelhard@gmail.com