

Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee

Testimony on House Bill 497

March 29, 2022

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

I would like to express my gratitude to Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robison and members of the Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee for the opportunity to share my views on House Bill 497, 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 30th year as a public educator in Ohio, and my 25th 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 sacrificed 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 successful 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 others 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. Through House Bill 497, 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 have graciously allowed us in recent years, I have seen 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.

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 also passed legislation that will require professional development for teachers next year to support children who struggle with reading due to dyslexia.

You recently passed a revision to our Local Report Cards that will require 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. Your support of HB 497 will address this concern.

Thank you for your time.