



---

*The OEA will lead the way for continuous improvement of public education while advocating for members and the learners they serve.*

**Senate Bill 21: Proponent Testimony**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
**Wednesday, February 27, 2013**

Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Hite, Ranking Member Sawyer and members of the Committee,

My name is Randy Flora. I serve as Director of Education Policy Research and Member Advocacy for the Ohio Education Association. On behalf of our 121,000 members, I want to thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 21. All of our members want their students to succeed, and the Third Grade Reading Guarantee is a worthy goal. However, our members have raised many concerns about the teacher qualification aspects of the law. We believe that Senate Bill 21, as introduced, is an important step in addressing these qualifications. Additionally, we have a number of suggestions to improve the bill by adding more flexibility. Such flexibility is needed to assist our teachers and schools in meeting the needs of students with regards to the Third Grade Reading Guarantee.

Since the passage of Senate Bill 316 and House Bill 555, the OEA has been receiving numerous questions and concerns regarding the implementation of the requirements by which licensed, experienced teachers must evidence the qualifications to teach in the program. We would like to first offer our support to Senate Bill 21 that seeks to eliminate the requirement that teachers be “actively engaged in the reading instruction of students for the previous three years,” which is linked to each of the options currently provided for in Ohio Revised Code section 3313.608. That would permit a person who has just earned a reading endorsement to qualify, for example. Based on member feedback, the OEA believes that additional changes should be made to the teacher qualifications in order to ease the transition for teachers and school districts. We offer the following suggestions for your consideration:

- Making it possible for experienced teachers who have satisfactorily taught reading for the previous three years to meet the requirement. This would take into account the experience and expertise these teachers possess and would add no cost or additional time for the teacher or the school district. This determination could be made at the local level based on evidence of teacher and student success.
- Retaining for the 2014-2015 school year and thereafter the qualification that allows the teacher to demonstrate in the 2013-2014 school year, “evidence of a credential earned from a list of scientifically research-based reading instruction programs approved by the department.” This would allow for more teachers to qualify, which would build school district capacity.



- Including a Master's in Literacy as counting towards the qualification. It appears in the latest guidance from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) that a Master's in Literacy would count. Confirmation of this from the Ohio Department of Education is needed.
- Enabling the Ohio Department of Education to provide training similar to that which was offered during the early years of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to permit special education teachers to meet the Highly Qualified Teacher qualifications. Similar training for teachers would create more flexibility toward implementing the Third Grade Reading Guarantee.
- Requiring ODE to provide the test to assess a teacher's knowledge and skills in the area of reading instruction and intervention earlier than Spring of 2014. Making it possible for teachers to qualify sooner through testing would benefit them and their students.

Additionally, the OEA requests clarification on how a rating of "above value-added" for the last two school years would be calculated for lower grade levels, since there currently are no state value-added assessments available for grades K-3. The OEA does not support the creation of a new battery of standardized tests, especially for children in these early grades.

Finally, the OEA remains extremely concerned about the lack of funding for the implementation of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. As policy makers continually "raise the bar," we also must ensure that our schools, students, and teachers are provided with the resources they need to meet these standards. As the General Assembly crafts the biennial budget, we believe this issue must be addressed.

Chair Lehner, this concludes my testimony. Thank you for listening. We look forward to working with you and the members of the committee on this issue. I would be happy to answer questions.