

## **History of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee** **April 2, 2013**

The Third Grade Reading Guarantee was proposed by Governor Kasich and passed last year in **Senate Bill 316**. At that time, OEA testified that if we wanted to make a serious effort to help all children read at grade level, Ohio should direct funds to provide access to early childhood programs, universal all-day, every day Kindergarten and smaller class sizes. Research tells us that these are proven methods in the effort to increase reading capabilities of students and overall student achievement. However, the legislature still passed the Third Grade Reading Guarantee with a requirement that students who need remediation in reading, or who are retained in the third grade, must have a teacher who meets the following requirements:

- Receive a passing score on a rigorous set of principles and reading instruction, or
- Possess a teaching license that contains a reading endorsement

After this language was passed, many education stakeholders, including OEA, voiced concerns regarding the prescriptive language.

Fast forward a couple months, legislators in the Ohio Senate made changes to the guarantee at the last minute in **House Bill 555**, the report card bill, to include more options. No testimony or input on these changes was permitted before the vote. This bill was passed the week before the 129th General Assembly concluded its work (“lame duck session”). **The changes required a teacher to have been actively engaged in the reading instruction of students for the previous three school years in addition to meeting at least one of the following options:**

- Hold a reading endorsement and pass the corresponding test
- Have a Master's degree in reading (the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) has clarified that a Master's in Literacy would also count)
- Demonstrate evidence of a credential earned from a list of research-based reading instruction programs approved by the Ohio Department of Education (to be released in April 2013)
- Have a rating of "above value added" most effective in reading as determined by ODE for the last two school years
- Pass a rigorous test of principles of scientifically-based reading instruction approved by ODE (not yet developed)

While the qualifications provided additional flexibility, they were wrought with problems, including that the teacher must have been actively engaged in reading instruction the previous three years, cost, time, no value-added data available for the lower grade levels and the list and test yet to be developed.

This brings us to **Senate Bill 21** sponsored by Senate Education Committee Chair Peggy Lehner which provides additional flexibility to teachers in meeting the requirements. SB 21 makes the following changes:

- Removes the requirement that teachers be “actively engaged in the reading instruction of students for the previous three years.”
- Removes the qualification that the teacher is rated “above value-added” in reading. This is replaced with “the teacher is an effective reading instructor as determined by criteria established by the Department.”
- Clarifies the qualification option that the teacher has completed a program included on a list of scientifically research-based reading instruction programs. This option qualifies for the 2013-14 school year and each year thereafter. Previously this provision required a credential, which may have excluded some programs and only applied to next school year.
- Clarifies that if a district cannot furnish the number of teachers who satisfy one or more of the qualifications to work with third grade students during the 2013-14 school year, a waiver will be granted upon passage of a resolution by the local school board and submitted to the Department of Education. The department may not reject the plan.
- Adds an emergency clause to the bill so that it will become law when and if passed by the House and signed by the Governor.

OEA does support Senate Bill 21 because it allows for additional flexibility for teachers to meet the qualifications instead of SB 316 which only provided two options. During the week of March 18, 2013, the OEA sent a Legislative Watch to members as an update on the interpretation by Chair Lehner in her sponsor testimony in House Education Committee of the original intent of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee to only apply to teachers who teach third grade (SB 21 makes that change).

Senate Bill 21 is currently pending hearings in the House Education Committee. The House has signaled some reluctance to move the bill forward. Therefore, it is critical that OEA members who care about the Third Grade Reading Guarantee contact their member of the House to encourage them to pass the bill and send it to the Governor for his signature. If members are interested in testifying in the House Education Committee, they should contact Julie Parsley in Government Relations at [parsley@ohea.org](mailto:parsley@ohea.org).

Given the political reality in Columbus – Governor Kasich in office and Republican super-majorities in both chambers of the Ohio legislature – the Third Grade Reading Guarantee is here to stay. The best the OEA can do is fight to make it better for our members and our students. We must be clear that all of the negative legislation introduced and passed over the last three years has come from the Kasich administration and Republican legislators in the legislature – Senate Bill 5, dramatic cuts of \$1.8 billion to public education in the current budget (HB 153), valued-added in teacher evaluations, expansion of vouchers and charters and the Third Grade Reading Guarantee. **Who we elect matters.** This is why it is so critical for OEA members to become engaged in the debate, become politically active and work to elect pro-public education government officeholders in the future.