

**Prepared Notes for Board Meeting**  
**Third Grade Reading Guarantee**  
**September 24, 2012**  
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Something very sad is happening here this evening. What we have here is essentially the death of local control of public education in the state of Ohio. One can argue that it died a long time ago and indeed, I've been saying for years that local control of public education is a myth, but nothing has served to bring that point home than the policy we are about to pass.

In a way, it's unfortunate, this passing of local control. In a recent Fallon Research poll, Ohioans were asked which group they would have the most trust and confidence in to make good decisions. A strong 63.9% majority said that they had the most trust and confidence in local school boards vs. 6.6% for the Governor and 3.3% for the legislature.

Essentially, we are nothing more than agents of the state, from which we derive the power to set local education policy and from which said power can be removed at any time under any conditions for any reason, or for no reason. If ever there was a decision that cried out for local control, mandatory retention of third graders is it.

There will come a time in next few years that an 8 year old boy or girl, for whatever reason, does not hit the magic cut score despite our attempts at intervention over the years. That child, like all children, will be a unique individual with a unique situation. Currently, in a quality school district such as ours, the child's parents, teacher, principal, maybe some intervention specialists and who knows who else may get together and discuss what can be done to help this child. Maybe they'll conclude that retention is the best strategy in this unique case for this unique child but maybe they won't. Maybe the child is already big for her age and our experts, with their decades of training and education and experience will conclude that she would look out of place having to repeat 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, so we'll opt for a different intervention because we've analyzed that unique situation. Maybe the child's parents sought professional help for an emotional problem and those experts tell us that retention would be devastating. Maybe, just maybe, the policy we are approving tonight is going to ruin someone's life. It can happen, you know. It's not hyperbole. Some studies suggest a correlation between retention with the possible resulting social stigma and a failure to succeed in high school.

I am not reflexively against retention. I've read the Brookings study and the Florida results along with other research on both sides of the issue. Clearly, retention has its place. What I am against is a state mandate that removes the decision to retain from the people closest to the situation and places it in the hands of bureaucrats who have never and will never meet the unique child.

I am going to vote for this policy because the state says I have to, or, more correctly, it says we need to have a policy in place. George was kind enough to modify it so those people affected know that our Board has no discretion in this area. That said, I am going to continue to work with the legislature to modify the law such that school districts such as ours with the resources and motivation to stage effective interventions be granted flexibility to consider the unique needs of the unique child. Recent discussions have given me hope that such modifications are possible. Once again, I thank the room for their indulgence.