

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
November 5, 2022

Media Contact:  
Adam Hughes  
203-906-9161  
adam@socm.org

### **Knox County Parents, Teachers, and Community Members to Hold Press Conference Supporting Board of Education Resolution on Third-Grade Retention Law**

**WHEN:** November 7, 2022, 4pm EST

**WHERE:** Market Square, Knoxville

**[KNOX COUNTY, TN]** – On Monday, November 7<sup>th</sup> at 4:00pm EST, parents, teachers, and concerned community members will gather for a press conference supporting a Board of Education resolution, prepared by Fourth District Board Member Katherine Bike, that calls on the Tennessee General Assembly to allow school districts to make retention decisions for third- and fourth-grade students. The resolution would ask that the General Assembly amend TCA 49-6-3115, a state law that goes into effect this year that requires all third graders who do not pass a single standardized reading test to be held back and repeat third grade. The press conference is being organized as part of a statewide campaign by [Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment \(SOCM\)](#), and two or more board members may be in attendance, but no deliberation will take place. Following the press conference, attendees will attend the Board's scheduled work session to support the resolution.

Board Member Katherine Bike said, "We need to put this energy into the learning environment. We can create amazing opportunities for all children to be successful with literacy, and to identify students that need support."

While this law may be rooted in good intentions, those who work with students day in and day out have significant concerns. There has been overwhelming pushback from educators, parents and school administrators. Over [380 letters from concerned parents and educators](#) have been sent to state representatives, [local school boards have passed resolutions](#) asking for amendments to the law, and [a petition](#) started by a Hamilton County teacher and parent has drawn almost 2300 signatures. A few of the main concerns raised are outlined below:

- Remediation should be determined by the student's overall performance, along with the recommendation of their teachers; a child's fate should NOT be determined by a single test.
- 2021 statistics suggest that statewide, 50-60% of 3rd and/or 4th graders could be held back and forced to repeat 3rd or 4th grade with this new law. Our buildings, teachers, staff, students and tight budgets of local school districts cannot sustain this.
- Retention alone, especially by third grade, does not improve student outcomes. There is no data to support this law.

- We need policies and funding that actually address student academic, social and emotional needs, not a single high stakes, standardized test.
- Summer school has been proposed as a way for 3rd graders who don't pass the test to get a second chance. However, school districts have not been given funding or a concrete plan for what this would look like. Furthermore, there is no evidence showing that a few weeks of summer school will have a significant impact on test results.

Candace Bannister, retired Knox County elementary teacher, said, "As a retired second, third, and fourth grade elementary school teacher, I have very serious concerns about the Third Grade Retention Law. Currently, across the state of Tennessee, only 2% of our students are retained per year, and with good reason. This law goes into effect this school year and will require 50-60% of our third graders to be retained based on their score on just one section of a single standardized Reading/Language Arts test which they are taking for the very first time. This decision will be made without teacher and parent input. This is wrong for students. We must act on behalf of our youngest learners to revise this retention law. We must support our students' learning with interventions and adequate staffing to meet their needs. We must impress upon our legislators the need to modify this law to allow school districts to use valid information to make decisions for individual students."

Board Member Katherine Bike's resolution cites findings from the National Association of School Psychologists that retention laws can have adverse effects on students with disabilities and at-risk students. It also cites examples from other states that allow alternative knowledge assessments, based on school district data, to support student promotion for students who may be prepared for promotion but may not perform well on standardized tests. Monday's work session will give Board of Education members the opportunity to discuss the resolution and hear from concerned community members. The resolution will be voted on at the scheduled Board meeting on Wednesday, November 9.

#####