



## Defiance College Testimony on the Science of Reading May 21, 2024

Good morning, Chair Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the House Higher Education Committee. My name is Dr. Carla Higgins, and I am the Director of Education and an Associate Professor at Defiance College. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Science of Reading.

I would like to provide you with my background. I have been an educator for 26 years. I began my career teaching third grade in the same building where I later became a Literacy Coordinator. In that position I coached teachers in the classroom and provided professional development for teachers in grades K through nine heavily focused on reading, but inclusive of all areas of English Language arts. During that time I also provided professional development literacy for several districts in Central Ohio and taught courses for the Summer Institute for Reading Intervention sponsored by the Ohio Department of Education. In 2011, I earned my Ph.D. in Teacher Education and Literacy and began teaching reading and language arts coursework at the Ohio State University at Newark until 2015 when I made the move to Defiance College. I have just completed my ninth year as the Director of Teacher Education. In my time as the Director, my colleagues and I have developed several new programs, redesigned the structure of our clinical experiences, and completed a successful accreditation site visit. I have provided professional development for the Northwest Ohio Educational Services Center, and have consulted with several school districts in the northwest Ohio area in literacy instruction.

To provide you with background about our program faculty, in 2021 we had six full-time faculty members, including myself. At the end of the 2021- 2022 academic year, three faculty members left DC. We were able to replace them, but at the end of 2023 we lost another faculty member, and, for various reasons, we have not been able to replace her. Among those faculty who left, two were responsible for teaching the bulk of our literacy coursework. We were able to hire two part-time faculty in 2022 and 2023 so we now have four faculty members qualified to teach the courses. Since 2022, those faculty members have completed more than 300 hours of training or coursework in the science of reading and dyslexia.

The Defiance College Teacher Educator Program offers three licensure programs most relevant to today's hearing - those that require a 12-hour reading core - our PK-5 Primary, Middle

Childhood and K-12 Intervention Specialist Mild to Moderate programs. Our Adolescent to Young Adult Integrated Language Arts, Integrated Mathematics, Integrated Social Studies, Life Science and Life Science and Chemistry programs have a 3-hour reading requirement. We maintain approval for all of our teacher licensure programs through the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE), and we are fully accredited through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). In order to gain approval, all programs must be in compliance with ODHE's requirements which include all administrative rules codified within the Ohio Revised Code (ORC) Section 3333.048 educator preparation; Metrics and programs which address the science of reading and Section 3333.049 regarding reading endorsement programs; instruction in computer science. In my nine years at DC, we have had to make several major curricular changes due to new standards and state and federal requirements. We have become quite efficient with these processes.

My colleagues and I recently submitted our newest program for approval to ODHE, our PK-5 Primary program in fall of 2022 which included the 12-hour reading core aligned to the Ohio reading standards that were current at the time. In December of 2023, ODHE published the most recent standards to include the Science of Reading content. We have updated our courses to align with the new components of those standards as we prepare for a full review of our licensure programs in preparation for our next National accreditation site visit in the Fall of 2026. Our next steps are to revise documents that follow our faculty governance process such as program requirements and course descriptions in our catalog and on our website.

As my colleagues and I have worked to ensure alignment and to embed the new reading standards in our coursework, it should be noted that the bulk of the science of reading research is not new research for our institution. Gough and Tunmer's Simple View of Reading, Ehri's Phases of Word Recognition and Seidenberg & McClelland's Four-Part Processing Model of Word Recognition have been part of the larger body of reading literature since the late 80's and Scarborough's Reading Rope since 2001. Because we have always stayed abreast of research, our beliefs about effective literacy instruction have been grounded in this existing research, much of which is now part of the body of SoR research. Phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension have always been the foundation of what we teach in our reading coursework.

In Ohio, the requirement for a stand-alone course in phonics has been in place for over 20 years. The content of this course has always included the continuum of the development of all systems including orthography, phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and discourse, and it is currently aligned with the Ohio's 12-hour Reading and Literacy Core Standards. In addition to our phonics course, our remaining five courses are aligned with Ohio's 12-hour Reading and Literacy Core Standards which include content in foundational literacy knowledge, phonological

awareness, phonics/word recognition, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, writing, assessment and data-based instruction and high-quality instructional materials. We believe these courses “are designed with a primary focus of improving literacy instruction and providing PreK-12 students with the knowledge and skills they need to become competent readers. Alignment with these standards ensures that teachers understand Science of Reading research and are prepared to implement evidence-based practices for the betterment of our schools and communities” (ODHE, 2023).

The data we currently use to determine the efficacy of our instruction include the Ohio Assessments for Educators (OAE) licensure assessments, our edTPA assessment task scores and some components of our CPAST evaluation tool used in student teaching. We use evaluation metrics we receive from ODHE on our completers as well as survey data from completers and employers. Over the past academic year, we piloted a key assessment in our reading methods courses during this academic year and will be reviewing data from those assessments this summer in order to fully implement the assessment during the 2024-25 academic year.

In addition to work we are doing with our courses, we are currently revising the Memorandum of Understanding we have with all of our partner school districts to include language from ORC 3333.048 A4 requiring students in the relevant licensure areas be placed with mentor teachers who have been trained in SoR.

As is required by all entities to whom we are accountable, we review all aspects of our program on a continuous basis and make improvements we believe will be effective. Our goal is always to ensure our candidates have the best possible chance of fulfilling the requirements to obtain licensure and employment. We have always and will continue to use current research that supports effective instruction and will continue to ensure that our candidates can do the same.

Chair Young, I thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony today, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.