



Chairman Young, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Mary Heather Munger, and I am a faculty member at the University of Findlay. I am here to share the journey our university has undertaken to align our curriculum with the science of reading, and to emphasize the impact this has on our future educators and their students.

Before I begin explaining our journey, I'd like to share a story with you. The story features two Ohio school children; both bright kids, both raised in a home that nurtured language and both had parents that modeled positive reading habits. Both children had access to books that suited their interests, and both were regular fixtures at their local libraries. Both kids were engaged with wordplay regularly at a young age, and both had parents who fully understood the importance of providing a solid foundation for future reading skills. Both attended schools that were held in high regard in their communities and beyond. Perhaps most important to this story is that both children had at least one parent who was trained to teach reading. Given all these factors, these kids were on track to hit the ground running when it came to literacy.

Let's look at their trajectories.

The first child struggled every step of the way when it came to reading and spelling. The child was a hard worker and was conscientious about following through with his teacher's directions. He didn't complain when he was taken away from his friends to spend extra time with a tutor or when he was asked to sit through hours of testing. He diligently completed his homework and wanted nothing more than to unlock the code that he was able to see his classmates doing with, what seemed like to him - little effort. Imagine the frustration of the parent who had invested time and money in training to help with just such a scenario and found that she was unable to do so. Fortunately, this child went on to do well in school, but it was incredibly hard work for him and his family. He was able to improve his literacy skills with help outside of his regular school day, which took time from his hobbies and friends, financial resources from his parents, and slowly built up equal parts rage and curiosity as to why the progress seen outside of school wasn't being built upon inside the school. This child is now an adult. He currently holds a master's degree and owns his own business. With incredible support and an innate work ethic made of steel, this kiddo made it. Sadly, we all know children who are not so fortunate.

The other child did hit the ground running the second she stepped foot in school. As soon as she was given assessments to measure her reading skills, she scored well above her grade level. She read voraciously and traveled the world while never leaving the living room chair. She learned anything she wanted to learn and excelled in every academic subject put in front of her – largely due to her ability to read so well. Just recently, this child was selected as the top senior English student in her class of 416. I'm sure she will go on to open any door she wants because she has the keys – the keys to literacy.

It's important to illustrate the paths of these two children because they are why I am standing before you today. These are my children. When my son was hurting, I should have been able to help, and I couldn't. I tried everything I knew how to do at the time, and it made no difference. Of course, every child is unique and my kids are not carbon copies of each other. However... it is interesting to note that these two kids – raised in the same home by the same parents, and provided with the same opportunities – had one distinct difference in their stories – they went to schools that had vastly different approaches to teaching reading. After the stressful and difficult experience with my son's school, we decided to make a change and send our daughter somewhere else. I want to be careful not to paint the first school in a bad light. My son's teachers were wonderful. They supported him and did the best they knew how to do. However, every child in every school in Ohio should have access to teachers who understand how to teach every child how to read.

My personal experience with my son is what drove me to pursue a PhD and put myself in a position where I could help train teachers to do a better job. I committed myself to learning as much as I could about reading and learned much along the way that was not part of my own teacher preparation. This action on my part is what eventually landed me at the University of Findlay, where we've been working diligently to make sure our candidates are prepared to meet the needs of the diverse learners they will encounter.

In 2021, the University of Findlay College of Education embarked on a transformative journey supported by a grant from the Ohio Deans Compact. This grant was a pivotal first step, enabling us to begin revising our syllabi and acquiring materials grounded in the science of reading. We aim to ensure that our teacher candidates are not only familiar with the latest research but also equipped with practical strategies to teach reading effectively.

Through additional grants and ongoing professional development, we have continually bolstered our efforts. We have been fortunate to work with organizations such as Ohio's P-20 Literacy Collaborative and The Path Forward, supported by the Barksdale Reading Institute and The Hunt Institute. Alongside colleagues from other IHEs, we have shared best practices and identified key levers for change.

When I work on various projects with people from other states, I'm proud to be from Ohio, because people often comment on Ohio being known for its collaborative spirit, and this spirit has been crucial to our success. The P-20 Literacy Collaborative convenings have provided invaluable opportunities for higher education institutions and P-12 district leaders

to come together, discuss challenges, and leverage our collective impact. As the saying goes, "a rising tide lifts all ships," and we have seen this in action as we work together to improve literacy outcomes for all students. I'd like to extend a special thank you to Dr. Amy Murdoch and Dr. Laura Sailor, as well as their colleagues at Mount Saint Joseph's University for sharing syllabi and facilitating professional development events through their Center for Reading Science. While we each have an allegiance to our universities, we all understand how important it is for all of us to graduate highly skilled teachers, and we help each other with this endeavor whenever we can.

Reading is a complex issue, influenced by a myriad of variables. But within this complexity lies a critical piece we can address: the preparation of our teachers. At the University of Findlay, we have dedicated ourselves to this mission. As a small university, we have the advantage of being nimble and responsive. We quickly began revising our syllabi to incorporate the latest science of reading research, built up our teacher resource center with high-quality, aligned materials and expanded our field experiences. In our campus hometown of Findlay, we regularly engage with our Findlay City School partners to get feedback about our graduates and share resources. We even made a special library card for teachers at FCS who were interested in checking out materials from our teacher Resource Center, which is typically only for student use. Our reading faculty regularly attends professional development sessions and engage with each other about research and book studies. We work to support each other both inside our university and beyond.

Our efforts are bearing fruit. We see our teacher candidates graduating with a robust understanding of how to teach reading, equipped with the confidence and knowledge to make a difference in their classrooms. They are prepared to help children lift words from the page, understand the nuances of various texts, build strong vocabularies, and read with fluency and comprehension. These skills are not just academic—they set the stage for the rest of a child's life.

I'd like to share three quotes from UF students regarding their perceptions of their preparation in reading (edited for clarity):

Sophomore:

Throughout my time at the University of Findlay, I have been prepared with many tools regarding the teaching of reading. I have been able to provide students with instruction using structured literacy and have seen firsthand the growth that the students have made in a very limited timeframe.

Graduate:

The University of Findlay gave me a very solid foundation on how to teach reading, as well as the knowledge of how children learn to read. Our professors are up to date on teaching the science of reading/structured literacy. This was very insightful upon coming into my

teaching career as many of my colleagues were taught Balanced Literacy in their collegiate programs. I feel UF gave me the knowledge I needed to come prepared to teach my students and also to help my colleagues understand this "new" way of teaching reading.

Graduate: (Currently a volunteer missionary teacher in Belize)

Upon leaving university, many say it is difficult to feel confident in the profession as a first-year teacher – and rightly so! However, because of my experience at the University of Findlay, in the area of teaching reading, I knew I was adequately prepared. I also knew that there was much to learn, yet I was comforted by the arsenal of trusted resources that my professors equipped us with. For the past year, I have been teaching at a college in Belize, Central America. In addition to teaching classes, I also have one-on-one and small group sessions with our students who struggle with reading. Most of our students have Spanish as a first language and their world has been a confusing mixture of English and Spanish. Because of this, they have a competency in both languages, but a mastery of neither. The materials are difficult, such as Aristotle, Socrates, and other Great Thinkers. Through my education at UF, I am able to use evidence-based practices to scaffold this material and make it accessible to these students.

In addition to my work at the high school (...) we continue to do remedial work each week using Orton Gillingham. (...) The tutoring that is integrated into one of the courses (at UF) gave me the confidence to replicate this instruction in Belize. I (also) recently created a summer plan for a student who has a learning disability. After observing her in the classroom and working with her to identify her needs, I was able to create a few goals to work on throughout the summer. I also gave her reliable resources that I could trust because of my own education.

I can't thank the professors and the program at the University of Findlay enough for making this possible!

In conclusion, we are proud of the strides we have made at the University of Findlay. We still have work to do, but all strong organizations embrace continuous improvement. Our commitment to aligning our curriculum with the science of reading is a testament to our dedication to preparing effective, knowledgeable teachers. We are grateful for the support of the Ohio Deans Compact, The P-20 Literacy Collaborative, and our other partners in this endeavor. Together, we are making a difference, one teacher at a time.

Thank you for your attention and support in this critical effort. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.