

## Testimony Before the House Higher Education Committee

Dr. Anna DeJarnette  
Director of the School of Education  
University of Cincinnati

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Chair Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the House Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today about teacher preparation at the University of Cincinnati and how we have aligned our work with the state's commitment to the Science of Reading. I am Dr. Anna DeJarnette. I am the Director of the School of Education at the University of Cincinnati, and I am an Associate Professor of Math Education. Our School is part of the College of Education, Criminal Justice, Human Services, and Information Technology, which was originally founded as the College for Teachers in 1905. Teacher preparation is a core component of our mission as a School and as a College, and we are proud to serve students and teachers in Ohio in this way.

I appreciate the chance to share the work of our faculty to ensure teachers are prepared to teach children in Ohio to read. The University of Cincinnati offers four undergraduate teacher licensure programs—in Elementary Education, Middle Childhood Education, Secondary Education, and Special Education—as well as a graduate certificate program in connection to the state's reading endorsement. In spring 2024, we graduated 190 teacher candidates. As of fall 2024, we will have 880 students enrolled across our undergraduate licensure programs. Eighty-seven percent of our teacher candidates are Ohio residents, and they represent 57 Ohio counties, including Hamilton, Warren, Butler, Clermont, Franklin, and Cuyahoga Counties. We regularly partner with over 50 public school districts, in addition to educational centers, preschools, and independent or Catholic schools, to provide field experiences for our teacher candidates. These field partners include urban districts such as Cincinnati City Schools; suburban districts such as Loveland City Schools; and rural districts such as West Clermont Local Schools.

Preparing teacher candidates to teach reading is a collaborative effort among our grade-level and content-area faculty and our literacy faculty. Like other Ohio institutions, we have long been accountable to the Reading and Literacy Core Standards set forth by the Ohio Department of Higher Education. In recent years, faculty have revised our literacy curriculum to give increased emphasis to explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and writing. For example, students in those licensure programs take a 3-credit hour course on phonics theory and awareness as part of the 12-hour core. Passing rates among UC students on the Foundations of Reading assessment—taken by candidates in Elementary, Middle Childhood, and Special Education—have been slightly higher than the state average in each of the past five years. Programs review licensure exam data on an annual basis as part of our ongoing program assessment and improvement cycle to ensure effective instruction.

The most recent update to the Reading and Literacy Core standards was published last winter, and in Spring 2024 our faculty developed and began implementation of a year-long plan—funded by the Ohio Department of Higher Education—to ensure the alignment of our coursework and instruction with the revised standards. This is a cross-disciplinary effort to review and revise 16 courses taught within the School of Education. Faculty have developed a crosswalk to self-assess our coverage of the revised standards across our coursework and are making updates where necessary for the upcoming academic year. We have also established a common syllabus template – based on the syllabus model provided by the state of Ohio – that will be used in our literacy courses. The standardization of our syllabi will ensure consistency across courses. The content of our courses is aligned with the Reading and Literacy Core standards and with the state’s definition of the Science of Reading in House Bill 33.

Faculty are also developing their own knowledge and skill, including participating in a book study on the Science of Reading and working with expert consultants to review our curriculum. In spring 2024 I, and some of my colleagues, attended meetings with the Ohio Department of Higher Education to review metrics and processes for the audits of Institutions of Higher Education that will begin in January 2025. As these metrics become more widely available, they will become part of our program improvement cycle.

With respect to our field partners and mentor teachers, we have received support from the Ohio Department of Higher Education to communicate Science of Reading requirements with our mentor teachers and to document evidence of their professional development. We just received this funding at the start of June and have begun our efforts, starting with our elementary partners and expanding from there. In the informal conversations I have had with elementary-school teachers, I have been reminded that many of them completed professional development courses under the requirements of the Dyslexia Support Laws, which also qualify for the required training in the Science of Reading. Some teachers are electing to pursue continued training to satisfy continuing education requirements. Due to the sustained commitment of our partner schools and mentor teachers to improving literacy instruction, we are well positioned as a school to meet the requirement of field placements.

As we continue to update and improve our programs, we are proud to do our part to grow the education workforce pipeline in Ohio. Our school has adopted new strategies to open doors for potential teacher candidates that might not have pursued education as a profession otherwise. For example, we have partnered with districts to offer an introductory education course through the College Credit Plus program, so that high school students can earn early college credit at no cost to them. We have developed strong partnerships with local districts to employ the grow-your-own teacher model that is helping identify and attract more prospective students to our programs, including individuals from underrepresented backgrounds in the teaching profession. We have also allocated one-time funding to reduce the financial burden on current undergraduate students of the newly required pre-service teaching permit. As we scale our teacher licensure programs to

meet the needs of schools and students in Ohio, we remain committed to providing rigorous programs that prepare excellent teachers.

I am confident in the University of Cincinnati's ability to align with the revised standards and audit metrics. The state's commitment to the Science of Reading reflects an understanding of the depth of expertise necessary to teach reading well. Like many of my colleagues from other Ohio institutions have expressed, the transition to a PK-8 teaching license will create challenges to developing this expertise in teachers. The opportunity for teacher candidates to specialize in the developmental stages and disciplinary demands associated with the existing grade bands is part of what has helped our students become prepared, and remain engaged, in the work of teaching.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share the work of teacher preparation at the University of Cincinnati. I appreciate your commitment to supporting students and teachers in Ohio.