



House Higher Education Committee Testimony: Science of Reading
Amity Noltemeyer, PhD
Interim Dean, College of Education, Health, & Society
Miami University
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Chair Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller, and House Higher Education Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Amity Noltemeyer, and I am the Interim Dean of the College of Education, Health, and Society (EHS) at Miami University. Although I started in this role in January of this year, I am not new to Miami. I joined the faculty in 2010 and since then, I have held a variety of roles including Coordinator of the School Psychology program, Chair of the Department of Educational Psychology, and Associate Dean of the Graduate School. I also have experience working as a school psychologist in both Northeast and Southwest Ohio, and I am a past president of the Ohio School Psychologists Association. A life-long Ohio resident, I received my K-12 education at Winton Woods City School District, my bachelor's degree from Xavier University, my master's and educational specialist degrees from Miami University, and my doctoral degree from Kent State University.

Ensuring a high-quality education for all Ohioans is very important to me, and I would not be sitting here today were it not for the Ohio educators who helped me unlock the transformative power of literacy. In fact, literacy was one of the reasons I pursued a career in school psychology. I tutored for two years in an adult education center in Cincinnati through AmeriCorps. During my work with adults developing basic literacy skills, despite many of them attending some high school, I realized how early literacy sets a foundation for a lifetime of learning and success. Whether it was the skilled tradesperson who needed to be able to read work orders, or the grandparent who longed to read to their young grandchild, or the young mother who wanted to get her GED to get a better job and disrupt her family's cycle of poverty - over and over I wondered how our schools could have better served these students. As a school psychologist I fortunately had more opportunity to engage in early intervention efforts. However, as you have heard from earlier testimony, an unacceptable number of students in Ohio are still not reading proficiently.

Although this complex issue has a number of contributing factors, I believe that it is our responsibility to do what we can to empower every child to become a proficient reader. This includes preparing our future educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources to teach literacy using evidence-based approaches that align with the Science of Reading. At Miami University, we build upon a rich tradition and commitment to literacy in our college. In fact, the very building that we teach and learn in - McGuffey Hall - was named to honor William Holmes McGuffey, a Professor who developed the McGuffey Readers, which were widely used to teach generations of students. Fast forward to today, and as a result of our dedicated and talented faculty, staff, and students, our educator preparation programs at Miami University produce strong



educators who positively impact Ohio year after year. For example, our average pass rate on the Ohio Assessment for Educators' Reading Foundations assessment has exceeded the state average for at least the past five years. Furthermore, for teachers with licenses that became effective in years 2018-2021, a recent analysis conducted by researchers at our Discovery Center for Evaluation, Research, and Professional Learning indicated that the percentage of Miami graduates with a "Light Blue" value-added classification, indicating significant evidence of more student growth than expected, was higher than the statewide percentage in 2021-2022. Despite these and other positive indicators, we always strive to innovate and improve - not only for our students at Miami University but also for the millions of K-12 students our graduates impact across the state.

With the requirements of House Bill 33 as a recent additional motivator, and building upon our existing strengths, my team and I have initiated several additional efforts since I began in January to ensure the Science of Reading is systematically embedded in our educator preparation programs. I will share some highlights with you, chronologically, so you can understand our progress and our future vision for this work.

First, In January, we conducted an **audit of existing Science of Reading activities** across our college. I sent an email to EHS faculty, staff, and administrators involved in literacy preparation, asking them to share various curricular, research, grant, experiential learning, and community work we currently had in place related to the Science of Reading. This helped us begin to identify strengths, gaps, and future opportunities.

Shortly thereafter, in early February, I **convened a cross-departmental group of 12 EHS faculty, staff, and administrators involved in literacy instruction** to share updates on Science of Reading requirements, develop a more nuanced understanding of our strengths and areas of opportunity for improvement, and hear their ideas on potential short-term and long-term goals and next steps. As a result of the meeting, we identified a small group of faculty to pursue Ohio Department of Higher Education funding to support Science of Reading curricular alignment, which I will describe later in my testimony.

Colleagues and I also participated in a **meeting with Ohio education leaders** in mid-February. Five of us from Miami University met on Zoom with representatives from the Department of Higher Education, the Governor's Office, and the Department of Education and Workforce. We shared the progress we are making with Science of Reading at our university and heard from them about state resources, opportunities, and implementation advice.

Throughout the spring semester, we were also in the implementation phase of a project supported by an **Ohio Department of Higher Education Science of Reading Student Teacher Placement Grant**. Specifically, Miami University was funded \$19,000 by ODHE to partner with the Lakota Local School District to support placement of our student teachers with host teachers who are trained in Science of Reading. Dr. Molly Sawyer and Kara Conniff from the EHS Office of Clinical Placements and Field Experiences, are the Miami project leads and they have been working with the Lakota Local School District to ensure successful implementation. The project was



piloted in Spring 2024 with 5 Miami University student teachers and will continue through the next academic year with an additional 40 student teachers placed in Lakota. The students who participated in the spring semester attended five training sessions, alongside their host teachers, to better understand the Science of Reading. Preliminary data show that the students increased their knowledge of the Science of Reading from pre-test to post-test.

In late February, we also spent time reviewing our **ODHE Science of Reading Self-Assessment Results**. This Self-Assessment was completed in November and December 2023 by 10 of the 16 faculty identified by Miami to have taught literacy courses in our education preparation programs in the prior two years. Our overall self-assessment score was 1.98, which is below the state average of 2.27. I reviewed and shared the report with our relevant Department Chairs, 14 faculty and staff involved in literacy instruction, and our EHS leadership team. These chairs distributed the report to other faculty and staff in their departments and we discussed how to address areas of concern.

In early March, I also initiated and participated in a **discussion about Science of Reading metrics and audits**. This meeting involved the two relevant Department Chairs, our Director of Assessment and Accreditation, myself, and one of our Associate Deans. We discussed how we would monitor compliance to the Science of Reading metrics and ensure that our literacy core was adequately aligned to the new standards and all ODHE requirements. Following the meeting, and after the metrics were finalized, we created a tracking spreadsheet that could be used to assess implementation. This additional layer of monitoring builds upon the variety of assessment activities we are already engaged with for external accreditation and our university's full-cycle assessment process, and will allow us to effectively communicate our alignment with the Science of Reading requirements if we are audited.

Throughout the semester, we also convened several meetings to **clarify the role of the EHS Learning Lab** in our Science of Reading efforts. The EHS Learning Lab provides tutoring services (mainly virtual) to students, schools, and community partners throughout the Southwest Ohio region, and partners with faculty for tutoring projects, to enhance courses, and for research purposes. For literacy, all tutors are trained to implement the Science of Reading, using a Structured Literacy approach for phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary. I met several times with the EHS Learning Lab Director Dr. Michelle Cosmah and Coordinator Heather Grimes to discuss Science of Reading and the future of the Learning Lab, which we hope will play a role in improving and expanding student opportunities to apply Science of Reading skills. The Learning Lab has been grant-funded, most recently through the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, and therefore we are exploring options for sustaining this work and what it might look like next year and long-term as our current grant funding concludes.

Another exciting development involves the opportunity for students to engage in certified **Orton Gillingham training**, which prepares them to teach using an evidence-based structured literacy curriculum aligned with the Science of Reading.



Miami's Dr. Sarah Watt worked with the national Institute for Multi-Sensory Education (IMSE) to arrange an opportunity for students to receive the 30-hour Orton Gillingham Comprehensive Plus training for only the cost of materials, which the students will be able to keep, with no trainer fee. We advertised this course as an optional summer experience for current student teachers, dual pathway students, and inclusive special education majors. Thirty-three students enrolled, about half graduate students and half undergraduate students. We are looking into offering this opportunity again in the future and identifying other ways to establish partnerships that will allow our students to receive training or certification that closely aligns with what local school districts require for teachers in their buildings.

We are also building the capacity by offering opportunities for our faculty and staff **to be trained in Orton Gillingham**. Dr. Sarah Watt is certified herself and is in the process of becoming a certified trainer as well. Furthermore, our college and the Department of Teaching, Curriculum, and Educational Inquiry also co-funded Dr. Lena Lee to receive the Orton-Gillingham training this spring. Our college is committed to funding at least two additional faculty members next year to receive the training. Realizing that we also need to explore additional training options to serve more faculty, I met with several staff at the **State Support Team Region 13** in June, and they were more than willing to work with us on additional options for training and support this upcoming academic year.

All of the efforts described in my testimony thus far lay the groundwork for the Science of Reading education and represent a step in the right direction. An additional substantial part of our improvement efforts will take place this summer when the three faculty who applied for the ODHE curriculum alignment grant will make **extensive progress in our curriculum redesign**. We're grateful for the \$6,000 received from ODHE, and given the importance of the work, our college is matching that for a total of \$12,000. Part of that funding will go to a consultant from the Systems Development & Improvement Center at the University of Cincinnati, and the remainder will provide a summer salary for the three project leads.

The three leads each represent different program areas: Dr. Lena Lee serves as the Primary Education Program Coordinator; Dr. Michelle Cosmah teaches across Primary Education and the Graduate Literacy and Language Program and is the Director of the Learning Lab; and Dr. Sarah Watt is the Program Coordinator for the Graduate Special Education Licensure Program. Together, they will work across programs and departments to analyze current curricular crosswalks with the ODHE's criteria to identify gaps in our curriculum. Serving as liaisons to their respective programs, the Science of Reading team will **draft course-level and program-level revisions that are needed for us to be in compliance with the new requirements**, ensuring vertical and horizontal cohesion across programs and undergraduate and graduate offerings. Beyond addressing the standards, they will examine course textbooks, supplemental materials, and major assignments. In doing so, they will incorporate and align the Science of Reading standards and requirements with their programs' vision and mission, taking into consideration the culturally relevant perspectives on teaching and learning that are important to our college and departments. In addition to this



work, two other faculty recently revised courses in our Language and Literacy graduate program and our Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages Endorsement Certificate (TESOL) to align with the Science of Reading, and will collaborate with the grant team on any further alignment.

Consistent with our university's established shared governance processes, upon returning this Fall, faculty in the relevant departments will be invited to provide input to the initial work the group drafts over the summer. We will then work quickly across the university **to ensure approval and implementation by January 2025**. Of course, the work will not stop there, as we know that even the best evidence-based practices can fail without building capacity for effective implementation. Throughout the next academic year, I anticipate convening faculty who will teach our literacy courses to ensure they are adequately equipped and have the necessary professional development to teach the revised courses with fidelity. The consultant will also provide online modules for our faculty to complete and will help design a Community of Practice to support faculty development. We will also utilize resources through ODHE, the P20 Literacy Collaborative, and the State Support Team to support the onboarding of new instructors teaching our literacy courses. Additionally, we will refine and implement streamlined systems to engage in monitoring and continuous improvement.

Finally, I have been in contact with staff at the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), who indicated that we can resubmit materials through an interim review process for the Reading Foundations component of the NCTQ teacher preparation review. Once the curriculum revisions described above are complete, we intend to resubmit our syllabi and related materials, with the hope of earning a grade that more accurately reflects our work and efforts in this area.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. As I hope you have heard, Miami University is taking the new requirements seriously and we have made many strides in the past several months. We also recognize much hard work will follow this summer and fall, and we are committed to ensuring quality and success. We want our future educators to be equipped with the best tools and resources to effectively serve all student learners in Ohio. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.