



March 27, 2023

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The Ohio State University supports and applauds Governor Mike DeWine for his focus on early literacy. The university's goal is to continue to prepare the best teachers with strong backgrounds in literacy practices that are science-based and help all children, but particularly the most vulnerable and marginalized children. We look forward to partnering with the governor's initiative to make sure that Ohio's children are not only proficient but excel in reading.

Teacher graduates from Ohio State are well prepared to teach reading. In fact, teachers who graduate from Ohio State are not trained in any packaged, commercial program. Instead, like other teacher graduates in Ohio, they are trained in what's commonly called "the reading core." They learn about reading and writing development, reading processes, and instructional practices in alignment with the scientific research base on these topics. They study evidence-aligned content and pedagogical knowledge across areas such as the reading process, emergent literacy, phonics and word study, fluency and reading comprehension, oral language, multimodal writing, high-quality children's literature, evidence-based practices, literacy assessment, and assessment-instruction cycle/differentiation.

Current state law requires that every Ohio teacher education student complete, at a minimum, 12 hours of coursework in reading; one course alone must be devoted to phonics. We are confident that Ohio State's graduates are well prepared to teach reading. In addition to assessment measures used by Ohio State faculty, our students consistently perform well on the state's rigorous test of teacher content knowledge of reading. They have maintained a passing rate above 96% for the last three years; and in 2022, a remarkable 97% passed! Our teachers perform at that level year after year because they are well-prepared to teach reading.

The value of our teaching force was never so evident as with the release of 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress results for reading. Our National Report Card, coming on the heels of a pandemic, lockdowns, and interrupted schooling, showed the largest drop in reading achievement since the 1980s. It may very well be the most important natural experiment in our history – understanding what happens to students when we replace face-to-face, teacher-led instruction with computers and online learning. Their reading scores plummet. Make no mistake about it, teachers are vital to learning, and Ohio State's teachers are well prepared to meet the challenge of educating Ohio's children.

We support the Governor's initiative to fund measures that will support reading development, and what we teach at Ohio State is in no way at odds with the administration's proposal. No single commercial program is appropriate for all students, just as no single tool is the only implement for a given task. We would urge caution with any legislation that prescriptively adopts one approach without any consideration for the individual student.

Education research scientists at Ohio's institutions of higher education are well-positioned to assist the state in evaluating the fidelity of implementation and the effectiveness of the measures adopted—gauging both short-term and long-term outcomes.

We applaud the Governor's investment in early literacy in Ohio and advocate for comparable support for mathematics instruction and continuing support for mental health interventions. Math scores also plummeted during the pandemic, and unlike reading where scores are beginning to rebound, math scores remain low across the state. Similarly, the pandemic had a negative impact on the emotional and mental wellness of Ohio's children. National organizations, including the American Psychological Association and the National Institutes of Health, report a sharp uptick in mental health disorders in children and adolescents. An investment in these areas should also be priorities for the state.

We urge the legislature to maintain academic freedom, support our teachers, and avoid the wholesale adoption of any single or specific program that leaves teachers without the requisite toolbox to meet the varying needs of our students. Invest in teachers. Invest in learning. Invest in our students. Invest in a scientific approach to reading instruction.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "D. Pope-Davis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Don Pope-Davis, PhD  
Dean