

## **Legislative Update for OACTE, OAPCTE, and SUED**

May 24, 2024

### **Gov. Mike DeWine signs House Bill 250**

A bill that would modify educator licensure laws is now law. Gov. Mike DeWine on May 15 signed House Bill (HB) 250 into law. The bill takes effect 91 days after the governor signs and files the bill with the Ohio Secretary of State.

Among other provisions, the bill specifies that license holders who renew their license can have a license under the former three-grade-band system or the current two-grade band system, provided the new license includes at least one of the grades they were previously authorized to teach. The bill also ensures teachers who teach outside their current licensure grade band by up to two grade levels – a recent flexibility from HB 33 – are considered to be “properly certified or licensed” teachers.

### **House activity**

The House at its May 22 meeting did not vote on HB 183 (same-sex bathrooms at higher education institutions and K-12 schools) or SB 83 (higher education reform). The House meets next on June 12, except for a potential May 28 emergency session requested on May 23 by Gov. Mike DeWine to place President Joe Biden on the Ohio presidential ballot.

The House Primary and Secondary Education Committee on May 21 amended and passed HB 432, which creates licensure flexibility for career-technical educators. The amendment (1) requires the mentoring program for the bill’s alternative two-year licensure program to be a program created by one or more lead districts and (2) requires the bill’s alternative licensure programs to align with the state competency standards developed by the Department of Education and Workforce. The bill could be placed on the House’s agenda at its next meeting on June 12.

The House Higher Education Committee met twice this week, continuing its testimony from representatives of Ohio’s public and private colleges and universities on the implementation of the Science of Reading in their teacher preparation programs. News coverage of the hearing is accessible at the end of this newsletter, and a recording of the hearings is accessible here:

<https://ohiochannel.org/collections/ohio-house-higher-education-committee>. Among those who were invited and testified are:

- Dr. Lisa Vernon-Dotson – Ashland University;
- Dr. Mary-Kate Sableski – University of Dayton;
- Dr. Carla Higgins – Defiance College;
- Dr. Mary Heather Munger – University of Findlay;
- Dr. Laura Saylor – Mount St. Joseph University;
- Dr. Lisa Harrison – Ohio University;

- Dr. Lisa Lenhart – University of Akron; and
- Dr. Gail Evanchan – University of Akron.

Additional hearings will take place on June 4, 5, 11, 12, and 18.

**Senate activity**

The Senate Education Committee on Tuesday held a third hearing on SB 219 for interested party testimony. No witnesses were in present to testify, but the committee received eight pieces of testimony, accessible here:

[https://www.ohiosenate.gov/committees/education/meetings/cmte\\_s\\_education\\_1\\_2024-05-21-0300\\_1254](https://www.ohiosenate.gov/committees/education/meetings/cmte_s_education_1_2024-05-21-0300_1254). The committee will not meet again until June 11. It is unknown whether SB 219 will receive a hearing on that date.



## Private Institutions Address Science of Reading Efforts in House Committee

### **Bills in this Story**

[HB33 FY24-25 OPERATING BUDGET \(Edwards, J\)](#)

### **Mentioned in this Story**

[Rep. Beryl Piccolantonio \(D-Columbus\)](#)

[Rep. Tom Young \(R-Columbus\)](#)

Leaders of teacher preparation programs at several private colleges and universities told lawmakers Tuesday they're confident they'll be aligned to new state literacy policy ahead of a January 2025 deadline, while sharing their concerns about faculty recruitment and other issues.

The House Higher Education Committee continued its hearings on institutions' implementation of new science of reading standards established in the budget, HB33 (Edwards). Witnesses included Lisa Vernon Dotson, education dean for Ashland University; Mary-Kate Sableski, reading program coordinator for the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Dayton; Carla Higgins, director of education and associate professor at Defiance College; Mary Heather Munger, a faculty member at the University of Findlay; and Laura Saylor, education dean for Mt. St. Joseph University.

Rep. Tom Young (R-Centerville), chair of the committee, launched the hearing series after voicing concern about implementation of HB33 policies. The committee heard last week from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, Ohio Department of Higher Education and various policy advocates, and this week has two hearings scheduled to learn from witnesses from educator preparation programs. Ohio University and the University of Akron are scheduled for the Wednesday, May 22 11 a.m. hearing.

Young asked the witnesses whether their programs will meet the January deadline for alignment to the science of reading standards, and if not, what work they have yet to do to achieve that goal. The witnesses generally said they're largely in alignment now, with perhaps a few tasks to finalize. Higgins noted that Defiance was required to submit all its programs for review two years before its accreditation site visit in 2026, so it needed to get all its affairs in order this year ahead of the budget deadline.



“Do you have any trouble finding faculty that will help us align to the science of reading in your institutions?” Young asked, picking up on some references to faculty in the witnesses’ prepared remarks.

“It’s a struggle. We’re a very small institution,” Higgins said, adding that Defiance has a strong pool of adjunct faculty to help.

Vernon-Dotson said Ashland faces similar struggles in finding full-time faculty.

Rep. Beryl Brown Piccolantonio (D-Gahanna) asked about the institutions’ work with nearby school districts, and asked whether there are enough classrooms in which to place teachers in training.

Higgins expressed excitement that state science of reading policies are finally leading to classroom experiences that follow what teachers in training learn in their programs.

“We teach theory and research and best practice all the time, and then our students go into the field and they don’t see that,” she said. “Honestly, I’m glad that we’re all being held to the fire.”

Munger said grant funding from the Ohio Department of Higher Education has been helpful for institutions’ ability to find high-quality field placements for teacher candidates.

Sableski said finding placements where the teachers are prepared, and at times when teacher candidates can be present for the actual reading instruction, is a challenge.

In their testimony, the witnesses spoke about the importance of improving reading instruction.

“Reading is highly researched by cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists, as well as educational researchers. We know a great deal about how to teach reading. So, one might ask, what’s the problem? “The problem is a serious and persistent gap between the science and practice. Fortunately, there is growing awareness of the need to change, and teacher preparation is being examined and pressured to change. That is a good thing. Learning to teach reading according to the science is a rigorous undertaking. But it can be done. And it must be done,” said Saylor.

Munger said she was inspired to earn her Ph.D. by the disparate experiences of her son and daughter, who attended different schools with different approaches to literacy instruction. Her daughter “hit the ground running” and “read voraciously,” while her son “struggled every step of the way.

“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



...kids are not carbon copies of each other. However, it is interesting to note that these two  
...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," Munger said.

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## UA, OU Review Science of Reading Implementation

### **Bills in this Story**

[HB33 FY24-25 OPERATING BUDGET \(Edwards, J\)](#)

### **Mentioned in this Story**

[Rep. Adam Bird \(R-Columbus\)](#)

[Rep. Gayle Manning \(R-Columbus\)](#)

[Rep. Tom Young \(R-Columbus\)](#)

The House Higher Education Committee Wednesday continued its review of the implementation of new science of reading standards established in HB33 (Edwards), hearing from the leaders of teacher preparation programs at the University of Akron (UA) and Ohio University (OU).

Administrators from both schools said they will be in compliance with the new standards well before the January 2025 deadline and are largely already in alignment.

### **University of Akron**

Lisa Lenhart, director, and Gail Evanchan, associate professor, at the Lebron James Family Foundation School of Education at UA, told the committee that science of reading instruction has a long history at the university.

In 2000, UA was part of a three-university state consortium that was awarded federal Reading First dollars to provide professional development using only scientific based reading research (SBRR) teaching methods, which the university did in the state's lowest income and highest poverty districts.

More recently, Lenhart said the UA program has received an "A" rating from the National Council on

Teacher Quality (NCTQ) after making adjustments to its program, and it is developing an International Dyslexia Association (IDA) accredited Center for Structured Literacy (CSL) to prepare and apprentice future teachers in the science of reading and structured literacy. UA will be the only public university in Ohio to provide this accreditation and certification.

UA also has Rebecca Tolson as a consultant. Tolson chairs the Ohio Dyslexia Committee and



...es on the Ohio Dyslexia Legislation Committee, and she is now training faculty to be ...ed as structured literacy/dyslexia interventionists.

Lenhart and Evanchan further reviewed their efforts to align their syllabi and coursework with science of reading and structured literacy (SL) as well as to remove contrary practices.

“As you can see, the transition to SOR, even for an institution with a history of teaching SL, is a significant shift that needs to focus on curriculum revision, curriculum development, and training for all involved. UA is on the leading edge of this shift, and we look forward to being a resource for other higher education institutions, K-12 schools and students of all ages across Ohio,” Evanchan said.

Responding to a question from Vice Chair Gayle Manning (R-North Ridgeville), Lenhart said UA just graduated 70 student teachers, but that enrollment in the program has increased. The school does not have an online program at this time, but online modules are embedded in the program.

Rep. Adam Bird (R-Cincinnati) asked if they have evidence that schools are spending millions of dollars to re-train teachers in the science of reading. Lenhart said she doesn't have evidence of that, but said in the past it has been difficult to train teachers because districts were doing “all different things.” Now, she said, “everything's coming together” and people are getting on the “same page.” The university is focused on building capacity to work with Akron Public Schools and the greater Northeast Ohio region.

Chair Tom Young (R-Dayton) wanted to know if teachers are “cooperating” with the retraining process. UA works mostly with Akron Public Schools but has 50 school districts it works with and sends students to. Akron Public Schools, Lenhart said, was “pretty primed” for the change, and in general districts are doing a “wonderful job” of meeting requirements. Lenhart said though that “I'm sure there's some resistance, and there's some resistance in faculty across the state. This is a big ... learning curve. It's a big change.”

### **Ohio University**

Lisa Harrison, interim dean of the Patton College of Education at OU, similarly told the committee that faculty have taught various aspects of science of reading for many years. The school received an “A” rating in the Thomas B. Fordham Institute Report on Ohio teacher education programs implementation of the science of reading, she noted.

“Our faculty have all received some science of reading training through either Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training, which is a comprehensive professional development designed to provide early childhood and elementary educators and administrators with deep knowledge to be literacy and language experts in the science of



...ing, or as part of their doctoral studies. They have intentionally infused aspects of their science of reading training into our courses to better equip both our undergraduate and graduate candidates for science of reading classroom instruction. This work extends for teacher candidates in all licensure bands,” Harrison said.

She also emphasized OU’s work with the community, including summer camps, after-school Literacy+ STEM clubs for children, and family literacy programs.

The school is currently working on updating course syllabi, and said OU expects to be in full compliance with the updated reading and literacy standards before the end of Fall 2024 semester.

The last OU graduating class had about 300 teachers, Harrison said. Education enrollment has been on the decline, she said.

She told Young OU works with all local school districts in the region, “pretty much southeast Ohio,” she said.

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