

Testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor

Dr. Deborah Simmons

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am here as an individual who has committed her life's work to teaching children to read. I began as a speech clinician in the public schools in Tennessee and today conduct research in Texas, Connecticut, and Florida. From research we know that if a child is a struggling reader at the end of first grade there is only a 1 in 5 chance of becoming an average reader. To address this problem, my research focuses on building and evaluating effective beginning reading programs for children who need the best instruction possible.

Let me respond to some of the questions you may have about my role in Reading First.

What Was My Role in National Reading First Efforts?

My specific activities in Reading First at the national level involved the following. I provided 3 presentations and one professional development session, all delivered in 2002. In 2005, I presented a workshop for members of the technical assistance centers. These presentations focused beginning reading instruction, professional development, and the Consumer's Guide. I was paid on a daily basis for this work.

In 2001 and 2002, I participated as a member of the Assessment Committee. Based on my recollection, all committee members identified assessment tools on which they were authors and they did not evaluate the adequacy of assessment instruments on which they were authors. I am not an author of any reading assessments. I was compensated at a daily rate for work conducted on this committee.

It has been stated in various reports that I have been Co-Director or staff member of the Western Regional Reading First Technical Assistance Center. This is not correct. I was never a staff member or director of a regional or national Reading First center.

What Was My Role in Product Development?

In 2000, I served as a co-developer of "*A consumer's guide to evaluating core reading programs grades K-3.*" This Consumer's Guide was developed before Reading First. It was provided at no cost to users. As designed, it has included a level of review for existing programs with a research base and untested programs that incorporate scientifically based practices.

The Oregon Department of Education established the Oregon Reading First Center at the University of Oregon in 2003. I served as co-director in 2003. In fall 2003, I resigned my role as co-director and served as a part-time staff member through spring of 2004. During this period I participated in a limited role in the Core and Supplemental/Intervention program review. I reviewed two grade levels of one core program and two supplemental programs. For each program I reviewed, I signed a conflict of interest statement indicating I had no personal or financial relationship with the product.

In spring 2004, the Oregon Reading First Center revised the initial review of Core Reading Programs. Although I was not directly involved in this re-analysis, I was advised of the decision and agreed with the rationale. It has been asserted that this revision benefited a program from which I profited. That is not correct. First, the criteria were applied consistently across all programs. Second, I received no personal benefit from this adjustment as I was not an author of a published core program at the time. The reporter for the Chronicle of Higher Education who

investigated allegations related to this reanalysis wrote to me as his article was being published:

“I hope that I’ve done justice to the various arguments here. Looking over the article this morning, I wish that I had said more explicitly that it appears that Oregon scholars were acting in good faith when they removed the vocabulary and comprehension elements from their product analyses in 2003. As far as I can see, there is no reason to believe that the Oregon center was trying to cherry-pick a list-making method that would boost Scott Foresman and injure Success for All...”

Did I Use My Involvement in Oregon Reading First to Influence States’ Decisions About Reading Programs to Obtain Financial Benefit?

No I did not. I am an author of an intervention program published by Pearson/Scott Foresman in 2002/2003. This program was reviewed as part of the Oregon curriculum review process. According to the Oregon Reading First website, 66 individuals from across Oregon served on the curriculum review panel that evaluated programs for Oregon. Individuals who reviewed programs signed conflict of interest forms. I did not participate in the review of the intervention program on which I am an author. I was blind to the reviewers, the review process, and the analysis of results. I did not promote this product in workshops I conducted for national Reading First.

I am now an author of a Scott Foresman core reading program that was published in 2006. I began receiving royalties in 2006. This 2006 reading program was not part of the Oregon review conducted in 2003. Except for one workshop conducted in 2005, I stopped my involvement with national Reading First in 2002.

In Summary, based on my recollection and documentation:

- My national Reading First activities included delivering 3 presentations and 2 workshops and serving as a member of the Assessment Committee. None of the presentations I conducted involved recommendations of reading programs. I am not an author of a reading assessment.
- I was never a staff member of a national or regional TA center.
- I co-developed the Consumer's Guides based on a review of beginning reading research. I participated in a limited review of core and supplemental reading programs for Oregon Reading First. I signed conflict of interest statements for each review I participated in. I was not an author of a core reading program during this time. I was an author of an intervention reading program that was included in the Oregon review. I did not review my program. I was blind to the reviewers, the review process, and the analysis of results. I did not promote my product in workshops I conducted for national Reading First.
- I am now an author of a core reading program that was published in 2006. This program was not one of the core reading programs reviewed by Oregon Reading First in 2003. Except for one workshop conducted in 2005, my involvement with national Reading First activities ended in 2002.