

## EVIDENCE ADVOCACY CENTER

Transforming Education for Student Success

### Founders

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School closures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic raised awareness and fueled a fire of attention about reading failure in our nation's public schools. Experts have known about reading instruction and performance outcome issues in public education for decades. However, the knowledge garnered by lockdown parents who were concerned for their children's academic welfare was ignited when they discovered reading failure at home.

A growing number of parents and the public soon realized that typical reading instruction methods used in classrooms from coast to coast are based on balanced literacy concepts that don't work with all learners, and that ongoing scientific, evidence-based reading instruction alternatives and best practices are promising and effective!

Today, the public is more aware that many educators-in-training are exposed to principles and practices based on invalid assumptions, fads, appeals to authority, and personal philosophies. Concerned citizens have learned that teachers weren't specifically trained to teach reading effectively, and schools and districts compounded the problems by using insufficient textbooks and curriculums. Earlier names for best practices coined by researchers, reading experts, and academics were repurposed and named the "science of reading" (SOR). But such terminology may be somewhat opaque because, while it is descriptive of a body of over fifty years of research about what is known about how proficient reading and writing develop, it is not a single method, nor a specific curriculum. However, enough is known about reading and about how students learn to be able to identify effective instruction.



One example is what is called *structured literacy*, which is grounded in the science of reading and is gaining general acceptance and usage. Social media groups, such as The Science of Reading: What I Should Have Learned in College, have hundreds of thousands of participants. Training conferences conducted by expert, profit, and nonprofit literacy organizations are well attended.

Convincingly, hundreds of validated research studies conducted over many years support the science behind what is known about how reading develops and what components are necessary for a student to become a proficient reader. Moreover, recent mainstream media podcasts and articles by gifted APM journalist Emily Handford clearly explain the facts in "Hard Words" and *Sold a Story* and tell of compelling reading challenges as well as success stories resulting from current practices based on SOR.

Forty states and DC have now passed legislation related to the science of reading. While such legislation is an important and necessary step, without comprehensive implementa-



tion plans and a wholesale realignment of all components of the US education system—including the state house, higher education educator preparation, and schools—the current shift to more effective reading practices may not endure. In the report *On the Same Page: A Primer on the Science of Reading and Its Future for Policymakers, School Leaders, and Advocates*, the educational nonprofit organization Bellwether noted that "the US has seen several large-scale education reform efforts come and go . . . but less than a decade after these reform efforts were adopted, the public had turned on them, policymakers have diluted them, and the full potential of intended impact was never fully realized."

Before the pandemic, America had a reading crisis because most teachers weren't trained to

teach reading effectively. The root cause contains four key factors: (1) a failure to use evidence of instruction effectiveness, resulting in huge numbers of students failing needlessly, (2) a failure to protect students from ineffective and even harmful instructional practices and materials, (3) a failure to establish accountability for educators since no one loses their jobs due to miseducating students, and (4) a failure to sustain the use of evidence-based standards of practice—new leaders bring their own favorite ideas.

Training educators isn't a static factor. As long as children are born and enter schools, current and future teachers need continued training and updating as new evidence emerges. Teacher attrition is a recurring factor in a high-turnover job. Training knowledgeable leadership is also

a consistent hurdle to improving education. In the past ten years, more than one million education graduate degrees have been conferred, and these individuals occupy hundreds of thousands of jobs in the education system, which includes 1,456,050 educational service businesses in America.

Educators can't continue to hide behind the fig leaf of academic freedom when realistic metrics of the reading crisis continually show that the majority of students are failing in reading and that 84 percent of Black, 73 percent of Latino, and 50 percent of White students don't reach grade proficiency, a benchmark that means they don't genuinely read effectively. However, educator accountability is defeated by the lack of commitment to research-based practices that define safe and effective instruction. Education belief systems that undermine our democracy, like "academic progress cannot be expected from some students because of their home and social environment" or "teaching is an art, not a science" or "educators have the right to resist mandates that undermine their own philosophy of education" are unacceptable.

Negative reading outcomes represent the diminished capacities of American citizens for future success in education, employment, access to healthcare, and real participation in our democracy, leading to trillions of dollars lost to our economy, costly mass incarceration, and sustaining an underclass of illiterate people. In *Why Reading Matters—Now More Than Ever: A CEO Action Plan to Support Improved U.S. Literacy Rates*, Business Roundtable stated, "Finding qualified workers for in-demand jobs will always be a CEO priority, which is why the persistent skills gap in the American workforce

continues to challenge employers and hold individuals back from reaching their full potential." The Fairfax, Virginia, NAACP stated that "in a year where all students suffered, the learning loss for Black and Hispanic children has been catastrophic."



Long before the pandemic, earlier in this century, states like Mississippi took positive steps to change student reading outcomes through a unique collaboration between private philanthropy and government. Legislation; state funding; in-service, research-aligned teacher training; new licensure requirements; and colleges and graduate schools getting on board with preservice teacher training forged improvements. Mississippi has sixteen years of bragging rights, and more states are joining that enlightened vanguard. These steps represent encouraging progress in the fight to end America's dire reading crisis. However, the problem is huge,

the knowledge of effective instruction must be repeatedly justified, and the will of the people and their representatives must be nurtured and compelled to follow through for the long term. Overwhelming, expert-presented evidence must be commonplace, so the unproductive debates become moot. Even though the National Reading Panel identified five core components (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) to achieve reading

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reading to the science of learning and rigorously leading implementation, will, like Mississippi, be most successful.

While the embattled, systemic thaw leading to the general acceptance of the science of reading, with all the complexity that entails, Evidence Advocacy Center (EAC) experts advocate for professionalizing education by promoting a more comprehensive transformation that includes advocating for an education knowledge management system (KMS), such as those found in medicine, engineering, aviation, and other professions. A KMS, usually an accessible data storage system for the profession, goes beyond literacy and includes systematizing a knowledge base consistent with research evidence as well as evidence from practices demonstrated by schools that produce high achievement—especially for marginalized populations. The KMS advocated by EAC should include comprehensive guidance and protocols for educator preparation, licensure, license renewal, and accreditation. To support the development of such a KMS, the EAC will contribute research-based resources with links to many reliable organizations, policy briefs, and syntheses of guidance for literacy, math, and behavioral wellness.

While the EAC will not develop the KMS, it will serve as the catalyst for its development and will work with other groups to convene a collaborative from education, research, business, social justice groups, families, policy makers, KMS-based professions, and others to undertake this complex effort. The EAC is issuing a call to action for policymakers, educators, researchers, and all stakeholders to commit to building a KMS that equips educators, empow-

ers students, and secures the foundation of every other profession. By investing in this effort, the education system can become a beacon of trust and efficacy, leading to a brighter future for teachers, learners, and society as a whole.

## About the Evidence Advocacy Center

The Evidence Advocacy Center (EAC) is a nationwide nonprofit founded in 2023 by Drs. Doug Carnine and Reid Lyon, Linda Diamond, and Kelly Butler, four distinguished and experienced experts in science, education, government, and public policy. EAC provides practical and useful resources that rest on a continuum of evidence to support the missions and objectives of state departments of education, education policymakers, districts and schools, higher education institutions, and parent and family advocate groups.



[evidenceadvocacycenter.org](http://evidenceadvocacycenter.org)

EAC can lead the field in making educational decisions that are objective and grounded in the best available evidence. EAC acts as an intelligent, go-to repository of research-based resources and practices, with policy briefs and

reports that present vitally important information in an effective and accessible manner for all interested parties. Resources from EAC are thoughtfully directed toward each of the nine major components that make up the US education system: (1) educator preparation programs, (2) state policymakers, (3) district and school leaders, (4) parent and family advocates, (5) professional learning, (6) linguistic diversity, (7) special education, (8) assessment, and (9) instruction.

**Consistent resistance to the use of scientific evidence in education has deep roots in the institutions that prepare future education leaders and teachers.**

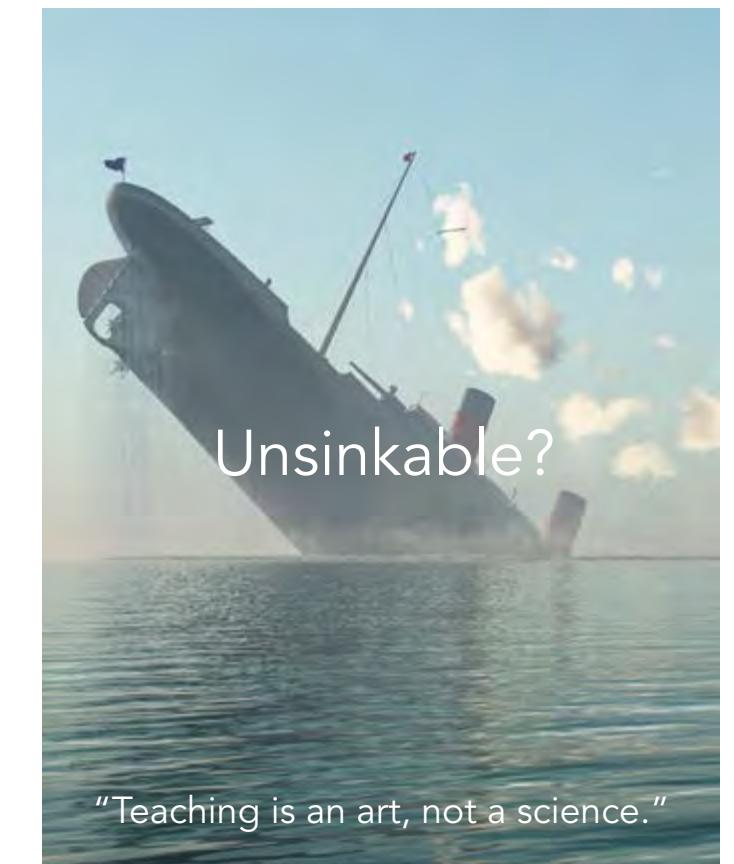
Dr. Doug Carnine compares how "educators in the United States, from the federal level to the local classroom level, operate like independently minded sea captains" did before the tragic sinking of the HMS *Titanic* 111 years ago. Today, educators remain generally free to make decisions in their sphere of influence. Of the roughly seven hundred schools of higher education in America, only a small minority know how to prepare teachers in SOR, operating within the confines of the shadowy butterfly net of "academic freedom." Following the *Titanic* tragedy, Carnine says, "The public's immediate outcry led to the convening and adoption of the International Convention for Maritime Safety Standards, known as Safety of Life at Sea, or SOLAS, which specified minimum standards for

the construction, equipment, and operation of ships, compatible with their safety."

SOLAS was drafted for the "greater good," benefiting passengers, preserving valuable cargo, and enhancing economic growth through proven maritime procedures. While the education system fails us, educators as individuals share a profound concern for the well-being of their students, families, and communities. Those leaders are aware of the negative statistics, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the greater impact reading failure has in low-income and minority communities. However, the US education system doesn't have the benefit of SOLAS-like guidance for educators, and the resulting harm to educators, students, families, and communities is catastrophic.

EAC founders represent some of the best, brightest, and most experienced experts in the field. Dr. Reid Lyon, chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch within the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) from 1992 to 2005, oversaw and contributed to the world's largest program on literacy research as part of the NICHD's fifty years of research into learning disabilities. He has been discouraged at seeing the failure of educational institutions to widely apply the research, and, if the research is applied, seeing it implemented without fidelity.

At the school and district level, Linda Diamond, a cofounder of CORE Learning and noted academic author, oversaw hundreds of evidence-based, successful school improvement initiatives only to see the vast majority of those initiatives abandoned. She founded the Consortium on Reaching Excellence in Education



(CORE). Its mission is to provide educators with evidence-based research on the most effective ways to teach children to read and become mathematically proficient, and then, through workshops, coaching, and mentoring, help them leverage instructional practices based on the research to improve outcomes for all students. Linda dedicated her career to teaching children to read, particularly those with word-reading difficulties like dyslexia.

While she worked for many years in the classroom directly with students, Linda became a principal; the director of curriculum and instruction for a K-12 school district in California; and a senior policy analyst with an emphasis on school-to-career, charter schools, and school reform. In these roles, she quickly realized that in order for students to become strong readers, they need teachers who understand the science of reading, can identify which skills

students struggle with, and can provide expert instruction to help students overcome reading difficulties. Dismantling successful initiatives disrespected the efforts of the educators who brought about these successes and jeopardized the achievement of future students.

In 1996, Doug Carnine became deeply involved in statewide reading initiatives in Texas and California. Both initiatives were evidence based, sanctioned, state funded, and successful. However, despite increased student achievement, both initiatives were abandoned for various reasons, including inconsistent accountability, limited implementation, conflicting ideologies, and uninformed belief systems.

Kelly Butler is senior advisor to ReadingUniverse.org, a large-scale legacy project of the Barksdale Reading Institute (BRI), where she served as CEO. Barksdale Reading Institute helped lead the changes that transformed Mississippi's fourth-grade student reading performance from forty-ninth to twenty-first in the nation in sixteen years. Despite that comprehensive success admired by so many, Kelly seeks greater systemic consistency and accountability that encompass all levels of K-12 literacy. Reading Universe is housed at WETA, PBS's flagship station in Washington, DC, amidst a suite of award-winning literacy websites supporting research-based practices for teachers of reading and writing. During her tenure at BRI, Kelly initiated the original Reading Universe concept to provide high-quality professional development to educators in Barksdale schools and educator preparation programs. Butler authored three statewide studies on teacher preparation for early literacy instruction, which propelled The Path Forward, a multistate initiative focused

on preparation and licensure. Kelly is an advisor to the Mississippi Reading Panel, the Mississippi Reading Clinic, The Path Forward, the Southeast Region's Education Laboratory, and the Education Advocacy Center and is a board member for Springboard to Opportunities and Deans for Impact.

### One important source of education guidance, in addition to scientific research, can come from studying and understanding qualities, policies, and practices of high-performing educators.

Evidence Advocacy Center's theory of positive change involves collaborating with selected states to identify and refine research-based resources (RBRs) and advocate for evidence-based licensure, effective educator preparation programs, continuing education based on effective practices, and accountability. The curated RBRs allow EAC to carry out its mission to benefit all students, in particular by contributing to educational equity that significantly and permanently improves the achievements and social-emotional and behavioral well-being of diverse, marginalized, and vulnerable student populations in an inclusive manner that also increases the success of students with learning differences. While the primary purpose of the EAC's research-based resources is to increase the academic and social-emotional well-being of students, families, and communities, RBRs are also needed to counter the influence of and prevent waste and harm caused by non-research-based programs. Millions of dollars are

invested in reading programs and materials that don't advance the skills of students in reading. Every dollar invested plays a part in squandering the future of our greatest natural resource—our students.

Experts at EAC have a highly professional systems perspective. Because education is a complex, multifaceted system, EAC recognizes that the failure of one component of a system impacts the effectiveness of the entire ecosystem. A tragic example of such a failure is that of an O-ring gasket on the Challenger space shuttle, which cost the lives of seven crew members and billions of dollars. The failure of the US education system is far less dramatic, but more costly in terms of lives and dollars. Because of EAC's systems perspective, it organizes its RBRs around

### EAC serves as a clearinghouse to inform policies and practices by curating trustworthy resources for states, districts, schools, higher education institutions, policymakers, and parent advocates.

nine teams, one for each of the critical components of the education system. The members of the nine teams are nationally and internationally recognized researchers, implementers, and policymakers who have the expertise to identify valid research-based resources. The devastating effects of the long-lasting education crisis, coupled with the frustration that evidence is too rarely used, explain in part why experts volunteer their time to serve at the EAC.

The organization of research-based resources across these nine components allows education decision-makers to view education from a systems perspective in terms of the adequacy of each component and access research-based resources to optimize the performance of each of the nine components of the system.

In EAC's plan to transform the education profession into a research-based system, educators relinquish certain freedoms—notably the leeway to employ practices that have been demonstrated to be ineffective or harmful. However, the transformation will allow educators to profoundly impact their students' futures, thus fulfilling their original purpose in becoming educators. Unfortunately, reforming US education to empower educators will be far more difficult and time-consuming than designing a space shuttle or making seafaring safe.

The prescription reads: the Evidence Advocacy Center experts have elevated the evidence from schools with high-performance status. Success for students demands multiyear strategies that involve and engage educators and the community with a purposeful, long-term financial investment in teacher training and ongoing support from literacy coaches and informed administrators. High-performing states use research-aligned instructional materials. All strategies entail universal student screening, especially in grades K-3, and the development of improvement plans. Further, these states have implemented multitiered systems of support and intervention for students based on data-determined needs. Success depends upon continuous observation and support of all teachers and administrators to ensure sustainability. ■