

**Michigan's "drop" in reading scores: Is more phonics the solution?
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Michigan's rank in third grade reading has declined (no difference in scores but other states are doing better). Suggested reasons include (1) a decline in number of school librarians; (2) not enough phonics. There is strong evidence supporting (1): the research shows that the presence of a credentialed school librarian is a significant predictor of reading achievement.

(2) is the result of a PR campaign claiming that heavy phonics instruction has "scientific" support, but not mentioned in their statements are studies that show:

- many children learn to read very well without phonics;**
- many phonics rules are complicated and are hard to teach and remember;**
- heavy phonics teaching only improves scores on tests in which children pronounce words presented on lists. Heavy phonics teaching does not improve scores on tests in which children have to understand what they read.**

Children who develop a pleasure reading habit do very well in phonics tests as well as on tests of reading comprehension.

Learning some straight-forward basic rules of phonics may be useful, but most of our knowledge of phonics is the result of reading; the more complex rules of phonics are acquired as children read and understand books.

This is the position of Anderson, Hiebert, Scott and Wilkinson, authors of *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, a book widely considered to provide strong support for phonics instruction:

"...phonics instruction should aim to teach only the most important and regular of letter-to-sound relationships ... once the basic relationships have been taught, the best way to get children to refine and extend their knowledge of letter-sound correspondences is through repeated opportunities to read. If this position is correct, then

much phonics instruction is overly subtle and probably unproductive.”

Current posts:

Quintana, A. 2019. MMSD changing curriculum to brain-based letter-sound approach as Wisconsin readers fall behind. <https://www.channel3000.com/news/mmsd-changing-curriculum-to-brain-based-letter-sound-approach-as-wisconsin-readers-fall-behind/1118470315>

Parker, P. 2019. Michigan students' reading levels fall as school librarians go extinct. August 29, 2019. <https://www.michiganradio.org/post/michigan-students-reading-levels-fall-school-librarians-go-extinct>

Recommended reading:

Anderson, R., Hiebert, E. Scott, J. and Wilkinson I. 1985. *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. Center for the Study of Reading.

Coles, G. 2019. Cryonics Phonics: Inequality's Little Helper. *New Politics*, 28(3)

Goodman, K. 1993. *Phonics Phacts*. Heineman

Krashen, S. 2003 *The Power of Reading* (second edition). Libraries Unlimited.

Krashen, S. 2009. Does Intensive Decoding Instruction Contribute to Reading Comprehension? *Knowledge Quest* 37 (4): 72-74,

Lance, K.C. and Kachel, D. 2018. Why school librarians matter: What years of research tell us. *Phi Delta Kappan*. 3/26/18. <https://www.kappanonline.org/lance-kachel-school-librarians-matter-years-research/>

<https://tinyurl.com/jc6x8mk>

Smith, F. 2004. *Understanding Reading*. Sixth Edition, Erlbaum