

What kind of test?

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A headline in the Press-Herald (Dec 27) proclaims that “young Windham students read better with new program.” The new program is Jolly Phonics, a program that teaches the rules of phonics in a strict sequence. The evidence is that more children are reaching the district standards on a reading test than in previous years.

We are advised at the end of the article to ask not just whether we should teach phonics but also “What kind of phonics.” But we should also be asking “what kind of test?”

Research consistently tells us that intensive phonics produces strong results only on tests in which children pronounce words presented in a list out of context, read only single sentences, or fill in the blanks, with little or no comprehension required. Intensive phonics has very limited impact on tests in which children have to understand what they read. In contrast, children who develop a pleasure reading habit do very well on both kinds of tests.

We should not be impressed by test scores on what researcher Jeff McQuillan calls “reading tests that don’t measure reading.”

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Original article: <https://www.pressherald.com/2019/12/27/program-has-dramatic-impact-on-students-reading-skills/>

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