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Sold a Story: How teaching kids to read went so wrong

Transcript

Episode 14: The Cuts

> **Emily Hanford:** So, this is Emily. Where are we? We're at the corner of — where are we?

Hanford: I'm in Washington, D.C. It's a gray day in March. And I'm looking for a government office building.

> **Hanford:** Where are we?
> **Woman:** 9th.
> **Hanford:** 9th — OK?
> **Woman:** 9th and D.
> **Hanford:** 9th and D. OK, all right, so it's starting to rain, and I met these four people on the corner.

Hanford: They were looking for the same office building I'm looking for. And they seem to know where they're going, so I walk with them.

> **Hanford:** I'm going to let you guys lead the way.

Hanford: When we arrive, there's a small crowd gathered outside.

> (Clapping)
>
> **Crowd:** Thank you!
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> **Hanford:** People have signs that say things like, "Thank you for your service," "YOU make America great," "Statistics and research help kids learn."
>
> (Clapping and honking)

Hanford: The crowd is here in support of people who just lost their jobs.

> **Crowd:** Education matters!
>
> (Honking)

Hanford: People who worked at a place called the Institute of Education Sciences.

The Institute of Education Sciences is the research and statistics arm of the U.S. Department of Education. And it was gutted by the Trump administration. About 90% of the people who worked there lost their jobs.

And today people are coming back to the office, one last time, to turn in their government equipment. And pick up their personal stuff.

> **Hanford:** Every few minutes, a person or a couple of people or maybe three, walk in, looking somber. A couple looked like they were on the edge of tears.
>
> (Honking)

Hanford: I try to talk to people as they walk out of the building with their things. I approach a woman with a bunch of bags and boxes on a cart.

> **Hanford:** Are you able to talk to me?
>
> **Woman:** No.
>
> **Hanford:** No. OK, well, I'm really sorry.

Hanford: She shakes me off.

> **Crowd:** Thank you!
>
> (Clapping)

Hanford: But people in the crowd are willing to talk.

> **Michaela:** I'm Michaela and I'm here in solidarity to support my friends.

Hanford: Micheala knows what this feels like. She lost her job at U.S.A.I.D., another federal agency that was gutted by the Trump administration.

> **Michaela:** What is happening is not right. We're here to support all those who fight for it to be right.

Hanford: There are some teachers in the crowd, too.

> **Frank:** I'm on spring break.

Hanford: This is Frank. He's an art teacher from Wisconsin.

> **Frank:** Visiting my daughter who is a federal employee. And this happened to pop up, so what better thing for a public school teacher to do than help support public education.

Hanford: And this is Bill.

> **Bill:** Just here to show support.

Hanford: Bill's retired. Says he taught for 34 years in Ohio and Virginia.

Bill: I do think this is what people might call an inflection point in history. So you have to show up.

(Theme music in)

Hanford: An inflection point in history.

(Theme music continues)

Hanford: You might think the Trump administration's cuts to the Department of Education are a good thing. You might think they're a bad thing. But most people seem to agree that something big is happening here. Something is changing about the federal government's role in education. And about the federal government's role in education research. And because this podcast has focused on education research, we decided to make an episode about what's happening.

(Theme music swells)

Hanford: I'm Emily Hanford, and this is *Sold a Story*, a podcast from APM Reports. For this episode, we talked to a bunch of the researchers who are responsible for the body of work people now call "the science of reading." They told us they're deeply concerned that cuts to the Institute of Education Sciences — and to scientific research more broadly — pose a threat. A threat to continued progress on the science of reading and the effort to get that science into schools. We also talked to historians to help us put what's happening now into perspective. And that's where we're going to start. With a little bit of history.

(Theme music out)

Hanford: For America's first eight decades as a nation, the federal government pretty much stayed out of education.

(Music in)

Hanford: And then the Civil War happened. And after the Civil War, there was a belief — especially among Republicans in Congress — that improving education could foster national unity, and that the federal government had a responsibility to help build schools for Black children in the former Confederate states. And there was no U.S. Department of Education.

(Music out)

Hanford: So Congress created one.

Jonathan Zimmerman: It was entirely threadbare.

Hanford: This is Jonathan Zimmerman. He's an education historian.

Zimmerman: And really its only role was to try to collect some information about these nascent school systems so we could compare across them.

Hanford: But this new Department of Education only lasted a year. Jonathan Zimmerman says it got caught up in the politics of race.

> **Zimmerman:** The idea of the federal government having any hand in education was deeply threatening to white people in the South, because what it threatened was assistance to Black people.

Hanford: Congress downgraded the Department of Education to an "office" and stuck it in the Department of the Interior. And for the next hundred years or so, it was a small, relatively powerless agency that mostly collected data on schools. And funded some education research. But science historian Daniel Kleinman says the federal government's role in research — not just in education, but all kinds of research — was pretty limited back then.

> **Daniel Kleinman:** Science was really pretty small scale, small science.

Hanford: Research was mostly funded by foundations and industry. And then, another big war.

> **Radio broadcast:** We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin. The Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii by air. President Roosevelt ....

> **Kleinman:** The Second World War and the creation of the atomic bomb and nuclear science really created big science — demanded big teams, big spaces and lots of people.

Hanford: And when the war ended, there was widespread recognition that continued advancement in science and technology —not just wartime stuff, but research in things like health and medicine — required big investment. The kind of large-scale, long-term investment that the federal government was capable of.

> **Kleinman:** It was a sea change.

Hanford: And there was a debate about how the federal government was going to support scientific research.

> (Music in)

Hanford: On one side of the debate were people who wanted to set up government-directed labs.

> **Kleinman:** And on the other side was an approach that was more in keeping with the way scientists thought about how science should be funded. And it would provide funding to scientists in university settings. So not research done directly by the government.

Hanford: Instead, the government would give grants and contracts to scientists at universities. This is the vision that prevailed.

> (Music out)

> **Radio program:** Nowadays, most of the research carried out by scientists around the country is supported not by private institutions, as it used to be ....

Hanford: This is a radio program from 1967.

> **Radio program:** Something like 90% of the money spent on research in the country today comes from the federal government.

Hanford: And it's federal government support for research that established the United States as the global leader in science and technology. And it's how the science of reading was born.

> **Mark Seidenberg:** I don't know how the research would've been done in this country without that support.

Hanford: This is Mark Seidenberg, a cognitive scientist you've met before on this podcast. I asked him how much of his research on reading was paid for with government grants.

> **Seidenberg:** For 25, 30 years it was all supported by government research agencies.

> **Nancy Madden:** Without the federal government, it wouldn't have happened.

Hanford: This is Nancy Madden, talking about Success for All — the program you heard about in our previous episodes about Steubenville, Ohio.

> **Madden:** The basic strand of research could not have been developed. The stability would not have been there to do that long-term research.

Hanford: We talked to more than a dozen reading researchers about how their work was funded.

> (Music in)

> **Jack Fletcher:** The feds had an enormous role.

> **Charles Perfetti:** Having the federal government supporting reading research was absolutely critical.

> **Reid Lyon:** There would not have been a science of reading without the federal funding.

Hanford: The research on reading started to really take off in the 1970s. A lot of the work was led by cognitive scientists and neuroscientists. They were doing experiments that explored basic questions, like: What happens in our minds when we see a word?

> (Music out)

Hanford: And there was a lot of scientific interest in reading disabilities and learning disabilities more generally.

> **Fletcher:** People weren't sure about how to define them.

Hanford: This is Jack Fletcher. He was at the University of Houston.

> **Fletcher:** There was a lot of skepticism as to whether learning disabilities were really real.

Hanford: And it was the federal government that supported a lot of this research. But it wasn't through the Department of Education; there actually was still no Department of Education in the 1970s. It was the National Institutes of Health that funded a lot of the work on learning disabilities and reading.

> **Barbara Foorman:** The National Institutes of Health became involved in reading because people couldn't read the directions on their medications.

Hanford: This is Barbara Foorman, who led big reading studies funded by the government health agency. The early studies revealed that reading disabilities are, in fact, real. That they can be identified. And that kids with disabilities can learn to read. But they need instruction. They need to be taught. And the National Institutes of Health wasn't in the business of studying instruction. Until Reid Lyon started working there.

> **Lyon:** I opened up an entire new program to determine, under what conditions do kids learn to read? And to understand that we had to determine what types of instruction were most beneficial at which phases of a kid's development?

Hanford: You've met Reid Lyon before. He's a neuroscientist who worked at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. He says there were professors in colleges of education who weren't happy when the institute started studying reading instruction.

> **Lyon:** They saw us as interlopers into the way they do their jobs.

Hanford: It was like scientists were invading their turf.

(Music in)

Hanford: And at the heart of this turf battle were disagreements about how to do research. On one side were scientists. On the other side were professors of education.

> **David Francis:** What they took for how you carry out a research study and what we took for that were just two very different things.

Hanford: This is David Francis. He's a neuropsychologist who studies reading. He says one of the big disagreements was about how to measure things.

> **Francis:** I remember having this conversation at around that time with Ken Goodman.

Hanford: Ken Goodman was a professor of education and one of the fathers of the whole language movement.

> **Francis:** And I said, "How do you measure reading in children?" Like, how do you — what assessments do you give? And he says, "I don't need to assess a student to know if they can read." That's what he said: "I don't need to measure whether or not a kid can read." And that's — and that was it. So it was an epistemological difference.

Hanford: An epistemological difference — a difference in how people think about knowledge. People with an epistemological difference are operating from different beliefs about what counts as evidence, and ultimately, what counts as truth.

(Music out)

Hanford: Scientists like David Francis and Reid Lyon wanted education research that followed the scientific method — standardized measurement, randomized trials, results that could be replicated. More like medical research. But that's not the kind of research the Department of Education was funding back in the 1980s and '90s. By then, there was a Department of Education again. It had been re-established by Congress in 1979. And it had a research office. But it was focusing more on descriptive accounts of what goes on in classrooms — observational studies, qualitative research.

> **Francis:** That's not to say that there's not a place for qualitative work or observational studies in education. There absolutely is.

Hanford: This is David Francis again.

> **Francis:** But there is also a place for experimental science.

Hanford: And by the early 2000s, many policymakers had become convinced that the Department of Education should be funding experimental science. That the department needed an office of education research that operated less like the old office of education research and more like the National Institutes of Health.

> **Whitehurst:** I got called on a Saturday afternoon by somebody in the just-installed George W. Bush administration, asking me if I wanted the job.

Hanford: This is Russ Whitehurst, an experimental psychologist. He was being offered a job as the head of a new office of research at the Department of Education.

> **Whitehurst:** And my wife always reminds me I said yes without talking to her.

Hanford: The new office of research was called the Institute of Education Sciences.

> **Whitehurst:** I thought that was a tremendous opportunity to take something that wasn't working and construct an organization and a focus and a funding and a level of support that would allow it to work.

Hanford: Congress established the Institute of Education Sciences in 2002 as part of the same legislative push that created Reading First — that big initiative to get the science of reading into schools. The Institute of Education Sciences set a new standard for how education research should be done. To get funding, you had to use valid and reliable ways of collecting data. There was more rigorous peer review. And the priority was on research methods that could determine whether a program or an approach actually caused students to do better.

Geoffrey Borman: These were huge changes in terms of the education research landscape.

Hanford: This is Geoffrey Borman. You met him in the episodes on Steubenville because he did research on the Success for All program.

Borman: In the early 2000s, there was a really strong swing toward the quantitative type of research that we do a lot of today.

(Music in)

Hanford: And now, more than two decades later, the branch of the Department of Education that helped make that change is all but gone. In a moment, we'll take you inside as the Trump administration dismantles the Institute of Education Sciences. And not everyone sees the cuts as a bad thing.

Mark Schneider: I was the director for the Institute of Education Sciences for six years. I feel no sorrow. I'm envious of how fast DOGE was able to clear the decks.

(Music out)

Hanford: That's coming up after a break.

**** BREAK ****

Hanford: Last year, Kenneth Shores applied for a new job.

Kenneth Shores: I really wanted to do policy-relevant work.

Hanford: He was already a tenured professor at the University of Delaware.

Shores: You know, academics publish papers, we give talks.

Hanford: But he wanted his work to have more of an impact.

(Music in)

Hanford: So he applied for a job at the Institute of Education Sciences.

Shores: I was basically applying during the election. But I had no idea who was going to win.

Hanford: And he didn't think the election would have much impact on his work. The Institute of Education Sciences was set up to be nonpartisan. He got the job. And started in January.

Shores: I was plugged into five or six studies my first month.

Hanford: He says they were high-quality studies. And the people were great.

Shores: I was really impressed by everyone, from, you know, core competency, statistical rigor, research design, curiosity about learning.

(Music out)

Erin Pollard Young: In education research, IES was always everyone's dream.

Hanford: This is Erin Pollard Young. When she was in graduate school, she knew she wanted to work at the Institute of Education Sciences. She'd been there for more than 13 years when Trump was elected again.

Pollard Young: We expected this to be similar to the first Trump term. Probably more work on charter schools, vouchers, that kind of thing.

Hanford: But the idea that the Institute of Education Sciences would be gutted and they would lose their jobs — she and her colleagues weren't thinking about that.

Pollard Young: So, things were chugging along.

Hanford: Until Monday, Feb. 10. At about 1 p.m.

(Music in)

Pollard Young: The cancellation notices started coming.

News broadcast: Today, the Department of Education terminated 89 contracts worth $881 million.

Pollard Young: And it's termination after termination after termination.

Hanford: Elon Musk's DOGE team canceled almost all of the department's research contracts.

Shores: When the contract is cut, the study just dies.

Hanford: We talked to 18 people who worked at the Institute of Education Sciences. Most of them didn't want us to use their names because they feared retaliation.

Woman 1: It was chaos.

Woman 2: There was no clear communication about why things were being cut, what was happening.

Hanford: They were confused and stressed. But they still weren't thinking they were going to be fired.

Woman 2: I think everyone sort of told themselves a story that we just didn't know what was happening. But it wouldn't necessarily end with all of us losing our jobs.

Hanford: And then, on Tuesday, March 11, they got an email.

Pollard Young: Saying the next day, our offices were all going to be closed for a security threat.

Woman 3: Our building is right next to Immigration and Customs Enforcement. And there have been some protests.

Pollard Young: And I text my friend who works in ICE, like, "Hey, are you guys closed tomorrow?" "No." So like, OK. And HHS is not closed tomorrow and they're downstairs. OK. So the threat is coming from inside. We are the threat. Why are we the threat?

Hanford: They left work at the end of the day. They had a feeling something bad was about to happen.

(Music out)

Woman 2: I had tickets to take my 7-year-old son to the Alvin Ailey dance troupe, and I was really happy that I had theater tickets because I was pretty devastated at just everything that seemed like it was probably going to happen that evening.

Woman 3: I was at home, trying to prepare a meal for my family.

Pollard Young: I was cleaning up dinner and helping with homework.

Hanford: And then the messages started coming.

Pollard Young: I got an email saying that my entire organizational unit was being eliminated.

Woman 2: I turned my phone back on and it was full of text messages indicating that we had all lost our jobs.

Shores: And at that point we were blocked out of our computers and everything.

Woman 3: We were told that we're supposed to close out and prepare to transfer our work to someone else.

Pollard Young: But you have no access to your files, you have no access to your email, you have no access to your phone. And then — I think it was about a week later — we had to go into the office to return our stuff and gather any personal belongings.

Hanford: That's the day I was outside, in the rain, with the crowd holding signs and the drivers honking.

Woman 3: I have decades of hard-copy documents sitting in my office that I need to transfer. And I am being told I have 15 minutes to go in and get my belongings: you

know, my couple pairs of shoes and my photos of my kids and my coffee mugs that are at my cube.

Pollard Young: You walk around the office, and you see — there's no more National Center for Education Research. There's no more National Center for Education Evaluation. It is empty. So then we left and went home.

Linda McMahon: Good evening, good evening.

Hanford: The next week, the secretary of education, Linda McMahon, held a press briefing outside the White House.

McMahon: It's nice to see all of you today on this beautiful, glorious, sunny evening in Washington D.C.

Hanford: She was kidding. It was a stormy night.

(Reporters asking questions)

Hanford: A reporter asked the secretary about the job cuts.

McMahon: Well, thank you so much for asking that because last week we did terminate almost half of the Department of Education. We did it thoughtfully. We looked to see where duplication was in the departments. We wanted to make sure that we were just cutting fat from the bureaucracy.

Hanford: A spokesperson for the Department of Education characterized the contracts that were cut as examples of "waste, fraud and abuse."

Wes Hoover: I think that's very shortsighted.

Hanford: Wes Hoover is a long-time reading researcher, and he found that explanation hard to believe.

Hoover: I understand the idea of waste, fraud and abuse. You want to combat that whenever you can. But when you're cutting entire agencies, and you're doing it so quickly, I just don't see that the focus really is on waste, fraud, and abuse — unless you think all of it is wasteful.

Fletcher: You know, you're really dismantling a very large research enterprise that'll be very difficult to resurrect.

Hanford: That's Jack Fletcher. You heard him earlier. He and other people we talked to said they aren't just concerned about the cuts to the Department of Education. They're concerned about the cuts to research more generally.

Roger Geiger: It's a frightening departure from U.S. science policy since World War II.

Hanford: This is Roger Geiger. He's an historian.

> **Geiger:** This very large, federal investment has created one spectacular breakthrough after another for decades and now is being just practically shut down.
>
> **Kleinman:** This moment is another sea change, potentially, and not in a good way.

Hanford: That's Daniel Kleinman again. He says America's role as the global leader in science and research is at risk.

> (Music in)

Hanford: But of course, not everyone sees it this way. Our reporter Christopher Peak talked to someone who thinks the cuts at the Institute of Education Sciences might be a good thing.

> (Music out)
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> **Christopher Peak:** First question, this is easy: Can you just introduce yourself?
>
> **Mark Schneider:** OK. I'm Mark Schneider. I was the director for the Institute of Education Sciences for six years.

Peak: Mark Schneider is a political scientist. He started his career as an academic.

> **Schneider:** I mean, I was a distinguished professor. I have bling, medals, all this kind of stuff.

Peak: But he was tired of academia. And during the George W. Bush administration, when the Institute of Education Sciences was still pretty new, he got a job there. He ran the statistics side of the operation. When Bush left office, he went into private consulting. And when a Republican was in charge again, during Trump's first term, Mark Schneider was tapped to run the whole operation. He thought the place needed a shake-up.

> **Schneider:** There was no coherent and no cohesive strategy for how to spend well over a hundred million dollars a year on research. It was like: Oh, we need some work in social emotional learning. We need some work in this. We need some work in that. We need some work in — you know. And I spent six years trying to change it. And changing it was so hard. I mean, really and truly hard. And, I mean, did you ever work for government?
> **Peak:** No.
> **Schneider:** Don't.

Peak: He left frustrated at the end of his term last year and went to work for a conservative think tank. After Trump took office again, he watched with amazement at how quickly things happened.

> **Schneider:** DOGE came along and just wiped everything out. So, I've lost a lot of friends by saying, like, what happened to IES is not the worst thing that could have

happened. And you could build a whole new, modern research center right now. It's possible. You don't need Congress, you don't need new legislation, nothing.

(Music in)

Peak: But Mark Schneider says he does believe the federal government has a critical role to play when it comes to funding education research. And he has concerns about whether the Trump administration is committed to that role. He also believes the federal government has a critical role to play when it comes to getting education research into schools. This is a key part of the mission of the Institute of Education Sciences. It's one of the reasons Congress established it in the first place. Not just to improve education research. But to get that research into schools. To get research into practice. And this is where Mark Schneider thinks the Institute of Education Sciences really fell down on the job.

Schneider: IES blew the dissemination part.

Peak: It's at this point that Mark Schneider brings up our reporting. Not just this podcast that first came out in the fall of 2022, but the reporting on reading instruction that Emily had been doing for years before that.

Schneider: Emily Hanford comes along, and she did so much more to change the nature of state policies, what goes on in schools, than hundreds of millions of dollars of IES research. And this is a clear failure on IES's part. Right, so she comes along, Emily comes along and boom, boom, boom, boom. And then now 40-some-odd states are doing the science of reading and, you know, passed legislation. Some of the legislation's good, some of it's not so good. But the fact of the matter is there are over 40 states that are now committed to some version of the science of reading.

(Music out)

Hanford: Hey, Chris.

Peak: Hey, Emily.

Hanford: So, I want to ask you about what Mark Schneider just said there. Obviously, that's a huge compliment to this reporting and to journalism in general. But of course, this reporting wouldn't exist without the scientific research itself. And that wouldn't exist, according to the people we talked to, without the federal government's investment in that research over decades.

Peak: Exactly.

Hanford: But it is hard to argue with the idea that there's a problem when it comes to getting education research into practice. That's the main idea of our podcast — that there was all this research on how kids learn to read, and lots of teachers didn't know about it.

Peak: Right. And the question of course is: Why? And that's what we spent years investigating.

Hanford: And if you've listened to this entire podcast, you know that there's not a simple answer to that question.

Peak: Nope.

Hanford: So, here's my question about what Mark Schneider just said. Did the Institute of Education Sciences fall down on the job? Did it fail in some fundamental way at getting research into schools?

Peak: I talked to a lot of people about this. None of them were as harsh as Mark Schneider. But they acknowledged that the institute had work to do in this area. Mission definitely not accomplished, at least not yet. But they say it was something that the institute was working on. And they pointed to things they think the Institute of Education Sciences was doing that was getting the research out there. For example, they have been putting out these things called "practice guides." They summarize the most important research and provide tips for teachers based on that research.

Hanford: Those practice guides have been really useful for me. I've read a bunch of them. And teachers have told me they use them, too.

Peak: They're supposed to be kind of like clinical practice guides that are used in medicine.

Hanford: Medicine comes up a lot when you talk to people about the challenges that education faces with getting research into practice. A lot of people hold up medicine as the field that education should emulate.

Peak: Yeah, that was the big idea when the Institute of Education Sciences was set up back in 2002 — to make education research more like medical research.

Hanford: But it can take years for medical research to get into practice too.

(Music in)

Hanford: Like, it took a really long time to convince surgeons that they should be washing their hands before they operate on people. We're talking many decades between the time there was validated research that showed handwashing saved lives and when it was standard practice for surgeons to do it. This was back in the late 19th century, but getting medical research into practice is still a big challenge.

(Music out)

Hanford: To tell you more about that, I'm going to say goodbye to Chris.

Peak: Bye, Emily.

Hanford: And introduce you to a woman named Carolyn Riehl.

Carolyn Riehl: Often people compare what they think is going on in medical research as the gold standard compared to what's going on in education.

Hanford: Carolyn Riehl is a professor of sociology and education policy. And she's married to a physician.

Riehl: Medical journals have come into my house for about 40 years. And I look at them and I don't see things quite the way some of those people see them.

Hanford: About 20 years ago, she wrote an article called "Feeling Better: A Comparison of Medical Research and Education Research."

(Music in)

Riehl: There is certainly a large evidence base in medicine, but healthcare practitioners — sometimes they're literally not aware of the research. An example would be the long time it took for doctors to stop making wrong treatment decisions regarding stomach ulcers.

Hanford: She says, for years, doctors thought stomach ulcers were caused by stress. So, to treat ulcers ....

Riehl: You counseled patients against stress. That was the received understanding of the day.

Hanford: And then, in 1979, a pathologist in Western Australia noticed bacteria in stomach biopsies from people with ulcers. He and a colleague thought — maybe bacteria are causing those ulcers. So they did studies. And they were right. Bacteria are the main cause of stomach ulcers. But it took years to get doctors to use antibiotics to treat ulcers. They were stuck in the belief that ulcers were caused by stress.

Riehl: The researchers really had to fight against that received wisdom.

Hanford: There are other examples where research in medicine should've changed practice but was ignored. And even when best practices are finally well known, they are often poorly implemented.

(Music out)

Foorman: Bridging that gap between the research and practice — that's a problem with science in any discipline.

Hanford: That was Barbara Foorman. You heard her earlier. You also heard Nancy Madden.

Madden: We haven't figured out exactly how to make all of this research make the kind of impact that we want yet. But giving up on it doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

Hanford: And that's what she and others are concerned is happening here — that the federal government is turning away from its decades-long support of scientific inquiry and knowledge production.

Seidenberg: There's so much potential here, but you've got to stay the course.

Hanford: You heard Mark Seidenberg in earlier episodes airing his concerns about getting the details of the scientific research right in classrooms. But overall, he was actually quite optimistic that things were finally beginning to change for the better.

Seidenberg: It's just such an incredible moment that we got to where we might actually hope to make some really huge changes in literacy. And so to now back off from that would just be disastrous and, and deeply, deeply disappointing, and deeply — it's just not a good time.

(Music in)

Hanford: And he's not just concerned that the federal cuts could get in the way of the existing knowledge finally making a difference in schools. He's concerned about new knowledge. About future investment in research.

Seidenberg: There's a huge number of new questions. Reading is changing right now. So I'm not teaching this year; I'm retired, but my colleagues tell me it is very, very hard to get anyone to actually do the reading assignments. They don't have to because they can let AI summarize the stuff for them. Well, that has consequences. We need to understand it.

(Music out)

Hanford: Kenneth Shores is also worried about the future of research.

(Music in)

Hanford: Remember him? The guy who left academia to work at the Institute of Education Sciences and lost his job a couple of months later.

Shores: I'm going to go back to the University of Delaware.

Hanford: He got his tenured position back. He's lucky to have a job. Most of his former coworkers are struggling to find work. But he's worried about universities, too, because of the big cuts they are facing.

Shores: We have a Ph.D. program that will be hard to continue funding in the absence of grants. And so you're going to see a lot of talent leaving this whole sector, going to other stuff. You know, the really, really bright ed policy person was like somebody who could have got a job as like an analyst at Amazon and made twice as much money. But they cared about education. They cared about, like, learning. And this is something they were

drawn to. And so they did it for 5, 15 years, whatever the number is. And now I think a lot of them are not going to do it anymore. And that — I just don't think we really know what that's going to be like. We've had really, really talented people trying to kind of like figure out schooling. And what the world looks like when they're not doing that anymore, I think we don't really know.

(Music out)

Hanford: Here's my take: This podcast has helped create a sense of urgency, a sense of "enough already, we've waited too long for kids to get evidence-based reading instruction." But evidence-based instruction is still kind of new in education. The Institute of Education Sciences has existed for just over 20 years. That's barely a generation. Maybe 20 years isn't that long when it comes to the complex work of getting research into schools. So yes, there should be urgency about all of this. But maybe things are — or were — just getting started.

(Music in)

Hanford: There's more to come in *Sold a Story*. We are working on Season 2 right now. And it goes beyond reading. It's a whole new story about how learning works and why research about it often doesn't make it into classrooms. I think you're going to love it. Keep following *Sold a Story* in your podcast app so you don't miss it. We have a website. It's soldastory.org. There, you'll find much more on the Trump administration's cuts to education research, including the sudden shutdown of a data project running since the 1970s, a big reading study nearly killed just months before completion, and one of the only parts of the education department that the administration wants to keep. That's all at soldastory.org.

Hanford: This episode was produced by me, Emily Hanford, with reporting from Christopher Peak, Kate Martin, Carmela Guaglianone and Olivia Chilkoti. Curtis Gilbert is our editor. Fact checking by Betsy Towner Levine. Our digital editor is Andy Kruse. Mixing, sound design and original music by Chris Julin. Final mastering by Derek Ramirez. Our theme music is by Wonderly. Our executive editor is Jane Helmke. The APM Reports team includes Emily Corwin and Emily Haavik. Special thanks to Tom Scheck. Leadership support for *Sold a Story* comes from Hollyhock Foundation and Oak Foundation. Support also comes from Ibis Group, Esther A. & Joseph Klingenstein Fund, Kenneth Rainin Foundation, and the listeners of American Public Media.