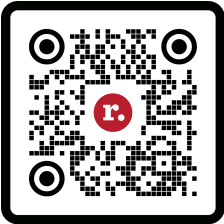


Episode 11: The Outlier There's a school district in eastern Ohio where virtually all the students become good readers by the time they finish third grade. Many of the wealthiest places in the country can't even say that. And Steubenville is a Rust Belt town where the state considers almost all the students "economically disadvantaged." How did they do it?  EPISODE 11		
Episode Length	Listen to the episode	Read the transcript
32:29	https://www.apmreports.org/episode/2025/02/20/sold-a-story-e11-the-outlier	Printable Transcript
Additional Materials	- APM Reports — Most school districts have lots of kids who struggle with reading. This one is different - American Educator — Catch Them Before They Fall - Timothy Shanahan — Letter names or sounds first?	

Questions and Topics for Discussing “The Outlier”	
Before Listening	What do you think makes some schools more successful than others? What are your criteria for a successful school?
While Listening	What specific practices help Steubenville students become successful readers?
After Listening	<i>From a teaching perspective:</i> This episode describes practices that Steubenville uses to teach reading, but it does not provide the name of the program they use. - How might discussing practices rather than programs change conversations among teachers? - How did listening to a description of successful reading practices without a program name affect your listening? In Steubenville, the staff has agreed on a consistent way to teach foundational skills, from classroom to classroom and grade to grade. - What steps would be needed to create consistency in reading instruction across all classrooms in your school? - How could doing so help your students?

Steubenville provides tutoring during the school day.

“In fact, every first grader at this school gets a reading tutor until they've mastered all the first grade material. And as kids reach mastery and their tutors are freed up, the first graders who are still behind get even more tutoring ... probably 25, sometimes 40, minutes. Sometimes twice a day, four days a week.”

- How does this compare to your school's approach to helping students who need support?
 - How are students identified for additional support?
 - Who teaches them? What are they taught?

From a parenting perspective:

Consider Steubenville's focus on attendance:

“Attendance is huge. A school can offer fantastic reading instruction. But kids aren't going to get that instruction if they're not in school. So Steubenville puts a lot of effort into making sure kids show up.”

Suzanne Allen describes what she does to promote attendance:

Allen: “So when I receive the attendance cards from the teachers, if a parent hasn't called, I make sure that I give them a call.”

Emily Hanford: “If he doesn't show up on Monday, she says she'll drive to the homeless shelter and find out what's going on. She does this a lot — knocks on doors, brings kids to school if she has to.”

- What does your child's school do to promote attendance?
- In the past, how have you determined whether or not your child will attend school on any given day? Does hearing about Steubenville's approach and success make you think about those decisions differently?

Students in need of reading tutoring receive it during the school day in Steubenville.

- How does this approach compare to the support available at your child's school?
- Has your child received tutoring? What was that experience like?

From a community perspective:

Steubenville helps meet students' basic needs — providing clothing, helping them with their hair, and even visiting their homes to check on attendance.

- What kinds of support are available for students in need at your school?
- Should schools make it a priority to offer this kind of help? Why or why not?

From a student perspective:

- In what ways did the classrooms in Steubenville sound similar or different from your school?
- What do you think about cooperative learning, where students teach each other? Do you do that at your school?

Wrap Up	What would it take for your school to become an outlier like Steubenville?
Extend	<i>Activity 1</i> Read Catch Them Before They Fall, which includes the following quote: “The best solution to the problem of reading failure is to allocate resources for early identification and prevention. It is a tragedy of the first order that while we know clearly the costs of waiting too long, few school districts have in place a mechanism to identify and help children before failure takes hold.”  ARTICLE - What’s in place in your school district to identify students at risk of reading difficulty? - What resources are allocated to support these students? - What kind of help is available for older students? <i>Activity 2</i> Steubenville uses a “sounds first” approach to teaching letters, but: “There’s actually some disagreement among cognitive scientists about whether it’s better to start with the letter names or the letter sounds. The bottom line is that kids need to learn both.”  ARTICLE Read Letter names or sounds first? - What surprised you about the research findings regarding teaching letter names versus letter sounds? - What does this example tell you about how complex teaching something "simple" actually is? - How does this article help you understand why different schools might approach early literacy differently? - Do you know if the students entering kindergarten near you tend to know letter names? Sounds? Do they already know how to read? Shanahan acknowledges that his final recommendation is “an opinion rather than a data-based, science of reading claim.” - What does this suggest about the relationship between research and classroom practice?

We’d love to hear about your *Sold a Story* discussion!

- Email us: soldastory@apmreports.org
- Leave us a voicemail message: (612) 888-7323