

Episode 12: The Evidence

There’s a name for the program at the heart of Steubenville’s remarkable reading results. It’s called Success for All. It’s been around for decades, and numerous studies have shown it’s effective. But relatively few school districts use it. We trace the history of the program and why it’s never really caught on.



EPISODE 12

Episode Length	Listen to the Episode	Read the Transcript
34:31	https://www.apmreports.org/episode/2025/02/27/sold-a-story-e12-the-evidence	Printable Transcript
Additional Materials	- APM Reports — Success for All gets kids reading. Why don’t more schools use it? - Vanderbilt — What is an evidence-based practice or program? - Success for All — Research summary - Right to Read Project — A Classroom Teachers’ Guide to Reading Research	

Questions and Topics for Discussing “The Evidence”	
Before Listening	Read the episode description. - What do you know about Success for All? - What do you think it means for a program or practice to be “evidence-based”? Write down your definition.
While Listening	- Take note of how the terms “evidence” and “scientifically based” are used and defined. (in particular, the section from 18:00 to 25:00) - Why did Bob Slavin call for an end to Reading First? (20:30 to 24:55) - Why did Heinemann and its star authors flourish after Reading First? (27:15 to 28:30)
After Listening	<i>From a teaching perspective:</i> The episode described how researchers relied on different approaches to understand and address reading difficulties. Compare the way Marie Clay developed Reading Recovery with the way Bob Slavin and Nancy Madden created Success for All: “[Marie Clay] observed children and came up with a theory — an idea — about how they learn. She built her program based on that idea. But then a lot of cognitive science research came

	along that showed her idea was wrong. “Bob Slavin and Nancy Madden took a different approach. They didn't start with an idea about how kids learn to read. They started with a collection of practices, backed by rigorous research. Practices like phonics instruction that had already been studied and shown to work.” • Which approach is more familiar to you? Do you remember what you were taught in your teacher preparation program? • When you encounter a new program or practice, how do you determine whether you want to use it? Do you look for research evidence, or do you rely on other factors to determine whether it’s worth implementing? <i>From a parenting perspective:</i> Nancy Madden says: “You may be worrying about high school, but if those kids aren't reading by third grade, then you've lost them. You have to do that early part really well.” • Does this perspective align with how you’ve thought about your child’s education? • Success for All is a highly structured, scripted program. Would you want your child to attend a school that uses a program like that? Why or why not? <i>From a community perspective:</i> The Reading First initiative collapsed amid controversy over conflicts of interest and program promotion. Bob Slavin wrote in his complaint that the “Reading First legislation itself is sound, well-intentioned.” “But Slavin said Reading First had strayed from its intended purpose. That it was not promoting ‘scientifically based reading research.’ That it had become, instead, a giant giveaway to publishers who were making millions of dollars on programs that hadn't been tested or proven.” • What lessons from Reading First could help inform reading instruction changes going on now in your state or district? What can be done so that education policies don't become “giveaways to publishers”? <i>From a student perspective:</i> • Nancy Madden and Bob Slavin were looking for things that schools could do differently to help kids succeed. What could your school do differently to help you or your classmates? • What do you think about the idea that your school can make a real difference in whether you succeed?
Wrap Up	Look back at your definition of “evidence-based.” Now review the chart below:

	<table border="1" data-bbox="370 153 1458 655"> <tr> <td data-bbox="370 153 727 327">Evidence-based program or practice</td><td data-bbox="727 153 1458 327">Directly tested in rigorous studies (e.g., randomized controlled trials, strong quasi-experimental studies) and has shown positive results</td></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="370 327 727 508">Research-based program or practice</td><td data-bbox="727 327 1458 508">Built on principles, theories or strategies that are supported by research, but the program or practice itself has not been directly tested</td></tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="370 508 727 655">Emerging program or practice</td><td data-bbox="727 508 1458 655">Anecdotal evidence of effectiveness but research has not been conducted</td></tr> </table> Check your understanding by explaining to the person next to you or jotting a quick note: • What is the difference between an “evidence-based” and a “research-based” program or practice? • Is your school using “evidence-based” programs and practices? How do you know? • There isn’t an evidence-based program or practice for every instructional need. Can you think of some examples? What do you do in that case?	Evidence-based program or practice	Directly tested in rigorous studies (e.g., randomized controlled trials, strong quasi-experimental studies) and has shown positive results	Research-based program or practice	Built on principles, theories or strategies that are supported by research, but the program or practice itself has not been directly tested	Emerging program or practice	Anecdotal evidence of effectiveness but research has not been conducted
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Extend	Activity 1 Read A Classroom Teachers’ Guide to Reading Research • What terms or explanations were new to you? Here’s a way to remember the difference between “efficacy” and “effectiveness”: • Efficacy = Can it work? (best-case scenario) • Effectiveness = Does it work? (real-world scenario) Now think about your school. • Why might a program that has been proven in a study turn out not to work at your school? What could you do to increase the chances that the program would work? Activity 2 Read Success for All gets kids reading. Why don’t more schools use it? • Why do schools drop Success for All? • Would a program like Success for All work in your school or district? Why or why not?  ARTICLE						