

In reading “Scaling Literacy Success Through Reading Science” (November 2019), I share Brian Kingsley’s goal of “vastly improved reading outcomes” in our schools. To do that, we must make sure we are examining *all* the evidence on what works.

He rightly states that students need more “background knowledge” to understand their reading. Research by Keith Stanovich and others has found that this knowledge is, to a great extent, a product of considerable amounts of pleasure reading. **OUR FIRST PRIORITY SHOULD BE TO ENCOURAGE READING**, including popular series books. My recent study found that children can acquire more than a third of their academic vocabulary by reading a million words of light fiction. Children who read 30 minutes a day can do that in less than a year.

Before we purchase expensive curricular packages, perhaps we should try **GIVING KIDS THE TIME, PLACE AND RESOURCES** to get hooked on books. It’s never too late to become a good reader.

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**Literacy Research**

Brian Kingsley, in his essay (“Scaling Literacy Success Through Reading Science,” November 2019), proposes: “In early grades, students must receive daily, systematic phonics instruction to ensure all students can decode words effectively.”

Studies tell us, however, that while children following a systematic decoding-based curriculum do better on tests of decoding (pronouncing words out-loud), they do not perform better on measures of reading comprehension. The best predictor of performance on tests in which children have to under-

stand what they read is how much self-selected reading they have done.

Here is a review of this research that I completed in 2009 titled “Does Intensive Reading Instruction Contribute to Reading Comprehension?” (<https://tinyurl.com/jc6x8mk>)

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**Cultivating Community Schools**

Steve Webb and Tom Hagley’s article “Cultivating Community Schools” (August 2019) really got me thinking. Their writing was so crisp, clear and to the point.

We have a duty to seek out partnerships, try things we haven’t done before and wrap around our students so that learning can happen and families can thrive. The community schools work in Washington’s Vancouver Public Schools inspires me to do better and to try new things in the spirit of enhancing outcomes for kids and families.

**TIFFANY SHIREMAN**  
CHIEF OF STAFF,  
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Steve Webb and Tom Hagley delivered a really great story in your magazine that will definitely help others. I’m just so appreciative.

**JOSE MUNOZ**  
DIRECTOR, COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS,  
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I’m grateful Steve Webb and Tom Hagley published their article in your magazine before my co-author and I finished our next manuscript — so we can cite their work. It’ll be a follow up to our 2013 book *Building a Culture of Hope: Enriching Schools with Optimism and Opportunity*.

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