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## Courier Journal request

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To: "Krauth, Olivia" <OKrauth@gannett.com>

Wed, Oct 2, 2019 at 3:02 PM

Hi Olivia,

Thanks for your email.

You said: My coworker Grace passed along your note about JCPS and SCALA. Can you share more about what you'd like to talk about?

I am glad Grace forwarded my message to you.

My response is rather complex, here is a compressed outline:

Note: As this is a long email with many links and attachments, would you please let me know that you've received it?

### Who am I? Headlines from my background:

- I was the architect of Apple Computer's first desk-top university. I gave dozens of 'Future of Learning' keynotes at Apple International's top-level education marketing events. ([more](#))
- I've engaged in over 1000 hours of deep dialogue-interviews with over 100 world class thought leaders in fields related to our current understanding of "reading" (scientists, scholars, policy makers, activists - including Nobel prize and National Humanities Medal winners). ([more](#))
- From those conversations, I produced 140+ videos related to "the code and the challenge of learning to read it". ([more](#))
- I have given hundreds of keynotes or featured presentations at conferences including: Science of Educating Conference – National School Mental Health Association – 21st Century Learning Initiative – World Futurist Society – PBS: New Science of Learning – New American Schools Design Team – National Technological University – California Education Summit – International Dyslexia Association – Scientific Learning's National Circle of Learning – Lindamood-Bell National Conference – Carus Foundation – Rotary International – National Center for Family Literacy and many others. ([more](#))

### Why Reading? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdMRWN0uuHM>

For as long as we have been keeping data (NAEP) nearly 2/3 of the entire US K-12 student population has been less than proficient in reading - less than proficient in *3rd grade all the way through 12th grade*. ([more](#)) The issue isn't just the obvious lack of critical access/interface skills (which makes everything about school harder because reading isn't as transparent to learning as it needs to be). Everything about school is also harder because day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year **every day at school is another reminder that they aren't good enough at learning**. The "Mind-Shame" that accompanies such chronic learning difficulties is toxic to their trust in learning ([more](#)). Our progress in education is limited to how many kids make it to grade level proficiency before they 'shame out'.

In 2015 a recently retired G.E. executive, Kenneth Pritchett who had spent 5 frustrating years working one on one with kids as literacy tutor, asked his friend Tim Hagan, a JCPS principal, why the kids he was trying to help weren't improving. Tim said no one he knew hows to help the 50%+ JCPS kids who struggle with reading. Tim sent Kenneth to Stephen McCrocklin (Co-founder of "Langsford Learning") who told Kenneth that if he really wanted to understand how to teach reading he should reach out to me.

Within a short time Kenneth began to understand my views on why 1/2 the kids of JCPS were in life-danger because of their reading difficulties and what I thought would really help them. Kenneth brought in some friends from G.E. including Mark Shirkness (the G.E. executive who led the Haier acquisition). Mark was on the board of JCPEF and got us an audience with Dewey Hensley (JCPS CAO at the time). Dewey had enough of a 1st person understanding of reading to appreciate our completely new approach. With Dewey's support (see attached letter of endorsement) we enlisted Dr. David Paige of Bellarmine (see attached letter of endorsement) and with some funding from Gheens embarked on a early trial (see Magic Ladder Early Results). Important note: Gheens and all other dollars were donations or grants to Learning Stewards a 501c3 non-profit who was developing the new technology and committed to give it freely to JCPS and every one of its students.

Olivia, it's difficult to convey what is SO different about what we are doing. At this early point in the story we were providing a

paper-print technology called **PQs** that varies the appearance of letters in simple and systematic ways that profoundly reduces the confusion involved in working out the recognition of words. In the following example, notice the grayed "c" and "e" indicating that they are silent and the enlarged bold "n" indicating that it is making its alphabet name sound.

## "Scent"

Engaging over 100 local volunteers, we conducted a series of trials. Even with this simple initial technology we saw significant "large" effects on student performance (as reported (attached) by David Paige of Bellarmine).

### Phonics Knowledge

The Magic Ladder group climbed higher and faster.

$F(1,62) = 19.62, p < .001, d = 1.13$  (very large effect)



### Reading Fluency

The Magic Ladder group progressed faster.

$F(1,62) = 8.29, p = .005, d = .73$  (large effect)



Unfortunately, the control group used by David Paige was made up of students who were also part of the "Bellarmine JCPS Literacy Project". Also during this time, Dewey Hensley resigned from JCPS.

In early 2017 with evidence of our success and a new and more powerful version of the technology, we attended a meeting set up by then assistant superintendent Karen Branham which included numerous JCPS leaders of curriculum and instruction

and Bellarmine's Dr. Theresa Magpuri-Lavelle (who Karen Branham called "JCPS Lead with all things Literacy"). It turned out that the meeting was held the same week as Donna Hargens' unexpected departure. Consequently, Karen Branham was unable to attend.

Dr. Theresa Magpuri-Lavelle began the meeting by saying that it was critical to the Bellarmine JCPS Literacy Project that the data it was collecting on its teacher training effects not be contaminated by the effects of our work. At the time, the Bellarmine JCPS Literacy Project was in virtually every elementary school in JCPS (and making Bellarmine a lot of money). Prohibiting us from continuing in the elementary schools at JCPS (for all the wrong reasons) was tragic. Our technology (for reasons I hope you will invest some time in learning about) can be used to teach reading, but it can also be used as a "safety net" for middle and high school kids whose poor reading is obscuring their ability to learn from what they are reading. Pivoting off the conversation about elementary schools, we addressed the others in the room about the "safety net" application. Jenni Aberli and Stephanie Young were the leaders of literacy instruction for middle and high school. They said JCPS middle and high schools do not have reading problems. They have comprehension problems and made it clear they weren't interested in efforts to improve to reading.

After the meeting I emailed Karen Branham and shared:

For what it is worth, I feel compelled to share with you my impression that the attendees of the meeting, representing middle and high schools, had a dangerously insufficient understanding of reading - specifically of the relationships between decoding, fluency, and comprehension. We were stunned by claims that you don't really have many students with reading issues in middle and high school - only comprehension issues.

She responded that she appreciated what I shared and wanted to meet to discuss it. Before we could arrange a meeting she unexpectedly resigned.

JCPS leaders Donna Hargens, Dewey Hensley, and Karen Branham were all advocates and they had all unexpectedly left. We subsequently tried working with individual principals. A great example of the process was with Ryan Rodosky, principal of (FLOAN) Frederick Law Olmsted Academy North ([CJ contributor](#)). We met with Ryan on the 29th of November 2018. He was SO excited. He had just received notice that FLOAN was going to receive tablets from a Verizon grant, but he was worried. He said 80% of his kids couldn't read well enough to benefit from the tablets. He loved what we were doing and immediately schedule a meeting with all his teachers for the next week. That meeting went great and all of the teachers were eager to proceed. We now needed to meet with the schools tech admin to get everyone's devices enabled. Over the next couple of months we were given one excuse ("regulatory paperwork", "not authorized to share Google folders") after another as to why the tech admin didn't have time to work with us. Then, after months of delays, we received this from the tech admin:

"Due to adjustments in our school improvement plans, we will not be moving forward with Magic Ladder this school year."

Completely surprised by this kind of "Dear John" dismissal, I wrote Ryan:

Ryan,

As you know, after our initial meeting with you, we met with your teachers in early December. There was great interest and enthusiasm to move forward immediately with training your teachers. However we ran into a series of delays as Tyler said he didn't have the time (an hour or so) to prepare your end. After a couple of delays in December, the training was pushed til late February. Now, today, we received this:

Thank you for sharing information about Magic Ladder. Due to adjustments in our school improvement plans, we will not be moving forward with Magic Ladder this school year.

Best,

P. Tyler Stevens  
Instructional Coach  
Olmsted Academy North

Ryan, I need a better explanation than this. When we talked in your office I felt we developed a respect for each other and a mutual appreciation for how hard we are each working to help the kids of JCPS. After our meeting, and based on the enthusiastic response of your teachers, our 2019 plans allocated serious time and resources to learning and working together at Olmsted North. This drop-out really hurts us.

Ryan, I assume this was ultimately your call. It is extremely important to the future of Learning Stewards that I fully understand why this happened. What changed your mind? Was it something about the Magic Ladder? Something from JCPS administration? Whatever is meant by 'adjustment in school improvement plans', why not engage with us in a good faith dialogue to weigh the pros and cons or talk about ways we could adapt to your new conditions? We are talking about something the vast majority of your kids are having their lives warped / seriously harmed by. Please respect our (non-profit) mission and years of hard work enough to share why we were so perfunctorily dismissed. If you'd rather talk on the phone about this let me know a good date, time, and number to call.

Thanks for reading this Ryan. I look forward to hearing from you.

I never heard back from Ryan. I tried to call, no response. I emailed again he never responded.

Olivia, this happened in numerous other situations as well. For example, we started working with a YMCA summer school program but had to stop because "someone at JCPS" told them they couldn't work with us. When we asked the YMCA folks who at JCPS blackballed us, they said they can't risk JCPS support by telling us.

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Olivia, I'd really like to share more about our JCPS experience and I hope you will reach out to learn more.

I will leave you with a partial explanation of this.

First, I assume you know that well over 50,000 JCPS students are chronically improficient with reading. This not only exacerbates all the other challenges of school, it erodes kids confidence in their ability to learn. If you are interested, we can go deeper into how this "mind-shame" becomes learning disabling.

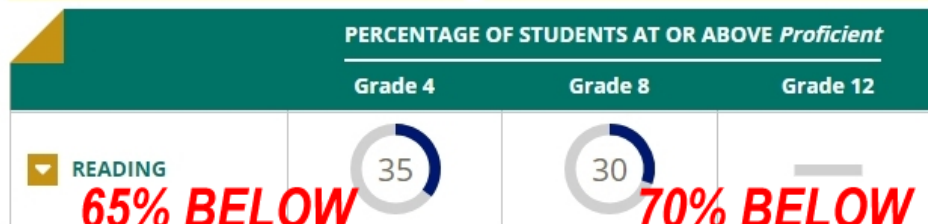
# The Nation's Report Card

2017

SELECT JURISDICTION:

SELECT RESULT:

Jefferson County (KY)

At or above *Proficient*

Everything about the ways we have thought about reading instruction - every science journal article - every reading instruction system - the whole of 'reading science' - has been and is based on a **common assumption: the orthography is two dimensional, inert, and immutable: the words learners must learn to read with can't themselves help learners read them.** Because everything about the "science of reading" is based on that assumption, everything about "reading instruction" (phonics, whole language, O.G., structured word inquiry, balanced literacy, ...) aims to abstractly (and offline from the live act) train the brains/minds of readers with the knowledge and skills they will need to "interpret" the code when they later encounter it.

In other words, we have to train the brains of readers to be able to automatically work out the recognition of unfamiliar words by reflexively applying abstractly learned knowledge and skills. That's where it all breaks down (and always has). When we had no choice but to teach reading on paper, then this model was understandable. Now that we can use "e-text" as the medium of learning to read, teaching the way we have been is absurd.

Having the said the above, there is a vast amount of money and reputations that work to make sure that nothing changes the "phonics" train.

When I was working on the Children of the Code project the world's leading authorities on learning to read loved it (see: [Paradigm Inertia in Reading Science and Policy - Part 1](#)).

As I began to question the reason why so many kids continue to struggling with reading, a senior official of the Bush Administration warned me to stop (see: [Paradigm Inertia in Reading Science and Policy - Part 2](#)).

In deep dives with the senior most scientists and policymakers in the world of reading it was clear that their fear of reawakening reading wars was more powerful than their scientific interest in understanding reading issues or their desire to help the afflicted kids (see: [Paradigm Inertia in Reading Science and Policy - Part 3](#)).

In closing, Olivia we now know kids can learn to read in profoundly more neurologically efficient and emotionally safe ways. Inevitably the majority of kids, including dyslexic kids, will learn to read without ever being taught (in any way resembling the ways kids are taught today). Instead, their every interaction with every word on every device (phones, tablets, computers, TV sets, augmented reality glasses, etc.) will be supported by "virtual" reading teachers and reference librarians – by "learning-guide bots" that are always tracking alongside their minds and instantly ready to help. Should a learner stumble reading an unfamiliar word, the helpers immediately appear to support and guide them. I am not talking about reading to them, rather scaffolding their learning to read at levels currently inconceivable to those whose minds are trapped in two dimensional static orthography.

You can get a 1st hand experience of what I've been talking about in a few minutes here:  
<https://mlc.learningstewards.org/>

Thanks for reading. I hope to hear from you.

David

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*In light of the rapidity and complexity of change and future uncertainty,  
what's more important to our children's futures than how well they can learn when they get there?*

**NOTHING!**

David Boulton  
Learning Activist

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***Changing how we think about learning  
can change how we learn about everything.***

**Articles:**

[Interactive Orthography: Training Wheels for Learning to Read](#)  
[Interactive Orthography: A Safety Web for Reading to Learn](#)  
[Hechinger Report: Future of Learning: The Magic Ladder](#)  
[Paradigm Inertia in Reading Science and Policy](#)  
[The #1 Cause of Low Literacy in America](#) (As published in Language Magazine)  
[PreK-2: The Obstacle Course Wall](#)  
[3rd thru 12th: No More Instructional Confusion, Guessing or Mind-Shame](#)  
[Adult Literacy: Overcoming Self-Sabotaging Habits](#)

**Key Points:**





[The Key Distinctions](#)  
[Is Wealth Inequality A Matter of Choice](#)  
[When Learning Hurts - Toxic Learning](#)  
[Reading: The Brain's Challenge](#)

*We can no longer assume that what we think children should learn  
is more important than how well they can learn.*

[Quoted text hidden]

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**4 attachments**

-  **Letter of Endorsement - Dr Hensley.pdf**  
322K
-  **Endorsement Letter, Dr. David Paige.pdf**  
2527K
-  **Magic Ladder Early Results 2014-15.pdf**  
558K
-  **Fall Trial Executive Summary.pdf**  
378K