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A Focus on Phonics or Comprehension? What Reading Research Should Look Like in Practice

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As schools around the nation scramble to respond to the alarm bells set off by falling scores on “the nation’s report card,” we—two university professors who teach reading courses and who are former elementary teachers—are watching. We get it. We, too, want to see better results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. We, too, worry about schools not effectively teaching what many believe is the building block of reading instruction, phonics. That needs to be corrected. But phonics, which has made its way to the center of the “science of reading” movement, is neither the whole problem nor the whole solution. That’s because phonics only focuses on sounding out words. It does not support readers to understand or analyze those words.