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Laura Adams (Wisconsin DPI) conversation on reading curriculum with Kate Archer Kent

It is the Morning show. I'm Kate Archer Kent. State education leaders seek ways to boost low reading proficiency scores among Wisconsin students. We learn about what's. Tools may use to teach children how to read and a science backed approach. You can be part of the discussion. Call with a question.

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Laura Adams is a policy initiatives advisor for the State Department of Public Instruction. Laura, welcome to the IDEAS Network. Good morning. Thank you so much for the invitation to be here today. Yes. So your department is asking the state legislature's budget writing committee to approve 11 early literacy curricula for kindergartners through third graders.

Why is the agency seeking approval of these reading materials versus some other options? I think first it's just important to take a step back and look at the bigger context that this list is a part of, and that is part of some new legislation that was passed this summer known as Act 20, and the reason why this legislation is PLA was passed is because.

We all know that developing reading skills is critical both to a child's academic success and their future life success. And we know based on our state data that while there were, there have been some pockets where our learners are succeeding in developing those early critical reading skills. We also know that we can all do better, which is why the department of.

Public instruction worked collaboratively with our legislators to really reimagine the way that literacy is taught to our schools. And there are a lot of things in this complex and comprehensive piece of legislation. This legislation changes what instruction our future teachers are getting around reading in their colleges and universities.

It requires all of our early educators and administrators to participate in a specific kind of reading training. This legislation allows for a limited number of statewide early literacy coaches to support our schools that have the greatest early literacy needs, and it also provides for a single reading readiness assessment.

That all learners in public and independent charter schools will be taking so that we have some data points that we can look at. And especially for those learners that experience high mobility, uh, schools will have the best information about them in order to provide the most meaningful instruction.

And so, but the most important piece of this legislation, the real foundation, is the fact that there's a clear definition of science-based early literacy instruction, which clearly delineates what needs to be taught, uh, as far as reading skills to our youngest learners. And, and then that is what our recommended list.

Is connected to. And Laura, you know, um, it seems like with the science of reading, teaching phonics seems to garner, you know, a lot of the spotlight. Um, are there other strategies in, in a science-based approach, uh, on learning to read? Yeah, I really appreciate that question. And this is something that, um, I'm really proud of Wisconsin for doing.

There were some states that have passed similar legislation that just focused on phonics, but what we know from the research and evidence I. Is that phonics alone is not enough to build critical reading skills. We also need to focus on oral language development and building vocabulary and background knowledge of learners, which comes through other kinds of subject area content like science and social studies.

And we know that writing instruction is deeply connected because that's a reciprocal process between reading and writing. And so that's one thing I'm really proud. Out of Wisconsin for doing is establishing a really comprehensive definition, which is ultimately what the department used, um, to, in our review of the instruct early literacy instructional materials.

Laura Adams is with US Policy Initiatives Advisor for the State Department of Public Instruction as we explore Wisconsin's work to transition to new state guidelines for reading curriculum and early readers. You can join in questions and comments. 806 4 2 1 2 3 4. So Laura, how would schools choose which reading materials to adopt?

That is an excellent question. I mean, right now, the way that the process works is that all local school boards have the independent authority to adopt whatever early literacy curricula they want, and they spend a great deal of time reviewing instructional materials based on their local criteria. And what this piece of legislation does is it tries to make that process.

Easier. Remember that, as I said, the law clearly delineates what are the criteria for science-based early literacy instruction and the law required the formation of a council, the early literacy curriculum council with three members appointed from the Speaker of the assembly. Three members appointed by the Senate Majority Leader and three members appointed by the Department of Public Instruction.

And the statute defined their job to review early literacy, instructional materials, and then to make a recommended list. To the department by having a list for schools to begin that process with that, uh, really allows our school districts to establish any additional local criteria based on the needs of their local learners and their local communities, uh, just to make their process a little bit easier at the local level.

So this nine member education council, um, the, uh, they. Come forth with four curriculum choices. Um, the Department of Public Instruction struck one of those recommendations from its list. What is problematic about the, um, the recommendation that was called Bookworms by Open up resources. Yeah, that's a very good question.

I, I think first it's really important to acknowledge that this council faced a lot of challenges, even for professionals who analyze curriculum as part of their daily roles and responsibilities. That's a complex process. This council had a really short deadline. Their deadline in the law said that they had to present a recommended list to.

Uh, the department by December 1st, and they, they chose to go beyond what was delineated in the law, uh, to establish their review criteria, but in the stress of their shortened timeline, they. They failed to norm as a group on the rubric that they established. They were engaging in some open conversation about a predetermined number of instructional materials that might make a good recommended list.

Um, and, and all of that really. Exposed Wisconsin to a level of legal risk that required that the department then engage in our own independent review of the instructional materials. And as I said, the department was using exactly what the law states must be required in science-based early literacy instruction.

And the law also states that those components. Need to be both explicit and systematic. And you can see our reviews publicly, um, posted online. We, our independent reviews just found that some of the comp. Components that are listed in the law were not met to our satisfaction in the, in that particular set of instructional materials.

Or perhaps there was evidence, um, that it was missing that explicit piece of instruction. What do you mean In some of those components? Yeah. What do you mean by explicit and systematic? Yeah, that's a great question. So systematic is really that idea that there is, there's a, an a pre-established scope and sequence.

Um, if I'm an early literacy teacher, I don't teach about the, the CH combination. Um, I don't do that just because I feel like it. I do that because. That's part of a very well established scope and sequence, and it makes sense, um, just based on the progression of the skills that are being taught. Mm-Hmm. So that's the systematic piece, and then explicit is that.

Uh, when I provide that instruction, I'm very clearly explaining to students what the instruction, what the instructional goal is, and why we're learning about it, and providing some, um, explicit instruction in maybe how to make that sound by, um, providing instruction on what do I do with my mouth? And providing some really clear instruction at a level that those early learners can understand about, uh, when, when we use that, uh, perhaps when we use that particular combination of letters.

Oh, thank you for that explanation. Laura Adams. Is a policy initiatives advisor at the State Department of Public Instruction as we discuss reading instruction methods in Wisconsin in the rollout. Be part of the discussion. Call in with a question. Share your thoughts. 806 4 2 1 2 3 4. I'm Kate Archer Kent.

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It is the Morning show. I'm Kate Archer Kent. We explore the latest efforts to help struggling young readers in Wisconsin and new instructional methods that schools may consider using like an emphasis on phonics. Colin, with a question, you can add your perspective. 806 4 2 1 2, 3, 4. Email ideas@wpr.org.

Laura Adams is with US Policy Initiatives Advisor at the State Department of Public Instruction, Laura, under the state law that that set in motion this transition to new reading guidelines. Schools must shift from balanced literacy to science of reading curricula. What is the difference between balanced literacy and science of reading methods?

I think that the answer to that question really depends on who you ask. To be honest, I think that, um, what it's, it's hard to really, it, it can be really easy to get hung up on those. Terms like balanced literacy. Sometimes we hear whole language. Even though, um, those terms, whole language and balanced literacy refer to two different things, they're often very confused, um, or conflated in the early literacy.

C conversation. Um, science of reading, um, very often includes, um, the perspective of a more phonics focused, uh, approach to early reading instruction. But to, you'll also find that people who subscribe to balanced literacy will will say that they also believe in a phonics. Focused approach to, uh, early literacy instruction.

And that's why I think it's so helpful that our legislation actually names science-based early literacy instruction, and then very clearly and comprehensively delineates exactly what that means and names all of the components that must be a part of that. And that way we don't need to get hung up on, um, conversations or debates about some of those early literacy terms.

How long will teachers have to be able to undergo training on their school's new reading curriculum? Once it's set, I. Yeah, that probably not long. And this was definitely, um, a stressful part of, of the process. The reality of a school budget cycle and the reality of a school calendar means that. Any Wisconsin district that does want to purchase new early literacy instructional materials and get those in the hands of learners for next school year, they need to be making those purchases now.

Um, and so that was definitely something that added stress to, to the entire process. And so it's also an important reminder that in Wisconsin. Districts are not required to select any of those early literacy curricula from the recommended list. They are required to implement science-based early literacy instruction as it's delineated in the law.

So if, uh, so at this point in time, we are waiting for the Wisconsin Joint Committee on Finance to approve a final recommended list. Because they are the body that has the authority to do that. At this point, the council has recommended a list and the department has recommended a list, but we need to wait for that joint committee on finance.

And as soon as that happens, um, which we're hoping will be very soon, then school districts can begin that process of purchasing if they choose to do that, and, um, will likely be able to begin. That process of professional learning on how to use those materials effectively, maybe this summer, certainly next fall.

And of course, that is the key, right? Because there is no silver bullet set of instructional materials. I mean, get any instructional materials that you want in the hands of teachers, but if they're not supported with ongoing professional learning on. Early reading practices and how to use those materials.

A school is not going to see the the positive impacts that they want to see. Talking with Laura Adams, policy Initiatives advisor at the State Department of Public Instruction as we talk about Wisconsin's transition to new state guidelines for reading curriculum. Call in questions and comments. (800) 642-1234.

Tom is here in Green Bay. Hello Tom. Good morning. Our. My question is about the Give a Kid a book program that the, the Brown County Library, uh, runs every year. And our Green Bay Area, retired Men's Club donates, uh, quite a bit of money to that. And I just wondered if there's any, um, measurable results from that program.

That's all. Tom. Thank you. The, the Give a Kid a book program, um, would this support, uh, the activities happening in the classroom? Laura? It absolutely would. And first of all, just what an amazing program. And, and I know that so many of our Wisconsin communities have similar programs and there's also, um, like the reach out and read program.

Mm-Hmm. And, and there there's definitely evidence that shows that the more books that you, um, provide to our youngest learners from birth, the. That helps them really develop those critical early literacy skills. You know, I'm, I'm a mom of four and I know that the on-ramp to reading is different for every kid.

Um, and, you know, every child could be supported in a different way for learning to read and, and, and write. Would the curricula that is being proposed support that diverse range of learners and have enough interventions and, um, uniqueness for different, um, for. Kids learning differently. Yeah, I think that that is, uh, a yes and kind of answer because the answer is yes, that all learners will certainly be supported because this list of curriculum meets that definition that we have established in our law of what early literacy, um, must look like.

And that's based on research and evidence and. At the same time, there are always some learners who need additional supports and in that case, um, that it depends on the need of the learner and they might need some more intensive additional supports beyond just that general universal curriculum. And then that really leads us.

Into the conversation about how well resourced our schools are, because without adequate funding to provide those additional supports, some of our learners who need them may not get them heard from Ed and Madison called in to say, what in interventions are there for struggling readers that work? A lot of money goes into programs, ed says, but they aren't working and giving results.

Absolutely. And there's, you know, I think first of all, if we definitely knew exactly what intervention was, the right intervention, we wouldn't be here having this conversation. Hmm. And there is a great body of research, um, that shows that different interventions work for, for different learners, and you first have to really do the work of identifying.

What is the underlying reading skill that is a barrier for that learner? And that's why, um, part of this legislation requires additional diagnostic reading testing when a learner is identified as at risk, so that schools can just really accurately identify what is the underlying reading skill that is a problem for this learner, so that it can be targeted and addressed and different reading interventions.

Target different specific reading skills. Laura, thank you so much for joining us. Absolutely. Thank you, Kate. Laura Adams is a policy initiatives advisor at the State Department of Public Instruction. I'm Kate Archer Kent. You're listening to the Morning Show here on the Ideas Network.

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