

What a Small, All-Black Private School Can Teach Florida About the Reading Wars

Cheron H. Davis, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University

The “Reading Wars” have begun again. In response to low test scores and poor reading skills among kids, the focus in recent years has shifted toward a multidisciplinary, phonics-first approach, now termed the “science of reading.” Since 2019, at least 45 states, including Florida, have passed legislation aimed at reforming reading instruction along these lines.

Science of reading advocates, however, frequently misrepresent research by emphasizing instruction focused on phonics while neglecting the importance of language comprehension. Phonics refers to knowing letter sounds and using that knowledge to decode unfamiliar words. While phonics is critical to foundational reading skills, other important skills — like reading smoothly (fluency) and understanding words (vocabulary) — are also crucial to the main goal of reading: understanding the text.