



Kendall Dwayne Deas' Public Comment on the U.S. Department of Education's Evidence-Based Literacy, Education Choice, and Returning Education to the States Proposed Priorities

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on “Priorities, Requirements, Definitions, and Selection Criteria: Evidence-Based Literacy, Education Choice, and Returning Education to the States.” I am Dr. Kendall Deas, an Assistant Professor of Education Policy, Law, and Politics in the Department of African American Studies with the McCausland College of Arts and Sciences at the University of South Carolina. As a scholar of education policy and law, I have engaged in research regarding best practice models for reading and mathematics instruction at middle school grade levels along with school choice and voucher programs. I have also written about the adverse effects school voucher programs can have on public schools serving Black students most recently “[How School Choice Policies Evolved from Supporting Black Students to Subsidizing Middle-Class Families](#)”.

While I support the use of evidence-based literacy instruction to improve student outcomes, I urge the U.S. Department of Education to approach its expansion with caution as the model's standardized approach may not meet the needs of all learners. With National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test results indicating that 4th and 8th graders in our nation's schools are lagging far behind in basic reading skills, solid research does show that evidence-based literary instruction does in fact move the needle regarding student achievement in literacy. The approach to reading instruction does draw upon various studies that have been rigorously reviewed showing that the instructional method has reliably improved students' reading skills. In fact, improvement can be seen across the board, from increasing students' understanding of phonics to enhancing their phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Further, this instructional method to improve performance in reading is especially effective when it is utilized by educators teaching students in earlier grades. significantly improve. Moreover, existing studies do reveal that evidence-based literacy is particularly effective at closing achievement gaps in reading for students who struggle with reading or have dyslexia. However, though widely effective based upon the results of existing studies, evidence-based literacy does face limitations in the context of today's classrooms. It is these limitations that should give the U.S. Department of Education some pause in terms of making it a top priority for expansion.