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Agenda, Abstract and Biography Listing May 20, 2021 - Times Listed in EST-NY [Registration Link](#)

9:00-9:15 Welcome

9:15-10:15 **Session 1: A Conversation: The Impact of Literacy on Children’s Health and Well-Being**
Dr. Eiman Abdulrahman

As the parent of two elementary school children, Dr. Abdulrahman was thrust into the role of “teacher” along with parents throughout the world as a result of the COVID-19 school closures and various plans for remote instruction. The experience of observing the reading instruction her first-grade son was receiving and his subsequent frustration, along with witnessing the challenges of low literacy and illiteracy faced by patients of all ages in the Emergency Room where she works, has inspired her to advocate for the science of reading in the medical field. Join us as we have a conversation about Dr. Abdulrahman’s personal background as an English language learner, how she is balancing what she has learned about the science of reading with the instruction she sees being used in schools, and her plans for educating her colleagues about literacy as a health care crisis.



Eiman Abdulrahman is a Pediatric Emergency Medicine physician and Assistant Professor of Pediatric and Emergency Medicine at George Washington University. She has been working at Children’s National Medical Center since 2011. She completed her medical education and Masters of Public Health at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, pediatric residency at Cohen’s Children Hospital, and Pediatric Emergency Medicine fellowship at Emory University. She is passionate about preventative health and currently wants to focus on the science of reading in preparing all children not only for success in school, but better health outcomes.

10:15-10:30 Break

10:30-11:30 **Session 2: How Our School of Education Embraced the Science and Redefined How We Prepare Future Teachers**
Dr. Amy Murdoch, Dr. Laura Saylor

Dr. Murdoch and Dr. Saylor describe the journey of Mount St. Joseph’s School of Education as they transformed their reading coursework to systematically teach the Science of Reading across ALL programs, and formed partnerships with area elementary schools. Key points leading to this transformation will be discussed, including gaining administrative support, getting all faculty on board, the role of strong partnerships with elementary schools, and creating the new curriculum (including structured literacy field work). Additionally, faculty involvement on a state-level task force to implement the science of reading in higher education will be discussed.

Dr. Amy Murdoch holds a Ph.D. in School Psychology with a focus on Early Literacy. Prior to joining the MSJ faculty twelve years ago, she has worked as a School Psychologist-Reading Specialist in a large urban school district, as the director of a number of large reading grants, including the Reading First grant, and was a regional reading consultant. Her research and service work has focused on helping schools serving children and families living in poverty implement research-based reading practices. She is currently involved in two large research projects. The first is on preschool literacy, and involves the creation of a free, research-based instructional program with a large focus on language and knowledge development. The second is an OSEP Model Demonstration grant that has the goal of better understanding early identification and early support of children with Dyslexia and those at risk for reading problems (preschool – grade 3).



Dr. Laura Saylor is the dean of Education and is an assistant professor in the School of Education. She earned her Ph.D. in Educational Studies with a concentration in Educational Policy and Higher Education and a focus in STEM education from The University of Cincinnati. Previously, she earned her Masters of Education from Xavier University with a concentration in Montessori Education. Laura is a frequent presenter at national conferences, focusing on the importance of learning science in teacher preparation. Her recently published research includes mathematics discourse with pre-service teachers and the effects of teacher-centered mentorship. Her teaching expertise includes educational assessment, math and science teaching methods, and collaborative work in education.



11:30-11:45 Break

11:45-12:45 Session 3: **Parents as Powerful Change Agents: Starting a Movement**
Sonya Thomas

Nashville PROPEL (People Requiring Our Public Education system to LEAD) is a two-year-old parent-led movement that organizes and develops powerful parent leaders to ignite a movement that demands equitable education policies and practices in Nashville public education. Sonya Thomas, co-founder and executive director of Nashville PROPEL, shares her journey from parent advocacy to parent fighter and leader. This journey begins when she learns heartbreaking news about her youngest son’s reading skills after years of pleading for support. Since then, Sonya has vowed to fight so that another parent never feels the way she felt that day. In this presentation, Sonya shares what she has learned about her son, herself, and the science of reading.

Sonya Thomas is one of the founding parent activists for the first of its kind parent movement in Nashville, TN. Nashville PROPEL (People Requiring Our Public Education system to LEAD) is an organization with a mission to organize and develop powerful parent leaders to ignite a movement that demands equitable education policies and practices in Nashville Public Education. Sonya has the honor of leading this group of powerful parents to disrupt inequities in education. She is also one of several leaders who are growing a national movement of parents and grandparents from St. Louis, MO; Memphis, TN; San Antonio, TX; Atlanta, GA and Oakland, CA. She believes that when children are inspired and given what they need, every child will reach their greatest potential.



During her journey, she has been an education adviser to mayoral candidates and education-centered groups in Tennessee and has participated in challenging several 2020 presidential candidates on their education plans. Sonya realizes this work is important, but her most important role is being a mother to her beloved two sons and two daughters. In her spare time she enjoys watching college football (Roll Tide), reading, and sewing.

Sonya and the work of Nashville PROPEL has been featured in Emily Hanford’s APM “What the Words Say?” as well as BET’s docu-series by Executive Producer Soledad O’Brien, “Disrupt and Dismantle.”

12:45-1:15 Break

1:15-2:15

Session 4: The Power of Consumer Knowledge as Champion for the Science of Reading
Linda Diamond

In this session, Linda Diamond, author of the *Teaching Reading Sourcebook*, will speak to the importance of being an informed consumer when selecting instructional materials to teach reading. How will you know to trust outside organizations that evaluate curricula without being knowledgeable yourselves about what to consider? How will you know if a professional learning provider really brings to the school and district learning that is consistent with the science of reading? What does it mean to be a knowledgeable consumer? This session will look at The Reading League Curriculum Evaluation Tool as a resource to guide you and once you know, what to look for, you will have the power to support and inform parents, influence publishers, district selection committees, and even university teacher preparation programs.

A former English teacher, elementary and middle school principal, and K-12 Director of Curriculum and Professional Development, Linda Diamond moved into education public policy and then founded (and recently retired from) the Consortium for Reaching Excellent in Education (CORE). CORE provides equity-focused professional development and curriculum implementation support in ELA and math. During Ms. Diamond's tenure she developed professional learning courses in reading and participated in research studies. Ms. Diamond is a national speaker and known for her book *Teaching Reading Sourcebook*, widely used by university teacher preparation programs that adhere to the science of reading, and also for her other book *Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures*. Currently, Ms. Diamond works independently as an advocate for changes in state education policies to support the science of reading, as a consultant to publishers and other organizations, and as a thorn in the side to publishers who refuse to change their programs.



2:15-2:30

Break

2:30-3:30

Session 5: Using Your Voice to Impact Early Literacy Policy
Kymyona Burk

Across the nation, states have been considering, developing, or strengthening early literacy policy with the goal of ensuring that students are reading on grade level by the end of third grade. Some of these efforts have been spearheaded by governors, state education agency leaders, grassroots parent organizations, or other invested stakeholders. Regardless of your "why," understanding your state's strategy for improving literacy outcomes is key to using your voice to advance literacy efforts in your state.

Dr. Kymyona Burk is the Policy Director for Early Literacy at the Foundation for Excellence in Education (ExcelinEd). In this role Dr. Burk supports states pursuing a comprehensive approach to K-3 reading policy by assisting state leaders in building new or improving existing K-3 reading policies, with a heavy focus on supporting successful policy implementation. She most recently served as the Executive Director for the Office of Teaching and Learning in the Jackson Public School District (JPSD) where she provided the leadership and vision for all aspects of the JPSD's instructional programs including curriculum, instruction, and professional learning. Dr. Burk is also the former K-12 State Literacy Director for the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), leading the state-level implementation of the *Literacy-Based Promotion Act* (2013), which aims to ensure that all students are proficient readers by third grade. Additional experience includes teaching reading and English, instructional coaching, and delivering professional development. She currently serves as a Board Member of The Reading League. Dr. Burk received a Doctorate in Early Childhood Education, Specialist in Secondary Education/English, Master of Science in Educational Leadership, Master of Arts in Teaching English, and Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Jackson State University.



3:30-3:45

Break

The Power of the Alphabet Arc with Holly Aranda

Research has demonstrated the importance of phonological awareness, letter recognition, and oral language in the acquisition of reading and spelling skills. Once students understand the sound structure of spoken language and can instantly name letters, they are ready to learn how sounds map onto letters. This session will focus on instant letter recognition and automaticity by using the alphabetic arc.

Holly Aranda is a certified academic language therapist, dyslexia therapist, qualified instructor of the Orton Gillingham-based structured literacy program “Take Flight,” educational consultant/Intervention specialist. She is a Certified LETRS® Trainer and Acadience trainer. She has taught special education for 29 years and consults with special education and general education teachers in the science of reading.

Holly holds a BSE in Special Education/Psychology and an MS in Learning Disabilities, School Leadership and Administration from Emporia State University. Also, she received Reading Specialist Certification from Emporia State University and ALTA-Academic Language Therapy Certification from Newman University.

Holly is currently the treasurer for the Reading League Kansas. She is a Past-Vice President of the Kansas/Missouri branch of the International Dyslexia Association (IDA). Holly is a dyslexia therapist and special education teacher at the Auburn Washburn school district in Topeka, Kansas. She hopes that all pre-service teachers will one day have the opportunity to learn about the science of reading while in college.

Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency and Writing Conventions Taught in a Morning Message with Nora Chahbazi

Learn how even beginning readers can get exposure to many facets of reading, writing, and spelling in one simple activity! This process will integrate instruction in a way that will accelerate student acquisition of these skills and concepts during explicit instruction. You will learn what the instruction looks like with significant teacher support as well as how to gradually release to increasingly more student independence.

Nora Chahbazi is the founder of Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction (EBLI). Previously a Neonatal ICU nurse, she began researching reading in 1997 to learn how to teach her daughter, who at the time was a struggling reader. This led to the opening of Ounce of Prevention Reading Center in 1999 and the creation of EBLI in 2003.

Nora is the author of a bi-weekly blog and host of monthly webinars that aim to educate the public about the most current, effective, and efficient literacy research and instructional practices. She has presented at many education conferences and has been interviewed by several exceptional individuals including Maya Angelou, Jack Canfield, and Emily Hanford.



Nora serves on the board of The Reading League Michigan.

Passionate about providing a bridge from the research on reading, writing, and spelling to effective, efficient instructional practices that can be used in the classroom and remediation settings, Nora’s ultimate mission is to teach the world to read.

Irregular Words, High Frequency Words, and Sight Words with Melissa Abernathy and Christa Snyder

This “Take-Away” defines and discusses how these terms are used, provides clarification of which words truly need to be explicitly memorized vs. mapped, and provides strategies for teaching this (now very short!) list of words.

Christa Snyder is a member of The National Reading League and is on the board of directors for The Reading League Indiana. She has been in education for over 13 years and has taught 1st thru 4th grade. Christa did her undergraduate work at Ball State University and completed her Masters in Curriculum and Instruction from Coppin State College. Currently, Christa devotes her time as a reading specialist in Title 1 and instructing multi-language learners. She is an avid supporter of The Reading League and considers herself “A Little Leaguer” among a group of consummate professionals. Christa is passionate about public education and works diligently towards systematic changes to a flawed system.



Melissa Abernathy is the secretary of The Reading League Indiana. She has been in education for 15 years as a teacher and administrator. She resides just south of Indianapolis, Indiana. Melissa received her B.S. in Elementary Education from IUPUI, her Masters in Education from Indiana-Wesleyan, and completed her educational leadership courses through the University of Indianapolis.

In 2018, her daughter was identified with a Specific Learning Disability in Reading. After multiple years of failed interventions, Melissa set out on her journey to discover the Science of Reading and how it can benefit all students. Melissa is currently finishing her Orton-Gillingham certification through the Orton Gillingham Online Academy.



4:45-5:00

Conclusion