

FROM BUY-IN TO BREAKTHROUGH

Delivering READ Act Results



**March 24,
2025**



**EDUCATORS
FOR EXCELLENCE
MINNESOTA**

INTRODUCTION

Over the past year, Minnesota has joined many other states in enshrining a commitment to evidence-based literacy instruction into state law. The Minnesota Reading to Ensure Academic Development (READ) Acts 1 & 2.0 require districts to update their materials and teacher training practices to adhere to the research on how students learn to read. The laws also offer financial incentives for districts to adopt state-approved curricular materials and participate in professional learning (PL) opportunities.

Extensive research tells us that access to evidence-based, high-quality curriculum increases academic achievement. Unfortunately, students do not have equitable access to said curriculum in the United States. We also know from research that effective implementation is key, including teacher access to sustained curriculum-aligned PL. By gathering teacher feedback on the effectiveness of implementation thus far, districts can take steps to strengthen their literacy initiatives and close gaps that teachers – and their students – might be experiencing.

With two years remaining until the deadline for districts to transition to evidence-based literacy curricula, survey data from Minnesota teachers illuminates what's working in compliance with the READ Act – and what must improve. One clear finding from the survey is this: teachers believe in the shift toward high-quality, evidence-based literacy curricula. In fact, 93% of teachers using a new state-approved curriculum believe that with enough time and effective support, this change could improve student achievement. It's time for state and district leaders to now listen to their perspectives on what's needed to ensure this major shift has a positive impact on students.

WHAT IS THE SCIENCE OF READING?

Schools across the country have transformed their approach to early literacy instruction over the past several years, moving away from an approach known as “Balanced Literacy” or “Whole Language” and toward the “Science of Reading” (SOR). Balanced Literacy – the prevailing literacy method in many U.S. districts over the past few decades – is based on the assumption that learning how to read comes naturally – in the same way that learning how to talk does. It also prioritizes guessing and contextual clues, ignoring the crucial importance of explicitly teaching kids how to read. SOR, on the other hand, is grounded in that importance, emphasizing methods of phonetic memorization, fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and text-based comprehension.

40 states – including Minnesota – have passed laws requiring the adoption of SOR-aligned materials, and districts nationwide have moved to replace their now-defunct curricula. These changes are reaching the classroom: nearly two-thirds of teachers nationally report that their district has implemented new SOR-aligned curricular materials in the past three years.

METHODOLOGY

To learn more about how teachers are experiencing this state-level action in their schools, E4E-Minnesota surveyed nearly 150 public school educators from 50 schools in five districts across the state. The largest representation of respondents work in Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) and St. Paul Public Schools, with 64 educators – or 48% of respondents – coming from those two districts. The survey was conducted between December 5th, 2024, and February 17th, 2025. Educators were asked 17 questions about their experience with literacy trainings, changes to core reading curricula, district support in these efforts, and their overall perspective on this initiative.

Of the 35% of teachers using a new core reading curriculum at their school, 79% are using UFLI Foundations. The other 21% are spread across EL Education, Functional Phonics+Morphology, Wit & Wisdom, or an unlisted curriculum not identified as “highly aligned with evidence-based structured literacy practices” by the University of Minnesota’s READ Act Curriculum Review Series. Due to this breakdown, comparisons cannot be made between different curriculum options, as n-sizes for the other curricula are too small. Roughly half of the 76% of respondents who report having already participated in, or signed up for training, completed LETRS. Roughly a quarter completed CAREIALL and OL&LA, each. Comparisons between the experiences of educators in each of these training programs are included in the report.

THE MINNESOTA READ ACTS 1 AND 2.0

The Minnesota READ Act requires all Minnesota school districts to provide evidence-based literacy instruction by the 2026-2027 school year. Until then, they are not required to adopt new literacy curricula, but if they do, it must be “evidence-based.” As required under the law, Minnesota’s Department of Education (MDE) published a list of evidence-based K-12 reading curricula: EL Education’s Open Up, Magnetic Reading from Curriculum Associates LLC, Functional Phonics+Morphology from the University of Minnesota, UFLI Foundations from Ventris Learning, and Wit & Wisdom from Great Minds. The law allocates \$35M to partially reimburse districts for newly adopted curricula from the list. If they choose an evidence-based curriculum not on the list, they are not reimbursed.

The READ Act 2.0 stipulates that teachers participate in one of a list of approved evidence-based reading instruction trainings in two phases: Phase 1 educators are those directly involved in foundational literacy instruction, including all K-3 teachers, and Phase 2 educators are involved to a lesser extent. Phase 1 educators’ deadline is the end of the 2026 school year (SY), and Phase 2 educators have until the end of SY 2027. Minneapolis’ plan for complying with the READ Act is to adopt the MDE-approved curriculum UFLI at some schools in 24-25 and expand district-wide by 25-26. St. Paul Public Schools is already using UFLI for grades K-2, and “partially approved” Heggerty in grades 3 through 5. However, they still have many non-approved materials listed in their literacy plan and do not note plans to change curriculum externally.

Survey Result #1: Teachers report that their districts are complying with READ Act requirements: more than three-quarters (76%) have taken or signed up for a state-mandated training and more than one-third (35%) confirm their district has adopted new curricula.

According to the survey, professional learning (PL) is being rolled out across Minnesota to train teachers in the fundamentals of the Science of Reading: 76% of respondents have already participated in or signed up for READ Act-approved PL. While the survey did not inquire about what “phase” of state-provided trainings the respondents fall into, the 24% of teachers who did not yet sign up for their training are likely Phase 2 educators less directly involved in foundational literacy instruction who will begin their training programs next fall.

A third of respondents say their school has adopted a new, evidence-based literacy curriculum in the past two years. With a 2027 deadline for districts to transition to an evidence-based literacy curriculum, many respondents’ schools may have not yet changed their reading curriculum to comply with the READ Act. Also, some districts were already using curricula from the approved list; St. Paul, for example, was already using UFLI Foundations for grades K-2, and they comprise the second largest bloc of survey respondents, behind MPS.

E4E-MN’s Advocacy:

The Minnesota READ Act was signed into law in 2023, and while it provided funding for new, evidence-based, high-quality curricula to be adopted, it did not provide funding for teacher training. In 2024, E4E-MN members testified before the Education Policy and Education Finance Committees of the MN State Legislature in favor of financial investment in science-based literacy instruction PL, delivering 200 signed petitions from educators who supported this investment. The legislature listened and allocated funding to compensate eligible teachers for completing the required training under the READ Act.

Survey Result #2: A strong majority of teachers view their Minnesota READ Act-funded PL programs positively.

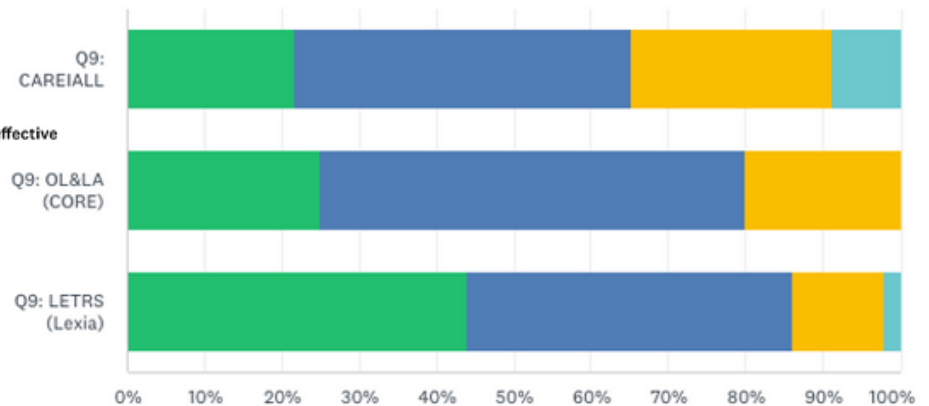
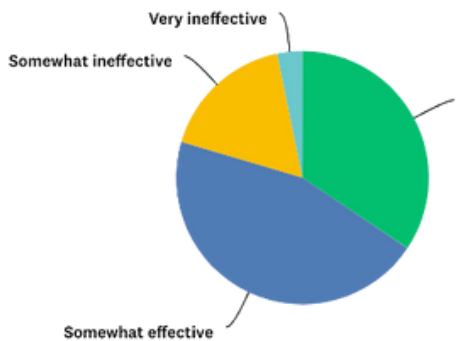
80% of respondents report that their state-mandated asynchronous training improved their understanding and ability to implement evidence-based literacy instruction, with 34% calling it “very” effective.

Despite this largely positive perspective, survey respondents also identified pain points. In an open short answer question, 28% of respondents cited the relatively low pay of \$10 per hour that they received for completing this training as a place for growth, and others noted that the information was redundant to what they learned in graduate school, making the training feel like a drain on their already-full schedules. This is backed up by the fact that **educators identified “payment for teachers to engage in curriculum-aligned PL outside of the school day” as the number one thing that would most improve implementation of the READ Act** out of a list of four options.

LETRS is the training that received the best ratings from teachers, with 86% of teachers who took it reporting it was effective. Meanwhile, 80% of teachers who participated in OL&LA deemed it effective, and 65% for CAREIALL. It’s worth noting that among respondents in St. P, 82% participated in CAREIALL, while in MPS, 73% took LETRS. Due to the prevalence of one training over others in specific districts, other contributing factors could be influencing teachers’ ratings of effectiveness across trainings. For example, because St. Paul has been using UFLI Foundations for a few years, teachers may feel that completing a required training on evidence-based literacy instruction is unhelpful because they are already familiar with the content. On the other hand, most of the MPS teachers who took the survey are using LETRS, and their district is in the midst of more substantive changes to literacy materials. With a more cohesive set of changes to early literacy happening in MPS, teachers may feel more bought-in to the overall initiative, and thus view their training experience as more helpful.

Q10. How effective was this training in improving your understanding of and ability to implement evidence-based literacy instruction?

Q10. (Filtered by training) How effective was this training in improving your understanding of and ability to implement evidence-based literacy instruction?



Survey Result #3: A majority of teachers report satisfaction with school-based PL, but more than half want additional job-embedded coaching or collaboration time to support implementation.

Satisfaction with school-based PL is slightly lower than satisfaction with state-mandated trainings. 67% of respondents say they are satisfied with the literacy-focused PL they receive at their school, with 20% claiming they are very satisfied. That leaves around one-third of educators reporting some level of dissatisfaction with their school-based PL. When asked what supports would most improve implementation of the READ Act, the second- and third-most popular out of four options -- with 54% of teachers selecting them collectively -- were further investment in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and coaching. The fact that the two options for consistent, job-embedded supports were the combined top choices in this question suggests that **in-school coaching and training is the place where the READ Act has the most room for improvement in the eyes of teachers.**

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE NUMBERS

Curricular materials alone cannot teach children how to read. In fact, a study from 2015 showed that up to half of the impact of shifting to a higher-quality curriculum can be lost if it is not paired with an accompanying change in educator practice that explicitly supports those materials.

Research shows that such shifts are only possible if teachers can access sustained, curriculum-aligned PL. A 2020 study showed that when teachers used new, high-quality instructional materials without content-specific PL support, students' achievement increased by 6 percent of a standard deviation. However, when teachers used the new materials and participated in curriculum-based PL, their students' scores improved by 9 percent of a standard deviation – about the same effect on student achievement as replacing an average teacher with a top performer or reducing class size by 15%.

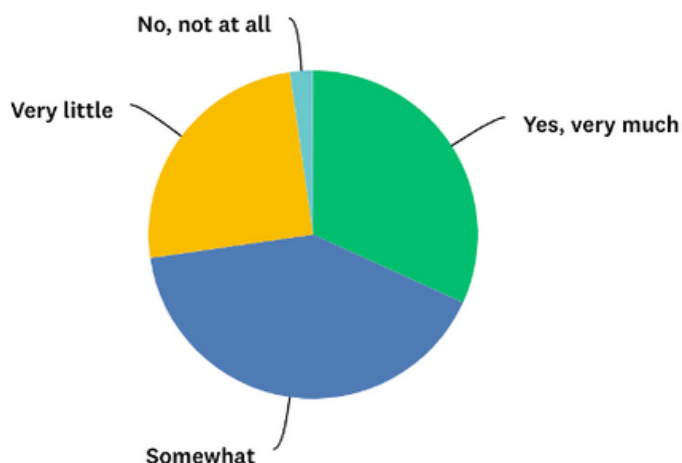
With the right incentives and teacher training, empowering teachers to help develop their colleagues is the most cost-effective PL approach. Thus, schools' implementation plans can have more longevity than relying on continuous input directly from curriculum provider representatives.

Survey Result #4: Large majorities of teachers using a new curriculum say their district has effectively supported their implementation (78%) and that their instruction has changed positively (77%).

Teacher perspective is mostly positive on the curriculum shifts, with some concerning minorities of respondents not appearing to be bought into their curriculum.

Of the 35% of respondents whose schools *have* adopted a new curriculum in the past two years 78% believe their district has provided effective support in implementing the new materials, but 55% say it has been only “somewhat” effective.

Q11. How has your core new reading curriculum changed your instructional practices?



When asked about the impact of the new curriculum on their instructional practices, responses were generally positive. 73% of teachers report that their teaching has changed "somewhat" or "very much," while about a quarter of respondents feel that the new curriculum has changed their instructional practices "very little" or "not at all."

The perception of the new curricula's impact on instruction is largely positive, with 34% of educators calling the change to their instruction "very positive" and another 43% rating it as "somewhat positive," resulting in a combined 77% of educators saying

that the curriculum had shifted their instruction in a positive way. Still, 23% of respondents felt the impact was negative or that their instruction had not shifted in any meaningful way.

When asked whether they thought that "with sufficient time and effective support, their new core reading curriculum would lead to higher student achievement," 93% of educators using a new curriculum agreed. This is an encouraging level of optimism, but it is also a warning: educators really believe in this overhaul, but they require sustained support inside their school to deliver on its ambitious promises.

CHANGING PRACTICE: The share of Minnesota teachers claiming that new materials have not changed instructional practices is similar to E4E’s national teacher survey, Voices from the Classroom 2024. In that survey, teachers from across the country were asked the same question about changes to their instructional practices following the implementation of an SOR-aligned curriculum: 75% reported that their instruction had changed moderately to significantly. E4E also conducted a survey called Reading Between the Lines in New York City Public Schools – where a more concerted effort to change every elementary school to evidence-based curricula over the course of two years – revealed that 86% of teachers’ instructional practices had changed “somewhat” or “very much.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Districts should collaborate with school boards, administrators, and teachers’ unions to develop new policies that operationalize the big shifts outlined by the READ Acts. This effort should include a change management strategy, guidance and training for principals and school administrators, and measurable desired literacy outcomes. Building out such resources that could be leveraged at the school level could help close the gap between the percentage of teachers reporting satisfaction with district-level support (78%) and school-level support (68%).

2) Districts and other decision-makers should continue to engage teachers in the implementation process. E4E-MN’s survey showed that 93% of educators using a new curriculum believe that under the right conditions, these shifts can lead to higher student achievement. Educators have deep insights on how to reach the goal of improved student literacy, and generating their buy-in is an essential factor in ensuring these curricular shifts take hold and prove successful.

3) Districts should improve in-school PL support for educators by hiring a full-time literacy coach in higher-needs schools, while also building internal capacity among teachers to lead PL and coaching in their own school communities. According to the survey, 33% of teachers are unsatisfied with the PL they've received specifically in their school. And, studies show that sustained, curriculum-aligned PL significantly improves the effectiveness of new high-quality instructional materials. Districts could support existing leaders to support or lead this PL by deepening their knowledge of READ Act-aligned training and materials and passing this knowledge along to their peers. For example, the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers contract with MPS stipulates positions such as Demonstration Teachers, Site Lead Teachers, Teacher Mentors, and Professional Development Center Coordinators – any of whom could receive additional training to help support their peers.

4) The state should allocate additional funding to compensate teachers for completing evidence-based PL programs. In the final, short-answer question of E4E-MN's survey, the number one way teachers said their experience with READ Act training and materials could be improved was by paying them more and/or providing work time to complete their required PL sessions. Addressing this concern would both give teachers the compensation they deserve and address a potential barrier to teacher buy-in.

CLOSING

This survey shows that teachers are motivated to shift to a new, evidence-based literacy curriculum, and believe in the potential of high-quality instructional materials. However, they are also calling for more school-based supports that provide sustained, in-depth training for themselves and their colleagues. With two years remaining before the deadline to shift materials, school districts across Minnesota should use this time to ensure a highly engaging implementation and training process that deepens each teacher's skills and fosters buy-in for these new materials and techniques.