Evidence of Impact: Online Language & Literacy Academy and Michigan's K–5 Literacy Professional Learning Requirements

A white paper prepared for the Michigan districts implementing K-5 literacy professional learning

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Executive Summary

Beginning with the 2031–2032 school year, Public Act 26 of 2026 requires Michigan districts, intermediate school districts, and public school academies to ensure that certificated K–5 personnel who provide, support, or oversee reading instruction complete approved professional learning grounded in scientifically based reading research. This paper summarizes the evidence of impact for CORE Learning's Online Language & Literacy Academy, the online course CORE Learning has submitted for this purpose, together with evidence for Elementary Reading Academy, its in-person counterpart. The online evidence comes from a 2025 evaluation of Online Language & Literacy Academy in Minnesota. The in-person evidence comes from 2026 evaluations of Elementary Reading Academy in Wisconsin and Oregon and from independent studies of student outcomes associated with CORE Learning's in-person Reading Academy in California between 2017 and 2019.

The evidence addresses each link in the chain that effective professional learning is expected to produce, from educator knowledge to classroom practice to student achievement. Because Online Language & Literacy Academy shares approximately 90 percent of its content with Elementary Reading Academy, and both are based on CORE's *Teaching Reading Sourcebook*, results from both courses are presented. Each finding identifies the course and format to which it applies. The relationship between the two courses is described in Section 3.

Principal findings include the following:

1. **Online Language & Literacy Academy:** In Minnesota, 1,041 participants self-reported large, statistically significant gains in knowledge of evidence-based literacy practices, with growth in all 18 domains assessed.

2. **Elementary Reading Academy:** In Milwaukee Public Schools, 134 educators gained 7.0 points on the standardized Teacher Knowledge of Early Literacy Skills survey (TKELS), approximately 0.7 standard deviations ($p < 0.01$), and the change was robust and consistent across numerous models that controlled for educator role, race, experience, grade band, event location, and participant rating.

3. **Elementary Reading Academy (in person):** In the Salem-Keizer School District, 553 educators demonstrated statistically significant knowledge growth on TKELS ($p < 0.01$), with significant gains at every grade level from Pre-K through grade 3, at every level of teaching experience, and across teachers, instructional assistants, and instructional coaches.

4. **Elementary Reading Academy (ERA) with coaching (in person):** Salem-Keizer educators who received CORE Learning coaching support after completing the course continued to grow, increasing from 52.69 points before receiving CORE's ERA to 56.94 points immediately following the course to 56.35 points four months later, following coaching and implementation support ($p < 0.01$). Educators in Title I schools gained 3.66 points, or 36.6% of a standard deviation, showing statistically significant gains across all three administrations.

5. **ERA with coaching (in person):** In three quasi-experimental studies in Pajaro Valley Unified School District, designed to meet ESSA Moderate (Tier 2) evidence standards, students whose teachers participated in CORE Learning professional learning and coaching using SIPPS foundational skills curriculum outperformed matched peers in grades 1, 2, and 3 (effect sizes of 0.15 to 0.18), and English learners in grade 2 showed statistically significant gains greater than those of the overall sample.

Taken together, these findings indicate that CORE Learning's professional learning is consistently associated with meaningful and statistically significant growth in educator knowledge across diverse districts and roles, that this growth continues when coaching follows the course, and that it carries into student reading achievement.

1. Introduction

1.1 Policy context

MCL 380.1531k, enacted through Public Act 26 of 2026, establishes Michigan's expectation that every certificated individual who provides, supports, or oversees K–5 reading or language arts instruction, including classroom teachers and teachers with special education endorsements, complete professional learning approved by the Michigan Department of Education. Under Section 1531k(2), approved professional learning must provide educators with the knowledge base to implement any class-wide, supplemental, or intervention reading approach and to determine

why some students struggle with reading, writing, spelling, and language. It must also build content and pedagogical knowledge of the critical components of literacy, support the use of screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostic data within a multi-tiered system of supports, embed assessment of participant knowledge, and include train-the-trainer facilitator professional learning.

The Department's Request for Submission further asks providers to demonstrate effective teacher-based outcomes, specifically participant knowledge growth and participant changes to classroom practice (Phase 1, Non-negotiable 1d). It defines high-quality professional learning, following Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017), as sustained learning that increases educator knowledge, improves instructional practice, strengthens implementation fidelity, and builds organizational capacity over time.

1.2 The need

Research on teacher knowledge of early literacy has consistently found substantial room for growth among practicing educators. In the Mississippi statewide study that produced the TKELS instrument, K–3 educators answered an average of 54 percent of items correctly (Folsom et al., 2017), and educators in the Salem-Keizer evaluation reported here began at a comparable level, answering an average of 16.76 of 31 items correctly. These findings underscore the importance of professional learning that builds deep, durable knowledge of how reading develops and the instructional practices that support that development.

1.3 Purpose and organization of this paper

This paper consolidates the available evidence of impact for Online Language & Literacy Academy and the closely aligned Elementary Reading Academy. Sections 2 and 3 describe CORE Learning and the course. Section 4 describes the evaluation measures and designs. Sections 5 through 8 present findings on educator knowledge, sustained growth with coaching, classroom practice, and student outcomes. Sections 9 through 11 address implementation in Michigan, limitations of the evidence, and conclusions.

2. About CORE Learning

CORE Learning (Consortium on Reaching Excellence in Education, Inc.) was founded in 1995 by Linda Diamond and Bill Honig, former California Superintendent of Public Instruction, in response

to California's reading crisis and the instructional inequities it revealed for students of color. For 30 years, CORE Learning has supported states, districts, and schools in building the knowledge and instructional capacity of preK–12 educators to deliver effective, evidence-based reading and writing instruction, and it has served more than 200,000 educators nationwide. CORE Learning is a subsidiary of UnboundEd.

CORE Learning's professional learning integrates several bodies of knowledge: the science of reading, second language acquisition, asset-based pedagogies related to students and their languages, and learning and instructional sciences. This integration is designed to ensure that every student, including Multilingual Learners and speakers of English language varieties, is supported by educators who understand how reading develops and how language development and literacy development interact.

CORE Learning's *Teaching Reading Sourcebook*, the foundational text for its literacy courses, has been listed as an exemplary text by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) since 2014. In NCTQ's 2026 review, it was the most widely used of 2,387 textbooks reviewed, appearing in more than 1,300 educator preparation courses nationwide.

CORE Learning typically partners with districts from one to four years, supporting educator knowledge and development that improves student learning, instructional leadership, and the systems that support it (MTSS). CORE Learning works with each district to build the internal capacity to sustain the work independently, while remaining available as an ongoing partner. Where a district has adopted high-quality instructional materials, CORE Learning supports teachers in understanding the scientific foundation of those materials, identifying and addressing gaps present in any core program, and strengthening classroom instruction through observation, coaching, and debriefing.

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3. Online Language & Literacy Academy

3.1 Course design

Online Language & Literacy Academy (Elementary) is a 45- to 50-hour course for K–5 educators, accredited by the International Dyslexia Association as an independent teacher training program. The course is organized into nine modules completed over approximately 18 weeks, with three 60-minute live sessions led by a CORE Learning facilitator following Modules 3, 6, and 9. Participants learn in cohorts of 20 to 30 educators and engage through discussion forums,

reflection, and collaborative activities.

CORE's two publications, *Teaching Reading Sourcebook* and *Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures* is the primary source of course content.. In each module, participants read assigned sections of these publications, and each module then follows a consistent explicit instructional sequence that builds on that reading: presentation through video models and narrated screencasts, guided practice through interactive activities with immediate feedback, and application through Write to Learn and In Practice activities tied to participants' own classrooms. The course builds content and pedagogical knowledge of how the brain learns to read, phonological and phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, phonics and advanced phonics, vocabulary and oral language, fluency, comprehension, spelling and writing, the organization of language, and assessment within a multi-tiered system of supports. Throughout, the course addresses the needs of Multilingual Learners, speakers of English language varieties, and students with characteristics of dyslexia, and includes English and Spanish diagnostic assessments.

Assessment of participant knowledge is embedded at both the formative and summative levels. Each module includes pre- and post-knowledge checks, Quick Checks, and Section Reflections, and participants must score at least 80 percent on each post-knowledge check to progress. Successful completion requires passing post-knowledge checks (40 percent of the final grade), completion of all required activities (40 percent), and a hand-scored final portfolio (20 percent). Participants receive permanent copies of the *Teaching Reading Sourcebook* (3rd ed.) and *Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures* (Rev. 2nd ed.).

Since March 2024, CORE Learning has delivered Online Language & Literacy Academy (Elementary and Secondary) to approximately 17,882 Minnesota educators as one of the approved options under that state's READ Act, supported by approximately 100 facilitators who at peak enrollment facilitated roughly 300 concurrent cohorts.

3.2 Relationship to Elementary Reading Academy

Elementary Reading Academy is CORE Learning's in-person counterpart to Online Language & Literacy Academy, delivered across seven six-hour sessions by a CORE Learning literacy consultant. Both courses, accredited by the International Dyslexia Association, are built on the same two core texts (*Teaching Reading Sourcebook* and *Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures*), and involves 42 hours of learning. Approximately 90 percent of Online Language & Literacy Academy content is fully aligned with Elementary Reading Academy. The remaining 10 percent consists of additional content on language development and second language acquisition. Table 1 presents the alignment by content domain.

Table 1. Content alignment between Online Language & Literacy Academy and Elementary Reading Academy

Content domain	Online Language & Literacy Academy	Elementary Reading Academy
How the brain learns to read; structure of English and Spanish	Modules 1–2	Session 1
Print awareness, letter knowledge, phonological and phonemic awareness	Module 3	Sessions 1–2
Phonics, decoding, and irregular word reading	Module 4	Session 2
Multisyllabic word reading, spelling, and fluency	Module 5	Session 3
Vocabulary and oral language	Module 6	Session 4
Syntax and sentence comprehension	Module 7, including language frames and writing	Session 5
Reading comprehension	Module 8	Session 6
Reading assessment and MTSS	Module 9, including Spanish-language assessments	Session 7

Given this shared foundation of content that rests in CORE's two publications, results from Elementary Reading Academy are presented in this paper as evidence of the impact of the shared course content, and results from Minnesota are presented as direct evidence for Online Language & Literacy Academy.

4. Evaluation Approach

4.1 Measures

Teacher Knowledge of Early Literacy Skills (TKELS). TKELS was developed by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southeast at Florida State University, under contract with the Institute of Education Sciences, to evaluate the Mississippi Department of Education's statewide K–3 early literacy professional development initiative (Folsom et al., 2017). Items were drawn from established research measures of teacher knowledge and address comprehension, fluency, writing

and grammar, vocabulary, spelling, phonological and phonemic awareness, and phonics. The instrument has two validated 31-item forms, developed to permit repeated administration while reducing testing effects, and scores may be converted to a standardized scale with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10.

Course self-assessments. Online Language & Literacy Academy includes an Opening Self-Survey in Module 1 and a Closing Survey in Module 9, in which participants rate their knowledge across 18 domains of literacy instruction. These surveys are administered to every participant at the beginning and end of the course. In the self-assessment, participants are asked to rate their familiarity from "Not Knowledgeable" to "Very Knowledgeable" about each of the literacy domains. Domains include language acquisition, phonological awareness, morphemic analysis, and reading comprehension strategies.

Student reading assessments. The Pajaro Valley studies measured student reading achievement with NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Reading in grades 2 and 3 and with Fountas & Pinnell benchmark reading levels in grade 1.

4.2 Designs

Table 2. Summary of evaluations

Site	Course	Period	Design	Sample	Outcome measure
Minnesota (statewide)	Online Language & Literacy Academy	2025	Matched pre/post	1,041 educators	Course self-assessment
Milwaukee Public Schools, WI	Elementary Reading Academy,	August 2026	Pre/post regression	134 educators	TKELS (standardized)
Salem-Keizer School District, OR	Elementary Reading Academy	January 2026	Matched pre/post	553 educators	TKELS
Salem-Keizer School District, OR	Elementary Reading Academy with coaching	January–June 2026	Matched pre/post/follow-up	105 educators	TKELS

Pajaro Valley Unified School District, CA	Reading Academy with coaching	2017–2019	Quasi-experimental, propensity-matched comparison	2,223 students	NWEA MAP; Fountas & Pinnell

The educator knowledge evaluations were conducted by the UnboundEd/CORE Learning Research and Evaluation team. The student outcome studies were conducted independently by SEG Measurement.

5. Findings: Educator Knowledge Growth

5.1 Minnesota: Online Language & Literacy Academy

In 2025, the Research and Evaluation team analyzed 1,041 matched Opening and Closing Surveys from Minnesota educators who completed Online Language & Literacy Academy, which districts selected as one of several pathways to meet READ Act requirements. Across multiple analytic specifications, participants' self-reported gains in knowledge of evidence-based literacy practices were positive, large, and statistically significant. Average ratings increased in all 18 domains assessed. The largest gains occurred in morphemic analysis, strategies for reading irregular words, the explicit phonics lesson sequence, and language development for language-diverse students, the last of which is central to the content that distinguishes Online Language & Literacy Academy.

Figure 1. Average pre- and post-course self-ratings across 18 domains, Minnesota (n = 1,041) [Pending: chart to be rebuilt from exact domain averages, response scale, and effect size.]

5.2 Milwaukee Public Schools and Salem-Keizer School District: TKELS

Table 3. Educator knowledge growth on TKELS

Site and course	Matched educators	Pre	Post	Change	Significance
Milwaukee, Elementary Reading Academy only (standardized score, controlling for demographics)	134	52.28	59.29	+7.01	p<0.01
Salem-Keizer, Elementary Reading Academy pre- to post-event (standardized score, t-test)	553	49.93	52.96	+3.04	p<0.01

Salem-Keizer, Elementary Reading Academy with additional coaching (standardized score, t-test)	105	53.99	57.93	+3.94	p<0.01

In Milwaukee, the program effect remained stable at 7.01 points across three regression models: an unadjusted model, a model controlling for educator role, race, years in education, and grade band, and a model adding event location and participant rating. None of the event-level factors was a significant predictor, indicating that knowledge growth was consistent across settings and independent of how participants rated the experience. On the standardized scale, the gain corresponds to movement from approximately the 56th to the 75th percentile of the original TKELS reference sample.

In Salem-Keizer, knowledge growth was statistically significant at every grade level, within every band of teaching experience, and within each of the four largest role groups, as shown in Table 4. Smaller role groups, including special education staff and administrators, also showed gains that did not reach statistical significance given their sample sizes.

Table 4. Salem-Keizer knowledge growth by subgroup (standardized score)

Subgroup	# of Matched educators	Pre	Post	Change	Significance
Pre-K	29	41.45	46.38	+4.93	p = 0.07
Kindergarten	109	50.13	52.09	+1.96	p < 0.01
Grade 1	120	51.06	54.13	+3.08	p < 0.01
Grade 2	132	50.89	54.52	+3.64	p < 0.01
Grade 3	147	49.62	52.46	+2.84	p < 0.01
0–5 years of experience	210	46.80	48.49	+1.69	p < 0.01
6–10 years	88	50.50	54.67	+4.17	p < 0.01
11–20 years	152	50.84	54.47	+3.63	p < 0.01
More than 20 years	103	54.49	58.42	+3.93	p < 0.01
Teachers	261	52.36	56.55	+4.19	p < 0.01
Instructional assistants	96	50.98	54.15	+3.17	p < 0.01
Instructional coaches	112	44.88	45.84	+0.96	p=0.12
Student support staff	23	51.96	56.78	+4.83	p=0.02

The consistency of these results across grade levels, experience levels, and roles indicates that the course content supports growth for the full range of personnel covered by Section 1531k(1), from early-career teachers to veteran educators and from classroom teachers to the instructional assistants and coaches who support them.

6. Findings: Sustained Growth with Coaching

Following the January 2026 Elementary Reading Academy training, a subset of Salem-Keizer educators received coaching and implementation support from CORE Learning consultants. Between May 5 and June 15, 2026, approximately four months after the training, these educators completed TKELS a third time. The 105 educators with matched scores at all three administrations increased from 53.99 at pretest to 57.93 at post-test ($p<0.01$) and to 58.27 at follow-up ($p<0.01$), a net gain of 4.27 points or 43% of a standard deviation.The 105 educators with matched scores at all three administrations increased from 19.17 at pre-test to 20.17 at post-test ($p < 0.01$) and to 21.62 at follow-up ($p < 0.01$), a net gain of 2.45 items.

Table 5. Salem-Keizer knowledge growth from pre-test to follow-up after coaching (standardized score)

Group	Matched educators	Pre	Follow-up	Change	Significance
All educators, three timepoints	105	53.99	58.27	+4.27	p < 0.01
Educators in Title I schools	70	53.01	56.96	+3.94	p < 0.01
Educators in non-Title I schools	35	55.94	60.89	+4.94	p < 0.01
Early-career educators (0–5 years)	18	46.78	52.89	+6.11	p < 0.01
Educators with 11–20 years	38	53.59	58.92	+3.00	p < 0.01

These results indicate that knowledge gained during the course was retained and extended when coaching followed. Gains among educators in Title I schools are of particular relevance to Michigan's highest-need districts, and the 36.6 percent standard deviation relative gain among early-career educators suggests that coaching accelerates knowledge development for newer teachers.

7. Findings: Student Reading Outcomes

SEG Measurement conducted three independent studies of CORE Learning's professional learning in Pajaro Valley Unified School District, California, a district of approximately 20,000 students in which roughly half of students are English learners and nearly three quarters are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Teachers and administrators completed CORE Learning's Reading Academy, learned to implement the SIPPS foundational skills program, and received ongoing classroom coaching.

Each study employed a quasi-experimental, pre/post, treatment-comparison design consistent with ESSA Moderate (Tier 2) evidence. Students in classrooms of participating teachers were compared with students from other district classrooms matched by propensity score on initial reading achievement, gender, ethnicity, English learner status, and free or reduced-price lunch eligibility (and, in grade 2, special education status). Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to compare end-of-year achievement while adjusting for beginning-of-year scores.

Table 6. Student reading outcomes, Pajaro Valley Unified School District

Grade	School year	Students	Outcome measure	Effect size	Significance
Grade 2	2018–19	911	NWEA MAP Reading	0.18	$p < 0.001$
Grade 3	2018-19	364	NWEA MAP Reading	0.17	$p = 0.017$
Grade 1	2018–19	948	Fountas & Pinnell benchmark levels	0.15	$p = 0.011$

In all three grades, students in classrooms of teachers who participated in CORE Learning professional learning demonstrated significantly greater reading growth than matched comparison students. In grade 2, English learners in participating classrooms gained more than English learners in comparison classrooms, and the difference was larger than that observed for the full sample; a similar pattern was observed for students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. In grade 1, the effect was consistent across gender, ethnicity, English learner status, and income. Because professional learning influences students indirectly, through changes in teacher knowledge and instruction, effects of this magnitude are meaningful. The grade 3 study was peer reviewed and presented at the Innovate Learning Summit in November 2020.

8. Application to Classroom Practice

Online Language & Literacy Academy (OL&LA) is structured so that each module concludes with application in participants' own instructional settings. In-Practice activities require participants to implement or plan specific routines with their students and to reflect on resulting changes to their instruction. Examples include diagnostically analyzing student spelling errors and selecting a corresponding instructional routine (Module 5), planning a Text Talk or Word Map vocabulary lesson (Module 6), and planning text-specific comprehension instruction (Module 8). Participants also evaluate their adopted core, supplemental, and intervention programs against the explicit lesson models presented in the course, identifying gaps in existing materials and planning instruction to address them. These applications are compiled into the hand-scored portfolio required for course completion.

Where districts add coaching and implementation support, CORE Learning consultants provide classroom coaching to model lessons, co-teach, observe instruction, and provide feedback, and they conduct learning walks with principals and coaches to establish shared expectations for instruction and to address problems of practice. Following each site visit, district and school leaders receive a written report of findings and recommended next steps. This model of support was in place in Salem Keizer Public Schools and also Pajaro Valley Unified School District, where the student outcomes reported in Section 8 were measured.

9. Implementation and Continued Evaluation in Michigan

9.1 Implementation pathways

CORE Learning offers Michigan districts, intermediate school districts, and public school academies three complementary components, which may be combined to meet local capacity and staffing needs.

Table 7. Components available to Michigan districts

Component	Participants	Format	Purpose
Online Language & Literacy Academy (Elementary)	Certificated K–5 personnel and administrators	Nine modules over 18 weeks with three live facilitated sessions; cohorts of 20–30 [Pending: confirm synchronous option]	Required professional learning under Section 1531k(2)(a)–(e)

Online Language & Literacy Academy Cohort Leader Certification (OPTIONAL OFFERING)	Literacy coaches, specialists, and teacher leaders who have completed the course	Eight weeks, approximately 70 hours, including eight 90-minute live virtual sessions; cohorts of 10–20	Train-the-trainer facilitator learning under Section 1531k(2)(g)
Leadership for Literacy	Administrators and instructional leaders	Two-day training	Team-based leadership and systems for a multi-tiered system of supports

The Cohort Leader Certification prepares district-based leaders to facilitate future cohorts, coach teachers in applying course content, and adapt facilitation to local needs, building the internal capacity that allows implementation to continue and expand over time. Leadership for Literacy prepares school leaders and leadership teams to establish the scheduling, assessment, and data-based decision-making structures through which a multi-tiered system of supports operates at the school and district levels.

9.2 Continued evaluation

CORE Learning will document the impact of Online Language & Literacy Academy in Michigan through the following measures:

- Opening and Closing Surveys and module-level knowledge checks completed by every participant, yielding evidence directly comparable to the Minnesota results.
- Enrollment, completion, and withdrawal data by role group, recorded by CORE Learning's learning platform and reported annually to the Department as required under Section 1531k(4).
- A validated external pre/post measure of educator knowledge, such as TKELS, if determined appropriate in consultation with the Department.

10. Limitations

Several considerations should inform interpretation of these findings.

- **Design of the educator knowledge studies.** The Minnesota, Milwaukee, and Salem-Keizer evaluations use pre/post designs without comparison groups. Results are therefore reported

as growth associated with participation and do not by themselves establish causal effects.

- **Course modality.** TKELS results are available for Elementary Reading Academy; TKELS has not yet been administered to Online Language & Literacy Academy participants. Direct evidence for Online Language & Literacy Academy is drawn from participant self-assessments, which are subject to the limitations of self-report.
- **Timing of measurement.** In Milwaukee and Salem-Keizer, post-tests were administered on the final day of training, and the Salem-Keizer follow-up occurred approximately four months later. Alternate TKELS forms were used at pre-test and post-test to reduce testing effects, and Form A was readministered at follow-up.
- **Sample attrition.** In Salem-Keizer, 1,121 educators completed the pre-test, 795 the post-test, and 321 the follow-up. Matched analyses include only educators whose responses could be linked across administrations, which may not fully represent all participants.
- **Student outcome studies.** The Pajaro Valley studies were conducted in 2017–2019, evaluated CORE Learning professional learning in combination with SIPPS implementation and coaching, and in grade 1 relied on Fountas & Pinnell benchmark levels, which were transformed for analysis.
- **Statistical reporting.** Significance is reported at conventional thresholds ($p < 0.05$ or below).

11. Conclusion

The evidence summarized in this paper indicates that CORE Learning's professional learning is consistently associated with significant growth in educators' knowledge of early literacy across states, district contexts, grade levels, experience levels, and roles. That growth is sustained and extended when coaching follows the course, and independent quasi-experimental studies demonstrate that it reaches students, including English learners, in measurable gains in reading achievement. Online Language & Literacy Academy delivers this shared knowledge base in a flexible format that has already been implemented at statewide scale in Minnesota, with deeper integration of language development and second language acquisition. Together with the Cohort Leader Certification and Leadership for Literacy, it offers Michigan districts a pathway to meet the requirements of Section 1531k while building the local capacity to sustain strong literacy instruction for every student over time.

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