



RESEARCH REPORT

# Elementary English Language Arts Curriculum Resources in Michigan: Trends From 2019-2023

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# Curriculum Update: Executive Summary

Amy Cummings and Tanya S. Wright

This report examines the evolving landscape of English language arts (ELA) curriculum resources in Michigan elementary schools from the 2019-20 to the 2022-23 school years. These years have been marked by significant challenges and transformations in the educational landscape. The most notable among these has been the COVID-19 pandemic, which prompted a swift shift to remote learning and necessitated rapid curricular changes. Additionally, this period saw the ongoing implementation of Michigan's Read by Grade Three Law, which emphasizes evidence-based literacy instruction (Michigan Public Act 306, 2016). While the pandemic had a more immediate and widespread effect, the Read by Grade Three Law's influence on curricular choices has remained evident during this period in many districts.

Recognizing the pivotal role instruction plays in shaping students' literacy development, this report explores which curriculum resources teachers are using to provide ELA instruction and the infrastructure of support surrounding curriculum implementation. Relying on statewide survey data, we find that:

- Districts made many changes to their ELA curriculum resources due to the COVID-19 pandemic but few due to the Read by Grade Three Law;
- Variability remains a feature of Michigan's ELA curriculum resource landscape;
- Elementary classroom teachers are more likely to use only one core curriculum resource than they were in 2019-20;
- Elementary classroom teachers are more likely to supplement their core curriculum with additional writing, phonics, or spelling resources than they were in 2019-20;

- More teachers are using curriculum resources that *EdReports* rates as “Meets Expectations” than they were in 2019-20, particularly in districts serving higher proportions of students from historically underserved populations;
- The majority of the most-used core ELA curriculum resources are not rated by *What Works Clearinghouse* or *Evidence for ESSA*; and
- Teachers reported increased access to curriculum-aligned professional development compared to 2019-20.

Based on these findings, we offer the following recommendations for policymakers and practitioners:

- Support access to research-based curriculum resources with robust curriculum evaluation tools;
- Promote consistency of curriculum resource selection from classroom to classroom within districts while valuing teacher professional judgment; and
- Continue and expand curriculum-aligned professional development opportunities, with a focus on coaching.

# Section One: Introduction

In recent years, the focus on enhancing literacy instruction in elementary schools has led to significant policy developments across the United States. As of 2023, 17 states and the District of Columbia have established mandates requiring school districts to align their English language arts (ELA) curricula with evidence-based instructional methods (Fischer et al., 2023; Zimmerman, 2023). This trend is reflective of a growing recognition among policymakers and educators that curriculum resources play a crucial role in shaping teachers' instruction, and consequently, influencing student outcomes.

Michigan, however, diverges from this trend. While the state has not issued any statewide requirements for ELA curriculum or instructional resources (Education Commission of the States, 2023), it did enact the Read by Grade Three Law in 2016 (Michigan Public Act 306, 2016). This Law was in part a response to concerns about early literacy performance on state and national tests (Cummings et al., 2023), and its aim is to improve literacy instruction and student achievement by the end of 3rd grade. Although it does not prescribe specific ELA curriculum resources, the Law mandates that literacy instruction should be “evidence-based” or “based in research and with proven efficacy” (Michigan Public Act 306, 2016). Teachers must also address the “five major reading components”: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In this sense, the Law may influence the selection of curriculum but does not require the use of particular resources.

Despite the presence of the Read by Grade Three Law, Michigan's ELA curriculum landscape remains varied. Our [previous study](#) showed that the ELA curriculum resources teachers were using in 2019-20 were substantially different across districts and also among teachers within the same district (Wright et al., 2022). In that report, based on pre-COVID-19 data, we found that

teachers used over 450 different ELA curriculum resources across Michigan. Despite this broad range of resources, teachers most commonly employed one of 10 core ELA resources. Many of these curriculum resources were either unrated or did not meet expectations according to three curriculum rating sites that are free and accessible to educators: *What Works Clearinghouse*, *Evidence for ESSA*, and *EdReports*.

In light of these findings, we made several policy recommendations. We encouraged districts to critically evaluate and, if necessary, replace their existing ELA curriculum resources with evidence-based materials. We also called for state support in helping districts choose high-quality curriculum resources and underscored the need for professional development to support effective implementation.

The current report aims to update these findings, especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on education. We investigate the latest trends in ELA curriculum resource use, examine the supports teachers receive for curriculum implementation, and consider any pandemic-induced shifts. We believe this report will serve as a vital resource for policymakers and practitioners who seek to make informed decisions about curriculum adoption and teacher professional development.

To frame our analysis, we posed the following research questions:

1. How did districts change their ELA curriculum resources between 2019-20 and 2022-23? Were any shifts influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic or the Read by Grade Three Law?
2. Which ELA curriculum resources were teachers using in the 2022-23 school year, and how did this compare to curriculum resources in use during the 2019-20 school year?
3. How are the ELA curriculum resources teachers were using rated according to *What Works Clearinghouse*, *Evidence for ESSA*, and *EdReports*, and are there systematic differences in the use of resources receiving favorable ratings?
4. What supports did teachers receive to implement their ELA curriculum resources?

Through this updated examination, we aim to provide policymakers and practitioners with actionable insights for shaping future curriculum policy and practice in Michigan.



# Section Two:

## Data and Methods

### DATA SOURCES

The data for this report are from the Education Policy Innovation Collaborative’s (EPIC’s) annual Read by Grade Three surveys, conducted from the 2020-21 to the 2022-23 academic years. Each spring, EPIC surveyed K-5 teachers and district superintendents in Michigan to understand their perspectives and practices surrounding the Read by Grade Three Law, including questions about literacy curriculum resources.<sup>1</sup>

Table 2.1 presents the sample sizes and response rates for each educator group over these three survey years. The table highlights a slight decline in response rates, most noticeably among district superintendents. This decrease may be attributable, in part, to survey fatigue, as educators were asked to respond to the Read by Grade Three survey for four consecutive years.

| <b>TABLE 2.1. Sample Size and Response Rates</b> |                      |                          |                      |                      |                          |                      |                      |                          |                      |
|--|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
|  | <b>2020-21</b>       |                          |                      | <b>2021-22</b>       |                          |                      | <b>2022-23</b>       |                          |                      |
|  | <b>Survey Sample</b> | <b>Target Population</b> | <b>Response Rate</b> | <b>Survey Sample</b> | <b>Target Population</b> | <b>Response Rate</b> | <b>Survey Sample</b> | <b>Target Population</b> | <b>Response Rate</b> |
| K-5 Teachers                                     | 6,670                | 29,317                   | 22.8%                | 5,588                | 30,777                   | 18.2%                | 4,948                | 29,948                   | 16.5%                |
| District Superintendents                         | 162                  | 632                      | 25.6%                | 89                   | 590                      | 15.1%                | 87                   | 505                      | 17.2%                |

*Note: In the K-5 teacher sample, we include only general education classroom teachers. The target population for district superintendents is less than the total number of traditional public and charter school districts in Michigan (N=831) because some districts combine the superintendent and principal roles into one position. In these instances, we directed respondents to complete the principal survey.*

The sample generally reflects the broader educator population in terms of demographics and the schools and districts in which they work. However, teachers in the sample more commonly work in smaller districts with more economically disadvantaged students and fewer English learners. Meanwhile, superintendents are more likely to be female and work more frequently in charter or smaller districts.<sup>2</sup>

To supplement the survey data, we once again consulted the same three open-access curriculum evaluation websites as in our [previous report](#) (Wright et al., 2022). These sites are freely available to educators as they make decisions about which curriculum resources to adopt. We systematically searched these sites—*What Works Clearinghouse*, *Evidence for ESSA*, and *EdReports*—for the 10 most commonly used core ELA curriculum resources in Michigan. *What Works Clearinghouse* and *Evidence for ESSA* both rate curriculum resources based on evidence of their effectiveness from existing research studies (Evidence for ESSA, 2023; Institute of Education Sciences, n.d.). *EdReports* analyzes the content of curriculum resources for their alignment to college and career readiness standards (EdReports, 2023). While there are now additional organizations rating curriculum resources (e.g., The Knowledge Matters Campaign, n.d.), our use of these websites was driven by their accessibility to educators and our aim for methodological consistency so that we could make comparisons with findings in our previous report.

Table 2.2 provides an overview of the data sources we use in our analyses, organized by the corresponding research questions they aim to address. The table details the data collected from each source as well as the year it was collected.

| TABLE 2.2. Data Sources  |                                 |   |                   |
|--|---------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Research Question  | Source                          | Data Collected (Respondents)  | Year(s) Collected |
| 1. How did districts change their ELA curriculum resources between 2019-20 and 2022-23? Were any shifts influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic or the Read by Grade Three Law?  | Survey                          | As a result of COVID-19, did your district change or adopt curricula to support remote instruction? (Superintendents)   | 2020-21           |
|  |                                 | Did you change the core literacy curricula between the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years? If yes, why? (Superintendents)   | 2021-22           |
|  |                                 | Has your district’s literacy curricula changed as a result of the Read by Grade Three Law? (Superintendents)  | 2022-23           |
| 2. Which ELA curriculum resources are teachers using in the 2022-23 school year, and how does this compare to curriculum resources in use during the 2019-20 school year?  | Survey                          | Which of the following ELA curricula do you use? (Teachers)   | 2022-23           |
|  |                                 | If you use additional writing curricula, please mark all that you use. (Teachers)   | 2022-23           |
|  |                                 | If you use additional phonics/spelling curricula, please mark all that you use. (Teachers)  | 2022-23           |
| 3. How are the ELA curriculum resources teachers were using rated according to <i>What Works Clearinghouse</i> , <i>Evidence for ESSA</i> , and <i>EdReports</i> , and are there systematic differences in the use of resources receiving favorable ratings? | <i>What Works Clearinghouse</i> | Ratings of 10 most commonly used core ELA curriculum resources  | 2022-23           |
|  | <i>Evidence for ESSA</i>        | Ratings of 10 most commonly used core ELA curriculum resources  | 2022-23           |
|  | <i>EdReports</i>                | Ratings of 10 most commonly used core ELA curriculum resources  | 2022-23           |
| 4. What supports did teachers receive to implement their ELA curriculum resources?   | Survey                          | Please tell us on which of the following topics you have received literacy professional development this school year and in what format (i.e., one-on-one literacy coaching, other literacy professional development): “Implementing my school’s/district’s literacy curriculum” (Teachers) | 2020-21, 2021-22  |

## METHODS

To address our first research question about changes in ELA curriculum resources at the district level, we analyze superintendents' survey responses. We also explore whether these changes vary by district characteristics, including ELA performance, the proportion of economically disadvantaged and non-White students, and locale.<sup>3</sup> We test whether differences between these groups are statistically significant using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis.

For our second research question about the ELA curriculum resources Michigan teachers are using, we calculate the total number of resources reported in each category: core ELA, writing, and phonics/spelling. The survey allowed teachers to select from a predefined list of curriculum resources and to write in any resources not included in the list. In our analysis, we combine multiple editions of the same curriculum resource as well as those that changed names for subsequent editions (e.g., *Core Knowledge Language Arts* is also published as *Amplify ELA*).<sup>4</sup> Additionally, we combine resources from the same author or author teams when we could not determine which specific products teachers were using.

We employ descriptive statistics to identify the percentage of teachers using each curriculum resource across the three categories (core ELA, writing, and phonics/spelling) and identify the most-used curriculum resources in each. We compare this to the findings from [our previous report](#) to determine how the most commonly used resources have changed since 2019-20 (Wright et al., 2022).

To answer our third research question about how these resources are rated, we rely on the ratings from *What Works Clearinghouse*, *Evidence for ESSA*, and *EdReports*. *What Works Clearinghouse* assesses curriculum resources based on the rigor of the research supporting them. It categorizes studies into tiers of evidence quality, from high-quality randomized controlled trials (Tier I) to studies with serious design flaws (Tier III) (National Center for Education Evaluation at IES, 2022). *Evidence for ESSA* similarly evaluates curriculum resources based on their effectiveness as demonstrated through rigorous research studies, categorizing them into "Strong (Tier I)," "Moderate (Tier 2)," or "Promising (Tier 3)" evidence levels depending on the study design and results. "Strong" signifies a program supported by a well-conducted, randomized study showing significant positive effects, while "Moderate" indicates a program backed by quasi-experimental studies and "Promising" reflects programs that show positive outcomes but do not fully meet the criteria for higher tiers, often due to limitations in study design or sample size (Evidence for ESSA, 2024). Finally, *EdReports* evaluates curriculum resources using three key gateways. Gateway 1 assesses text quality, complexity, and alignment to the Common Core State Standards; Gateway 2 focuses on building knowledge through integrated literacy tasks and coherence with grade-level standards; and Gateway 3 examines the usability of materials, including teacher supports, assessment systems, and student supports. Based on these three gateways, resources are given a rating of "Meets Expectations," "Partially Meets Expectations," or "Does Not Meet Expectations" (EdReports, 2024).

Because most of the commonly used curriculum resources in Michigan were not rated by either *What Works Clearinghouse* or *Evidence for ESSA*—due to the absence of research studies meeting these sites' inclusion criteria—we rely on *EdReports*' ratings for subsequent analyses. Based on these ratings, we develop an indicator in our survey dataset to identify whether a teacher reported using a curriculum resource that *EdReports* rated as "Meets Expectations." We then analyze the percentage

of teachers using such resources, exploring variations across different district characteristics. This allows us to compare the current use of curriculum resources *EdReports* rates highly with the data from our 2019-20 report (Wright et al., 2022).

Finally, to address our fourth research question regarding the supports teachers receive to implement their ELA curriculum resources, we use descriptive statistics on their survey responses. We collected data on whether teachers reported receiving one-on-one literacy coaching or other forms of non-coaching professional development related to literacy curriculum implementation.

In summary, this report employs data from EPIC's annual Read by Grade Three surveys and curriculum rating websites to delve into key aspects of ELA curriculum resources in Michigan. The data and methods outlined here enable us to explore the ELA curriculum resources in use, detect changes over time, and gauge the supports educators receive to implement these resources. Through descriptive analyses and OLS regression, we aim to provide nuanced understandings that can inform policy discussions and decisions aimed at enhancing literacy instruction.

# Section Three: How Have Districts Changed Their ELA Curriculum Resources?

To examine the evolution of ELA curriculum resources in Michigan elementary schools, we first aim to understand the role of district-level decisions in shaping the resources teachers use. As we established in our [previous report](#), all districts in Michigan offer guidance on curriculum resource selection, with approximately 60% mandating the use of specific resources and the remainder providing or recommending curriculum resources (Wright et al., 2022).

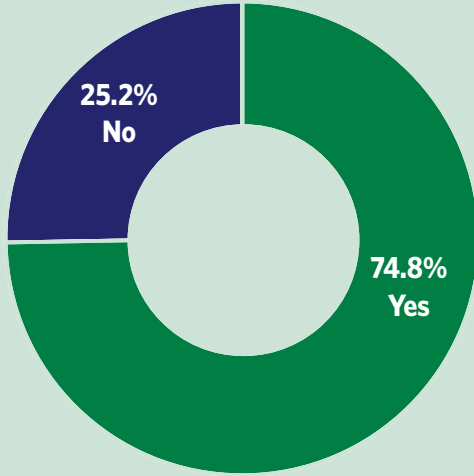
## DISTRICTS ADAPTED THEIR ELA CURRICULUM RESOURCES DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about significant changes in education, including in literacy instruction. A notable shift was the move to remote learning, which posed challenges for districts and educators alike. Our [recent study](#) focused on K-3 literacy instruction in Michigan during the 2020-21 pandemic-affected school year and found that the time allocated for literacy instruction decreased on average by one hour per week compared to the pre-pandemic period (Wright et al., 2023). Teachers consistently implemented evidence-based instructional practices within these time constraints, although the quality of instruction varied broadly across different classrooms.

A critical aspect of this transition was likely how districts adapted their ELA curriculum resources to the demands of remote learning. As illustrated in Figure 3.1, approximately three-quarters of superintendents reported making adaptations to their ELA curriculum resources to facilitate effective remote instruction. This high rate of adaptation underscores the responsiveness of districts to the urgent need for curriculum flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our analysis did not reveal any significant differences in the likelihood of changes to curriculum resources based on district characteristics such as ELA performance, student demographics, or geographic location. This indicates that there was widespread recognition of the importance of adapting curriculum resources under these extraordinary circumstances. It also suggests that districts, irrespective of their specific contexts, shared common challenges around curriculum and responded in similar ways during the pandemic.

Figure 3.1. District Changes to ELA Curriculum Resources to Support Remote Instruction



Note: Superintendents were asked, “As a result of COVID-19, did your district change or adopt curricula to support remote instruction?” 4.3% of superintendents did not answer this question and therefore are excluded from this analysis. Source: 2020-21 EPIC Read by Grade Three Law survey.

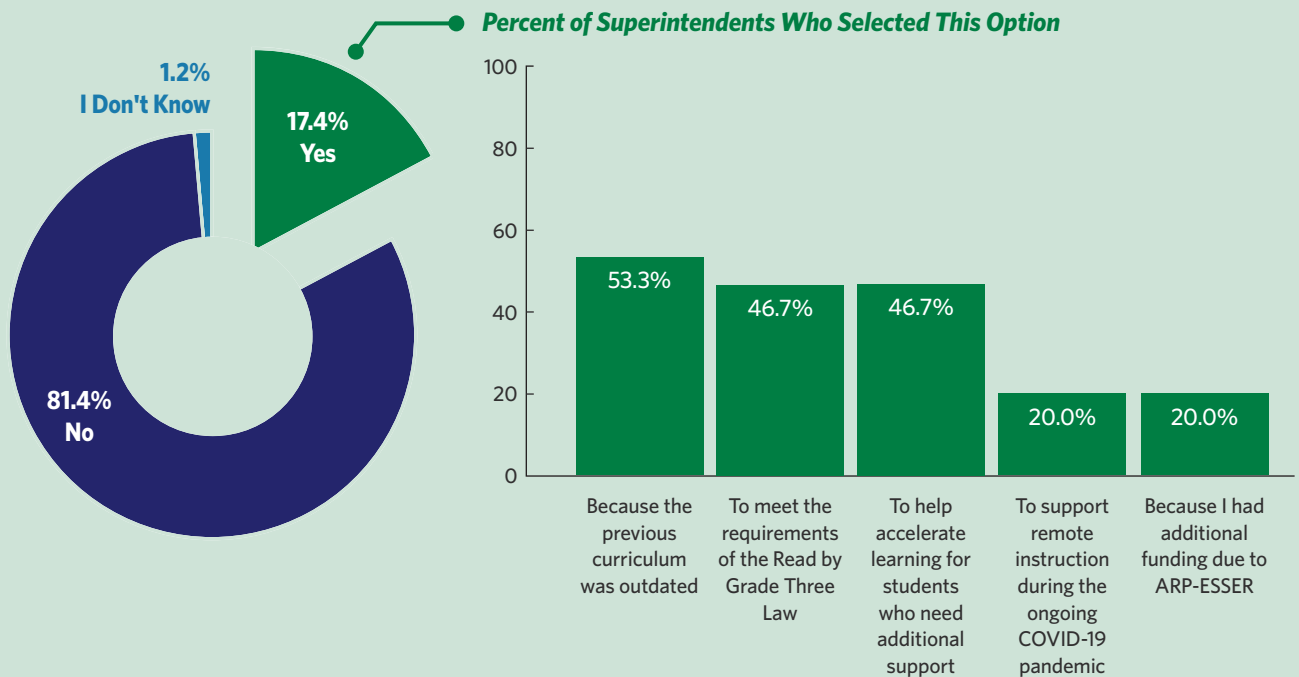
## DISTRICTS MADE FEW CHANGES TO THEIR CURRICULUM RESOURCES IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE PANDEMIC

Following the disruptive phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2020-21 school year, the 2021-22 school year marked a period of relative stability for Michigan districts in terms of ELA curriculum resource changes. As depicted in Figure 3.2, only about 17% of superintendents reported further modifications to their core ELA curriculum resources during this period.

The primary reasons superintendents cited for changes during the 2021-22 school year focused on the need to update outdated curriculum resources, meeting the requirements of the Read by Grade Three Law, and helping to accelerate learning for students requiring additional support. Interestingly, despite expectations to the contrary, modifications due to the influx of pandemic-related funding, such as from the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP-ESSER), were reported less frequently. This contrasts with the widespread assumption that such funding would primarily

be used for curricular changes, indicating that districts may have prioritized other areas or faced challenges in efficiently channeling these funds towards new curriculum resources.

FIGURE 3.2. District Changes to Core ELA Curriculum Resources in 2021-22



*Note: This figure combines results from two questions. Superintendents were asked, "Did you change the core literacy curricula your district is using between the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years?" 3.37% of superintendents did not respond to this question. Those who responded "Yes" were then asked, "Why did you change the literacy curricula you are using between the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years? Please mark all that apply." Source: 2021-22 EPIC Read by Grade Three Law survey.*

Our analysis did not reveal any significant differences in these changes across districts based on ELA performance, student demographics, or geographic location. This suggests that the extensive curriculum resource adaptations made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic's initial effect may have mitigated the need for or reduced the ability to accommodate further changes in the subsequent year.

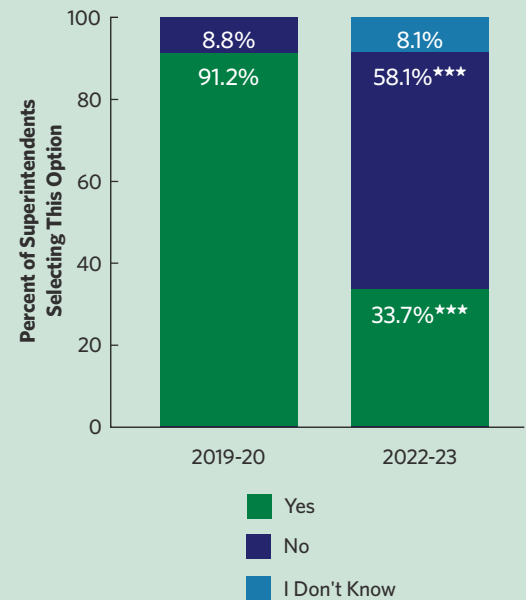
## MOMENTUM FOR CURRICULUM RESOURCE CHANGES DUE TO THE READ BY GRADE THREE LAW HAS DECREASED

By the 2022-23 school year, there was a noticeable decrease in the momentum for curriculum resource changes in response to Michigan's Read by Grade Three Law. This contrasts significantly with the more immediate aftermath of the Law's enactment, when an overwhelming 91.2% of superintendents reported making at least small changes to their ELA curriculum resources due to the Law in 2019-20 (Wright et al., 2022). Figure 3.3 shows that by 2022-23, the proportion of districts reporting changes for this reason had dropped significantly to 33.7%.

This decrease could indicate that most districts had already completed any changes to their curriculum resources that they felt were needed to meet the requirements of the Law. Additionally, the curriculum resource adaptations necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic might have affected districts' capacity to implement further changes specifically for the Law.

In this case, our analysis did reveal significant differences across districts. Consistent with data from 2019-20, in 2022-23, districts with lower ELA performance and higher proportions of economically disadvantaged students were more likely to report changes to their curriculum resources to align with the Law. This pattern indicates a concerted effort in these districts to make their curriculum resources more aligned with the requirements of the Read by Grade Three Law.

**FIGURE 3.3. District Changes to ELA Curriculum Resources as a Result of the Read by Grade Three Law**



*Note: This question was phrased differently in 2019-20 and 2022-23. In 2019-20, superintendents were asked, "To what extent has your district's literacy curricula changed as a result of the Read by Grade Three Law?" In this figure, "Yes" is indicated by superintendents who selected "To a small extent," "To a moderate extent," or "To a great extent," while "No" is indicated by superintendents who selected "Not at all." 5.2% of superintendents did not respond to this question. In 2022-23, superintendents were asked, "Has your district's literacy curricula changed as a result of the Read by Grade Three Law?" Response options included "Yes," "No," and "I don't know." 1.2% of superintendents did not respond to this question. Statistical significance is indicated by  $p < 0.10$  +,  $p < 0.05$  \*,  $p < 0.01$  \*\*,  $p < 0.001$  \*\*\*. Source: 2019-20 and 2022-23 EPIC Read by Grade Three Law surveys.*

## SUMMARY

In summary:

- The primary driver of changes in ELA curriculum resources between the 2019-20 and 2022-23 school years was the COVID-19 pandemic. The need for remote learning led to significant and rapid adaptations in curriculum resources.
- After initial pandemic-related changes, there was a period of stabilization, with only about 17% of districts reporting further modifications to their curriculum resources in the 2021-22 school year.
- Although the implementation of the Read by Grade Three Law initially prompted widespread revisions to curriculum resources, the rate of these changes decreased by the 2022-23 school year. However, districts with lower ELA performance and higher proportions of students who are economically disadvantaged continued to make changes, indicating an ongoing effort to make their curriculum resources more aligned with the Law.

While these changes represent districts' efforts to make their curriculum resources more aligned with the Read by Grade Three Law, these frequent changes, or "curriculum churn," particularly in lower-performing districts serving students who are economically disadvantaged, may pose challenges for teachers as they continually adapt to new resources. In the next section, we delve deeper into the ELA resources teachers reported using and compare these findings with previous data from 2019-20. This will shed light on how the curricular landscape has transformed at the classroom level over this period.



# Section Four: What ELA Curriculum Resources Are Teachers Using?

In this section, we explore how the ELA curriculum resources Michigan’s elementary teachers are using changed between the 2019-20 and 2022-23 school years. Our analysis provides insights into the evolving landscape of ELA instruction in Michigan’s elementary schools, highlighting trends in the adoption of core and supplemental resources.

## A BROAD RANGE OF ELA CURRICULUM RESOURCES IS USED IN MICHIGAN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

The broad range of ELA curriculum resources in Michigan’s elementary classrooms continues to be a defining characteristic. In 2022-23, teachers reported using 444 unique ELA curriculum resources, only a slight decrease from the 464 resources identified in our previous report. These resources included 154 distinct resources for core ELA, 120 for writing instruction, and 170 for phonics and/or spelling. Table 4.1 provides a detailed breakdown of these resources.

|                               | 2019-20    | 2022-23    |
|-------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Core ELA                      | 170        | 154        |
| Supplemental Writing          | 128        | 120        |
| Supplemental Phonics/Spelling | 166        | 170        |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>464</b> | <b>444</b> |

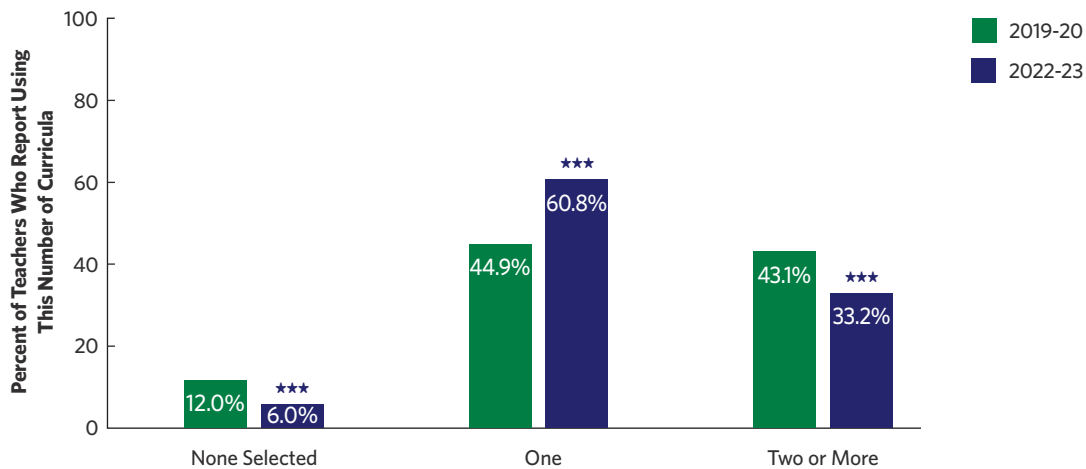
*Note: This figure combines results from multiple survey questions. Teachers were asked, “Which of the following English language arts (ELA) curricula do you use? Please mark all that apply,” “If you use additional writing curricula, please mark all that you use,” and “If you use additional phonics/spelling curricula, please mark all that you use.” Teachers could also write in their curriculum if it was not listed. Source: 2019-20 and 2022-23 EPIC Read by Grade Three Law surveys.*

Importantly, not all 154 resources reported for core ELA instruction are traditionally considered core ELA curricula. Teachers wrote in professional texts, *Teachers Pay Teachers* lesson plans, and even assessment materials as core curriculum resources they use for ELA instruction.<sup>5</sup> For more details on the specific curriculum resources used, see Appendices A through C.

## TEACHERS INCREASINGLY USE A SINGLE CORE CURRICULUM RESOURCE

Michigan elementary teachers demonstrated a shift toward using one core ELA curriculum resource. The data from 2019-20 to 2022-23 highlighted in Figure 4.1 show a significant increase in the percentage of teachers using just one core ELA resource, rising from 44.9% to 60.8%. At the same time, there has been a significant decrease in the use of multiple core resources, from 43.1% to 33.2%, and the proportion of teachers using no core resources at all halved from 12% to only 6%.

**FIGURE 4.1. Number of Core ELA Curriculum Resources Teachers Reported Using**



*Note: Teachers were asked, “Which of the following English language arts (ELA) curricula do you use? Please mark all that apply.” Teachers could also write in their curriculum if it was not listed. We combined curricula that were the same but different editions. All core ELA curriculum resources teachers reported using can be found in Appendix A. Statistical significance is indicated by  $p < 0.10$  +,  $p < 0.05$  \*,  $p < 0.01$  \*\*,  $p < 0.001$  \*\*\*. Source: 2019-20 and 2022-23 EPIC Read by Grade Three Law surveys.*

This shift towards a single core curriculum may reflect a clearer and more coherent approach to supporting literacy within Michigan classrooms because core curriculum resources are designed to be comprehensive and cover all aspects of literacy. However, it is important to note that about 40% of teachers report using multiple core resources or none at all. The persistence of this 40% suggests the need for ongoing support and guidance for districts in effectively selecting core curriculum resources.

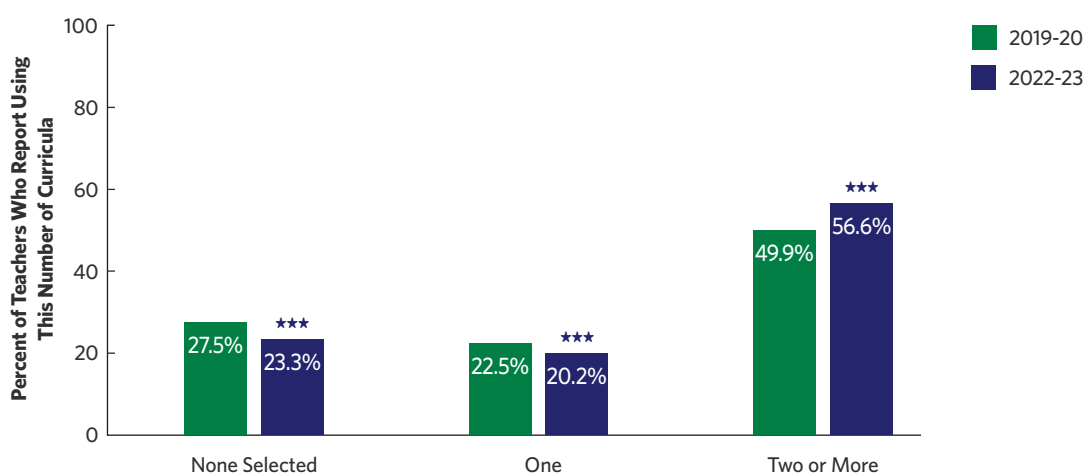
## TEACHERS REPORTED USING MORE SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

While teachers are more likely to report using a single core curriculum, there is a trend towards the expanded use of supplemental resources in writing and phonics/spelling. These supplemental resources are used to support “Tier 1” instruction, which is delivered by the classroom teacher

to all students. Unlike core curriculum resources that aim to support all ELA standards, these supplements focus on specific areas of literacy instruction. Figure 4.2 illustrates this shift, showing a significant increase in the percentage of teachers using two or more supplemental resources from 49.9% in 2019-20 to 56.6% in 2022-23. This does not necessarily indicate a larger number of different supplemental titles being used but rather that more teachers are employing supplemental resources beyond their core curriculum in their instruction.

The data also reveal a decrease from 27.5% to 23.3% in the number of teachers not using any supplemental resources. This shift towards greater use of supplemental resources for writing or phonics/spelling suggests that districts or teachers may believe that the selected core curriculum resources are not adequately addressing these areas of literacy.

**FIGURE 4.2. Number of Additional Curriculum Resources Teachers Reported Using**



*Note: This figure combines results from multiple survey questions. Teachers were asked, "If you use additional writing curricula, please mark all that you use," and "If you use additional phonics/spelling curricula, please mark all that you use." Teachers could also write in their curriculum if it was not listed. All supplemental curriculum resources teachers reported using can be found in Appendix B (Writing) and C (Phonics/Spelling). Statistical significance is indicated by  $p < 0.10$  +,  $p < 0.05$  \*,  $p < 0.01$  \*\*,  $p < 0.001$  \*\*\*. Source: 2019-20 and 2022-23 EPIC Read by Grade Three Law surveys.*

The trend towards integrating more supplemental resources alongside a more unified core curriculum likely results from strategic decisions at the district level and the professional judgment of teachers in adapting and enriching their instructional strategies.

## TEACHERS REPORTED USING DIFFERENT CORE ELA CURRICULUM RESOURCES THAN IN 2019-20

Our analysis also shows notable shifts in the most commonly used core ELA curricula between 2019-20 and 2022-23, suggesting an evolving landscape of instructional resources in Michigan's elementary schools. Table 4.2 presents these changes, which show that the use of Fountas & Pinnell resources decreased (although it is still the most commonly used curriculum resource),

while *Wonders* increased. Additionally, curriculum resources that were not previously in the top 10, including *Literacy Footprints* and *Benchmark Advance*, are now among the most used. It is possible that these changes could stem from differences in survey respondents across years.

| TABLE 4.2. Most Used Core ELA Curriculum Resources |                 |  |                     |   |                     |   |
|--|-----------------|--|---------------------|---|---------------------|---|
|  |                 |  | 2019-20             |   | 2022-23             |   |
| 2019-20 Ranking                                    | 2022-23 Ranking | Curriculum Name  | % of Teachers Using | % of Districts in Which This Was the Most Used Curriculum | % of Teachers Using | % of Districts in Which This Was the Most Used Curriculum |
| 1  | 1               | Fountas & Pinnell resources  | 31%                 | 13%   | 19%                 | 10%   |
| 7  | 2               | <i>Wonders</i> (also known as <i>Reading Wonders</i> )   | 9%                  | 13%   | 14%                 | 14%   |
| 3  | 3               | <i>Units of Study for Teaching Reading</i> (i.e., Lucy Calkins)  | 17%                 | 13%   | 13%                 | 11%   |
| NR   | 4               | <i>Literacy Footprints</i>   | NR                  | NR  | 11%                 | 8%  |
| 2  | 5               | <i>MAISA Units of Study for Reading</i>  | 19%                 | 18%   | 10%                 | 10%   |
| 5  | 6               | <i>Journeys</i>  | 11%                 | 10%   | 8%                  | 9%  |
| NR   | 7               | <i>Benchmark Advance</i>   | NR                  | NR  | 5%                  | 6%  |
| 9  | 8               | <i>Amplify CKLA (Core Knowledge Language Arts)</i>   | 4%                  | 3%  | 5%                  | 8%  |
| 8  | 9               | <i>EL Education K-5 Language Arts</i> (formerly <i>EL Education</i> or <i>LearnZillion</i> )/ <i>MoDEL Detroit</i> | 6%                  | 1%  | 4%                  | 5%  |
| NR   | 10              | <i>Into Reading</i>  | NR                  | NR  | 4%                  | 7%  |

Note: NR = Not Ranked. Teachers were asked, “Which of the following English language arts (ELA) curricula do you use? Please mark all that apply.” Teachers could also write in their curriculum if it was not listed. We combined curricula that were the same but different editions. 6.0% of teachers did not respond to this question. Source: 2022-23 EPIC Read by Grade Three Law survey.

## TEACHERS ARE INCREASINGLY USING THEIR DISTRICTS’ PREFERRED CORE ELA CURRICULUM RESOURCE

There is a growing alignment between the core ELA curriculum resources teachers report using and those most commonly used in their districts. Figure 4.3 illustrates this alignment, revealing that a significant majority of teachers are using their districts’ most-used core ELA curriculum resources. This suggests a move towards more standardized curriculum choices within districts, likely influenced by factors such as educational policies—like the Read by Grade Three Law—and district-level strategies to streamline the selection of curriculum resources.

However, this trend of alignment does not negate the individual variability in teachers' curriculum usage. It appears that while district-level policies and recommendations are influencing teachers' curriculum resource use, there is still evidence of individual teacher discretion. This dynamic interplay between district mandates and teacher autonomy reflects a complex, multi-layered approach to the use of ELA curriculum resources in Michigan's elementary schools.

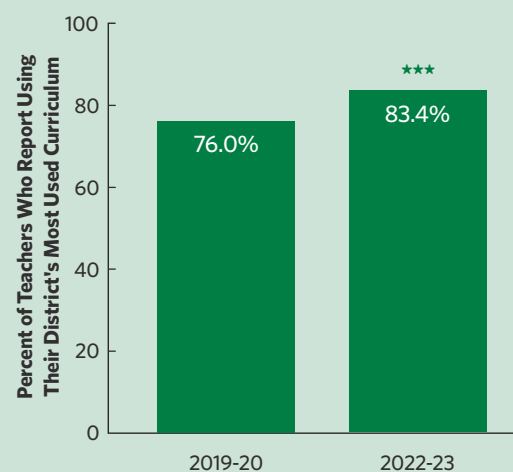
## SUMMARY

In summary:

- Despite some changes between the 2019-20 and 2022-23 school years, a wide range of different curriculum resources continues to characterize Michigan's educational landscape.
- There is a notable trend of teachers using a single core ELA curriculum resource, indicating a move towards a more streamlined approach to curriculum use.
- There has also been a rise in the use of multiple supplemental resources, suggesting efforts to address phonics/spelling and writing instruction more comprehensively.
- There have been substantial changes to the most frequently used core ELA curriculum resources since 2019-20.
- There is growing alignment between the core curriculum resources used by individual teachers and those most commonly used in their districts.

Overall, these trends suggest a move towards more uniform instruction across classrooms, yet this is intertwined with ongoing teacher autonomy. This reflects the complex interaction between district-level decisions and individual teachers' decision making about curriculum resources. In the next section, we examine how these ELA curriculum resources used in Michigan are rated by external curriculum evaluation organizations.

**FIGURE 4.3. Percentage of Teachers Using Their District's Most-Used Core ELA Curriculum Resources**



*Note: Teachers were asked, "Which of the following English language arts (ELA) curricula do you use? Please mark all that apply." Teachers could also write in their curriculum if it was not listed. We combined curricula that were the same but different editions. 6.0% of teachers did not respond to this question. Statistical significance is indicated by  $p < 0.10$  +,  $p < 0.05$  \*,  $p < 0.01$  \*\*,  $p < 0.001$  \*\*\*. Source: 2019-20 and 2022-23 EPIC Read by Grade Three Law surveys.*

## Section Five: How Are the Most-Used Core ELA Curriculum Resources Rated?

In this section, we examine the ways that prominent curriculum evaluation organizations such as *What Works Clearinghouse*, *Evidence for ESSA*, and *EdReports* rate commonly used core reading curriculum materials in Michigan (Institute of Education Sciences, n.d.; Evidence for ESSA, 2023; EdReports, 2023). We also examine the implications of using highly rated core curriculum resources on teachers' use of supplemental resources.

### MORE TEACHERS ARE USING CORE ELA CURRICULUM RESOURCES THAT *EDREPORTS* RATES AS “MEETS EXPECTATIONS” THAN IN 2019-20

Our analysis reveals that teachers are increasingly using core ELA curriculum resources that *EdReports* rates highly. Table 5.1 presents the most recent ratings for the top 10 core ELA curriculum resources used in Michigan. These ratings are accessible to educators and may be used as part of curriculum selection. However, it is important to note that our analysis does not confirm whether Michigan teachers are using the exact editions reviewed on these sites, and some locally used versions, like *MoDEL Detroit*, have been adapted from rated curricula.

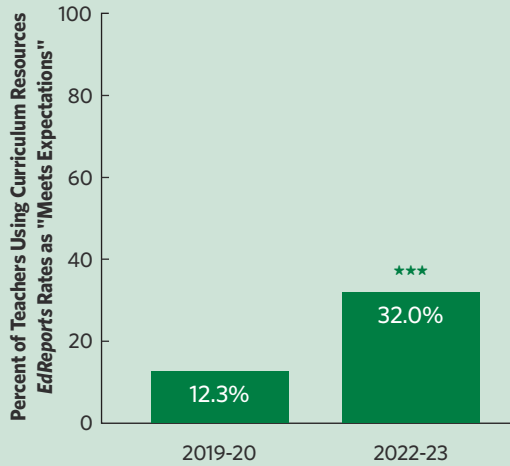
| TABLE 5.1. Ratings of Top 10 Most-Used Core ELA Resources  |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
| Curriculum Name  | What Works Clearinghouse   | Evidence for ESSA   | EdReports   |
| Fountas & Pinnell resources  | Only provided information about <i>Leveled Literacy Intervention</i> (tested as a Tier 2 intervention, not as a core curriculum) | Qualifying studies found no significant positive results. | <i>Fountas &amp; Pinnell Classroom</i> (2020 Edition) does not meet expectations. |
| <i>Wonders</i> (also known as <i>Reading Wonders</i> )   | Not rated  | Qualifying studies found no significant positive results. | 2023 Edition meets expectations.  |
| <i>Units of Study for Teaching Reading</i> (i.e., Lucy Calkins)  | Not rated  | No studies met inclusion requirements.                    | 2018 Edition does not meet expectations.  |
| <i>Literacy Footprints</i>   | Not rated  | Not rated   | Not rated   |
| <i>MAISA Units of Study for Reading</i>  | Not rated  | Not rated   | Not rated   |
| <i>Journeys</i>  | Not rated  | “Strong” (Tier I) (2012 Edition)                          | 2017 Edition partially meets expectations.  |
| <i>Benchmark Advance</i>   | Not rated  | Not rated   | 2022 Edition meets expectations.  |
| <i>Amplify CKLA (Core Knowledge Language Arts)</i>   | Not rated  | No studies met inclusion requirements.                    | 2015 Edition meets expectations.  |
| <i>EL Education K-5 Language Arts</i> (formerly <i>EL Education</i> or <i>LearnZillion</i> )/ <i>MoDEL Detroit</i> | Not rated  | No studies met inclusion requirements.                    | 2019 Edition meets expectations.  |
| <i>Into Reading</i>  | Not rated  | No studies met inclusion requirements.                    | 2020 Edition meets expectations.  |

Note: “Not rated” means that this curriculum resource was not found on the organization’s website.

EdReports has reviewed eight of the top 10 curricula used in Michigan. Two of the most widely adopted curricula—*Fountas & Pinnell Classroom* (used by 19% of teachers) and *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* (used by 13%) (shaded purple)—did not meet expectations for text quality, building knowledge, or usability—the three gateways EdReports evaluates. Another, *Journeys* (8%) (shaded blue) partially met expectations in some of these areas. However, half of the top 10 core ELA curriculum resources used in Michigan received favorable EdReports ratings (shaded green), an increase from only three of the top 10 in 2019-20.

*What Works Clearinghouse* had ratings for only one of the 10 curricula—a Fountas & Pinnell resource evaluated as a Tier 2 intervention, not a core curriculum. Similarly, *Evidence for ESSA* reported positive results for an older *Journeys* edition but found no substantial positive effects for Fountas & Pinnell resources and *Wonders*, two of the most-used core curriculum resources in Michigan (by 19% and 14% of teachers, respectively).

**FIGURE 5.1. Teachers’ Use of ELA Curriculum Resources EdReports Rates as “Meets Expectations”**



*Note: The percentages in this figure represent the percent of teachers who reported using one or more core ELA curriculum resources that EdReports rated as “Meets Expectations.” Teachers were asked, “Which of the following English language arts (ELA) curricula do you use? Please mark all that apply.” Teachers could also write in their curriculum if it was not listed. We combined curricula that were the same but different editions. 12.01% of teachers did not respond to this question in 2019-20 and 6.0% did not in 2022-23. Source: 2019-20 and 2022-23 EPIC Read by Grade Three Law surveys.*

Because *EdReports* provided the most ratings for the curriculum resources in our top 10 most-used list for both 2019-20 and 2022-23, we use *EdReports*’ ratings to compare the percentage of teachers using curriculum resources that *EdReports* deems “Meet Expectations” between the two years. Our findings show a significant increase in the use of such resources among Michigan elementary teachers, rising from 12.3% in 2019-20 to 32% in 2022-23, as illustrated in Figure 5.1.

While there is a general trend towards the adoption of ELA curriculum resources that *EdReports* rates as “Meets Expectations,” the most widely used ELA curriculum resources—those by Fountas & Pinnell—do not receive high ratings, indicating that many teachers continue to use resources that are not rated highly. It is also important to note that the absence of a rating should not be considered indicative of poor quality; it simply means that this curriculum resource has not been reviewed.

## DISTRICTS SERVING HIGHER PROPORTIONS OF STUDENTS FROM HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS ARE MORE LIKELY TO USE CURRICULUM RESOURCES EDREPORTS RATES AS “MEETS EXPECTATIONS”

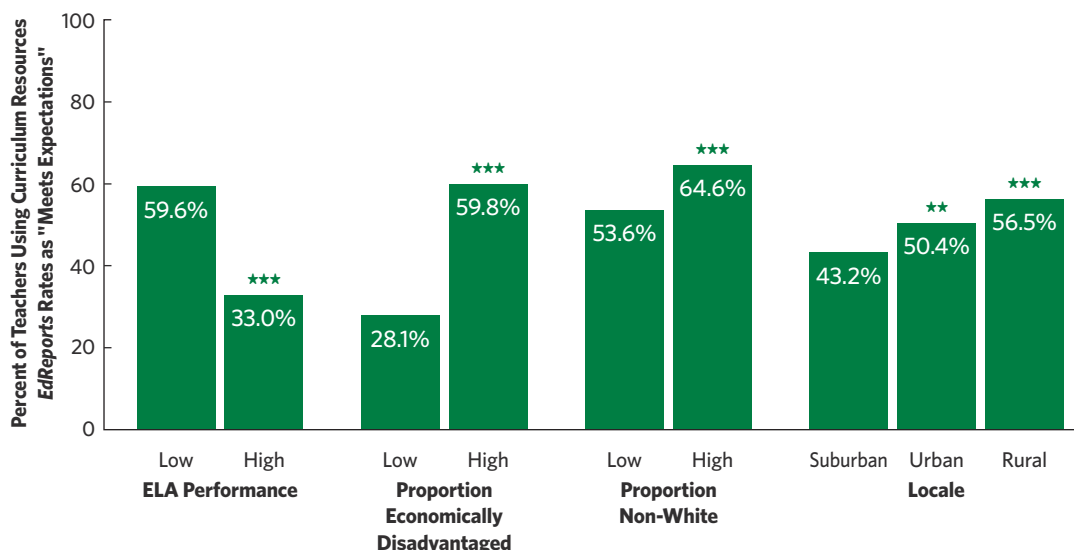
We also examined variation in teachers’ use of curriculum resources that *EdReports* rated as “Meets Expectations” across different types of districts. Figure 5.2 shows that teachers in districts with low ELA performance, high proportions of students who are economically disadvantaged and non-White, and urban and rural districts were significantly more likely to use curriculum resources that were rated as “Meets Expectations” by *EdReports*. This contradicts common narratives in other states suggesting that such districts predominantly adopt low-rated curriculum resources (e.g., Closson, 2023).

These findings challenge assumptions about curriculum resource quality in districts serving students from historically underserved populations. Additionally, they corroborate our earlier observation that these districts were more likely to report curriculum resource changes in response to the Read by Grade Three Law. It appears these updates may be leading to an increased use of



resources that *EdReports* deem “Meet Expectations” in communities that have been historically underserved. However, as these changes may be relatively recent, the full impact of these new resources on literacy instruction and student outcomes remains to be fully understood.

**Figure 5.2. Teachers’ Use of Curriculum Resources *EdReports* Rates as “Meets Expectations,” by District Characteristics**

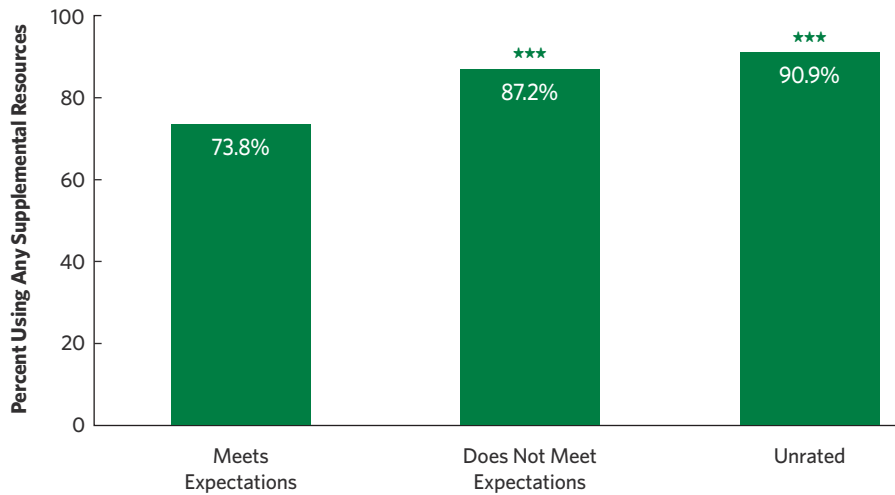


Note: The percentages in this figure represent the percent of teachers who reported using one or more core ELA curriculum resources that *EdReports* rated as “Meets Expectations.” Teachers were asked, “Which of the following English language arts (ELA) curricula do you use? Please mark all that apply.” Teachers could also write in their curriculum if it was not listed. We combined curricula that were the same but different editions. 6.0% of teachers did not respond to this question. Statistical between the two groups (and between Urban and Rural relative to Suburban) is indicated by  $p < 0.10$  +,  $p < 0.05$  \*,  $p < 0.01$  \*\*,  $p < 0.001$  \*\*\*. Source: 2022-23 EPIC Read by Grade Three Law survey.

## TEACHERS USING CORE CURRICULUM RESOURCES UNRATED OR RATED AS “DOES NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS” BY *EDREPORTS* ARE MORE LIKELY TO USE SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

As shown in Figure 5.3, teachers whose core curriculum resources are unrated or rated as “Does Not Meet Expectations” by *EdReports* are significantly more likely to use supplemental resources for writing, phonics, or spelling instruction. This trend suggests that these teachers might perceive gaps in their core ELA resources, prompting them to supplement to ensure coverage of each area of literacy. On the other hand, teachers using core ELA curriculum resources that *EdReports* rates as “Meets Expectations” tend to supplement less, likely finding these resources more comprehensive and thereby avoiding the complexities associated with integrating supplemental resources.

**FIGURE 5.3. Teachers’ Use of Supplemental Resources by Core Curriculum Resource Rating**



Note: This figure was created using data from multiple survey items, along with ratings from EdReports. Teachers were asked, “Which of the following English language arts (ELA) curricula do you use? Please mark all that apply,” “If you use additional writing curricula, please mark all that you use,” and “If you use additional phonics/spelling curricula, please mark all that you use.” Teachers could also write in their curriculum if it was not listed. Teachers are in the “Meets Expectations” group if they reported using a core ELA curriculum resource that was highly rated on EdReports, in the “Does Not Meet Expectations” group if they reported using a curriculum resource that was poorly rated on EdReports, and in the “Unrated” group if their curriculum resource was not rated on EdReports. Statistically significant differences from the “Meets Expectations” group are indicated by  $p < 0.10$  +,  $p < 0.05$  \*,  $p < 0.01$  \*\*,  $p < 0.001$  \*\*\*. Source: 2022-23 EPIC Read by Grade Three Law survey.

## SUMMARY

In summary:

- The majority of the most-used core ELA curriculum resources in Michigan are not rated by *What Works Clearinghouse* or *Evidence for ESSA*, indicating that there are no existing research studies of these materials that meet criteria for these rating organizations.
- The percentage of teachers using core ELA curriculum resources that *EdReports* rated as “Meets Expectations” increased significantly from 12.3% in 2019-20 to 32% in 2022-23.
- Teachers in districts with low ELA achievement and high proportions of students who are economically disadvantaged and non-White are more likely to use curriculum resources that *EdReports* rates as “Meets Expectations” compared to teachers in districts that have historically been more advantaged.
- Teachers who reported using core ELA curriculum resources that were unrated or that *EdReports* rated as “Does Not Meet Expectations” were significantly more likely to report using supplemental resources for writing, phonics, or spelling.

While there is a trend towards the use of curriculum resources that *EdReports* rates as “Meets Expectations”, particularly in low-performing districts serving larger proportions of students

who are economically disadvantaged or non-White, this also further reflects the fact that the curriculum resources Michigan teachers are using are changing. Consequently, there will be a need for comprehensive supports to help educators implement these new resources effectively. The next section delves into the types of supports currently available to teachers and identifies potential areas where additional assistance may be required to ensure that these changes in curriculum resources enhance literacy instruction across the state.

## Section Six: What ELA Curriculum Supports are Available to Teachers?

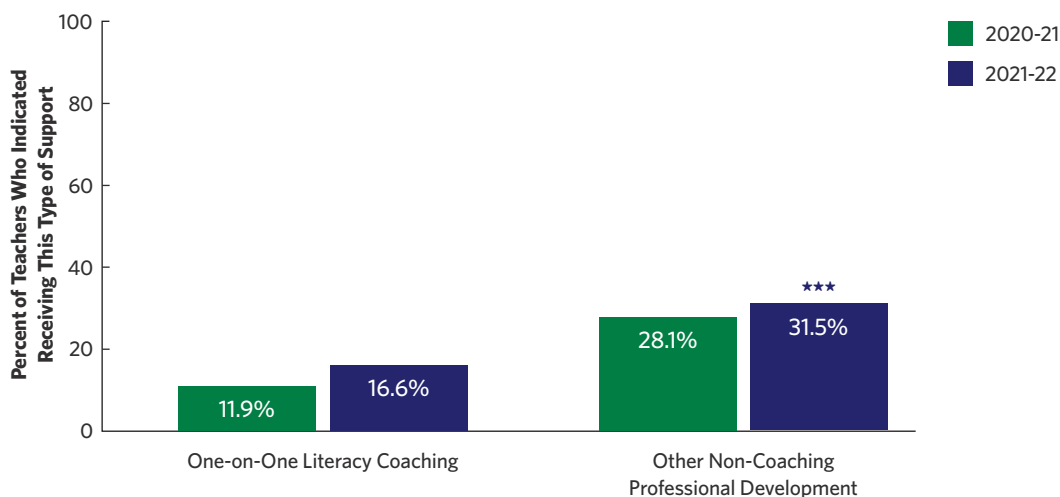
As Michigan’s ELA curriculum landscape continues to evolve, the effectiveness of these changes largely depends on teachers’ ability to adapt and implement new resources in their classrooms. In this section, we turn to the supports teachers receive to help them navigate the changing curricular landscape. Specifically, we explore the extent to which they received literacy coaching and other forms of professional development on their school’s or district’s literacy curriculum.

### TEACHERS INCREASINGLY RECEIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON IMPLEMENTING LITERACY CURRICULUM RESOURCES

Figure 6.1 shows that there is an upward trend in teachers’ receipt of professional development in the area of literacy curriculum implementation. In 2020-21, around 12% of teachers received one-on-one literacy coaching in this area and 28% participated in other forms of professional development such as large-group sessions or professional learning communities. By the following year, these numbers rose to 17% for one-on-one coaching and 32% for other forms of professional development, with the latter showing a statistically significant increase.

This trend indicates a growing recognition of the importance of providing teachers with the skills and knowledge to effectively implement their school’s or district’s literacy curriculum. While a significant proportion of teachers still did not receive either form of professional development, the observed increases reflect a commitment to enhancing literacy education through focused teacher support and professional learning opportunities.

**FIGURE 6.1. Percent of Teachers Receiving Professional Learning Supports on Implementing Literacy Curriculum**



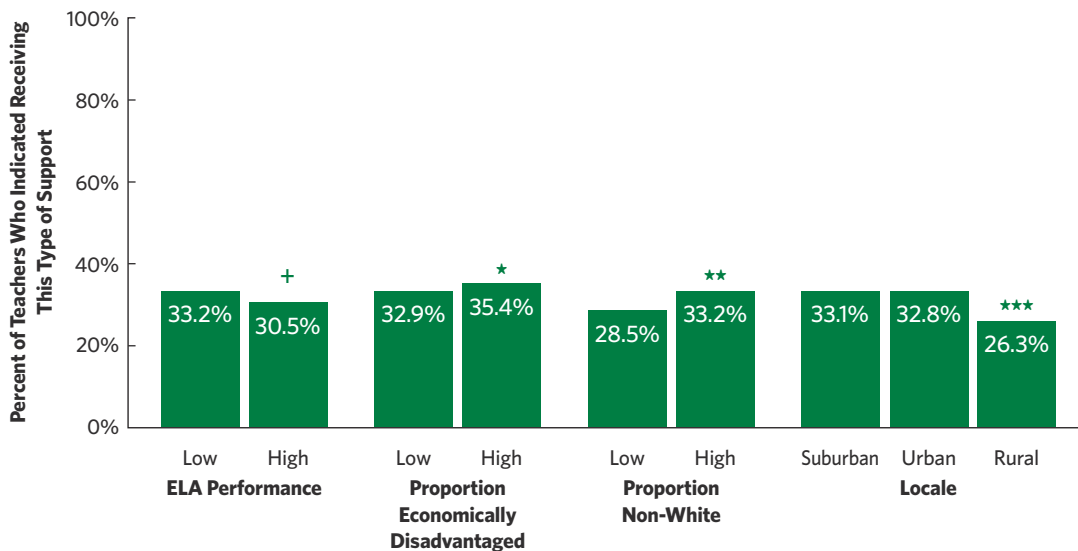
Notes: Teachers were asked, "Please tell us on which of the following topics you received literacy professional development this school year and in what format." This figure shows responses for the item, "Implementing my school's/district's literacy curriculum." Response options included, "One-on-one literacy coaching from an ISD Early Literacy Coach," "One-on-one literacy coaching from someone other than an ISD Early Literacy Coach," and "Other literacy professional development." This figure combines the two coaching options. In 2020-21, 66.9% of teachers received neither one-on-one literacy coaching nor other literacy professional development and thus did not answer this question. This was the case for 55% of teachers in 2021-22. Statistical significance between the two school years is indicated by  $p < 0.10$  +,  $p < 0.05$  \*,  $p < 0.01$  \*\*,  $p < 0.001$  \*\*\*. Source: 2020-21 and 2021-22 EPIC Read by Grade Three surveys.

## TEACHERS IN DISTRICTS SERVING HIGH PROPORTIONS OF STUDENTS FROM HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO RECEIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON LITERACY CURRICULUM RESOURCES

Our analysis also highlights that teachers in districts with low ELA performance and high proportions of students who are economically disadvantaged or non-White are significantly more likely to receive professional development support, particularly in non-coaching formats, compared to teachers in districts that have historically been more advantaged (see Figure 6.2). However, teachers in rural districts are significantly less likely to receive this type of professional development compared to their counterparts in suburban districts. This suggests that there may be unique geographic constraints preventing teachers in rural districts from receiving these supports.

The increased professional development in lower-achieving districts serving larger proportions of students who are economically disadvantaged and non-White may represent a strategic effort to address perceived disparities in access to quality educational resources. It may also reflect the reality that these districts were more likely to have changed their curriculum resources in response to the Read by Grade Three Law. Consequently, there may have been a heightened need for professional development to support teachers in implementing new curriculum resources.

**FIGURE 6.2. Percent of Teachers Receiving Professional Development on Implementing Literacy Curriculum, by District Characteristics**



Note: Teachers were asked, “Please tell us on which of the following topics you received literacy professional development this school year and in what format.” This figure shows responses for the item, “Implementing my school’s/district’s literacy curriculum.” Statistical significance between “Low” and “High” groups and between Suburban, Urban, and Rural districts is indicated by  $p < 0.10$  +,  $p < 0.05$  \*,  $p < 0.01$  \*\*,  $p < 0.001$  \*\*\*. Source: 2021-22 EPIC Read by Grade Three survey.

## SUMMARY

In summary:

- There is a notable upward trend in teachers receiving professional development for implementing literacy curriculum resources. From 2020-21 to 2021-22, the proportion of teachers receiving one-on-one literacy coaching increased from 12% to 17%, while participation in other forms of professional development rose from 28% to 32%.
- Teachers in districts with low ELA achievement and high proportions of students who are economically disadvantaged and non-White are more likely to receive professional development support for curriculum implementation.

The rising trend in professional development supports, especially for teachers in low-achieving districts with higher proportions of students who are economically disadvantaged and non-White, suggests that efforts are being made to support teachers’ implementation of curriculum resources. Despite this positive development, a significant number of teachers, including a notable proportion in rural areas, still lack access to such supports. This underscores the necessity for ongoing and expanded efforts to ensure that all teachers, regardless of their location, receive adequate professional development to effectively manage curriculum resource changes.

# Section Seven:

## Key Takeaways and Recommendations

This final section aims to offer key takeaways and informed recommendations related to ELA curriculum resources to guide policymakers and educational practitioners at both state and district levels. By doing so, we aim to ensure that teachers have access to high-quality curriculum resources and receive the necessary support to effectively implement them—with the ultimate goal of improving literacy instruction and enhancing student literacy learning.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

#### Districts Made Many Changes to Their Curriculum Resources Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, but Few Due to the Read by Grade Three Law

Michigan’s districts have made considerable changes to their ELA curriculum resources since the 2019-20 school year, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic’s onset saw approximately three-quarters of districts modifying their ELA curriculum resources to support remote learning. This highlights districts’ adaptability to respond swiftly to unprecedented challenges.

Post-pandemic, there was a notable stabilization in curriculum changes. Less than a fifth of districts reported further modifications in the 2021-22 school year, signifying a shift to a steadier state of implementation. This likely reflects a period of adjustment to new curricula and a decrease in the urgency or ability to make further changes.

Regarding the Read by Grade Three Law, there was a significant initial response with widespread curricular revisions immediately following its enactment, as we discussed in our [previous report](#) (Wright et al., 2022). However, by the 2022-23 school year, the momentum for these changes decreased notably. This suggests that districts may have already implemented the required updates or that other priorities, such as adapting to the pandemic, took precedence. In contrast to this statewide trend, districts with lower ELA performance and higher proportions of students who are economically disadvantaged consistently reported more changes in response to the Law, indicating a continued effort to align their curricula with its requirements.

## Variability Remains a Feature of Michigan’s ELA Curriculum Resource Landscape

Michigan elementary teachers continue to use a large range of ELA curriculum resources. While there was a slight decrease in total resources used—from 464 in 2019-20 to 444 in 2022-23—overall, there continues to be substantial variation from classroom to classroom across the state.

This could reflect ongoing efforts by teachers to meet the diverse needs of students and to address different aspects of ELA instruction effectively. However, the sheer number of different resources can lead to differences in the quality of literacy education students receive. While this variability allows for a certain level of customization in addressing local needs and preferences, it also raises questions about the equity of students’ access to high-quality literacy resources.

## Elementary Classroom Teachers Are More Likely to Use Only One Core Curriculum Resource Than They Were in 2019-20

A significant trend in Michigan’s elementary schools is teachers’ use of only one core ELA curriculum resource. This suggests a more consistent approach to ELA instruction and ensures some level of coherence in literacy education from classroom to classroom within districts.

## Elementary Classroom Teachers Are More Likely to Supplement Their Core Curriculum with Additional Writing, Phonics, or Spelling Resources Than They Were in 2019-20

There is simultaneously an expansion in the use of supplemental resources for writing, phonics, and spelling. This suggests that teachers are working to fill instructional gaps that a single core curriculum might leave.

This dual approach—a consolidated core curriculum supported by a range of supplemental resources—could be interpreted in different ways. On the positive side, it indicates that teachers are actively seeking to enhance their literacy instruction by integrating additional resources that target specific areas not adequately covered by the core curriculum. On the other hand, the reliance on supplemental resources, particularly among teachers using curriculum resources that do not meet expectations or are unrated by *EdReports*, may reflect an attempt to address areas of literacy instruction that are not addressed in these



curriculum resources. This could lead to challenges in ensuring consistency and quality across classrooms if individual teachers supplement differently, as well as placing extra demands on teachers' time and resources to effectively integrate these additional resources into their teaching practice.

## More Teachers Are Using Curriculum Resources *EdReports* Rates as “Meets Expectations” Than They Were in 2019-20, Particularly in Districts Serving Higher Proportions of Students From Historically Underserved Populations

The proportion of teachers using ELA core curriculum resources that *EdReports* rates as “Meets Expectations” increased significantly from 2019-20 to 2022-23. However, more than two-thirds of teachers still use curriculum resources that are either unrated or do not meet expectations according to *EdReports*. Although *EdReports* is not the definitive measure of quality, its ratings offer one publicly available way to consider alignment to standards, especially given the lack of rigorous empirical research on the majority of the most commonly used core ELA curriculum resources in Michigan.

Furthermore, our findings highlight that teachers in districts with low ELA performance and high proportions of students who are economically disadvantaged or non-White are more likely to use curriculum resources that are rated as “Meets Expectations” by *EdReports*. This challenges common assumptions about these districts not using curriculum that addresses all ELA standards, including foundational skills.

## The Majority of the Most-Used Core ELA Curriculum Resources are Not Rated by *What Works Clearinghouse* or *Evidence for ESSA*

Meanwhile, most of the core ELA curriculum resources commonly used in Michigan do not have ratings from *What Works Clearinghouse* or *Evidence for ESSA*. This absence of ratings indicates a lack of research studies that meet these organizations' criteria, highlighting a significant gap in our understanding of the effectiveness of the materials that Michigan teachers are using. This lack of empirical data underscores the need for more rigorous evaluation of curriculum resources to ensure these resources meet educational standards and effectively support student learning.

## Teachers Reported Increased Access to Curriculum-Aligned Professional Development Compared to 2019-20

There was a noticeable increase in professional development opportunities for teachers in implementing their ELA curriculum resources, especially for those in districts with low ELA performance and high proportions of students who are economically disadvantaged or non-White. This suggests that efforts are being made to enhance teacher capacity to implement their school's or district's literacy curriculum. However, the disparity in support for rural educators compared to their suburban and urban counterparts points to an area needing attention to ensure equitable educational opportunities across all districts.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

## Support Access to Research-Based Curriculum Resources With Robust Curriculum Evaluation Tools

There continues to be a need to evaluate curriculum resources used in elementary classrooms to understand whether current resources are well-aligned with standards and research evidence. While most ELA curriculum resources lack direct research studies concerning their effectiveness, it is possible to assess whether these materials incorporate instructional practices that are grounded in proven research. To this end, we suggest several strategies and resources.

- **Dissemination of Information on High-Quality Curriculum Evaluation Tools:** MDE could provide educators with access to robust tools for evaluating curriculum resources, thereby supporting adoption decisions and aiding districts in their decision-making about whether and how to include supplemental curriculum resources. Although the websites consulted in this report (i.e., *What Works Clearinghouse*, *Evidence for ESSA*, *EdReports*) focus on specific curriculum evaluations, there are other tools available that do not review specific resources but offer rubrics and guidelines applicable to any curriculum resource. For example, the Stand for Children Center for Early Literacy Success (2023) provides several such tools, including the “Rubric for Evaluating Reading/Language Arts Instructional Materials” by REL Southeast (Foorman et al., 2017), the “Knowledge Matters Review Tool” by the Knowledge Matters Campaign (Knowledge Matters Campaign, n.d.), “Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines” by the Reading League (The Reading League, 2023), and the “2023 Culturally Responsive ELA Curriculum Scorecard” by NYU Steinhardt (NYU Metro Center, 2023). These tools can help educators apply a rigorous evaluation framework to any curriculum materials they currently use or are considering, enabling more informed and nuanced decisions at the district level.
- **Monitoring and Continuous Evaluation:** Districts could establish a system for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum resources in use, using the tools mentioned above. This system should not only focus on identifying areas for improvement and ensuring that teachers have access to resources that meet high-quality standards, but also manage the proliferation of curriculum resources. As new materials are integrated based on evolving research on instructional best practices, it will be crucial to assess and streamline the existing resources. This approach will prevent the accumulation of redundant or outdated materials, maintaining a balanced and effective curriculum framework.
- **Involve Practitioners in Curriculum Resource Decision-Making:** District leaders could encourage practitioners’ active participation in curriculum resource adoption decisions, guided by the criteria set out in the evaluation tools. Their insights can lead to selections that are aligned with the practical realities of classroom teaching.

By integrating these strategies, the goal is to bridge the gap between curriculum resource adoption and classroom implementation. This will ensure that educators have a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of different curriculum resources.

## Promote Consistency Within Districts While Valuing Teacher Professional Judgment

Given the variety in ELA curriculum resources used within districts, there is a need to enhance consistency in literacy instruction while respecting teachers' professional judgment. The goal is to ensure that all students within a district have equitable access to high-quality literacy instruction, regardless of the classroom to which they are assigned. Districts could consider the following recommendations:

- **Develop a District-Wide ELA Curriculum Resource Framework:** Establish a comprehensive curriculum resource framework at the district level that outlines the core ELA resources and supplemental resources to be used—or selected from—across all schools.
- **Incorporate Teacher Feedback and Flexibility:** Engage teachers in the development of this framework to honor their expertise and insights. Allow for a degree of flexibility within the framework so teachers can adapt instruction to meet the unique needs of their students. This could include a selection of approved supplemental resources that teachers can choose from based on their students' specific learning needs and interests.
- **Regularly Review and Update the Framework:** Periodically review and update the curriculum resource framework to reflect the latest research in literacy instruction, changes in student needs, and feedback from educators. This ensures that the framework remains relevant, effective, and responsive to the district's evolving educational landscape.

By implementing these strategies, districts can strike a balance between ensuring consistency in their literacy curriculum across classrooms while respecting the professional autonomy of teachers to supplement or adapt to meet their students' needs.

## Continue and Expand Curriculum-Aligned Professional Development Opportunities, With a Focus on Coaching

Michigan has shown commitment to professional development, with a notable increase in the percentage of teachers receiving support in implementing their ELA curriculum resources, yet literacy coaching remains limited. Addressing this aspect of professional learning is important, as coaching is a key element of effective professional learning. Districts could aim to increase one-on-one literacy coaching to provide teachers with more tailored, ongoing support that aligns with their daily classroom practice.

- **Build on Current State Initiatives:** The state has already laid significant groundwork in this area by allocating funds and establishing support systems for hiring, training, and retaining literacy coaches at the Intermediate School District (ISD) level (MDE, 2022). Districts should leverage these initiatives, perhaps by collaborating with ISDs to identify and address specific local needs for literacy coaching.
- **Expanding and Deepening Coaching Programs:** While the state's efforts have laid a solid foundation, there is room to deepen and expand these programs. This

could involve increasing the number of coaches available, ensuring their equitable distribution across districts, and enhancing the quality of coaching through advanced training and professional development for coaches themselves.

- **Curriculum-Aligned Coaching at the District Level:** When adopting new curriculum resources, districts could integrate curriculum-aligned coaching to ensure that teachers are not only proficient in implementing the curriculum but also attuned to the specific needs of their students and the local context. This approach could ensure that coaching is directly relevant to the instructional materials in use and that it addresses unique challenges and leverages the strengths of each district.

By focusing on enhancing literacy coaching, districts can build upon the state's ongoing efforts, providing teachers with more personalized support that directly affects their instructional practice.

## NOTES

1. For charter schools, we surveyed the listed superintendent or director of a charter school district, educational services provider (ESP), charter management organization (CMO), or educational management organization (EMO).
2. Because there are few differences between the survey sample and target population, and to align with our previous report on ELA curriculum resources, we report unweighted survey analyses in this report.
3. We categorized districts' ELA performance and proportion of economically disadvantaged and non-White students by quartile, where "Low" represents the bottom quartile of districts, "Medium" represents the middle two quartiles, and "High" represents the top quartile. ELA performance is measured by the district's 2018-19 average ELA M-STEP performance.
4. While different editions may include different content, we did not ask teachers to provide the publication dates for their curricula and therefore could not accurately differentiate by curriculum edition.
5. *Teachers Pay Teachers* is a website where teachers can post, sell, and purchase original educational resources, including lesson plans, activities, workbooks, and classroom decorations.

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## APPENDICES

As is visible in Appendices A-C, elementary teachers reported using an extremely broad range of curriculum resources to teach ELA. These included options the research team listed on the survey as well as many write-in responses. In these appendices, we include all curriculum resources that at least 10 teachers wrote in, even if we were not able to verify it or locate a published resource with that name. Therefore, some of the resources listed in the appendices are lesson plans, assessments, or other types of resources. Curriculum resources are listed in order from those that the highest number of teachers reported using to the lowest, and the number of teachers who reported using each is listed.

### APPENDIX A. LIST OF CORE ELA CURRICULA TEACHERS REPORTED USING

| Core ELA Curriculum Resource   | Number of Teachers Using |
|--|--------------------------|
| Fountas & Pinnell Classroom  | 912                      |
| Wonders (also known as Reading Wonders)                                | 699                      |
| Units of Study for Teaching Reading (i.e., Lucy Calkins)               | 654                      |
| Literacy Footprints  | 538                      |
| MAISA Units of Study for Reading                                       | 505                      |
| Journeys   | 384                      |
| Benchmark Advance  | 265                      |
| Amplify CKLA (Core Knowledge Language Arts)                            | 234                      |
| EL Education K-5 Language Arts (formerly EL Education or LearnZillion) | 207                      |
| Into Reading   | 201                      |
| Reading Street Common Core   | 184                      |
| Bookworms K-5 Reading and Writing                                      | 182                      |
| Teacher-, school-, or district-created resources                       | 134                      |
| ReadyGEN   | 109                      |
| myView Literacy  | 102                      |
| Imagine Learning EL Education K-5 Language Arts                        | 100                      |
| Collaborative Literacy   | 92                       |
| Heggerty Phonemic Awareness  | 82                       |
| Reading Mastery  | 78                       |
| EngageNY   | 70                       |
| Open Court Reading   | 57                       |
| Wit & Wisdom   | 54                       |
| iReady   | 47                       |
| MoDEL Detroit  | 45                       |
| Orton-Gillingham   | 32                       |
| Other Harcourt resources   | 30                       |
| ARC (American Reading Company) Core                                    | 26                       |
| UFLI (University of Florida Literacy) resources                        | 25                       |
| Sharon Walpole resources <sup>1</sup>                                  | 24                       |
| Teachers Pay Teachers resources  | 22                       |
| Literacy by Design   | 21                       |
| From Phonics to Reading  | 18                       |
| Making Meaning   | 18                       |
| Phonics for Reading  | 18                       |
| Phonics First  | 14                       |
| Tara West resources  | 14                       |
| Treasures  | 13                       |
| Montessori   | 12                       |
| Reading A-Z  | 12                       |
| Scholastic resources   | 12                       |
| Jan Richardson resources   | 10                       |

<sup>1</sup>Although Bookworms is a Sharon Walpole resource, we consider Bookworms separately from other Sharon Walpole resources when educators wrote in "Sharon Walpole" or "Walpole" without specifying which curriculum resource they were using.

## APPENDIX B. LIST OF WRITING CURRICULA TEACHERS REPORTED USING

| Writing Curriculum Resource                          | Number of Teachers Using |
|--|--------------------------|
| Units of Study for Writing (i.e., Lucy Calkins)      | 1,051                    |
| 6+1 Traits of Writing                                | 358                      |
| Writing from my basal reader                         | 272                      |
| MAISA Units of Study for Writing                     | 202                      |
| Being a Writer                                       | 195                      |
| Teacher-, school-, or district-created resources     | 146                      |
| Step Up to Writing                                   | 124                      |
| WriteSteps   | 121                      |
| WriteWell  | 86                       |
| Teachers Pay Teachers resources                      | 85                       |
| Benchmark Education resources                        | 36                       |
| Wonders  | 36                       |
| Handwriting Without Tears                            | 31                       |
| SRSD (Self-Regulated Strategy Development) resources | 27                       |
| Write from the Beginning...and Beyond                | 27                       |
| Other Harcourt resources                             | 26                       |
| Journeys   | 24                       |
| Tara West resources                                  | 23                       |
| Into Reading   | 19                       |
| EL Education resources                               | 18                       |
| Bookworms K-5 Reading & Writing                      | 13                       |
| Fountas & Pinnell resources                          | 13                       |
| Reading Street                                       | 12                       |
| Writer's Workshop                                    | 11                       |
| Collins Writing Program                              | 10                       |
| The Writing Revolution                               | 10                       |



## APPENDIX C. LIST OF PHONICS/SPELLING CURRICULA TEACHERS REPORTED USING

| Phonics/Spelling Curriculum Resource                           | Number of Teachers Using |
|--|--------------------------|
| Words Their Way  | 770                      |
| The Fountas & Pinnell Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study System | 384                      |
| Heggerty Phonemic Awareness                                    | 307                      |
| Units of Study for Phonics (i.e., Lucy Calkins)                | 292                      |
| Phonics for Reading  | 212                      |
| Phonics First (Brainspring)                                    | 203                      |
| Zoo-phonics  | 186                      |
| Orton-Gillingham   | 181                      |
| Amplify CKLA (Core Knowledge Language Arts) Skills             | 146                      |
| From Phonics to Reading  | 89                       |
| UFLI (University of Florida Literacy) resources                | 88                       |
| Wilson Foundations   | 88                       |
| Pathways to Reading  | 54                       |
| Sharon Walpole resources                                       | 45                       |
| Really Great Reading   | 40                       |
| Teachers Pay Teachers resources                                | 40                       |
| EBLI (Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction)                     | 34                       |
| Wonders  | 32                       |
| Teacher-, school-, or district-created resources               | 30                       |
| Benchmark Phonics  | 26                       |
| Saxon Phonics & Spelling                                       | 24                       |
| Enhanced Core Reading Instruction (ECRI)                       | 20                       |
| REWARDS  | 18                       |
| Reading Horizons Discovery Spelling                            | 17                       |
| DRI (Differentiated Reading Instruction)                       | 16                       |
| Other Harcourt resources                                       | 16                       |
| Journeys   | 15                       |
| Unlocking the Reading Code                                     | 15                       |
| CR Success Learning resources                                  | 13                       |
| Open Court Reading   | 13                       |
| Secret Stories   | 13                       |
| Logic of English resources                                     | 12                       |
| The Phonics Dance!   | 12                       |
| Into Reading   | 11                       |
| Learning A-Z resources   | 11                       |
| Rebecca Sitton resources                                       | 11                       |
| Express Readers Foundational Skills and Reading Program        | 10                       |
| Lexia Core5  | 10                       |
| The Superkids Reading Program                                  | 10                       |



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