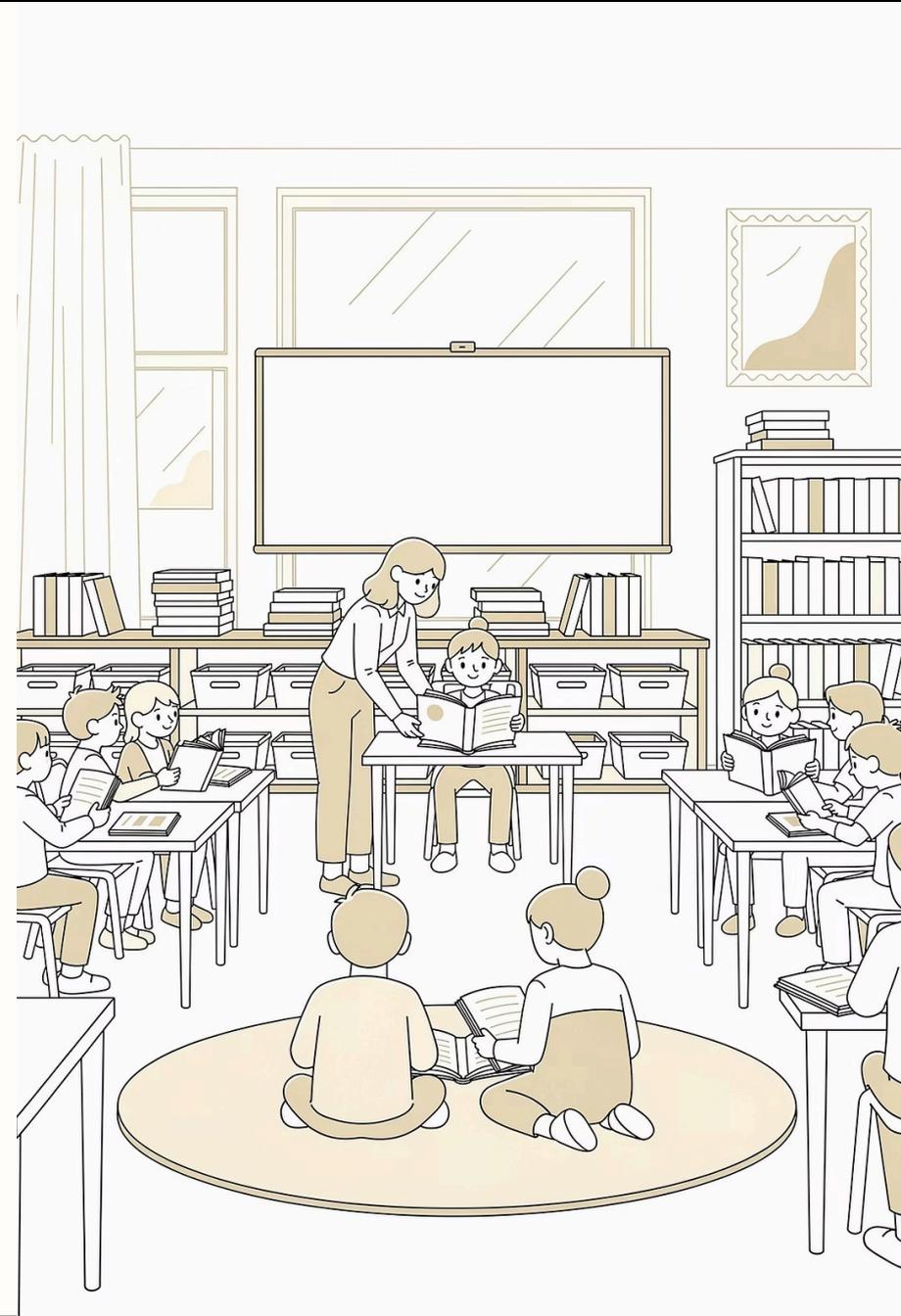# Arizona's Move On When Reading Law Research Requirements for Core, Supplemental, and Intervention Literacy Programs

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LXD Research

Arizona's Evidence-Based Literacy Framework

Arizona's Move On When Reading (MOWR) law is one of the clearest examples of a state literacy policy that directly links instructional materials to research evidence standards. Administered by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), the law requires K–3 schools to implement evidence–based reading instruction and to document those choices in annual literacy plans.

What distinguishes Arizona's approach is its **structured vetting process**. Reading programs are categorized into three distinct types — Core, Supplemental, and Intervention — and each category must independently meet evidence requirements aligned to the top three tiers of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Vendors must submit research documentation during a defined window. Programs that do not meet criteria are not placed on vetted lists, which has direct implications for district procurement.

This presentation explains:

- The structure of Arizona's literacy law

- How ADE differentiates Core, Supplemental, and Intervention programs

- The research standards required for vetting

- Submission timelines and procurement implications

- What this means for edtech creators and publishers

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I. Policy Context: Move On When Reading (MOWR)

Arizona's literacy framework operates under A.R.S. §15-704, commonly referred to as Move On When Reading. The law requires:

- Early identification of reading deficiencies in K–3

- Evidence-based literacy instruction

- Targeted intervention for struggling readers

- Annual submission of K–3 literacy plans

- Potential retention of third-grade students not meeting proficiency benchmarks (with exemptions)

Unlike some state policies that focus primarily on screening and retention, Arizona explicitly integrates curriculum and research standards into compliance expectations.

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ADE's Role in Program Vetting

The Arizona Department of Education publishes vetted program lists and issues guidance documents outlining research expectations for each instructional category.
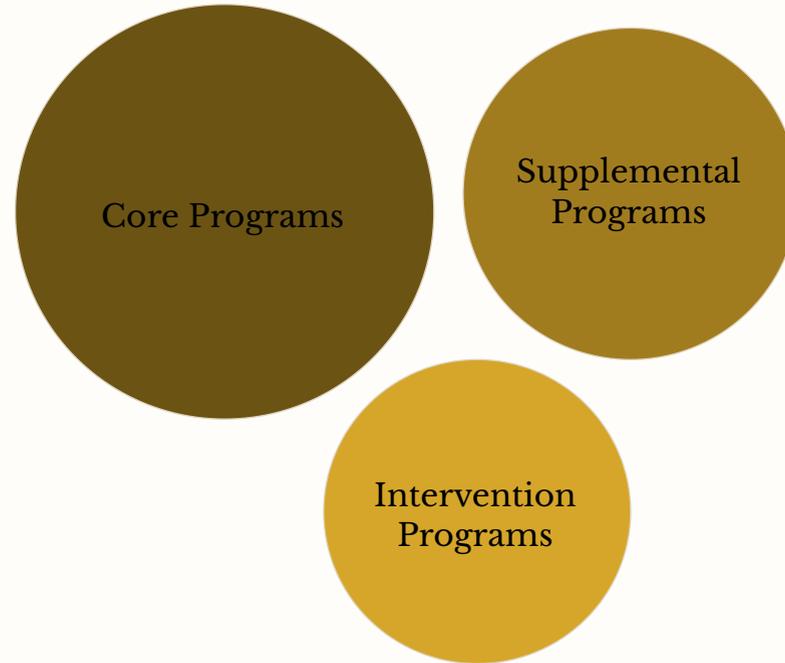
Key Function

ADE serves as the gatekeeper for literacy program approval, ensuring all materials meet rigorous evidence standards.

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II. Three Instructional Categories — Three Separate Vetting Pathways

Arizona separates literacy products into three categories for administrators (**admin overview**):

Each category has its own evidence requirements and vetting process, preventing vendors from using a single study to qualify across multiple instructional uses.

1. Core Programs (Tier 1 Instruction)

Core programs are the primary reading curricula used daily in K–3 classrooms (**see list here**). These programs must address the essential components of reading:

Phonological awareness	Phonics	Fluency	Vocabulary

Reading comprehension

Core programs are expected to provide comprehensive literacy instruction grounded in structured literacy principles.

> 🗒 **Importantly, ADE does not accept balanced literacy or three-cueing approaches as meeting current evidence standards.**

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# 2. Supplemental Programs ([see list here](#))

Description and Examples

Supplemental programs are used alongside a core curriculum to reinforce specific skills. Examples include:

- Targeted phonics practice
- Fluency tools
- Vocabulary development platforms

Key Requirement

Supplemental programs must demonstrate additive impact — not merely engagement or alignment to standards.
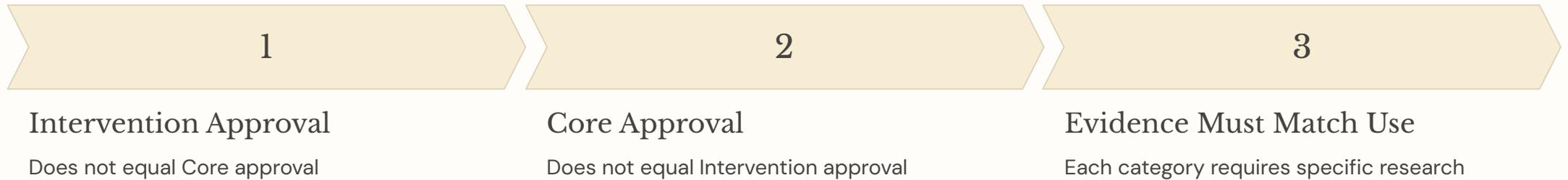
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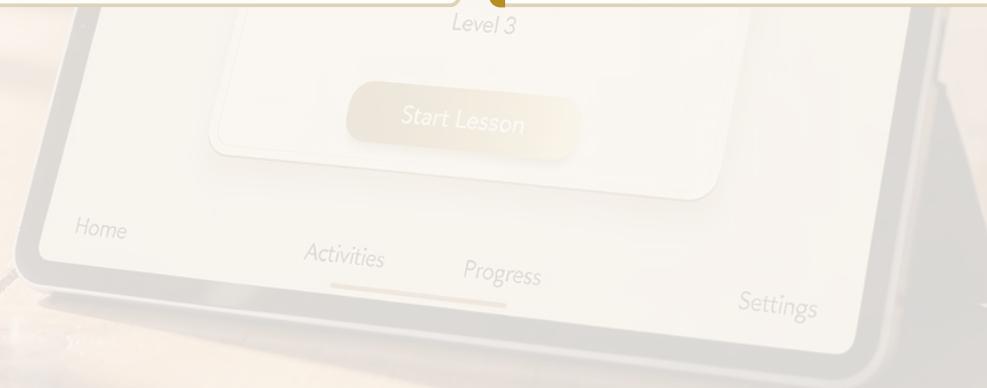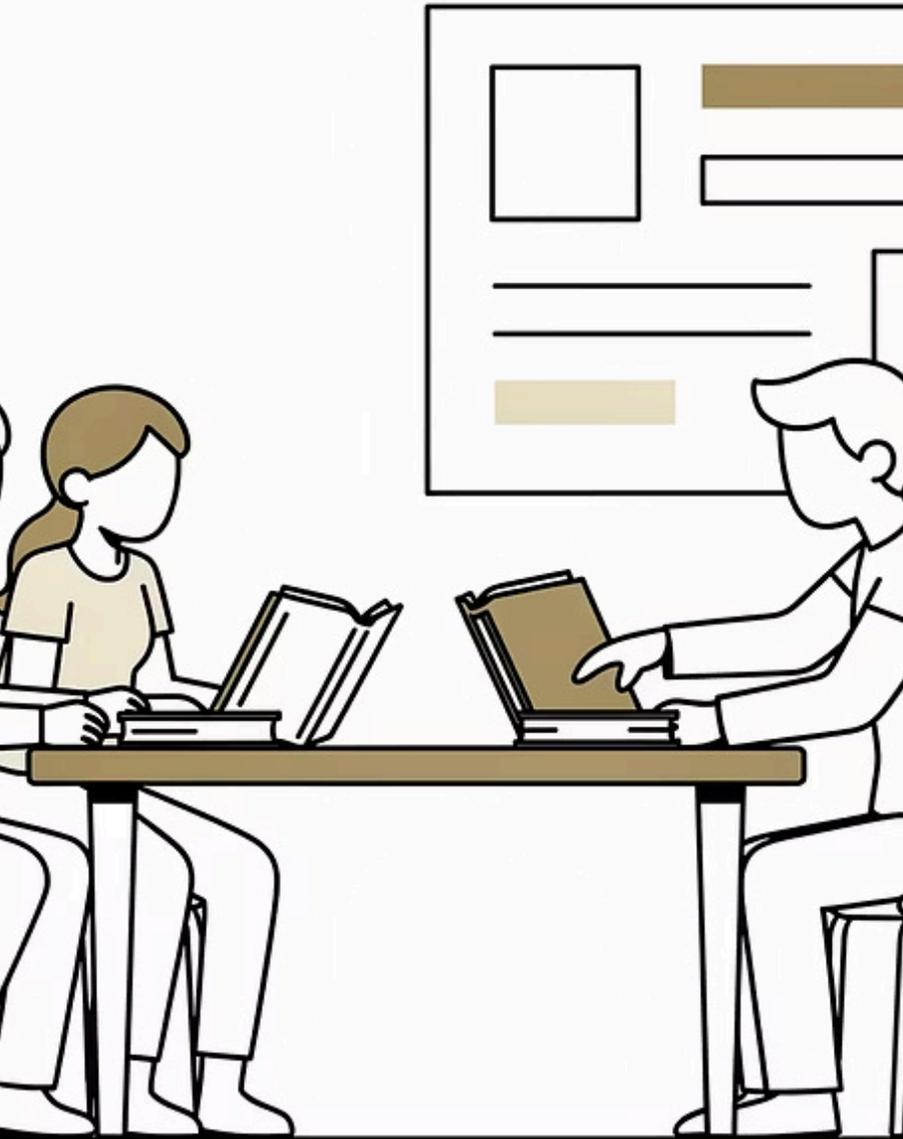
3. Intervention Programs (Tier 2/3 - see list here)

Intervention programs provide intensive support for students identified as having reading deficiencies. These programs typically serve students performing below benchmark expectations and must demonstrate impact specifically with struggling readers.

Intervention programs often face the highest research bar due to the population served and the stakes involved.

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Critical Distinction

Arizona does not allow a single research submission to automatically qualify a product across all three categories.

1	2	3

Intervention Approval

Does not equal Core approval

Core Approval

Does not equal Intervention approval

Evidence Must Match Use

Each category requires specific research

A program approved as Supplemental is not automatically approved as Intervention or Core.

Evidence must match the intended instructional use.

This structural separation prevents vendors from repackaging the same study to support multiple claims.

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III. Requirements: ESSA Evidence Alignment

Arizona requires research evidence that meets ESSA Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3 criteria.

ESSA Tier Definitions

| 1	2	3
Tier 1 (Strong Evidence) Well-designed and well-implemented randomized controlled trials (RCTs) demonstrating statistically significant positive effects.	**Tier 2 (Moderate Evidence)** Well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental studies with statistically significant positive effects.	**Tier 3 (Promising Evidence)** **Arizona requires a control group** and a "large" sample size in all studies. This is not the same requirements as the correlational study as described in the ESSA Law.

🗒 Descriptive case studies, testimonials, internal growth reports without comparison groups, school-level analysis without implementation evidence, or anecdotal evidence do not meet these standards.

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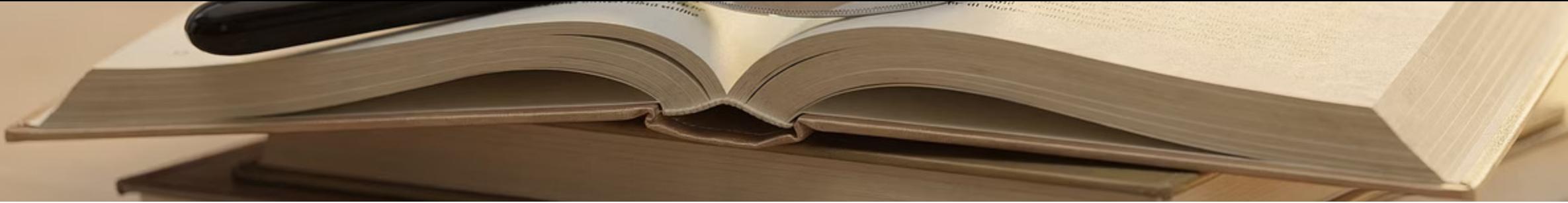
IV. Study Expectations and Quality Criteria

General Requirements

- Statistically significant positive literacy outcomes
- Clearly defined K–3 student samples
- Transparent research design
- Established and validated outcome measures
- Clearly reported methodology
- Adequate sample size
- Research conducted within a reasonable recency window (often within approximately 15 years)

For Intervention Programs

Additional considerations may include:

- Evidence specific to struggling readers
- Sufficient sample size thresholds depending on evidence tier
- Demonstrated effects on reading deficiency outcomes

Based on ADE vetting guidance, submitted research must typically include:

Programs lacking comparative designs or relying solely on internal pre/post growth metrics are unlikely to qualify.

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V. Submission Windows and Compliance Timelines

Vendor Submission Window

Vendors must submit research documentation during a defined window — typically **July 1 through November 1**.

Submissions are reviewed during a subsequent vetting cycle, often in the spring. Approved programs are added to category-specific vetted lists.

Programs not submitted or not approved do not appear on the vetted lists.

District Literacy Plan Deadlines

Local education agencies (LEAs) must submit K–3 literacy plans including curriculum selections and assessment data:

October 1
Initial plan and beginning-of-year data

June 1
End-of-year data

1 — **2** — **3**

February 1
Midyear update

If a program is not on a vetted list, districts may face compliance risks or scrutiny during literacy plan review.

This creates a direct connection between research documentation and purchasing decisions.

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VI. Implications for Vendors and District Leaders

Arizona's model sends several clear signals:

Evidence Must Match the Claim

A program claiming intervention status must show research with struggling readers. A comprehensive core curriculum must show impact across essential reading components.

"Research-Based" Is Not Enough

Marketing language does not substitute for a qualifying study design.

Timelines Matter

Research submission deadlines affect whether a program is eligible for inclusion in district literacy plans.

Evidence Is a Procurement Lever

Arizona has effectively embedded research quality into the purchasing process.

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VII. Practical Red Flags in Vendor Submissions

District leaders reviewing programs should look for:

No comparison group	No statistical significance reported	Sample not specific to K–3
Study not aligned to the intended use case	Only internal growth data presented	Claims of ESSA alignment without tier designation

Arizona's framework provides a useful screening model for evaluating literacy research claims.

Conclusion

Arizona's Move On When Reading law demonstrates how state policy can operationalize research standards in meaningful ways. By separating Core, Supplemental, and Intervention pathways and requiring ESSA-aligned evidence for each, the Arizona Department of Education has created a system that connects instructional decisions to research rigor.

For edtech creators and publishers

The message is clear: evidence must be purpose-specific, statistically sound, and submitted on time.

For districts

Arizona offers a blueprint for distinguishing substantive research from marketing narratives.

As more states revisit literacy policy, Arizona's structured vetting model is likely to influence how research quality shapes curriculum approval nationwide.

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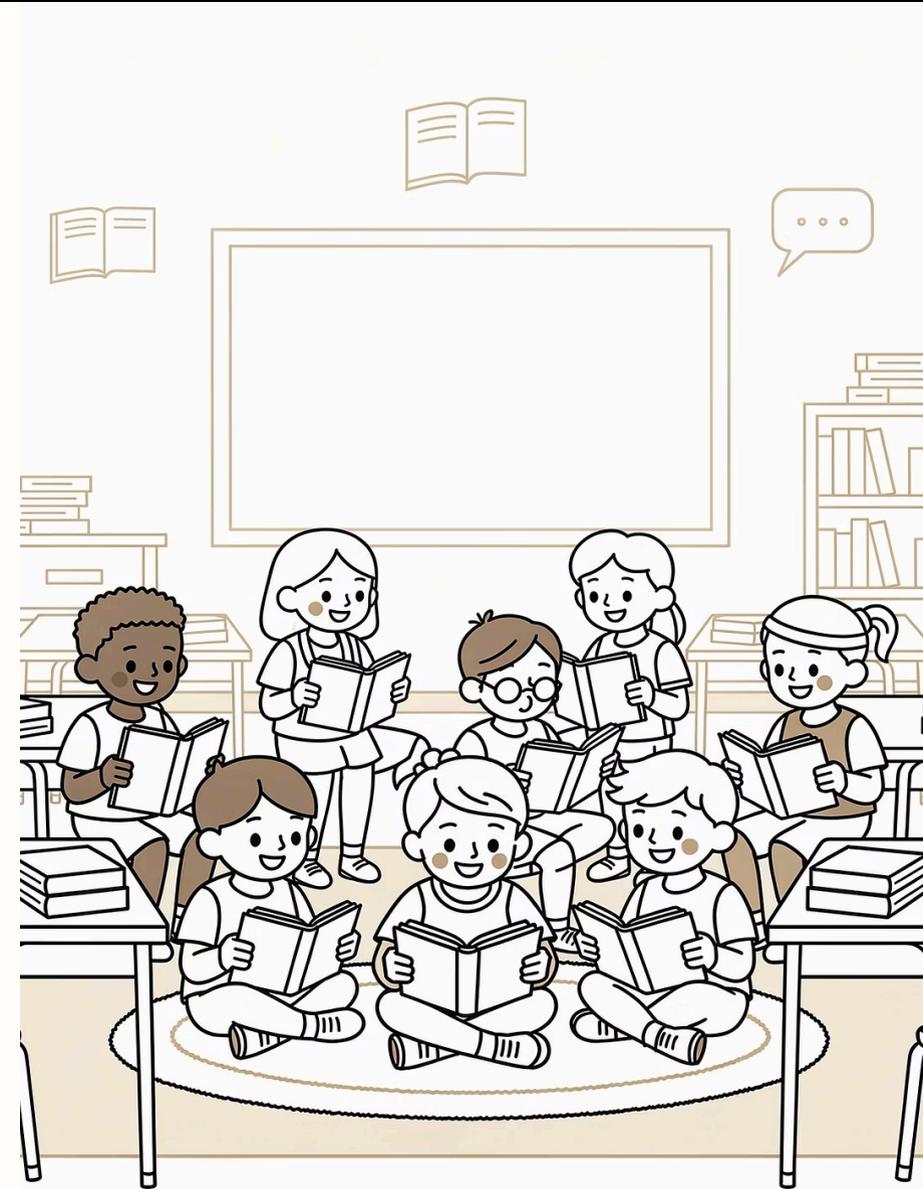
Arizona Literacy Law
Official ADE Resources & Vetted Lists

1

Move On When Reading (MOWR) – Overview

https://www.azed.gov/mowr

2

Vendor Submission & Literacy Plan Deadlines

https://www.azed.gov/mowr/k-3-literacy-plans-assessment-data

3

Evidence Criteria & Administrator Guidance

https://www.azed.gov/mowr/mowr-for-administrators

Official Vetted Program Lists

- **Core Program List (Tier 1 Instruction)**
  https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2022/03/MOWR%20Vetted%20Core%20Program%20List.pdf

- **Intervention Program List (Tier 2/3 Support)**
  https://www.azed.gov/mowr/k-3-literacy-plans-assessment-data

- **Supplemental Program List**
  https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2024/08/Supplemental%20Program%20List.pdf

Statutory Reference (A.R.S. §15-704)
https://www.azleg.gov/ars/15/00704.htm

Reach out to LXD Research to get a plan for your evidence requirements in order for Arizona.

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