

Michigan's New Literacy Rankings Reward All Levels of Evidence

What Reading Product Companies Need to Know Now

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More states are incorporating ESSA evidence into their approval processes

Michigan's new literacy rankings system offers one of the clearest examples yet of how this works in practice.

In December 2025, the Michigan Department of Education released its approved lists of literacy assessments and elementary reading curricula, following landmark literacy legislation signed in October 2024. Backed by \$87 million in funding, the state adopted a rankings-based model for literacy materials.

What makes Michigan's approach notable is this:

It rewards all levels of ESSA evidence.

This is not a Tier 1-only mandate. It is a scored framework. And in a competitive funding environment, points matter.

Michigan's Rankings Model: Scored, Not Binary

Michigan's system does not treat evidence as a pass/fail checkbox. Instead, programs earn points based on their ESSA level:

Tier 1

Strong Evidence (highest points)

Tier 2

Moderate Evidence

Tier 3

Promising Evidence

Tier 4

Demonstrates a Rationale

📄 Every tier earns something. Even Tier 4 earns credit. No evidence earns none.

This is a fundamentally different signal than "Tier 1 or nothing."

Michigan is rewarding progress along the evidence continuum.

What Michigan's ESSA Worksheet Actually Requires

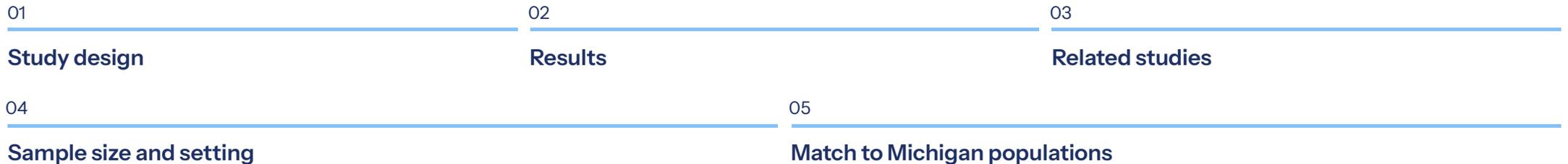
The state's ESSA Levels of Evidence Worksheet outlines how vendors must demonstrate and document their tier selection.

Vendors:

- Self-select a tier.
- Submit supporting research.
- Provide clear narratives explaining design and outcomes.
- Link directly to studies (not behind paywalls).
- Document statistical significance and sample details.
- Show alignment between study population and Michigan students.

The Committee for Literacy Achievement verifies and may adjust the tier designation.

Importantly, the worksheet evaluates five factors:



This means evidence quality is multidimensional. It is not just about having a study — it is about how well that study supports your specific program submission.

Higher Tiers Earn More Points — But **Any Evidence Is Better Than None**

Michigan prioritizes Tiers 1-3, particularly because the statute gives preference to programs with a history of improving outcomes.

But the framework does not eliminate Tier 4.

Tier 4

"Demonstrates a Rationale"

Tier 4 reflects programs that:

- Align with established research theory,
- Have a logic model,
- But do not yet have outcome evidence.

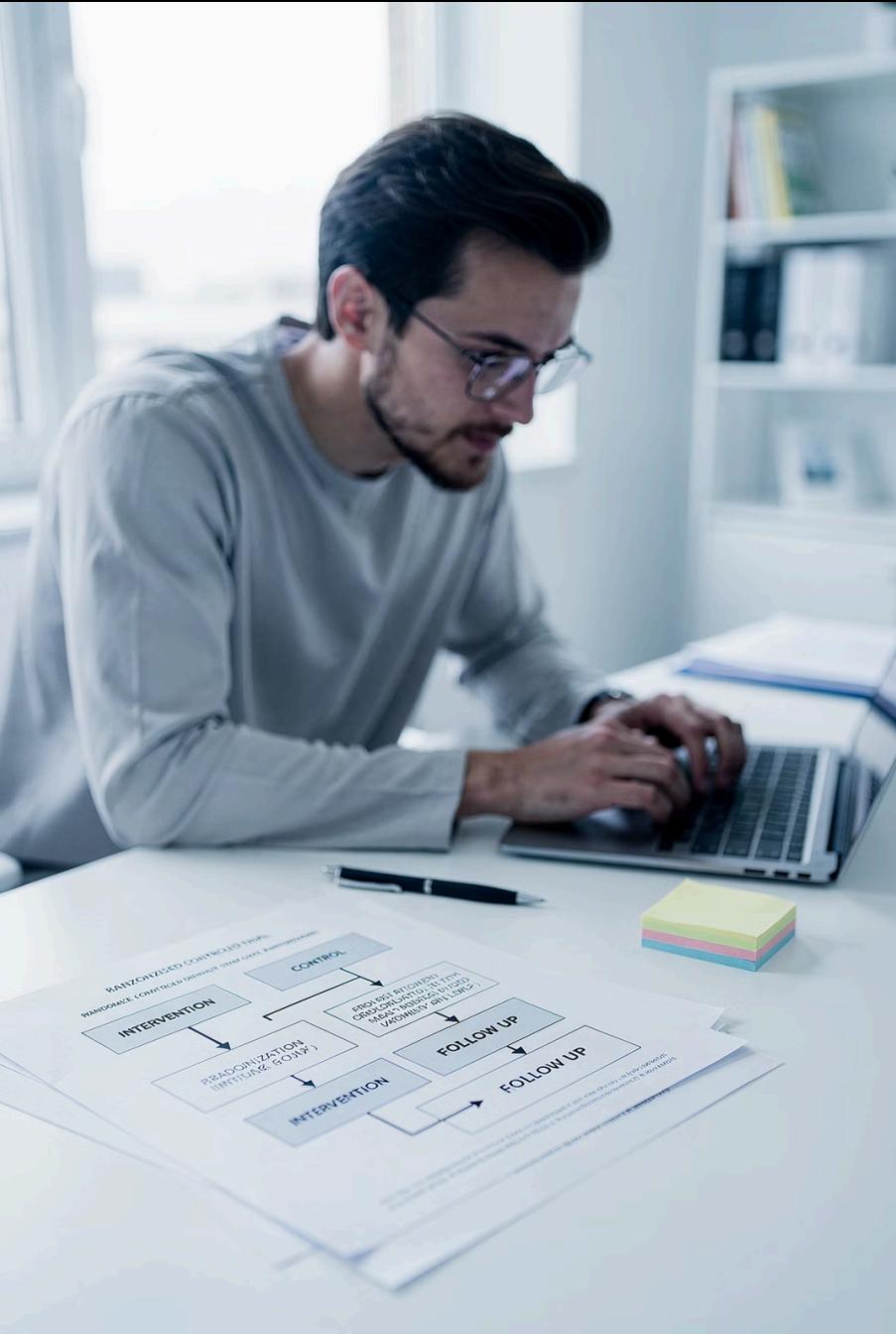
Even this level earns credit in the rankings.

That creates an important dynamic:



No evidence materially weakens your standing.

Michigan is signaling that incremental evidence-building is strategically valuable.



An Important Nuance: Design Intent Matters

There is an additional nuance worth noting.

Randomized controlled trials that were designed as RCTs but experienced implementation realities (e.g., attrition, reassignment) may still receive credit for Tier 1 design intent — even if the final analytic structure resembles quasi-experimental analysis.

In other words, Michigan recognizes research design rigor, even when real-world implementation complicates perfect execution.

This is an important distinction for companies that have conducted high-quality studies but worry about classification technicalities.

Evidence Is Weighted Alongside Instructional Quality

Michigan's literacy rankings do not evaluate evidence in isolation.

Programs are evaluated across multiple dimensions, including:

Alignment to Science of Reading requirements

Instructional materials quality

ESSA evidence level

The ESSA phase meaningfully affects overall placement. It is not a symbolic add-on.

This means:

- Strong HQIM alignment alone is not sufficient.
- Evidence contributes directly to competitive positioning.
- Programs with moderate evidence and strong design can remain viable.
- Programs with strong design and no evidence will be disadvantaged.

Evidence is weighted. It moves rankings.

Ongoing Submission Window: A Strategic Opportunity

The Committee for Literacy Achievement will continue evaluating submissions through September 2026. [Here is the Michigan Evaluation Worksheet.](#)

Districts will apply for funding based on product placement on the rankings list.

This creates a rolling opportunity:

Companies can improve their tier standing over time.

Michigan is not closing the door. It is inviting improvement.



Strategic Implications for Reading Product Companies

1. Validate What You Already Have

Many companies have conducted studies that have never been formally mapped to ESSA tiers.

If you have:

- Internal evaluations,
- Third-party studies,
- Implementation research,
- Correlational analyses,

Those need to be reviewed, documented, and aligned to the worksheet criteria.

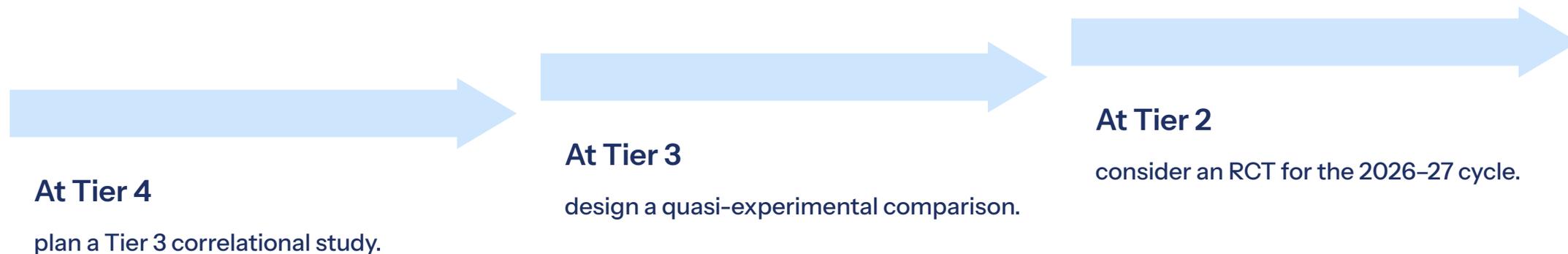
 **Untiered research is invisible research.**

Points require documentation.

2. Plan Your Next Tier

Michigan's model rewards forward motion.

If you are:



Evidence-building is cumulative.

Companies that move steadily up the continuum will outperform those waiting for a single large-scale RCT.

3. Don't Wait for Perfect

Michigan's framework makes one thing clear:

Progress beats perfection.

Waiting until you can afford a national RCT may cost you market access in the meantime.

Incremental studies:

Generate points.

Improve placement.

Strengthen district
confidence.

Build toward higher tiers.

The rankings system rewards movement.

A Broader Trend: Evidence Is Becoming Formalized

Michigan joins Texas, Arizona, Florida, California, and others in formalizing evidence expectations for reading products.

This is no longer informal marketing language about "research-based."

It is structured.

It is documented.

It is scored.

For reading product companies seeking broad market access, building your evidence base is no longer optional.

It is strategic infrastructure.



Final Takeaway

Michigan's literacy rankings offer a clear signal to the market:

Tier 1
is powerful.

Tier 2 and Tier 3
are valuable.

Tier 4
keeps you competitive.

No evidence
limits opportunity.

This is not an all-or-nothing mandate.

It is a points-based system that rewards momentum.

Companies that understand the scoring mechanics — and act now — will be positioned to compete effectively in Michigan and beyond.



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