

A Utah Study of Family Literacy

One-Year Research Plan — Kindergarten & First Grade

Rural, Title I, and Targeted-Assistance Schools

The Alma Street Foundation · in partnership with **rinnalla** · Independent evaluation by LXD Research

Executive Summary

Utah has committed that every child will read, and it has resourced schools to deliver. The lever it has barely pulled is the home. This plan proposes a rigorous, independently evaluated one-year study of whether equipping parents with evidence-based, personalized literacy support — delivered free through **rinnalla** — helps children arrive better prepared to read, measured in Utah's own Kindergarten and first-grade assessments.

At the suggestion of Board leadership, the study also measures whether that work reaches educators. Two levers are examined: whether reducing the number of individualized reading plans a teacher must write and monitor eases teacher workload, and whether better-informed families change the preparation burden and quality of parent-teacher conversations. Both are drawn from data the study already collects or from a brief instrument the independent evaluator designs.

The Alma Street Foundation funds and coordinates delivery; LXD Research independently designs, owns, and reports the study; and Utah's mineral-lease education-research fund would underwrite the independent research, family support, and free family access. The study concentrates on rural, mineral-impacted communities and on Title I and targeted-assistance schools — the families least able to purchase such support — and is designed to produce the level of evidence ESSA recognizes as “moderate,” usable by every Utah district regardless of the tools it adopts.

This request funds a single study year, October 2026 through October 2027, spanning the intervening summer. The design deliberately establishes the baseline and infrastructure a longitudinal extension would require, but no multi-year commitment is sought here.

Statement of Need

Utah's K–3 reading goal and the literacy requirements of SB 241 place real weight on early reading, and the State has funded schools to act on them. The home has not been resourced the same way. In keeping K–3 devices from going home (HB 273), Utah made a deliberate choice — and in doing so defined a “what do families do at home” space it has not yet filled. Decades of evidence point to the parent as one of the most powerful and least-supported contributors to early literacy; most families want to help their children read and were simply never shown how. That is a system-design problem, not a parenting problem.

Utah's own data give the study its urgency: educators are seeing alarming gaps in beginning-of-year reading readiness among first and second graders, and summer erodes hard-won gains at the end of Kindergarten and first grade. This study asks whether equipping

parents can blunt those gaps — and whether it can do so for families who could never purchase the support on their own.

The window closes faster than the system moves

National evidence establishes how narrow this window is. NWEA's research brief *Behind the Starting Line: What Kindergarten Test Scores Tell Us About Reaching Proficiency in Third Grade* followed students who began in the bottom quintile of achievement and tracked how many reached third-grade proficiency. The pattern is stark, and it plays out entirely inside the grade span this study covers.

Point in time	Share of bottom-quintile students reaching grade 3 reading proficiency
Fall of Kindergarten	13.9%
Spring of Kindergarten	7.2%
Fall of first grade	5.8%
Spring of first grade	2.5%

NWEA. Proficiency defined as scoring at or above the 65th percentile in reading in spring of third grade. Each figure is estimated using the students in the bottom quintile in that specific term.

A child who enters Kindergarten in the bottom quintile has roughly a one-in-seven chance of reading proficiently in third grade. A child still in that quintile by spring of first grade has roughly a one-in-forty chance. The odds do not decline gradually across elementary school. They collapse across four terms — the exact terms this study spans.

This reframes what first-grade readiness is worth. Every child moved out of the bottom quintile before first grade begins is a child whose odds of third-grade proficiency are several times higher than they would otherwise have been. That is the leverage point, and it sits largely outside the school day: it is built in the years and the summers when no teacher is present.

Identified Gaps

- The home is the highest-leverage, least-resourced layer of early literacy.
- Alarming gaps appear in beginning-of-year (BOY) Acadience data for first and second graders.
- Summer slide erodes gains at the end of Kindergarten and at the end of first grade.
- The probability of third-grade proficiency for a struggling reader falls sharply across Kindergarten and first grade — from roughly 14% to under 3% — making this the highest-return window in which to act.
- Most parents want to help but were never shown how — a system-design gap, not a parenting gap.
- Rural, mineral-impacted, and high-need families are least able to purchase support on their own.
- Educator workload tied to early reading — individualized reading plans, family

communication, conference preparation — grows with the number of children below benchmark, and no Utah study has tested whether family coaching moves it.

USBE Strategic Alignment

The study maps directly to two of the Board's four strategic-plan goals, and to the State's statutory literacy commitments.

- **Goal 1 — Early Learning.** “Each student starts strong through early grades with a foundation in literacy and numeracy.” This study builds that foundation where it begins — in the home — strengthening the early-reading trajectory the Board tracks toward third-grade proficiency.
- **Goal 4 — Personalized Teaching & Learning.** “Each student and educator has access to personalized teaching and learning experiences.” **rinnalla** delivers coaching that adapts to each child, extending personalized learning beyond the classroom into everyday moments at home.

The study also advances the State's K–3 Reading Goal and the individual-reading-plan requirements of SB 241 by equipping parents to participate, and it concentrates on the rural, mineral-impacted communities at the heart of the mineral-lease fund's purpose — extending equitable access to the families furthest from support.

Study Design

The intervention: **rinnalla** coaches a parent through a short daily cycle — Watch → Cue Card + Commit → Practice → Reflect — that turns ordinary moments into evidence-based, play-based literacy practice, personalized and adaptive to each child, on the parent's phone.

- Two cohorts — Kindergarten and first grade — followed across a single study year that spans the intervening summer.
- Sites in rural (including mineral-impacted) districts, Title I urban schools, and targeted-assistance schools identified as in need of support.
- A quasi-experimental design: participating sites are compared against schools matched from Utah's statewide Acadience Reading data on community type, Title I status, and prior-year performance — no school serves as a control and none carries added testing burden.
- LXD Research (Dr. Rachel Schechter) independently designs, collects, analyzes, and owns the findings. **rinnalla** delivers the program and family support; the Alma Street Foundation serves as research partner. Neither has access to outcome data.

Research Questions

- 1. Kindergarten cohort.** Do participating children reach the first-grade-ready benchmark at the beginning of 1st grade at higher rates than comparable Utah children? (Targets summer slide at the end of Kindergarten and the beginning-of-1st-grade gap.)
- 2. First-grade cohort.** Do participating children arrive at the beginning of 2nd grade at or above benchmark at higher rates than comparison? (Targets summer slide at the end of first grade and the beginning-of-2nd-grade gap.)
- 3. Mechanism.** Among participating families, does parent confidence rise, do at-home routines take hold, and do those gains track with children's reading growth?

4. Educator impact. Does equipping families change what reaches the teacher — specifically, the number of individualized reading plans required, and the preparation burden and quality of family communication?

Educator Impact

This section was added at the suggestion of Board leadership, which asked whether the study could measure efficacy as it relates to staff as well as students. The study examines two levers. Both are deliberately constructed from data the study already collects or from a brief instrument administered by the independent evaluator, so that the educator component adds evidence without adding cost or testing burden.

Lever one — individualized reading plans and teacher workload

An individualized reading plan is triggered when a student does not meet the beginning-of-year grade-level benchmark. The number of plans a teacher writes, monitors, and reports is therefore a direct function of how many children arrive below benchmark in the fall.

The study can count this without any new data collection. For the Kindergarten cohort, the number of plans indicated at the beginning of Kindergarten is compared with the number indicated for the same children at the beginning of first grade. The same comparison is made for the first-grade cohort entering second grade, and against matched comparison sites.

If a year of parent coaching moves children across the benchmark, the count falls — and every plan not required is a plan a teacher does not have to write, progress-monitor, document, and report.

Two points of framing matter here. First, this is a threshold measure rather than an average. Acadience growth tells the Board how far children moved; the plan count tells a first-grade teacher whether she walks into August with eight plans or fourteen. They answer different questions, and the second is the one a building feels. Second, because the SB 241 requirement does not take effect for another year, this analysis forecasts the workload Utah districts are about to inherit rather than commenting on a mandate already in force. The Board would be sizing a cost before it arrives.

Lever two — family communication and conference preparation

Teachers currently carry the full weight of informing families about a child's reading progress. Conferences, reading-plan meetings, and mid-year check-ins are usually one-directional: the teacher prepares the information, delivers it, and hopes it lands.

A coached parent arrives differently. They have been working with their child at home across the year, they know what their child has done and how it has gone, and they can bring a parent report generated from that work. The conversation becomes two-way. The parent contributes rather than receives.

The hypothesis is that this reduces preparation and follow-up burden for teachers and improves the quality of the exchange — a stronger home-to-school partnership that costs the teacher less, not more. The independent evaluator could measure this with a brief teacher instrument administered at participating and comparison sites, covering preparation time, perceived quality of family communication, and perceived family readiness to participate.

Interpretation and limits

Teacher-reported measures carry a known limitation: educators at participating sites may be aware of which families are enrolled, and that awareness can shape responses. The independent evaluator will determine whether blinding is feasible and will state the limitation plainly in reporting. The reading-plan count is not subject to this concern, as it is derived from assessment data already collected statewide.

The educator component is designed to be delivered within the existing independent-evaluation line. Final instrument design, sample, and analysis plan rest with LXD Research.

Family Support & Implementation Fidelity

A study of family coaching measures only what families actually receive. This line funds the human support that makes the intervention real in homes across the study year — and protects the Board's investment from producing an uninterpretable result. An underserved family is not a null finding; it is an unmeasured one.

- **A dedicated family support lead.** A named staff member that families and sites can reach throughout the study year — onboarding assistance, troubleshooting, and proactive re-engagement outreach to families whose usage lapses. Re-engagement is the single largest driver of analyzable sample size.
- **Parent office hours.** Recurring virtual sessions where families can ask questions, receive live coaching on the practice, and build confidence in the routine. Scheduled around working-family availability, including evenings.
- **Site liaison support.** A consistent point of contact for participating schools — launch coordination, workshop delivery, and ongoing communication with the staff who encourage family participation.
- **Implementation monitoring.** Structured tracking of activation, engagement, and support contacts, reported to the independent evaluator as implementation-fidelity context — kept operationally separate from outcome data.

Spanish-Language Support

Spanish-speaking families receive support in Spanish, not translated text alone. Family support and parent office hours are delivered in Spanish by the **rinnalla** team.

This matters to the study's validity as well as its equity. If Spanish-speaking families in Title I sites receive a thinner version of the intervention than English-speaking families, differential implementation is embedded in the findings. Funding bilingual live support keeps the intervention consistent across the population the study is designed to reach.

Methodology & Projected Impact

Children are measured on Acadience Reading at the beginning, middle, and end of year — assessments already administered statewide, so both treatment and comparison scores are available without new testing. Because Acadience measures different foundational skills at each grade, outcomes are defined as benchmark-status transitions and Acadience's grade-adjusted Pathways of Progress, set by the independent evaluator; the study does not compare raw scores across grades. Parent confidence is measured with a short, validated self-efficacy instrument,

and at-home routines are tracked among participating families. Educator outcomes are derived from benchmark–status counts and a brief teacher instrument, as described above.

The study is offered at three investment levels, so the Board can model options against the reach it wishes to fund. Each level funds the independent evaluation, family support and implementation fidelity, site implementation, and free family licenses (October 2026 – October 2027):

Investment level	Sites (rural / urban)	Families & children served	~ % of each Utah grade	Funds serving families directly*
Base — \$297,800	19 (14 / 5)	~1,450	~1.5%	83%
Expansion — \$397,200	27 (20 / 7)	~2,050	~2.1%	87%
Full — \$493,400	34 (25 / 9)	~2,600	~2.7%	90%

**Family licenses plus training, launch, and family support — the share of the request delivered directly to families. The remainder funds the independent evaluation.*

What Each Level Funds

The request covers three things, not a license purchase. At the Base level, \$99 per family per year accounts for roughly half the request; the balance funds the training and family support that make the program work in homes, and the independent evaluation that produces the evidence.

Line item	Base	Expansion	Full
Independent research & evaluation (LXD Research)	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
Training, launch & family support	\$104,250	\$144,250	\$186,000
Family program — free licenses (\$99 / family / year)	\$143,550	\$202,950	\$257,400
Total request	\$297,800	\$397,200	\$493,400

The study leans rural (roughly 74% of sites) to concentrate on the mineral-impacted communities the fund is meant to serve; Title I urban and targeted-assistance schools carry family volume and test the intervention across a gradient of need. Family counts span both cohorts; the analyzable sample is set by the independent evaluator.

Hypothesized effect (the question the study tests, not a promised result): that equipping parents raises the share of children reaching benchmark, reduces summer slide, and lowers the number of individualized reading plans required in the following year — consistent with the research base below — or, just as valuably, that it does not.

Procurement

This is submitted as a sole-source request. **rinnalla** is a parent-coaching program grounded in the Science of Reading, delivering personalized, adaptive coaching to a caregiver through a short daily cycle. Utah's existing state-provided family resources deliver information to parents; they do not coach a parent through practice with a specific child and adapt to that child over time. To the best of our knowledge, no comparable product is available for procurement in Utah.

Because the study tests a specific intervention rather than a category of tools, the intervention and the evaluation are necessarily paired. The State owns the resulting evidence, and that evidence serves every Utah district regardless of which tools it adopts — including a finding that the intervention does not work.

Research & Evidence

The grounding is established. Sénéchal's (2006) meta-analysis found that parents who teach targeted foundational skills produce roughly six times the measurable impact of parents who read aloud alone — regardless of family income or a child's reading level. **rinnalla** puts that science in the hands of parents who were never taught how to use it, grounded throughout in the Science of Reading and aligned with Utah's LETRS investment.

NWEA's *Behind the Starting Line* establishes the urgency of the specific window this study targets: among students in the bottom quintile, the share who go on to read proficiently in third grade falls from 13.9% in fall of Kindergarten to 2.5% by spring of first grade. Intervention that moves a child across the benchmark before first grade begins is materially more valuable than the same movement a year later.

The matched-comparison, quasi-experimental design drawing on Utah's statewide Acadience data is the design category ESSA recognizes for moderate evidence, and it establishes the foundation for a larger, multi-district trial.

Evaluation Plan

Data collection

- Acadience Reading (already administered statewide) plus short parent self-efficacy and routines surveys among participating families.
- Benchmark-status counts used to derive individualized-reading-plan indications, and a brief teacher instrument on communication and preparation burden.
- Minimal-data by design: student performance data is shared directly with the independent evaluator, never with **rinnalla** or the Foundation; no personally identifiable information leaves the family's device.
- IRB approval and data-sharing agreements are finalized before any data is collected.

Participant incentives are not included in this request. The partnering schools have committed to supporting survey and interview completion directly — communicating the purpose to families and encouraging participation — because they want the findings for their own communities. This reduces the cost of the study and reflects genuine site investment in it.

Timeline

When	Milestone
August 7, 2026	Finance Committee review — approved and forwarded with a positive recommendation
September 2026	Full Board consideration
October 2026	Launch; free family licenses active October 2026 – October 2027
Fall 2026	Baseline (beginning-of-year) Acadience Reading — both cohorts; baseline reading-plan counts
Winter – Spring 2027	Middle- and end-of-year Acadience Reading; teacher instrument administered
Fall 2027	Second-year beginning-of-year Acadience — the fall-to-fall window that captures summer; follow-up reading-plan counts
2027 – 2028	Analysis and reporting to the Board

Reporting

Findings are reported to the Board and made public. The State owns the evidence, which serves every Utah literacy effort regardless of which tools a district adopts.

Disclosure & Conflict Management

This request is made with full disclosure of every relationship that touches it. The following are stated proactively rather than in response to inquiry.

The founder's advisory panel appointment

rinnalla's founder, Marci Houseman, serves on the Utah State Board of Education's Science of Reading advisory panel — an unpaid advisory appointment. Before accepting it, she disclosed to Board staff that she was launching **rinnalla** and intended to work with Utah schools, and was advised that the roles were compatible.

The panel carries no authority over procurement, funding, or this request. The founder holds no vote on this proposal, will not participate in any panel discussion that touches it, and will not take part in the Board's deliberation. The panel appointment is advisory to the State's literacy work and confers no advantage in this process.

Board and district relationships

Any Board member or district leader with a connection to a proposed study site discloses that relationship in writing, recuses from the funding decision, and takes no part in site selection. Site selection is made on research merit and readiness by the independent evaluator, not on relationship. Where a proposed site sits within a Board member's own district, that fact is disclosed on the record and the member recuses.

Independence of the research

- LXD Research independently designs, collects, analyzes, and owns the findings. A null or negative result is a real and valuable possibility, and findings publish regardless of outcome.
- Student performance data is shared directly with the independent evaluator, never with **rinnalla** or the Alma Street Foundation. No personally identifiable information leaves the family's device.
- Family support staff funded by this request work on delivery and re-engagement only. They have no access to outcome data and no role in analysis.
- Teacher-reported measures are collected and held by the independent evaluator. Participating educators are not identified to **rinnalla** or the Foundation.

Pricing

Family licenses are provided free to participating families. The per-family rate in this request is \$99 per year, below **rinnalla**'s commercial rate of \$120 per family per year. No participating family pays anything.

Utah would be among the first states to answer whether equipping parents moves children's earliest reading outcomes — and whether it lightens what reaches the classroom. Built so the answer, whatever it turns out to be, is one Utah can trust and every district can use.

Communities build readers.

The Alma Street Foundation · **rinnalla**