



**Learning Ovation, Digital Promise, UCI, and MDRC Awarded U.S. Department of Education  
EIR Grant to Scale Personalized Literacy Instruction for United2Read Project**

*Five-Year Expansion Grant Aims to Have 90+ Percent of Students Reading at Grade Level by Third Grade,  
and to Improve District, School, and Teacher Capacity*

**October 24, 2017; Washington, D.C.** – Learning Ovation, Digital Promise, UC Irvine (UCI), and MDRC have been awarded a U.S. Department of Education [five-year Education Innovation and Research \(EIR\) expansion grant](#) totaling \$14.65 million for the United2Read project.

United2Read project partners will bring Learning Ovation’s “A2i” technology professional support system to students and teachers nationwide with the goal of improving literacy skills and closing the achievement gap, which are national priorities. A2i, or assessment-to-instruction, has strong evidence of efficacy based on results of randomized controlled trials and quasi-experiments conducted since 2005 in 30 schools and more than 190 classrooms in Florida and Arizona. The first study in 2005-06, published in *Science* magazine, with 10 schools randomly assigned to treatment or control conditions, showed that first graders whose teachers used A2i and received professional development achieved stronger literacy skills than their peers in the control classrooms.

“A2i is a researched-based instructional tool that informs teachers on the right amount and type of reading instruction so that they can effectively differentiate instruction for all students’ needs,” explains Amanda Jacobs, principal at Phoenix Collegiate Academy and user of the A2i professional support system. “A2i was a major relief to our literacy teachers. They had the data to tell them what to do *and* the tools to help them build concrete lessons and next steps. They felt confident in their instructional decision-making. As a result, students are growing much faster and teacher morale is much higher.”

“Our mission is to close the Digital Learning Gap and create an environment where everyone has the opportunity to learn, supported by technology and research,” said Karen Cator, president and CEO of Digital Promise. “We are thrilled to join with our esteemed partners and take this research-based strategy to the League of Innovative Schools and beyond to help ensure students are reading at or above grade level.”

“Partnerships of this character can serve as a model for improving education in the 21st Century. By leveraging external partners, our extraordinary faculty can accelerate the broad dissemination and use of evidence-based solutions to literacy and other pressing educational needs facing our nation. It’s truly thrilling to see the work of professors Carol Connor and Deborah Vandell impacting the educational lives



of tens of thousands of students in more than 300 schools,” said Richard Arum, dean of the University of California, Irvine’s School of Education.

Many high-need students do not achieve literacy proficiency because they do not receive effective personalized literacy instruction during the early elementary grades. The A2i professional support technology is a data-driven system that was designed by and for teachers.

While the grant emphasizes high-need student success, the partnership’s ability to expand nationwide is made possible by the fact that the individualization afforded by A2i benefits ALL children. Subsequent studies of the cumulative effects (2012) of using the A2i’s professional support systems from kindergarten through third grade, have shown children finishing third grade reading at an average fifth grade level. These results were only possible given that both struggling and successful readers showed significant improvement.

At least 300 schools and 100,000 students in K-3rd grade will be served through the grant. One hundred and fifty-five schools have already been identified, many including Digital Promise’s League of Innovative Schools network.

“We are excited to be the partner in this project that evaluates scale-up strategies for a state-of-the-art reading program that leverages technology in many creative and useful ways,” said Fred Doolittle, Vice President and Director of K-12 Education at MDRC.

### **Partners and Roles:**

- 1) **Learning Ovations** will provide the A2i software platform, individual school partners, teacher coaching, online assessments, full data reporting, and customized technology support to each district based on their choice of curricula, assessment, and LMS. Learning Ovations supports schools and shares accountability in achieving these results for children.
- 2) **Digital Promise** will act as the overall project manager and fiscal agent, engage school participants through its [League of Innovative Schools](#) network, provide qualitative research, and offer guidance in line with its [Learner Positioning Systems](#) initiative, which provides research-based personalized learning supports for the full diversity of learners.
- 3) **UCI** will serve as the research lead and will advise on all aspects of professional development, partnering with schools, and improving the A2i technology ([isilearn.net](#)). The School of Education is ranked in the top 25 in the country, according to *U.S. News & World Report*.
- 4) **MDRC**, the evaluation partner in the project, will conduct a school-level randomized controlled trial study of the expansion of United2Read.



The outcomes of the initiative are twofold:

- (1) Achieve strong student literacy outcomes for students using the A2i professional support system in at least 300 schools across the nation, serving over 100,000 students; and
- (2) Identify and remove critical barriers to scale including a literacy scan, an independent evaluation of the professional development protocols to test the cost effectiveness of moving to technology-based PD, and investigate how IBM-Watson can facilitate administrative processes.

### **About Learning Ovation**

Learning Ovation Inc. was founded to bring evidence-based and rigorously tested interventions and instructional practices to schools with the aim of raising learning outcomes for all students. Learning Ovation combines technology and professional development to provide educators with the tools, data, and know-how to effectively individualize literacy instruction from kindergarten through third grade. The patented, A2i technology platform, coupled with professional development is proven to raise reading achievement for all students to at or above grade level by the end of third grade. The A2i professional support system links language and literacy assessment results to recommendations for specific amounts and types of reading instruction thru evidence-based algorithms.

### **About Digital Promise**

Digital Promise is a nonprofit organization authorized by Congress to spur innovation in education to improve the opportunity to learn for all Americans. Through its work with educators, entrepreneurs, researchers, and leading thinkers, Digital Promise supports a comprehensive agenda to benefit lifelong learning and provide Americans with the knowledge and skills needed to compete in the global economy. For more information, visit the [Digital Promise website](#) and follow [@digitalpromise](#) for updates.

### **About the University of California, Irvine**

Founded in 1965, UCI is the youngest member of the prestigious Association of American Universities. The campus has produced three Nobel laureates and is known for its academic achievement, premier research, innovation and anteater mascot. Led by Chancellor Howard Gillman, UCI has more than 30,000 students and offers 192 degree programs. It's located in one of the world's safest and most economically vibrant communities and is Orange County's second-largest employer, contributing \$5 billion annually to the local economy. For more on UCI, visit [www.uci.edu](http://www.uci.edu).



### **About MDRC**

Founded in 1974, MDRC is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that develops, evaluates, and improves education and social programs that serve low-income children, adults, and families. Visit our website ([www.mdrc.org](http://www.mdrc.org)) or follow us on Twitter (@MDRC\_News) for more information.

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