



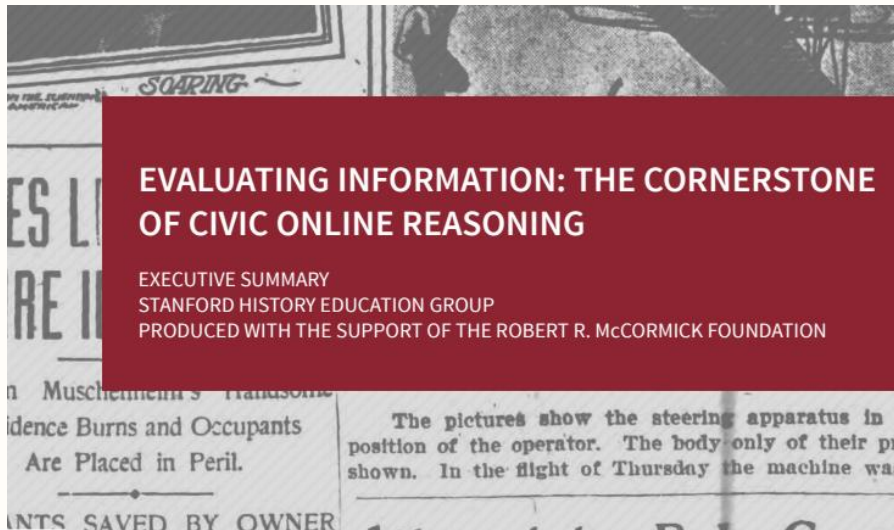
# Using Lateral Reading to Bridge the Digital Media Literacy Gap

**We are experiencing a crisis of  
informed citizenship.**

**What is required is nothing short  
of a transformation in the way  
digital media literacy is taught.**

# The Pedagogy Problem

**Students struggle to evaluate online information using the strategies they've been taught.**



**'In every case and at every level, we were taken aback by students' lack of preparation'**



**Stanford History  
Education Group**

# Vertical vs. Lateral Reading



VS.



# CTRL-F & Lateral Reading

Fact-checkers' skills packaged for the classroom



## Investigate the Source

Who made the information?  
What is their reputation?



## Check the Claim

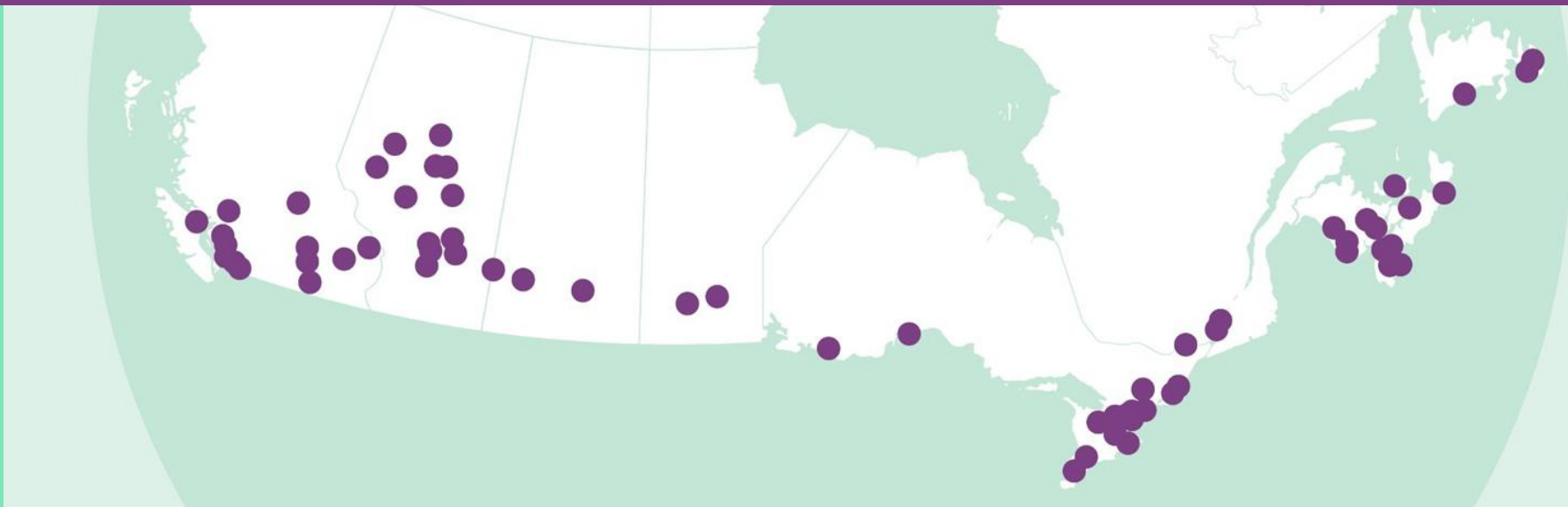
Are known credible sources saying the same thing?



## Trace the Information

Has this information changed in the re-telling?

**2020/21 School Year:** 80 teachers / 2 hours of virtual training / 2,324 students in grades 7 to 12 / Matched control group of 363 students / ~ 7 hours of CTRL-F instruction



## Measuring the CTRL-F impact

CIVIX partnered with expert researchers to test these tools to understand their impact on Canadian middle- and high-school students' ability to reason through online sources and claims

CTRL-F



Stanford History  
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# Research Questions

## Baseline

What steps do Canadian students take when asked to evaluate an online source or claim?

## CTRL-F Skills

What impact does going through the CTRL-F program have on students' ability to locate key context about online information?

# Pretest: the baseline isn't good

Canadian students struggle to evaluate online information

79% percent  
read vertically,  
analyzing the  
post to reach  
conclusions

Only 6%  
identified the  
agenda of an  
advocacy  
group



# What students do

Look for signs of authority  
on the page itself

“I definitely think  
that this is a  
trustworthy  
website because  
it is listed as a  
organization (.org).”

Advocacy Group: American College  
of Pediatricians (anti-LGBT)



CTRL+F

Judge content by  
its appearance

“I think it’s not  
that trustworthy  
because there  
are a lot of ads  
on the side of  
the page”

Newspaper of Record:  
The Daily Star (Bangladesh)



Over-rely on their own  
instincts/experience

“I don't think U.S school  
district would arm  
students with rocks. If  
there is an active  
shooter a rock will not  
win over a gun.”

True Claim: US students armed with  
rocks to fend of school shooters



# Students who get the right answers *for the right reasons* read laterally.

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When assessing the trustworthiness of a claim, **only 10% of students read laterally**, but **83% of those students assessed the prompt correctly** (versus an overall average of 40%).

# Posttest Results

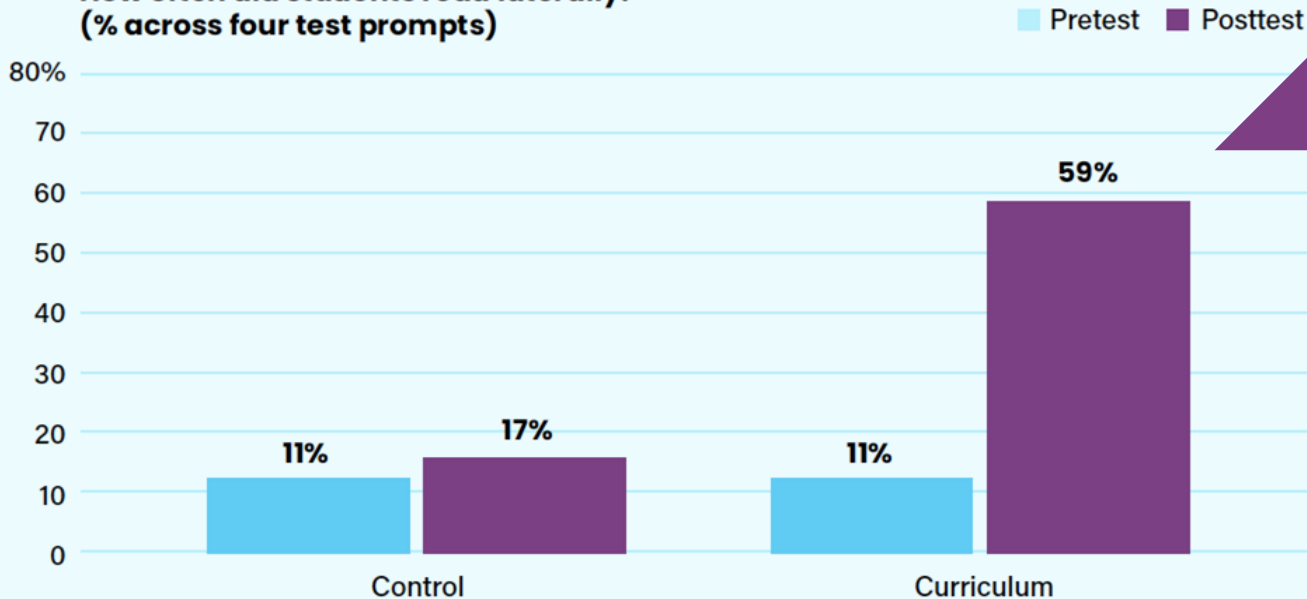
The good news is that the CTRL-F skills and program work



## Key Finding #1

# CTRL-F effectively teaches lateral reading skills

How often did students read laterally?  
(% across four test prompts)



***Sixfold***  
increase in  
lateral  
reading

**59%**  
on posttest

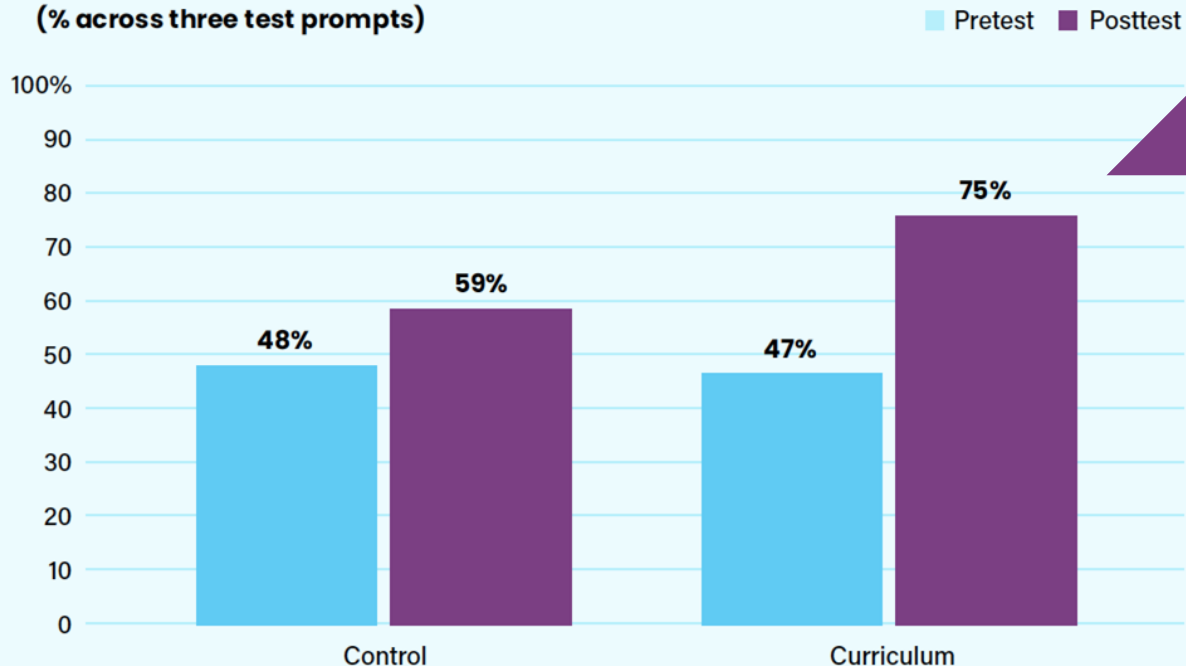
vs

**11%**  
on pretest

## Key Finding #2

# The CTRL-F program improves student accuracy

How often did students reach a correct conclusion?  
(% across three test prompts)



**28**  
percentage point  
increase in  
accuracy

**75%\***  
on posttest

VS

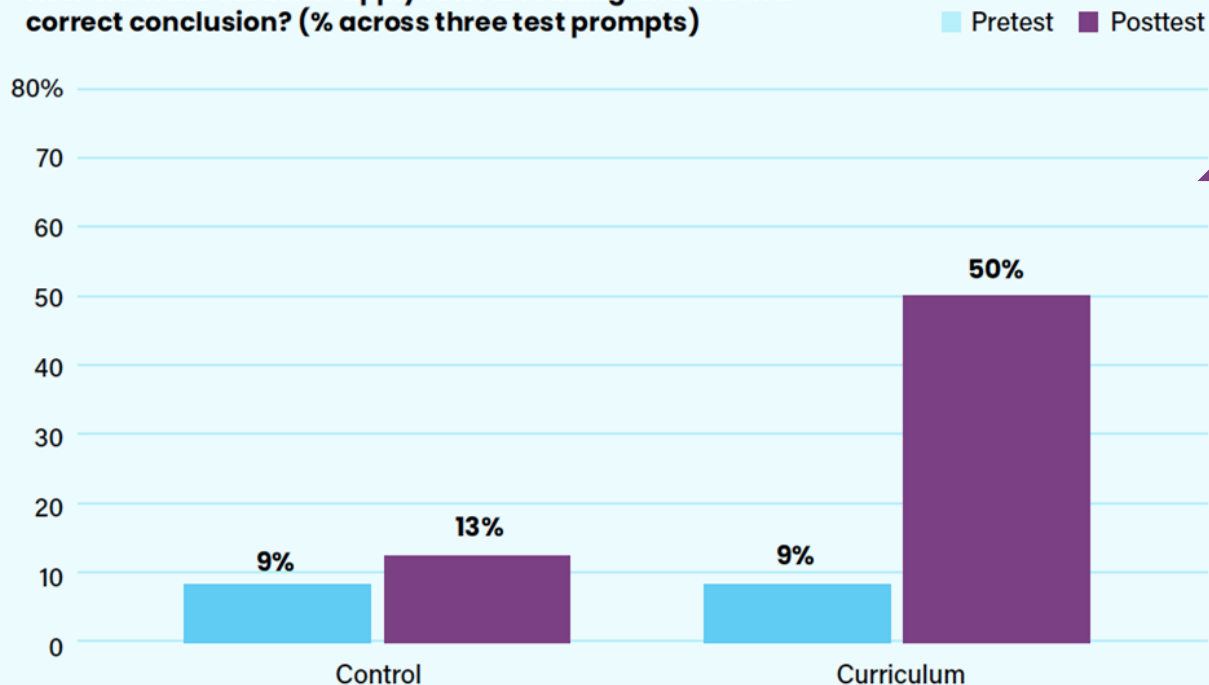
**47%**  
on pretest

\*While significant, accuracy is not the strongest success metric, as results may come down to luck if no distinction is made between a student who guesses correctly and one who bases their response on evidence from research.

## Key Finding #3

# The CTRL-F program helps students get the right answer for the right reasons

How often did students apply lateral reading and reach a correct conclusion? (% across three test prompts)



**41 point**  
increase in  
reasoning

**50%**

Cited key context  
on posttest

VS

**9%**

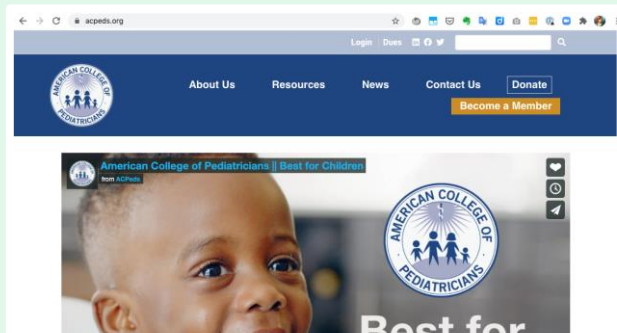
on pretest

## Key Finding #4

# CTRL-F teaches students to locate key context about nuanced information

**Student A** pretest response:  
American College of Pediatricians

***"The website isn't cluttered with advertisements. There is contact information. They have stated their objectives."***



On pretest, only  
**6%** of students  
identified the  
agenda of an  
anti-LGBT group

## Key Finding #4

# CTRL-F teaches students to locate key context about nuanced information

**Student A** delayed posttest response:  
National Vaccine Information Center

***“After reading about the organization on Wikipedia, I found out that it is a source of fearmongering and misinformation about vaccines.”***

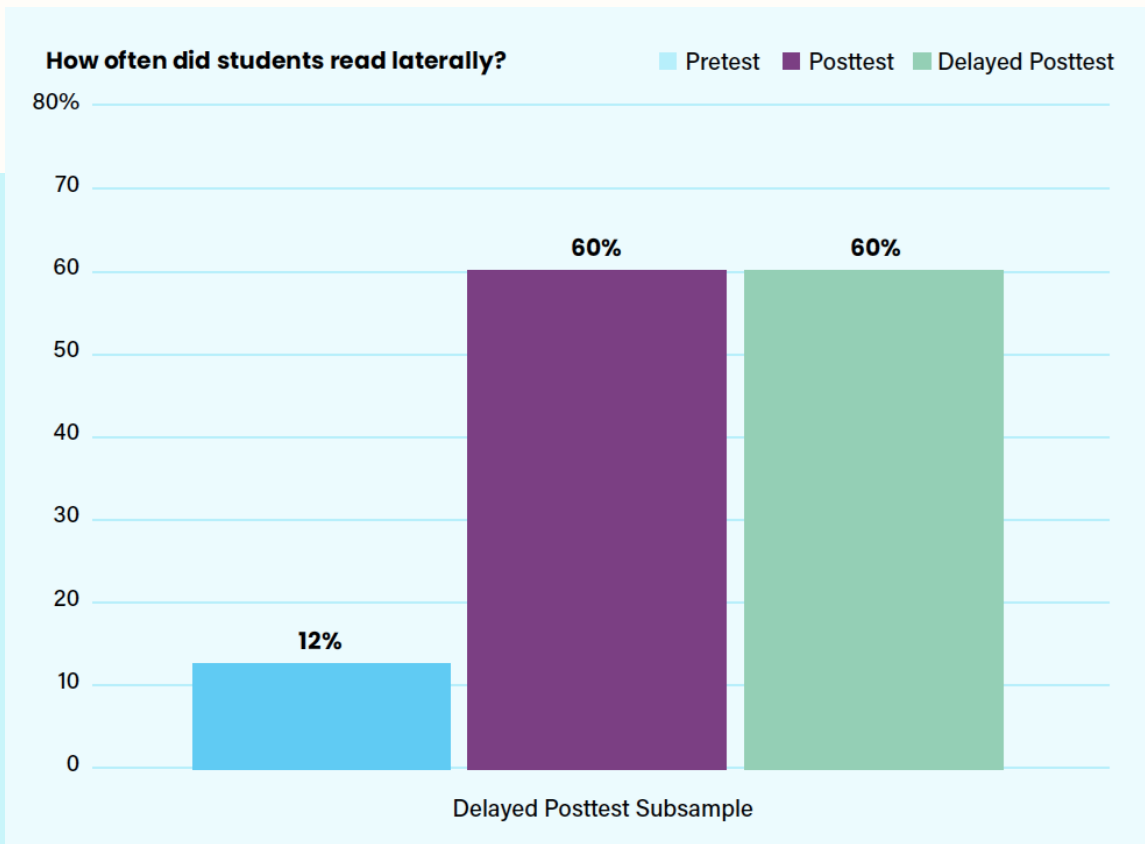
***6 weeks after completing CTRL-F, 49% of students identified the agenda of an anti-vax group***





## Key Finding #5

# The skills at the heart of CTRL-F stick



Six weeks after the end of CTRL-F students showed no erosion in their use of lateral reading

**Results were  
consistent  
across  
conditions**

# Takeaways

1

Canadian students struggle to evaluate online information, often using the strategies they've learned in school

2

Lateral reading helps students reach informed conclusions about information

3

CTRL-F is effective teaching these skills, and this project demonstrates that it can be successfully scaled