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Kentucky Read to Succeed Evaluation: Year 1 Report

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Executive Summary

Prior to the onset of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, 50% of Kentucky's third-graders did not score at or above proficiency in reading (Kentucky Department of Education [KDE], 2019) and Kentucky's fourth-graders were declining in their reading results (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Compounding these trends is current research that shows that the impact of COVID-19 has been particularly pronounced among early learners (Lewis & Kuhfeld, 2023). However, well-established research has shown that investing in early literacy through teacher professional development and through classroom curriculum with strong literacy content, such as phonemic awareness and systematic phonics instruction, improves student literacy achievement (e.g., Didion et al., 2019; National Reading Panel, 2000; Piasta et al., 2009). One program that incorporates each of these literacy components is the Lexia Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS®) Professional Learning. Evaluations of the impact of participating in LETRS have found significant increases in teachers' knowledge of early literacy skills as well as increases in the quality of literacy instruction, student engagement, and teaching competencies (Folsom et al., 2017). Alongside these educator outcomes, evaluations of LETRS have also found increases in students' grade-level proficiency in Grades K–3 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction , 2023) and increases in students' Grade 3 reading proficiency (Mississippi Department of Education, 2023).

In response to these statewide trends and relevant literature, the Kentucky General Assembly passed the Read to Succeed Act (Senate Bill 9, 2022), which supports evidence-based early literacy instruction based on the science of reading and invests in teachers to increase student success in reading. The Kentucky Reading Academies program, implemented through the Read to Succeed Act, intends to transform literacy instruction across the state by expanding access to the LETRS® Professional Learning. Educators and administrators across the state are able to opt in to this no-cost professional learning opportunity and enroll in LETRS for Educators or LETRS for Administrators. Each course is self-paced, with LETRS for Administrators consisting of five units intended to be completed in 1 year and LETRS for Educators including eight units designed to be completed over 2 years. The Kentucky Reading Academies program is being implemented in three phases targeting three cohorts of educators and administrators. Cohort 1 began in fall 2022 and Cohort 2 launched in fall 2023; there are plans to launch Cohort 3 in fall 2024. During the 2024–2025 academic year, a literacy coaching model will be added in select schools across the commonwealth.

The goal of the Kentucky Reading Academies is to influence K–5 educators' knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instructional practices in early literacy so as to ultimately improve student reading and writing outcomes. In particular, the program has five literacy goals for educator and student learning:

a) Increased teacher knowledge regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle.
b) Increased teacher capacity to incorporate instructional strategies aligned to their new learning regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle into their classroom practice.

c) Increased adoption of high-quality instructional resources for reading and writing at Tier 1 with aligned resources at Tiers 2–3.

d) Increased student progress toward grade-level proficiency based on universal screeners and diagnostic assessments.

e) Increased student outcomes at Grade 3 on the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA) for reading.

In 2023, the KDE hired ICF, a third-party evaluator, to address four primary research questions that together seek to help the KDE and other stakeholders understand the extent and ways in which participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies is shaping educator practice and student learning.

This evaluation utilized a mixed-methods approach that included quantitative metrics collected through teacher surveys and the KSA along with qualitative data collected through school-based observations and focus groups with instructional staff and school leaders. Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively, including through subgroup analysis, and inferentially, using hierarchical linear modeling. Qualitative data were transcribed and coded using an inductive approach. Findings from across data sources were triangulated based on topic area and evaluation question.

Evaluation Research Questions

1. To what extent and in what ways does participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies influence educator knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction?
2. To what extent are the Kentucky Reading Academies' five literacy goals for educator and student learning met?
3. To what extent does each element of the LETRS program (digital learning platform, print materials, live virtual sessions, bridge-to-practice activities) positively influence educator knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction? How?
4. When the literacy coaching model is established, to what extent are the school-based coaches effective in supporting and achieving positive literacy outcomes? *(Addressed in Year 2 of this evaluation.)*

Key Findings

In examining trends across research questions, participants benefitted from new and increased knowledge, strengthened or modified beliefs about how students learn to read and why they struggle, implementing new or adjusted strategies into their classroom practice, and saw early indicators of positive student outcomes as a result. Each of these trends is discussed further, as aligned to relevant research questions.

Research Question 1: To what extent and in what ways does participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies influence educator knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction?

Overall participation: Participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies varied by district and school, with some participants reporting that they were the only participant in their school or grade level. In contrast, some districts or school administrators encouraged or required educators to participate in the academies, which tended to result in larger cohorts of participants in that district or school. Across data sources, educators reported that participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies had a positive influence on their knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction

or educational practice. Educators described their experience with the Kentucky Reading Academies to be "eye-opening" and "informative," with many veteran teachers reporting that the LETRS professional learning was the best professional development experience of their careers.

Educator knowledge: Surveyed teachers in both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 demonstrated increases in literacy skills and knowledge throughout the academic year and although this growth was not statistically significant (perhaps due to the short amount of time between the fall and spring surveys), statistically significant differences in knowledge were seen between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2, suggesting enhanced benefits to educator knowledge over time. Teachers and administrators also reported that Kentucky Reading Academies participation had increased participants' confidence in their literacy knowledge, which translated into reported greater comfort teaching literacy. For example, one first-grade teacher reported, "Learning about morphology and the origin of words has added so much to my own knowledge of why we pronounce words the way we do—why you know they're compound, why you know the different pronunciations. In the past, I would be like, 'Well, I don't know the rule; that's just the way it is.'"

Educator beliefs: Surveyed educators reported high levels of agreement with belief statements aligned to a phonics approach to literacy and lower agreement ratings about statements related to the whole-word or meaning-based approach. Although a change to beliefs over time was not statistically significant, analysis did find that those in Cohort 1 who had participated in the Kentucky Reading Academies for the longest amount of time were statistically significantly less likely to agree with statements related to a whole-word or comprehension-focused approach than those in Cohort 2. This trend is in alignment with content from LETRS that emphasized a phonics-based approach rather than one focused on comprehension. Similar to findings related to educator knowledge, the lack of statistical significance may be representative of the short time between the two surveys. Teachers and administrators also shared shifting beliefs related to strategies to help students learn to read and the overall benefits of early literacy.

> *I've always looked at kids who struggle and struggle and struggle as there's got to be some kind of learning disability going on with them … and looking at the science behind how the brain works. … It's been enlightening. … It might be that you're just not hitting them where you need to hit them as far as what they need—how they need to learn.*
>
> – Grade 1 teacher, Cohort 1

***Classroom instruction*:** Most teachers were integrating strategies learned in LETRS into their classroom instruction, with teachers in Cohort 1 reporting greater implementation of LETRS strategies than those in Cohort 2. However, both cohorts reported that they needed additional time to reflect on and plan how to fully apply LETRS strategies in their own classrooms. This suggests that teachers may continue to add or adjust teaching strategies even after they have completed their LETRS program. Accordingly, improved literacy outcomes among students may lag a year or two behind teacher participation while teachers scale up implementation of new tools and approaches—as preliminary analysis for this evaluation

> *I'm still trying to balance the workload of getting, you know, everything complete. So maybe down the road, then I can start incorporating those [strategies] more.*
>
> – Grade 2 teacher, Cohort 2

has found. During this reported initial implementation, educators used the knowledge gained in LETRS to make decisions about general strategies and structure to use in the classroom as well as to inform the incorporation of various instructional content into their classrooms. Of particular salience were strategies and tools related to phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and morphology.

Educational practice: Administrators also leveraged information learned through their participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies to shape conversations with and observations of teachers as well as to inform decision-making. Some administrators also highlighted the use of assessments from LETRS in individual classrooms or grade levels, including a Phonological Awareness Screening Test and a phonics assessment. In addition, participants in LETRS for Administrators described adding more data discussions to weekly or monthly professional learning communities and incorporating discussions about data into coaching sessions to inform teacher instruction and shape student support.

Research Question 2: To what extent are the Kentucky Reading Academies' five literacy goals for educator and student learning met?

Goal A: Increased teacher knowledge regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle.

As discussed under Research Question 1, educators reported increased knowledge about student literacy, with initial analysis suggesting that this knowledge increases during the 2 years of participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies, although that growth was not yet statistically significant. Specific knowledge gains reported by educators related to how the brain processes written language, phonics and phonemic awareness, and ways to help students struggling with elements of literacy.

Goal B. Increased teacher capacity to incorporate instructional strategies aligned to their new learning regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle into their classroom practice.

Although some teachers felt limited in their ability to quickly and fully implement their LETRS learnings (see discussion under Research Question 1), many teachers and administrators shared that their own capacity to incorporate strategies and skills from LETRS had already increased. Those in Cohort 1 reported that it had gotten easier to identify, select, and implement LETRS strategies compared with those in Cohort 2, again attributing this to the increased time and practice Cohort 1 teachers had with these strategies. In addition to being able to use specific resources in their classroom practice, many teachers reported an increased intentionality in their literacy instruction as a result of their participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies.

> *[At first] it was scary doing it on my own because it's like, 'Am I using this strategy the right way?' … So, it was terrifying last year to make that change. I kind of switched it midyear, [but] even just in that, like, half a year, I saw so much more growth. … So, I think now I'm getting some success with these—the strategies that seemed crazy at the time.*
> – Kindergarten teacher, Cohort 1

During observations, teachers demonstrated strong pedagogy, receiving high average ratings across all competencies observed. However, teachers displayed opportunities for improvement in instructional implementation during observations. In particular, additional support may be needed to improve instruction related to spelling in the context of reading, writing, grammar, fluency, and students reading their own writing, which received the five lowest ratings. This further underscores that it may take teachers an additional year or two following LETRS completion to fully implement these skills into their instruction, and, correspondingly, improvement in student outcomes may be delayed.

Goal C. Increased adoption of high-quality instructional resources for reading and writing at Tier 1 with aligned resources at Tiers 2–3.

Many districts had already adopted a high-quality instructional resource (HQIR) specific to literacy, with those numbers increasing throughout the year. Some educators—generally classroom teachers—expressed frustration about the HQIR curricula selection process, particularly the limited role of teachers in resource selection or the cost of various curricula. However, implementation of adopted HQIRs was also progressing at a high rate throughout the year. LETRS participants reported that their participation in the professional learning program had motivated them to implement their district-approved HQIR into their classroom practice. Furthermore, analysis of KSA Reading data found that Grade 4 and 5 students enrolled in districts that had adopted and implemented an HQIR for literacy had higher reading scores than students who did not attend such districts, a promising early indicator of the benefits of these resources.

More broadly, teachers and administrators had varying perspectives about the overall quality and utility of literacy curriculums in place at their schools, generally indicating more favorable views about those that were designated as HQIRs for reading and writing. However, LETRS participants disagreed about the extent to which the curriculum played a critical role in teachers' ability to successfully implement LETRS strategies into their classroom instruction. Overall, most participants reported a belief that while some curricula made it easier to apply LETRS tools and approaches to instruction, the strategies taught in LETRS could be successfully incorporated into any curricula.

Goal D. Increased student progress toward grade-level proficiency based on universal screeners and diagnostic assessments.

Teachers and administrators reported increased use of universal screeners and diagnostic assessments to measure student growth and identify areas where students needed extra support, both at the classroom and school level. These assessments were then reported to allow teachers and interventionists to provide more tailored instruction to struggling students. This is a promising development as research has shown that using diagnostic assessments to provide customized intervention can improve students' literacy skills (Catts et al., 2001).

Many Kentucky Reading Academies' participants shared positive anecdotal evidence about incremental student progress resulting from their participation in the reading academies and

implementation of LETRS tools and approaches. Some teachers shared general impressions, reporting that their current class had made more progress than a similar class in previous years, while others reported specific results for specific students or their whole class. For example, one third grade teacher in Cohort 1 of LETRS shared, "I had a little boy that started in third grade last year, reading well below grade level and he was also an English language learner student and we, myself, and one of the intervention teachers, … we were working with him together using [LETRS] strategies, and by the end of the year, [it] took us all year, but he could read the third-grade passages and did very well on the state assessment." Other teachers described improvements related to a reduced need for intervention, substantial gains in reading and writing skills among elementary school students who arrived behind grade level, and increased scores in specific assessments across the year. Although not yet seen systematically, these early indicators of program success are a positive sign that LETRS is influencing teachers in a way that is impacting student development and success.

> *I've been using some of the assessments from LETRS, like the phonics screeners and things like that, and I'll show [students] 'Here's where you started. Here's where you are now. Look at how far you've come.' And that's helped them build their confidence a little bit more.*
> – Grade 1 teacher, Cohort 1

Goal E. Increased student outcomes at Grade 3 on the KSA for reading.

As expected, statewide data on the KSA lagged behind teachers' anecdotal reports of student progress and had yet to show significant gains in learning attributed to LETRS participation. In addition, complications with obtaining another student outcome data source—reading assessment data from a third-party vendor—prevented the inclusion of that analysis in this report, limiting what is fully known about student progress. So, with KSA Reading data as the only available measure of student achievement at the time of this report, analysis was restricted to examining outcomes among students in Grades 4 and 5 during the 2022–2023 school year. Among these students, there was no significant difference between students with teachers who participated in the Kentucky Reading Academies and those with teachers who had not participated in the professional learning. This may be reflective of the more limited implementation of LETRS strategies into classroom instruction that was reported by teachers, particularly during their first year of reading academies participation.

Research Question 3: To what extent does each element of the LETRS program (digital learning platform, print materials, live virtual sessions, bridge-to-practice activities) positively influence educator knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction? How?

The LETRS professional learning content uses a blended model that includes a print manual, an online learning platform, and live virtual sessions with a trained facilitator. Overall, survey participants reported that the most-used component was the print materials followed by the live facilitated sessions. Correspondingly, survey respondents indicated that both print materials and the live facilitated sessions had a positive influence on their understanding of literacy skills and strategies, their literacy beliefs, and their classroom practice. This influence seemed to grow over time with those in Cohort 1 indicating statistically higher ratings than those in Cohort 2 across many of these domains. However, although participants were generally pleased with the facilitators

of the live virtual sessions, many expressed that the length of the sessions was excessive and acted as a barrier to robust participation.

Many educators also provided positive opinions about the overall online learning platform, particularly the diverse modes of communicating information. However, several of the components within the platform were less utilized. For example, educators varied in their use of the embedded bridge-to-practice activities, with some required to complete these activities to qualify for participation incentives offered by their district while others struggled to complete these activities based on their role in the classroom. Educators also had divergent thoughts on the benefits of embedded videos, with some reporting that the videos of teachers enacting LETRS strategies were extremely valuable and others indicating that they found the videos unrealistic and less useful. In contrast, participants were generally unified in their reports that the online journal and online help center were less useful and correspondingly less used.

> *"I think one thing that I've really enjoyed is the energy of the in-person [sessions]. And the presenters have been really good.*
>
> – Intervention teacher

Program Barriers, Facilitators, and Recommendations

Program participants shared several factors that acted as barriers or facilitators to initial participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies, predominately:

- Administrator or district support strengthened the number of participants and the quality of participation.
- Participation in LETRS required a substantial time commitment, which prevented some from participating or fully benefiting from the program.

Many who were able to successfully join the Kentucky Reading Academies described factors that supported their ability to successfully implement LETRS strategies and approaches, including:

- District-level support for the Kentucky Reading Academies created a positive environment for implementation.
- Participating in LETRS with colleagues in the same school supported implementation and helped facilitate long-term planning.

However, participating educators also encountered some barriers to fully implementing LETRS approaches into the instruction or practice, such as:

- The sequencing of LETRS units limited implementation opportunities for some participants who reported that content learned in the middle or end of the year would be best implemented at the beginning of the academic year.
- The length of the live virtual sessions as well as a lack of interaction from participants acted as a disincentive for active engagement.
- Participating in LETRS without other colleagues or without leadership support created additional barriers to implementation, including barriers resulting from curriculum that did not align with LETRS approaches.

Aligned with reported barriers and facilitators, participants offered several recommendations on how to improve and extend the Kentucky Reading Academies moving forward:

- Participants suggested a variety of approaches to address or compensate for the significant time commitment required to participate in the Kentucky Reading Academies including stipends, time off, or offering the program during the summer.
- Several participants recommended ways that reading academies participants could further their new knowledge or share it with colleagues including through monthly cohort meetings or professional learning communities.

Discussion and Next Steps

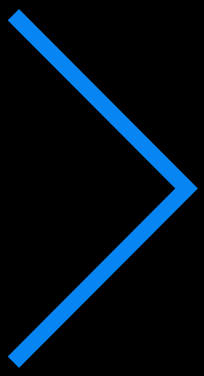
Although every participant's experience was unique—shaped by their own literacy knowledge; prior experience teaching; and the individual context of their districts, schools, and personal lives—numerous common themes emerged across our data, lending confidence to these findings. In examining these trends across research questions, participants benefitted from new and increased knowledge, strengthened or modified beliefs about how students learn to read and why they struggle, implemented new or adjusted strategies into their classroom practice, and saw early indicators of positive student outcomes as a result. Findings related to change over time for educator knowledge and beliefs and student outcomes were not yet statistically significant, perhaps reflective of the relatively short time between the fall and spring surveys (3 months), or the more limited implementation of LETRS strategies into classroom instruction that was reported by teachers, particularly during their first year of Kentucky Reading Academies participation.

> *No one else in my building is doing [LETRS] … it's hard to piggyback off of what the teachers are doing in the classroom because they're not exactly teaching it the same way I am; or just completely different.*
>
> – Reading interventionist

Nevertheless, these preliminary findings are important because research has shown that content knowledge in phonological awareness, phonics, and morphology—all topics that Kentucky Reading Academies participants reported learning through LETRS—are essential for teachers to have in building a foundation of students' literacy development (Moats & Foorman, 2003; Moats, 2014; National Center on Improving Literacy, 2022; Seidenberg et al., 2020).

Furthermore, research has found that teachers who have more knowledge about early literacy concepts and strategies produce students with higher reading gains (Piasta et al., 2009) and that the use of diagnostic assessment to provide tailored classroom instruction and intervention can improve students' literacy skills (Catts et al., 2001).

As this evaluation enters a second year of data collection and analysis, ICF will continue to partner with the KDE to interpret the findings and implications of this report to make data-informed decisions about program implementation and evaluative focus.



Kentucky Read to Succeed Evaluation: Year 1 Report

I. Introduction

In Kentucky, summative assessment results from third-grade reading data showed that in 2019, approximately 50% of Kentucky's third-graders did not score at or above proficiency in reading (Kentucky Department of Education [KDE], 2019). Additionally, data from the 2018–2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveal a downward trend in fourth-grade reading results, ranking Kentucky as twenty-third in the nation at that time (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). This is of particular concern because research indicates that students who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to not finish high school (Hernandez, 2011). Further exacerbating this challenge is that current research shows that the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has been pronounced among early learners, who are still struggling to achieve pre-pandemic levels of academic performance (Lewis & Kuhfeld, 2023). Indeed, in Kentucky, reading scores have continued to fall post-pandemic with data from the 2021–2022 NAEP reading results showing a further average loss of 4 points from 2018–2019 levels (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

The well-established literature shows that investing in early literacy yields long-term dividends in student academic and life outcomes. In particular, several studies show that early literacy programs help young learners develop fundamental skills such as alphabet knowledge and phonetic awareness that serve as building blocks for future academic and social success. For example, Duncan et al. (2007) found that early reading skills predict later academic performance in multiple subjects. Other studies (e.g., Miles & Stipek, 2006; Cooper et al., 2014) have found a relationship between early reading skills and positive social and behavioral outcomes in later years.

Numerous studies have found that teachers are the most essential school-based factor in student success (Hattie, 2008). Research also shows that teacher professional development can impact students' early literacy outcomes. For example, Folsom and colleagues (2017) found positive educator and student outcomes for a statewide early literacy professional development initiative involving online modules, in-person workshops, and literacy coaches embedded at high-need schools. More generally, a meta-analysis of teacher professional development interventions focused on early reading (Didion et al., 2019) found moderate and significant positive effects on student reading outcomes. And a 2009 study by Piasta and colleagues found that first-grade teachers' level of understanding of phonology, orthography, and morphology could predict the word-reading gains of first-grade students, with more knowledgeable teachers (i.e., scoring at the 50th percentile or higher) producing students with higher gains than less knowledgeable teachers (i.e., scoring in the lowest 25th percentile).

Program Overview

In response to these statewide trends and relevant literature, the Kentucky General Assembly passed the Read to Succeed Act (Senate Bill 9, 2022), which supports evidence-based early literacy instruction based on the science of reading and is investing in teachers to increase student success in reading. The Kentucky Reading Academies program, implemented through the Read to Succeed Act, intends to transform literacy instruction across the state by expanding access to Lexia's Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS®) Professional Learning.

The Kentucky Reading Academies is a comprehensive, no-cost professional learning opportunity open to all K–5 public school educators. Participants—including general educators, special educators, reading specialists, interventionists, those who teach English Learners (EL) and more—get access to two different LETRS professional learning courses: LETRS for Educators and LETRS for Administrators.

The goal of the Kentucky Reading Academies is to influence K–5 educators' knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instructional practices in early literacy to ultimately improve student reading and writing outcomes. The reading academies program is being implemented in three phases targeting three cohorts of educators. Teachers in each cohort group have access to a 2-year LETRS course covering literacy-related topics, including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, and assessment, while administrators participate in a 1-year course of learning. Within the LETRS professional learning, there are several key elements that contribute to educators' knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction. Primarily, these include:

a) Print materials, including the professional learning manual;
b) The overall online learning platform that includes video modeling, interactive activities, participants' journals, and the LETRS help center;
c) LETRS virtual live sessions, led by a live facilitator; and
d) Bridge-to-practice activities contained within the online learning platform; these prompts guide teachers through exercises to apply LETRS content strategies to their classroom practice.

The LETRS for Educators program is broken down into eight units, divided between two volumes that are typically taken across 2 years. Each unit is further broken down into multiple sessions. The LETRS for Administrators content was intended to be completed over a single year across five units, rather than the 2 years of eight units recommended for LETRS for Educators.

LETRS for Educators Content

Volume 1
Unit 1 – The Challenge of Learning to Read
Unit 2 – The Speech Sounds of English
Unit 3 – Teaching Beginning Phonics, Word Recognition, and Spelling
Unit 4 – Advanced Decoding, Spelling, and Word Recognition
Volume 2
Unit 5 – The Mighty Word: Oral Language and Vocabulary
Unit 6 – Digging for Meaning: Understanding Reading Comprehension
Unit 7 – Text-Driven Comprehension Instruction
Unit 8 – The Reading-Writing Connection

LETRS for Administrators Content

Volume 1
Unit 1 – Using Systems and Implementation Science to Improve Literacy Outcomes
Unit 2 – Universal Instruction at the Word-Recognition Level
Unit 3 – Universal Instruction at the Language Comprehension Level
Unit 4 – Leadership, Assessment, Data-Based Decision Making, and Literacy Intervention
Unit 5 – Professional Development, Community and Family Involvement, Problem-Solving, and Sustainability Planning

Participants work through material from each unit on the online learning platform and in the print manual, which includes checks for understanding. At the end of each unit, teachers complete a bridge-to-practice activity (LETRS for Administrators does not have bridge-to-practice activities). Once each unit is completed, participants then join in a multi-hour live virtual session where they discuss the content further, ask questions, and discuss strategies with the facilitator and other participants. Upon completion of a volume, participants take a final summative assessment.

Cohort 1 began in fall 2022 and Cohort 2 launched in fall 2023, with plans to launch Cohort 3 in fall 2024. Teachers participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies in Cohorts 1 and 2 are the main focus of this report, although administrators were also included in data collection.

Understanding the Science of Reading

Kentucky's efforts to implement the reading academies program are situated in a broader national context of states and districts adopting evidence-based reading programs and practices that align with the science of reading. In many academic and practitioner circles, the science of reading represents a body of evidence about learning to read, what skills are involved in reading, cognitive processes involved in learning to read, and applying this body of research to instruction to foster skilled reading (e.g., Petscher et al., 2020; Seidenberg, 2013; Snowling et al., 2022). At the heart of this rich, ever-evolving body of research are key theoretical frameworks (e.g., Simple View of Reading: Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Scarborough's Reading Rope: Scarborough, 2001) that describe skilled reading as a complex process where the reader not only decodes the written word effectively but also builds a coherent mental representation of the text (Hulme & Snowling, 2012). Essentially, the science of reading focuses on five reading subskills: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Center on Improving Literacy, 2022). The science of reading framework differs from a balanced literacy or "whole-word" approach. The former uses a building-block approach to reading instruction by prioritizing teaching children foundational reading skills. The latter emphasizes giving students the opportunity to discover the meaning of the text through strategies such as three-cueing where students use three different sources of information: meaning from context or pictures, syntax, and visual information such as letters or parts of words. Structured literacy, the application of the science of reading framework to instructional practice, prioritizes the systematic and explicit instruction of foundational reading skills thus providing literacy practitioners with the tools to deliver targeted and responsive evidence-based literacy instruction (Spear-Swerling, 2019).

Impacts and Outcomes of Literacy Professional Development Initiatives in Other States

Declines in reading proficiency levels in recent years (U.S. Department of Education, 2019) have led to an increasing number of states opting to reform their state's literacy initiatives in favor of the science of reading approach to better align teaching practice with research about how children learn to read and why they may struggle. Although states have by and large adopted the science of reading framework, they vary on the scope and implementation strategy as they target different components of literacy instruction, including training teachers on the science of reading though professional development and teacher preparatory programs, adoption of science-of-reading-backed high-quality instructional resources (HQIRs) and curricula, promoting a literacy-rich home environment by engaging with families and the community as well as provisions for districts/local

education agencies to facilitate this shift to a science-of-reading approach. To help situate the Kentucky Reading Academies in the broader context of ongoing statewide literacy initiatives, this section focuses on discussing literacy professional development in these statewide literacy initiatives.

Mississippi – In 2014, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) provided K–3 educators with early literacy professional development through the LETRS program. Mississippi educators participated in the program in two phases where they had 6 weeks to complete Phase 1 of the LETRS program (Units 1–3 and 7), followed by a 3-day in-person training and then another 6 weeks to complete Phase 2 (Units 4–6), followed by another round of 3-day in-person training. The first phase of LETRS professional development was provided in one academic year and the second phase in the subsequent year. While the training was free and open to all K–3 educators, it was mandated for educators in schools with the highest population of students with low performance on the state literacy assessment. Findings from the 2017 evaluation of Mississippi's early literacy professional development initiative showed significant increases in teachers' knowledge of early literacy skills as well as increases in the quality of literacy instruction, student engagement, and teaching competencies (Folsom et al., 2017). Upon completion of the professional learning initiative in 2016, 36% of Grade 3 students reached proficiency on the state reading assessments (MDE, 2017) which had increased to 48% in the 2019 school year (MDE, 2019). Grade 3 reading proficiency levels had decreased in the aftermath of the pandemic, but not by much (i.e., 46% were proficient: MDE, 2022), but proficiency levels are currently on the upward trend with 52% of Grade 3 students reaching proficiency (MDE, 2023). Similar trends were observed on the NAEP where Grade 4 reading scale scores increased from 209 in 2013, when the Literacy-Based Promotion Act (2013) was passed, to 219 in 2019. Scaled scores in reading decreased slightly in the 2022 NAEP to 217 (U.S. Department of Education, 2022) likely due to the pandemic-related learning loss. While these increases may be due to a plethora of other literacy initiatives provided by the MDE, these trends suggest that there may be a delay for interventions to take effect on student reading outcomes.

North Carolina – Through the Excellent Public Schools Act in 2021, PreK–5 educators in North Carolina received training on foundational literacy skills through the LETRS program. The North Carolina professional development initiative is similar to that of the Reading Academies in that educators can choose to enroll in one of three cohorts scheduled for each school year. Preliminary findings from Cohort 1 teachers who had completed the LETRS training are promising, specifically that North Carolina's statewide literacy benchmark results showed that a larger proportion of K–3 students were on track and were performing at or above previous benchmark scores (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2023). From these preliminary findings, Kindergarten and Grade 1 students were observed to have benefitted the most from the shift to the science of reading compared to students in Grades 2 and 3, which may be due to virtual instruction students received during the pandemic where teaching foundational literacy skills such as phonics is a challenge in a remote setting (Kramer & Hicks, 2023).

Colorado – The Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development, or READ, Act (2012) was revised in 2019 to require K–3 educators who provide literacy instruction (i.e., reading interventionists and teachers) to complete a minimum of 45 hours of evidence-based training in reading instruction. This training requirement could be fulfilled either by participating in a Colorado

Department of Education (CDE)-provided training or a training from CDE's approved list of professional learning, completing a university course (graduate or undergraduate level) related to literacy instruction, completing an endorsement or a state board approved assessment, or a district training program. An independent evaluation of this training initiative in its third year reported that immediate benefits of this training were seen on teachers' knowledge and beliefs about their instructional practice, however, only a few schools had seen this shift translate to student outcomes (Grogan et al., 2023).

Tennessee – During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tennessee General Assembly passed the Tennessee Literacy Success Act, which necessitated all teachers complete a foundational literacy skills course by 2023. Tennessee's professional learning for K–5 teachers took place in two parts over 2 weeks during the summer. First, teachers participated in an online asynchronous course on science of reading concepts. The second part entailed an in-person 5-day workshop that trained teachers to apply learnings to their instructional practices through lesson plans and instructional materials. Stipends were made available to teachers upon completion of this training. As a result of this professional learning—along with other initiatives (e.g., a literacy research center, secondary literacy initiatives, family resources, implementation of HQIRs, and so forth) passed through the Tennessee Literacy Success Act—improvements in Grade 3 reading scores on the state reading assessments were seen with 40% of Grade 3 students reaching proficiency (Tennessee Department of Education, 2023).

Program Evaluation

To understand the outcomes and impacts of the Kentucky Reading Academies on student and teacher outcomes, the KDE contracted with ICF to conduct an external evaluation of the reading academies program, including the implementation of the LETRS professional learning opportunity and the eventual coaching model.

The goals for this evaluation are to better understand the extent to which the Kentucky Reading Academies program is meeting its goals of influencing education knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction through the LETRS professional learning program and the eventual coaching model. This evaluation will also make recommendations based on the study findings related to the effectiveness of the professional learning and coaching model.

This study has four primary research questions that together seek to help the KDE and other stakeholders understand the extent and ways in which participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies is shaping educator practice and student learning.

Kentucky Reading Academies Evaluation Research Questions

Research Question 1: To what extent and in what ways does participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies influence educator knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction?

Research Question 2: To what extent are the Kentucky Reading Academies' five literacy goals for educator and student learning met?

a. Increased teacher knowledge regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle.
b. Increased teacher capacity to incorporate instructional strategies aligned to their new learning regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle into their classroom practice.
c. Increased adoption of high-quality instructional resources for reading and writing at Tier 1 with aligned resources at Tiers 2–3.
d. Increased student progress toward grade-level proficiency based on universal screeners and diagnostic assessments.
e. Increased student outcomes at Grade 3 on the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA) for reading.

Research Question 3: To what extent does each element of the LETRS program (digital learning platform, print materials, live virtual sessions, bridge-to-practice activities) positively influence educator knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction? How?

Research Question 4: When the literacy coaching model is established, to what extent are the school-based coaches effective in supporting and achieving positive literacy outcomes? *(Note that this question will be addressed in Year 2 of this evaluation)*

ICF utilized a mixed-methods evaluation approach that included quantitative metrics collected through teacher surveys and student assessments along with qualitative data collected through school-based observations and focus groups with instructional staff and school leaders. The first year of this evaluation consisted of four types of data sources.

Data Sources Used to Address Research Questions

- Two rounds of surveys with teachers and administrators participating in the LETRS professional learning program;
- Two rounds of focus groups with teachers and administrators participating in the LETRS professional learning program;
- Extant data from the Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) including de-identified demographic and academic data from both teachers and students; and
- Classroom observations of teachers participating in the LETRS professional learning occurring in spring 2024.

Findings from across these methods were examined for contradictions and confirmations (Johnson et al., 2007) and triangulated to produce the following comprehensive picture of the Kentucky Reading Academies program, including its strengths and weaknesses; factors that contribute to its success; its influence on students, teachers, and schools; and potential steps that could be taken to refine and customize the program over time. Detailed methods are presented in Appendix B.

Findings in this report are organized into themes according to four types of outcomes evaluated:

- Section II includes formative outcomes related to educators' participation in and perceptions of the Kentucky Reading Academies.
- Section III discusses educator outcomes about the influence of the Kentucky Reading Academies on educators' improved knowledge, changing beliefs, and enhanced classroom instruction and educational practice.
- Section IV presents information about the extent to which participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies has shaped student outcomes.
- Section V reports on the adoption and implementation of HQIRs in the midst of Kentucky Reading Academies participation.

Finally, the report concludes with a discussion of all these findings aligned with key research questions and situated in the context of broader literacy research. Recommendations for adjustments to the program and for ongoing implementation are included in the conclusion, along with a discussion about next steps and considerations. Quotations from LETRS participants are presented throughout along with the participants' roles and, where relevant, their cohort of participation.

II. Participation and Perceptions of the Reading Academies

A key element of this evaluation involved understanding the perceptions and experiences of teachers and administrators participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies. This included explorations of educators' motivation to participate, patterns of participation, and perceptions of the Kentucky Reading Academies as a whole as well as individual components of the LETRS professional learning platform. Across these domains, this evaluation also examined barriers and facilitators to participation in the reading academies along with current participants' recommendations about who would benefit the most from participating in this program in the future. Findings related to each of these domains are presented in this section.

Motivation to Participate

Fall 2023 and spring 2024 focus group participants were asked to describe their reasons for joining the Kentucky Reading Academies and, although all participants expressed unique perspectives, several themes emerged that expressed teachers' and administrators' motivations for participating. Findings are presented thematically.

Administrators learned about LETRS through district leadership, colleagues, or personal research. Staff from the KDE began recruiting teachers and administrators into the Kentucky Reading Academies program in April 2022. Administrators participating in focus groups mainly reported learning about the opportunity to participate in LETRS through an invitation from their district or local cooperative. However, some were already aware of the program through colleagues or their own research. Some administrators reported that participation was an expectation from their district leadership, while others reported making a personal decision to opt into the program.

> *I was doing a walk-through in a neighboring county last school year and got to speak to a kindergarten teacher who was doing things a little differently than I'd seen in my building. And she was in the LETRS … so I wrote it down and started to ask around.*
> - Principal

> *Our principal told us about it. … And I've just never been confident in teaching reading, so I just wanted to be better.*
> - Grade 3 teacher

Teachers learned about LETRS primarily through administrators or peers. Among teachers, those participating in the fall 2023 focus groups primarily reported learning about LETRS through their principals or through specialists in the school. A few staff serving as interventionists or specialists also reported hearing about LETRS through an email from KDE staff. Some teachers in Cohort 2 learned about the opportunity from those in Cohort 1.

Administrators hoped LETRS would allow them to better support teachers. Administrators in the fall and spring focus groups generally reported going into the LETRS program with excitement about the possibilities of the program. One administrator shared, "I have a commitment to helping my teachers grow professionally, but also deepening their knowledge so that our students will leave our school as readers." Additionally, some reading interventionists and curriculum and instruction specialists doing the teacher modules wanted to provide better support to the

teachers with whom they work. This sentiment was echoed by a reading interventionist who reported that she "wanted to learn more about the science of reading, instruction around reading skills, so that I can support teachers with our curriculum."

> *We just kind of felt like there was some piece of something that we were missing that we just had a large number of kids that couldn't read, and I knew my teachers were teaching and there were lots of good things going on, but we just couldn't figure it out.*
> – Director of instruction

Teachers were motivated to join the Kentucky Reading Academies program to increase their literacy skills to better support students. In particular, teachers reported an interest in expanding their knowledge and skills around literacy and a desire to better help their own students with reading. Teachers in the fall 2023 and spring 2024 focus groups frequently reported a desire to expand their own set of tools and strategies to help struggling readers through participating in LETRS. For example, one first-grade teacher in Cohort 2 explained, "I currently have 14 [students] in my class that have one [reading improvement plan], and my goal with LETRS was to … find the best resources that I could to help pull them out of those reading plans."

Some teachers, specialists, and interventionists joined the Kentucky Reading Academies to position themselves as leaders among other teachers. Many teachers in both the fall and spring focus groups joined LETRS out of a desire to continue or step into formal or informal leadership roles in their schools. One veteran Grade 5 teacher said, "I need to be a leader in my position for other teachers who are teaching reading." Other teachers reported signing up for LETRS in part to set an example for newer teachers about the need for and benefits of continuous professional development.

> *I'm new in this position and I'm working with primary grade teachers and my background is in middle school language arts and library science. I wanted to learn more about the science of reading, instruction around reading skills so that I can support teachers with our curriculum.*
> – Reading interventionist

Some administrators participated in LETRS for Educators to further extend program benefit. Four administrators who participated in the focus groups signed up to participate in the teacher modules once they finished with LETRS for Administrators. One administrator in the fall 2023 focus groups reported doing both programs simultaneously. Five other administrators expressed their intention of taking the teacher modules to be able to better help the teachers they supported and the students they served. One director of counseling instruction shared:

> *I felt like while LETRS for the Administrators was good … I didn't feel like it was able to mesh well with me and my people. I didn't ever feel like I was on the same page as they were, so if I could have done the teacher one with them—and maybe sprinkled in a little bit of administrator here and there—but that would have been more beneficial.*

Participation Patterns and Progression through the LETRS Professional Learning

Participants in focus groups provided insights on the degree to which participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies varied across schools and districts and shared general impressions regarding the program.

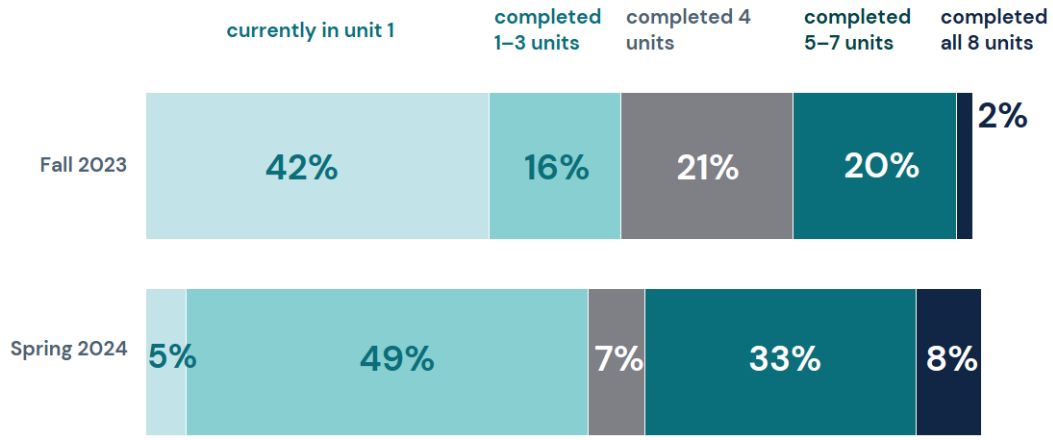
Participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies varied by district and school. Some districts or school administrators encouraged or required teachers or administrators in their districts or schools to participate in the program, which tended to result in larger cohorts of participants in that district or school. In contrast, some individuals were the only participant of the reading academies in their school or grade level. This trend was mirrored by focus group participants, all of whom had colleagues in the same school doing LETRS; but the degree of participation varied greatly. Some participants had only one colleague and others had 20 or more. Some schools had only teachers in Cohort 2 and other schools had both cohorts. In one school, all kindergarten teachers were in Cohort 2 of LETRS but upper grades were not participating. In another school, all Grade 2 teachers were in Cohort 2 of LETRS with other grades having some or no teachers participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies. Other focus group participants represented a third school, for example, where only one teacher and one administrator were part of the reading academies going through LETRS. The implications of this range of participation are discussed more at the end of this section in Facilitators and Barriers to Participation in the Reading Academies.

> *All of our teachers, K–5, are doing LETRS. Our grade-level teams definitely collaborate during professional learning circles and it's interesting to see how each grade level pulls out different components of LETRS. Not that they're not using all of them, but you definitely see more of some components at different grade levels.*
> – Administrator, Cohort 1

Survey respondents from both cohorts reported their progression in the LETRS professional learning, which helps to contextualize other important findings presented in this report.

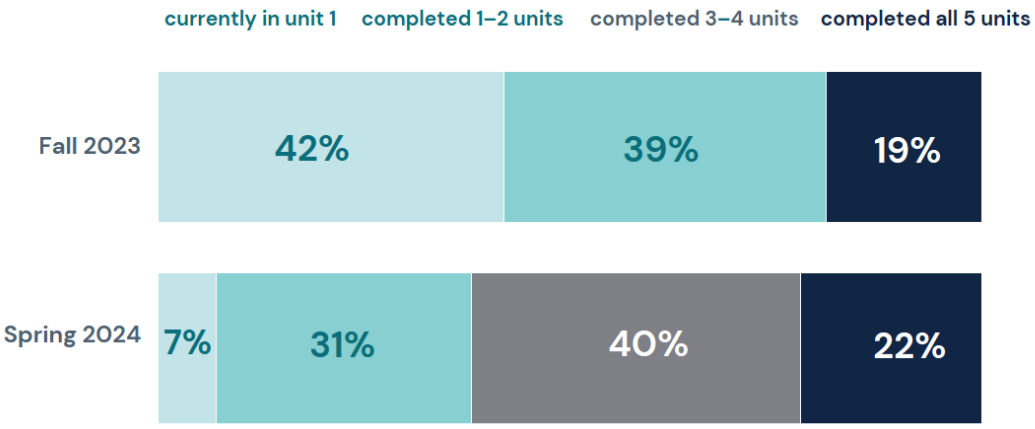
The majority of survey respondents were in the early units of LETRS content, which shaped their perceptions and reflections. At the time of the fall 2023 survey, 58% of respondents were enrolled in Cohort 2, having begun LETRS at the start of the 2023–2024 school year and were in the very early units of LETRS content. Even at the time of the spring survey, the vast majority of these participants had not yet completed the first volume of LETRS (see Exhibit 1). This is largely as expected; the first year the LETRS program covers units 1-4 and educators had several months left in the year to complete this content at the time of the survey. Despite this limited progress, as this report goes on to describe in Section III, nearly all participants expressed a positive experience in the Kentucky Reading Academies and had already seen LETRS content start to shape their knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Relatively few survey respondents who had enrolled in Cohort 1 had completed all eight units across both volumes of LETRS for Educators at the time of the spring survey (8%), but they also expressed positive impressions of their participation and its' influence on their literacy understand and instruction.

Exhibit 1. Progress among LETRS for Educators Participants in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024



Surveyed administrators were more likely to have completed their LETRS program than teachers, given that their program was designed to be completed in a single year, but the majority were still in progress. At the time of the fall survey, 42% of administrators who responded to the survey indicated that they were currently in Unit 1 of LETRS. At the other end of the spectrum, 19% reported having already completed all five units of LETRS as part of Cohort 1 (see Exhibit 2). Respondents' progress had steadily increased by the time of the spring survey, with just 7% of administrators indicating that they were in Unit 1, and 62% advancing to Unit 3 or higher. This progress informed their outcomes, as discussed in Section III.

Exhibit 2. Progress among LETRS for Administrators Participants in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024



General Perceptions of the Reading Academies

Focus group participants shared overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding their participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies.

Teachers and administrators reported that participating the program was "eye-opening." Teachers and administrators in the fall and spring focus groups were asked to describe their

experience participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies in just one word. A variety of descriptors were shared, as seen in Exhibit 3, with respondents most frequently describing their participation as "eye-opening" and "informative."

Exhibit 3. One-Word Descriptions of Participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies by Teachers and Administrators

Many veteran teachers shared that the LETRS professional learning was the best professional development experience of their careers. Survey participants were asked to share if they would recommend Kentucky Reading Academies participation to their colleagues. As part of their rationale, many respondents indicated that the reading academies and the LETRS professional learning had been more informative and transformative than any other training in which they had participated. For some veteran teachers, this included not only undergraduate learning but also master's degree programs, literacy certifications, and a myriad of professional development opportunities. One special education facilitator said, "This has been the best professional experience of my 21-year career in education." An instructional coach added, "I have learned more in the past year about how children learn to read than I learned getting a bachelor's or two master's degrees." Focus group participants shared similar reactions to the benefits of Kentucky Reading Academies participation, with an administrator echoing the feedback of many teachers, saying, "Many of them [teachers] have a graduate degree, a master's degree as reading specialists and none of this was included." One first-grade teacher who participated in the fall focus groups shared, "Out of all the literacy

> *"LETRS has been the best reading professional development I have ever received in my 22 years of teaching and coaching.*
> - Instructional coach, Cohort 1

programs I've ever been taught or implemented in the classroom, I feel like LETRS is just the most comprehensive and intensive."

The LETRS content generally resonated with participants who highlighted specific knowledge gained as well as practical content that could be implemented in classrooms. Speaking broadly, one curriculum specialist shared, "There are ideals that build on each other. There's a progression of those topics." More specifically, focus group participants particularly highlighted the impact of the content in Unit 1, specifically the content about how the brain learns to read. Several participants in LETRS also valued the applicability of LETRS content. One instructional coach in Cohort 1 said, "Each time I did a session, I walked away with something new that I really wanted to take back and share with the teachers in our building." This sentiment was also shared by grade-level teachers, such as one first-grade teacher who noted that "LETRS strategies are really engaging, so for our children that may struggle in the classroom … they are able to stay focused. And there are lots of great resources in the back of the LETRS manuals, like phonemic awareness assessments."

> *I feel like it's all been very covered thoroughly and well. I've not really found any component of literacy that I've not felt did a good job.*
> - Grade 3 teacher, Cohort 1

Perceptions and Influence of LETRS Components

Focus group and survey participants also provided observations regarding the perceptions and influence of specific LETRS components. Breaking this down to assess the extent to which each LETRS component influenced teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and instruction revealed clear trends and themes about which elements were most utilized and perceived to be the most helpful.

Teachers and administrators from both cohorts spoke highly of their experience with LETRS, including the platform as well as the content. The LETRS professional learning content uses a blended model that includes a print manual, an online learning platform, and live virtual sessions with a trained facilitator. Focus group participants described an appreciation for the various modalities of LETRS and the particular blend of the three primary components—the online platform, the hard-copy manual, and the interactive live facilitated sessions. Participants also highlighted the benefits of going through a self-paced program that also had opportunities for connections with others who were at the same place in their learnings.

Throughout the year, teachers primarily reported using print materials and the virtual live sessions. In looking across several elements of LETRS professional learning, teachers reported that the component they used the most was the print materials (77% used this to a large or very large extent in the fall survey and 79% in the spring survey), followed by the live facilitated sessions (62% in the fall and 66% in the spring) and the bridge-to-practice activities (46% in the fall and 45% in the spring; see Exhibit 4). These trends did not vary substantially by cohort in either the fall or the spring.

> *I love that there are both online versions of learning and live versions of learning the same material.*
> - Grade 3 teacher

Exhibit 4. Use of LETRS Components by Participants in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024

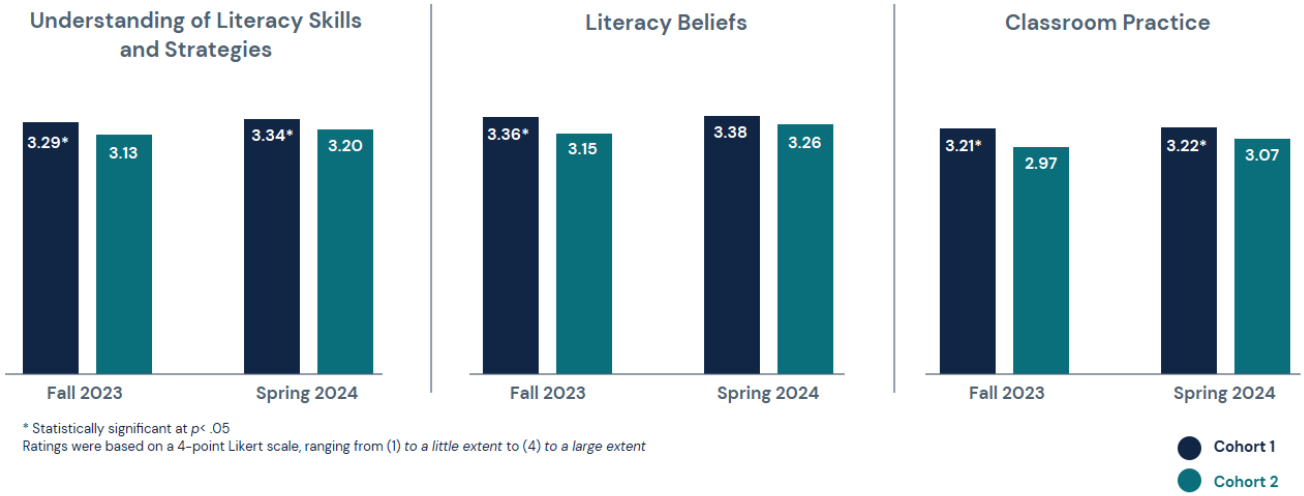
	Fall 2023 (n=855)					Spring 2024 (n=626)				
	Not at all	A little extent	Some extent	A large extent	A very large extent	Not at all	A little extent	Some extent	A large extent	A very large extent
Print materials (incl. manuals)	1%	4%	18%	34%	43%	<1%	2%	17%	36%	43%
LETRS live facilitator	5%	5%	28%	34%	28%	3%	6%	26%	37%	29%
Bridge-to-practice activities	7%	13%	34%	31%	15%	5%	13%	37%	32%	13%
Journal	9%	22%	40%	20%	9%	9%	24%	42%	18%	7%
LETRS help center	60%	23%	13%	2%	2%	56%	26%	14%	2%	2%

Print Materials

The primary print material used by LETRS participants is the LETRS manual, which includes key objectives, relevant research embedded activities, and reviews of key concepts for every session within each unit of the LETRS professional learning sequence. Participants also have access to supplemental printed material such as sample assessments, resources for students, and planning tools.

Survey participants reported that print materials had a positive influence on their understanding, beliefs, and practices. During the fall survey, both cohorts reported that print materials to a large extent had a positive impact on their literacy skills and strategies, literacy beliefs, and classroom practices. This belief may be associated with length of time in the program, with those in Cohort 1 indicating statistically significantly higher ratings than those in Cohort 2 across all three of these domains (Exhibit 5). These trends continued through the spring with Cohort 1 again indicating greater influence of print materials on skills and strategies, beliefs, and classroom practice than Cohort 2. This difference between cohorts remained statistically significant during the spring survey for an understanding of literacy skills and strategies and for classroom practice.

Exhibit 5. Average Ratings of the Influence of LETRS' Print Materials on LETRS Participants in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024, by Cohort



Focus group participants reported similarly positive impressions of the print materials. Across fall and spring focus groups, participants had positive comments about the influence of the print materials on their learning and practice, including one first-grade teacher who shared:

> *I've enjoyed having the workbooks, the two texts, the volume texts they sent us. They're set up really well and easy to understand. And within them they have a lot of extra resources you can refer to as well. So that's been really helpful to have on hand and be able to keep referring to.*

Online Learning Platform

LETRS' online learning platform is another primary content-delivery component of LETRS professional learning and includes relevant research, video modeling of teachers demonstrating strategies or approaches discussed in the corresponding manual text, interactive activities such as the bridge-to-practice activities, and participants' journals.

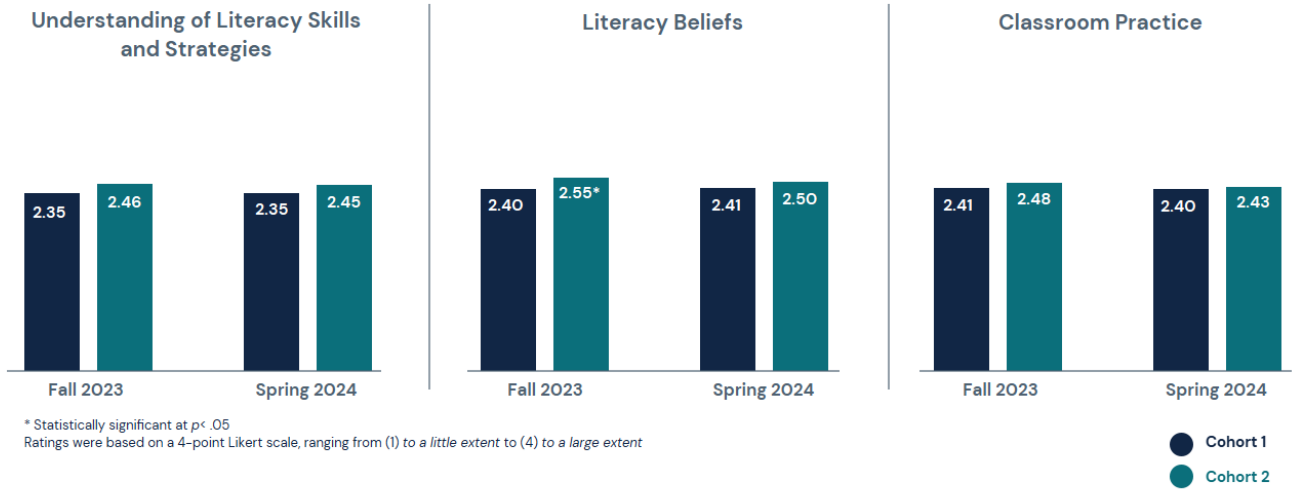
During focus groups, many educators provided positive opinions about the overall online learning platform. Participants appreciated the applicability of the online learning platform and the diverse modes of conveying information. One instructional specialist explained, "I love how the research on the online platform is connected to examples of what's happening in people's classrooms." A reading interventionist also mentioned, "If you have to read something, it's very short and it's the way it switches from video to reading to slideshow to video to questions."

Educators varied in their use of the bridge-to-practice activities. Embedded within the online learning platform, bridge-to-practice activities provided teachers with a concrete opportunity to practice implementing pieces of the content covered in each unit. This element was available to all participants, but during the focus groups, some teachers indicated that the bridge-to-practice activities were required for the teachers doing the LETRS program to qualify for a rank change. This seemed to influence the extent to which participants completed this activity, with some teachers not eligible for a rank change sharing that they did not regularly implement these activities. Across

all participants, roughly one-third reported using these activities "to some extent," with another third reporting "to a large extent" (Exhibit 4 above).

Participants in Cohort 2 reported slightly higher influences of bridge-to-practice activities on their understanding, beliefs, and practices. Survey respondents from Cohort 2 were more likely to indicate that the bridge-to-practice activities positively influenced their literacy skills, beliefs, and classroom practices, with a statistically significant difference seen between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 for literacy beliefs at the time of the fall survey (see Exhibit 6). At the time of the spring survey, respondents from Cohort 2 continued to rate these activities as having greater influence on their literacy understanding, beliefs, and practices, although these differences were no longer significant.

Exhibit 6. Average Ratings of the Influence of LETRS' Bridge-to-Practice Activities on LETRS Participants in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024, by Cohort



* Statistically significant at $p < .05$
Ratings were based on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) *to a little extent* to (4) *to a large extent*

Teachers in the focus groups also shared varying perspectives on the benefits of bridge-to-practice activities. Some teachers reported that in their experience, the bridge-to-practice activities were more helpful in theory than in practice. For example, a Grade 1 teacher said, "I think [the bridge-to-practice activities] have been really challenging, which feels really silly because, like, that's applying what we're learning. But it's not always timed with what applies for my students." In addition, some LETRS participants who did not see students regularly or saw different students each day found completing these activities to be challenging.

LETRS participants shared divergent opinions on the benefits and relevance of videos embedded in the online learning platform. For some participating educators, the videos were the best component. An educator recovery specialist administrator said that "for the teacher version, personally, I think the video recordings of the teachers in action are the most valuable thing." However, some participants found the videos unrealistic, noting that they did not reflect a current public-school classroom. One director of counseling instruction shared:

> *A lot of times the videos are like professional videos. They're made because that's what it's supposed to look like. But sometimes we need videos of … what it actually*

looks like, because in our mind, it's supposed to be perfect, but we all know that I have never taught one lesson that's gone exactly the way I planned it.

Other components of the online learning platform were substantially less utilized. In addition to write-ups of research, embedded videos, and the bridge-to-practice activities, the online learning platform also hosted a journal and a help center, both of which were less utilized than the other elements. Both cohorts described the help center as having the smallest influence on their literacy understanding, beliefs, and practices. The utility of the journal also lagged well behind that of the other components, with participants indicating that they used the journal between a little and some throughout their LETRS experience.

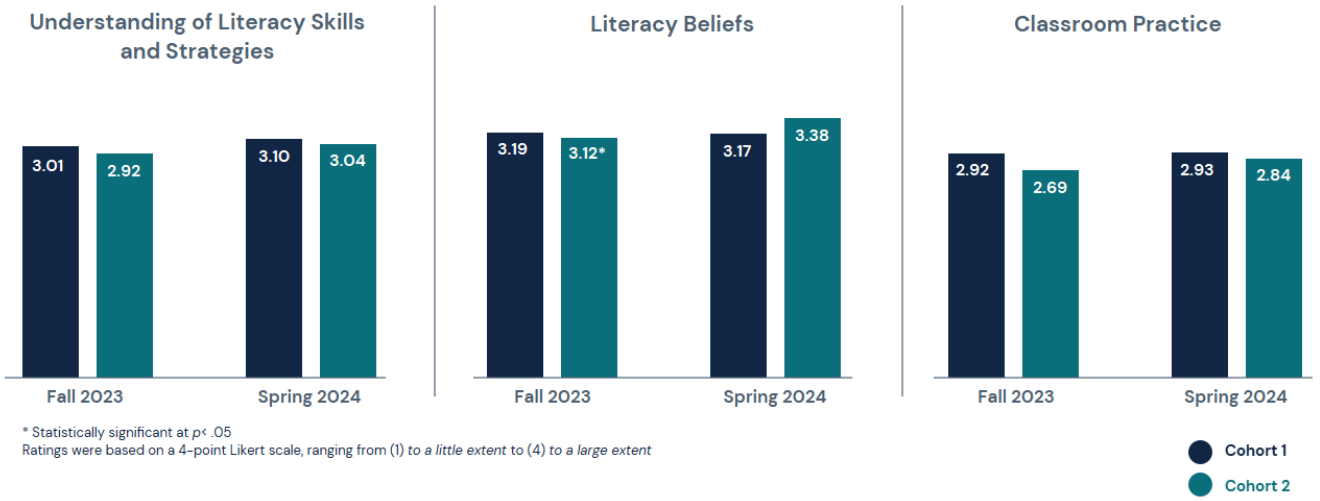
Virtual Live Sessions

LETRS participants were required to attend a facilitated virtual live session that corresponded to the content from each unit in the manual and online learning platform. Focus group participants generally found live sessions useful, sharing that the facilitator functioned as an expert to address questions and provide more clarity. Some focus group participants also appreciated that the live virtual sessions allowed for interaction with other participants with different experiences and inputs.

Across both cohorts, survey respondents reported that the live virtual sessions were widely utilized and had positively influenced them. In particular, the live virtual sessions had a positive influence on participants' literacy understanding, literacy beliefs, and classroom practices across both the fall and the spring. This influence may be associated with length of time in cohort, although this difference was only statistically significant for the influence on classroom practice and there, only at the time of the fall survey administration (see Exhibit 7).

> *I think one thing that I've really enjoyed is the energy of the in-person [sessions]. And the presenters have been really good.*
> – Intervention teacher

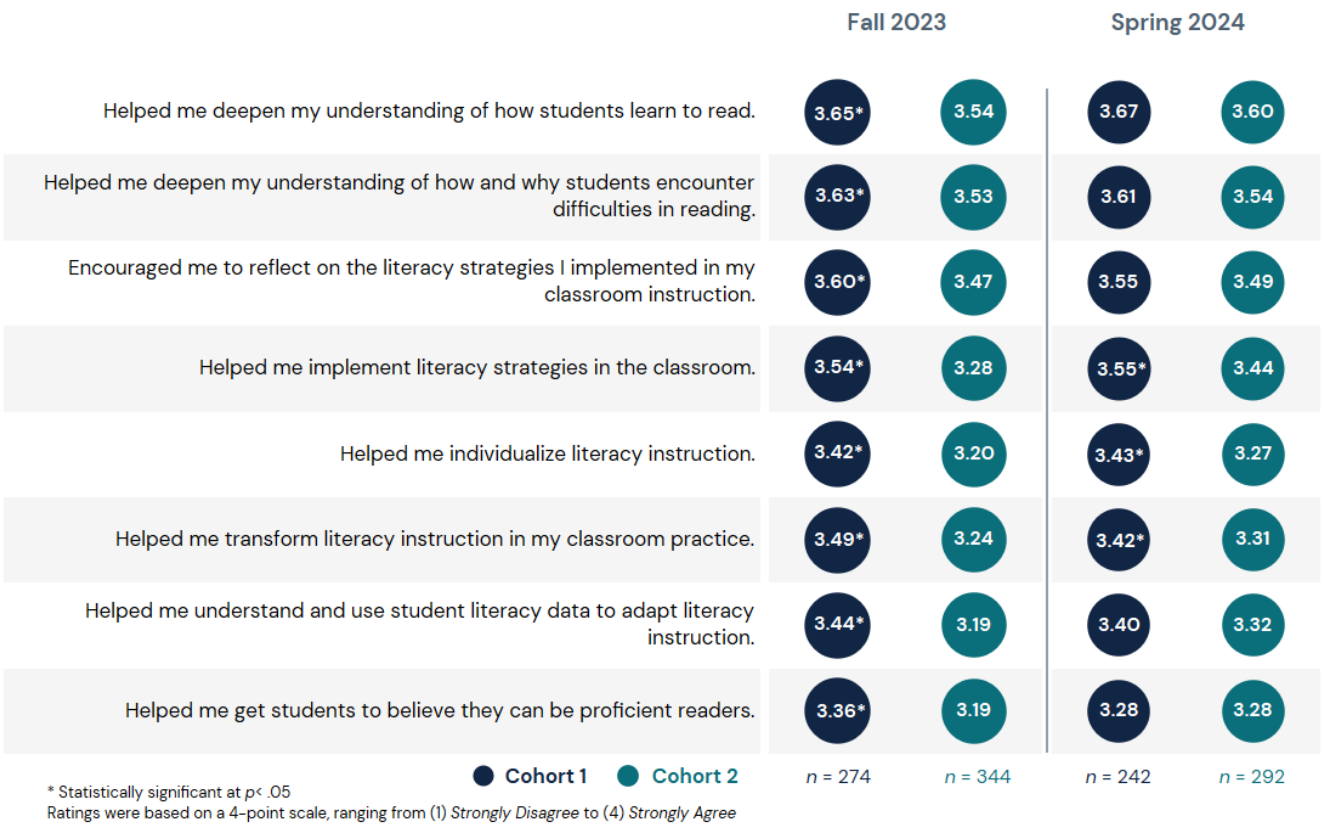
Exhibit 7. Average Ratings of the Influence of the Facilitators of LETRS' Live Virtual Sessions on LETRS Participants in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024, by Cohort



* Statistically significant at $p < .05$
Ratings were based on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) *to a little extent* to (4) *to a large extent*

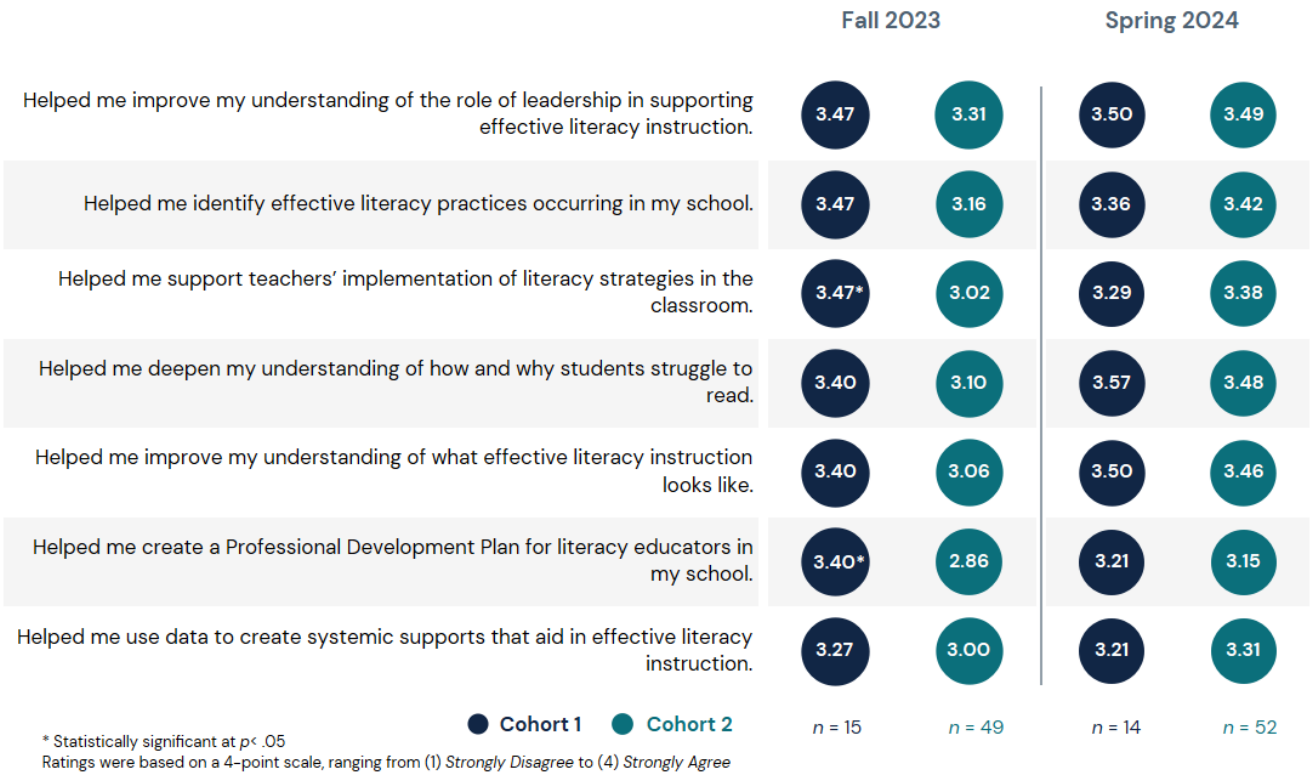
Across all respondents, teachers were generally pleased with the live virtual session facilitators. Teachers were asked to report their agreement with various statements related to their interactions with live facilitators on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Overall, survey respondents in the fall and again in the spring tended to average a rating between agree (3) and strongly agree (4) that the facilitators of the live virtual sessions helped with key areas of understanding and implementation (see Exhibit 8). Participants in Cohort 1 expressed statistically significantly higher agreement about the benefits of the facilitators compared with those in Cohort 2.

Exhibit 8. Agreement about Live Facilitators for LETRS for Educators in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024, by Cohort



As with teachers, administrators reported similar levels of agreement related to the influence of live facilitators on their understanding and implementation. Administrators were asked similar questions about the facilitators of live virtual sessions, with most statements meriting agreement or strong agreement. Cohort 1 administrators also had areas where they were significantly more likely to agree with the benefit of their facilitators compared with those in Cohort 2, particularly that facilitators helped the administrator to support teachers' implementation of literacy standards in the classroom and that facilitators helped the administrator to create a professional development plan for educators in their school (see Exhibit 9).

Exhibit 9. Agreement about Live Facilitators for LETRS for Administrators in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024, by Cohort



Participants did have some challenges completing the live virtual sessions. Many teachers expressed frustrations about the length of the live virtual sessions, describing them as excessive. In addition to the length, teachers' experiences with these sessions seemed to vary based on the facilitator, the content of the session, and the degree of preparation that participants brought to the meetings.

> *If you get a group when you're put into a breakout session and they are willing to talk and connect, it's great. But sometimes you find yourself in a breakout room and no one will put their video on or no one will speak.*
> – Grade 1 teacher

Facilitators and Barriers to Participation in the Reading Academies

Participants described several key factors that influenced their participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies, either positively or negatively. Overall, while support from administrators and encouragement from other staff helped increase motivation to sign up for the program, some teachers indicated that they felt they lacked the time to participate in addition to not seeing the need for additional content knowledge in literacy, especially among veteran teachers. Additionally, there are some concerns that the mix of content across different grade bands within LETRS makes it difficult to determine which teachers should participate as not all content seems applicable to every grade level. Key themes are presented below.

Administrator or district support strengthened participation. A key driver in initial sign-ups was administrator/district support. Teachers appreciate the incentives provided by the districts. Some districts provided a stipend while others allow participants to use the training as professional development hours. And some districts provide substitute teachers to allow participants to do the modules and attend the live session during regular school hours.

Some veteran teachers struggled to understand the benefits of participating. Some administrators and teachers reported a lack of motivation to participate among veteran teachers. Two administrators mentioned that some National Board for Professional Teaching Standards-certified teachers and veteran teachers are reluctant to participate in the program. When asked about what the reason could be, one principal mentioned skepticism: "If you've been in education very long; some of my veteran teachers, they've seen things come and go."

LETRS participation requires a substantial time commitment, which acted as a barrier to participation. The volume of content and time required for participation was seen by some as a substantial challenge to fully benefit from the program, particularly among those who lacked tangible district support through stipends, the ability to use professional hours, or additional substitute teachers to facilitate participation. Although many teachers reported feeling supported by their administrators in their LETRS participation, many expect more assistance since they are investing an average of 10 hours per unit of their own time to complete the modules.

> *Our district does not do any type of stipend or payment for teachers that are participating in this. Because of that, I don't feel good as a leader making them take it. It's a lot of time.*
> – Principal

> *I find the Zoom sessions to be too long to be fully present through. And that's frustrating.*
> – Grade 1 teacher

Confusion persists among educators about which teachers should participate in LETRS. Although LETRS has been advertised as available to and useful for all K–5 teachers, several teachers mentioned that the way units are structured and the mix of content from different grade bands might make it so that not all information throughout the program is applicable to all teachers. They pointed out that while the first units cover phonics and phonetic awareness, which seems to be the emphasis in K–3 grades, later units cover vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency, which seems to be the focus in older grades. The result was a lack of clarity among educators about for whom LETRS would be most beneficial, particularly as information was shared by those who had only completed their first year of the program.

> *Some of the feedback that we've had from the teachers … after the first year [was] … 'This is great, but this is for primary teachers. We teach fourth and fifth grade. This doesn't really apply to us.'*
> – Academic program consultant

Recommendations about Future Participation

Across all survey and focus group participants, the vast majority indicated that they would recommend the Kentucky Reading Academies and LETRS professional learning to their colleagues.

However, both groups repeatedly made the caveat that participants should be aware of the substantial workload required by participation. With this came several distinct themes related to who would benefit the most from future participation and recommended adjustments related to elements of LETRS.

Future Participants for the Reading Academies

Survey participants listed all elementary teachers as the group that would benefit the most from program participation, especially early elementary and new teachers. Several individuals suggested that the deep understanding of the way the brain learns to read, the fundamental shift in understanding the why behind reading instruction, and additional tools teachers can use to help students in different situations would be helpful for teachers across primary school grades. One third-grade teacher said:

> *I would recommend the LETRS academy to any/all educators, especially those in the early childhood and K–3 environment. This program truly deepens your knowledge of literacy to where you can easily help others do the same. I've had so many "light bulb" moments and have in turn seen them in my students … and that is priceless.*

> *I think it is important for all elementary educators to participate in the Kentucky Reading Academies. These educators need a deep understanding of the way the brain learns to read. This is vital in reaching the most students.*
> – District administrator

> *I think it should be almost a requirement for all K–5 elementary teachers in the state.*
> – Grade 1 teacher

Other participants felt that the Kentucky Reading Academies program was best suited for educators with a literacy focus. Respondents mentioned reading specialists, interventionists, and those focused on English language arts in upper elementary school as educators who would benefit the most from participating in the reading academies. One Grade 2 teacher said, "I feel that it would be beneficial for teachers to complete the reading academies if they are going to be teaching or supporting reading in primary grades."

New teachers were also reported to uniquely benefit from the Kentucky Reading Academies. Other surveyed participants reported that new teachers would get disproportionate benefit from going through the program. In most cases, this was tied to a belief that new teachers did not emerge from their preparatory programs well-equipped to teach literacy, and that LETRS would increase the knowledge and confidence of these teachers. One veteran kindergarten teacher shared:

> *If I could have had this information when I was a first- or second-year teacher as opposed to now, I think back to my first classes and I feel like I did such a disservice to them because I didn't know any better.*

> *I would recommend participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies to my colleagues (especially beginning teachers) because it provides teachers with such a vast knowledge and understanding of the how and why we teach reading.*
> – Reading specialist

Teachers were divided about the need for upper elementary teachers to go through the Kentucky Reading Academies. Some teachers of older grades recommended participation in the program to both help students who are struggling and to understand the fundamental principles of literacy that older students build from once they are able to read. One Grade 4 teacher explained, "I have always taught an upper grade level, so truly to teach a student to read was not in my realm of expertise. I think all [English language arts] ELA teachers should have this in their back pocket to help meet the needs of their struggling students." In contrast, some Grade 4 and 5 teachers who focused on math and science felt that the LETRS content was not as beneficial to their teaching practice.

Recommended Adjustments to Elements of LETRS

Participants most frequently cited challenges related to the live virtual sessions and expressed recommendations for making these more engaging. Participants indicated that the length of live sessions caused some issues and that separating longer sessions into shorter sessions would be helpful. As one participant described, "I appreciate the live facilitators. However, 3 hours is a very long time after having taught all day. I wish that these could be a little shorter, maybe 2 hours." Further exacerbating the lengthy time requirements were fellow participants who seemed to make less of an effort in the live virtual sessions. For example, one English language arts teacher shared:

> *It is frustrating to give 3–6 hours of your time … and participate with people who have their cameras off the entire time and are clearly just logged in. It makes breakout rooms difficult and it's just discouraging. There has to be a better way to hold people accountable.*

Several participants recommended changes be made to the bridge-to-practice activities, particularly noting concerns that the activities only worked for teachers in traditional classroom settings. Some teachers described challenges completing or using the bridge-to-practice activities, and wanted to see more options for how to apply LETRS strategies outside of a typical classroom setting. For example, one instructional coach said:

> *It's very challenging for me to complete those because I don't have a regular group of kids that I see. I actually work in four different buildings, and … it just was impossible for me to do it with my schedule consistently in a way that would impact kids.*

Another participant, a speech language pathologist, said:

> *It's hard for me to do a lot of those [bridge-to-practice] things because I don't have a typical classroom and I don't have a classroom full of kids all day, and I run in small groups and they're working on specific goals and it's not always appropriate to the goals that the kids have.*

Other participants said they felt the bridge-to-practice activities were "repetitive," "busy work," or that they "don't always align" with what's happening in the classroom.

III. Educator Outcomes

This evaluation explores elements of the Kentucky Reading Academies' influence on educators, with a particular focus on educators' literacy knowledge, beliefs about literacy, and classroom instruction. This section presents findings from across focus group, survey, and observation data, highlighting common themes that emerged across data sources related to the influence that the Kentucky Reading Academies is having on educators.

Teacher Knowledge

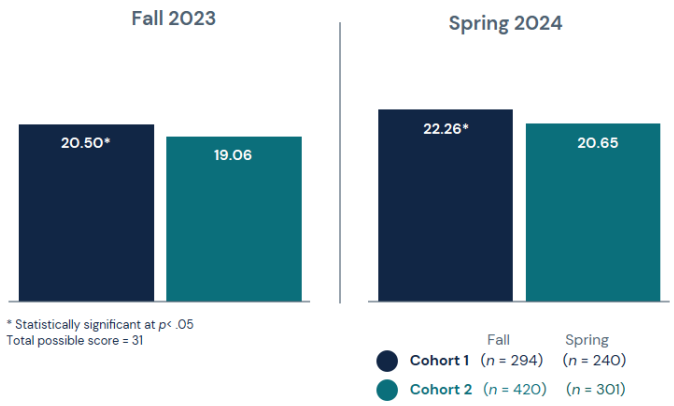
Surveyed teachers completed the Teacher Knowledge of Early Literacy Skills (TKELS; Folsom et al., 2017) in both the fall and the spring to indicate their knowledge on key early literacy concepts and skills. Out of a possible total score of 31, the overall average score of respondents on the TKELS was 19.65 among fall survey respondents (Form A) and 21.37 among spring survey respondents (Form B). Responses to the TKELS were also analyzed for 316 teacher respondents who completed the survey at both points in time—which were just 3 months apart—using a growth model. Focus group participants also shared examples of new or enhanced knowledge gained through LETRS participation during fall and spring focus groups. Key findings are presented below.

Teacher Knowledge of Early Literacy Skills Survey

This validated survey includes two equivalent forms (Form A and B), each consisting of 31 questions related to knowledge, application, and teaching of comprehension, writing and grammar, fluency, vocabulary, spelling, phonological and phonemic awareness, and phonics. Form A was administered in the fall while Form B was administered in the spring.

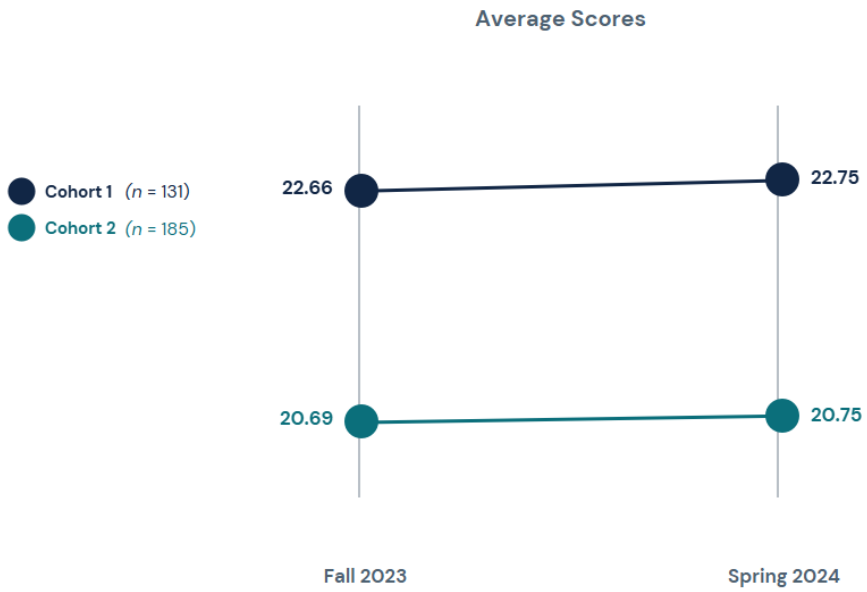
Survey participants in Cohort 1, who were further along in the LETRS professional learning, demonstrated increased knowledge on key early literacy concepts compared to those in Cohort 2. Cohort 1 teachers had a statistically significantly higher score on the TKELS during the fall data collection than Cohort 2 teachers (20.50 versus 19.06; see Exhibit 10). This remained steady into the spring when Cohort 1 educators again had a statistically significantly higher score on the TKELS than Cohort 2 teachers. Teachers across both cohorts demonstrated increases in literacy skills and knowledge measured through the TKELS on the fall and spring surveys.

Exhibit 10. Comparison of Average TKELS Scores in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024, by Cohort



Findings from the growth model indicated that this change in literacy knowledge and skills over the 3-month period between survey administrations was not statistically significant for all teachers in the sample, regardless of cohort (γ_{01} = 0.06, *t* = 0.31, *p* = 0.758; see Exhibit 11). With respect to whether increases in literacy skills and knowledge differed as a function of the cohort in which teachers belonged to, positive albeit non-statistically significant effects were found (γ_{11} = 0.04, *t* = 0.13, *p* = 0.899). Although findings are not statistically significant, increases in literacy knowledge in both cohorts, with Cohort 1 teachers scoring higher on the TKELS than Cohort 2 teachers, is suggestive of the benefits associated with longer exposure from participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies.

Exhibit 11. Growth from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024 on Literacy Knowledge and Skills, by Cohort



Breaking down the results, enhanced literacy knowledge was seen among specific subgroups. Years of teaching experience were positively associated with higher TKELS scores in both the fall and spring surveys, although the precise significance varied from the fall to the spring. Among fall survey respondents, those with 20 or more years of teaching experience showed significantly higher scores than teachers with 4–9 and 0–3 years of experience (21.37 compared with 18.63 and 19.10, respectively). Among spring survey respondents, educators with 9–20 years of experience had significantly higher literacy scores on the TKELS than those with 0–3 years of experience (22.15 versus 20.77). Across both survey administrations, these findings indicate that teachers with more years of experience had higher scores on the TKELS than less-experienced teachers. Moreover, educators participating in the spring survey who were teaching in non-rural schools had a significantly higher score on the TKELS than those in rural schools (22.26 versus 20.65).

Focus group participants in both cohorts reported gaining knowledge related to literacy theory. Teachers and administrators in both cohorts shared several examples of new knowledge or shifts in understanding stemming from their participation in LETRS. In particular, teachers frequently discussed learning more about how the brain processes written language in a way that helped them better understand the science behind reading. Some teachers highlighted learning about specific challenges such as dyslexia and gaining a better understanding of how to help children with that diagnosis. Teachers also discussed benefiting from enhanced understanding about the "why" behind reading practices and strategies as well as how the English language works.

> *There were times that I would stop and be like 'I don't understand why they can't get this.' And, finally, seeing the actual brain mapping and the parts like that was showing me, 'OK, that makes sense.'*
> – Grade 3 teacher

Focus group participants in both cohorts highlighted improved knowledge related to literacy practice. Teachers and administrators shared examples of new knowledge or shifts in understanding during focus group discussions. These included gaining a common terminology for literacy principles and skills as well as discrete knowledge related to phonics, phonemic awareness, decoding, and morphology. Several teachers connected their gains in knowledge to their instructional practice (discussed further in the section on Classroom Instruction), such as one reading interventionist in Cohort 2 who shared, "Knowing how important [phonemic awareness] is, I've put more of a focus on it now just in these past few months and I just see that it really is important."

> *Learning about morphology and the origin of words has added so much to my own knowledge of why we pronounce words the way we do—why you know they're compound, why you know the different pronunciations. In the past, I would be like, 'Well, I don't know the rule; that's just the way it is.'*
> – Grade 1 teacher

Surveyed teachers also reported gaining knowledge through Kentucky Reading Academies participation, which they perceived to strengthen their overall teaching. Respondents valued the new knowledge and theoretical concepts taught in the program and felt they helped empower teachers. In open-ended survey responses, teachers particularly highlighted learning new information about how and why reading difficulties occur and how to address them. Armed with this additional information and context, teachers expressed feeling better able to address issues in their classrooms and help students who are struggling. As one kindergarten teacher described:

> *LETRS has changed my thinking on teaching reading. This training has opened my eyes to a whole new way for students to actually understand the why behind certain aspects of reading, which allows them to plant that knowledge deep in their minds.*
> – Grade 1 teacher

> *This program has taught me many things about how children read, how letter sounds are made, what errors to look for, and many other things about the English*

language I wasn't totally aware of. It has made me more diligent in teaching reading strategies to my students.

Another surveyed kindergarten teacher explained that LETRS "is very beneficial in learning how the brain works and how students learn to read. It helps to identify why students make the errors they do, and what might be causing them to struggle."

Teachers and administrators perceived that Kentucky Reading Academies' participation had increased participants' confidence in their literacy knowledge. Focus group participants, particularly those in the spring, reported a belief that participating in the program had led themselves and other participants to feel more confident and comfortable teaching literacy because they had the foundational knowledge underpinning their instruction. One literacy coach in Cohort 1 observed that teachers participating are "more confident teachers of language and reading."

> *I feel more comfortable addressing those [mistakes] and kind of explaining to the students why they have those errors and it just really kind of gets to the root of the problem.*
> – Reading interventionist, Cohort 2

Educator Beliefs

The fall and spring teacher survey also contained the Teacher Beliefs Survey component (Bills, 2020), which asked teachers to respond to statements about phonics (or code-based items), the whole-word approach (or meaning-based items), and neutral beliefs about literacy (which were not representative of a specific theoretical approach). In the fall, 720 participants completed the Teacher Beliefs Survey component, while 627 completed this section of the survey in the spring to report on their literacy beliefs. Three hundred and forty-eight responses were further analyzed using a growth model to assess any growth over time—the 3-month period between fall and spring survey administrations—based on three groupings of beliefs. Those results are as follows.

Teacher Beliefs Survey

Response options were from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

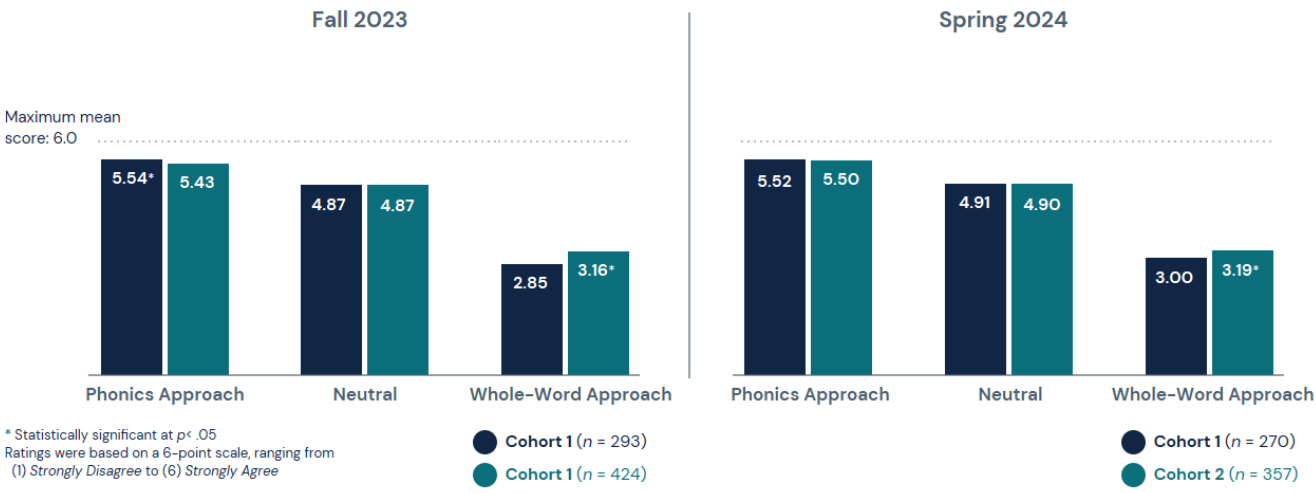
- 7 code-based items involve beliefs about the phonics approach (e.g., *When beginning readers encounter an unknown word, a good strategy is to prompt them to sound it out*).
- 6 meaning-based items involve beliefs about the whole-word approach (e.g., *When beginning readers encounter an unknown word, a good strategy to suggest is to use pictures to figure out the word*).
- 5 neutral items are not representative of a specific theoretical approach but are general beliefs about literacy (e.g., *Time spent just reading directly contributes to reading improvement*).

Teachers reported higher agreement ratings for items related to a phonics approach than for those related to a whole-word approach. Based on descriptive analyses, teachers reported an average rating between agree (5) and strongly agree (6) for questions related to the phonics approach (average score of 5.48 in the fall and 5.50 in the spring). Teachers had a lower agreement rating about statements related to the whole-word approach to literacy, averaging a rating of 3.04 in the fall and 3.10 in the spring, or mildly disagree. For the neutral literacy items,

teachers averaged an agreement rating of 4.87 in the fall and 4.91 in the spring, both between mildly agree and agree.

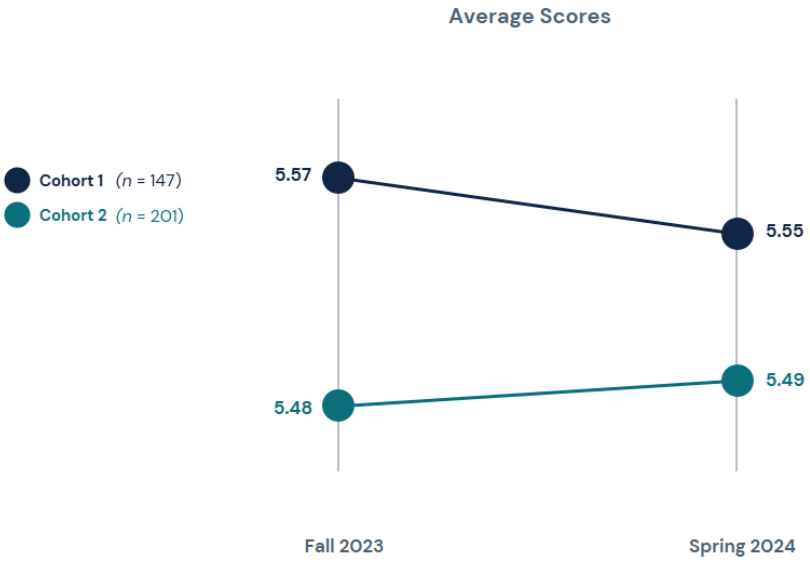
Reported agreement with these beliefs varied significantly by cohort. Among respondents to the fall survey, participants in Cohort 1 who had participated in the Kentucky Reading Academies the longest showed significantly higher agreement with code-based items related to a phonics approach compared with those in Cohort 2. This trend was also seen among spring survey respondents, although not at the level of statistical significance (see Exhibit 12). In contrast, participants in Cohort 2 who were newer to LETRS and the Kentucky Reading Academies reported a statistically significantly higher agreement with statements related to a whole-word approach during both the fall and spring surveys.

Exhibit 12. Comparisons of Average Rates of Agreement with Literacy Beliefs, by Cohort in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024



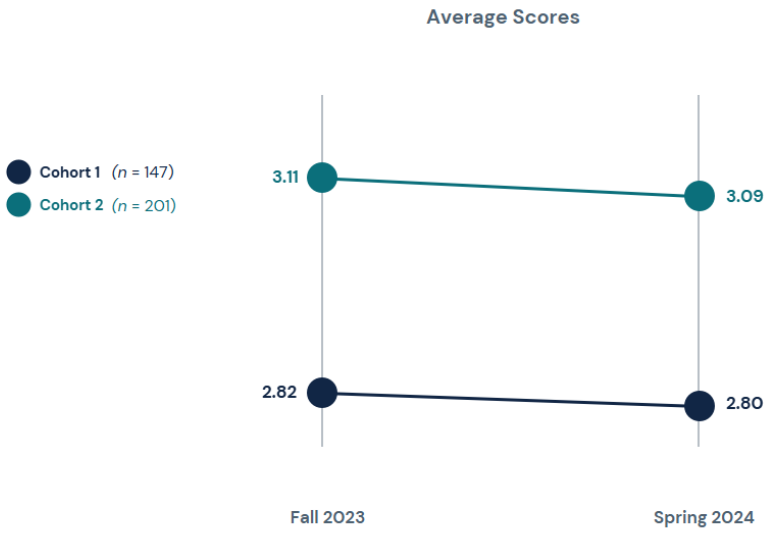
Statistically significant changes in beliefs about a phonics (or code-based) approach were not observed over the 3-month period. On this phonics approach subscale, higher agreement with statements about the phonics approach is preferred. Findings from the growth model indicated no statistically significant change in phonics-based literacy beliefs for all teachers in the sample across time (γ_{01} = 0.01, t = 0.83, p = 0.410). Although this effect was not significant, it was positive, indicating that teachers in the overall sample reported increases in phonics-based literacy beliefs over the 3-month period. In exploring the effect of level of participation, operationalized as cohort status, on phonics-based literacy beliefs, negative albeit non-statistically significant effects were found (γ_{11} = -0.04, t = -1.71, p = 0.088) with Cohort 1 respondents reporting slightly lower agreement on the phonics-based literacy beliefs subscale in spring 2024 compared to fall 2023; however, Cohort 1 respondents still reported higher overall phonics-based beliefs compared to those in Cohort 2 (see Exhibit 13).

Exhibit 13. Growth from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024 on Phonics-Based Literacy Beliefs, by Cohort



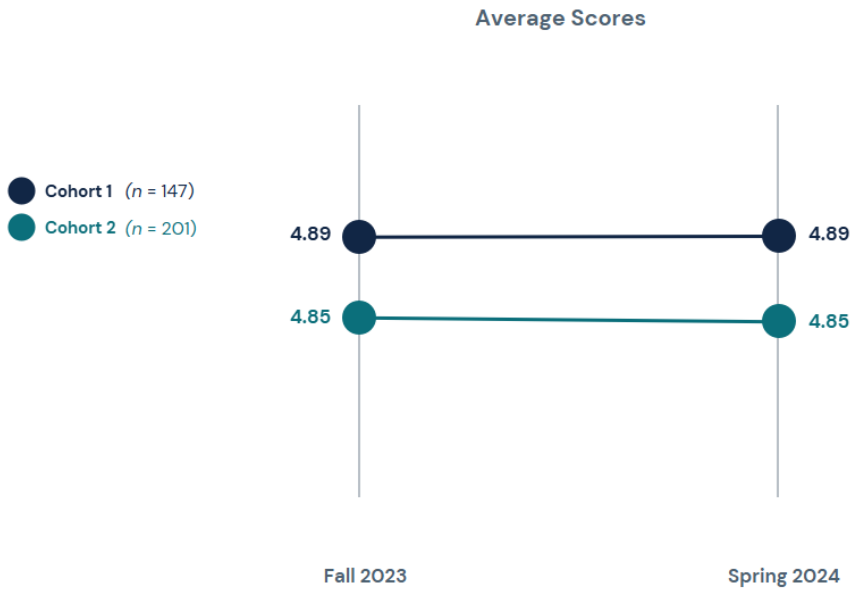
Statistically significant changes in beliefs about a whole-word (or meaning-based) approach were not observed over the 3-month period. Contrary to the phonics-based beliefs subscale, lower agreement on meaning-based belief statements is ideal. With respect to examining change in meaning-based beliefs, results from the growth model yielded no significant change in meaning-based beliefs over time (γ_{01} = -0.03, t = -0.95, p = 0.342). Despite this effect being non-significant it was slightly negative, suggesting that teachers across both cohorts demonstrated lower agreement with meaning-based beliefs across the 3-month period, a generally positive finding since lower agreement is better. In examining this effect by cohort, a positive interaction effect was observed (γ_{11} = 0.01, t = 0.17, p = 0.866), with both cohorts reporting decreases in beliefs related to this whole-word approach (see Exhibit 14). Of note, Cohort 1 respondents reported lower ratings on these literacy beliefs than Cohort 2 respondents.

Exhibit 14. Growth from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024 on Meaning-Based Literacy Beliefs, by Cohort



Statistically significant changes in neutral literacy beliefs were not observed over the 3-month period. With respect to examining change in neutral literacy beliefs, results yielded no significant change over time (γ_{01} = -0.002, t = -0.11, p = 0.911); however, this effect was slightly negative, suggesting that neutral literacy beliefs in general decreased over time. Breaking this down further to determine whether this effect differed as a function of cohort, we can see a slightly positive albeit not significant effect (γ_{11} = 0.002, t = 0.09, p = 0.930) where respondents in Cohort 1 saw incremental increases from fall to spring and Cohort 2 respondents saw incremental decreases across time (see Exhibit 15).

Exhibit 15. Growth from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024 on Neutral Literacy Beliefs, by Cohort



Focus group participants in both the fall and the spring also discussed ways in which participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies and exposure to LETRS content had shaped their beliefs. Thematic findings are presented below.

Educator-held beliefs about reading and writing shifted during participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies based on focus group data. When asked directly, focus group participants struggled to identify specific beliefs that had changed or been influenced by LETRS. However, through conversations in the focus groups, changes to educator-held beliefs about reading and writing came up frequently. These included shifts related to:

- **Teacher's best practices and strategies to help students:** "A lot of kids missed a lot of things because the teachers were just bouncing around, doing whatever, and it wasn't

> *I've always looked at kids who struggle and struggle and struggle as there's got to be some kind of learning disability going on with them … and looking at the science behind how the brain works … It's been enlightening to see that it might not be that they're developmentally delayed. It might be that you're just not hitting them where you need to hit them as far as what they need, how they need to learn. [That] has really helped how I approach my low kids.*
> – Grade 1 teacher

really following something to mastery." – Grade 3 teacher, Cohort 1

- **If and how students could overcome reading challenges:** "I saw in my students that spelling was very hard for them. What I learned through LETRS is, you know, they don't understand how their mouths are forming the letters." – Grade 2 teacher, Cohort 2
- **The importance of phonics:** "Just the importance of phonics and phonemic awareness and decoding—that's the thing that stood out to me." – Intervention teacher
- **The benefits of incorporating vocabulary across subjects within a classroom to create vocabulary-rich classrooms:** "Here's your math vocabulary, and here's your reading, and here's your writing and everything just seems so separated. … Just being a fourth-grade teacher, it was just really evident to see how important that is to have those vocabulary rich classrooms just altogether and just incorporate it." - Academic program consultant

Administrators' beliefs also shifted during their participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies. Several LETRS for Administrator participants shared a heightened belief in the importance of early literacy instruction after going through LETRS. Others shared strengthened beliefs in the value of assessments to shape and target instruction. One director of elementary schools shared, "[We'd] make assumptions on enrichment or acceleration for kids when we really don't know that kids have it. Well, we don't slow down enough to [assess and] make sure and that's where the gap comes in. We've assumed because the kid can memorize a list that they're ready to read."

Classroom Instruction and Applications of LETRS

Applications of evidence-based reading practices were assessed using observations of classroom instruction as well as educator reports about classroom instruction in surveys and focus groups. Educators also described facilitators and barriers to applications of content from LETRS in the classroom. These findings are summarized in this section.

Observations of Classroom Instruction

Classroom practice and instruction were observed during February and March of 2024 using the Coach's Classroom Observation Tool (CCOT) (Folsom et al., 2017) to capture ratings of early literacy skills instruction, student engagement during instruction, and teaching competencies. The

Sample Teacher Competencies

Responses: 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)

- **Planning:** The teacher seems to be organized and has all materials necessary for instruction easily accessible.
- **Management:** The teacher has well established instructional routines.
- **Instruction:** The teacher provides sufficient practice.
- **Monitoring of Students' Learning:** The teacher provides feedback in a positive manner.
- **Personal Characteristics:** The teacher is generally motivated and keeps students actively involved by maintaining an enthusiastic learning atmosphere.

44 observed teachers then completed brief reflections about the observed instruction and the role that LETRS played in their instruction.

Observed implementation tended to include whole class instruction and high student engagement. Most observations were of whole class instruction followed by small group activities; 73% of observations included whole class instruction for half or more of the observed session and 25% of observations included small group instruction for half or more of the session (see Exhibit 16). Five percent of the observations or fewer included pairs (5%), independent work (5%), or differentiated/ individual assignments (2%) for half or more of the observed session (see Exhibit 15). All teachers were assessed as maintaining either medium (34%) or high student engagement (66%) during the observation, defined as having either most or all students actively engaged in a learning activity.

Exhibit 16. Proportion of the Time Spent in Various Grouping Levels in Observed Lessons

Grouping Strategy	>50%	>20%	>10%	<10%	0%	Not observed
Whole class	73%	2%	2%	7%	5%	11%
Small groups	25%	5%	2%	2%	11%	55%
Pairs	5%	9%	2%	7%	18%	59%
Independent	5%	14%	9%	7%	14%	52%
Differentiated/Individual	2%	2%	5%	5%	11%	75%

Observed teachers demonstrated strong pedagogy. During observation sessions, teachers received ratings in five areas of teacher competencies, each with a maximum average score of 4: planning, management, instruction, monitoring of students' learning, and personal characteristics. Observed teachers received high average ratings across each competency, receiving the highest average score for planning and for personal characteristics (see Exhibit 17). Slight differences were seen across cohorts, but the small sample size does not allow for meaningful comparisons by cohort.

Exhibit 17. Average Rating of Teacher Competencies, by Overall Observed Sample and Cohort

Teacher Competencies	Overall (n=44)	Cohort 1 (n=26)	Cohort 2 (n=18)
Planning	3.61	3.54	3.72
Management	3.39	3.24	3.61
Instruction	3.33	3.24	3.47
Monitoring of Students' Learning	3.28	3.19	3.41
Personal Characteristics	3.59	3.54	3.67

Teachers displayed opportunities for improvement in instructional implementation. Observers looked for implementation of a variety of early literacy skills during the observed session and teachers received a quality rating for each content area from weak (1) to excellent (4) as well as the ability to indicate that there was no opportunity to observe specific skills. The highest rated

areas of instructional implementation were overall reading/language arts (average rating of 3.18), preview to prepare for reading (3.08), and alphabetic instruction/graphophonemic correspondence (3.06; see Exhibit 18). However, many content areas received ratings below high average (3) or excellent (4), suggesting that additional support may be needed to improve instruction in these areas, including spelling in the context of reading (2.50), writing (2.50), grammar (2.50), fluency (2.40), and students reading their own writing (2.00). Slight differences were also seen in implementation across cohorts, with teachers in Cohort 2 having slightly higher ratings than those in Cohort 1 (2.89 versus 2.73), although opportunities for improvement were present among both Cohorts.

Exhibit 18. Average Ratings of Observed Early Literacy Content

Early Literacy Content	Average Rating	Early Literacy Content	Average Rating
Overall reading/language arts	3.18	Writing - composition/more than single words	2.50
Concepts of print/book awareness/conventions	3.00	Grammar/capitalization/punctuation /mechanics	2.50
Phonemic/phonological awareness	3.04	Students reading their own writing	2.00
Alphabetic letter recognition and reproduction	3.00	Oral language	2.86
Alphabetic instruction/ graphophonemic correspondences	3.06	Vocabulary	2.92
Word work/study/phonics (with text)	3.04	Fluency	2.40
Structural analysis/morphology	2.88	Reading text/books beyond the word level	2.60
Spelling	2.87	Preview to prepare for reading	3.08
Spelling in the context of reading	2.50	Reading comprehension (during or after reading)	3.00

Teachers shared a variety of LETRS strategies and activities that they were implementing in their classroom instruction. In reflecting on their observed lessons, teachers described a variety of specific strategies and techniques that they were implementing from LETRS. The most frequently used were finger taps and various techniques to work on sounds, including sound cards, voiced sounds, tongue placement, and sound chains. Teachers of older grades implemented more techniques related to vocabulary and reading fluency, including echo partner reading, and the I Do, We Do, You Do model. Specific teacher reflections are included below in Exhibit 19.

Exhibit 19. Examples of Implemented LETRS Strategies and Approaches from Observation Reflections

"Using the dot markers is a totally new concept for me on this. I'm using the sound cards and we're starting to do that every day now along with tapping out—using the arm, that was new to me, and again, I'm 16 years in! And why had I not thought to do that?" – Kindergarten teacher, Cohort 2

"I used the 123 method and also finger typing today, and those were very significant things that I learned from the LETRS that that I had not done in the past." – Grade 1 teacher, Cohort 1

"I've learned a few activities to do with kids [from LETRS] and they were involved in the lesson that I taught, such as word chains and sound chains and learning a specific sound and then practicing that in the decodable that we read." – Grade 1 teacher, Cohort 2

"I used the Unit 6 Session 1 comprehension planning checklist as a guide to planning my lesson today and to make sure I thought about all of the different components I need it to include." – Grade 2 teacher, Cohort 2

"Today, I really drew out the best practices of echo reading, partner reading, model reading, and talk about vocabulary and background knowledge. I'll do all those things throughout my week. Also from LETRS, we did the I Do, We Do, You Do model." – Grade 3 teacher, Cohort 1

Educator Reports about Applying LETRS to their Educational Practice

The ways in which participants were able to or struggled to implement strategies and concepts from LETRS into their instruction or administration was a primary focus of spring focus groups, particularly among Cohort 1 participants who had a longer time period in which to begin incorporating strategies and approaches into their practice. Teachers surveyed in the spring also responded to a subset of questions related to their ability to implement instructional strategies from LETRS. Thematic findings are grouped by implementation into instruction and implementation into administration.

Implementation of LETRS Strategies into Instruction

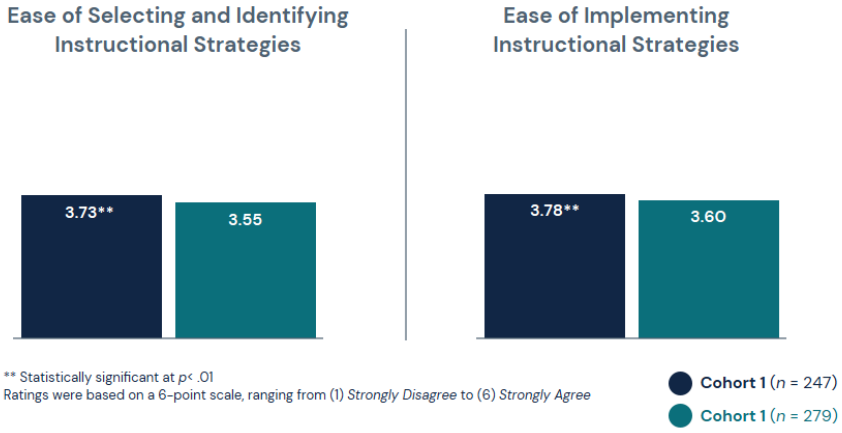
Most teachers were integrating strategies learned in LETRS into their practices, but at different levels. Teachers in Cohort 1 reported greater implementation of LETRS strategies in their classroom instruction than those in Cohort 2, but both cohorts reported that they needed additional time to reflect on and plan how to fully apply LETRS strategies in their own classrooms. For example, one first-grade teacher in Cohort 2 explained, "I'm still trying to balance the workload of getting, you know, everything complete. So maybe down the road then I can start incorporating those [strategies] more." A second-grade teacher in Cohort 2 described plans to use her summer to think through how to integrate LETRS strategies into her lessons, saying, "That's exactly what I plan on doing and I plan on—over the summer—prepping my resources."

Once they started to incorporate LETRS strategies into instruction, many participants found implementation to be generally easy. Some focus group participants described feeling apprehensive when beginning to implement strategies from LETRS, but overall survey respondents reported that implementation was somewhere between neutral (3) and easy (4). Specifically, respondents rated the ease of selecting and identifying instructional strategies 3.64, while the ease of implementing these instructional strategies was rated a slightly higher 3.69 (results not presented).

> *[At first] it was scary doing it on my own because it's like, 'Am I using this strategy the right way?' … So, it was terrifying last year to make that change. I kind of switched it midyear, [but] even just in that, like, half a year, I saw so much more growth. … So, I think now I'm getting some success with these—the strategies that seemed crazy at the time.*
> – Kindergarten teacher, Cohort 1

Perceived ease of implementation may be associated with greater program exposure. Survey respondents in Cohort 1 were significantly more likely to report that both selecting and identifying strategies and implementing those strategies was easy compared with those in Cohort 2 (see Exhibit 20). This mirrors findings from focus group participants where Cohort 1 teachers generally reported greater increased capacity and comfort with implementing LETRS strategies compared with those in Cohort 2. In focus group discussions, some teachers attributed this to the greater amount of time and practice they have had to implement these strategies.

Exhibit 20. Average Reports of Ease of Selecting and Identifying, and Implementing Instructional Strategies among LETRS Participants, by Cohort in Spring 2024



Some instructional areas had more resonance with teachers than others. The most cited areas of implementation were phonics, decoding, and phonemic awareness. This was mainly due to several factors: 1) Few participating teachers had advanced to later units in the professional learning when the focus groups and the observations took place; 2) LETRS strategies that addressed phonics and decoding, and phonemic awareness were covered in the first units of the program; and 3) most of the participating teachers in the focus groups and in the observation portion of the study were K–2 teachers. However, examples of implemented strategies regarding vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and morphology were provided by focus group participants

who were teachers of Grades 3–5, particularly in the spring focus groups. Exhibit 21 provides some examples of implementation.

Exhibit 21. Examples of LETRS Implementation from Focus Group Participants

Phonemic Awareness: Multiple teachers referenced new or revised approaches to teaching about phonemic awareness that came from LETRS.

"I've learned a few activities to do with kids and they were involved in the lesson that I taught. Such as word chains and sound chains and learning a specific sound and then practicing that in the decodable that we read." – Grade 1 teacher, Cohort 2

"We do use the map and graph almost every day. I think it helps them to be able to finger tap to be able to sequence those sounds. Together, it helps us to be able to review the diagraphs. It helps us to review the blend that we could read it quickly." – Grade 1 teacher, Cohort 1

Phonics and Decoding: Particularly in lower elementary grades, many teachers described using strategies from LETRS to improve their students' understanding of phonics and skills with decoding words.

"They've got the mirrors to see their mouth, their tongue, you know, look at me, follow me. That kind of thing. So, like, all of the things that I've learned so far up to Unit 3." – Grade 1 teacher, Cohort 2

"I realized these level books are not working with these kids; like you have your kids that can read level books and they're gonna be just fine. The kids that I serve aren't usually those kids, so we've been using decodable word attack skills." - Reading interventionist, Cohort 2

Vocabulary, Comprehension, and Fluency: Teachers' experiences implementing these literacy elements from LETRS came from Grade 3 and up.

"When we read a text and especially with, like, text structure, vocabulary—and it's made me more aware of things that kids might struggle with too, and things that I need to be pre-teaching them before expecting them to comprehend it." – Grade 3 teacher, Cohort 1

"In Unit 2 Chapter 4, [LETRS] talks about the importance of reading fluency for third-graders and I've been using the practices of echo reading, partner reading, and model reading … And [LETRS] also talks about the word count per minute, so I use the score for the word count per minute … Also from LETRS the I Do, We Do, You Do model. And I know LETRS … they really did emphasize background knowledge and vocabulary for third grade just to help boost their comprehension." – Grade 3 teacher, Cohort 1

Morphology: Implementation of morphology strategies occurred less in the lower grades, while some upper elementary teachers shared the benefits of adding this content.

"I started a morphology block for all the kids. [Before] we had talked about chunking the words, maybe prefixes and suffixes, but you really don't tell the kids the why. And [now] my kids have just been amazed by it." – Grade 5 teacher, Cohort 1

Teachers and specialists reported more intentionality in their instructional activities and support as a result of LETRS participation. Several educators from both cohorts noted that LETRS professional learning taught them to be more intentional in their instructional activities, such as identifying and addressing gaps, building background knowledge, digging into comprehension, and teaching grammar rules. One Grade 3 and 4 teacher from Cohort 1 explained it: "For me, [LETRS] taught me to be more patient and to be super intentional about every single component and then they can get it." For other teachers and specialists, LETRS informed how they selected activities, organized lessons, or structured their small groups. For example, one kindergarten teacher in Cohort 2 shared:

> *I've kind of changed the structure of my small groups to focus more on individual targeted skills [that] more than two or three [students] need. Or maybe I do a whole group and then I kind of target particular students with particular things that they need.*

> *"What I do is I kind of look at my curriculum through the lens of LETRS. … I'll look at my vocabulary words, how they're introduced in [the curriculum] and make adjustments as needed to fit what I'm learning kids need in LETRS.*
> – Grade 3 teacher, Cohort 1

Those going through LETRS for Educators were able to apply strategies across all three tiers of students. Of the focus group participants going through LETRS for Educators, 53% were classroom teachers and the remaining 47% were staff with various supportive roles such as teachers' coaches and classroom interventionists. The latter tended to also support Tier 2 and Tier 3 students. These educators believed that strategies learned through LETRS were appropriate to use with students across tiers. Summarizing this, one instructional coach in Cohort 1 shared:

> *I think we have to use what we're learning in LETRS and Tier 1 instruction. And then I think of course, those things carry over into Tier 2 into Tier 3 instruction where you're really digging down and figuring out exactly which skill the student is missing.*

Reflecting on these shifts in instructional strategies, many teachers shared regrets that these new approaches had not taken root sooner. One teacher from the first round of focus groups and several educators from the second round were vocal about the impact of teaching instruction when helping students in the process of being proficient readers, with one veteran teacher summarizing these opinions, stating, "I think a big barrier for them has been the way we've taught." In addition, three teachers from different districts mentioned that COVID-19 pandemic restrictions continued to have an impact on children's performance. One academic consultant shared, "I taught second [grade] for the last 5 years and I really think that masks made it really hard for those primary students where they weren't able to see people making the sounds, you know, their mouths."

Implementation of LETRS Strategies into Administration

Administrators leveraged LETRS approaches to shape conversations with teachers about literacy topics. The LETRS program helped administrators and district leaders to foster deeper conversations about literacy in their own schools and across schools and districts. One district literacy coach mentioned that LETRS was part of their regular meetings with their teachers. "Every

other month [teachers] meet with me so we can kind of go over our learning." Another school administrator shared that LETRS helped to establish common goals and priorities with teachers. "[LETRS] helped create alignment between school leadership and teachers. I think that was really important in ensuring that we have a unified approach to literacy. In my school, we were working towards that, but we weren't there yet."

Administrators were able to implement tools and approaches from LETRS in their work with teachers. Some administrators with coaching responsibilities mentioned that LETRS was helping them to build their professional toolbox, particularly around bringing data to coaching conversations. As one instructional coach shared, "I do a lot of observations in the classroom, and I give extensive feedback and I want to say I started using some of the observation tools in our administrators for LETRS booklet too and I love those." However, administrators with literacy coaching responsibilities felt that the teacher units helped them more than LETRS for Administrators. One curriculum specialist in Cohort 2 noted:

> *I had the administrative side of it and like I said, I felt like that was the overarching view. But I don't feel like it took me to the depth that I needed to be on the level of teachers and providing them with feedback and just ensuring and knowing what it is that maybe if they're not getting.*

Administrators in various roles described implementing more data-driven decision-making. A key focus of LETRS for Administrators was how to effectively leverage data to inform student- and school-level decision-making. Some administrators highlighted the use of assessments from LETRS in individual classrooms or grade levels, including a Phonological Awareness Screening Test and a phonics assessment. In addition, participants in LETRS for Administrators described adding more data discussions to weekly or monthly professional learning communities (PLCs) and incorporating discussions about data into coaching sessions. One assistant principal summarized these comments based on her experience, sharing:

> "*We have schoolwide data charts that we keep up with. And we put any new screener assessments that we have taken [there]. That will help us to be able to pull up and track progress for say, 2 or 3 years until we're really getting into this LETRS [implementation].*
> – Assistant principal

> *We have PLCs weekly, and there's just a lot of data discussions and lots of discussions about how to, you know, take what we're learning in the classes and implement it. So it's just a constant conversation at PLCs and then the coach going into classrooms, admin[istrators] going into classrooms as well.*

Facilitators and Barriers to Implementing LETRS Content

In reflecting on their participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies and LETRS professional learning, teachers and administrators shared feedback about factors that supported or hindered implementation of LETRS strategies and approaches.

Facilitators of Implementation

Many of those who were able to successfully participate in LETRS were able to find further success in implementing new instructional strategies and approaches. Educators found success in implementation when they were able to align and agree on the importance of implementing LETRS concepts in the classroom. Having others at the district or campus level who also participate in LETRS helped facilitate the transition to implementation and having pre-existing flexibility within existing reading curricula made adopting new approaches much easier for educators.

District-level support created a positive environment for implementation. Several teachers described how having buy-in and support from district-level administrators and support staff was crucial to their implementation. Even in instances where the school-level administrators were not directly involved in LETRS, having support at the district helped allow for better integration of LETRS content in the classroom. As one special education teacher described:

> *We have our curriculum director; she's doing the administrative portion and has been really supportive, but the actual administrators of the elementary school are not. Although I do think it would be helpful if they did, they'd have a better understanding of what we're doing.*

Participating in LETRS with colleagues in the same school-supported implementation. Going through the program with other teachers or administrators in the same building facilitated discussions around learning and provided opportunities to share localized strategies. In one school, teachers reported collaborating across grades via social media with other teachers going through LETRS. As one interventionist described, "We actually started, like, our own little Facebook group of just the eight teachers that are in my building together and everyone's like, 'Did you do your reading?' … Doing it together makes you feel better."

> *"It's been nice to be able to bounce ideas off each other and talk to each other about where we're at and what we're struggling with and how we can use this.*
> – Grade 1 teacher

Participating in LETRS with colleagues in the same school also helped facilitate long-term planning. Teachers and administrators at the same campuses often used LETRS participation as an impetus to align and coordinate efforts for year-long planning of scope and sequence in order to ensure that teachers could implement what they were learning. In some instances, this was done in small groups, such as a teacher and their interventionist, while in other schools entire grades and their administrators were involved in planning out their full school year. One administrator described how they were able to facilitate this planning at their school: "We built in some time for our teachers that are in the training to work together, to work on their student profiles to ensure that what they're learning from LETRS is transferring over into the curriculum, and so we've given them subs for 2 days so that they can come out of the classroom and give them some time to collaborate and plan together as well." In a few schools, this planning involved

> *"Over the summer we had like a working session [professional development] and my co-teacher and I sat down in one day and we made all of our materials for the whole year and that has changed my life.*
> – Special education teacher

teachers from multiple grades working to ensure that students would benefit from teachers' LETRS learnings as they progressed across grade levels.

School- and classroom-level factors contributed to ease of implementation. Class structure was also cited as a factor that allowed teachers to implement LETRS strategies more easily. In some instances, pre-existing reading blocks and small-group settings allowed more seamless integration of various strategies for students at different reading levels. With this built-in flexibility, teachers at different levels used structured flexibility to apply their new content in a variety of situations to meet student needs.

> *We're able to put into practice most of the strategies … that we've learned just because we do flex groups at our school. So, it's like ability grouping and that is really focused on helping those kids meet the benchmark … or push them even further than they already are.*
> – Grade 1 teacher

Barriers to Implementation

Although many teachers and administrators experienced substantial success in implementing approaches and strategies learned through LETRS, even those who were successful reported challenges with implementation. In some instances, the structure of LETRS made implementation more challenging while for others, district-, school-, or classroom-specific barriers were the challenge.

The sequencing of LETRS limited implementation opportunities among some participants. In some instances, educators described challenges with implementing specific aspects of LETRS content because their students' needs and progress didn't align with the literacy content covered in early units. During the first year of LETRS, teachers reported that the content they were learning during the spring semester would have been appropriate to implement during the fall semester. Teachers of upper elementary grades reported that strategies related to word recognition and beginning phonics taught during the first year of LETRS were not very applicable for their students, and more useful instructional strategies were not covered until the second year. One participant indicated that some additional clarity early on in the program as to which units would be more aligned with which grade levels would help reduce confusion when educators work to implement the strategies they've learned.

> *The information I've learned in Volume 1 in Units 1–4 has not been as well lined up to teaching fifth-grade reading. … However, I am looking forward to Volume 2 next year when I can really dig into those comprehension strategies and vocabulary.*
> – Grade 5 teacher, Cohort 2

Challenges navigating previous LETRS content within the digital platform was reported to hinder implementation. In discussing the implementation of concepts learned in LETRS, some teachers mentioned frustration when trying to go back and find a specific element in the content that was covered in past units. One instructional coach said, "I cannot stand in the platform not being able to bookmark stuff and go back [to find it quickly]. It drives me insane … being able to at least snip things and save them in a file … of some sort would just be so beneficial." Several

participants suggested there be an index or summary of resources for later access to help ease implementation after the program was completed. One third-grade teacher said, "I would love to have a LETRS cheat sheet for like all the resources, for all the activities or units. I know would probably be massive, but I would love that."

> *There's so much other stuff that I'm priming in my brain that it's hard to remember it all. I wish there was like a quick sheet or something.*
> – Grade 2 teacher

Those going through LETRS without other participants at their school found some challenges in implementation. For teachers or administrators who were the only LETRS participant in their school, incorporating LETRS concepts into their lessons was reported to be challenging. These teachers cited the lack of other staff with whom to collaborate or model as a challenge as well as alignment to other teachers who are not implementing the same principles. Some described their implementation as "on pause" until others at their campus were able to participate in LETRS.

> *No one else in my building is doing [LETRS] … it's hard to piggyback off of what the teachers are doing in the classroom because they're not exactly teaching it the same way I am. Or just completely different.*
> – Interventionist

A lack of support among leadership created additional barriers to implementation. In some instances, administrators who were not participants in LETRS or were skeptical of making changes to traditional approaches made implementing LETRS content in the classroom more difficult. As one kindergarten teacher described, "My biggest barrier was administration not believing. … I was running into a lot of walls where I wanted to change or do things differently and they did not agree. So, I was not permitted, or I was reprimanded when I wanted to make those changes."

Reliance on different philosophies of teaching literacy at the school or district level created additional barriers to implementation. Some teachers described working in schools or districts that were using programs or curriculum the fundamental principles of which did not align with the approaches promoted by LETRS. One teacher described her experience as her district rolled out Literacy Footprints, saying, "People were going in and modeling and showing us this great … reading program and I did all of this work. And then I started LETRS, and they said, 'Reading is not like what you [were taught].' " This tension made it difficult for teachers to gain support in implementing what they've learned through LETRS.

> *If you are trained in LETRS but your district only has materials that are appropriate for guided reading, it's going to be impossible.*
> – Curriculum and instructional coach

IV. Student Outcomes

The primary goal of the Kentucky Reading Academies is to influence educators' knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instructional practices in early literacy such that student reading and writing outcomes are improved. This section looks at the extent to which students are benefiting from educators' participating in the program by progressing toward grade-level proficiency and reporting improved outcomes on the KSA for reading. Themes and analysis related to these key goals are presented below.

Student Progress Toward Grade-level Proficiency

A key goal of the Kentucky Reading Academies is that teachers apply the content and skills learned through LETRS professional learning into their instructional practice, resulting in incremental progress toward grade-level proficiency among students. This increased proficiency can be measured by universal screeners and diagnostic assessments, some of which are included as resources in LETRS materials. Focus group participants and observed teachers shared reflections about how LETRS informed their use of assessments as well as the improvements they had seen among their students through these assessments.

LETRS participants varied in their use of diagnostic assessments with their students. Some focus group participants reporting using specific assessments from LETRS, including the Phonological Awareness Screening Test, the LETRS Word Reading Survey, a phonics assessment, and a spelling inventory. A third-grade teacher shared, "I have been able to implement the Phonological Awareness Screening Test with my at-risk students to better understand where their issues are."

> *I have used the screeners and templates for coaching teachers.* – Literacy coach

Many LETRS participants had begun using the results of screeners and assessments to better support student progress. Teachers and coaches participating in focus groups shared that they had been able to use the data from the assessments to better understand knowledge gaps among students, to tailor instruction in both small and large groups, and to provide individual students with personalized feedback and encouragement. An instructional coach who was part of Cohort 1 reported:

> *The first thing that I really did was completely change our assessments that we gave here in our district and I totally aligned them with the LETRS one. In fact, we use the LETRS Word Reading Survey and the spelling inventory, and then we have a phonemic awareness. But we started just using those assessments to drive instruction a lot more and that was really huge from LETRS.*

At the classroom level, one first-grade teacher in Cohort 2 shared:

> *I've been using some of the assessments from LETRS, like the phonics screeners and things like that, and I'll show [students], 'Here's where you started. HerEe's where you are now. Look at how far you've come,' and that's helped them build their confidence a little bit more.*

Other focus group participants were aware of the support available through LETRS to strengthen their use of diagnostic assessments but had not yet begun using these tools or maximizing their benefits. For example, one reading interventionist in Cohort 1 reflected, "That's one area where I feel like we need to do a better job, is really looking at the data and letting the data drive the instruction."

Teachers shared many markers of incremental progress seen among their students throughout the year. Observed teachers and those participating in focus groups highlighted improvements in reading, writing, spelling, and overall literacy, which they attributed to shifts in instructional practice brought about by LETRS. For example, one kindergarten teacher who participated in the observations shared:

> *Once I started using that [strategy] after doing LETRS training, I could really see a difference in my kids because they were really paying attention to the sounds as they were tapping and it was easier for them to write the CVC words [three-letter words made up of a consonant, vowel, consonant] after tapping and moving the chips.*

> *"Focusing on the phonics portion is not only helping students become better readers, but it's also helping them become better writers.*
> – Grade 2 teacher

> *"I'm definitely noticing my students are more comfortable taking risks with words and more creative in how they approach them … I think metacognition has increased. And that's really helpful.*
> – Grade 1 teacher

A different kindergarten teacher highlighted improvements in recognizing rhyme, reflecting:

> *My kids were doing 0 out of 5 correct as far as being able to drop the beginning sound and tell the rhyme. Most of them now, except for [those at a lower level] that we're still working on, can do 5 out of 5 of those words.*

Many teachers also shared examples of significant student progress since they began implementing LETRS strategies, presented below in Exhibit 22.

Exhibit 22. Examples of Student Progress

"I've never more clearly seen kids make progress as they have this year and the last probably years they've been here, and I think the first 5 years I was teaching." – Reading interventionist

"So we just took our reading [test] and it shows they all went up except for five, which is pretty good, and they went down but not more than 5 points. So I do see, even though we're still in the red, they went up … I think we started LETRS in September. So I do feel it's partially because of this." – Grade 3 teacher

"I had a little boy that started in third grade last year, reading well below grade level and he was also an English language learner student and we, myself, and one of the intervention teachers—who was not taking LETRS, but she was kind of reading and learning about using more science of reading strategies—we were working with him together, and by the end of the year, [it] took us all year, but he could read the third-grade passage and did very well on the state assessment." – Grade 3 teacher

"My kids can read and write now and that's really exciting for me because 13 of mine have IQs of lower than 70. … They came to me—they're fourth-graders—so they're now 10 and they couldn't read or write. And it was just, 'Oh my goodness, they can read and write right now!' … The fact that I got my kids to read and write that couldn't … that's LETRS." – Grades 3 and 4 teacher

"My kids, when I got them at the beginning of this year, were in kindergarten level. But I'm a second-grade teacher. They tested in kindergarten. I had none in second grade. I had none even around the end of first [grade]. I now have 12 of them—and this was in December—I've had 12 of them who moved to second grade and I got three of them in third grade. I only have seven still [reading at a kindergarten level] and all of them have IEPs [Individualized Education Plans]. So moving them up a whole grade level in half a year is proof that it works." – Grade 2 teacher

"One of [the kindergarten teachers] messaged me the other day and said her kids had never been this far ahead with reading as they are now, and she attributes it to the LETRS training. And all our kindergarten teachers are seeing great gains with their students since they've started and the LETRS training and implementing that within the classroom. [In particularly, they're seeing] a lot of gains with our kids that typically would have been identified as, you know, struggling readers and put into intervention. They're not necessarily needing that anymore." – Speech pathologist

Student Outcomes on the KSA for Reading

Data from the 2022-2023 KSA Reading exam was analyzed to assess the impact of Cohort 1 teacher participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies on student progress. The current analysis of student performance on the KSA Reading exam was limited to Grade 4 and 5 outcomes, instead of Grade 3 as stated in the original goal. While research suggests that professional development programs targeting emergent reading skills are likely to pose a greater impact on

earlier grade levels than later, controlling for pre-intervention impacts (e.g., prior-year performance) increases the robustness and validity of the statistical comparison. As Grade 3 is the earliest grade level for KSA administration, it was deemed unsuitable for use as an outcome in the current analysis given that it was needed to serve as a prior-year performance.

There was no significant difference in performance—either in scale scores or performance level (proficient or greater)—between students of teachers who had participated in the Kentucky Reading Academies and those who had not. This finding held when controlling for student characteristics (baseline performance, demographics, and attendance), teacher characteristics (demographics, experience, educational attainment), and campus/district characteristics (locale, HQIR adoption, Title I status). This was evident across three-level hierarchical linear model (HLM) analyses of both Grade 4 and Grade 5 students (Grade 4: γ_{01k} = -0.656, t = -1.05, p = 0.294; Grade 5: γ_{01k} = 0.069, t = 0.08, p = 0.937).

Of the 960 classroom teachers identified in the KSA Reading exam data who participated in Cohort 1 of the Kentucky Reading Academies training, only 130 (14%) were listed as teaching a Grade 4 or 5 reading course and served at least five students with KSA Reading scores for both the 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 administrations (this threshold is discussed more in Appendix B). This subset of teachers had a slightly different demographic profile compared to the entire population of Kentucky educators in 2022–2023, with the Cohort 1 participants exhibiting higher representation of female and White teachers. However, their average age and years of experience were statistically equivalent to statewide averages. The estimation of propensity scores (discussed in more detail in Appendix B) allowed for the successful identification of non-participating demographic peers for the 130 Cohort 1 teachers, yielding baseline equivalence on all modeled characteristics (i.e., demographics, experience, educational achievement, classroom composition).

The subset of students that was identified for analysis was also similar in profile, when comparing those exposed to the Kentucky Reading Academies influence and those unexposed. The Grade 4 sample showed statistical equivalence on gender, race/ethnicity, gifted status, free or reduced-price lunch status, and special education status. The Grade 4 students of Kentucky Reading Academies participants (N = 3,478) had slightly lower average absence rates than their peers (6.3% versus 6.6%, t = 2.61, p = 0.01) and slightly higher Grade 3 KSA scale scores (511.5 versus 510.6, t = -2.19, p = 0.02) than their peers (N = 3,784).

The Grade 5 sample showed statistical equivalence on gender, gifted status, special education status, Grade 3 KSA scale scores, and absence rates. The Grade 5 students of Kentucky Reading Academies participants (N = 2,383) showed a smaller proportion of White students (78.3% versus 82.6%, $\chi 2$ = 13.6, $p < 0.001$) and a larger proportion of students identified for free or reduced-price lunch (60.7% versus 57.0%, $\chi 2$ = 6.9, $p < 0.01$) than their peers (N = 2,307).

Neither grade-level sample showed significant differences in average scale scores or performance level on the 2022–2023 KSA Reading exam, even prior to controlling for student-, teacher-, and campus-level covariates in the three-level HLM. Further, models allowing for student subgroups (i.e., gifted status, free or reduced-price lunch status, special education status) to interact with (or moderate) the impact of Kentucky Reading Academies yielded no significant results. This suggests that different types of learners did not exhibit a noticeably different KRA impact than others.

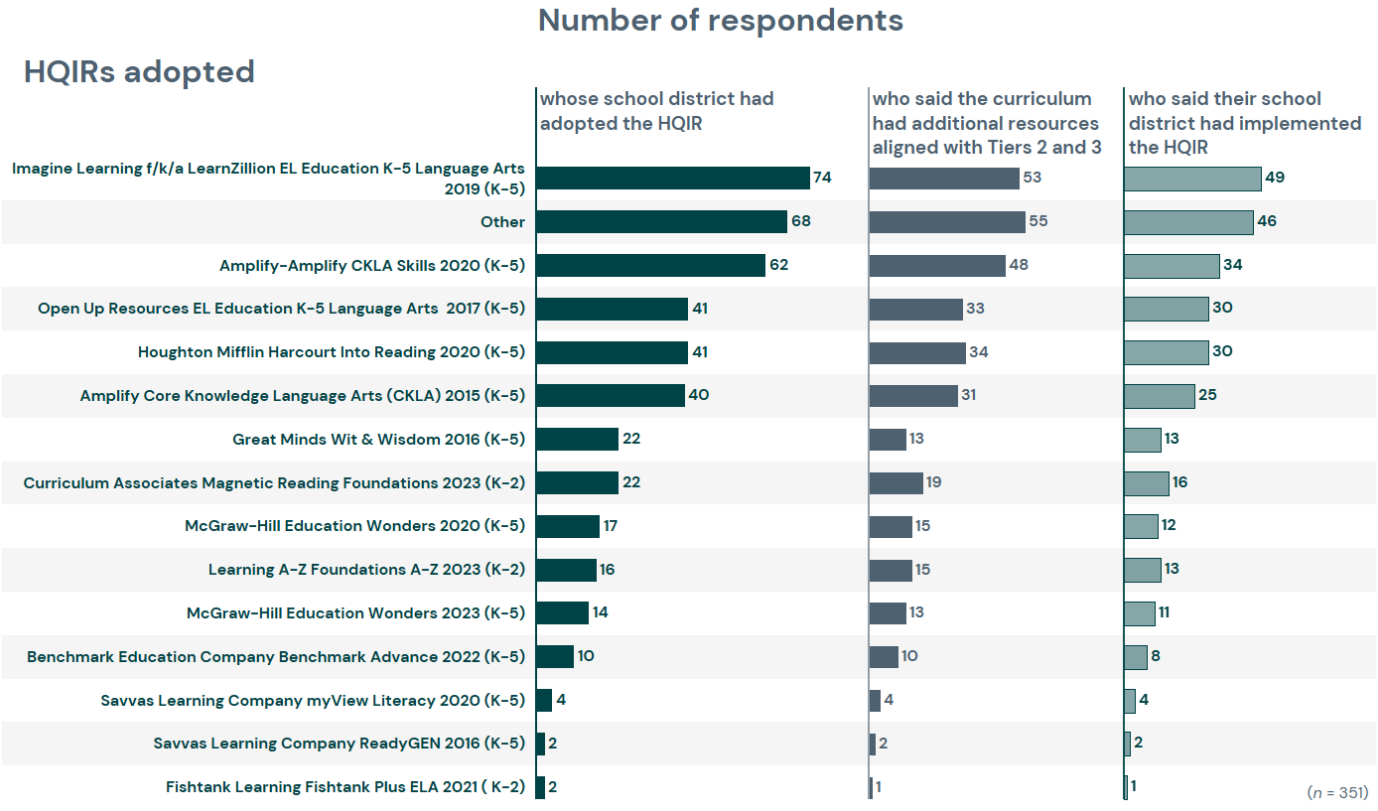
V. Use of High-Quality Instructional Resources (HQIRs)

At the same time as many educators across Kentucky have begun participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies, districts throughout the commonwealth are reviewing, adopting, and beginning to implement HQIRs for literacy. Survey participants reported on the extent to which their school district had adopted and implemented an HQIR for reading and writing. Focus groups explored these questions further, asking participants in the fall and spring to reflect on the benefits or weaknesses of their current literacy curriculum based on their participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies and strategies learned through LETRS. Thematic findings across data collection methods are presented below.

HQIRs

Many districts had already adopted a literacy HQIR. Approximately half of fall respondents (49%) indicated that their school district had already adopted an HQIR specific to literacy. This percentage increased at the time of the spring survey with 57% of respondents reporting that their school district had adopted an HQIR for literacy. Roughly one-third of fall respondents (31%) were not sure if their district had adopted an HQIR or not; this proportion similarly declined in the spring survey where just 17% of respondents were unsure about their districts' HQIR adoption. Among those who reported having a literacy HQIR in place, a wide range of curriculum resources seemed to be in place, many with additional resources aligned with Tier 2 and 3 instruction (see Exhibit 23).

Exhibit 23. HQIRs Adopted by Surveyed Participants' Districts in Spring 2024



Note: Other HQIRs include UFLI, Heggerty, and Wilson Foundations.

Reports of HQIR adoption varied by the type of school but stabilized by the spring. At the point in the initial fall survey, a higher percentage of teachers in non-rural school districts reported already adopting a literacy HQIR; 64% of non-rural teachers indicated having a literacy HQIR in place in their district compared with 35% of teachers in rural districts. This ratio had stabilized by the time of the spring survey with 58% of non-rural teachers reporting that their district had adopted an HQIR compared with 55% of teachers in rural districts (results not shown).

Some educators expressed frustration about the HQIR curricula selection process. Both teachers and administrators reported some level of frustration when researching and making decisions about literacy curricula for their schools. Some teachers voiced frustration that they were not more directly involved in curriculum selection. Others expressed concern about the cost of various curricula, noting that the price was a key component in the final decision. For other educators, finding a comprehensive curriculum was an ongoing challenge that they mitigated by combining several curricula or adapting individually. A Grade 2 teacher explained it: "We would like to choose the best of all of the different components and put it together as opposed to being told we have to now choose this, choose a program that maybe isn't great."

> *Most of the time [the curriculum] that's chosen is by people who don't necessarily listen to the people that have been through the training or understand this.*
> – Speech pathologist

Adopted HQIRs were already being implemented at very high rates. Most teachers and administrators surveyed in the fall who were working in districts that had adopted an HQIR specific to literacy reported that that HQIR was also being implemented; 92% of surveyed teachers and 100% of surveyed administrators who worked in districts that had adopted an HQIR indicated that the HQIR was being implemented. Implementation trends were slightly less robust among spring survey respondents although that likely reflects adoption decisions made after the fall survey in districts that plan to implement the new HQIR beginning the following school year. In the spring, 82% of teachers surveyed who indicated that their districts had adopted an HQIR reported already implementing that resource in their literacy instruction while 94% of administrators reported the same (results not shown).

One promising indicator of the impact of HQIRs was seen among Grade 4 and 5 student achievement data from the KSA. While the adoption of HQIRs at the district level did not significantly influence the impact of LETRS participation on students' KSA Reading performance, the effect of HQIR adoption was significant. Specifically, students in the analysis who attended HQIR-adopting districts had higher average scale scores than students who did not attend such districts (Grade 4: $t = 6.97$, $p < 0.001$; Grade 5: $t = 2.29$, $p = 0.02$). These results suggest that the adoption and implementation of an HQIR for literacy carries a unique benefit—even without related teacher training.

Interconnectedness of LETRS and Curricula

Participants shared a variety of perspectives about their experience in LETRS and how that has connected to their views of curricula, including HQIRs.

Focus group participants reported using a wide range of curricula, including HQIRs, and shared varied perceptions of those curricula. The curricula most mentioned by focus group participants were UFLI, Amplify CKLA, Wonders, and Heggerty, followed by Literacy Footprints and the Orton Gillingham approaches. Other curricula cited with much less frequency were Scarborough's Reading Rope, 95 Phonics Core Program, Reading Common Core, Horizons, Open Up Resources EL, Lexia, i-Ready, and Foundations. Teachers' satisfaction with the adopted district curricula varied greatly, but some curricula received more positive input than others. All teachers in the focus groups that mentioned using UFLI and Amplify CKLA had a positive opinion of those curricula. Teachers who used the Wonders curriculum were more critical of it while others, including Open Up Resources EL, drew mixed feedback. Some of the illustrative comments are shown in Exhibit 24.

Exhibit 24. Educators' Impressions of Literacy Curriculum

"I use UFLI and I can see huge results, especially in their writing." – Grade 3 and 4 teacher

"[About Amplify] … I will say by the beginning of October and those kids were reading like I had never seen first-graders and it was so encouraging and sweet and just as sweet as you can imagine a first grader to be learning to read." – Reading Interventionist

"We have Wonders K–3 and that, I would say we use mostly for comprehension, but next year our district is adopting UFLI just because we feel like it does a better job of addressing like the science of reading and the multisensory and just all those strategies that we're learning that kids need." – Grade 3 teacher

"We have Open Up and I feel like it addresses a lot of the foundational skills, but it does not address all the comprehension. It's lacking in that area." – Special education facilitator,

"Orton Gillingham is our Tier 1 instruction with the comprehension just kind of pieced together, but at my school level and my principal are actually looking for a Tier 2 or Tier 3 reading intervention program." – Reading interventionist

LETRS participation was reported to influence HQIR implementation. Over three-fourths of surveyed educators (76% in the fall and 79% in the spring; see Exhibit 25) reported a belief that participating in the LETRS professional learning had motivated them to implement their district-approved HQIR into their classroom practice. This varied slightly by cohort with those in Cohort 1 more likely to say that LETRS participation motivated their own implementation of the HQIR into their classroom practice. In addition, a subset of teachers described being more aware of strengths and weaknesses within curriculum after going through LETRS. One district-level administrator reported, "I think [LETRS] had a huge impact in us

> *The knowledge is very helpful … so you can learn the 'why' behind various procedures in any given curriculum and also notice where there are gaps.*
> – Reading specialist

> *I noticed some of my teachers have a hard time looking at something and determining if it's something good, and so I think this LETRS will help them be a better judge of what is good, authentic resources and what really is just garbage.*
> – Principal

deciding that districtwide, we were going to buy into Foundations as a district and we were going to implement that wholly as a district."

Exhibit 25. LETRS Participants who Believed that Kentucky Reading Academies Participation Motivated Their Implementation of HQIRs

However, teachers disagreed on the relative importance of the curriculum in place when implementing LETRS. Focus group participants shared their perspectives on the relative importance of curricula in the implementation of LETRS. Participants disagreed on the extent to which the curriculum limited or helped the implementation of LETRS, with some reporting that aligned curriculum facilitated implementation and others reporting that LETRS strategies could be integrated into any curriculum. As an instructional reading coach explained, "One feedback I have about the program is that it's general enough that you can really apply to anything." In contrast, one curriculum instruction specialist working in a school that had adopted UFLI said that "LETRS is the 'why' and then UFLI is the 'how' to apply it, so it helps streamline all of that information and it applies it and puts it in teacher friendly [format]." For other educators, the literacy curriculum was a less impactful component when compared to the teacher expertise in literacy strategies. One reading interventionist shared:

> *I don't know that there is an ideal curriculum as much as there is ideal teacher training, because I think the teacher makes the difference. … Until teachers understand the "why" and why it's so important, I don't think the curriculum's gonna make a difference.*

> *I think the most beneficial component of LETRS is that it really doesn't matter what program you use. This helps you to identify, connect, and to use whatever program it is that you're using in a more effective way.*
> – Reading specialist

VI. Conclusions and Next Steps

Overall, more than 1,600 Kentucky Reading Academies participants shared their feedback and experiences through focus groups, survey responses, and observations. Although every participant's experience was unique, shaped by their own literacy knowledge, prior experience teaching, and the individual context of their districts, schools, and personal lives, numerous common themes emerged across our data, lending confidence to these findings.

This section summarizes key findings across research questions in the Discussion and Conclusions subsection. Next, recommendations for program enhancement as suggested by evaluation participants are presented. This section concludes with a discussion of next steps and considerations.

Discussion and Conclusions

This evaluation sought to address three key research questions related to the benefits of participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies, the unique influence of each element of the LETRS program, and the Kentucky Reading Academies' five literacy goals for educator and student learning. In examining trends across research questions, participants benefitted from new and increased knowledge, strengthened or modified beliefs about how students learn to read and why they struggle, implementing new or adjusted strategies into their classroom practice, and saw early indicators of positive student outcomes as a result. Each of these trends is aligned to relevant research questions in the discussion.

Research Question 1: To what extent and in what ways does participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies influence educator knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction?

Overall participation: Participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies varied by district and school, with some participants reporting that they were the only participant in their school or grade level. In contrast, some districts or school administrators encouraged or required educators to participate in the program, which tended to result in larger cohorts of participants in that district or school. Across data sources, educators reported that participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies had a positive influence on their knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction or educational practice. Educators described their experience with the program to be "eye-opening" and "informative," with many veteran teachers reporting that the LETRS professional learning was the best professional development experience of their careers.

Educator knowledge: Surveyed teachers in both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 demonstrated increases in literacy skills and knowledge throughout the academic year and although this growth was not statistically significant (perhaps due to the short amount of time between the fall and spring surveys), statistically significant differences in knowledge were seen between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2, suggesting enhanced benefits to educator knowledge over time. Teachers and administrators also reported that Kentucky Reading Academies participation had increased participants' confidence in their literacy knowledge, which translated into reported greater comfort teaching literacy and improved skills in evaluating literacy materials.

***Educator beliefs**:* Surveyed educators reported high levels of agreement with belief statements aligned to a phonics approach to literacy and lower agreement ratings about statements related to the whole-word or meaning-based approach. Although a change to beliefs over time was not statistically significant, analysis did find that those in Cohort 1 who had participated in the Kentucky Reading Academies for the longest amount of time were statistically significantly less likely to agree with statements related to a whole-word or comprehension-focused approach than those in Cohort 2. This trend is in alignment with content from LETRS, which emphasized a phonics-based approach rather than one focused on comprehension. Similar to findings related to educator knowledge, the lack of statistical significance may be representative of the short time between the two surveys. Teachers and administrators also shared shifting beliefs related to strategies to help students learn to read and the overall benefits of early literacy.

***Classroom instruction*:** Most teachers were integrating strategies learned in LETRS into their classroom instruction, with teachers in Cohort 1 reporting greater implementation of LETRS strategies than those in Cohort 2. However, both cohorts reported that they needed additional time to reflect on and plan how to fully apply LETRS strategies in their own classrooms. This suggests that teachers may continue to add or adjust teaching strategies even after they have completed their LETRS program. During this reported initial implementation, educators used the knowledge gained in LETRS to make decisions about general strategies and structure to use in the classroom as well as to inform the incorporation of various instructional content into their classrooms. Of particular salience were strategies and tools related to phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and morphology. These areas of implementation into classroom instruction are particularly promising as they align with the pillars of reading instruction found to improve student literacy achievement and promote proficient reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rumelhart, 1977; Seidenberg et al., 2020).

Educational practice: Administrators also leveraged information learned through their participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies to shape conversations with and observations of teachers as well as to inform decision-making. Some administrators also highlighted the use of assessments from LETRS in individual classrooms or grade levels, including a Phonological Awareness Screening Test and a phonics assessment. In addition, participants in LETRS for Administrators described adding more data discussions to weekly or monthly professional learning communities and incorporating discussions about data into coaching sessions to inform teacher instruction and shape student support.

Research Question 2: To what extent are the Kentucky Reading Academies' five literacy goals for educator and student learning met?

Goal A: Increased teacher knowledge regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle.

As discussed under Research Question 1, educators reported increased knowledge about student literacy, with initial analysis suggesting that this knowledge increases during the 2 years of participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies, although that growth was not yet statistically significant. Specific knowledge gains reported by educators related to how the brain processes written language, phonics and phonemic awareness, and ways to help students struggling with elements of literacy.

Goal B. Increased teacher capacity to incorporate instructional strategies aligned to their new learning regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle into their classroom practice.

Although some teachers felt limited in their ability to quickly and fully implement their LETRS learnings (see discussion under Research Question 1), many teachers and administrators shared that their own capacity to incorporate strategies and skills from LETRS had already increased. Those in Cohort 1 reported that it had gotten easier to identify, select, and implement LETRS strategies compared with those in Cohort 2, again attributing this to the increased time and practice Cohort 1 teachers had with these strategies. In addition to being able to use specific resources in their classroom practice, many teachers reported an increased intentionality in their literacy instruction as a result of their participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies.

During observations, teachers demonstrated strong pedagogy, receiving high average ratings across all competencies observed. However, teachers displayed opportunities for improvement in instructional implementation during observations. In particular, additional support may be needed to improve instruction related to spelling in the context of reading, writing, grammar, fluency, and students reading their own writing—areas which received the five lowest ratings. This further underscores that it may take teachers an additional year or two following LETRS completion to fully implement these skills into their instruction, and correspondingly, improvement in student outcomes may be delayed.

Goal C. Increased adoption of high-quality instructional resources for reading and writing at Tier 1 with aligned resources at Tiers 2–3.

Many districts had already adopted an HQIR specific to literacy, with those numbers increasing throughout the year. Some educators—generally classroom teachers—expressed frustration about the HQIR curricula selection process, particularly the limited role of teachers in resource selection or the cost of various curricula. However, implementation of adopted HQIRs was also progressing at a high rate throughout the year. LETRS participants reported that their participation in the professional learning program had motivated them to implement their district-approved HQIR into their classroom practice. Furthermore, analysis of KSA Reading data found that Grade 4 and 5 students enrolled in districts that had adopted and implemented an HQIR for literacy had higher reading scores than students who did not attend such districts, a promising early indicator of the benefits of these resources.

More broadly, teachers and administrators had varying perspectives about the overall quality and utility of literacy curricula in place at their schools, generally indicating more favorable views about those that were designated as HQIRs for reading and writing. However, LETRS participants disagreed about the extent to which the curricula played a critical role in teachers' ability to successfully implement LETRS strategies into their classroom instruction. Overall, most participants reported a belief that while some curriculum made it easier to apply LETRS tools and approaches to instruction, the strategies taught in LETRS could be successfully incorporated into any curriculum.

Goal D. Increased student progress toward grade-level proficiency based on universal screeners and diagnostic assessments.

Teachers and administrators reported increased use of universal screeners and diagnostic assessments to measure student growth and identify areas where students needed extra support, both at the classroom and school level. These assessments were then reported to allow teachers and interventionists to provide more tailored instruction to struggling students. This is a promising development, as research has shown that using diagnostic assessments to provide customized intervention can improve students' literacy skills (Catts et al., 2001).

Many Kentucky Reading Academies' participants shared positive anecdotal evidence about incremental student progress resulting from their participation in the program and implementation of LETRS tools and approaches. Some teachers shared general impressions, reporting that their current class had made more progress than a similar class in previous years, while others reported specific results for specific students or their whole class. These included a reduced need for intervention, substantial gains in reading and writing skills among upper elementary school students who arrived behind grade level, and increased scores in specific assessments across the year. Although not yet seen systematically, these early indicators of program success are positive signs that LETRS is influencing teachers in a way that is impacting student development and success.

Goal E. Increased student outcomes at Grade 3 on the KSA for reading.

As expected, statewide data on the KSA lagged behind teachers' anecdotal reports of student progress and had yet to show significant gains in learning attributed to LETRS participation. In addition, complications with obtaining another student outcome data source, reading assessment data from a third-party vendor, prevented the inclusion of that analysis in this report, limiting what is fully known about student progress. So, with KSA Reading data as the only available measure of student achievement at the time of this report, analysis was restricted to examining outcomes among students in Grade 4 and 5 during the 2022–2023 school year. Among these students, there was no significant difference between students with teachers who participated in the Kentucky Reading Academies and those with teachers who had not participated in the professional learning. This may be reflective of the more limited implementation of LETRS strategies into classroom instruction that was reported by teachers, particularly during their first year of program participation.

As shown in the experience of other states, improved literacy outcomes among students may lag a year or two behind teacher participation as teachers scale up implementation of new tools and approaches. This aligns with findings from Mississippi, Colorado, and North Carolina, which have seen areas of delayed impact on student reading outcomes after initial implementation of science-of-reading-based literacy programs. For example, delayed effects from Mississippi's science-of-reading-based literacy programs were observed on student reading outcomes where reading proficiency levels on the state assessment increased from 36% in the 2017 school year (MDE, 2017) to 45% in the 2018 school year (MDE, 2018). This increase occurred 2 years after most of the targeted teachers had completed LETRS—in June 2016 (Folsom et al., 2017). Three years after Colorado's teacher training mandate, increases in teachers' knowledge of literacy skills were seen, however, at the time of the report they had yet to see these shifts translate to student

outcomes (Grogan et al., 2023). In addition, North Carolina only saw impacts of its training after their first cohort completed professional learning (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2023).

Research Question 3: To what extent does each element of the LETRS program (digital learning platform, print materials, live virtual sessions, bridge-to-practice activities) positively influence educator knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction? How?

The LETRS professional learning content uses a blended model that includes a print manual, an online learning platform, and live virtual sessions with a trained facilitator. Overall, survey participants reported that the most used component was the print materials followed by the live facilitated sessions. Correspondingly, survey respondents indicated that both print materials and the live facilitated sessions had a positive influence on their understanding of literacy skills and strategies, their literacy beliefs, and their classroom practice. This influence seemed to grow over time with those in Cohort 1 indicating statistically higher ratings than those in Cohort 2 across many of these domains. However, although participants were generally pleased with the facilitators of the live virtual sessions, many expressed that the length of the sessions was excessive and acted as a barrier to robust participation. Several participants offered recommendations for improving this component of LETRS, which are included in the following section.

Many educators also provided positive opinions about the overall online learning platform, particularly the diverse modes of communicating information. However, several of the components within the platform were less well utilized. For example, educators varied in their use of the embedded bridge-to-practice activities, with some required to complete these activities to qualify for participation incentives offered by their district while others struggled to complete these activities based on their role in the classroom. Educators also had divergent thoughts on the benefits of embedded videos, with some reporting that the videos of teachers enacting LETRS strategies were extremely valuable and others indicating that they found the videos unrealistic and less useful. In contrast, participants were generally unified in their reports that the online journal and online help center were less useful and correspondingly less used.

Recommendations for Ongoing Implementation of the Reading Academies

The many educators who participated in the surveys and focus groups provided recommendations for strengthening ongoing implementation of the Kentucky Reading Academies, which the KDE may wish to consider as it moves into its third year of implementation.

Participants suggested approaches to address or compensate for the significant time commitment required to participate in the Kentucky Reading Academies. Nearly all participants expressed that participating in the program was extremely time-intensive and the program would benefit from either requiring less time or by compensating teachers for participating. At the time of this study, some districts were providing teachers with stipends or time off to participate in LETRS, and a few others were offering teachers rank changes upon program completion, but many were not compensating teachers for their participation. In response, the most common suggestions put forward by participants involved encouraging districts to allow release time for participants to complete the program and providing stipends to account for additional hours educators would need to spend doing program activities. One literacy coach pointed out that such incentives would likely need to be supported by the state as "not all districts have the funding to be able to do that."

> *It is by far the best training that I have ever participated in! It is also the most time-consuming. I believe that teachers should be given time during the day to complete the training or else paid for their time and effort.*
> – Grade 2 teacher

Some participants wanted to see the Kentucky Reading Academies provide an option for going through LETRS during the summer. A few teachers and administrators suggested that the reading academies be available as an intensive program over the summer rather than during the school year. A few teachers recommended condensing each year of LETRS into a summer session so that LETRS for Educators could be completed over two successive summers. One administrator suggested being able to complete the program before the start of the school year would help to better assist and support their teachers. Another school administrator recommended taking key content and strategies from LETRS and offering them as off-the-shelf training for teachers who are not able to commit to the full program.

> *I feel that to get better traction, KDE needs to offer some 1-day, 2-day, and even 1-week intensive trainings in the summer when teachers may be more willing to spend some time on additional [professional development].*
> – Reading specialist

A few participants suggested that there be additional specialized content specifically for non-traditional educators to assist in their specific roles. Some reading specialists, interventionists, and special educators expressed a desire for content more tailored to their roles. Some suggestions included separating the live virtual sessions by role, having the KDE provide supplemental materials by role type that could augment content in LETRS, or forming statewide PLCs by role that could serve as a forum for sharing strategies and approaches.

A few administrators mentioned that it would be beneficial to have access to the educator's content while they were doing the modules from the administrator side. Although some administrators had opted to complete LETRS for Educators after finishing their own program, many did not feel that they would have the time to commit to participating in both programs. A potential solution offered was to give all LETRS for Administrator participants access to some or all of the teacher content, perhaps by providing administrators with the print manual or granting access to

the online platform for teachers. As one administrator said, "While it's very comprehensive and it is in-depth, not knowing exactly what that teacher module is would be a slight disadvantage."

Some participants recommended ways that the Kentucky Reading Academies could continue upon completion of LETRS or ways that reading academies participants could share their new knowledge with colleagues. Some Kentucky Reading Academies participants were eager for additional support with implementing LETRS strategies and approaches after the program had ended. Others expressed a willingness to formally share what they had learned with colleagues. For example, one education recovery specialist suggested that there be some form of ongoing support for those who have completed LETRS to keep the knowledge fresh. They said, "If [participants] had a monthly cohort where they met and then they had one action step or one thing to take and follow up within the month … I think would be very beneficial." Another instructional coach also recommended "some sort of continued cohort ensuring that the practices are actually implemented right, not just that the online work is done, because that in and of itself will not be enough to sustain a change in practice."

> *One of the things we talked about doing was doing, like, a monthly kind of reading academy at our school. … We got a special ed teacher and two [classroom] teachers and then I've done it. So maybe the four of us just kind of leading the training to the whole staff.*
> – Assistant principal, Cohort 1

Several participants lamented that they did not receive similar training as an undergraduate or in graduate school, with some participants suggesting that the content from the LETRS professional learning be taught as a part of teacher preparatory programs. In the anecdotal accounts of several participants, educators expressed that they wished they had been taught these literacy concepts earlier in their careers. As one special education teacher put it, "This program has taught me more about literacy instruction than anything else I've done in my career (19 years). It is a disservice to teachers and students that this is not part of university instruction for all future teachers." Participants suggested that having these courses before becoming a teacher would ensure that new teachers are properly equipped to teach literacy skills across grade levels.

> *I have been in education for 27 years and have completely changed my way of thinking when it comes to effective and appropriate reading instruction. I wish I would have had this training as a pre-service teacher so that I could have better met the needs of the students I have had in the span of my career.*
> – Reading specialist

Next Steps and Considerations

As this evaluation enters a second year of data collection and analysis, there are several potential next steps that can inform key research questions and provide the KDE with more context for who is benefiting the most from Kentucky Reading Academies participation and in what ways. For example:

- ICF will continue to partner with the KDE and relevant third-party assessment providers to obtain additional statewide reading data. This will allow for deeper analysis of student progress toward grade-level proficiency and student literacy outcomes by Grade 3.

- This Year 1 evaluation was able to preliminarily explore the influence of the Kentucky Reading Academies on traditional classroom teachers but did not provide an in-depth analysis on the extent to which the program informs and benefits specialists such as reading interventionists or special education teachers. For the Year 2 evaluation, ICF recommends exploring the feasibility of focusing on teachers in these roles through case studies to better understand how and in what ways these teachers benefit from participation.
- Given that ICF found many positive but not statistically significant findings in the growth model regarding teachers' knowledge and beliefs (across both cohorts), the fact that only 8% of Cohort 1 survey respondents had completed the LETRS professional learning at the time of the spring survey, and the fact that there were only 3 months between fall and spring survey administrations, it is recommended that ICF survey Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 each one more time in the Year 2 evaluation to see if additional time to complete the professional learning will result in statistically significant gains in knowledge and beliefs.
- KDE plans to implement their literacy coaching model during the 2024–2025 school year. ICF will include coaches in the data collection of the Year 2 evaluation and seek to understand the extent to which these school-based coaches are effective in supporting and achieving positive literacy outcomes.
- As Cohort 1 teachers and administrators from Cohorts 1 and 2 complete their professional learning, ICF will work with the KDE to discuss the feasibility of exploring LETRS implementation among these teachers and administrators to understand how the professional learning is affecting practice.

As the KDE reflects on and responds to findings from this Year 1 evaluation, there are several potential opportunities to refine the Kentucky Reading Academies program, respond to participants' feedback, and further program impact. For example:

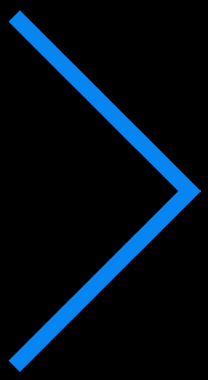
- As recruitment for Cohort 3 continues, the KDE could leverage findings about how teachers and administrators heard about the Kentucky Reading Academies and why they are motivated to join the program to shape outreach and messaging. For example, many administrators and teachers reported learning about LETRS through personal relationships. The KDE could conduct targeted outreach to current Kentucky Reading Academies participants with language they could use or tailor to encourage their colleagues and friends to join Cohort 3.
- Many teachers expressed concern about the significant level of effort required to participate in LETRS as a barrier to participation. Some schools and districts were able to offset this burden of time by offering stipends, providing substitute teachers, or rewarding participants with a rank change upon completion. The KDE could work with districts to explore opportunities to provide more support to teachers going through the Kentucky Reading Academies in ways that align with district budgets and priorities.
- Some districts required participation in the bridge-to-practice activities to qualify for a rank change or other school- or district-level stipends or incentives. However, many participants shared challenges with implementing those activities and even those who were able to complete them sometimes found them less useful than intended. Schools

or districts with these requirements may benefit from exploring other implementation exercises to ensure that LETRS participants are able to successfully implement LETRS content. The KDE may benefit from reaching out to individuals who have already completed LETRS to assist with developing these alternatives or brainstorming other potential workarounds.

- Many teachers and administrators shared suggestions for ways to make the LETRS platform more engaging, useful, or streamlined for their needs. Although these changes may not be incorporated in time for the start of Cohort 3, this feedback could be shared with Lexia to determine if changes can be made. Where changes are not feasible, the KDE could provide suggested workarounds, such as keeping a notebook outside of the LETRS platform to write down particularly impactful content or strategies to mitigate not being able to bookmark content or go back and review completed units.
- Both cohorts reported that they needed additional time to reflect on and plan how to fully apply LETRS strategies in their own classrooms. With two cohorts of administrators and the first cohort of teachers now through the LETRS program as of spring 2024, the KDE could explore opportunities to encourage school- or district-level implementation of LETRS practices. The incorporation of coaches into the Kentucky Reading Academies in the 2024–2025 school year may be one important strategy for supporting implementation of evidence-based reading practices in schools and districts across the commonwealth. In addition, the KDE could develop statewide or district-specific resources of "promising practices" or "emerging practices" to share how participants are collaborating within schools, successful approaches to implementing classroom practices, or steps administrators have taken to use screeners or assessments to drive instruction, for example. As another strategy, the KDE may wish to establish statewide PLCs through the Kentucky Reading Academies to support ongoing collaboration on how to implement learnings in the classroom.
- Although student outcomes on the KSA had not yet changed, it is important to note that the scores included in ICF's analysis were from the 2022–2023 school year, in which Cohort 1 teachers had just started the Kentucky Reading Academies program. In addition, as shown in other states that have implemented similar statewide science-of-reading professional learning initiatives, it may take a couple of years before teacher professional learnings begin to affect student outcomes. Although the evaluation will conclude in June 2025, and will only include KSA scores through the 2023–2024 school year, the KDE may wish to conduct a follow-up impact study in the future to assess the impacts of the Kentucky Reading Academies.
- A large number of LETRS participants expressed a desire that the content from LETRS be included in teacher training programs. The Kentucky General Assembly has already agreed with this finding, through the passage of the Read to Succeed Act in 2022, which also requires postsecondary institutions offering teacher preparation programs in early childhood education and elementary education (including special education) to align their curriculum with the evidence-based reading practices that are emphasized in LETRS. These include content areas such as phonological awareness as well as the implementation and use of data from assessments to monitor student progress and

tailor instructional strategies accordingly. The KDE can continue to support this effort to equip early-career teachers more thoroughly.

ICF will continue to partner with the KDE to interpret the findings and implications from this report to make data-informed decisions about the Year 2 evaluation. A detailed evaluation plan will be developed alongside the KDE that leverages available data, examines key research questions, and seeks to provide further evidence about the extent and ways in which Kentucky Reading Academies participation supports and strengthens educators across the commonwealth.



Appendix A: References

Appendix A: References

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Appendix B: Detailed Methodology

Appendix B: Detailed Methodology

The goals for this evaluation are to better understand the extent to which the Kentucky Reading Academies program is meeting its goals of influencing education knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction through the LETRS professional learning program and the eventual coaching model. An abridged description of the methodology for this evaluation is included in Section I of this report. Below is a detailed description of the study including the evaluation approach, data collection efforts, and analytic methods.

Research Questions

This study has four primary research questions that together seek to help KDE and other stakeholders understand the extent and ways in which participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies is shaping educator practice and student learning:

Research Question 1: To what extent and in what ways does participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies influence educator knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction?
Research Question 2: To what extent are the Kentucky Reading Academies' five literacy goals for educator and student learning met?

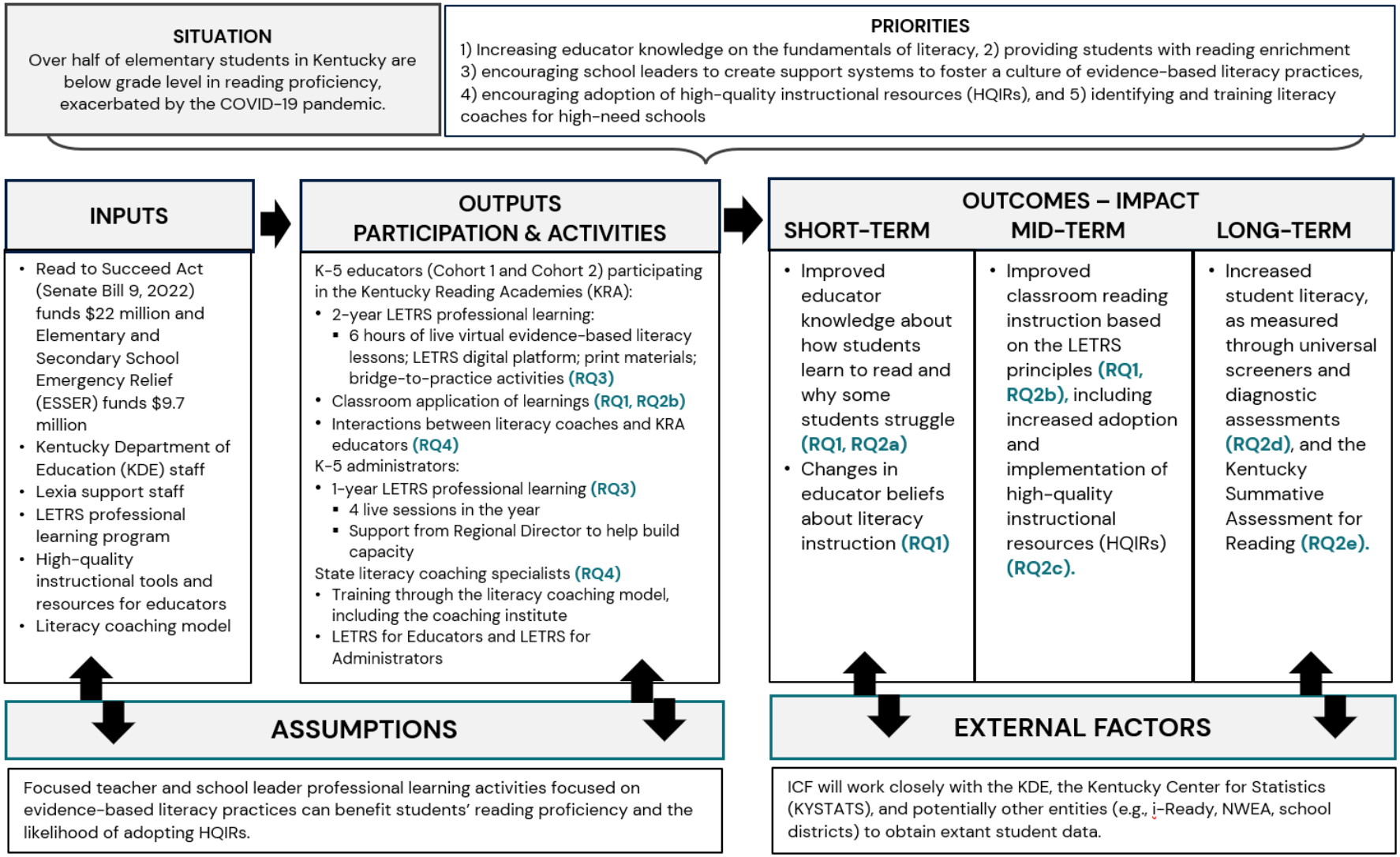
a) Increased teacher knowledge regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle.
b) Increased teacher capacity to incorporate instructional strategies aligned to their new learning regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle into their classroom practice.
c) Increased adoption of high-quality instructional resources for reading and writing at Tier 1 with aligned resources at Tiers 2–3.
d) Increased student progress toward grade-level proficiency based on universal screeners and diagnostic assessments.
e) Increased student outcomes at Grade 3 on the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA) for reading.

Research Question 3: To what extent does each element of the LETRS program (digital learning platform, print materials, live virtual sessions, bridge-to-practice activities) positively influence educator knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction? How?
Research Question 4: When the literacy coaching model is established, to what extent are the school-based coaches effective in supporting and achieving positive literacy outcomes? (Addressed in Year 2 of this evaluation.)

Each of these research questions align with various parts of the Kentucky Reading Academies program's activities and/or intended outcomes, as seen in the program logic model (Exhibit B.1). The Kentucky Reading Academies program, eventually supported by school-based coaching, is intended to change teachers' knowledge and beliefs about literacy instruction and the factors that lead to student success (Short-Term Outcomes). Those changes in knowledge and beliefs will lead to improved classroom instruction and the use of high-quality instructional resources (Intermediate-Term Outcomes), which will in turn positively impact student literacy in Grades K–3 (Long-Term Outcomes).

Exhibit B.1. Kentucky Read to Succeed Evaluation Logic Model

Mission: *The goal of the Kentucky Reading Academies is to promote K–5 educators' knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instructional practices in evidence-based literacy practices, to ultimately improve student reading outcomes.*



Evaluation Approach

ICF utilized a mixed-methods evaluation approach that included quantitative metrics collected through teacher surveys and student assessments along with qualitative data collected through school-based site visits and focus groups with instructional staff and school leaders. Findings from across these methods were examined for contradictions and confirmations (Johnson et al., 2007), and triangulated to produce the comprehensive picture of the Kentucky Reading Academies program, including its strengths and weaknesses; factors that contribute to its success; its influence on students, teachers, and schools; and potential steps that could be taken to refine and customize the program over time.

Data Sources

The first year of this evaluation consisted of four types of data sources:

a) Two rounds of surveys with teachers and administrators participating in the LETRS professional learning program;

b) Two rounds of focus groups with teachers and administrators participating in the LETRS professional learning program;

c) Extant data from the Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) including de-identified demographic and academic data from both teachers and students; and

d) Classroom observations occurring in Spring 2024.

Instrument Design and Development

Instruments were developed in October 2023 and modified as needed in January 2024. All instruments were reviewed by the KDE and reviewed and approved by ICF's Institutional Review Board and can be found in Appendix C.

Teacher Surveys

The teacher surveys consisted of five sections: 1) background characteristics; 2) Teacher Knowledge of Early Literacy Skills (TKELS; Folsom et al., 2017); 3) Teacher Beliefs Survey (TBS; Bills, 2020), 4) self-reported LETRS progress and use of LETRS materials, and 5) adoption of high-quality instructional resources (HQIRs). The TKELS and the TBS are validated instruments, while the rest of the survey was developed by ICF staff.

The TKELS includes two equivalent forms (Form A and Form B), each consisting of 31 questions related to knowledge; application; and teaching of comprehension, writing and grammar, fluency, vocabulary, spelling, phonological and phonemic awareness, and phonics. Form A was administered in the fall 2023 survey administration and Form B in the spring 2024 survey administration. Both forms of the TKELS were found to be equivalent (Folsom et al., 2017).

The TBS includes 18 items asking respondents to indicate their agreement about various literacy beliefs on a 6-point Likert scale 1 - *Strongly disagree to* 6 - *Strongly agree*. The TBS consists of seven code-based items involving beliefs about the phonics approach (e.g., Poor phonemic awareness contributes to early reading failure); six meaning-based items involve beliefs about the

whole-word approach (e.g., When beginning readers encounter an unknown word a good strategy to suggest is to use pictures to figure the word out.); and five neutral items are not representative of a specific theoretical approach but are general beliefs about literacy (e.g., Basic early literacy skills should never be taught in isolation). Higher agreement ratings on the code-based beliefs are expected, whereas lower ratings on meaning-based beliefs are expected.

Focus Groups

Focus group protocols were developed to reflect the evaluation research questions and to learn more about the stated goals of the Kentucky Reading Academies program. Protocols were semi-structured to allow for both consistency in discussions across groups as well as flexibility for groups and participants to focus on elements of LETRS or the Kentucky Reading Academies that were of particular salience.

Student Assessments

For the current report, students' academic achievement is determined by the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA), specifically the content area assessment for reading (KDE, 2024). The KSA is designed to measure student mastery of the Kentucky Academic Standards, resulting in both a scale score and performance level descriptor (distinguished, proficient, apprentice, and novice).

Classroom Observations

ICF worked with the KDE to create an observation tool heavily adopted from the Coach's Classroom Observation Tool (CCOT) by Folsom and colleagues (2017), which was specifically developed to capture ratings of quality of early literacy skills instruction, implementation of appropriate strategies, adoption of instructional resources, presence of teacher knowledge about how students learn to read, student engagement during early literacy skills instruction, and teaching competencies. The research team adapted the CCOT to better suit the context of classroom observations. Modifications included rephrasing the quality of implementation component of the CCOT to "Instructional Implementation" to ensure that teachers were not made to feel evaluated or judged and omitting some items on the teacher competencies subscale because it would not have been possible to observe these competencies within the 30-minute observation window. This tool was structured to be beneficial to this evaluation and to be used by the KDE coaches once they begin supporting teachers. In addition to the CCOT instrument, a brief reflective questionnaire was developed for teachers to complete following their observation.

Data Collection

This evaluation included two rounds of data collection, with teacher surveys and focus groups occurring in fall 2023 and spring 2024. Classroom observations took place only in the spring of 2024. Student assessment data was collected from the 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 spring administrations.

Sampling Approaches

Observations

The process of sampling Kentucky schools for participation in classroom observations began with access to a compiled school-level data file containing background information including county, district, and Kentucky Educational Cooperatives affiliations; National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) geographic locale indicators (e.g., rural-fringe, suburban-large, and so on); the number of teachers and administrators participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies; as well as demographic summary variables, including the percent of female students, percent of students by various racial/ethnic categories, the percent proficient on reading assessments, the percent of students who are economically disadvantaged, the average years of experience of teachers at the school, the percent of students taught by inexperienced teachers, teacher turnover rates, and school climate and safety index values.[1]

Schools were categorized by the number of Cohort 1 and 2 teacher and administrator Kentucky Reading Academies participants, creating groups for No Participants, Single Participant, 2–4 Participants, 3–10 Participants and 11+ Participants. Schools were also categorized by geographic locale into Rural, Town, Suburban and City groups. The remaining school-level background variables were mean-centered in preparation for propensity score estimation. The reading performance, student demographic summaries, teacher experience and turnover variables, and the climate and safety index variables were used to estimate the probability (i.e., propensity score) that a school had at least one Kentucky Reading Academies participant (i.e., a treatment school) as opposed to no participants (i.e., a comparison school). Schools were subsequently grouped into three distinct strata based on the estimated probabilities, so that schools within any one stratum would have similar probabilities and, hence, subsequent profiles based on all the compiled school background data.

A stratified sample was then drawn using the school-level data for schools with at least one Kentucky Reading Academies' participant,[2] with strata comprised of educational cooperative, geographic locale, the number of participants grouping, and the propensity-based grouping. To minimize the prevalence of schools with only a single Kentucky Reading Academies participant, these schools were assigned a weight value of 0.25 whereas all other schools were assigned values of 0.5. Once the sample was drawn, records within each stratum were randomly sorted in Primary and Reserve units, with the latter serving as available sites for observations should any of those identified as Primary refuse participation. Overall, this yielded six sampled sites as Primary and an additional five sites as Reserve for Kentucky Reading Academies Cohort 1 participants. The sampling process was then repeated based on Cohort 2 participation,[3] yielding six Primary and six Reserve sites.

To minimize scheduling challenges and ensure that schools with large numbers of participants weren't inadvertently given extra weight in the analysis, observations at all schools were limited to

[1] The school-level background variables were obtained from the KDE School Report Card website.

[2] Note that schools within the Williamstown Independent School District were removed before sampling to avoid conflict of interest issues (the superintendent of the district is the spouse of a Kentucky Reading Academies project leader).

[3] The Cohort 2 sampling proceeded after first removing schools already drawn as Cohort 1 Primary or Reserve sites.

two participating teachers per grade level, resulting in no more than 10 observations per school. Teachers at schools with more than two participating teachers per grade were then randomly assigned to either initial or back-up groups, with back-up teachers being invited to participate in observations if initial teachers refused participation or were unavailable. In addition, since the CCOT has only been validated in general education classrooms, reading interventionists and special education teachers were not observed.

Focus Group Participants

As with the site visit sampling, the process of selecting Kentucky Reading Academies participants for focus groups began with compiling teacher and administrator data for Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 participants, linking them with associated school-level data to serve as strata. Once compiled, any participants associated with schools already identified in the site visit sampling process were removed to avoid over-burdening the same schools.

The first stratified sampling process was conducted using data for teachers, once again using educational cooperative, geographic locale, the number of participants grouping, and the propensity-based grouping variables created as part of the site visit sampling process. Identified participants were then randomly assigned to one of eight possible groups representing four Primary and four Reserve groups. The same process was followed using only the administrator data, resulting in two groups (one Primary, one Reserve).

Participant Recruitment and Data Collection

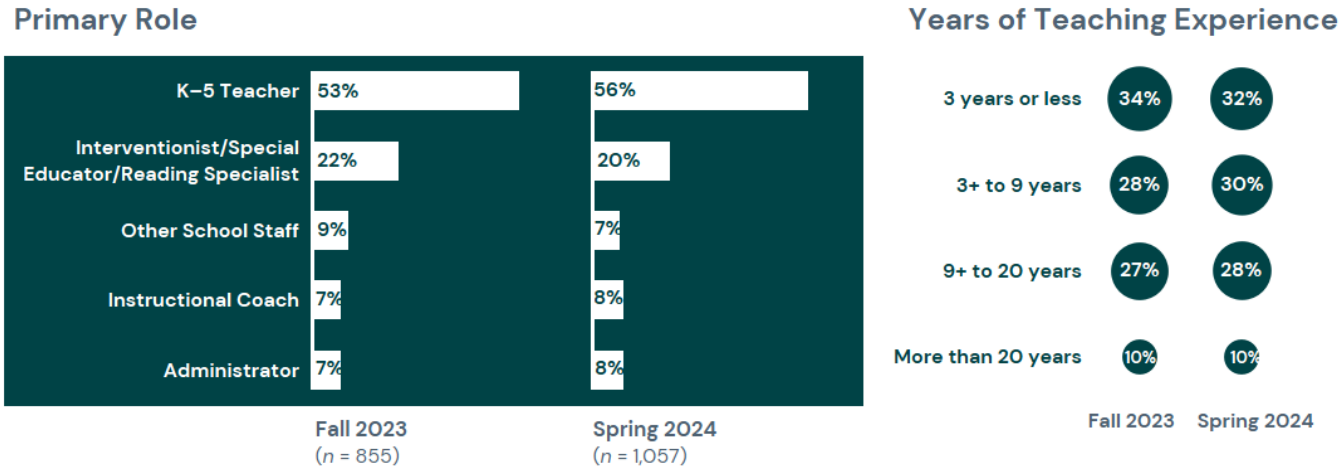
Prior to beginning data collection, the KDE sent study notifications to district and school administrators informing them of this study and upcoming data collection efforts so that they would know the study was valid.

Survey Recruitment and Data Collection

All registered LETRS participants were sent a link to the survey and twice weekly reminder emails throughout the data collection period in both the fall and the spring.

Fall Survey Participants. During the fall data collection, 855 LETRS registrants participated in the survey, which represented 20% of all LETRS registrants. Of those, 349 survey respondents were members of Cohort 1 (41%) and 497 were members of Cohort 2 (58%). A strong majority—90%—participated in LETRS for Educators while 10% participated in LETRS for Administrators. The majority of respondents were K–5 teachers (53%; Exhibit B.2), while a smaller proportion were interventionists, special educators, or reading specialists (22%). Participants varied in their years of teaching experience, with the majority having fewer than 10 years of teaching experience (62%). Approximately one-third of respondents (37%) worked in schools found in rural areas versus non-rural areas (61%).

Exhibit B.2. Demographics of Survey Participants in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024



Spring Survey Participants. During spring data collection, 1,057 respondents participated in the survey, which included 477 Cohort 1 participants and 580 Cohort 2 participants. Within this group, nearly two-thirds (64%) came from non-rural school districts. The majority of respondents were classroom teachers in kindergarten through Grade 5 (56%), followed by interventionists/special education teachers/reading specialists (20%). Just 8% of survey respondents were school- or district-level administrators. Roughly one-third of survey respondents were new teachers, having less than 3 years of experience (32%). Another third had between 3 and 9 years of teaching experience (30%), while 10% of all survey respondents had been in the teaching profession for more than 20 years.

Focus Group Recruitment and Data Collection

Following the initial outreach from the KDE, ICF also sent study notifications to teachers and school administrators selected to participate in the focus groups. In both the fall and the spring, there were low response rates among teachers who were selected to participate in the focus groups; to support recruitment, the KDE sent an additional email to all registered LETRS participants informing them of the opportunity to participate in focus groups.

Fall Focus Groups. The final group of 34 fall focus group participants was comprised of approximately one-third of individuals who had been selected through sampling and approximately two-thirds who had opted to participate following outreach from the KDE. Of these participants, 21 were teachers or specialists and 13 were school- or district-level administrators.

Spring Focus Groups. Overall, seven focus groups were held in the spring with 35 teachers and five administrators. This included 22 participating teachers enrolled in LETRS as part of Cohort 1, 13 participants enrolled in LETRS as part of Cohort 2, four administrators in Cohort 1, and one administrator in Cohort 2.

Observation Recruitment and Data Collection

Initial notification of inclusion into the observations was sent out by the KDE to all superintendents and school principals with a teacher in their district/building included in the sample as either a Primary or Reserve participant. One school in the primary sample opted to remove itself from the sample at this stage. Subsequent emails were sent out to all selected teachers informing them of their inclusion in the data collection effort and giving them an opportunity to decline to participate. As a result of this round of communication, 27 individual teachers withdrew from the sample. However, schools remained in the sample as long as they had at least one teacher willing and able to participate in observations. Overall, three schools from the Primary sample were replaced by schools in the Reserve sample and one Reserve school was further replaced by a different Reserve school.

Forty-four teachers across 11 schools participated in the observation. Five schools included teachers from Cohort 1 and six schools included teachers from Cohort 2, however there were greater numbers of LETRS participants at schools included in the Cohort 1 sample; 26 teachers were in Cohort 1 and 18 were in Cohort 2. Teachers were concentrated in kindergarten and first grade, but distributed across kindergarten through fifth grade (see Table B.3).

Table B.3. Characteristics of Observed Teachers (n=44)

Grade	Number	Percent
Kindergarten	15	34.1
Grade 1	12	27.3
Grade 2	6	13.6
Grade 3	8	18.2
Grade 4	1	2.3
Grade 5	2	4.5

Secondary Data Collection

ICF worked with the KDE and KYSTATS to draft and execute a necessary memorandum of understanding and data sharing agreement as well as to identify a list of needed variables. Following this process, KYSTATS provided the ICF team with rich statewide KDE data covering both the 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 academic years, including district- and campus-level characteristics, de-identified staff characteristics (e.g., demographics, years of teaching experience, credentials earned), and de-identified student characteristics (e.g., demographics, course enrollment, KSA data).

A similar process was begun with both the NWEA to access their MAP student assessment data and with Curriculum Associates to access their i-Ready student assessment data. Various delays in developing and executing confidentiality agreements and data sharing agreements prolonged this process such that data from these statewide assessments was not yet available for the purposes of this evaluation.

Analysis

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis for the teacher outcomes includes a demographic summary of the educators participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies program, including summary tables, appropriate graphical displays, and accompanying explanatory text based on characteristics such as years of experience, locale of school, role, and cohort. Descriptive summaries (e.g., means) of literacy outcomes, such as the literacy skills and beliefs scales (i.e., TKELS, TBS) and classroom practice as

obtained through the CCOT, are provided for fall 2023 and spring 2024 and for specific subgroups of interest, namely cohort, urbanicity, and years of experience. Parsing findings by subgroups such as these allows for a better contextual understanding of these findings.

Similar summaries are presented for the calculated measure of teacher progression through the Kentucky Reading Academies program as well as student outcomes (i.e., KSA Reading scale scores and performance level descriptors). Where appropriate, graphical summaries are offered to succinctly display patterns and relationships. These descriptive analyses are also conducted by various subgroups of interest to detect differences based on student population demographics or other contextual factors. Subgroup examples include summaries by school, geographic locale code (e.g., rural versus non-rural schools), or the distribution of a student body by race/ethnic background. Disaggregating data by subgroups such as these will allow our evaluation team to better understand patterns/trends in outcomes and how those may be influenced by local contexts or extrinsic factors outside of school control.

Qualitative Analysis

After completing all focus groups, the research team transcribed the sessions and coded transcripts under major themes. The analysis of the focus group conversations among Kentucky Reading Academies teachers and administrators was undertaken using an inductive approach, allowing meaning from interactions to emerge through coding and constant comparative strategies (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). We reviewed teacher conversations to look for common categories of experiences and impressions of participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies initiative. In addition, we coded observations shared by teachers that described the contexts within which they operated, including whether they served "high-need" students, the extent to which other teachers in their building were participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies, whether their school underwent a leadership change, or whether they recently changed their school assignment. Quotes or segments of the interactions that provided support for the underlying Kentucky Reading Academies theory of change or any quantitative data were identified for use in the final report.

As part of classroom observations, observed teachers were asked to record their impressions about the experience. Specifically, teachers were asked to record their responses to three questions: 1) what was the lesson that was observed, 2) why they chose the observed lesson/activity, and 3) how LETRS informed, if at all, their decisions around the observed instruction. The research team transcribed and analyzed the recordings, applying the same coding scheme as was developed during the focus groups.

Across all of this qualitative analysis, the research team used Dedoose, an established qualitative data analysis software, to help with the coding, analysis, and organization tasks. Thematic findings were also compared with findings from the teacher survey, quantitative observation data, and data from KYSTATS to determine alignment or divergence.

Inferential Analysis

Teacher Outcomes

To examine change in literacy knowledge and skills as well as literacy beliefs stemming from participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies, growth models using hierarchical linear models (HLMs; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) were employed. HLM is used to model effects when data has a nested structure. For example, repeated observations collected from a sample of individuals; individuals could also be nested within organizational units (e.g., classrooms, schools). HLM is also advantageous in how it considers missing data, specifically that all observations are employed in the model, for instance, when data from individuals are not gathered at all given time points. Given that repeated observations (fall 2023 and spring 2024) of teachers' literacy skills on the TKELS (Folsom et al, 2017) and that their literacy beliefs have the potential to be nested at the school level, results from a preliminary analysis using an unconditional model to examine whether change in literacy skills and beliefs was nested at the school-level. Given the limited number of teachers within each school with some schools having no teacher respondents, three-level models could not be conducted. To detect unbiased fixed effects from level-3 models a minimum of 10 individuals per group (i.e., school) is needed (Lee & Hong, 2021); hence subsequent analysis was carried out with Level 2 models.

$$Y_{ti} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{10}TIME_{ti} + \gamma_{01}Cohort_{ti} + \gamma_{11}TIME_{ti} \times Cohort_{ti} + \left(\mu_{0i} + \mu_{1i}TIME_{ti} + e_{ij}\right)$$

In this growth model, Y_{ti} is the outcome of interest (i.e., teacher literacy skills and beliefs) measured at time *t,* for teacher *i.* γ_{00} represents the overall intercept as the baseline (i.e., initial time point) mean of the outcome, γ_{10} represents the overall or main effect of change on the outcome of interest, γ_{01} represents the main effect of group membership (i.e., cohort) on the outcome, and γ_{11} represents the potential interaction effect of cohort as a function of time on outcomes. The terms inside the parentheses represent the random effects at the teacher and school levels, where μ_{0i} and μ_{1i} represent unexplained variance in the initial status or rate of change, respectively. Cohort membership is taken as an indicator of progress in the LETRS professional learning given their varying degrees of exposure to professional learning since most teachers are yet to complete their LETRS professional learning, where Cohort 1 = 1 and Cohort 2 =0. Growth modeling was carried out with 348 respondents who completed both fall and spring surveys.

Student Outcomes

An HLM approach was also designed to estimate the impact of Kentucky Reading Academies professional learning participation on student outcomes (i.e., KSA Reading scale scores), as the data form a hierarchical structure with students nested within classrooms, which are further nested within campuses. In order to reduce bias in the estimation of the treatment effect due to covariate confounding, propensity score methods were used to match participating Kentucky Reading Academies teachers to non-participating peers. Teachers were eligible for inclusion in the analysis if they 1) served as the educator on record for a Grade 4 or 5 reading course, and 2) at least five of their students had valid KSA Reading scores for both the 2022–2023 and 2021–2022 administrations, which is an acceptable minimum Level 1 group size for a multilevel model with

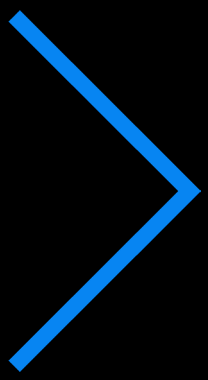
adequate numbers of upper-level units, when the effect of interest is an upper-level characteristic (Maas & Hox, 2005).

Once eligible Kentucky Reading Academies participants were identified, the pool of eligible peers was constructed using Grade 4 and 5 reading course enrollment data at campuses that had no Kentucky Reading Academies participants. Propensity scores, or the probability of belonging to the reading academies subset, were calculated based on a set of observed teacher- (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, age, years of experience), classroom- (i.e., classroom representation for students identified as female, White, gifted, free or reduced-price lunch, receiving Section 504 and/or special education services; average percent absent), and campus-level characteristics (i.e., campus locale, Title I status). Non-participants were selected for analysis using a greedy nearest neighbor approach, which selects the propensity score closest to that of the given Kentucky Reading Academies participant, without replacement. Matched peers were identified for all eligible participating teachers (analyzing Grade 4 and 5 samples separately), and baseline equivalence was demonstrated for all included covariates. For Grade 4, a total of 168 teachers, 142 campuses, and 6,544 students were selected for analysis. For Grade 5, a total of 110 teachers, 100 campuses, and 4,372 students were selected for analysis.

Upon the successful match of Kentucky Reading Academies participants to non-participants with similar sets of characteristics, the impact of LETRS participation on KSA Reading scores was estimated with the following three-level HLM (again, analyzing the Grade 4 and 5 samples independently)

$$Y_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 LETRS_j + \sum_{p=1}^{P} \beta_p X_{pi} + \sum_{q=1}^{Q} \beta_q X_{qj} + \sum_{s=1}^{S} \beta_s X_{sk} + e_k + e_{j(k)} + e_{i(j(k))}$$

where Y_{ijk} refers to student *i* taught by teacher *j* within campus *k*, β_0 refers to the overall average KSA Reading scale score, and β_1 is the main effect of LETRS participation on the outcome. β_p represents the association between student characteristic, X_{pi}, and the outcome; β_q represents the association between teacher characteristic, X_{qj}, and the outcome; and β_s represents the association between campus characteristic, X_{sk}, and the outcome. The random variance components estimated at the student-, teacher-, and campus-levels are represented by $e_{i(j(k))}$, $e_{j(k)}$, and e_k, respectively.



Appendix C: Instruments

Appendix C: Instruments

Kentucky Reading Academies Teacher Survey

Section 1: Background Characteristics

1. Please provide your district email address: _____
2. Please indicate the school district in which you are currently working in the 2023-2024 SY _____
3. Please indicate the name of the school in which you are currently working _____
4. Were you working in a different school from the one indicated in the 2022-23 SY?
   a. Yes
   b. No
5. Please indicate the school district in which you worked in the 2022-23 SY. _____
6. Please indicate the name of the school in which you are currently working _____
7. Please select your primary role at your school.
   a. K-5 Teacher
   b. Administrator (please specify): _____
   c. Instructional Coach
   d. Interventionist/Special educator/Reading specialist
   e. Other School Staff (please describe): _____
8. How long have you served in your current role?
   a. 3 years or less
   b. More than 3 years and 9 years or less
   c. More 9 years and 20 years or less
   d. More than 20 years
9. Do you provide reading instruction or support to K-5 students?
   a. Yes
   b. No
10. What grade level(s) do you teach or support? (***select all that apply)***
    - Kindergarten
    - Grade 1
    - Grade 2
    - Grade 3
    - Grade 4

- Grade 5

11. Did you participate in Cohort 1/Phase 1 (i.e., Fall of 2022) of the Kentucky Reading Academy?
    a. Yes
    b. No

Section 2: Teacher Knowledge of Early Literacy Skills

This section contains questions related to your current understanding of early literacy skills. Please select the most appropriate response to each question.

Form A (Used in Fall Administration)

1. What does morphemic analysis help students do?
    a. identify letter-sound correspondence
    b. blend speech sounds
    c. examine words for meaningful parts
    d. separate syllables into onsets and rimes
2. What is a requirement of a syllable?
    a. it contains at least one consonant letter
    b. it includes no more than one vowel letter
    c. it has a vowel sound with an accompanying consonant (i.e., a pronounceable unit)
    d. it has no more than one phoneme
3. What can sentence combining help students learn to do?
    a. question the text
    b. correct grammatical errors
    c. form complex sentence structures
    d. analyze word structure
4. What is vocabulary instruction in the primary grades most concerned with teaching students?
    a. highly frequent words
    b. base words and meaningful parts (e.g., prefixes, suffixes)
    c. decodable words
    d. word meanings
5. Which of the following is NOT an irregular, high frequency word?
    a. when
    b. does
    c. were
    d. said
6. If “tife” is a word, the letter “i” would probably sound like the “i” in which word?
    a. if

b. beautiful
c. find
d. ceiling

7. How should writing lessons be explicitly taught?
   a. by explaining and modeling a task, skill, or strategy, and providing feedback while students write
   b. by engaging students in correcting sample sentences on a daily basis
   c. by explaining a task, skill, or strategy, and giving students an opportunity to practice
   d. by engaging students in shared or interactive writing
8. Which of the following sets of words would be best for a teacher to use when providing students with examples of words conforming to the "silent e" phonics generalization?
   a. time, make, cube, done
   b. lake, breathe, raise, fate
   c. brake, use, hope, shine
   d. tree, lie, blue, toe
9. As a teacher reads aloud to his students from a social studies text he comments aloud, "This word pioneer is in bold print so that means it is an important word," and "The chapter headings in the book can help me understand the main ideas in the book, so I will be sure to read them." The teacher is helping students improve their comprehension of informational text primarily how?
   a. teaching them how to use graphic organizers
   b. modeling attention to useful features of informational text
   c. improving students' recall of the details of the text
   d. teaching them how to infer word meanings from context
10. Two or three times each week Mrs. Hruby teaches "phonics through spelling" with her students. She pronounces words sound-by-sound as her students listen, write the appropriate letters, and then blend the letters to identify the words. Why is this activity likely to be effective?
    a. reinforces students' recognition of common spelling patterns
    b. requires students to use letter-sound relationships to blend unfamiliar words
    c. reviews and strengthens students' ability to recognize and blend word chunks
    d. prepares students to combine letter-sound relationships with meaning-based clues
11. Why are there two n's in "running"?
    a. because the base word ends in a single consonant preceded by a single vowel
    b. because the final consonant is always doubled when adding -ing
    c. because the letter u has many different pronunciations
    d. because the consonant n is not well articulated
12. Mr. Lewis' class has been learning spelling rules for adding "ing" to base words. He is looking for groups of words that illustrate all the various rules to give his students a complex challenge. Which of the following groups of words would be best for this purpose?
    a. hopping, running, sending, getting
    b. hoping, buying, caring, baking

c. seeing, letting, liking, carrying
d. all of the word sets are useful for this purpose

13. Ms. Card wants to help her students become good spellers. Which activity should Ms. Card do?
    a. pronounce a word and have students write each sound
    b. display letter cards and have students pronounce the sounds
    c. say each sound of a word and have students say the word
    d. ask students whether pairs of spoken words rhyme
14. Why is metacognition important in reading comprehension?
    a. it helps students to monitor their own comprehension
    b. it makes the teacher aware of when the students are experiencing difficulty during reading
    c. it prompts students to create mental images
    d. it causes automatic processing of the text so that students can make meaning of the text
15. Teachers often read texts aloud as students follow along before the students try to read the text themselves. Which of the following is the best reason why teachers might do this?
    a. to teach comprehension strategies directly
    b. to model their expert decoding skills to students
    c. to present a challenge to the students to read the text quickly
    d. to demonstrate appropriate phrasing and expression for the text
16. What is a method of teaching reading that focuses on the application of phonemes to letters called?
    a. phonics
    b. phonemics
    c. orthography
    d. phonetics
17. What would the open syllable of the nonsense word "botem" most likely rhyme with?
    a. coat
    b. hot
    c. rah
    d. low
18. After reading a story, what should the discussion focus on in order to maximize comprehension?
    a. sequencing the events of the story
    b. the most important parts of the story
    c. the details of the story
    d. the characters in the story
19. Which of the following is an example of reading comprehension instruction that helps to promote active construction of meaning?
    a. independent silent reading
    b. doing a think aloud

c. sounding out difficult words
d. looking up words in a dictionary

20. What is the most important reason that oral segmentation and oral blending activities should be a part of reading instruction in the primary grades?
    a. strengthen students' fluency development through oral practice
    b. help students hear and identify short and long vowel sounds
    c. allow students to hear the mistakes of other students
    d. give students practice with skills they will use to read proficiently.
21. Which word(s) is/are phonetically irregular?
    a. done
    b. give
    c. peach
    d. a and b
22. Following her lesson on recognizing diphthongs in words, Mrs. Byrnes wants to provide her students with additional practice. Which type of text should she select to provide the best practice?
    a. predictable text with repetitious phrases
    b. authentic text from children's literature
    c. text with a high percentage of selected decodable words
    d. none of the above
23. Mr. Kubota teaches his grade 3 students to decode unfamiliar words by breaking words into parts such as word root, prefix, and/or suffix (e.g., un-imagine-able). Which skill is he teaching?
    a. structural analysis
    b. analyze the meaning of the word parts
    c. syllabication
    d. chunking the word
24. What is the difference between sight words and vocabulary words?
    a. sight words are learned through decoding and vocabulary words are not.
    b. Sight words are learned on sight and vocabulary words are learned through decoding.
    c. Sight words are related to recognition and vocabulary words are related to meaning.
    d. none of the above
25. A teacher assigns pairs of students to reread a text aloud to each other three times. What skill will this activity strengthen most effectively?
    a. choral reading
    b. text comprehension
    c. fluency development
    d. automatic word recognition
26. How many morphemes are in the word "unhappiness"?
    a. 2

b. 3
c. 4
d. 5

27. Which phonemic awareness activity would be most difficult for a student?
    a. blending phonemes into real words
    b. blending onset-rime units into real words
    c. deleting a phoneme and saying the word that remains
    d. segmenting words into phonemes
28. Mrs. Newswander begins a writing lesson by creating with the students a web that contains the word "said," surrounded by words like shouted, sulked, and replied. She did this to teach students:
    a. prewriting
    b. drafting
    c. revising
    d. editing
29. How many phonemes are in the word "box"?:
    a. 1
    b. 2
    c. 3
    d. 4
30. Decoding skills will benefit a student's understanding of text only if the words he or she decodes are what?
    a. recognized at sight
    b. encountered several times
    c. included in the student's oral vocabulary
    d. also defined by context clues
31. Which of the following is a nonsense word that does not follow English spelling patterns?
    a. shease
    b. toyn
    c. squive
    d. clow

Form B (Used in Spring Administration)

1. What is the rule for using a "ck" in spelling?
    a. when the vowel sound is a diphthong
    b. when the vowel sound is short
    c. when the vowel sound is long
    d. all of the above
2. Decoding skills will benefit a student's understanding of text only if the words he or she decodes are what?
    a. recognized at sight
    b. encountered several times

   c. **included in the student's oral vocabulary**
   d. also defined by context clues
3. Which word contains a consonant digraph?
   a. flop
   b. bang
   c. sink
   d. box
4. Which is a distinguishing characteristic of phonemic awareness instruction?
   a. uses printed letters
   b. uses two cueing systems
   c. does not use printed letters
   d. links meaning to sound
5. Which strategy for building students' phonemic awareness is the least likely to support beginning reading skills?
   a. teaching blending and segmenting of phonemes in words
   b. beginning phonemic awareness instruction in preschool
   c. teaching letter sounds in combination with phoneme manipulation
   d. teaching 3 or more types of phoneme manipulation skills at a time
6. Mrs. Funke is teaching her students to identify multisyllabic words. Which is an appropriate first step for her to do?
   a. model analyzing words for familiar prefixes and suffixes
   b. show students how to blend individual letter-sounds, left-to-right
   c. model how to look for little words in big words
   d. demonstrate sequentially blending onsets and rimes
7. What is one reason that teaching students the meanings of a new word's parts (affixes and root words) is useful for vocabulary development?
   a. helps students learn alternate spellings for words
   b. helps students use the new word to understand the sentence
   c. helps students decode multisyllabic new words
   d. helps students comprehend other new words
8. How many phonemes are in the word "box"?
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
   d. 4
9. Which set of words is decodable?
   a. bed, the, sit
   b. side, some, roam
   c. wash, boil, gave
   d. chap, slew, soft
10. What would the word be if you say the word "ice," and then reverse the order of the sounds?

a. easy
b. sea
c. size
d. sigh

11. After reading a story, what should the discussion focus on in order to maximize comprehension?
    a. sequencing the events of the story
    b. the most important parts of the story
    c. the details of the story
    d. the characters in the story
12. If "tife" is a word, the letter "i" would probably sound like the "i" in which word?
    a. if
    b. beautiful
    c. find
    d. ceiling
13. Which of the following is the most effective instructional strategy for helping students simultaneously strengthen word recognition, fluency, and comprehension?
    a. calling on students one at a time to read aloud from a story
    b. having students read words from a word wall
    c. having students select their own books and read them silently
    d. having students "echo-read" paragraphs that the teacher has read aloud
14. Which word is an example of this spelling rule: double the final consonant of a closed syllable that ends in one consonant when adding a suffix beginning with a vowel?
    a. ripple
    b. accommodate
    c. grassy
    d. winning
15. Mrs. Newswander begins a writing lesson by creating with the students a web that contains the word, said, surrounded by words like shouted, sulked, and replied. She did this to teach students:
    a. prewriting
    b. drafting
    c. revising
    d. editing
16. Which of the following words has an example of a final stable syllable?
    a. wave
    b. bacon
    c. paddle
    d. napkin
17. What can sentence combining help students learn to do?
    a. question the text
    b. correct grammatical errors

c. form complex sentence structures
d. analyze word structure

18. Which of the following is the best description of reading fluency?
    a. reading fluency is the ability to read grade-appropriate text with good comprehension and a high degree of engagement
    b. reading fluency is the ability to read grade-appropriate text with a high degree of accuracy and comprehension
    c. reading fluency is the ability to read individual words, including both real words and nonsense words, with a high degree of accuracy
    d. **reading fluency is the ability to read grade-appropriate text accurately, effortlessly, and with appropriate intonation and expression**
19. Which of the following is the most effective strategy for teaching new vocabulary words?
    a. direct instruction in varied contexts or subjects, and indirect instruction through use of new words in conversation and topically-related texts
    b. direct instruction in the context or subject during which the words are most often used, and indirect instruction through the use of text with controlled vocabulary
    c. direct instruction only; indirect vocabulary instruction is ineffective
    d. indirect instruction only; direct vocabulary instruction is ineffective
20. Why may students confuse the sounds /b/ and /p/ or /f/ and /v/?
    a. students are visually scanning the letters in a way that letters are misperceived
    b. the students can't remember the letter sounds so they are randomly guessing
    c. the speech sounds within each pair are produced in the same place and in the same way, but one is voiced and the other is not
    d. the speech sounds within each pair are both voiced and produced in the back of the mouth
21. What is the most important reason that oral segmentation and oral blending activities should be a part of reading instruction in the primary grades?
    a. strengthen students' fluency development through oral practice
    b. help students hear and identify short and long vowel sounds
    c. allow students to hear the mistakes of other students
    d. give students practice with skills they will use to read proficiently
22. Mrs. Ellefsen is determined to improve her students' blending abilities. She has them sort words according to spelling patterns and they are doing well. What else could Mrs. Ellefsen do to increase her students' blending abilities?
    a. have students read widely from easy texts
    b. segment words orally for students to write the word spellings from dictation
    c. model a word spelling strategy for students (e.g., see the word, spell the word, write the word)
    d. explicitly teach students how to blend sounds to pronounce words
23. Which of the following is a noun phrase?
    a. wrote the word
    b. beside the stream

c. an ill-conceived idea
d. before entering the house

24. Which of these would be the final step a teacher would use in an instructional sequence designed to increase students' ability to make inferences about what they read independently?
    a. teacher modeling
    b. student guided practice
    c. student application
    d. teacher direct explanation
25. Mr. Kubota teaches his grade 3 students to decode unfamiliar words by breaking words into parts such as word root, prefix, and/or suffix (e.g., un-imagine-able). Which skill is he teaching?
    a. structural analysis
    b. analyze the meaning of the word parts
    c. syllabication
    d. chunking the word
26. Mr. Willard is planning a repeated reading activity to strengthen his students' fluency skills. Which of the following reading materials would be most effective for the activity?
    a. a list of words from the social studies textbook
    b. a list of high-frequency words from a teaching manual
    c. two paragraphs from a grade-level text
    d. two paragraphs from a grade 4 level text
27. Which of the following words contains a schwa sound
    a. cotton
    b. phoneme
    c. stopping
    d. preview
28. If a student can read a list of words very rapidly and accurately without having to consciously decode, what is the student demonstrating?
    a. comprehension
    b. metacognition
    c. automaticity
    d. vocabulary skills
29. Fluency serves as a bridge between which two processes?
    a. word recognition and comprehension
    b. comprehension and vocabulary
    c. phonological awareness and comprehension
    d. word recognition and vocabulary
30. Mrs. Jackson's students need to improve their fluency skills. Which of the following activities should she include in her lesson plans for the 90-minute reading period?
    a. students will repeatedly read a text in pairs for 20 minutes
    b. students will read a 20-word list repeatedly until they can read it in 10 seconds

c. students will repeatedly read a text silently for 50 minutes
d. students will read along with books on tape for the entire 90 minutes

31. What does automaticity in reading refer to?
    a. process complex information with little effort or attention
    b. understand the meaning of the word upon seeing it in text
    c. use the next step in a series of steps that have been memorized
    d. apply an effective comprehension strategy when needed

Section 3: Teacher Beliefs

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements as they relate to your literacy beliefs and practices.

	Strongly Disagree	***Disagree***	***Mildly Disagree***	***Mildly Agree***	***Agree***	***Strongly Agree***
1. It is important for teachers to know how to assess and teach phonological awareness, i.e., knowing that spoken language can be broken down into smaller units (words, syllables, phonemes).						
2. It is important for teachers to know how to effectively assess and teach phonics (i.e., phoneme (sound) - grapheme (letter/symbol) correspondences).						
3. It is important for teachers to understand the sounds in English, including their articulatory features (i.e., the placement and actions of our lips, teeth and tongue when we make speech sounds).						
4. It is important for teachers to understand reading models, such as The Simple View of Reading, The Three-Cueing System, Scarborough's Reading Rope, and The Four-Part Processing Model.						
5. Teachers should be knowledgeable about the predictable structure of the English Language.						

6. Teachers should know how to collect a running record on students and analyze miscues (text reading errors) for meaning, structural and visual errors.						
7. When beginning readers encounter an unknown word, a good strategy is to prompt them to sound it out.						
8. Teachers should model how to segment words into phonemes when reading and spelling.						
9. When beginning readers encounter an unknown word, the most beneficial strategy to suggest is to use the context to figure out the word.						
10. Poor phonemic awareness contributes to early reading failure.						
11. When beginning readers encounter an unknown word a good strategy to suggest is to use pictures to figure out the word.						
12. Teachers do not need to be concerned when beginning readers' errors do not change meaning.						
13. Beginning readers need to encounter a new word a number of times to ensure it will become a word they can recognize as if by sight.						
14. All children can learn to read using literature-based, authentic texts.						
15. Beginning readers should learn predictable patterns in English.						
16. Basic early literacy skills should never be taught in isolation.						
17. Time spent just reading directly contributes to reading improvement.						

18. It is not important for beginning readers to look at all of the letters in words while reading (i.e., when a student reads "house" for the word "home," it does not need to be corrected).						

Section 4: LETRS PL

1. Please indicate the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) professional learning program you are enrolled in through the Kentucky Reading Academies . (select all that apply)
    a. LETRS for Educators
    b. LETRS for Administrators

2. Please indicate how many units you <u>completed up to this point</u> in the LETRS for Educators PL.
    a. I am currently in the first unit.
    b. 1-3 units
    c. I completed 4 units/ I completed Vol. 1
    d. 5- 7 units
    e. I completed all 8 units/ I completed Vol.2

3. Please indicate how many units you <u>completed</u> up to this point in the LETRS for Administrators PL.
    a. I am currently in the first unit.
    b. 1-2 units
    c. 3-4 units
    d. I completed all 5 units of the LETRS for Administrators PL

4. Have you implemented instructional strategies from the LETRS for Educators PL? (Spring Administration Only)
    a. Yes
    b. No

5. Please indicate your level of ease in identifying and selecting appropriate instructional strategies from the LETRS for Educators PL in your classroom practice. (Spring Administration Only)
    a. Very difficult
    b. Difficult
    c. Neutral
    d. Easy

e. Very easy

6. Please indicate your level of ease in implementing instructional strategies from the LETRS for Educators PL in your classroom practice. (Spring Administration Only
   a. Very difficult
   b. Difficult
   c. Neutral
   d. Easy
   e. Very easy

7. Please indicate the extent to which you interacted with or used the various facets of the LETRS PL program.

	Not at all/Did not interact with or use	***To a little extent***	***To some extent***	***To a large extent***	***To a very large extent***
LETRS Live Facilitator					
Print materials (including the manuals)					
LETRS help center					
Journal					
Bridge to practice activities					

8. Please indicate your level of agreement on the following items as they relate to your interactions with your LETRS Live Facilitator in a live virtual session as it relates to your participation in the LETRS for Educators PL.

The LETRS Live Facilitator has…	***Strongly Disagree***	***Disagree***	***Agree***	***Strongly Agree***
a. Helped me deepen my understanding of how students learn to read.				
b. Helped me implement literacy strategies in the classroom.				
c. Encouraged me to reflect on the literacy strategies I implemented in my classroom instruction.				
d. Helped me get students to believe they can be proficient readers.				
e. Helped me individualize literacy instruction.				
f. Helped me understand and use student literacy data to adapt literacy instruction.				
g. Helped me deepen my understanding of how and why students encounter difficulties in reading.				
h. Helped me transform literacy instruction in my classroom practice.				

9. Please rate your level of agreement for each of the following items about your LETRS Live Facilitator as it relates to your participation in the LETRS for Administrators PL.

LETRS Live Facilitator	***Strongly Disagree***	***Disagree***	***Agree***	***Strongly Agree***
a. Helped me deepen my understanding of how and why students struggle to read.				
b. Helped me support teachers' implementation of literacy strategies in the classroom.				
c. Helped me improve my understanding of what effective literacy instruction looks like.				
d. Helped me improve my understanding of the role of leadership in supporting effective literacy instruction.				
e. Helped me create a Professional Development Plan for literacy educators in my school.				
f. Helped me identify effective literacy practices occurring in my school.				
g. Helped me use data to create systemic supports that aid in effective literacy instruction.				

10. Overall, to what extent have the following elements of the LETRS program made a positive impact on your <u>understanding of literacy skills and strategies</u>?

	Not Applicable/ Did not use	***To a little extent***	***To some extent***	***To a large extent***	***To a very large extent***
a. LETRS Live Facilitator					
b. Print materials (including the manuals)					
c. LETRS help center					
d. Journal					
e. Bridge to practice activities					

11. Overall, to what extent have the following elements of the LETRS program made a positive impact on your <u>classroom practice</u>?

	Not Applicable/ Did not use	***To a little extent***	***To some extent***	***To a large extent***	***To a very large extent***
a. LETRS Live Facilitator					
b. Print materials (including the manuals)					
c. LETRS help center					
d. Journal					
e. Bridge to practice activities					

12. Overall, to what extent have the following elements of the LETRS program made a positive impact on your beliefs about literacy?

	Not Applicable/ Did not use	***To a little extent***	***To some extent***	***To a large extent***	***To a very large extent***
a. LETRS Live Facilitator					
b. Print materials (including the manuals)					
c. LETRS help center					
d. Journal					
e. Bridge to practice activities					

Section 5: High-Quality Instructional Resource Adoption

1. Has your school district adopted a High-Quality Instructional Resource(s) (HQIR) specific to literacy at the Tier 1 level (i.e., core instruction)?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. I don't know

2. Please select the High-Quality Instructional Resource(s) (HQIR) specific to literacy adopted by your school district. *(select all that apply)*
    a. American Reading Company ARC (American Reading Company) Core 2017 *(Grades K-5)*
    b. Amplify Amplify CKLA Skills 2020 *(Grades K-5)*
    c. Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) 2015 *(Grades K-5)*
    d. Benchmark Education Company Benchmark Advance 2022 *(Grades K-5)*
    e. Curriculum Associates Magnetic Reading Foundations 2023 *(Grades K-2)*
    f. Fishtank Learning Fishtank ELA K-2 2018 *(Grades K-2)*
    g. Fishtank Learning Fishtank Plus ELA 2021 *(Grades K-2)*
    h. Fishtank Learning Fishtank ELA 3-5 2018 *(Grades 3-5)*
    i. Fishtank Learning Fishtank Plus ELA 3-5 2021 *(Grades 3-5)*
    j. Great Minds Wit & Wisdom 2016 *(Grades K-5)*
    k. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Into Reading 2020 *(Grades K-5)*
    l. Imagine Learning f/k/a LearnZillion Imagine Learning EL Education K-5 Language Arts 2019 *(Grades K-5)*
    m. Learning A-Z Foundations A-Z 2023 *(Grades K-2)*
    n. McGraw-Hill Education Wonders 2020 *(Grades K-5)*
    o. McGraw-Hill Education Wonders 2023 *(Grades K-5)*
    p. Open Up Resources EL Education K-5 Language Arts 2017 *(Grades K-5)*
    q. Savvas Learning Company Savvas Essentials: Foundational Reading 2023 *(Grades K-2)*
    r. Savvas Learning Company myView Literacy 2020 *(Grades K-5)*

s. Savvas Learning Company ReadyGEN 2016 *(Grades K-5)*
t. William H. Sadlier, Inc. From Phonics to Reading 2020 *(Grades K-2)*
u. Other (please describe): _____

3. Does this High-Quality Instructional Resource(s) (HQIR) have additional resources aligned with Tiers 2 and 3 (i.e., targeted, strategic, and individualized instruction)?
    a. Yes
    b. No

4. Have you implemented the High-Quality Instructional Resource(s) (HQIR) in your literacy instruction?
    a. Yes
    b. No

5. Has the High-Quality Instructional Resource(s) (HQIR) been implemented by the literacy educators in your school/district?
    a. Yes
    b. No

6. Did participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies LETRS professional learning motivate you to implement the High-Quality Instructional Resource(s) (HQIR) in classroom practice?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. I'm not sure

7. Please indicate the reason(s) for not implementing the High-Quality Instructional Resource(s) (HQIR) in classroom practice. *(select all that apply)*
    a. Increased workload or responsibilities
    b. Time constraints
    c. Unfamiliarity with High-Quality Instructional Resource(s)
    d. Uncertainty whether the school has a High-Quality Instructional Resource(s) for literacy
    e. Other (please describe): _____

Closing remarks/ Wrap-up

1. Would you recommend participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies to your colleagues? Please explain. _____

2. Please use this space for any additional comments, questions, or concerns related to your involvement in the Kentucky Reading Academies.

    _____

Administrator Focus Group Protocol – Fall 2023
Kentucky Reading Academies

Background – Introduction [Target 5 mins]

1) Let's start out with some introductions.
    a. Tell me your name, current position, school, and briefly, your career path leading up to your current position.
    b. How long you served in an administrative role.
2) Is there anyone who joined in the first Phase of the KY Reading Academies & LETRS professional learning (PL) in Fall 2022*?*
3) What's one word you would use to describe your experience so far in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL?

Overall perceptions of the KY Reading Academies & LETRS Professional Learning [Target 25 mins]

Let's unpack those one-word descriptions. We're interested in learning about your overall experiences in participating in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS Professional Learning along with the resources made available to you, and any support you may have received.

4) First, let's hear about your initial thoughts prior to joining the KY Reading Academies & LETRS Professional Learning.
    a. How did you first learn about the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL?
    b. What motivated you to join the KY Reading Academies & LETRS Professional Learning?
5) How far along in the LETRS PL are you? How many units/volumes have you completed? [*Interviewer note: This progress indicator would help contextualize participants' experiences in the PL*.]
6) What are your overall thoughts on the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL so far? [*Probe for: collaboration, usefulness/meaningfulness/relevance to their roles, applicability to classroom instruction*]
7) What aspects of the KY Reading Academies & LETRS training have been most successful for you? And for your teachers? What are your thoughts about the ease or difficulty of implementing this structured literacy approach in teachers' classroom instruction? [*Probe for: school/district support*]
8) What aspects of the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL have been helpful to <u>your own</u> learning? [*probe for: resources, tools, facilitator support, etc.*]
    a. What about the content of the LETRS PL? Was it significant/relevant to your needs? [*probe for: relevance to role*]
    b. What about the interactions with the Facilitator/Trainer and any other resources in the PL? [Probe for: support received, specific helpful resources)
    c. What about the interactions with your State Literacy Coaching Specialist? What supports, if any, does your State Literacy Coaching Specialist provide you with in your LETRS learning?
9) Did you seek out and receive any additional support (besides support from the LETRS Facilitators) to undertake the LETRS PL? [*Probe for: school support, support from non-KY*

Reading Academies staff, and using resources outside of the LETRS PL (e.g., YouTube videos etc.)]

10) What opportunities have you had so far to practice what you learned during the training in your leadership role? [*probe for: outcomes or lessons learned]*
    a. What practices, if any, do you plan on implementing but have not yet?
11) What, if any, challenges or barriers have you experienced in transferring the knowledge you gained in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL into your role as an instructional leader? *[probe for: resources, schedules, school/district initiatives or mandates that do not align]*
    a. Were you able to address or mitigate those barriers in any way? How?
12) Have there been any other challenges or barriers to your participation in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL? *[Probe for: time, workload, support etc.]* Were you able to address or mitigate those barriers in any way?
13) Has your school or district adopted a High-Quality Instructional Resource (HQIR) in literacy? Why or why not? [If yes, ask the following set of questions]
    a. Can you describe what this curriculum/resource is? How did you choose this HQIR?
    b. Did participation in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL motivate you to choose this HQIR? How?
    c. Do you know if teachers are using this HQIR in their instruction? *[If no, any plans for implementing this in classroom instruction?]*

Prior experience with Literacy training and professional learning [Target 10 mins]

We would like to hear about your prior experiences with literacy before joining the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL.

14) Have you participated in any professional learning or training specific to literacy? These could include a college course, degree, or any professional development. What were they about? [*probe for: examples, any reading theories/understandings*]
15) How does your experience in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS training compare to other literacy training and/or literacy experiences you participated in?
16) Besides this professional learning and training in literacy, do you have experience teaching literacy prior to taking on a leadership role? Can you share some details of your experience teaching literacy topics? [*Probe for: grades taught, in what capacity e.g., SPED, ELL]*
17) Do you or did you provide feedback on early literacy instruction to teachers? If so, how comfortable <u>were</u> you providing feedback on early literacy instruction to teachers before participating in KE Reading Academies & LETRS PL?
    a. How comfortable <u>are</u> you now providing feedback on early literacy instruction to teachers after participating in KE Reading Academies & LETRS PL? Why?

KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL RA influences on literacy beliefs and practice [Target 15 mins]

Now, we would like to hear about your experiences with the LETRS PL, the resources made available to you, and any support you may have received.

18) Thinking back to before joining the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL, what was your understanding of how students learn to read and why some students may struggle in reading?
19) Has participating in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL influenced your perspective on how students learn to read? How so? [*Probe for: changes in assumptions of how students learn to read, any instances/examples they heard from their teachers?]*
20) Thinking of your own administrative role, how has participating in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL influenced your role, if at all?
    a. What were your goals and expectations prior to joining the KY Reading Academies for yourself, teachers in your school, and students?
    b. How has participating in the KY Reading Academies met those goals/expectations, if at all?
21) Thinking about the teachers in your school, what impacts on teachers do you see stemming from your participation in the KY Reading Academies LETRS PL?
    a. Can you share with us any support in place to help teachers implement what they learned from the KY Reading Academies & LETRS course? [*Probe for systemic supports, other supports etc.*]
22) Besides state assessments, do you plan to track students' outcomes regarding literacy in any other way? [Probe for: using a different tool, informal observations, etc.]

Sustainability [Target 5 mins]

I want to transition now to talk about sustainability

23) Do you/your school expect teachers to continue using the LETRS structured literacy approach to instruction after the PL ends? Why?
24) What are some ways you plan to sustain the literacy learnings from the PL after the initiative ends? [*Probe for: more training, funding, HQIR etc.*]
25) Which kind of support do you receive from your State Literacy Coaching Specialist on topics related to building capacity?
26) What else do you need from the Coaching Specialist or your school/district to implement the KY Reading Academies & LETRS program?

Final thoughts

27) Before we close, what else would you like to share with us about your experience with the Kentucky Reading Academies & LETRS PL?

Thank you so much for all the thoughts that you've shared today!

Administrator Focus Group Protocol
Spring 2024 Kentucky Reading Academies

Background – Introduction [Target 7 min]

28) Let's start out with some introductions.
   a. Tell me your name, current position, school
   b. How long you served in an administrative role.
29) When did you join the KY Reading Academies & LETRS professional learning (PL), in Fall 2022 (Cohort1), in Fall 2023 (Cohort 2)?
   a. How far along in the LETRS PL are you? How many units/volumes have you completed? [*Interviewer note: This progress indicator would help contextualize participants' experiences in the PL*.]
   b. Is there anyone who is doing the teacher modules? How far along are you?
30) Please share, if you know it, how many other staff in your school or district are also going through the LETRS program for Administrators (either in Cohort 1 or Cohort 2).
   a. What are their reactions to this training?
   b. Are you aware of anyone who stopped participating in the LETRS PL? What were the reasons? [*probe for left teaching; switched schools or roles; too demanding; personal commitments; etc.*]
31) How many teachers are doing the LETRS training in your school? In which grades? Are they in Cohort 1 or Cohort 2 of the Reading Academies?
   a. What are the teachers' reactions to this training?
   b. For the teachers who are not going through LETRS, do you know their reasons for not participating?
   c. What was your strategy/the district strategy or approach to promote the LETRS training among your teachers, if any? *[probe for monetary incentives, professional development hours, substitutes]*
32) What's one word you would use to describe your experience so far in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL?

Overall perceptions of the KY Reading Academies & LETRS Professional Learning [Target 15 min]

33) First, let's hear about your initial thoughts prior to joining the KY Reading Academies & LETRS Professional Learning.
   a. How did you first learn about the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL?
   b. What motivated you to join the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL?
34) What are your overall thoughts on the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL so far? [*Probe for: collaboration, usefulness/meaningfulness/relevance to their roles, applicability to classroom instruction*]
35) What aspects of the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL have been helpful to your own learning? [*probe for: resources, tools, facilitator support, etc.*]
   a. What about the content of the LETRS PL? Was it significant/relevant to your needs? What have you learned that you didn't know before? [*probe for: relevance to role*]

   b. What about the interactions with the Facilitator/Trainer and any other resources in the PL? [*Probe for: support received, specific helpful resources*)
   c. What were your goals and expectations prior to joining the KY Reading Academies for yourself, teachers in your school, and students?
   d. How has participating in the KY Reading Academies met those goals/expectations, if at all?

36) *[If group includes those doing teacher modules]:* For those who are doing the teacher modules. What motivated you to do it?
   a. What are the main differences between the administrator and the teacher modules?
   b. How is doing the teacher modules impacting you and your role as administrator?
   c. Would you recommend that other administrators do the teacher modules? Why or why not?
      i. Is there any specific content from the teacher modules that would be especially relevant for administrators?

LETRS Implementation (23 min)

I want to turn now to talk more specifically about ways that you may have been able to or struggled to implement your learnings from LETRS into your practice.

37) In general, how has participating in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL influenced your role as administrator, if at all?
38) What opportunities have you had so far to practice what you learned during the training in your leadership role? [*probe for: outcomes or lessons learned]*
   a. Can you provide some examples?
   b. What practices, if any, do you plan to implement but have not yet?
39) What, if any, challenges or barriers have you experienced in transferring the knowledge you gained in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL into your role as an instructional leader? *[probe for: resources, schedules, school/district initiatives or mandates that do not align]*
   a. Were you able to address or mitigate those barriers in any way? How?
40) Thinking about the teachers in your school including those not going through their own LETRS program, what impacts do you see on teachers stemming from your participation in the KY Reading Academies LETRS PL?
41) In your role, do you provide feedback on early literacy instruction to teachers? If so, has participating in KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL made you more comfortable providing feedback on early literacy instruction to teachers, or has it not made much of a difference? Why?
42) What are your thoughts about the ease or difficulty of implementing this structured literacy approach in teachers' classroom instruction? [*Probe for: school/district support*]
   a. Can you share what your participating teachers in LETRS are doing in Tier 1 instruction? And in Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction?
   b. Can you share with us any support in place to help teachers implement what they learned from the KY Reading Academies & LETRS course?

43) Thinking back to before joining the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL, what was your understanding of how students learn to read and why some students may struggle in reading?
    a. Has participating in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL influenced your perspective on how students learn to read? How so? [*Probe for: changes in assumptions of how students learn to read, any instances/examples they heard from their teachers?]*
44) Have there been any other challenges or barriers to your participation in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL? *[Probe for: time, workload, support etc.]* Were you able to address or mitigate those barriers in any way?

Literacy Curriculum (10 min)

1) We are aware that there is a statutory mandate for schools to adopt a high-quality instructional resource (HQIR) for reading and writing by July 2024. First, how would you describe what an HQIR in literacy is?
    a. How far is your school in this process of adopting a HQIR?
        i. [*If needed*]: Do you already have a HQIR in place/in mind? If yes, which one for Tier 1 instruction?
        ii. [*If needed*]: Can you describe what this resource is?
        iii. How do you see the alignment between this Tier 1 resource and the curriculum/resources you have for Tier 2 instruction and for Tier 3 instruction?
    b. What is/was your involvement in choosing this HQIR? (*If needed:* What is the process in your district to select a curriculum? Which people are involved? Who do you think has more weight in the final decision? What do you want to achieve with this curriculum?)
    c. Did your participation in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL influence you/your district in any way in choosing this HQIR? If so, how?
    d. Do you know if teachers are satisfied using the current curriculum in their instruction? What are their comments about the curriculum?
2) Besides state assessments, does the school/district plan to monitor students' outcomes regarding literacy in any other way? [*Probe for: using a different tool, informal observations, etc.*]
3) Per Senate Bill 9 (2022), Superintendents were required to select a reliable and valid universal screener and reading diagnostic assessment. Is your school using these early literacy assessments?
    a. In general, what do you do with data from the universal screener and diagnostic assessments? (RQ2d)
    b. Is LETRS equipping you to collect data and to interpret the data, or does it not address this?

   c. What could help you to use the data from universal screeners and diagnostic assessments in a more efficient way?
4) Which kind of changes/improvements do you expect to see in your students as a result of implementing the HQIR?
   a. Are there additional changes or improvements you expect to see in your students stemming from the reading improvement plans developed in response to the screener and diagnostic data?

Sustainability [Target 5 min]

I want to transition now to talk about the future.

1) Would you recommend this program to colleagues? Why or why not?
   a. Do you think it would be more beneficial for any particular groups of people to receive (e.g., younger grades vs. older grades; admin vs. teachers)?
2) Are there any plans in place to encourage additional teachers or administrators in your building or district to begin the KY Reading Academics program next year?
3) What are some ways you plan to sustain the literacy learnings from the PL after the initiative ends, if at all? [*Probe for: more training, peer support, funding, HQIR etc.*]
4) What else do you need from the Kentucky Department of Education or your school/district to implement the KY Reading Academies & LETRS program?

Final thoughts

5) Before we close, what else would you like to share with us about your experience with the Kentucky Reading Academies & LETRS PL?

Thank you so much for all the thoughts that you've shared today!

Teacher/Educators Focus Group Protocol (Fall 2023)
Kentucky Reading Academies

Background – Introduction [Target 5 mins]

1) Let's start out with some introductions. Let's go around and have everyone say:
    a) your name, current position, grades you are teaching, and school.
    b) how long you have been an educator and how many years of experience teaching literacy do you have.
    c) how long have you been in this school.
2) Is there anyone who joined in the first Phase of the KY Reading Academies & LETRS Professional Learning (PL) in Fall 2022*?*
3) What is one word you would use to describe your experience so far in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL?

Overall perceptions of the KY Reading Academies LETRS program [Target 25 mins]

Let's unpack those one-word descriptions. We are interested in learning about your experience in literacy prior to joining the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL along with the resources made available to you, and any support you may have received.

4) First, let's hear about your initial thoughts prior to joining the KY Reading Academies.
    a) How did you first learn about the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL?
    b) What motivated you to join the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL initiative?
5) How far along in the LETRS PL are you? How many units have you completed? [*Interviewer note: This progress indicator would help contextualize participants' experiences in the PL.*]
6) What are your overall thoughts on the KY Reading Academies LETRS PL so far? [*Probe for: collaboration with KRA educators, usefulness/meaningfulness/relevance, and applicability to classroom instruction*]
7) What aspects of the LETRS PL platform, if any, have been helpful to <u>your</u> <u>own</u> learning? [*probe for: resources, tools, facilitator support, etc.*]
    a) What about the content of the LETRS PL. Was it significant/relevant to your needs and instructional practice? How?
    b) What about the interactions with the Facilitator/Trainer and any other resources in the PL? [*Probe for: support received, specific helpful resources, assessments*)
8) What aspects of the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL have been most successful for you, if any? What has been the least successful?
    a) How do you feel about using this structured literacy approach in your classroom practice? [*Probe for: comfort, ease of implementation, supports needed*]
    b) For the ones who have not implemented yet: Do you plan to do it? Why or why not?
9) Did you seek out and receive any additional support (besides support from the LETRS Facilitators/trainer) to undertake the LETRS PL? [*Probe for: school support, support from non-KY Reading Academies teachers and staff, and using resources outside of the LETRS PL (e.g., YouTube videos etc.)]*
10) Were you able to implement what you learned from the LETRS PL to the classroom? [*probe for: experience with Tier 1, 2, or 3 curriculum, examples about vocabulary, small group*

instruction, scope and sequence, fluency, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, phonemic awareness, etc.?

11) What, if any, challenges or barriers have you experienced in transferring the knowledge you gained in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL into your instructional practice? *[probe for: resources, schedules, school/district initiatives or mandates that do not align]*
    a) Were you able to address or mitigate those barriers in any way? How?
12) Have there been any other challenges or barriers to your participation in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL? *[Probe for: time, workload, school support]*
13) Have you or your school/district adopted a High-Quality Instructional Resource (HQIR) in literacy? [*probe for: school/district mandate or teacher's own election, Tier 1, 2 and 3 resources]*
    a) Can you describe what this curriculum/resource is? Can you speak to the reasoning for why this resource was selected as the school's/district's adopted HQIR?
    b) Have you implemented this HQIR in your classroom instruction? Did participation in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL motivate you to incorporate this HQIR in your classroom practice, if at all? How? *[Probe for: usage of Tier 1, 2, and 3 resources as applicable]*
    c) *[If the participant says no or that they aren't sure, ask the following question]* What curriculum/resource are you and other educators in your school who are involved in literacy instruction using?

Prior experience with Literacy training and professional learning [Target 10 mins]

We are interested in learning about your experience in literacy prior to joining the KY Reading Academies LETRS PL.

14) Have you participated in any professional learning or training specific to literacy? These could include a college course, degree, or any professional development. What were they about? [*probe for: classroom examples, any reading theories/understandings*]
15) How did these trainings help you to teach literacy?
16) How does your experience in the KY Reading Academies LETRS training compare to other literacy training and/or professional learning you participated in?

Literacy beliefs and instruction [Target 20 mins]

17) Thinking about your experience in literacy instruction before joining the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL, what were some barriers to proficient reading you observed among your students?
    a) At the time, what did you think were the reasons why these students were struggling in reading?
    b) How did you try to address or mitigate these challenges? [*probe for: changes in instruction, using reading support programs and other types of intervention*]
    c) How did those trainings help you to teach literacy?
    d) How did these efforts help students?
18) After joining the KY Reading Academies LETRS PL, how have your perceptions about how students learn to read changed, if at all? [*Probe for: changes in assumptions of how*

students learn to read and why some students struggle to read fluently, any instances/examples in the classroom they observed]

a) Were you able to address or mitigate those barriers in any way? How?

19) Thinking about your own instructional practice, what were your goals and expectations prior to joining the KY Reading Academies? How has participating in the LETRS PL met these goals/expectations, if at all?
20) Thinking of your students, how do you expect your participation in the KRA LETRS PL would impact them? Do you see any changes in student reading due to the KY Reading Academies?
21) Besides state assessments, do you plan to track students' literacy skills in any other way? [*Probe for: using a different literacy assessment/tool, informal observations, etc.*]

Final thoughts

22) Before we close, is there anything else you would like to share in general or about teaching literacy, the KRA program, or the LETRS professional learning?

Thank you so much for all the thoughts that you have shared today!

Teacher/Educators Focus Group Protocol Spring 2024
Kentucky Reading Academies (60 minutes)

Background – Introduction [Target 8 min]

1) Let's start out with some introductions. Let's go around and have everyone say:
    a) your name, current position, grades you are teaching, and school.
    b) how long you have been an educator and how many years of experience teaching literacy do you have.
    c) how long have you been in this school?
2) I'd like to confirm when you joined the KY Reading Academies & LETRS Professional Learning (PL) [*moderator, select appropriate cohort: in Fall 2022 (Cohort 1) or Fall 2023 (Cohort 2*)].
3) Please share, if you know it, how many other teachers or administrators in your building are also going through the LETRS program (either in Cohort 1 or Cohort 2).
    a) What are your colleagues saying about their experiences?
    b) Are you aware of anyone who stopped participating in the LETRS PL? What were the reasons? [*probe for left teaching; switched schools or roles; too demanding; personal commitments; etc.*]
4) What is one word you would use to describe your experience so far in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL?

Overall perceptions of the LETRS Platform and Elements [Target 10 min]

5) First, how far along in the LETRS PL are you? How many units have you completed?
6) Now, let's hear about your initial thoughts prior to joining the KY Reading Academies.
    a) How did you first learn about the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL?
    b) What motivated you to join the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL?
    c) What were your expectations prior to joining the KY Reading Academies?
    d) How has participating in the LETRS PL met these goals/expectations, if at all?
7) Have there been any challenges or barriers to your participation in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL? *[Probe for: time, workload, school support]*
8) What aspects of the LETRS PL platform, if any, have been helpful to your own learning? [*probe for: resources, tools, facilitator support, etc.*]
    a) What about the content of the LETRS PL. Was it significant/relevant to your needs and instructional practice? How?
        i) What literacy components are well addressed or thoroughly addressed in the LETRS content? Please, be as specific as possible. *[if needed: For example, writing, phonics, spelling, reading comprehension*]
        ii) Which components would you like to have seen more addressed?
            (1) How are you planning to supplement these gaps?
    b) What about the interactions with the Facilitator/Trainer and any other resources in the PL? [*Probe for: support received, specific helpful resources, assessments*)

c) How have the bridge-to-practice activities affected your learning or classroom instruction?

9) If you could change something about the LETRS Platform or the various components of LETRS, what would it be?

Literacy knowledge, beliefs, and instruction [Target 8 min]

10) Thinking about your experience in literacy instruction before joining the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL, what were some common reading/writing mistakes you observed among your students? [*probe for: external barriers; cognitive barriers; gaps in specific skills]*
    a) At the time, what did you think were the reasons why these students were struggling in reading?
    b) How did you try to address or mitigate these challenges? [*probe for: changes in instruction, using reading support programs and other types of intervention*]
    c) How did these efforts help students?
11) Reflecting on your time in the LETRS program, what are some ways in which the program has changed or strengthened your knowledge and practices about these common reading/writing mistakes you observed, if at all? [*Probe for: changes in assumptions of how students learn to read and why some students struggle to read fluently, any instances/examples in the classroom they observed]*

LETRS implementation (Target 20 min)

I want to turn now to talk more specifically about ways that you may have been able to or struggled to be able to implement your learnings from LETRS into your classroom.

12) First, at a broad level, do you [each] feel like you have been able to implement pieces of LETRS into your classroom instruction?
    a. How comfortable do you feel now implementing new instructional strategies from LETRS compared to when you started LETRS? Please, provide some examples.
    b. When did you first implement strategies from LETRS into your teaching and why did you decide to do it at that moment? [*if needed: for example, were you able to do that right away when you started the program, or was there some sort of delay?]*
13) What strategies, lessons, or practices have you been able to implement or incorporate into your literacy instruction? [*probe for: experience with Tier 1, 2, or 3 curricula, examples about vocabulary, phonics, phonological awareness, fluency, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, phonemic awareness, etc.?*
    a) Have any of those been more successful than others? Why? [*probe for: curriculum alignment, timing of implementation, comfort in new strategy, type of students*]

14) What, if any, challenges or barriers have you experienced in transferring the knowledge you gained in the KY Reading Academies & LETRS PL into your instructional practice? *[probe for: resources, schedules, school/district initiatives or mandates that do not align]*
15) Were you able to address or mitigate those barriers in any way? How?
16) For those of you going through LETRS with other teachers in your building, have you been able to collaborate or share ideas around incorporating strategies or concepts from LETRS into your instruction? How?
    a) Are there ways in which you have been about to share ideas about LETRS strategies or concepts with other teachers in your building who are NOT going through the LETRS program? How?
17) Thinking of your students, how do you expect your participation in the KRA LETRS PL will impact them?
18) Have you seen any changes in student reading due to the KY Reading Academies?
    a) Can you provide a specific example?
    b) Besides state assessments, do you track students' literacy skills in any other way? [*Probe for: using a different literacy assessment/tool, informal observations, etc.*]
19) Per Senate Bill 9 (2022), Superintendents were required to select a reliable and valid universal screener and reading diagnostic assessment. Is your school using these assessments?
    a) In general, what do you do with the data from the universal screener and diagnostic assessments?
    b) Is LETRS equipping you to collect and interpret this data, or does it not address this?
    c) What could help you use data from the universal screener and diagnostic assessments in a more efficient way?

Literacy Curriculum (10 min)

20) Let's talk now about literacy curricula. Can you describe the literacy curriculum and resources that you and your school use? Are you satisfied with this curriculum? Why or why not?
    a) [*If unclear*] Does your school use the same curriculum or a related curriculum with students in Tier 2 targeted interventions and Tier 3 intensive interventions, or is there entirely different curriculum used in those settings?
21) We've heard from some participants that the curriculum in place at schools can influence how easy or difficult it is to implement LETRS. What is your experience in that regard?
    a) How do the approach and strategies learned in LETRS fit in with your current school literacy curriculum, if at all?
    b) *I*f you want to fully implement LETRS in your classroom practices, what support would you need from your district?

c) *[If time allows]:* More generally, what do you need from your district to be able to address your students' literacy needs?
    i) If the district can't provide this support, what will be your strategy to keep helping your students?

22) Some schools are currently reviewing options to fulfill the Kentucky statutory requirement to adopt a high-quality instructional resource (HQIR) for reading and writing by July 2024. Do you know if your school is already using an HQIR or what their plans are for adopting one?
    a) What is your input as a teacher when districts make decisions about which literacy curricula to adopt?
    b) Which kind of curriculum would be ideal for you and your students?
    c) How does your participation in the KRA and the LETRS program inform your opinion about what a good literacy curriculum should be?

Final thoughts (Target: 4 min)

23) Would you recommend this program to colleagues? Why or why not?
    a) Do you think it would be more beneficial for any particular groups of people to receive (e.g., younger grades vs. older grades; admin vs. teachers)
24) What else do you need from the Kentucky Department of Education or your school/district to implement the KY Reading Academies & LETRS program and support your growth?
25) Before we close, is there anything else you would like to share in general or about teaching literacy, the KRA program, or the LETRS professional learning?

Thank you so much for all the thoughts that you have shared today!

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