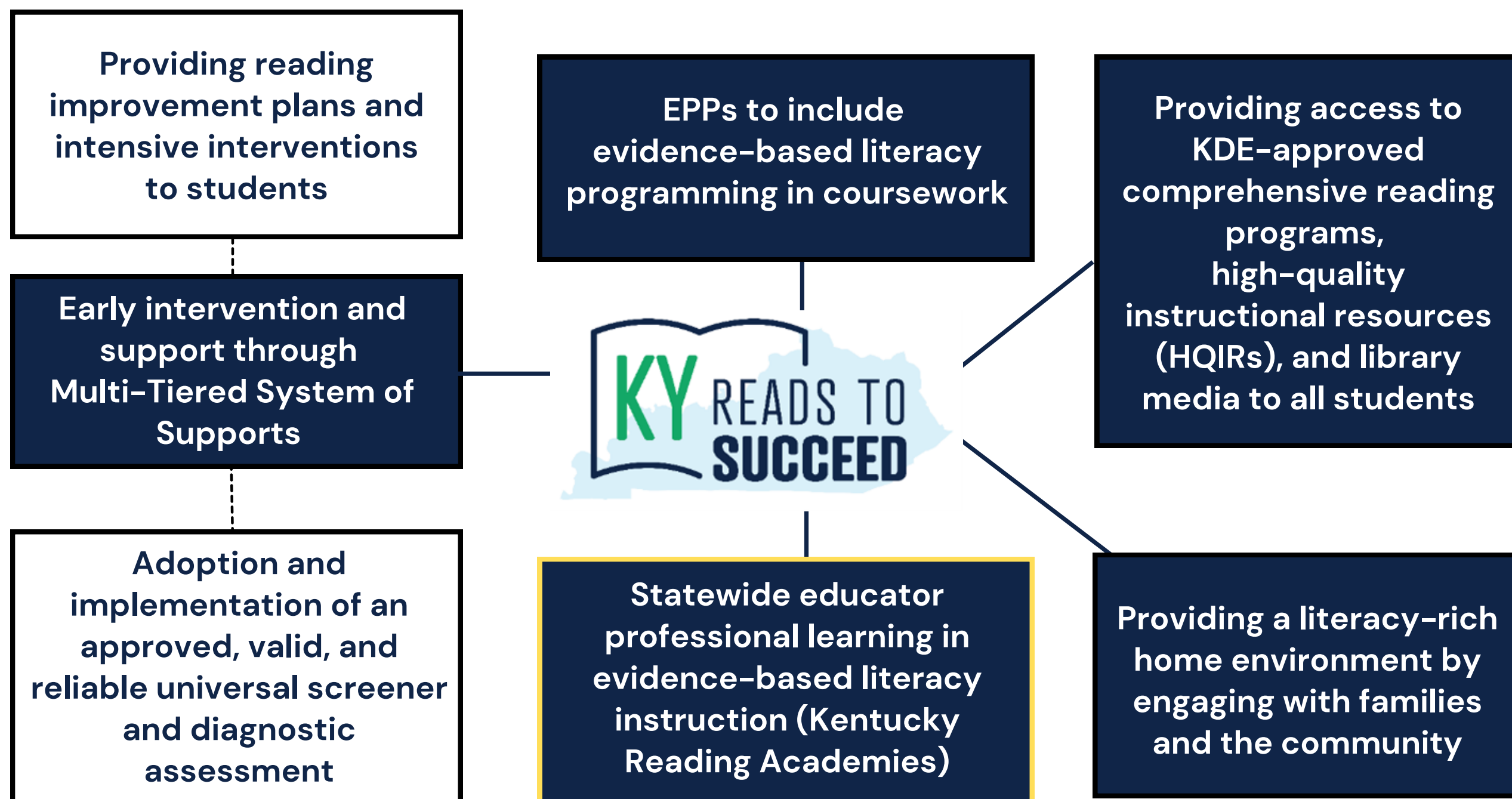


In 2022, the Kentucky General Assembly passed the Read to Succeed Act (Senate Bill 9, 2022) in an effort to improve reading proficiency of Kentucky students. The Read to Succeed Act (Senate Bill 9, 2022) promotes a comprehensive and multipronged approach to improve literacy through a plethora of statewide initiatives. One such initiative, the Kentucky Reading Academies, aims to invest in educators by providing high-quality, evidence-based early literacy instructional resources.

## STATEWIDE LITERACY INITIATIVES THROUGH THE READ TO SUCCEED ACT



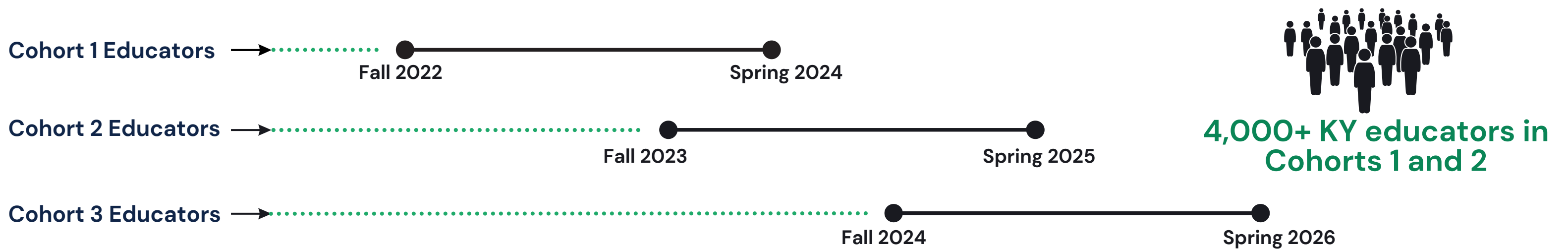
## THE KENTUCKY READING ACADEMIES

The **Kentucky Reading Academies**, a statewide professional development program for in-service K-5 educators, aims to transform literacy instruction across the commonwealth. The reading academies program targets participants who are tasked with providing evidence-based literacy instruction and interventions (e.g., K-5 teachers, administrators, reading specialists and interventionists, and instructional coaches) by providing a **comprehensive, self-paced, no-cost** training program. Participation in the reading academies is **voluntary**.

With this shift to evidence-based literacy instruction, the decision to encourage participation in the Reading Academies was based on prioritizing educator buy-in and motivation to promote increased participation and ultimately statewide scaling of the program over the life of the initiative. The first cohort of participants began their training in fall 2022.

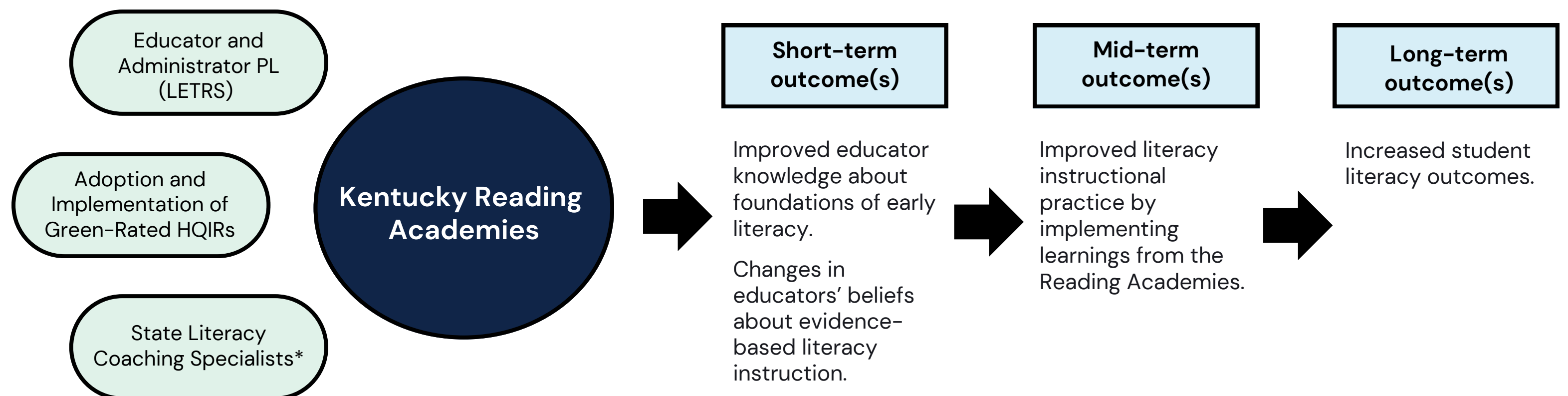
## LANGUAGE ESSENTIALS FOR TEACHERS OF READING & SPELLING (LETRS)

Participants in the reading academies had access to two different online courses **LETRS for Educators** and **LETRS for Administrators** – along with learning materials, namely the print manuals, live sessions with the LETRS Facilitator, and learning activities within the online modules. The LETRS for Educators course of learning, intended to be completed in two years, covers topics related to developing understanding about skills involved in learning to read, cognitive processes involved in learning to read, and applying this body of research to instruction to promote skilled reading. The LETRS for Administrators course of learning is intended to be completed in one year and consists of topics related to promoting effective systems and infrastructure for literacy-rich learning environments.



## THEORY OF CHANGE FOR THE KENTUCKY READING ACADEMIES

The Kentucky Reading Academies aim to develop K-5 educators' knowledge and beliefs surrounding foundations of early literacy—how children learn to read and why they may struggle. This, in turn, would translate to the classroom where educators would have the tools to deliver targeted and responsive literacy instruction, impacting student outcomes, specifically improved grade-level proficiency.



\*State Literacy Coaching Specialists will begin work with Kentucky teachers in Year 3 of program implementation (2024-2025)

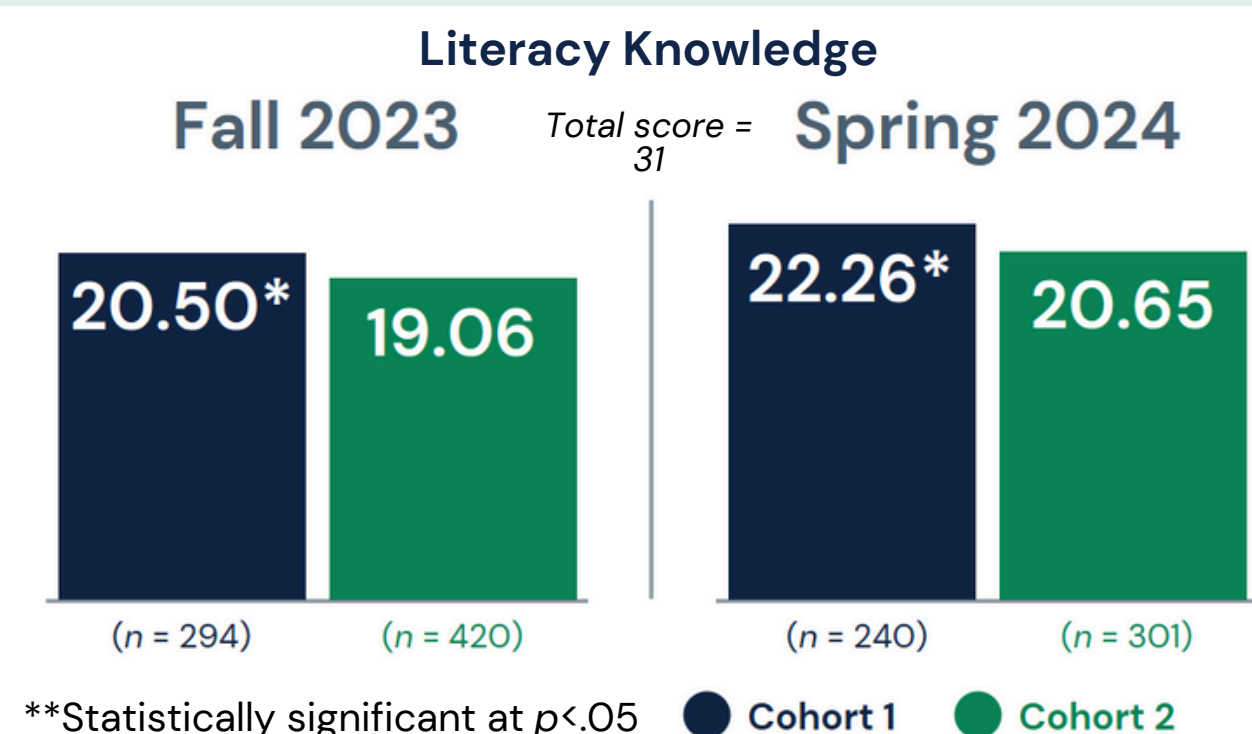
## PROGRAM EVALUATION

To understand the impact of Kentucky Reading Academies on teacher and student outcomes, KDE contracted with ICF to conduct an external evaluation of the program and its various initiatives. ICF used a **mixed-methods evaluation approach**, which included quantitative data from teacher surveys and student assessments along with qualitative data from school-based observations and focus groups with instructional staff and school leaders. The evaluation was designed to address four research questions focused on assessing participation in the reading academies.<sup>1</sup>

## SUMMARY AND FINDINGS: YEAR 1

**Educators demonstrated strong beliefs and knowledge supporting evidence-based literacy instruction with greater immersion in the reading academies.**

- Cohort 1 teachers, who were in their second year of professional learning, showed **significantly higher** literacy knowledge than Cohort 2 educators who were in their first year of professional learning.
- Cohort 1 educators showed **higher beliefs** supporting evidence-based literacy instruction compared to educators in Cohort 2.



The evaluation team also examined whether educator knowledge and beliefs changed over time. While incremental positive effects were observed, these were **not yet significant**, which is to be expected given the three-month duration between both survey administrations. However, anecdotal evidence from focus groups with teachers indicate shifts in literacy knowledge and beliefs as a result of the professional learning leading to increased confidence about implementing new learning into practice.



*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.*

– 1st Grade Teacher

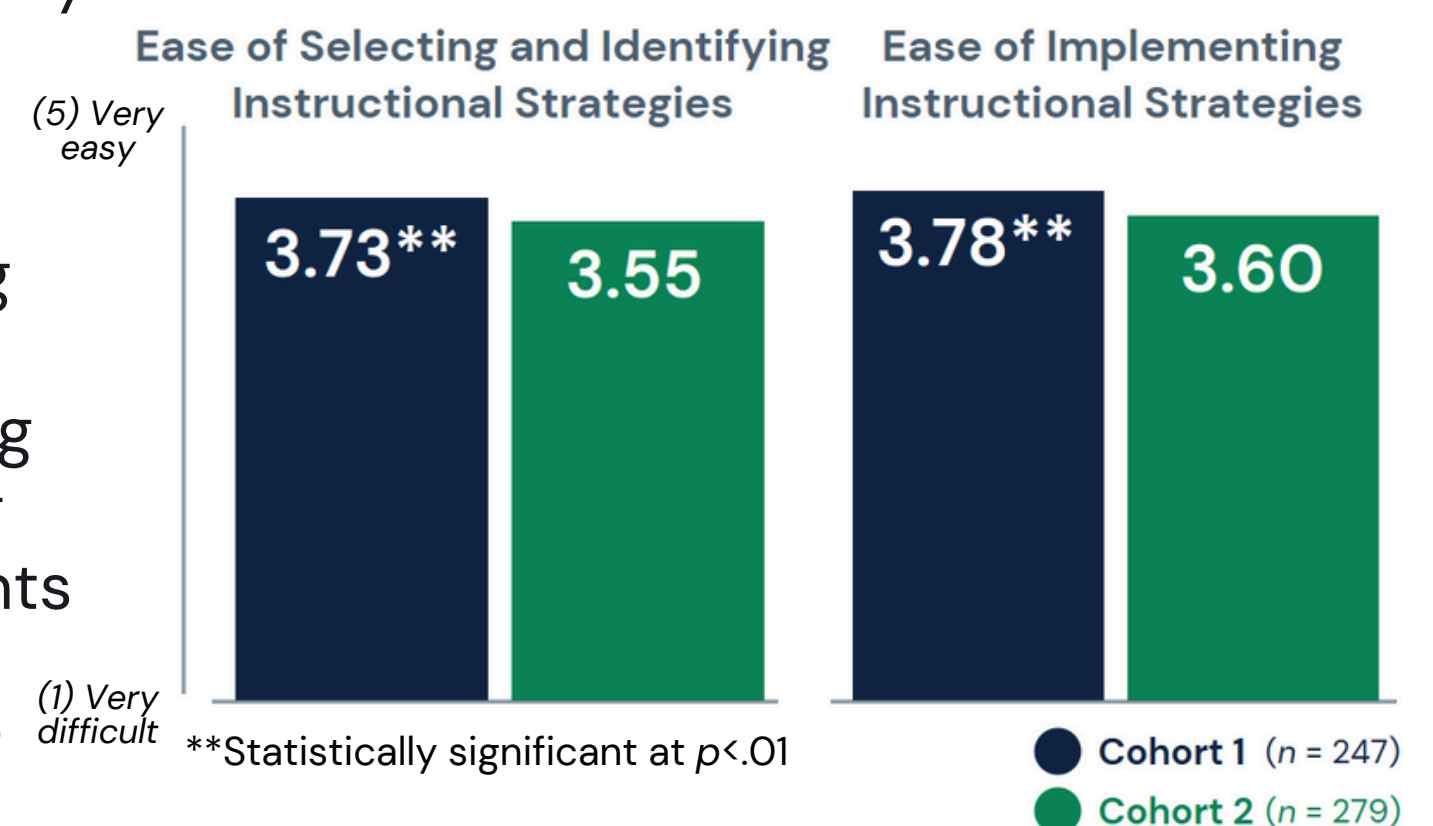


*I think we kind of assume that when [students] come to us, they'll be able to read pretty fluently. And if they can't ... then there's a bigger problem that would be very difficult to fix. But now I know it's difficult ... but it's not as challenging as I thought, if we can identify where they are really struggling.*

– 4th Grade Teacher

*There is promising evidence that teachers are beginning to put into practice what they learn in their PL; however, additional time is needed to fully implement learnings.*

- Cohort 1 teachers were **more confident** in their ability to identify and select instructional strategies and implement LETRS strategies in their classroom.
- While teachers across both cohorts reported being more intentional in their instruction, specifically in identifying and addressing curriculum gaps, building student background knowledge, and differentiating support, and were implementing certain components from the professional learning, (e.g., grapheme-phoneme correspondence) they reported **needing more time to reflect on how best to incorporate learnings in the lesson.**



*The impact of the Reading Academies has yet to be observed with state summative student reading outcomes.*

- Analysis of available data revealed **no significant effects** on Grades 4 and 5 student performance on the 2022–2023 Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA) for reading. At the time of the KSA administration, Cohort 1 teachers were in their first year of professional learning and may not have progressed to Volume 2 of the training, which covers topics more relevant to vocabulary, writing, and comprehension, topics especially relevant for these grades.

- This is **consistent with expected patterns of findings** observed in other states who are also implementing statewide evidence-based literacy initiatives. For instance, 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.<sup>2</sup> North Carolina, another example, only saw impacts of its training after their first cohort completed the two-full years of LETRS professional learning.<sup>3</sup>

## *Campuses that adopted green-rated HQIR(s) demonstrated improved reading outcomes.*

- Additional exploratory analysis examined the effect of adoption of green-rated HQIRs, as reported by participants on the surveys, on student reading outcomes. Student reading performance on the KSA was significantly higher in campuses that adopted the green-rated HQIRs than those who did not.

## NEXT STEPS AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

- In the next year of evaluation, teachers' literacy-specific knowledge, beliefs and practice will continue to be measured especially since Cohort 1 would have completed their professional learning and Cohort 3 will begin theirs.
- As the screening and diagnostic data become available, the extent to which participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies influence reading outcomes for additional grades (i.e., K-3 students) will be examined.
- Shifts in student learning are typically preceded by changes in instructional practice, which in turn is contingent on changes in teacher knowledge and beliefs (reflected in the program's Theory of Change); therefore it is likely that a delayed impact on student outcomes may be observed. KDE could continue to track student outcomes on the KSA even after the evaluation of the reading academies has concluded in June 2025.

“  
*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

## REFERENCES

1. Usher, K., Syal, S., Mazuelas Quirce, S., Spinney, S., Talley, A., Hahn, K., & Barr, S. (2024). *Kentucky Read to Succeed evaluation: Year 1 report*. ICF.
2. Grogan, K., Nabors, A., Soo Ping Chow, A., Torre Gibney, T., Wisniewski, R., & DeCesare, D. (2023). *Independent evaluation of the Colorado READ Act: Per-pupil funding year 3 summary report*. WestEd. Retrieved from: [https://go.boarddocs.com/co/cde/Board.nsf/files/CVDSAD71B674/\\$file/Year%203%20\\_Final\\_Per%20Pupil%20Summary%20Report.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/co/cde/Board.nsf/files/CVDSAD71B674/$file/Year%203%20_Final_Per%20Pupil%20Summary%20Report.pdf)
3. North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2023, August 3). *Year-End Literacy Assessment Shows Strong Gains Continuing for NC Early Grades Students* [Press Release]. Retrieved from: <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2023/08/03/year-end-literacy-assessment-shows-strong-gains-continuing-nc-early-grades-students>