

OVERVIEW

In 2022, the Kentucky General Assembly passed the Read to Succeed Act (Senate Bill 9) and implemented the Kentucky Reading Academies program, investing in teachers' professional learning in early literacy instruction to improve the student experience and increase outcomes in reading.

The Kentucky Reading Academies offer an **opt-in** and **self-paced** professional learning opportunity to K-5 educators and administrators at **no cost** through access to Lexia Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS®) Professional Learning, an online learning platform that includes video modeling, interactive activities, participants' journals, and the LETRS help center.



GOAL

Improve student reading and writing outcomes by helping Kentucky K-5 educators and administrators enhance and strengthen their own early literacy knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instructional practices.

BACKGROUND

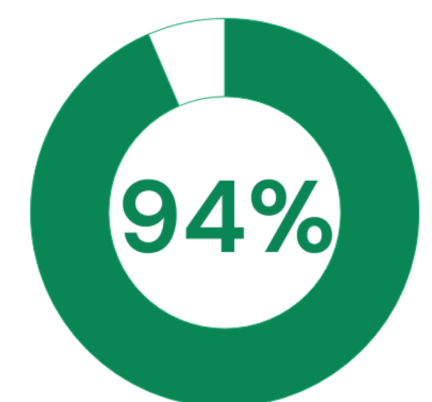
The Kentucky Reading Academies is one of several Read to Succeed initiatives based on Kentucky's shift to the evidence-based science of reading approach. The SoR approach focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension as the five components of skilled reading (National Center on Improving Literacy, 2022). Structured literacy enables educators to apply this SoR framework by prioritizing the systematic and explicit instruction of foundational reading skills through targeted and responsive evidence-based literacy instruction (Spear-Swerling, 2019).

LETRS helps educators integrate the *what, why* and *how* of literacy instruction, using structured literacy to improve their effectiveness and transform their instruction, ultimately leading to better student outcomes in reading. The explicit guidance provided by professional learning such as LETRS offers the often-missing translational component essential for research to truly influence practice (Seidenberg et al., 2020).

Participation included:



4,000+
Participants



School Districts

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES

intense growth
impactful knowledge engaging
flexibility intentional invigorating exciting
comprehensive "heart emoji" motivating needed revamp
mind-opening scientific based useful helpful challenging
insightful **eye-opening** informative
changing transformative enlightening resourceful
multifaceted reinvigorated instruction interesting
invaluable comfortable reassuring extensive
refreshing intrigue inspiring

“

I would recommend the LETRS academy to any/all educators [...] This program truly deepens your knowledge of literacy to where you can easily help other do the same. I've had so many "light bulb" moments and have in turn seen them in my students... and that is priceless.

- 3rd Grade Teacher

EXTERNAL EVALUATION

In 2023, the Kentucky Department of Education sought ICF, a third-party evaluator to better understand the extent and ways in which participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies shaped educator practice and student learning. Selected results and findings of the evaluation appear throughout (Usher et al., 2024).

Many teachers described their experience with the reading academies to be “eye-opening” and “informative.” Veteran teachers reported that LETRS professional learning was the best professional development of their careers.



LETRS has changed my thinking of 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

1,600+
participants

Feedback about experiences was shared via:

- Surveys
- Focus Groups
- Classroom Observations

Findings indicated that...



LETRS professional learning had a positive influence on participants’ knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction or educational practice.



Educators were more motivated to implement district-approved High Quality Instructional Resources (HQIRs) into classroom practice because of their participation.

COHORT SYSTEM

The Kentucky Reading Academies operate on a cohort system, where participants engage in professional learning over the course of one (administrators) to two years (educators), depending on enrollment in LETRS for Administrators or LETRS for Educators.

Participant Eligibility	Program & Time Commitment <small>Self-paced Estimation</small>
K-5 General educators, special educators, reading specialists, interventionists, teachers of English Learners, etc.	Lexia LETRS for Educators 8 units ~ 2 School Years
K-5 Principals, Assistant Principals, Instructional Coaches, Other Administrative Staff	Lexia LETRS for Administrators 5 units ~ 1 School Year

Components



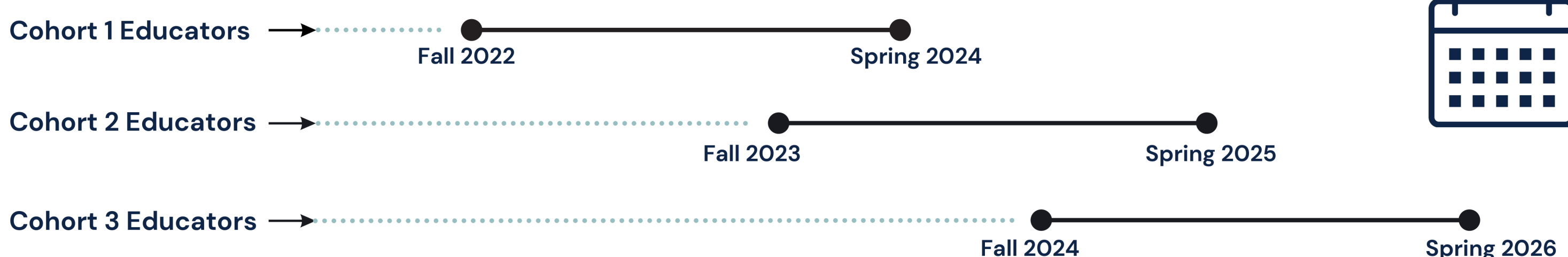
Print Materials (including a professional learning manual)



LETRS virtual live sessions, led by a live facilitator.



Bridge-to-practice activities for content application.



IMPACT OF KENTUCKY READING ACADEMIES

Participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies led to changes in educator-held beliefs about reading and writing, including shifts in identifying best practices and strategies to help students, understanding if and how students could overcome reading challenges, the importance of phonics, and the benefits of incorporating vocabulary across subjects to create vocabulary-rich classrooms. Educators left their learning experience with instructional strategies and tools related to phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, vocabulary, comprehension, and morphology. Additional evaluation findings are below.



Educators were motivated to join the reading academies to expand their knowledge and skills around literacy and out of a desire to better help their students who struggle with reading.



Educators, coaches, and administrators who participated in the Kentucky Reading Academies reported increased confidence in their literacy knowledge, which translated into reported greater comfort teaching literacy.



Teachers and specialists reported more intentionality in their instructional activities and support for students because of their participation.



Those going through LETRS for Educators were able to apply strategies across all three tiers of instruction for students.

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I had a little boy that started in third grade [...] reading well below grade level and he was also an English language learner [...] we were working with him using [LETRS] strategies, and by the end of the year [...] he could read the third-grade passages and did very well on the state assessment.

– 3rd Grade Teacher

“ —

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'd be like, 'Well I don't know the rule; that's just the way it is.'

– 1st Grade Teacher

“ —

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.

– Kindergarten Teacher

“ —

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.

– Instructional Coach

ADMINISTRATOR EXPERIENCES

Administrator participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies was motivated by a strong commitment to helping teachers grow professionally, and an equally important commitment to ensuring that students left school as readers. After finishing LETRS training, several administrators shared a heightened belief in the importance of early literacy, indicating a shift in beliefs previously held about reading and writing. Some participants even noted the importance of providing appropriate literacy interventions in the early grades. Administrators found that they could leverage information they learned through their participation in the academies to shape literacy-related conversations with teachers, as well as to inform decision-making. Additional evaluation findings are below.



Administrators reported that LETRS helped to establish common goals and priorities with teachers and also saw the benefit for all teachers to participate in the Kentucky Reading Academies.



Administrators with coaching responsibilities reported that LETRS was helping them to build their professional toolbox, particularly around bringing data to coaching conversations.

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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

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“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.”

– Instructional Coach

**Interested in joining the Kentucky Reading Academies?
Registration for Cohort 3 is open through August 30, 2024.**

LETRS for Administrators

This course is recommended for district leaders, building administrators, and instructional coaches.

LETRS for Educators

This course is recommended for K–5 teachers, interventionists, reading specialists, and anyone providing reading instruction or intervention supports to early readers.



Scan this QR code to learn more about the Kentucky Reading Academies and register for Cohort 3.

References

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