

The Kentucky Reading Academies: An Overview




In 2022, the Read to Succeed Act (Senate Bill 9) established the **Kentucky Reading Academies**, a no-cost opportunity to educators to opt into the Lexia Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS®) Professional Learning for Teachers (a two-year curriculum) and Administrators (a one-year curriculum). Cohort 1 began in fall 2022, with Cohorts 2 and 3 launching each subsequent fall.

Evaluation of the Kentucky Reading Academies

ICF conducted an external evaluation on whether and how the reading academies initiative has accomplished its goals. Data sources included:

- Surveys and focus groups of LETRS participants
- Classroom observations
- Data from the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA)

Program Goals

Influence K-5 educators' knowledge , beliefs , and classroom instructional practices  in early literacy to ultimately improve the student experience and reading and writing outcomes.

As of 2023-24, over **4,000** Kentucky educators were participating in the reading academies, and **160 out of 171 school districts** had at least one educator engaging in the learning.

Preliminary Findings: Year 2 of Implementation

Educators reported that the Kentucky Reading Academies had a positive influence on their knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction. They described the program as “**eye-opening**” and “**informative**.”

Teacher knowledge on student literacy topics appears to be increasing.

- Significantly higher literacy knowledge scores were seen for Cohort 1 compared to Cohort 2, suggesting that increased progression through LETRS may be connected to **increased educator knowledge**.

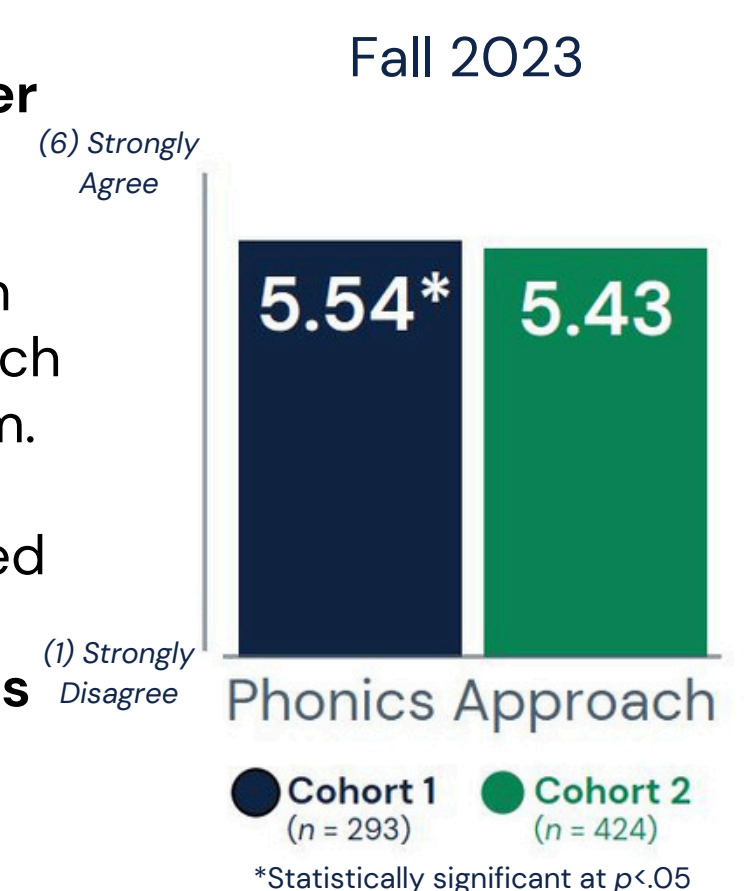
- Educators reported that reading academies participation had increased their confidence in literacy knowledge and had given them **greater comfort teaching literacy**.

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

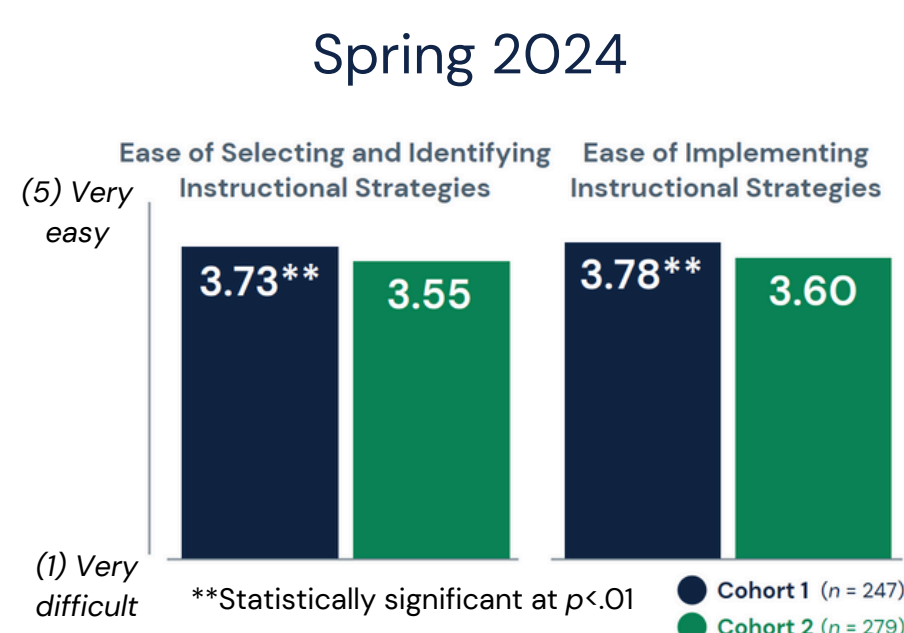
Educators' beliefs may be shifting toward evidence-based approaches to literacy.

- Cohort 1, which was halfway through LETRS at the time of fall survey administration, showed **significantly higher beliefs supporting the evidence-based phonics approach to literacy** when compared to Cohort 2, which had just begun the program.
- This suggests that increased progression through LETRS may be connected to **shifts toward evidence-based approaches to literacy**.



Although teachers are starting to incorporate their learnings into their literacy instruction, more time is needed to see full implementation of LETRS strategies. 

- Cohort 1 teachers reported greater ease of selecting, identifying, and implementing LETRS strategies than Cohort 2, suggesting that increased progression through LETRS may be connected to **increased use of new instructional strategies**.



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!"

– Kindergarten Teacher

- Teachers reported needing **additional time** to reflect on and plan how to fully apply LETRS strategies in their classrooms. Observations of teachers also showed opportunities to align instructional practice with LETRS strategies, underscoring **delays in full implementation**.

KENTUCKY READING ACADEMIES: Supporting Literacy in the Commonwealth

Implementation of high-quality instructional resources (HQIRs) for reading and writing is increasing across the commonwealth and supporting literacy acquisition. This may be driven, in part, by the reading academies.

49% of fall survey respondents reported HQIR adoption within their district.



57% of spring survey respondents reported HQIR adoption within their district.

- Educators reported that LETRS participation motivated implementation of their district-approved HQIR into their classroom practice.
- 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. The results of the KSA Reading analysis **suggest that the adoption and implementation of an HQIR for literacy carry a unique benefit, even apart from related teacher training.**

*LETRS participants reported anecdotal evidence of increased student progress toward grade-level proficiency based on universal screeners and diagnostic assessments.**

The full effects of the two-year teacher curriculum on student outcomes are not likely to be observed in KSA data for another couple of years.



- LETRS participants varied in their use of diagnostic screeners and assessments. Educators who used them had begun using the results to **better support student progress** individually and across grade levels.
- Teachers reported many examples of **anecdotal progress among individual students and whole classes** following the implementation of LETRS strategies.

- Available KSA student outcome data at the time of the analysis in spring 2024 was **not appropriate for determining the effects** of the reading academies on student outcomes:
 - Latest data available were from the spring 2023 KSA administration, when Cohort 1 teachers had not yet completed their first year of the two-year LETRS curriculum.
 - Grades available for measuring outcomes were Grades 4 and 5; LETRS content focused on literacy topics related to these grades doesn't get covered until the second year of the curriculum.
- As of spring 2024, teachers reported that they were not yet fully implementing LETRS strategies, so **student outcomes are likely to lag behind LETRS participation.**

“When I got [my kids] at the beginning of this year, we were in kindergarten level. [And they’ve] moved up a whole grade level in half a year; proof that this works.”

– 2nd Grade Teacher

*i-Ready assessments to measure grade-level proficiency were not yet available as of the time of reporting

Implications

- Many teachers reported that they needed additional time to reflect on and plan how to fully apply LETRS strategies in their own classrooms. Teachers may continue to add or adjust teaching strategies even after they have completed their LETRS program.
- Reported increased use of universal screeners and diagnostic assessments to measure student growth and identify areas where students needed extra support is a promising development. Research has shown that using diagnostic assessments to provide customized intervention can improve students' literacy skills.
- 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. Although statewide assessment data has yet to show widespread improvement, these early indicators of success are promising.