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Kentucky Read to Succeed Evaluation: Year 2 Report

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Kentucky Department of Education
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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). 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). In response to these statewide trends, the Kentucky General Assembly passed the Read to Succeed Act (Senate Bill 9, 2022), which supports evidence-based early literacy instruction rooted in the science of reading and invests in teachers through reading academies and targeted coaching 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 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, 2024). Educators and administrators across the state are able to opt in to this no-cost professional learning opportunity and enroll in LETRS for Educators (a 2-year program) or LETRS for Administrators (a 1-year program).

The Kentucky Reading Academies program is being implemented in phases targeting four cohorts of educators and administrators with Cohort 1 beginning in fall 2022 and Cohort 4 launching in 2025. 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:

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

In 2023, the Kentucky General Assembly further required that all school districts adopt a comprehensive reading program by the beginning of the 2024–2025 academic year. Districts were able to select from a list of green-rated high-quality instructional resources (HQIRs) for their Tier 1 instruction as well as a variety of highly rated supplemental materials. In addition, select teachers also began participating in literacy coaching with State Literacy Coaching Specialists (SLCSs) during the 2024–2025 academic year.

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. The third research question was thoroughly addressed in Year 1 and is not included in this report. For the final year of this evaluation, ICF continued to explore the remaining three research questions and added two additional exploratory research questions, depicted in the sidebar.

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 positively influence educator knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction? How? *(Addressed in Year 1 report only.)*
4. When the literacy coaching model is established, to what extent are the school-based coaches effective in supporting and achieving positive literacy outcomes?

EQ1. What organizational/community contextual factors affect participation in the reading academies and implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies? To what extent does district support/buy-in influence positive literacy outcomes for teachers and students?

EQ2. To what extent does cohort participation impact literacy skills and beliefs?

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.

Key Findings

In examining trends by research questions, participants benefitted from new and increased knowledge, implemented new or modified literacy strategies into their classroom practice including through the use of HQIRs and with the support of SLCSs, and saw promising indicators of student growth as a result. Each of these trends is discussed further, as aligned with 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 widely across districts and schools, with individual participation influenced by both intrinsic motivation (personal commitment to literacy improvement) and extrinsic factors (administrative encouragement or incentives). Those who participated in the reading academies with colleagues in their building reported feeling more supported and more deeply engaged in their participation while those participating by themselves felt isolation and expressed a desire for more widespread participation. Across all cohorts of the reading academies, LETRS continued to receive praise as one of the most impactful professional development experiences educators had received. LETRS participation was reported to deepen educators' understanding of literacy concepts and terminology—even for experienced teachers—and empowered them to better explain reading strategies to students.

Educator knowledge: Cohorts who were further along in their LETRS coursework consistently and significantly outperformed teachers in their literacy knowledge compared with those who had not yet progressed as far in the program, suggesting a positive relationship between LETRS exposure and literacy knowledge. Educators also reported that LETRS improved their knowledge of how to use targeted assessments to identify student needs more precisely and how to apply evidence-based strategies in their classroom instruction.

> *"Several of my students—they don't hear the sound; they don't hear the blends … . The LETRS training has been great for training me how to teach them and then implementing that … so far this year, I feel like I'm seeing a lot of success."*
>
> – Special education teacher, Cohort 1

Educator beliefs: Educators across all cohorts reported greater alignment with beliefs about the phonics approach than beliefs about the whole-word or meaning-based approach to early literacy at each data collection point. These beliefs did not significantly differ by cohort or change significantly as participants advanced through LETRS.

***Classroom instruction*:** Implementation of structured literacy into classroom instruction was a key focus of this second year of evaluation, which led to a focus on Cohort 1 educators who had completed their professional learning and were able to implement strategies from across the LETRS program into their instruction. Overall, LETRS professional learning was widely seen as impactful in transforming literacy instruction, particularly when paired with an aligned HQIR and supported by an SLCS (discussed further in Research Questions 2 and 3). Cohort 1 educators reported implementing a wide range of strategies in their classrooms, including word mapping, vocabulary activities, story frameworks, and phonics instruction.

For students requiring additional support, educators, particularly special education teachers and reading interventionists, reported using LETRS resources to guide Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction. Teachers and interventionists regularly administered LETRS screeners and assessments (ranging from weekly to quarterly) to facilitate more precise, data-driven interventions to address specific literacy weaknesses or gaps in understanding. Special education teachers reported that LETRS

strategies were highly applicable across various instructional settings. They used techniques related to phonics, phonemic awareness, decoding, and morphology, often in collaboration with general education teachers who had also completed LETRS. This shared training allowed for more cohesive co-teaching and flexible student grouping.

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 across all cohorts reported increased knowledge about student literacy, with analysis demonstrating that this knowledge increases during the 2 years of participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies. Specific knowledge gains reported by educators related to technical knowledge, such as how the brain processes written language, morphology, and the role of spelling in reading, as well as practical skills including segmenting sounds and how to teach phonics and phonemic awareness across multiple grade levels.

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.

As discussed under Research Question 1, participation in and completion of the reading academies was credited with transforming literacy instruction by educators across cohorts. Educators across cohorts reported that implementing instructional strategies learned through LETRS was challenging while participation in the reading academies was ongoing. This was largely attributed to the significant time commitment required by LETRS that limited the amount of time available to make ad hoc adjustments to classroom instruction. Survey data showed that most teachers across all cohorts were using LETRS strategies regularly, but Cohort 1 teachers—who had the most exposure—were significantly more likely to report ease in selecting and applying those strategies. This suggests that greater program exposure and time for practice contribute to increased confidence and capacity for successful implementation of instructional strategies. Indeed, Cohort 1 teachers reported that applying LETRS principles became easier after completing the full training, especially with time to reflect and plan over the summer. Cohort 2 teachers also reported greater confidence in using resources provided by LETRS, such as progress monitoring tools, compared to Cohort 3 participants, suggesting that teacher capacity to use these tools increases over time. Reading interventionists and special educators also generally felt an increased capacity to implement LETRS, especially when their schools provided aligned instructional resources.

> *"I felt that it's easier to implement the strategies that I've learned now that I'm finished with LETRS."*
> – Grade 3 teacher, Cohort 1

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

By the 2024–2025 school year, a majority of school districts had adopted an HQIR for literacy, with 87% of surveyed educators indicating their district had selected a core HQIR from a list of approved, green-rated programs by spring 2025. Most of the selected core HQIRs included

supports for Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction, and over half also reported using supplemental resources.

However, HQIRs were being implemented at very high rates, with more than 80% of educators working in districts that had adopted an HQIR also reporting implementation of that HQIR. While some educators felt their HQIR aligned well with LETRS and structured literacy, others noted only partial alignment or cited other challenges with HQIR implementation including frequent curriculum changes or the use of multiple programs simultaneously. SLCSs were able to mitigate many of these challenges both with individual teachers and across whole buildings, which is discussed further in Research Question 4.

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

During this second year of the evaluation, teachers and administrators continued to report increased use of universal screeners and diagnostic assessments to measure student growth and identify areas where students needed extra support. These participants shared examples of using these assessments individually and across classrooms or grade levels to provide more tailored instruction, particularly to struggling students.

Through these assessments and other markers of student progress, teachers and SLCSs reported substantial improvements in students' foundational literacy skills after implementing LETRS strategies. Educators shared numerous examples of growth in areas such as spelling, decoding, and phonemic awareness as well as attitudinal improvements such as confidence and independence in reading. Coaches and administrators also reported noticable student gains in reading fluency, vocabulary, and engagement with complex texts.

> *"For the end-of-the-year [assessment], my kindergarten teacher has 95% of her kindergarteners on grade level. Yes. So that was super, super exciting."*
> – State Literacy Coaching Specialist

Special education teachers and reading interventionists also highlighted their use of diagnositic assessments to track student progress and reported marked progress among students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 services, including those with significant cognitive disabilities or speech delays. Teachers across roles shared powerful stories of transformation, including non-readers reaching grade level, students with ADHD thriving through hands-on learning, and noticeable improvements in writing due to more explicit modeling. These outcomes underscore the broad and meaningful impact of LETRS on individual student literacy development.

> *"This is my tenth year teaching and I've always taught second grade and I've never seen writing like I've seen the last 2 years, because the programs have us doing so much more explicit modeling and this is what a sentence is and this makes a sentence."*
> – Second grade teacher, Cohort 1

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

This Year 2 evaluation began to demonstrate positive, statistically significant growth among students who were taught by LETRS-trained teachers. KSA Reading assessment data, taken during the prior school year (2023–2024) found that Grade 5 students who had

LETRS-trained teachers in two consecutive years scored significantly higher than students who only had a single LETRS-trained teacher or those who did not have any LETRS-trained teachers. This trend also persisted among students receiving special education services, with students in Grade 4 and Grade 5 who had two consecutive years of LETRS-trained teachers outperforming their counterparts who had only one or no LETRS-trained teachers across those two years. This data lags behind the rest of this evaluation, which focused on the 2024–2025 academic year, and has significant findings only in the upper grades.

Research Question 4: To what extent are the school-based literacy coaches effective in supporting and achieving positive literacy outcomes?

SLCSs were in place in 23 schools across Kentucky, supporting 148 individual teachers as well as the broader community of educators in each building. A subset of 100 of these coached educators were included in an observation database, where 58 were participants of the LETRS for Educators professional learning and 42 were not participants in LETRS. Coaches engaged with teachers in a five-phase coaching cycle (Goal Setting and Planning, Learning Supports, Feedback and Practice, Mid-cycle Check-in, Final Feedback and Practice) that prioritized multiple rounds of feedback and practice. In addition, coaches observed and rated teachers on instructional practice related to foundation skills, and comprehension in reading and writing. Overall, teachers and their supporting administrators placed a high value on the SLCSs and reported that coaches were particularly critical in their support for HQIR implementation and their modeling of and direction in structured literacy implementation in the classroom.

Teachers described coaches as approachable, knowledgeable, and instrumental in breaking down dense content during professional learning communities (PLCs), ultimately enhancing their ability to deliver strong literacy instruction. Focus group participants especially valued modeling, co-teaching, and collaborative planning, which helped them internalize best practices and build trust with their coaches. Surveyed teachers, regardless of LETRS participation, reported strong agreement that coaching improved their instructional strategies and helped them implement next steps to enhance student learning. However, administrators reported that coaches were especially valuable in schools with limited LETRS participation, where many teachers lacked foundational knowledge of structured literacy.

Coaches' primary role was to support teachers in their implementation of structured literacy strategies, which benefited all participating teachers, with LETRS participants receiving more of an initial benefit from coaching. Initially, teachers with LETRS training reported greater confidence in their foundational literacy knowledge and instructional flexibility, particularly when responding to student needs. They felt more prepared to explain their instructional decisions and adapt their teaching, while non-LETRS teachers initially struggled with shifting from older practices to evidence-based methods. However, coaching helped bridge this gap, with even teachers who were initially resistant gaining a better understanding of foundational literacy through support from literacy coaches.

Observation data showed that LETRS-trained teachers outperformed their non-LETRS peers in foundational literacy instruction during midyear evaluations, particularly in phonemic awareness, phonics, instructional practices, and student engagement. However, by the end of the year, differences between the two groups leveled out. In comprehension-focused lessons, both groups

performed similarly across all timepoints in areas such as using high-quality texts and effective questioning. LETRS-trained teachers did show a midyear advantage in fostering student engagement, but again, this difference diminished by year's end. These findings suggest that while LETRS provides an initial boost in instructional quality, sustained coaching plays a key role in supporting all teachers' growth over time.

In addition to the documented increases in educator knowledge, findings from teachers and coaches highlight significant shifts in classroom practice that were reported to yield measurable student benefits. Educators reported regular implementation of evidence-based strategies, such as orthographic mapping, sound walls, explicit writing models, and systematic phonics instruction, which enhanced both core instruction and targeted interventions. SLCSs observed that teachers demonstrated increased confidence and instructional precision, reporting that even initially reluctant educators incorporated structured literacy practices when provided with modeling and feedback. These changes in instruction corresponded with reports of notable student growth, including descriptions of some kindergarten classrooms achieving near-universal grade-level proficiency; special education students demonstrating new decoding skills; and broader improvements in fluency, spelling, and independent writing across older grades.

The integration of coaching support, particularly alongside LETRS, was regarded as a critical factor in ensuring the fidelity of implementation and the effective use of HQIRs. Teachers cited the individualized support, goal setting related to HQIRs, ongoing opportunities for reflection, and practical tools—such as lesson modeling and student work analysis protocols—as building their confidence and instructional effectiveness. Administrators also reported that coaches supported building-wide implementation of their HQIR, helping educators manage the complexity of new materials introduced alongside other curricula during PLCs. By the year's end, coaches' ratings of HQIR implementation integrity had significantly improved among coached teachers, regardless of whether or not the coached teachers had also participated in LETRS, highlighting the central role coaches played in successful HQIR adoption.

> *"[My coach and I] would go to classrooms and walk through together. And … we'd come out and we'd debrief … . She would teach me. So then when I would give feedback to the teacher, I could be very specific. … Without her, we would have all been way off track even with the right resource."*
> – School administrator

Exploratory Research Question 1: What organizational/community contextual factors affect participation in the reading academies and implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies? To what extent does district support/buy-in influence positive literacy outcomes for teachers and students?

The biggest contextual factor supporting participation in the reading academies was administrative or district support for participation. Participants referenced a variety of support mechanisms including covering the costs of substitutes, providing teacher stipends as participation incentives, and allowing time for teachers to collaborate and discuss LETRS learnings with their peers. Group participation in the reading academies was also reported to support individual involvement and completion while educators who were the only LETRS participants in their buildings often felt isolated and struggled to align their practices with peers.

Another key contextual factor influencing implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies was in-building collaboration, which was credited with fostering shared learning, motivation, and alignment across classrooms. Teachers who participated in LETRS alongside colleagues reported feeling more supported and confident, especially when they could engage in regular PLCs or grade-level meetings that tied LETRS strategies to their HQIR curricula.

SLCSs were in place in 23 schools across Kentucky. This contextual factor further enhanced implementation by offering personalized guidance, modeling lessons, and reinforcing LETRS-aligned practices, especially when both coaches and administrators were trained in LETRS. This benefit also extended to the entire building when SLCSs shared guidance on HQIR implementation and structured literacy instructional practices with administrators or at PLCs.

A broader culture of continuous learning also emerged as a critical factor supporting classroom instruction. Schools that emphasized professional growth, maintained a growth mindset, and prioritized doing what's best for students created environments where LETRS strategies could thrive. Regular PLCs, both within and across schools, provided structured time for collaboration, resource sharing, and instructional planning. These meetings often included data reviews using web-based integration platforms, allowing educators to reflect on student progress and adjust instruction accordingly.

This administrative and district support also played a key role in supporting positive literacy outcomes for students—when principals and district leaders were LETRS-trained, teachers felt more understood and better supported. Teachers cited regular PLCs, led by supportive administrators or teacher leaders, that leveraged LETRS tools and resources as well as data from screeners and assessments to tailor student instruction. This data-driven, collaborative approach helped ensure fidelity to evidence-based practices and supported sustained implementation of LETRS strategies. Ongoing support for administrators, provided by SLCSs or district staff, also contributed to successful implementation of structured literacy. Administrators who worked with a coach felt like they were better able to identify evidence-based literacy instruction in the classroom because of support from the literacy coach. Overall, participation and implementation were most successful in schools with strong leadership that was committed to structured literacy, collaborative structures, and a shared commitment to literacy improvement across grade- or school-levels.

Exploratory Research Question 2: To what extent does cohort participation impact literacy skills and beliefs?

The Kentucky Reading Academies has enrolled three cohorts of participants into the LETRS for Educators professional learning program. This evaluation sought to explore the possibility that the cumulative influence of literacy initiatives throughout Kentucky may have caused a shift in school cultures related to literacy that shaped the understanding of Cohort 3 participants in ways that were not true for earlier cohorts.

In terms of beliefs and perceptions, all cohorts expressed high satisfaction with LETRS and acknowledged its positive impact on their instructional practice. However, LETRS exposure rather than cohort participation seemed to have the largest influence on teachers' ability to implement structured literacy strategies into classroom instruction. Cohort 1 teachers, who had the longest

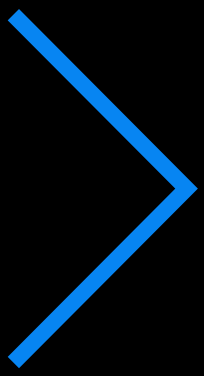
exposure to LETRS, reported greater ease in implementing LETRS strategies and demonstrated higher confidence and comfort in applying evidence-based practices. Similarly, Cohort 2 teachers reported significantly stronger agreement that LETRS equipped them with the skills to use progress monitoring tools effectively, compared to Cohort 3. This indicates that while all cohorts benefited from the training, those further along in the program (like Cohorts 1 and 2) experienced greater gains in both practical application and belief in the program's value. Overall, cohort participation influenced educators' literacy implementation, but the depth of impact was closely tied to the duration of LETRS exposure rather than other external factors.

Conclusions

Throughout this evaluation, more than 1,700 participants (including LETRS participants, coaches, and administrators) shared their feedback and experiences through focus groups, surveys, and case studies. Across these experiences, as well as the Year 1 evaluation conducted previously, numerous common themes emerged across our data, lending confidence to these findings. Participants continued to participate in and complete their LETRS coursework, benefitting from enhanced knowledge about structured literacy and struggling readers. Kentucky Reading Academies participants, as well as educators across Kentucky, implemented structured literacy in their classroom practice with the support of HQIRs and a limited number of SLCSs, and saw indicators of positive student outcomes as a result.

Educators across all cohorts of LETRS reported increased knowledge about student literacy with knowledge increasing across the 2 years of participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies, suggesting that increased exposure to LETRS professional learning may be significantly related to greater literacy knowledge. LETRS participants, particularly those in Cohort 1 who had completed the full professional learning program, reported implementing a variety of LETRS strategies and materials in their classroom practice. Many teachers reported that these paired well with HQIRs, particularly when HQIR implementation was supported by an SLCS. Teachers and interventionists reported regularly administering LETRS screeners and assessments to identify skill gaps and tailor instruction accordingly.

This Year 2 evaluation began to demonstrate positive, statistically significant growth among students who were taught by LETRS-trained teachers in 2023–2024, particularly Grade 5 students who had LETRS-trained teachers across two consecutive academic years as well as Grades 4 and 5 special education students who had the same. Qualitative findings from this evaluation found that teachers frequently reported difficulty fully implementing LETRS strategies into their classroom instruction until they had completed the 2-year professional learning. This timeline means that the 2024–2025 school year is the first with LETRS graduates from Cohort 1, which suggests that most teachers did not start fully implementing LETRS approaches and strategies into their classroom until that school year. This, alongside the more widespread implementation of HQIRs and the targeted deployment of SLCSs, suggests that student literacy growth will continue to progress in subsequent years, as more students have the opportunity to be exposed to multiple years of LETRS-trained teachers as well as curriculum that is aligned with structured literacy.



Kentucky Read to Succeed Evaluation: Year 2 Report

I. Introduction

In 2019, only about half of Kentucky's third-graders were proficient in reading, and national data placed the state 23rd in fourth-grade reading performance across the nation, with scores declining further after the coronavirus disease pandemic. (Kentucky Department of Education [KDE], 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). This is concerning, given that students who are not reading proficiently by Grade 3 are significantly more likely to drop out of high school (Hernandez, 2011). A large body of research literature highlights the long-term academic and social benefits of early literacy skills such as phonemic awareness (e.g., Duncan et al., 2007) and emphasizes the critical role of teachers in student success (Miles & Stipek, 2006; Cooper et al., 2014). Professional development for educators—especially in foundational literacy knowledge—has been shown to significantly improve student reading outcomes, underscoring the need to invest in both early literacy and teacher training (Didion et al., 2019; Folsom et al., 2017; Hattie, 2008; Piasta et al., 2009). These findings highlight the importance of equipping educators with deep content knowledge to enhance student literacy development.

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 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 Lexia Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (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. Cohort 1 began in fall 2022 with each subsequent cohort beginning the following fall.

Goals of the Read to Succeed Act

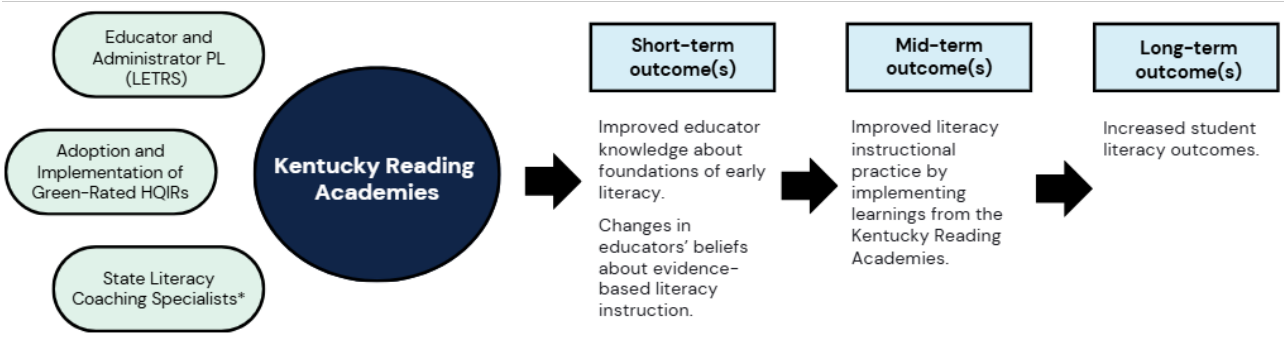
1. Increased teacher knowledge regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle.
2. Increased teacher capacity to incorporate instructional strategies aligned to their new learning regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle.
3. Increased adoption of high-quality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

Simultaneously, districts are required to adopt a comprehensive reading curriculum program from a "green-rated" list of programs provided by the KDE that are aligned with new reading and writing standards, research-based and/or externally validated, and determined to be accessible for all students. All districts were required to have this "high-quality instructional resource" or HQIR in place by July 2024 to be implemented no later than the 2024–2025 academic year.

Also in place during the 2024–2025 academic year were 23 State Literacy Coaching Specialists (SLCSs) who were supporting 148 teachers across the commonwealth. These coaches further support the foundations of literacy instruction in place through the Kentucky Reading Academies and HQIR implementation by providing coaching around literacy instruction, use of diagnostic assessments, effective multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS), and HQIR implementation.

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 development of knowledge and beliefs through the LETRS professional learning (PL) will, in turn, interact with the adoption and implementation of HQIRs and the influence of the SLCSs; translate to the classroom where educators would have the tools to deliver targeted and responsive literacy instruction; and impact student outcomes, specifically via improved grade-level proficiency (Exhibit 1.1).

Exhibit 1.1. Theory of Change for the Kentucky Reading Academies



*Coaching specialists began work with Kentucky teachers in Year 3 of program implementation (2024–2025). PL = Professional learning. HQIRs = High-quality instructional resources.

Program Evaluation

To understand the outcomes and impacts of the Kentucky Reading Academies on teacher outcomes (short-term and mid-term) and student outcomes (long-term), 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 educator knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction through the LETRS professional learning program and the coaching model. This evaluation will also make recommendations based on the study findings related to the effectiveness of the professional learning and coaching model.

Year 1 Evaluation Findings

The first year of our evaluation used a mixed-methods approach that combined surveys, focus groups, classroom observations, and student assessment data to assess the implementation of the reading academies as well as any emergent outcomes on educators or students. Findings from the initial year of this evaluation showed that educators gained new knowledge and confidence in teaching literacy, with many describing the LETRS training as transformative. Teachers reported

increased understanding of how students learn to read and why some struggle, and many began integrating LETRS strategies into their classrooms. However, full implementation into classroom practice was often delayed due to the sequencing of training content and time constraints; teachers reported spending all their excess time going through the training, which did not leave a margin for implementing new classroom instructional practices or folding in LETRS strategies. Administrators also reported using LETRS insights to guide instructional decisions and support teachers.

Progress toward the program's five literacy goals also showed promising early results. Teachers demonstrated increased knowledge and capacity to apply evidence-based strategies, and many districts had already adopted HQIRs. Teachers reported more intentional literacy instruction and greater use of diagnostic assessments to tailor support for struggling students. While anecdotal evidence suggested student gains, especially in reading fluency and comprehension, statewide assessment data had not yet shown statistically significant improvements, likely due to the short implementation period and the time needed for instructional changes to take full effect.

Participants identified several facilitators and barriers to successful implementation. Support from district- and school-level administrators and peer collaboration enhanced engagement among classroom teachers, while time demands and lack of alignment between curricula and LETRS strategies posed challenges. Recommendations included offering stipends to offset the level of effort required for LETRS, scheduling training time during the summer, and fostering professional learning communities (PLCs) at the school or district level to extend learning. Despite limited measurable outcomes in Year 1, the Kentucky Reading Academies have already laid a strong foundation for long-term improvements in literacy instruction and student achievement, with further evaluation planned in Year 2 to assess the impact of the literacy coaching model and continued implementation.

Reading Academy Results in Context

Kentucky's implementation of the reading academies aligns with a national movement toward evidence-based reading instruction grounded in the science of reading—a comprehensive body of research exists on how children learn to read and how to teach reading effectively (e.g., Petscher et al., 2020; Seidenberg, 2013; Snowling et al., 2022), largely in response to declines in reading proficiency levels in recent years (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Although many states have adopted the science of reading framework, they vary in their scope and implementation strategy as they target different components of literacy instruction.

For example, both Mississippi and North Carolina implemented teacher professional development programs based on similar LETRS training to what is available in Kentucky. Mississippi's phased LETRS training for K–3 educators led to notable gains in teacher knowledge and student reading proficiency, with Grade 3 proficiency rising from 36% in 2017 to 58% in 2024 after consistent upward progress each year (Mississippi Department of Education [MDE], 2017; MDE, 2024). North Carolina's LETRS-based initiative, launched through the Excellent Public Schools Act, showed promising early results, particularly for kindergarten and Grade 1 students, with statewide Grade 3 reading proficiency increasing from 44% to 49% between 2021 and 2024 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2024; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2023). Other states implementing science of reading programs using different training models have

experienced similar results. Colorado's Reading to Ensure Academic Development (READ) Act (2012) required 45 hours of evidence-based training for K–3 educators, resulting in improved teacher practices and a steady decline in the number of students struggling with reading, though overall proficiency remains below pre-pandemic levels (Grogan et al., 2023; Grogan et al., 2024). Across these states, results suggest that while gains may take time to materialize, sustained investment in evidence-based literacy training can lead to meaningful improvements in student outcomes.

Evaluation Approach in Year 2

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.
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? (*Addressed only in Year 1 of this evaluation)*

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 only in Year 2 of this evaluation)*

In addition, there are two exploratory research questions that have been addressed during this second year of the evaluation and draw upon case studies and supplemental survey analysis to more deeply understand the ways in which participation in the reading academies influences teacher beliefs and practices to subsequently impact student outcomes.

Kentucky Reading Academies Exploratory Evaluation Research Questions

Exploratory Question 1: What organizational/community contextual factors affect participation in the reading academies and implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies? To what extent does district support/buy-in influence positive literacy outcomes for teachers and students?

Exploratory Question 2: To what extent does cohort participation impact literacy skills and beliefs?

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 case studies, interviews, and focus groups with instructional staff, literacy coaches, and school leaders. The final year of this evaluation consisted of five types of data sources. 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 A.

Data Sources Used to Address Research Questions During Year 2

- Two rounds of surveys with teachers and administrators participating in the LETRS professional learning program and a single survey with teachers participating in the coaching model with SLCSs;
- Fall focus groups with teachers participating in the LETRS professional learning program with a focus on implementation of LETRS into classroom practice, and spring focus groups and interviews with teachers, administrators, and coaches participating in the coaching model with SLCSs;
- Extant data from the Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) and i-Ready, including de-identified demographic and academic data from both teachers and students;
- Extant data from TNTP that documents a subset of SLCSs' observations; and
- In-depth case studies at three schools across three districts, which included classroom observations of teachers from Cohort 1 of LETRS, focus groups with literacy-focused instructional staff, interviews with school and district administration, and a review of relevant extant data about each school.

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

- Section II includes formative outcomes related to educators' participation in and perceptions of the Kentucky Reading Academies, including participation in coaching.

- Section III discusses short-term outcomes in educators' knowledge and beliefs stemming from the influence of the Kentucky Reading Academies, including cohort difference as well as the influence of the coaching model on educators' improved knowledge and changing beliefs.
- Section IV includes a detailed examination of the mid-term outcomes related to implementation of structured literacy into classroom instruction through HQIR adoption and implementation, LETRS training and implementation of those strategies, and the influence of SLCSs on implementation of these literacy initiatives.
- Section V presents longer-term outcomes about the extent to which participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies, implementation of HQIRs, and participation in the coaching model have shaped student outcomes.

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, including future directions for research and evaluation. 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 and State Literacy Coaching Specialists

An early element of this evaluation involved understanding the perceptions and experiences of teachers and administrators participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies. During Year 2 of this evaluation, this expanded to include an understanding of the experience of those working with a SLCS provided by the KDE. This analysis included explorations of educators' motivation to participate, patterns of participation, and perceptions of the Kentucky Reading Academies and coaching model. Across these domains, this evaluation also examined barriers and facilitators to participation 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, with findings from the case studies included in teal boxes.

Participation and Perceptions of the Kentucky Reading Academies

Mirroring trends from the Year 1 evaluation report, focus group participants continued to share overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding their participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies. Participants in focus groups provided insights about the ways in which participation in and completion of the Kentucky Reading Academies varied across schools and districts and shared general impressions regarding the program.

> *"I feel those of us who probably were in the first cohort were probably, similarly to myself, looking like we felt like something was missing and that's why we volunteered."*
> – Kindergarten teacher, Cohort 1

Participation in the reading academies varied by district and school and was shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Focus group participants reported a wide range of reading academy participants in their building, ranging from no other educators to more than 20 people participating in one of the LETRS cohorts. This was in part driven by varying degrees of emphasis placed on participation across schools or districts. For example, 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. For example, one Grade 1 teacher in Cohort 1 said, "My principal has worked really hard [to get teachers to sign up for LETRS] and we had … almost our whole first-grade team and several of our second-grade team … in the first cohort." In contrast, some individuals were the only participant of the reading academies in their school or grade level. These participants often described high levels of intrinsic motivation to participate, such as one special education teacher who said, "I chose to do LETRS on my own, because I'm seeing more and more and more upper elementary non-readers."

Group participation in the reading academies was perceived to support ongoing engagement with LETRS and program completion. Focus group participants who enrolled in LETRS with other staff in their building reported feeling more supported in their participation, while those who went through the program alone reported feeling more isolated. Those who had a network of other educators going through the program together described participating in the live virtual trainings together, sharing ideas for implementing LETRS strategies, and feeling more supported. One reading interventionist said, "I do know that our AP [assistant principal] and principal are both also

doing the training, which is great. So, having that buy-in from the above is really great to have and knowing that they're understanding it at the same time we are." In contrast, those who went through the program as the only educator in their building reported feelings of isolation or frustration that they were not approaching literacy in the same way as others. One reading interventionist reflected, "I do wish there were more LETRS trained teachers in my building. Some of our reading teachers do not understand the foundational skills. I'm hoping our district will keep pushing teachers to take the training."

Educators continued to describe LETRS as one of the best professional learning experiences of their careers. Participants across all three cohorts reported that LETRS was a high-quality program that integrated well with HQIR curriculum and Kentucky's overall emphasis on structured literacy. A common sentiment, echoed by this 25-year veteran reading interventionist was: "I would say it is the best professional learning I have had in my entire career as an educator. I wish I would have had it year one. I wish that all preservice teachers would have it because I would do a lot differently." One veteran educator who was working as a reading interventionist explained, "I have been teaching for 28 years so this information wasn't new to me, but it was a new way for me to look at it. The [LETRS] facilitators gave us real tips; they could tell me something today and then tomorrow I could implement it in my classroom."

> *"I appreciate that the state of Kentucky is … providing this training to us along with requiring these high-quality instructional resources because while we're getting those HQIRs and getting the LETRS training, those of us who are having the LETRS training, you can see how they go together."*
> – Kindergarten teacher, Cohort 1

> *"LETRS was the best training I've ever had in my 25 years. Hands down, if you're going to teach kids how to read, especially the low[er grades] like K–3, you have to have LETRS, or at least have LETRS knowledge."*
> – Grade 1 teacher, Cohort 1

One Cohort 1 teacher indicated that in her 25 years of teaching, LETRS has been the most impactful professional learning she had ever received. This teacher indicated that for anyone teaching early readers—especially in Grades K through 3—LETRS is essential. Even though she was already using practices aligned with the science of reading, she did not fully understand the reasoning behind those practices until LETRS gave her the foundational knowledge, including phonics rules and terminology such as graphemes, phonemes, fricatives, and nasals. It also helped her understand why certain methods work and gave her the language to explain it to her students, who she realized were more capable of grasping these concepts than she had assumed.

Participants additionally described several key factors that influenced their ability to persist in and successfully complete the Kentucky Reading Academies. They shared similar factors that shaped their engagement with SLCSs.

Administrative support and participation were key facilitators of LETRS completion. LETRS participants in both fall and spring focus groups continually indicated that logistical support provided by their administration helped to mitigate challenges associated with full-time teaching responsibilities and the intensive time commitment associated with LETRS participation. Protected planning time, funding for substitute coverage to participate in the virtual sessions during the day,

celebrations and awards, stipends, and even rank changes post-completion were all indicated as additional reasons to participate. These factors supplemented the intrinsic desire to become a better teacher of literacy and enriched the overall experience. Having a supportive administrator who encouraged participation in evidence-based literacy learning such as LETRS (and others such as Orton-Gillingham, University of Florida Literacy Institute [UFLI], etc.) was a motivating factor because it indicated a commitment to educators' professional growth. Finally, district- and school-based leaders who also participated in LETRS were cited as strong motivators for teachers to engage, because not only was the leadership modeling commitment to the professional learning, but their participation also communicated the importance of LETRS as part of a broader initiative to improve literacy within the building and district.

> *"Our administrator is wonderful. If we say, 'Hey, we want to go do this and see how this [LETRS] works,' he's like, 'OK, have at it.' So, like, we've done some extra trainings on top of that, like I did the UFLI [University of Florida Literacy Institute] training, I've done the OG [Orton-Gillingham] training."*
> – Grade 2 teacher, Cohort 1

Case Studies: Contextual Factors Shaping Participation in the Reading Academies

Across the three case studies, strong district and school leadership buy-in and support for the LETRS program was a common facilitator for both LETRS participation and successful implementation of LETRS strategies. This support included covering the costs of substitutes, providing teacher stipends as participation incentives, and allowing time for teachers to collaborate and discuss implementation with their peers.

For example, one observed school implemented a strategic and phased plan to train teachers and administrators in LETRS. Initially, the case study school selected strong teachers, considered by their colleagues to be leaders, to join the first cohort of LETRS—without fully knowing what to expect. After these teachers and others in the district participating in Cohort 1 reported positive experiences, the district expanded LETRS professional learning to include all K–2 teachers, special education teachers, and English language learner teachers over a 3-year period. This approach enabled the district to leverage the professional learning provided by the KDE and gradually build internal capacity to continue training new teachers even after the state's LETRS offering concludes.

LETRS participants continued to cite the large time commitment and pace of new content as barriers to completing the program. Across cohorts, participants in the reading academies discussed the challenges of finding time to complete the required work, participate in the live virtual sessions, and absorb all of the new content included in the LETRS program. Educators of older students also expressed a disconnect between some of the early LETRS content and what they were required to teach in their grade levels. For some, it was a challenge to persist through this material that was perceived as less relevant to their students. One special education teacher in Cohort 2 recalled, "Initially when I did LETRS—the very first year—I was completely overwhelmed with keeping up with the work and all of it. As I got into year two and I kind of saw the whole connection—from the phonemic awareness more explicit instruction part there, to more of the

language comprehension part in year 2—when I started to see that tie, it made the whole thing a little bit easier."

Participation and Perceptions of Support from the State Literacy Coaching Specialists

In the 2024–2025 school year, literacy coaching support was offered to Kentucky teachers across 23 schools, whether they were participating in the reading academies or not, through Read to Succeed's Coaching Framework initiative. In this first year of implementation, 148 teachers were identified for coaching by SLCSs. The early part of the year was focused on building relationships and trust, with five-phased coaching cycles that prioritized multiple rounds of feedback and practice beginning in November:

- **Goal Setting and Planning:** This phase involved observing the teacher to understand their current performance and identify their strengths and areas for improvement. The coach and teacher then co-created a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Aligned, Realistic, Time-Bound) development goal and a Progression of Action Steps to achieve it.
- **Learning Supports:** During this phase, teachers engaged in activities that helped them implement the action steps. These activities included professional learning communities (PLCs), professional learning sessions, unit and lesson internalization, and coach modeling or co-teaching.
- **Feedback and Practice**: In this phase, teachers worked on implementing the agreed-upon action steps. The coach supported the teacher by providing feedback and creating a safe space for the teacher to make mistakes and learn from them. The goal was for the teacher to consistently try out the action steps in their classroom.
- **Mid-Cycle Check-In:** Midway through the coaching cycle, the coach conducted follow-up observations and discussed the teacher's progress towards their goals. This check-in helped determine if any revisions to the action steps were needed or if additional steps were required to help the teacher develop toward their SMART goal.
- **Final Feedback and Practice:** During this final phase of the cycle, teachers continued to work on the action steps while coaches supported the teacher in implementing these steps. Toward the end of the coaching cycle, the coach conducted a final observation to assess whether the teacher met their development goal. The evidence gathered was used to understand the teacher's progress and to decide the focus for the next coaching cycle or whether the teacher could be released from the formal coaching cycle.

Working across all 23 schools, the SLCSs completed a combined total of 255 coaching cycles, 2,456 classroom observations, 1,640 feedback conversations, and more than 1,000 coach-led PLCs focused on unit and lesson internalization as well as other topics.

Most educators reported positive shifts in their perceptions of literacy coaching after having hesitations towards the process. Initially, some educators were concerned that the time spent with a literacy coach would be ineffective and an inefficient use of planning time. However, once educators engaged in the coaching process, they recognized the coach's expertise and responsiveness to educators' literacy needs. Teachers consistently reported that coaching helped them feel more capable and confident in their literacy instruction, especially in the area of phonics instruction. Teachers also appreciated when coaches would model or co-teach lessons, which helped the teachers see best practices in action and ultimately helped them internalize those evidence-based practices for future instruction. Teachers—even those who were anxious about the amount of time spent with the coach—felt that the real-time, practical support provided by the coach was beneficial and helped them move beyond surface-level understandings.

> *"She [literacy coach] is helpful. She is positive. If I go to her and say … I don't know what this means … or I don't see the coherency or the fluency in why I'm teaching this now and this next, she [works hard] to find me that answer and bring it back, whether it's an answer or a product … . I have nothing but praise for her as far as her work ethic and her helpfulness, and she's helped me, like I said—[our curriculum] is heavy."*
> – Grade 1 teacher, Cohort 1

III. Short-Term Outcomes: Educator Knowledge and Beliefs

Improved education knowledge about the foundations of early literacy as well as changes in educators' beliefs about evidenced-based literacy instruction are desired short-term outcomes of the Kentucky Reading Academies, according to the theory of change described in Section I. This section presents findings from across focus group, survey, and case study data highlighting common themes that emerged across data sources related to the influence that Kentucky's emphasis on evidence-based early literacy instruction is having on educators' knowledge and beliefs.

Teacher Knowledge

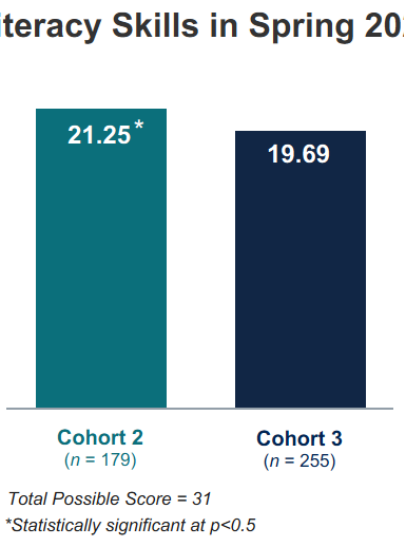
The Teacher Knowledge of Early Literacy Skills (TKELS; Folsom et al., 2017), a measure of teachers' knowledge of key early literacy concepts and skills, was administered to Cohort 3 teachers in fall of 2024 (455 respondents) and both Cohorts 2 and 3 in spring 2025 (179 and 255 respondents, respectively). Cross-cohort comparisons for the TKELS were analyzed with Cohorts 2 and 3 being compared at baseline in fall 2023 and fall 2024, respectively, and comparisons across the three cohorts when they were at the midpoint of their LETRS professional learning (i.e., fall 2023 for Cohort 1, spring 2024 for Cohort 2, and spring 2025 for Cohort 3). Focus group participants, including SLCSs, also shared examples of new or enhanced knowledge gained through LETRS participation or through participation in the coaching model. 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 B was administered in the fall while Form A was administered in the spring.

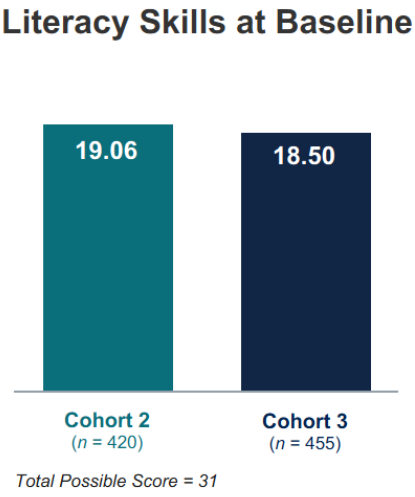
Cohort 2 teachers, who are at the end of their LETRS PL, outperformed Cohort 3 teachers on the TKELS in spring 2025. In spring 2025, Cohort 2 and Cohort 3 teachers were administered the TKELS. Cohort 2, who was at the end of their LETRS PL had significantly higher scores than Cohort 3 teachers who were at the midpoint of their LETRS PL (Exhibit 3.1). This finding is similar to findings in spring 2024 where Cohort 1 teachers who were further along in their LETRS PL outperformed Cohort 2 teachers on the TKELS. This suggests that increased exposure to LETRS professional learning may be significantly related to greater literacy knowledge.

Exhibit 3.1. Comparison of TKELS Scores at Spring 2025, by Cohort



Cohort 3 teachers had lower literacy knowledge at baseline than Cohort 2 teachers. Baseline comparisons of Cohort 2 and 3 teachers' TKELS scores showed that Cohort 3 had slightly lower—albeit not significantly so—TKELS scores than their peers in Cohort 2 (Exhibit 3.2). Baseline TKELS scores for Cohort 2 were obtained from the fall 2023 administration and Cohort 3 teachers' baseline TKELS scores were obtained from the fall 2024 administration. One potential reason for this difference may be because Cohort 3 teachers had a higher percentage of less experienced teachers than Cohort 2 at the time of their respective survey administration.

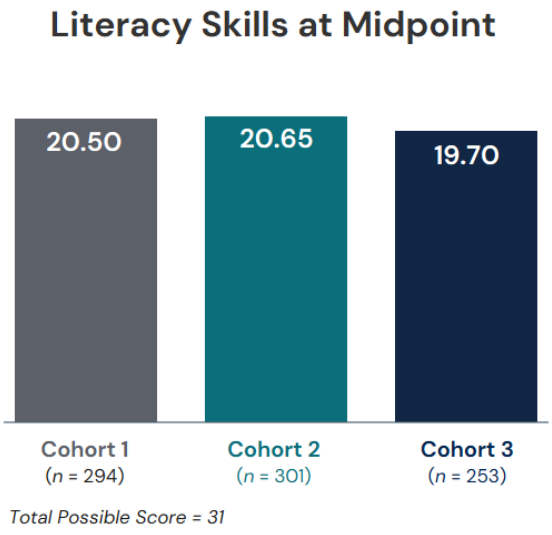
Exhibit 3.2. Comparison of Baseline TKELS Scores in Fall 2023 and Fall 2024, by Cohort



Teachers' literacy knowledge at the midpoint of the LETRS professional learning was similar across cohorts. Cross-cohort comparisons of teachers' TKELS scores when they were at the midpoint of their LETRS professional learning showed that Cohort 3 teachers' scores were slightly lower than teachers in Cohorts 1 or 2; however, this difference was not statistically significant

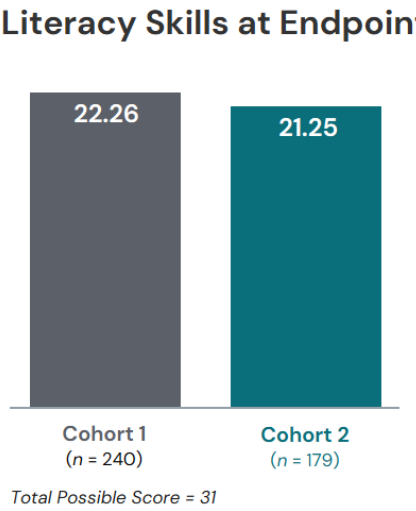
(Exhibit 3.3). For context, midpoint TKELS scores were obtained from the fall 2023 survey administration for Cohort 1, from the spring 2024 survey administration for Cohort 2, and from the spring 2025 survey administration for Cohort 3.

Exhibit 3.3. A Midpoint Snapshot of TKELS Scores in Fall 2023, Spring 2024, and Spring 2025, by Cohort



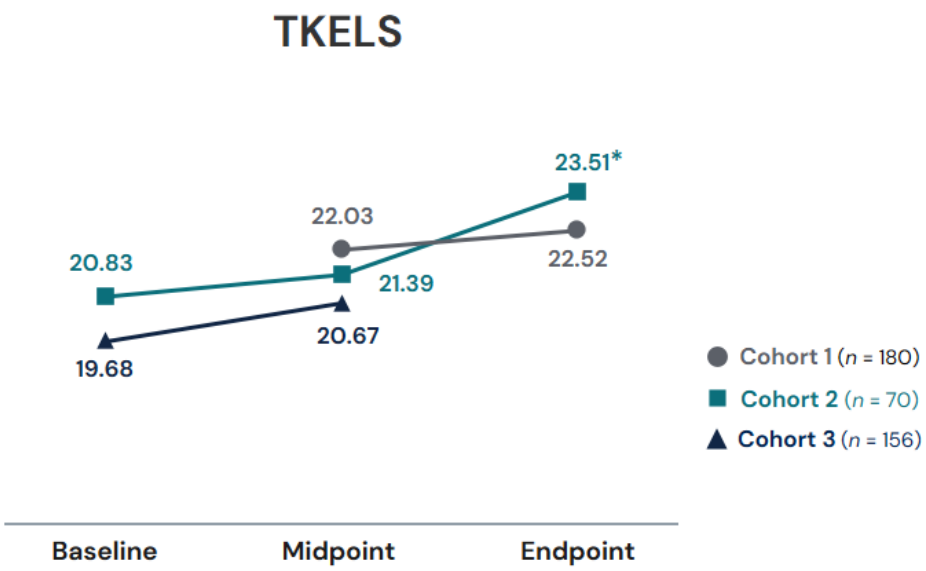
Teachers' literacy knowledge at the end of the LETRS professional learning was at similar levels across cohorts. Comparisons of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 teachers' literacy knowledge at the end of professional learning (i.e., spring 2024 and spring 2025, respectively) revealed no significant differences; however, Cohort 2 had slightly lower average means than Cohort 1 at that point in time (Exhibit 3.4). It is important to note that this analysis only provides a snapshot of literacy knowledge when teachers were at the end of their PL and did not account for baseline performance on the TKELS.

Exhibit 3.4. An Endpoint Snapshot of TKELS Scores in Spring 2024 and Spring 2025, by Cohort



Teachers in all cohorts showed growth in their literacy knowledge during their time in LETRS, with Cohort 2 teachers showing significant gains. Within-group comparisons were conducted to examine if cohorts demonstrated growth in their literacy knowledge as measured by the TKELS; comparisons across cohorts were not possible given that teachers across all three cohorts had taken the TKELS at different stages of their professional learning. Findings indicated that teachers in all three cohorts showed growth, with significant growth seen for Cohort 2 teachers' literacy knowledge at the end of their PL journey (γ_{02} = 2.68, t = 4.37, p <.001) from both baseline and midpoint (Exhibit 3.5). It is important to note that this analysis was conducted with only those teachers who took the TKELS at *each* timepoint, greatly reducing the sample, particularly for Cohort 2; this may explain the significant finding obtained.

Exhibit 3.5. Within-Cohort Growth Models of TKELS throughout LETRS Participation



Total Possible Score = 31
**Statistically significant at p<001.*

Educators underscored a strengthened understanding of why some students struggle with reading, which they attributed to the reading academies. Educators—including classroom teachers, special education teachers, and interventionists—cited the benefits of learning more about the background of literacy, including how the brain learns to read as well as the importance of fundamentals, as they sought to help students overcome reading struggles. These fundamentals included LETRS' emphasis on phonemic awareness, which one special education teacher attributed to her students' progress this year:

> *Several of my students—they don't hear the sound; they don't hear the blends … . The LETRS training has been great for training me how to teach them and then implementing that … so far this year, I feel like I'm seeing a lot of success.*

In addition, some reading interventionists who had completed the reading academies credited the various assessments recommended by LETRS as helping them pinpoint where students were struggling and where additional intervention might be needed.

Reading interventionists and special educators also highlighted specific strategies or knowledge that they learned through LETRS. For some, this included more about the science behind reading, including how the brain learns to read, how we take in information and retrieve it, and the overall science behind supporting students' literacy. For others, they cited more practical skills such as how to incorporate phonemic awareness in upper grades or how to segment sounds for early readers. Still others brought up learning more about how spelling affects reading and about the benefits of morphology as students encounter new words.

> *"[I've learned about] the origin of certain words and spelling, which also really helps students understand why our language can be so complex."*
> – Reading interventionist, Cohort 2

Coaches built teachers' literacy knowledge in real-time. One LETRS-trained teacher shared a powerful example of how her literacy coach deepened her understanding of phoneme articulation. During a classroom observation, the coach noticed students mispronouncing the /tr/ blend as /chr/. While the teacher recognized this as a mouth formation issue, the coach provided a more precise explanation of the articulatory process involved and was able to guide the teacher as she explained this to her students. This real-time feedback not only clarified the concept for the teacher but also enhanced her ability to explain it effectively to students—demonstrating how targeted coaching strengthened both her content knowledge and instructional practice.

Coaches identified changes in overall literacy knowledge in coached participants. Some coaches noted that, especially in schools with low LETRS participation, many teachers had little to no background in foundational literacy terminology and instruction. However, even with prior LETRS knowledge, coaches still identified knowledge gains among coached teachers, as reflected by one coach:

> *I have one teacher who [has] seen a lot of success. She went through LETRS. That was a huge game changer for her, but—I think what really switched her and really made her promote it for everyone else—was she started seeing student success. I really think [the teacher's] knowledge from LETRS was a big influence on that [student success]. You know, maybe more influential than I was. But she really leaned on me a lot in the beginning.*

Coaches reported gains in these teachers' knowledge and understanding, especially related to phonemic awareness and phonics.

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, 499 Cohort 3 participants completed the Teacher Beliefs Survey part of the survey, while 412 Cohort 2 and 3 respondents (179 and 232, respectively) completed this section of the survey in the spring to report on their literacy beliefs. Similar to the TKELS, cross-cohort comparisons for literacy beliefs were also analyzed at baseline for Cohorts 2 and 3 and across the three cohorts when they were at the midpoint of their LETRS professional learning. Focus group participants also shared examples of new or enhanced knowledge gained through LETRS participation or through participation in the coaching model. Key findings are presented below.

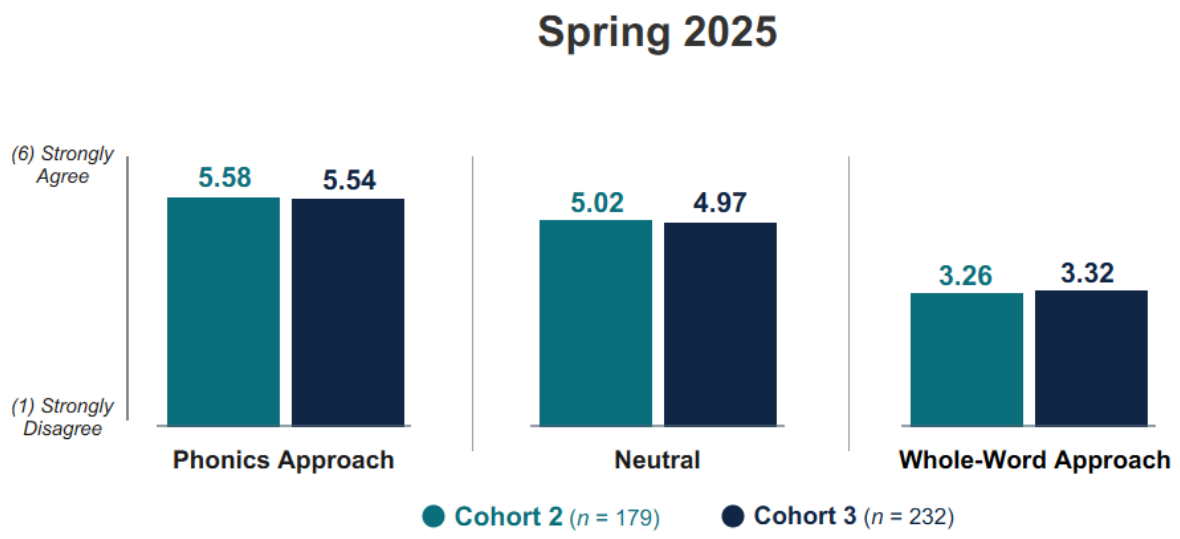
Teacher Beliefs Survey

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").

Cohort 3 educators reported similar levels of literacy beliefs compared to Cohort 2. In fall 2024, the Teacher Beliefs Survey was only administered to Cohort 3 respondents who had just begun their participation in the reading academies. Cohort 3 respondents' beliefs about code-based or phonics-based items were notably higher than their beliefs about the whole-word approach. In the spring 2025 survey, phonics-based, whole-word based, and neutral literacy beliefs were of similar levels for Cohort 2, who are at the end of their LETRS professional learning, and Cohort 3, who are at the midpoint of their PL journey (Exhibit 3.6).

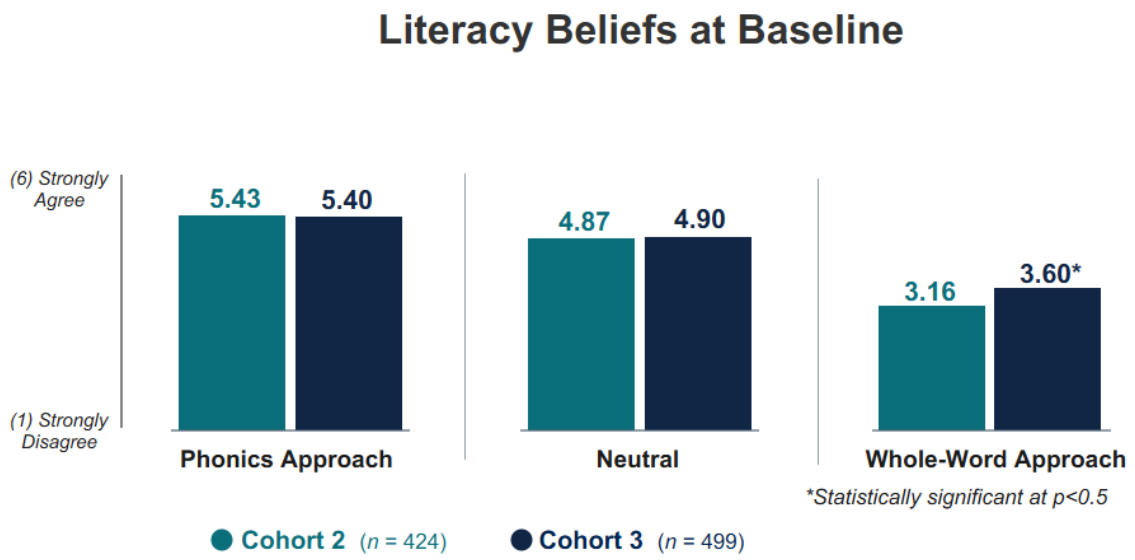
Exhibit 3.6. Comparisons of Average Rates of Agreement with Literacy Beliefs, by Cohort



Cohort 3 teachers had significantly stronger baseline beliefs about the whole-word approach. Baseline comparisons of Cohort 2 and 3 teachers' ratings on the Teachers Beliefs Survey showed that Cohort 3 had significantly higher whole-based beliefs than their peers in Cohort 2; however, code-based or phonics-based beliefs as well as neutral beliefs were similar across both cohorts. Baseline literacy beliefs ratings for Cohort 2 were obtained from the fall 2023 administration and

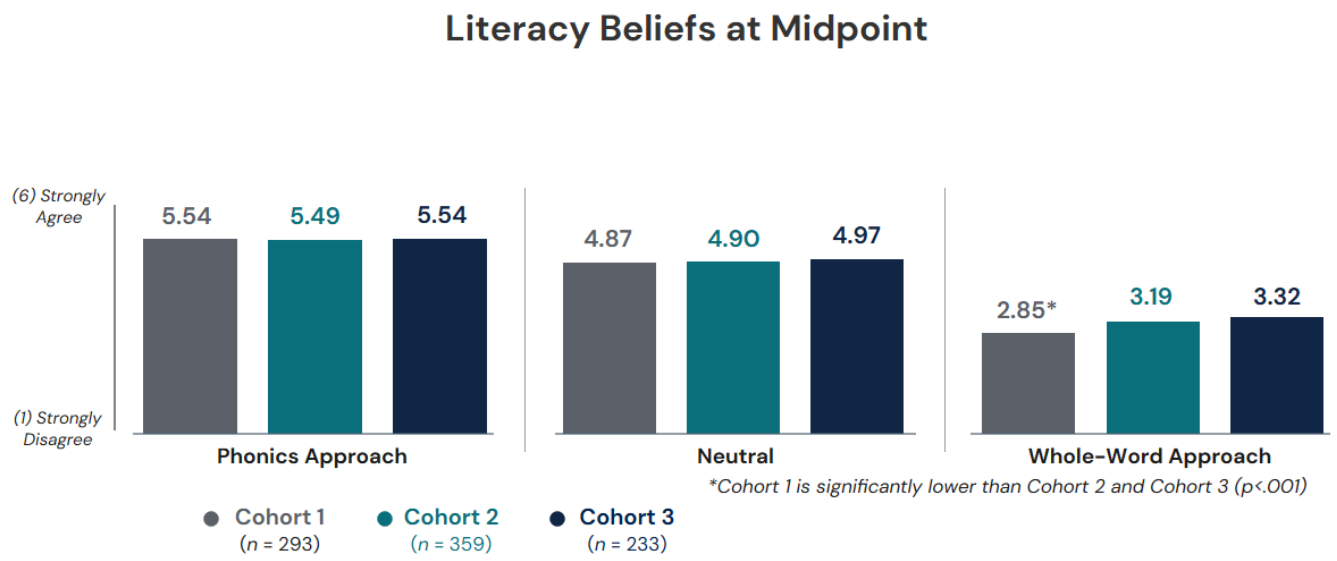
Cohort 3 teachers' baseline TKELS scores were obtained from the fall 2024 administration. One potential reason for Cohort 3's higher levels of whole word-based beliefs could be related to their lower baseline on literacy knowledge (Exhibit 3.7).

Exhibit 3.7. Baseline Literacy Beliefs Ratings, by Cohort (Cohort 2 – Fall 2023; Cohort 3 – Fall 2024)



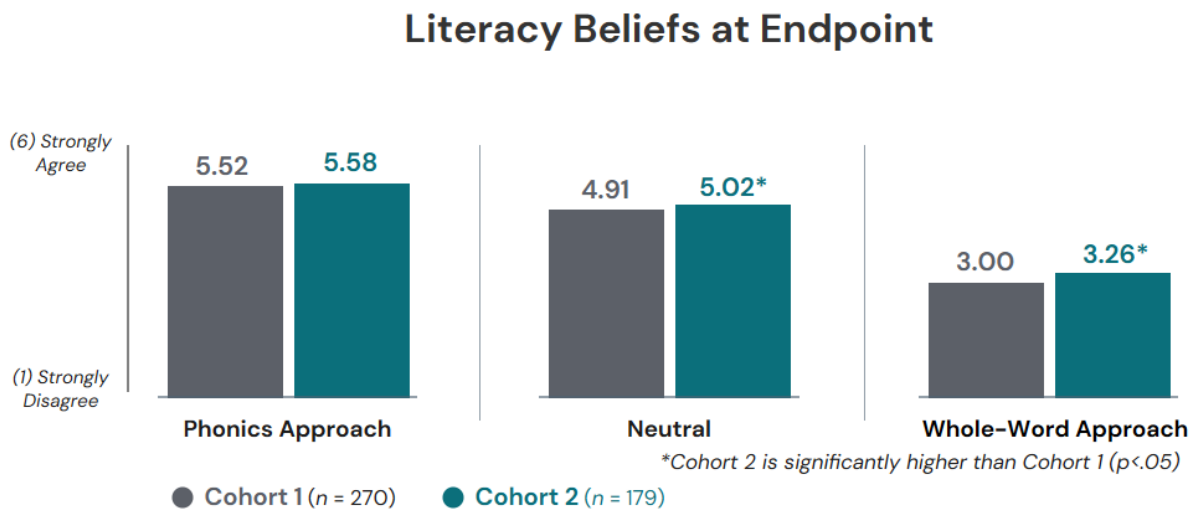
At the midpoint of their LETRS professional learning, Cohort 1 teachers had significantly weaker beliefs about the whole-word approach than teachers in Cohorts 2 and 3. Cross-cohort comparisons of teachers' literacy beliefs when they were at the midpoint of their LETRS professional learning showed that there were no significant differences between the three cohorts for code-based or phonics-based beliefs and neutral beliefs. However, significant differences were seen where Cohort 1 respondents had significantly lower beliefs about the whole-word approach than those in Cohorts 2 and 3 (Exhibit 3.8). This finding may be attributed to the fact that individuals who enrolled in the reading academies as part of the first cohort may have been more likely to already support evidence-based literacy practices and were thus more motivated to adopt these new strategies.

Exhibit 3.8. A Midpoint Snapshot of Literacy Beliefs Ratings in Fall 2023, Spring 2024, and Spring 2025, by Cohort



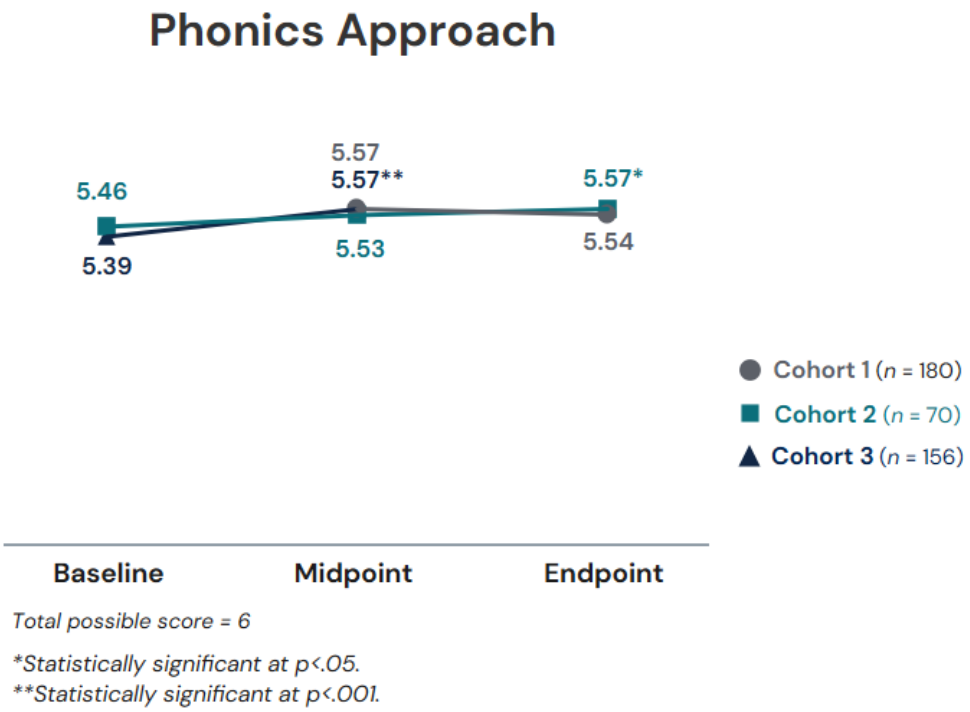
At the end of the professional learning, Cohort 1 educators reported significantly weaker beliefs about the whole-word approach than Cohort 2. Consistent with findings from the midpoint snapshot, Cohort 1 educators reported significantly weaker beliefs about the whole-word approach than educators in Cohort 2 at the end of their LETRS experience (Exhibit 3.9). This finding further supports the reasoning that Cohort 1 participants may have already been believers in an evidence-based literacy approach, as evidenced by them being more willing to enroll in the program as the first cohort.

Exhibit 3.9. An Endpoint Snapshot of Literacy Beliefs Ratings in Spring 2024, and Spring 2025, by Cohort



Significant improvement in held beliefs about the phonics-based approach was observed for Cohorts 2 and 3. Similar to the growth analysis described above in the section related to literacy knowledge, within-group comparisons were conducted to ascertain whether educators in each cohort showed improvements in held beliefs. Educators in Cohort 2 reported significantly stronger beliefs about the phonics approach at the end of their LETRS PL (γ_{02} =0.12, t = 2.46, p <.05) compared to baseline. Furthermore, Cohort 3 educators also reported significant growth at the midpoint of their PL compared to baseline (γ_{01} = 0.18, t = 5.08, p <.001; see Exhibit 3.10). Taken together, these findings suggest the positive effects of participating in LETRS PL on beliefs about the phonics approach. Note that readers should avoid making comparisons by cohort as the results for each cohort were run in separate analytic models. Secondly, this analysis only considered those individuals who took the survey at multiple timepoints, which greatly reduced sample sizes.

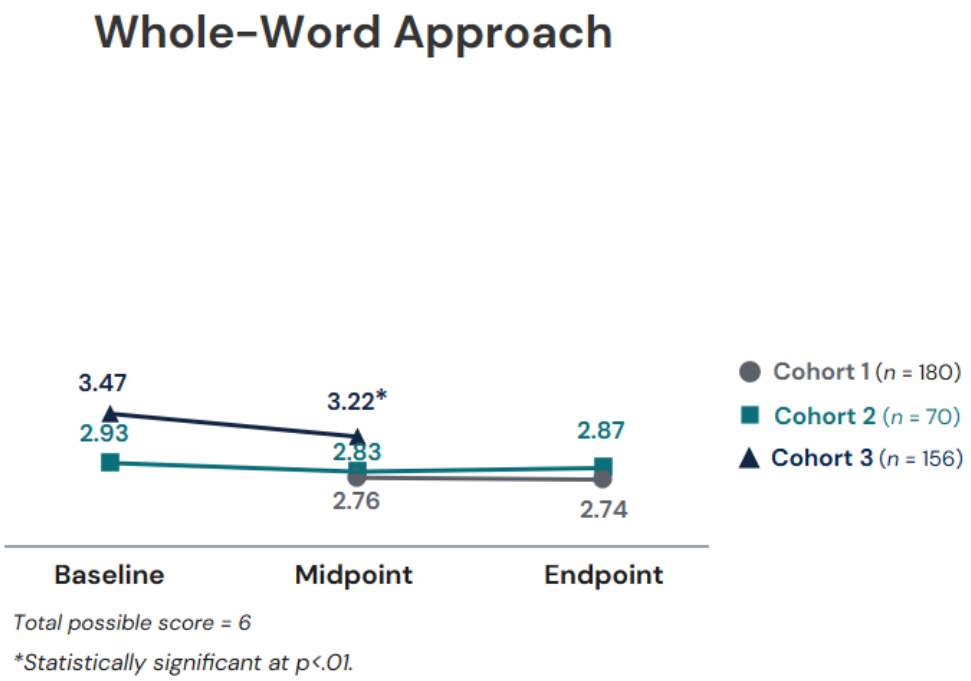
Exhibit 3.10. Within-Cohort Growth Models of Beliefs about the Phonics Approach for Each Cohort



Cohort 3 educators reported significantly weaker beliefs about the whole-word approach. Similar to the analysis conducted for phonics-based beliefs, within-group comparisons for beliefs about the whole-word approach showed that Cohort 3 educators reported significantly weaker beliefs about the whole-word approach at the midpoint of their PL compared to baseline (γ_{01} = -0.25, t = -2.92, p <.01; see Exhibit 3.11). This finding might be especially noteworthy because Cohort 3 educators reported significantly higher baseline scores on the whole-word approach (i.e., the finding discussed in the baseline snapshot) and among those who responded to the survey at both timepoints, a significant decline is observed. Additionally, although these changes were not significant, weaker beliefs about the whole-word approach were seen among educators across all three cohorts, except for Cohort 2, where beliefs were slightly higher at the endpoint compared to

the midpoint. These findings may be due to the reduction in sample size as only those educators who completed the survey at all three points of time were considered.

Exhibit 3.11. Within-Cohort Growth Models of Beliefs about the Whole-Word Approach for each Cohort



Facilitators and Barriers in Shaping Educators' Knowledge and Beliefs about Structured Literacy

Teachers, administrators, and coaches described several factors that facilitated their knowledge and beliefs related to literacy and barriers stemming from that foundation.

Coaches were able to build and direct teachers' literacy knowledge through observations and PLCs. Teachers and administrators shared examples of how SLCSs were able to partner with teachers to reinforce knowledge about structured literacy through modeling of LETRS-aligned approaches, training through PLCs, and targeted support around HQIR implementation. Teachers and administrators reported that this reinforcement strengthened their knowledge of structured literacy and comfort with implementation.

Reflection of past instructional practices not aligned with evidence-based literacy was crucial to solidifying new knowledge. Many participants noted that as they learned new literacy strategies, they struggled with how they used to teach reading, including having guilt for their former instructional practices. However, many focus group participants reflected on the cognitive dissonance related to how their new learning conflicted with what had been taught in educator preparation programs in college and resolved to grow despite this mental discomfort. The prevailing belief shared in these focus groups was that once you knew better, you did better, because students deserved literacy instruction that was effective. Teachers attributed student progress to these new perspectives.

IV. Mid-Term Outcomes: Implementation of Structured Literacy in Classroom Instruction

Educator application of new knowledge and beliefs (gained through the reading academies and coaching) in classroom instruction is a desired midpoint outcome. The second year of the evaluation focused in particular on implementation of structured literacy in the classroom through exploration of HQIR implementation and implementation of LETRS strategies. This section presents findings from this analysis and includes data from focus groups, surveys, case studies, and TNTP observations. Case study findings are presented separately in teal boxes.

Implementation of High-Quality Instructional Resources

At the same time as many educators across Kentucky began participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies, districts throughout the commonwealth adopted and began 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 and case studies explored these questions further, asking participants to reflect on the benefits or weaknesses of their current literacy curriculum based on their understanding of structured literacy. Thematic findings across data collection methods are presented below.

High-Quality Instructional Resources Adoption

A majority of school districts had adopted an HQIR at the start of the 2024–2025 school year. Approximately 79% percent of Cohort 3 respondents surveyed in fall 2024 indicated that their school district had already adopted an HQIR specific to literacy. At the time of the spring 2025 survey administration, this question was modified such that respondents were asked to indicate the core comprehensive literacy HQIR adopted at their school district as well as a supplemental HQIR that may have been adopted at the school district. Approximately 87% indicated selecting a core comprehensive literacy HQIR from the list of green-rated HQIRs (Exhibit 4.1). Seven percent of spring survey respondents indicated the adoption of a core comprehensive HQIR that was not in the list, including Fountas & Pinnell and Open Court. Furthermore, more than half of surveyed spring respondents indicated selecting a supplemental resource, such as the UFLI toolkit and 95 Phonics Core Program (Exhibit 4.2). Of those who selected a core comprehensive literacy HQIR, the majority (78%) indicated that these HQIRs had resources for Tiers 2 and 3 instruction.

Exhibit 4.1. Core Comprehensive HQIRs Adopted by Surveyed Participants' Districts in Spring 2025

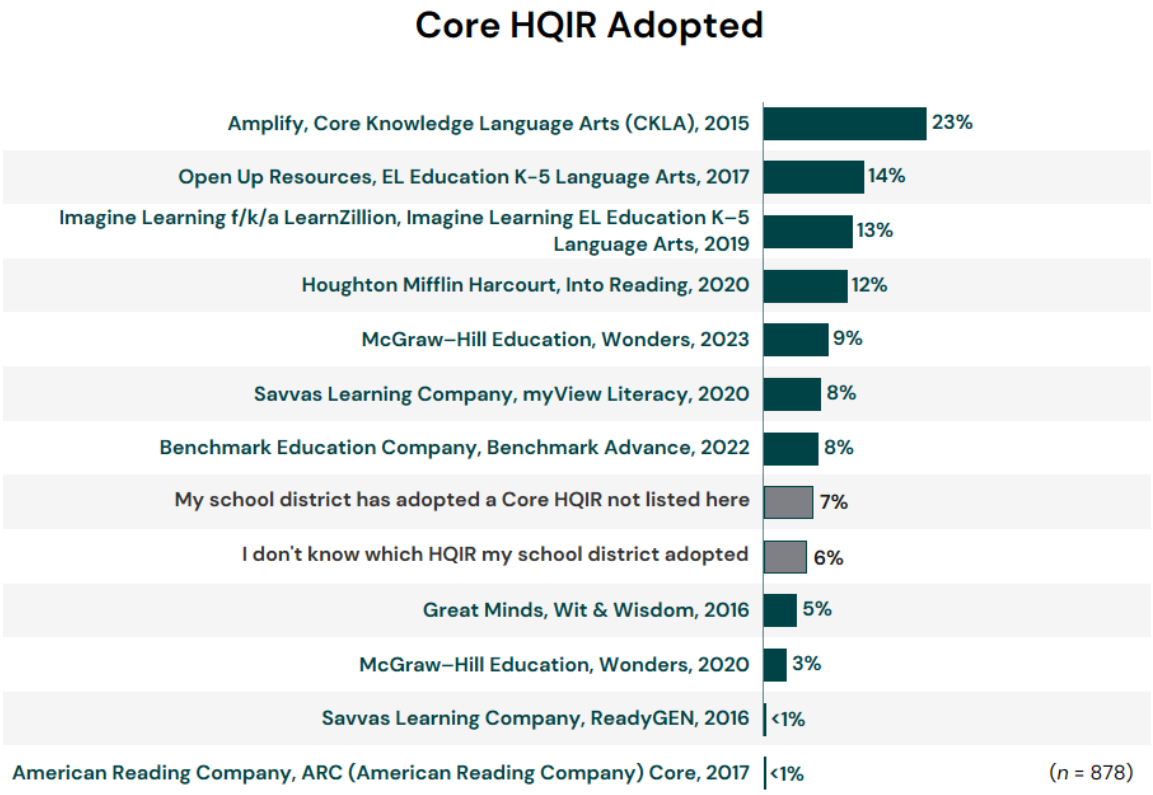
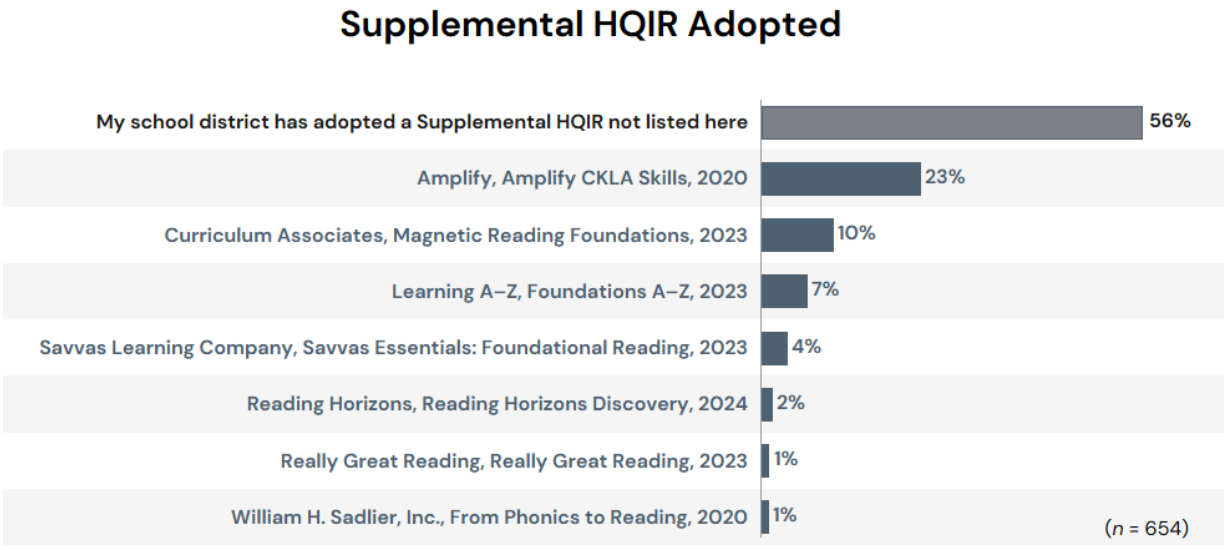


Exhibit 4.2. Supplemental Foundational Skills Only HQIRs Adopted by Surveyed Participants' Districts in Spring 2025

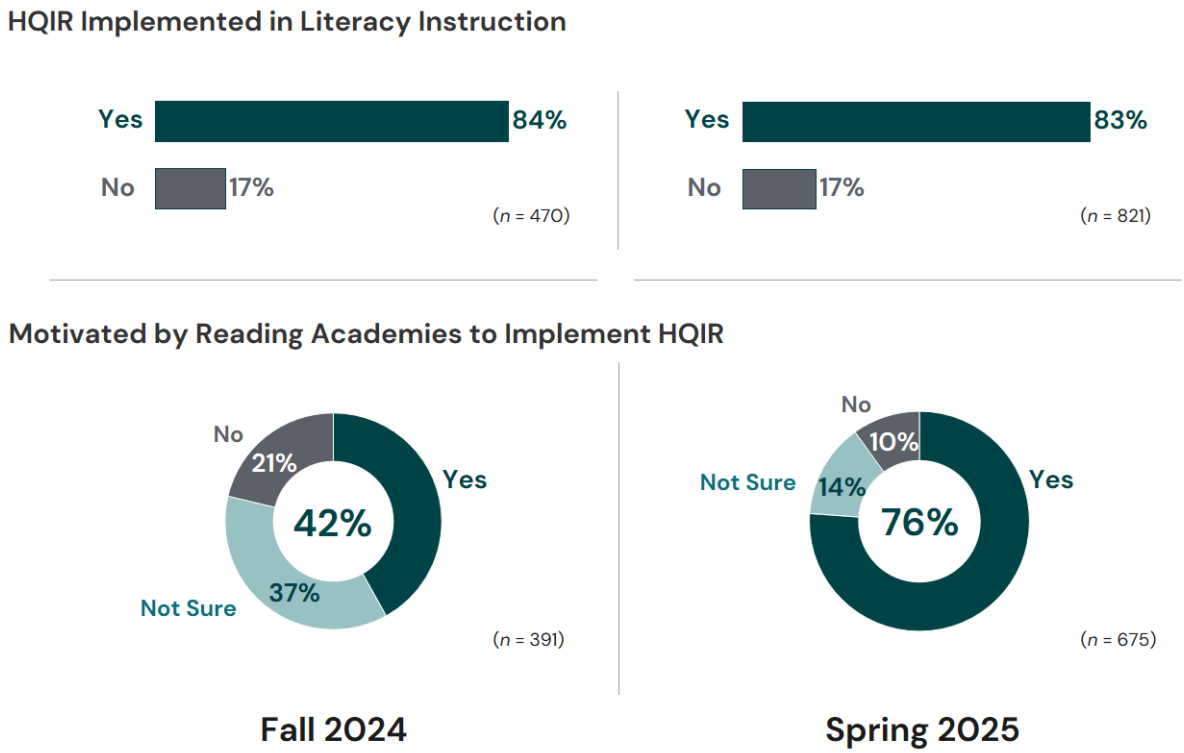


Note: Other HQIRs include UFLI, Heggerty, and Wilson Foundations.

High-Quality Instructional Resource Implementation

Adopted HQIRs were already being implemented at very high rates. Most teachers and administrators surveyed in the fall and spring who were working in districts that had adopted an HQIR specific to literacy reported that that HQIR was also being implemented—84% in fall and 83% in spring (Exhibit 4.3). Surveyed educators were also asked whether or not their participation in the reading academies motivated their implementation of the selected HQIR. The percentage of educators who agreed with this sentiment increased substantially from fall to spring (42% to 76%, respectively).

Exhibit 4.3. HQIR Implementation in Fall 20204 and Spring 2025



Focus group participants described a more nuanced and complicated picture of HQIR implementation. Some educators reported a perception that their district selected an HQIR that aligned well with LETRS while others reported that only portions of their HQIR seemed to support structured literacy and the science of reading. Further complicating the picture of HQIR implementation, were districts that had recently switched curricula several times or those that were using multiple curricula for their core instruction and supplemental or foundational skills. A final complication with HQIR implementation were teachers who persisted in their old curriculum or continued to use supplemental materials that they felt were more closely aligned with what they had learned in LETRS, like this Cohort 1 Grade 3 teacher who confessed, "I'm in an FPC [Fountas & Pinnell Classroom] district but I don't use it and I just shut my door and act like I do."

Coaching Support for High-Quality Instructional Resources

Coaches helped individual teachers implement their newly adopted HQIRs with fidelity. Coaches worked with teachers to develop goals that included the implementation of the district-approved HQIR, including focusing on lesson structure and delivery. Built-in, regular reflection throughout the process helped teachers learn how to adjust their instructional delivery based on what did and did not work during literacy lessons. Coaches further supported teachers by providing a range of supports that were individualized to the teacher, including laminated cards on a key ring that showed appropriate pacing for lessons, extra lesson modeling with subsequent reflection time (outside of the coaching cycle), and even encouragement to "markup" the lessons within the manual. This support enabled the coached teacher to feel more confident in their abilities to effectively teach their students how to read, while being responsive to the needs within their classroom. One Grade 1 teacher with no LETRS training—who was initially against the HQIR—found that, through coaching, her opinion shifted because the coach helped her to better implement the HQIR.

Educators also expressed how instrumental the literacy coaches have been in identifying any potential issues with the instructional materials, explaining discrepancies to ensure educator comprehension of the curricular requirements, and navigating updates from the publisher. One educator boasted about the ongoing support the coach provided as it enhanced her instructional confidence and HQIR use, saying:

> *[The literacy coach is] a blessing, as far as helping us go through our [curriculum] and kind of get [on] our feet because it is such a massive undertaking that I really feel sorry for our other buildings in our district who don't have a literacy coach because I think they are missing out on having someone who can look up things and … help us figure out that, you know, they [the publishers] have done some updates to things and they continually do updates. And just finding things and helping us make sure that we are understanding what it's [the curriculum] asking of us.*

A Grade 1 teacher described her literacy coach as consistently positive, approachable, and incredibly helpful—whether answering questions about curriculum materials, prepping resources, or clarifying instructional pacing. The teacher shared that when she was unsure about something—like the meaning of a symbol in the HQIR materials or the logic behind lesson sequencing—the coach always followed through, finding answers or providing what was needed without hesitation. According to the teacher, this kind of support made a real difference in her ability to deliver strong, coherent, Tier I literacy instruction.

Administrators indicated that literacy coaches were pivotal in the successful implementation of their HQIR and integration of LETRS learning in the classroom. Some schools indicated that implementing an HQIR was considered a massive undertaking, especially in schools that had not updated curricular materials in dozens of years and in schools with veteran staff who were trained under balanced literacy. Administrators appreciated the coaches' deep LETRS expertise and ability to support educators as they concurrently implemented LETRS learning and the HQIR. One administrator noted the "fantastic job" the literacy coach had done when helping to improve Tier I instruction.

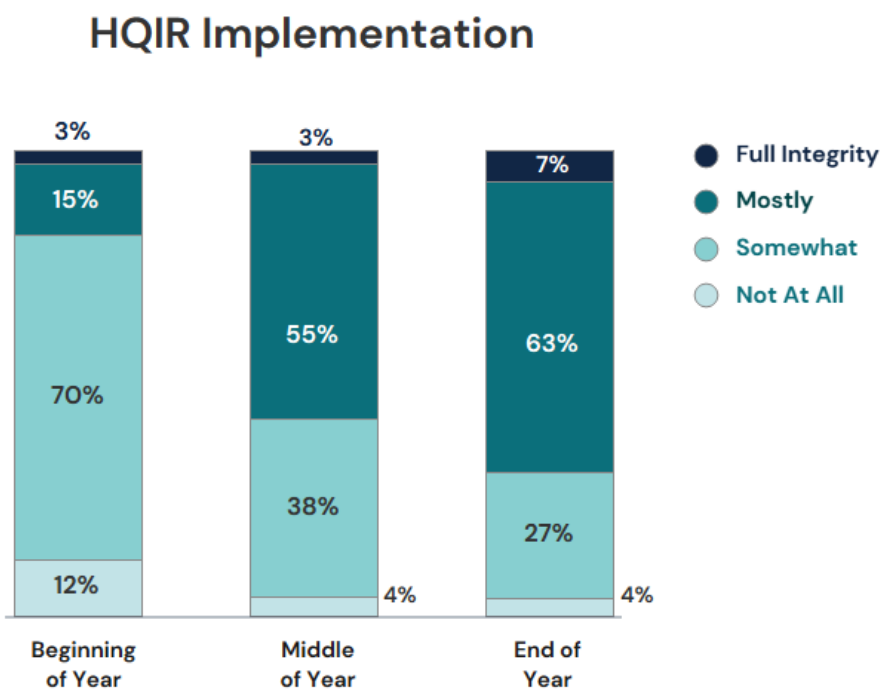
Building-wide HQIR implementation was also strongly supported by State Literacy Coaching Specialists. Across the board, both administrators and teachers who received coaching expressed appreciation for the support SLCSs provided related to the implementation of the HQIR. HQIRs for literacy were often introduced alongside other curricular materials for other content areas, most notably math materials. Administrators and teachers indicated that this caused information overload. This was further complicated when building-level personnel didn't feel that there was enough time or support to learn how to properly engage with the new materials, whether it be from inadequate publisher support (i.e., professional development) or lack of flexibility from the district to provide comprehensive training. Literacy coaches were seen as mitigators to these challenges by helping to translate dense materials alongside teachers during PLCs and helping teachers feel prepared each week to deliver the lessons with fidelity. Administrators reiterated that the support from coaches was integral to the success of the initiative, including increased participation in professional learning to help build a solid foundation for evidence-based literacy knowledge and practices.

> *"[Our coach] very much works on alignment [between the HQIR] with what we know from LETRS. And she's been so deeply trained [in LETRS] that it's just … her natural language. So when she's talking to me, I know that it's what I'm supposed to do."*
> – School administrator

Coaches reported that teachers had a greater understanding of the importance of having an HQIR after coaching. When coaches first arrived in their buildings, some noticed that instruction across grade levels was inconsistent—teachers were using whatever they could find, and there wasn't a clear progression from one grade to the next. Through coaching, coaches found that teachers started to understand how a strong HQIR supports continuity. Coaches reported that teachers are now seeing how what students learn in kindergarten can carry into first- and then second-grade. For example, teachers have begun to recognize that when instruction is aligned, students come in already knowing how to segment, blend, and follow routines—because the systems are in place and were learned in the previous year. That understanding of why HQIRs matter has been a major area of growth for some schools.

HQIR implementation integrity improved from beginning of the year to the end of year across all coaching participants. Throughout the year, coaches provided ratings on the degree to which coached teachers were fully implementing their HQIR in the classroom. Across the group as a whole, the percentage of teachers implementing the HQIR with full integrity increased from the beginning of the year to the end of the year along with the percentage of those rated as "mostly" implementing the HQIR with integrity (Exhibit 4.4). No differences were seen in HQIR implementation integrity between LETRS and non-LETRS participants receiving coaching, suggesting that the coaches played an outsized role in faithful implementation.

Exhibit 4.4. State Literacy Coaching Specialists' Ratings of Degrees of HQIR Implementation for Coaching Participants



Implementing LETRS Strategies and Approaches into Instruction

In order to more fully understand how LETRS strategies were implemented across diverse classrooms, we deliberately oversampled special education teachers and reading interventionists during our fall data collection. These classroom teachers and interventionists—primarily from Cohort 1—shared their experiences and perceptions in implementing LETRS strategies and approaches. This included dimensions of how prepared they felt to implement LETRS upon program completion, and how they operationalized implementation into their instruction across whole-class instruction, targeted and intensive instruction, and special education. Findings are presented by theme.

Preparedness to Implement LETRS

Classroom teachers felt prepared to implement LETRS strategies and approaches by the time they completed their training. Most Cohort 1 teachers reported feeling well-prepared to implement LETRS upon completing the program, noting that it became easier to apply its principles once their training was fully finished. One Grade 1 teacher shared that having the summer to regroup, reorganize, and reflect on their lesson plans and sequencing made implementation more manageable. Another Grade 4 teacher emphasized that completing LETRS made it easier to apply the strategies, particularly during the second year, which proved more relevant for supporting her students struggling with more advanced concepts. Teachers also highlighted the value of LETRS resources, especially the

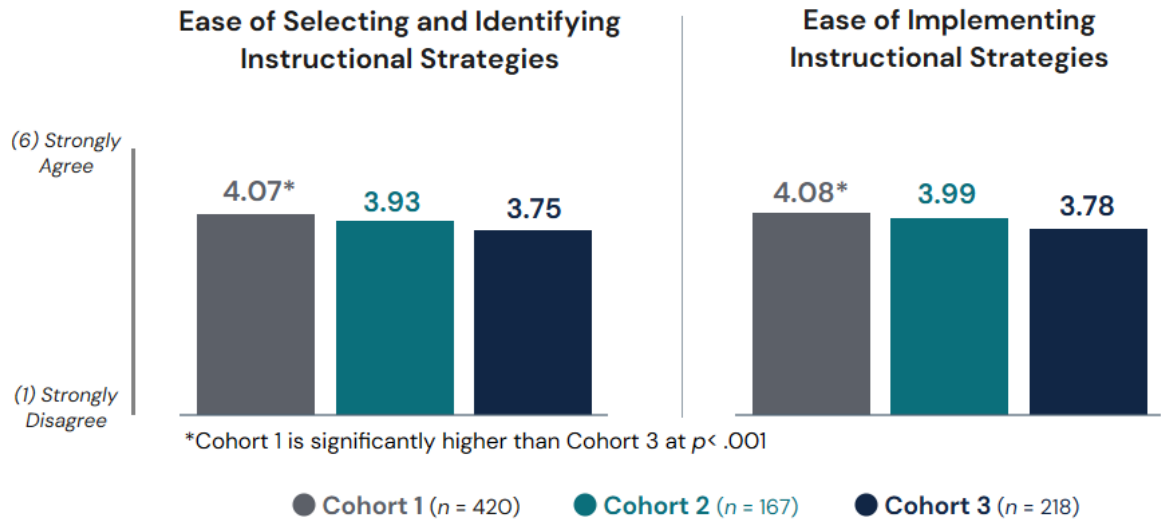
> *"I felt that it's easier to implement the strategies that I've learned now that I'm finished with LETRS. The second year of LETRS has been more applicable with some of my struggling readers this year."*
> – Grade 3 teacher, Cohort 1

instructional videos demonstrating techniques and the print manual, which many continued to use as a reference in their teaching practice after program completion.

Most reading interventionists and special educators also reported feeling prepared to implement LETRS with their students. Similar to classroom teachers, interventionists and special educators in Cohort 1 reported that upon completion of LETRS, they felt prepared to implement its' strategies and approaches into their classroom instruction. These educators reported that they felt more equipped to implement LETRS when they had access to a curriculum they believed aligned well with the program. However, a few specialists and special education teachers, particularly those in Cohort 2, expressed that they needed more time before feeling fully prepared to implement LETRS. One special education teacher in Cohort 2 noted, "I wish I could implement it more. I feel like it just takes a lot of time to digest it and to really let it be the right thing to implement."

Perceived ease of implementation may be associated with greater program exposure. In the spring survey administration, a majority of teachers across Cohorts 1, 2, and 3 reported implementing instructional strategies from the LETRS PL (97%, 93%, and 93%, respectively). Among these teachers, a majority of them reported implementing LETRS instructional strategies in their classroom at least a few times a week (84% across the three cohorts). Of note, Cohort 1 teachers were significantly more likely to report that both selecting and identifying strategies and implementing those strategies was easy compared with those in Cohort 3 (see Exhibit 4.5), which may be due to the longer program exposure Cohort 1 has had.

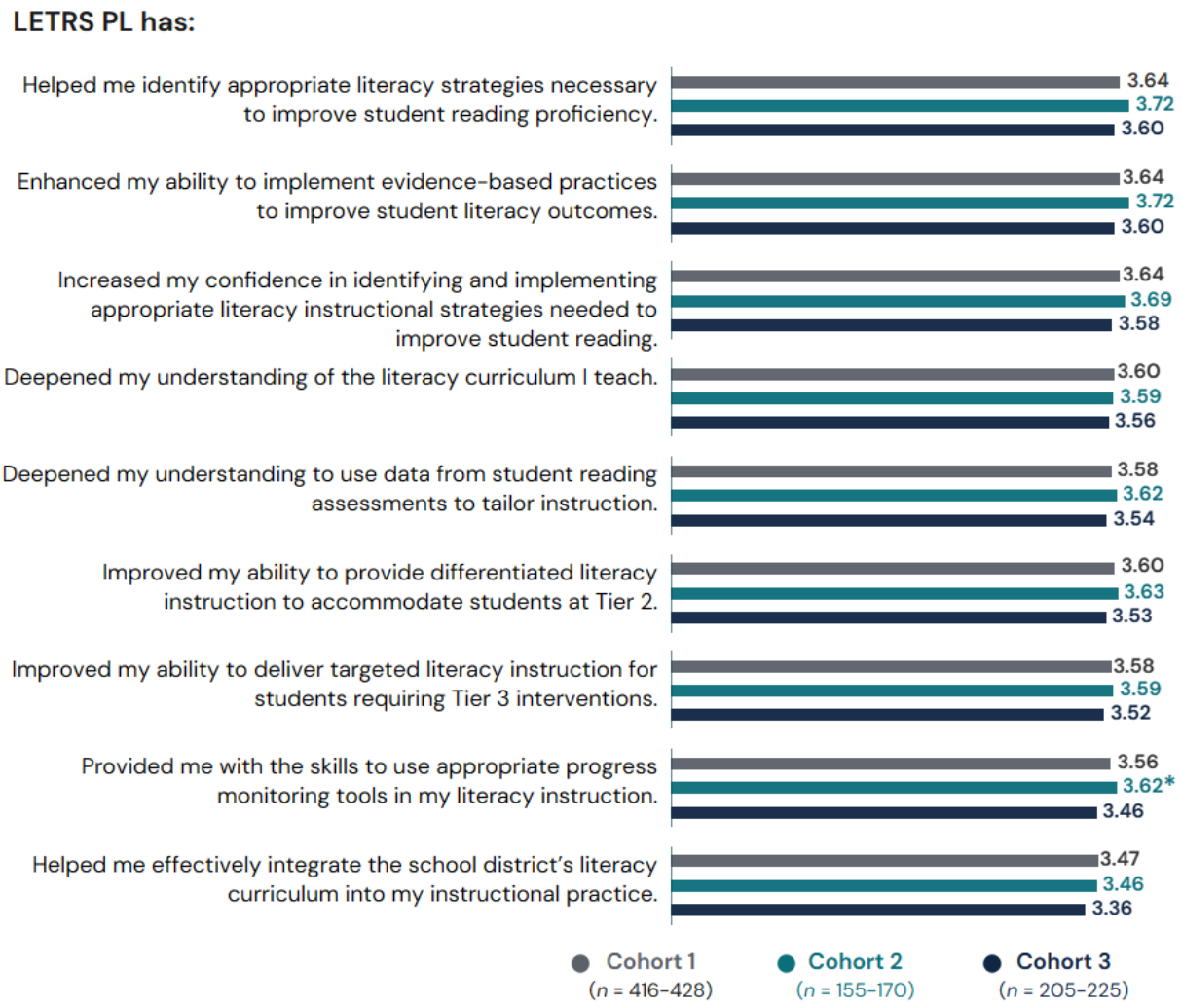
Exhibit 4.5. Average Reports of Ease of Selecting and Identifying, and Implementing Instructional Strategies among LETRS Participants, by Cohort in Spring 2025



Across all cohorts, teachers were strongly satisfied with the LETRS PL and agreed that the professional learning had an impact on their instructional practice. In the spring survey administration, teachers were asked to report their satisfaction of the LETRS PL on a 4-point scale, from (1) strongly dissatisfied to (4) strongly satisfied. In addition, they were asked to report their

agreement with various statements related to the influence of LETRS PL on their classroom practice on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Overall, teachers reported being satisfied with the LETRS PL (mean satisfaction of 3.95, results not presented) and tended to average a rating between agree (3) and strongly agree (4) that the LETRS PL impacted various aspects of their classroom practice (see Exhibit 4.6). Participants in Cohort 2 expressed statistically significantly higher agreement that the LETRS PL provided them with the skills to use appropriate progress monitoring tools in their literacy instruction compared with those in Cohort 3. Note that this graph presents findings from a single time point (spring 2025) but across cohorts at different points in the process of completing LETRS (Cohort 1 had completed one year prior, Cohort 2 was just completing, and Cohort 3 was at the midpoint of LETRS).

Exhibit 4.6. Agreement about the Influence of LETRS in Spring 2025, by Cohort



* Cohort 2 is significantly greater than Cohort 3 at $p < .05$
Ratings were based on a 4-point scale, ranging from (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (4) *Strongly Agree*

Implementing LETRS Strategies into Varied Classroom Settings

Whole-Class Instruction

Educators who had completed their LETRS professional learning shared a variety of strategies that they were able to implement in their classrooms. Teachers most commonly reported integrating LETRS strategies such as word mapping, vocabulary activities, story frameworks, and phonics techniques into their lesson plans for whole-class instruction. Several educators highlighted specific practices, such as using orthographic mapping daily with high-frequency words in kindergarten, applying the POSSUM [Predict, Organize, Search, Summarize, Use prior knowledge, and Monitor comprehension] strategy to enhance vocabulary instruction, and purchasing tools such as sound walls for classroom use. These examples reflect how LETRS training has influenced both instructional methods and classroom resources.

Case Studies: Observed Implementation

Case studies included a 30-minute observation of a LETRS-trained teacher. During the observations, multiple grade-level-appropriate LETRS strategies were used, some of which are highlighted below.

Example 1. In a Grade 1 classroom, a small group of students receiving intervention services participated in various teacher-led activities designed to enhance their phonemic awareness and literacy skills. Students practiced saying and repeating sounds aloud, guided by their teacher. While students were practicing beginning, middle, and end sounds, they used mirrors to observe their mouths while making sounds and learned about the tongue's position during pronunciation. Students wrote and spelled words on whiteboards and received formative teacher feedback.

Example 2. Before reading a folktale, a Grade 4 teacher introduced the vocabulary to the students and used Kagan Strategies to aid them with remembering and understanding each word. During the reading, the teacher conducted a fluency exercise where students read a passage aloud as a group, then with partners, and finally as a whole class again. Students also practiced reading comprehension with the think-pair-share method: they thought about their answer to a question, discussed it with a partner, and then shared it with the entire class.

Targeted and Intensive Instruction

Educators supporting students with Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction leveraged LETRS tools to better tailor their instructional practice. These educators described regularly using LETRS screeners and assessments to better identify students in need of additional Tier 2 or Tier 3 support. These assessments varied in frequency, with some administered weekly or biweekly and others used on a quarterly basis. The data gathered from these tools helped educators pinpoint specific skill gaps and tailor their instruction accordingly.

Teachers and interventionists also used specific strategies and approaches from their LETRS professional learning in their small group instruction. Participants reported using the results from LETRS screeners and assessments to then apply additional LETRS strategies in small or mid-sized group settings to address targeted skills. One reading interventionist shared how spelling screeners were used to guide instruction during What I Need (WIN) time. A different reading interventionist noted that LETRS training helped identify students on the cusp of moving from Tier 2 to Tier 1, allowing for more precise, needs-based instruction. Another interventionist described a comprehensive approach involving word mapping, repeated readings, and sentence structure analysis to reinforce phonics and vocabulary skills—practices rooted in LETRS methodology.

> *"Having the LETRS training helps us identify where those [struggling] readers are, and what they're deficient in, and what they maybe need to have re-taught in a small group or even in a middle-size group."*
> – Reading interventionist

Special Education

Special education teachers reported being able to use a variety of strategies recommended by LETRS in their classroom instruction. In multiple instructional settings, special education teachers shared that they were able to draw from LETRS techniques related to phonics and phonemic awareness as well as decoding and morphology as they were teaching students. These educators highlighted the benefits of having multiple classroom teachers trained in LETRS strategies so that in co-teaching or collaborative settings, the special education teacher and the classroom teacher could be utilizing the same frameworks to approach instruction. For example, one special education teacher reflected that where this is present, "You can collaborate, like, you can teach this little group over here, and they can teach that group over there, and you can share kids a lot better because everybody's kind of on the same page."

Educators described using a variety of tangible materials recommended by LETRS in their instruction. Across co-teaching, resource time, and in self-contained settings, special education teachers who had completed the reading academies listed an assortment of different hands-on materials demonstrated in LETRS that they had been able to incorporate into their instruction. These included various manipulatives, hands-on tools such as magnetic wands, Elkonin boxes with chips, magnetic foam tiles, mirrors, sandboxes, wiki sticks, beads on a pipe cleaner, whiteboards, and classroom visuals such as the alphabet arc and vowel valley charts.

> *"I've used a lot of the hands-on things that we've seen, like the magnetic wands. Those really help the kids when they're separating their sounds because there's that physical movement for them."*
> – Reading interventionist, Cohort 1

State Literacy Coaching Specialists' Influence on Classroom Instruction

SLCSs engaged with 148 teachers across 23 schools in Kentucky, which included 255 completed coaching cycles. These participants—coaches and educators—shared their experiences through a series of focus groups, survey responses, and data collected from 100 coached educators in the TNTP observation tool. That observation protocol used two instructional practice guides: K–*3 Foundational Skills* and *Comprehension in Reading and Writing*. Both instructional practice guides consist of three core actions:

K–3 Foundational Skills

- Culture of learning
- Core Action 1: Using systematic, explicit phonemic awareness and phonics resources
- Core Action 2: Using effective instructional practices
- Core Action 3: Using student engagement

Comprehension in Reading and Writing

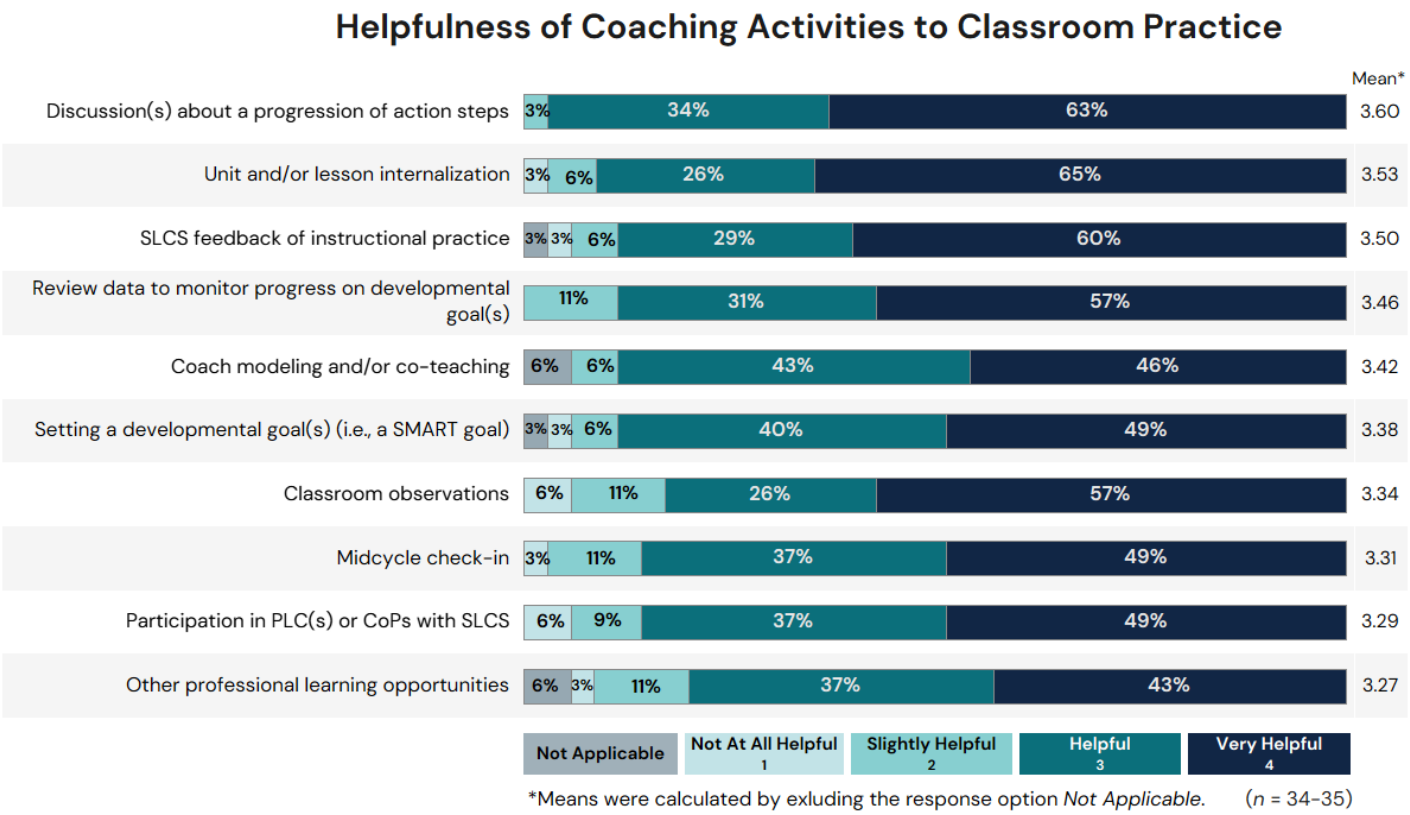
- Culture of learning
- Core Action 1: Focus on high-quality grade-level texts
- Core Action 2: Effective use of questions and tasks
- Core Action 3: Providing opportunities for vibrant student engagement

Across these data sources, coaches and coached educators reflected on the role of the coach in the teachers' classroom instruction and discussed the influence of coaching on HQIR implementation. Findings are presented thematically and grouped by perceptions about the influence of coaching on classroom implementation and the unique influence of coaching on LETRS and non-LETRS participants.

Perceptions of Coaching Influence on Implementation of Structured Literacy Practices and HQIRs

Teachers involved in a coaching cycle perceived the progression of action step(s), unit/lesson internalization, and SLCSs' feedback as being the most helpful to their classroom practice. When surveyed about their experience with the SLCSs and the coaching cycle, teachers, regardless of whether or not they participated in the reading academies, indicated generally high levels of helpfulness for the various aspects of the coaching cycle, with discussion about the action steps, unit and lesson internalization, and the feedback they received from their coach as being the most helpful to their classroom practice (Exhibit 4.7).

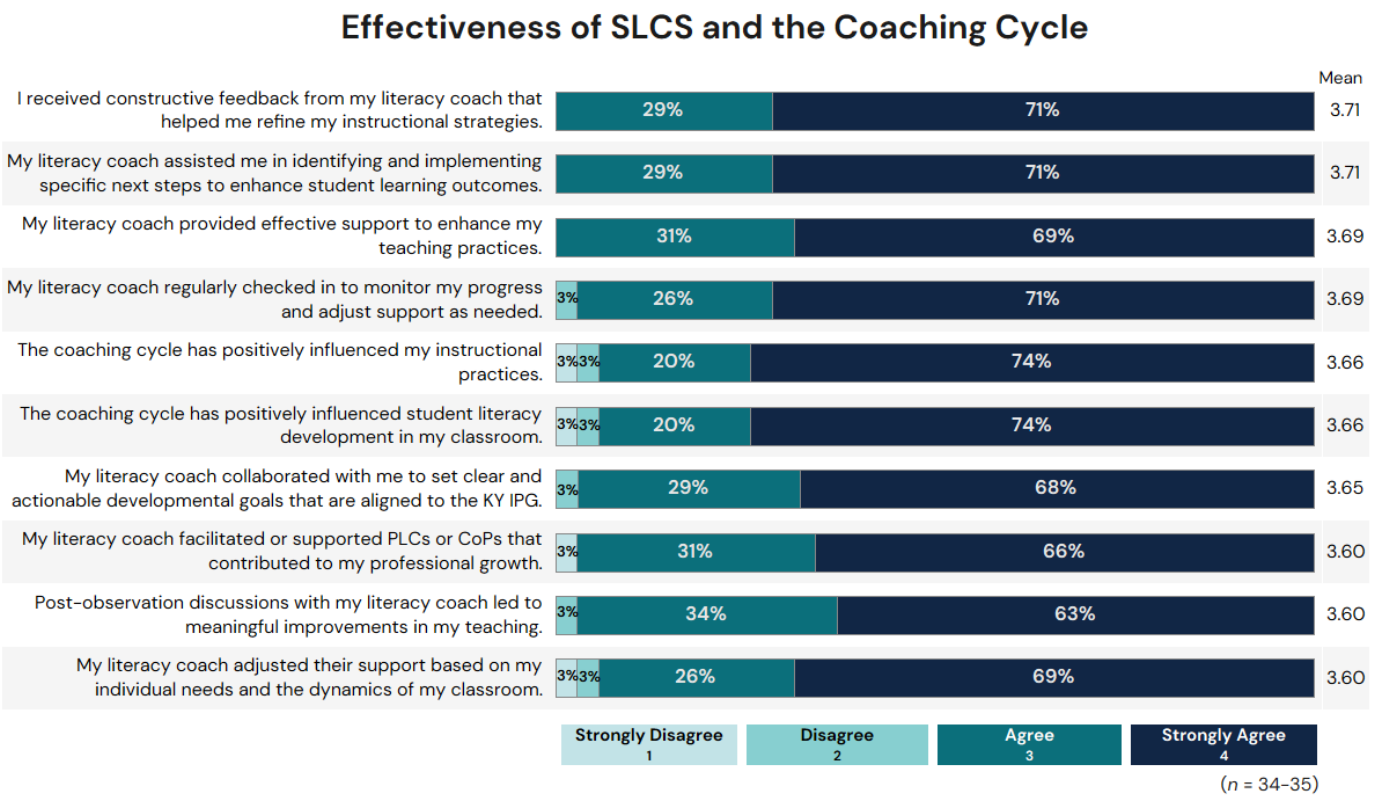
Exhibit 4.7. Reported Helpfulness of Coaching Activities to Classroom Practice, among Coached Educators in Spring 2025



Note. SCLC = State Literacy Coaching Specialist. PLC = professional learning communities. CoPs = Communities of Practice.

Coached teachers, regardless of whether they participated in the reading academies or not, reported generally high levels of agreement about the effectiveness of the coaching they received. Across both reading academies and non-reading academies groups, teachers receiving coaching reported generally high levels of agreement about the effectiveness of their coaching cycle, with an overall mean of 3.66. The highest level of agreement was seen for the items "I received constructive feedback from my literacy coach that helped me refine my instructional strategies" and "My literacy coach assisted me in identifying and implementing specific next steps to enhance student learning outcomes" (means of 3.71 for both; Exhibit 4.8).

Exhibit 4.8. Reported Effectiveness of State Literacy Coaching Specialists and the Coaching Cycle



Note. SCLC = State Literacy Coaching Specialist. PLC = professional learning communities. CoPs = Communities of Practice.

Modeling and co-teaching were cited as the most impactful form of support among focus group participants. While each of the five phases of the coaching cycle were generally well-received, coached teachers noted that the most beneficial aspects were within the learning supports phase, particularly modeling, resource support related to LETRS or HQIR implementation, co-teaching, and collaborative planning during PLCs. Once rapport had been built, teachers felt like they could trust the support being provided by the coaches. Overall, both LETRS-trained and those with no LETRS background felt that the literacy coaches were genuinely invested in helping them succeed and appreciated the coaches' commitment, responsiveness, and deep literacy knowledge. Coaches agreed with this assessment, with one SLCS reporting:

> *"The coaching cycles, I think, [are the most] beneficial … . It's where I've seen teachers really grow. But if you take a step back and think about [the] bigger picture, I feel like having the collaborative internalization time during PLCs is what's been the most beneficial to the school and teachers overall.*
> – State Literacy Coaching Specialist

> *I think that the things that I've done that have helped the teachers most have been the PLCs where we focused on just internalizing, getting to know the resource [HQIR], because it's brand new. We've had a lot of growth and good,*

honest conversations and troubleshooting. I feel like we've come a long way through PLCs. And then I think for most of my teachers, coaching cycles have been really effective.

Coaches reported that teachers shifted instructional practices after receiving coaching. One coach noticed that there was a general lack of understanding related to how important knowledge-building is for comprehension. The coach found that once she was able to work with teachers on comprehension, teachers began to shift to an integrated approach with the use of complex texts, instead of teaching comprehension skills in isolation. Coaches also noted that this knowledge-building approach impacted writing instruction.

Differences Between LETRS-Trained Educators and non-LETRS Trained Educators in Coaching

Teachers who had a LETRS background reported greater perceived confidence in their foundational literacy knowledge. LETRS-trained teachers reported more confidence in their foundational literacy instruction going into being coached. This included being able to describe their rationale behind why they responded to student errors and adjusted instruction. As a result, LETRS-trained teachers perceived themselves to be more able to be flexible and adaptive, which allowed them to pivot when they worked with a student who struggled. Conversely, teachers with no LETRS experience described initial discomfort switching from previous literacy practices to evidence-based practices through coaching. For example, a teacher with no LETRS experience was resistant to what she called the "pendulum shift" and wanted to utilize former practices such as using pictures to help identify a word. However, this teacher did change her opinion once she began working with a literacy coach and gained a better understanding of foundational knowledge.

> *"One teacher reached out … she just said, 'I'm so thankful that you are so clear and … taking your time and helping me understand these pieces. Because I can really tell that you care about our school.' And she said, 'When I first heard we were getting someone and we didn't know who it was or anything, I thought, 'Oh, it's just someone here to judge us or fix us or tell us what we're doing wrong.' I can tell you care about kids and that's growing."*
> – State Literacy Coaching Specialist

LETRS-trained educators and teachers with no LETRS experience were reported to engage differently with the coaching cycle. LETRS-trained teachers appeared to have a stronger grasp of the terminology and concepts associated with evidence-based instruction than the teachers who had not participated in the professional learning. Coaches felt that this allowed for a more differentiated approach to feedback. LETRS-trained teachers seemed more receptive to feedback, and their foundational knowledge gave them the terminology and understanding that coaches could build upon and connect to when guiding them through the coaching cycle.

LETRS-trained educators with coaches felt the coaching cycle was helpful but could be improved with some tweaks. Coaching was generally well-received and considered helpful, but more honest conversations and differentiation of feedback were desired. As a result, the only phase of the coaching cycle that received any criticism during focus groups was the feedback phase, as there was concern that the coaches may be holding back from providing constructive

feedback to preserve the rapport that had been built, especially when working with veteran teachers. One LETRS-trained, Grade 1 teacher said:

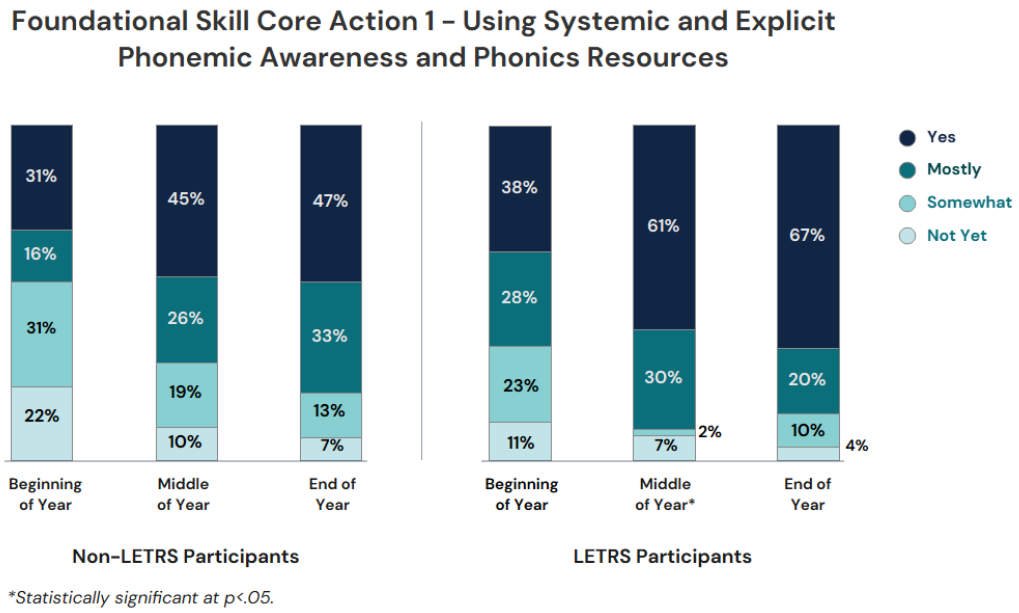
> *You know it's a double-edged sword, but I … just wonder if she's seen something that she could possibly give me some corrective feedback on but [is] not saying it. To kind of keep the camaraderie going or the openness or—you know what I mean? Like, maybe she's afraid of breaking the bridge or whatever, you know.*

Teachers participating in LETRS had similar observation ratings compared to those who were not in the reading academies on the culture of learning dimension in lessons focused on both foundational skills and comprehension. In their observations of foundational skills and comprehension lessons, SLCSs rated teachers on the general classroom environment, i.e., the extent to which teachers encouraged a culture of learning and high expectations in their classroom. No significant differences were seen in SLCSs' ratings of LETRS teachers and non-LETRS teachers at each timepoint with respect to the culture of learning dimension in lessons focused on foundational skills and comprehension.

Observed Foundational Skills between LETRS and non-LETRS Participants

LETRS teachers involved in a coaching cycle outperformed their counterparts at the middle and end-of-year observations in their use of systematic and explicit phonemic awareness and phonics resources in their instruction. No significant differences were seen in SLCSs' ratings of the subset of 100 LETRS and non-LETRS teachers included in the TNTP observation data at the beginning of year. However, significant differences were seen at the middle of the year, where teachers involved in LETRS significantly outperformed those not involved in the LETRS [χ^2 (3,*N* =85) = 8.46, *p*<.05].

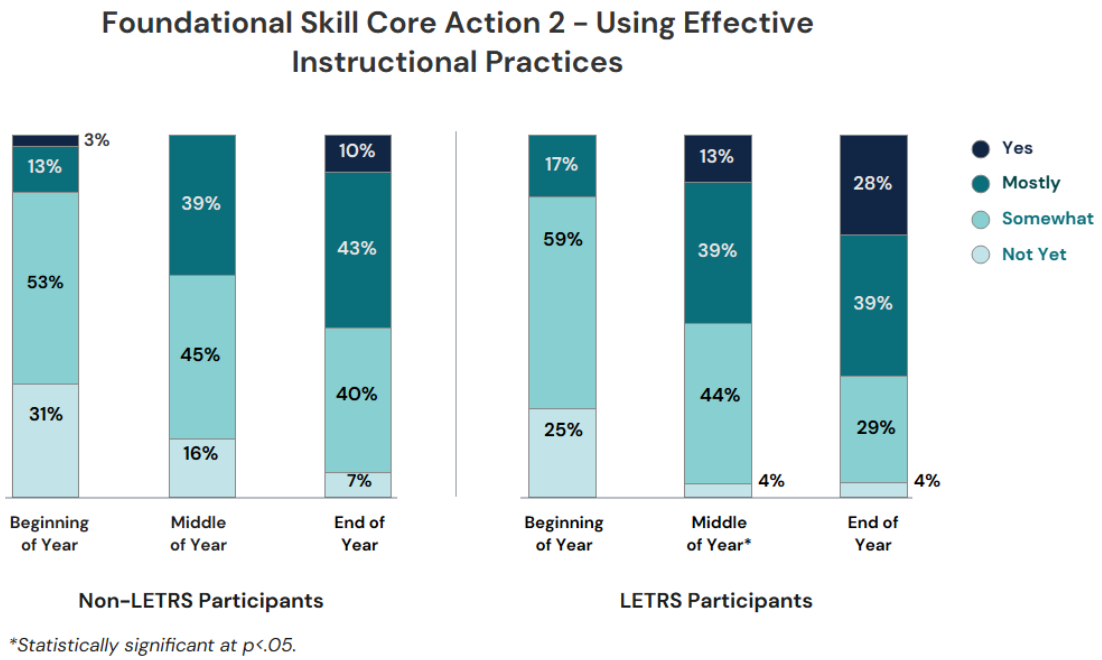
Exhibit 4.9. SLCSs' Ratings of Non-LETRS and LETRS Participants on Foundational Core Action 1: Using Systematic and Explicit Phonemic Awareness and Phonics Resources



Although the distribution of observation ratings was not significant during the end-of-year observation period, a greater proportion of LETRS-trained teachers received higher observation ratings than their counterparts in using systematic and explicit phonemic awareness and phonics resources (Exhibit 4.9). This finding suggests an added benefit for participating in LETRS for those receiving coaching on this core action.

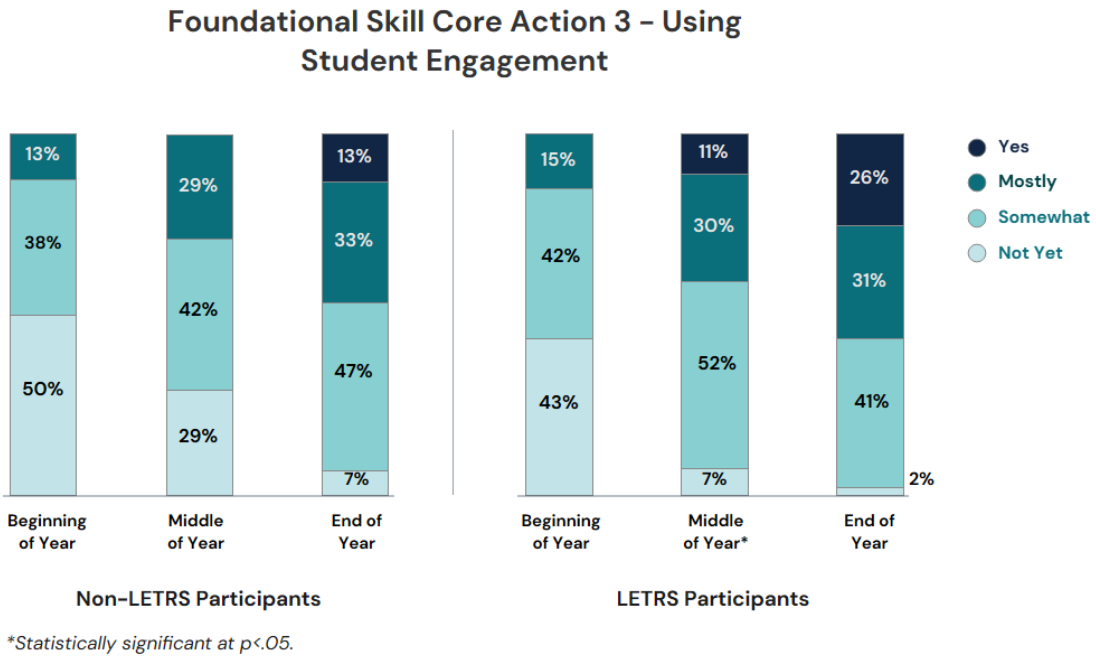
LETRS teachers did better than their non-LETRS peers in the middle of the year for observed Foundational Skills - Core Actions 2 and 3, but differences between the two groups levelled during the end-of-year observation period. Chi-square tests show no significant differences between the LETRS and non-LETRS groups at the beginning of the year for Core Action 2 (using effective instructional practice) and Core Action 3 (using student engagement). However, at the middle-of-the-year observation period, those with LETRS training did significantly better in their use of effective instructional practices (Core Action 2: χ^2 (3,*N* =85) = 7.71, p<.05) and student engagement (Core action 3: χ^2 (3,*N* =85) = 9.87, p<.05). This finding may suggest an initial midyear boost for those in LETRS training, but even without LETRS participation, it appears that coaching benefited both groups by the end of the year as differences across the two groups levelled out (Exhibits 4.10 and 4.11).

Exhibit 4.10. SLCSs' Ratings of Non-LETRS and LETRS Participants on Foundational Core Action 2: Using Effective Instructional Practices



**Statistically significant at p<.05.*

Exhibit 4.11. SLCSs' Ratings of Non-LETRS and LETRS Participants on Foundational Core Action 3: Using Student Engagement



**Statistically significant at p<.05.*

Observed Comprehension Skills between LETRS and non-LETRS Participants

Coached teachers participating in LETRS were rated similarly to those not in LETRS on using high-quality, grade-level texts (Core Action 1) and effective use of questions and texts (Core Action 2). No significant differences were seen in SLCSs' observations ratings of LETRS teachers and non- LETRS teachers using the instruction program guide for *Comprehension in Reading and Writing* at any timepoint with respect to a focus on using high-quality, grade-level texts (Core Action 1) and the effective use of questions and texts (Core Action 2). Exhibits 4.12 and 4.13 show the distribution of responses at each timepoint for both groups.

Exhibit 4.12. SLCSs' Ratings of Non-LETRS and LETRS Participants on Comprehension Core Action 1: Using High-Quality, Grade-Level Texts

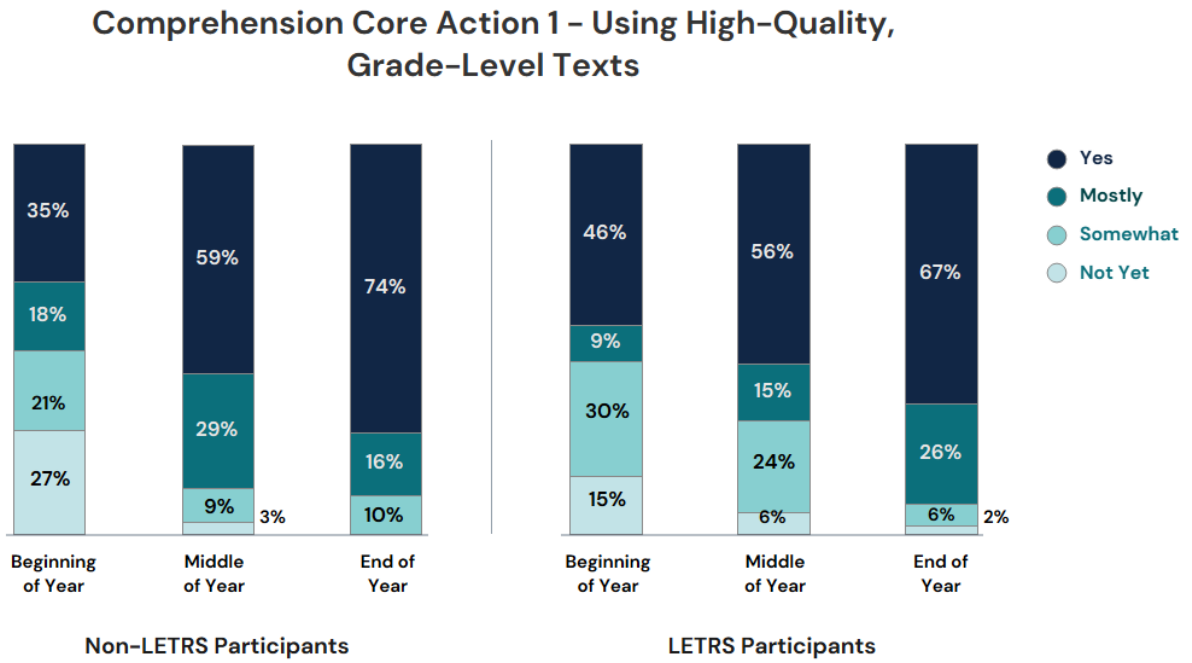
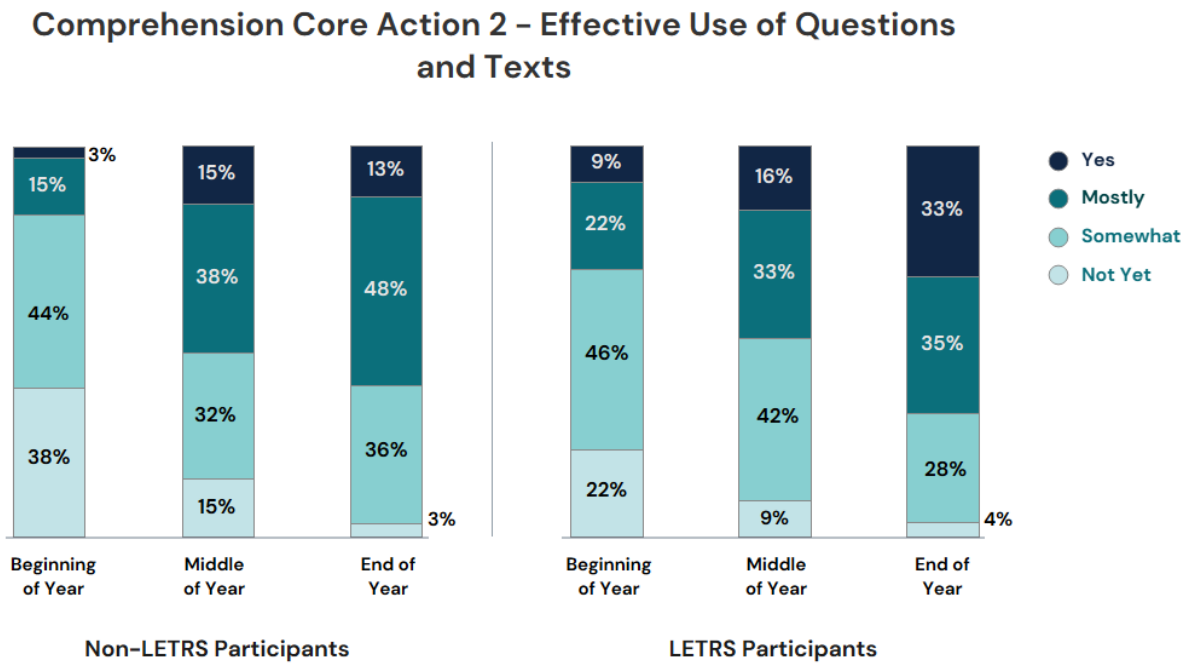
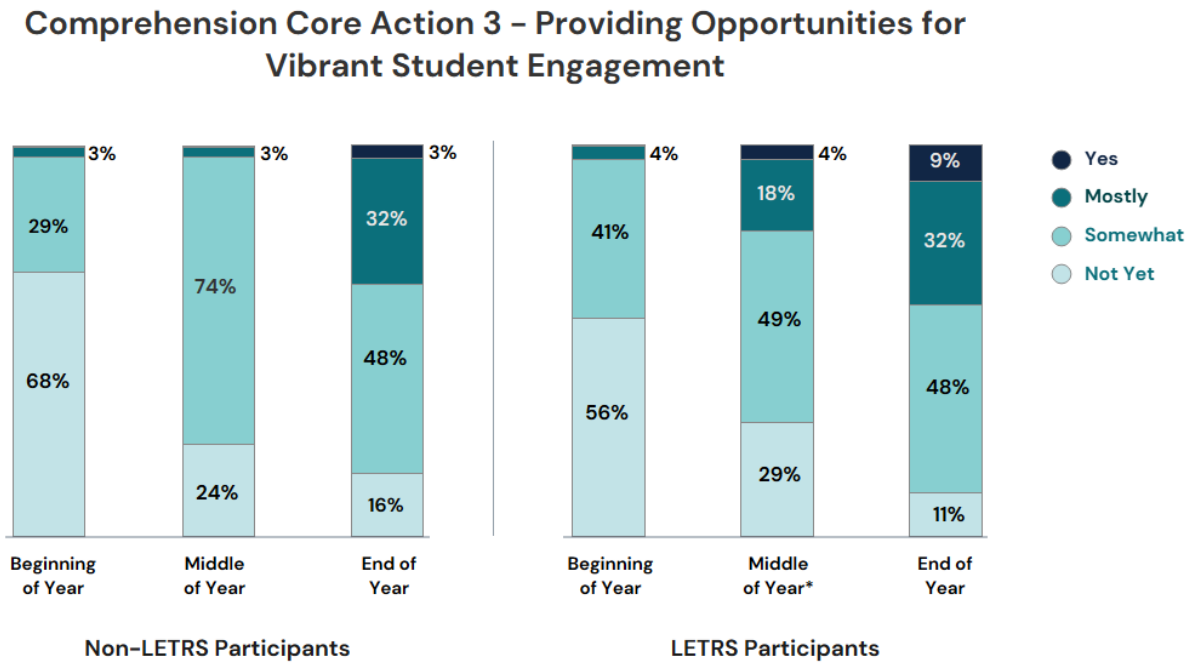


Exhibit 4.13. SLCSs' Ratings of Non-LETRS and LETRS Participants on Comprehension Core Action 2: Effective Use of Questions and Texts



LETRS teachers did better than their non-LETRS peers based on observations in the middle of the year for providing opportunities for vibrant student engagement, but differences between the two groups levelled out during the end-of-year observation period. Chi-square tests show no significant differences between LETRS and non-LETRS groups at the beginning of the year. However, at the middle-of-the-year observation period those in LETRS did significantly better in observed ratings for providing opportunities for vibrant student engagement [Core Action 3: Core action 3: χ^2 (3,*N* =89) = 9.11, *p*<.05]. This finding may suggest an initial midyear boost for those in LETRS, but even without LETRS participation, it appears that coaching benefited both groups by the end of the year as differences across the two groups levelled (Exhibit 4.13).

Exhibit 4.14. SLCSs' Ratings of Non-LETRS and LETRS Participants on Comprehension Core Action 3: Providing Opportunities for Vibrant Student Engagement



Facilitators and Barriers to Implementing Structured Literacy

In reflecting on their participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies or the coaching model, teachers and administrators shared feedback about factors that supported or hindered implementation of LETRS strategies and approaches as well as the skills supported by the State Literacy Coaching Specialists.

Facilitators of Implementation

A key facilitator of classroom implementation of LETRS strategies was in-building collaboration. Educators of all types shared that opportunities to collaborate around implementation not only increased motivation to implement new strategies but also increased alignment across classrooms. A few teachers also related this to increased tie-ins with HQIR curricula, noting that monthly PLCs or regular grade-level meetings provided opportunities to draw

in LETRS techniques that aligned with their HQIR. One Grade 1 teacher in Cohort 1 explained how this collaboration was able to strengthen implementation across the school: "The five of us [Cohort 1 LETRS participants] … we were sharing ideas and working together. We are all kindergarten and first grade, so then we would tell the other people on our team and share those ideas." A reading interventionist also highlighted ways that her LETRS training was informing other teachers in the building, noting, "I try to attend the weekly PLCs to see what the needs are … . [And] I do co-teach with a couple of teachers … some who are coming in and didn't have a phonics class when they were in college. [So] some of them are even having questions about how to say sounds, in isolation. So coaching and supporting those teachers and making sure that they know how to say the sounds correctly so they're teaching that to their students."

LETRS completion enabled the implementation of structured literacy practices. Completing LETRS training was a major factor in helping educators feel confident and prepared to implement structured literacy practices, with most Cohort 1 teachers reporting that the strategies became easier to apply once they had finished the full program. Many appreciated having time—especially over the summer—to reflect, reorganize, and plan for implementation for the next school year. Teachers in Grades 3–5 frequently noted that the second year of LETRS, which focused more on supporting readers who are struggling with understanding the text, building background knowledge, and drawing conclusions, was seen as particularly useful. Teachers valued the practical resources, such as the instructional videos and the print manual, which they continued to use in their daily practice, even after completing the professional learning. Interventionists and special education teachers felt especially successful when their schools provided HQIRs and supplemental instruction materials that aligned with LETRS. Overall, educators shared that they needed time to fully absorb the content before feeling ready to fully implement what they had learned.

Ongoing support for administrators is a key facilitator to successful implementation. Administrators who worked with a coach felt like they were better able to identify evidence-based literacy instruction in the classroom because of the support from the literacy coach, especially during walkthroughs. Having LETRS experience also enhanced this relationship, with one administrator saying, "… [Now] that I've got a little bit more information in my back pocket [from going through LETRS for Administrators], it's starting to match her [knowledge]. So we're having better conversations. But at the beginning of the year … we would go to classrooms and walk through together. And … we come out and we debrief … . She would teach me. So then when I would give feedback to the teacher, I could be very specific … . Without her, we would have all been way off track even with the right resource." Administrators viewed coaches as experts and trusted advisors in identifying evidence-based instruction in the classroom, indicating that this ongoing support is essential to the successful implementation of structured literacy approach.

SLCSs were crucial to implementation of structured literacy practices. State Literacy Coaching Specialists were essential to the successful implementation of structured literacy practices. Teachers, interventionists, special education staff, and administrators consistently spoke positively about the value coaches brought to their schools. The support was hands-on, practical, and tailored to individual needs. At the classroom level, coaches often worked side by side with teachers as they implemented district-approved HQIRs with fidelity. This close collaboration helped teachers build confidence in using the newly adopted materials. Coaches also provided

simple but effective tools, such as laminated pacing guides. These resources made it easier for teachers to implement structured literacy practices consistently and effectively. Beyond individual classrooms, coaches played a critical role in supporting schoolwide implementation. They helped teachers across the school break down dense instructional materials during PLCs, prepare for upcoming lessons, and provided real-time support during instruction. Their presence helped reduce feelings of being overwhelmed and increased teachers' readiness to deliver high-quality literacy instruction. Coaches also helped shift mindsets around evidence-based literacy practices. They served as both changemakers and cheerleaders, encouraging teachers and administrators to embrace new approaches and build a stronger foundation for literacy instruction across their schools.

> *"Just those bite-sized attainable goals so that there it is not instant success but success that comes shortly thereafter. So that they realize that the coaching cycle is worth their time. And they were grateful for that."*
> – State Literacy Coaching Specialist

Educators seemed to benefit the most from coaching when clear, attainable goals were set. Coaches indicated that educators found success in, and appreciation for, the coaching cycle when attainable goals were set and results were seen shortly after the instructional shifts were made. One Grade 2 teacher expressed appreciation for how the literacy coach helped her narrow her focus on how to best support her struggling readers within the classroom. Overall, the structured phases within the coaching cycle helped the teachers stay focused and allowed for the incremental building of literacy knowledge and evidence-based instructional practices.

Fidelity walks have become an important part of how schools are supporting the rollout of structured literacy. These informal, observational walkthroughs give district and school leaders—like administrators, coaches, and literacy leads—a chance to regularly visit classrooms and see how Tier I literacy instruction is being delivered using the HQIR. The goal of the walk is to make sure that what is happening in classrooms reflects the evidence-based practices aligned with the HQIR, LETRS learning, structured literacy, and support from the literacy coaches. These walks are especially valuable because they are not intended to be a "gotcha observation," but instead are intended to identify classrooms and teachers that potentially need support. When a teacher needs help with implementing the HQIR, follow-up coaching or professional learning is provided in a non-punative manner. This approach helps ensure that instruction is consistent across classrooms and grade levels, and that all students are getting access to evidence-based literacy instruction.

LETRS participants referenced a number of ways that they used LETRS resources to support broader implementation of LETRS strategies. Some reading interventionists discussed using printed materials from LETRS to support new teachers in developing their literacy instruction. One Cohort 1 Grade 2 teacher also shared how she leveraged materials from the LETRS manuals to increase parental buy-in: "Some of those easier infographics from the LETRS manual, like the simple view of reading, I love to have those available at parent-teacher conferences and be like 'This is why this is what we're doing, this is why it doesn't look like it used to look, and this is why you're not going to hear me say the things that you've heard teachers talk about in the past.' "

Case Studies: Contextualized Facilitators

From the case study sites, three themes emerged as facilitators to the implementation of LETRS strategies. Those themes included a culture of learning, formalized time for collaboration, and a focus on reviewing and using data.

A culture of learning promotes continuous improvement and striving for excellence. For example, the principal at one school emphasized the importance of a culture of continuous learning, stating that the staff are learners who want to do the right thing for the kids. This passion for learning and doing the right thing for the students is a driving force behind the school's commitment to excellence. Similarly, the district's elementary instructional supervisor of a second school highlighted the significance of maintaining a growth mindset and always striving to improve and learn for the benefit of the students. This mindset is a core strength of the school, underpinning its commitment to excellence and continuous improvement. In the words of the principal: "Our kids deserve that [excellence] and we're not going to stop learning for them."

Space for collaboration provides teachers support for refining their instructional techniques. All three schools have professional learning communities (PLCs) that regularly meet and help to support consistent use of instructional strategies. For one school, districtwide PLCs were also established to allow for quarterly meetings focused on evidence-based literacy instruction and practice. English language arts teachers are grouped by grade in these PLCs, with kindergarten all together, Grades 1 and 2 together, and Grades 3 through 5 together. Espousing the benefits of districtwide collaboration, one teacher shared, "It's really good because then you make connections with people that teach the same thing as you at different schools."

Regularly reviewing data and reflecting on instruction enables ongoing monitoring of student learning, supports fidelity to evidence-based practices, and identifies areas where students may need additional support. For example, one school has successfully implemented data dashboards to comprehensively monitor student performance. The data can be disaggregated by student, standard, teacher, and school, empowering the district to make informed decisions and showcase student progress. PLC meetings are also used in the case study schools for reviewing assessment data. One assistant superintendent explained, "[In PLCs], they will have those conversations. They'll pull up their i-Ready data, they'll talk about an assessment that they've given based on the pacing guide. And it's kind of a living, breathing conversation."

Barriers to Implementation

Full implementation of structured literacy was complicated by lack of teacher foundational knowledge, especially in schools with low LETRS participation. The lack of prior knowledge in foundational literacy amongst teachers with no LETRS experience was an initial challenge and slowed implementation. As one reading interventionist noted, "We have a couple of new teachers [this year] and they said they didn't get any experience through their [college] education on how to teach the sounds properly. But having these sound walls all over the school has been really helpful." This lack of baseline understanding was reported to make it difficult for some educators

to fully engage with interventionists and SLCSs at the same initial depth as educators who had already completed LETRS.

The absence of or hesitation in implementing an HQIR created inconsistency with instruction across grades and grade levels. While most participants had an HQIR by the time of the focus group, implementation was slow to start in many schools. This created inconsistency and disjointed instruction across some grade levels. Additionally, some veteran teachers were hesitant and even skeptical about the new curriculum. One coach remarked that these teachers were asking great questions, but they needed to be convinced that what they were being asked to do was indeed evidence-based instruction, as opposed to what they had been doing. Furthermore, in some cases, teachers were learning and being required to implement two different sets of materials at the same time, often when an HQIR was paired with a supplemental resource from a different publisher. These teachers reported feeling ill-equipped to implement new materials and frustrated that the districts were not responsive enough to these challenges. One teacher indicated that she wished her district had pivoted their instructional support days to instead address HQIRs, since the publishing company had failed to provide adequate training.

Case Studies: Contextualized Barriers

For the three case study sites, the barriers to implementation varied and included both individual, teacher-specific challenges as well as systemic issues.

Teachers who may be more ingrained in their literacy instructional practices and how they had been taught may find it more challenging to move from a balanced literacy to a structured literacy approach. Convincing more seasoned teachers to change and adapt to new teaching practices was a challenge referenced at one site. Some teachers have taught for many years and there is a learning curve to learning and applying LETRs strategies.

Shifting mindsets and adapting to new practices can be a challenge. Teachers in one school needed to let go of practices that had been successful for students but not aligned with LETRS (e.g., knowing all the letter names/sounds by a certain point or learning sight words). In another school, teachers needed time to adjust to new practices, such as breaking down writing skills for students.

Current preservice training did not prepare new teachers. At one site it was shared that new teachers are coming out of their degree programs less prepared to teach early literacy than previous generations. The principal noted, “The new teachers are not as prepared. It's not their fault, I don't think. It's the universities, the college[s]—they're not teaching them how to teach literacy.”

School consolidations impacted widespread implementation in one school: One school was currently undergoing two waves of consolidation with other schools in the county. This has led to the merging of differing school cultures and different experiences with literacy education. As a result, teachers have had to adjust literacy instruction to ensure all students are operating from the same foundational skills while navigating new student dynamics.

The master schedule posed some challenges to full implementation. One principal noted that she noticed that the school's master schedule from the previous year was not conducive to the appropriate amount of time needed for Tier I instruction. In fact, larger amounts of time were allocated to Tiers 2 and 3. Once the principal realized that the master schedule itself was complicating implementation, she adjusted the time allocations and has since seen a difference with HQIR implementation and integration of LETRS learning. This same principal indicated that the support from the literacy coach was essential to the full implementation of evidence-based literacy practices and supported the expansion of the coaching program, saying that it is "money well spent [by the KDE]."

V. Longer-Term Outcomes: Student Reading Proficiency

The ultimate 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 examines the extent to which the longer-term outcomes of students progressing toward grade-level proficiency and reporting improved reading are being achieved at this point of time in the broader implementation of Read to Succeed. 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 in 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.

Examples of Student Progress

"I had a student my first year implementing [LETRS] and he was actually one of the students that I chose to work with closer… . He came to me in fourth grade, he was a true non-reader, like nothing … and he'd been at our school from K through 3 and gotten this far. He did have some behaviors, and he and I bonded—that was part of it. But, through my LETRS training that year and work in using the strategies that I've learned, he really, really grew [and moved on] the next year." – Reading interventionist, Cohort 1

"[We] tend to have kids who, you know, have ADHD, who cannot just sit still and listen to a lecture. They want to be moving and they need to be engaged and the [LETRS] skills are more hands-on, and more hands-on things we can do, the more we see progress." – Special education teacher, Cohort 1

"This is my tenth year teaching and I've always taught second grade and I've never seen writing like I've seen the last 2 years, because the programs have us doing so much more explicit modelling, and this is what a sentence is, and this makes a sentence." – Grade 2 teacher, Cohort 1

"I had a second-grade student who was a non-reader—could barely write his name. By the end of third grade he was on grade level!" – Reading interventionist, Cohort 1

Teachers observed substantial improvements in individual students' foundational literacy skills after implementing LETRS strategies. Educators shared specific examples of student growth aligned to key areas of emphasis in the LETRS program, including spelling, decoding, and phonemic awareness. One special education teacher described how a Grade 2 student, initially unable to distinguish individual letter sounds, began to slow down and intentionally segment words to improve reading and spelling.

Another educator noted that students became more proactive and confident when encountering unfamiliar words, using strategies such as identifying "heart sounds" and phonics rules instead of relying on the teacher. Additionally, teachers reported that younger students, such as kindergartners and first-graders, became more independent and confident in spelling, thanks to the explicit and systematic instruction provided by LETRS. One teacher shared:

> *In previous years, [having students tap out the sounds] was a struggle. Then, in the last couple of years, since they've been getting this explicit systematic instruction [from LETRS], they're much more independent and capable [with spelling] … . They feel confident in themselves that they can do it, and they don't have to ask.*

Student growth is evident according to individual teacher and coach reports. Literacy coaches shared a variety of success stories that included student growth in reading fluency and decoding, speaking and vocabulary, engagement with complex texts, and meeting grade-level expectations. One coach shared the growth seen during a recent observation of a Grade 1 classroom with 6-year-olds. This coach explained that the first-graders were able to read the word *important*, a multisyllabic word by breaking it down into syllables. The teacher of these students was overjoyed: "Last year, they would not have known where to start. This year, they see this big word and they're like, 'Nah, we got this.'" Another literacy coach described a Grade 2 student who had consistently struggled with foundational reading skills and generally lacked confidence. However, due to coaching, and a teacher who transitioned to more inclusive Tier I practices, the coach observed this normally quiet student discussing rich vocabulary words now that she had "been given access to these ideas and this knowledge all year." This coach attributed the student growth to the child's access to complex texts and raved about the new confidence she exhibited, saying:

> *Can you believe the confidence that this one has? That's a direct result of us not sticking her in a leveled group and letting her have access to these big ideas and these big words, and look how smart she feels and look how confident she is! Look what she can come up with!*

Coaches also shared how diagnostic assessments at the end of the year for students of coached teachers have improved. One coach celebrated that it's "the end of the year and my kindergarten teacher has 95% of her kindergarteners on grade level. Yes. So that was super, super exciting." Another coach shared that an integrated co-taught Grade 3 classroom teacher and special education teacher she supported were able to successfully co-teach after coaching. This resulted in the students with individualized education plans (IEPs) no longer "sitting in a corner and doing their own thing." These students are now fully immersed in the same activities as the rest of the class during Tier I instruction. This change in instructional delivery resulted in positive growth in assessment scores, especially concerning speaking and vocabulary development.

> *"My proficiency rate has gone up consistently since the [evidence-based literacy] training—that's a definite. I'm hesitant to use KSA as a litmus test, but our KSA data has increased."*
> – School administrator

Administrators are seeing student growth across the building. Literacy assessment data was regularly reviewed by school and district administrators who reported noted improvements in student reading abilities, particularly with proficiency rates. Administrators at multiple schools

attributed these improvements to the more intentional work being done by teachers to improve their Tier I literacy instruction, which included implementing the HQIR with fidelity, working closely with literacy coaches, and seeking professional learning such as LETRS.

Case Studies: Decreased Number of Students on Reading Improvement Plans

In one of the case study schools, the implementation of HQIR and LETRS strategies has led to significant improvements in students' performance on the districtwide literacy assessments. Following students' completion of the i-Ready assessment, the number of students across the district who had reading improvement plans decreased substantially from approximately 90 to 50. The district instructional coach attributed this change to the districts' combined literacy efforts.

Special education and reading interventionist focus group participants indicated that LETRS had positive impacts on student progress, including students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 services. Multiple instances of students identified as "non-readers" or having "significant cognitive disabilities" were presented during focus group sessions with Tier 2 and Tier 3 providers, with similar sentiments shared, including increased progression toward grade-level reading attainment. In some cases, Tier 2 and Tier 3 providers indicated that due to LETRS-influenced instructional practices, students who were previously unable to isolate and identify separate sounds were now able to break down words by sound. Tiered service providers repeatedly touted the benefits of effective instructional practices including the use of hands-on resources with students who struggle with reading, with one special educator noting that this worked well for "ones who are beginning to talk or start and who were nonverbal, who are beginning into speech or have only had speech a couple of years, we're pulling the mirrors out, like looking at how to say sounds correctly with how to produce them. Like using the wands, you know, breaking it down."

Student Outcomes on the KSA for Reading

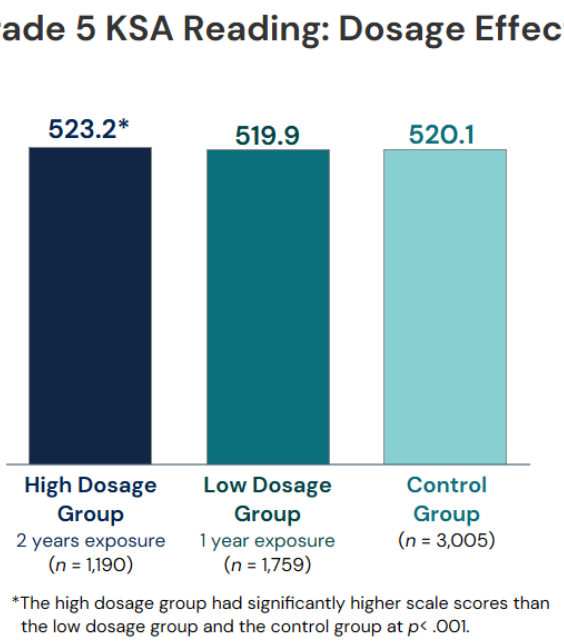
Kentucky Summative Assessment for Reading data were used to assess the impact of teacher participation in Cohort 1 of LETRS on student progress. KSA assessment data used for the prior year's report were updated to include scores from the 2023–2024 school year, allowing for an examination of Cohort 1 participants' impact in their second year of training. Mirroring the methodology used in the prior report, student outcomes were limited to KSA scale scores in Grades 4 and 5 in order to accommodate a robust statistical model controlling for prior-year performance.[1]

The additional year of assessment data also enabled an exploration of a "dosage" effect, such that students who were taught by Cohort 1 teachers in both 2022–2023 (the first year of LETRS PL) and 2023–2024 (the second year of LETRS PL) were identified as having "high" levels of dosage/exposure. Students exposed to Cohort 1 teachers in 2023–2024 only were assigned to the "low" dosage group. Performance from these distinct exposure groups was compared to that of a control group of demographic peers who were not exposed to LETRS-trained teachers.

[1] Please see Appendix A for further methodological details.

Grade 5 students exposed to LETRS-trained teachers over consecutive years had significantly higher reading scores than other students. Separating the treatment group into levels of dosage proved to be impactful in the assessment of students' reading scores in Grade 5. In a model that controlled for student-, teacher-, and campus -level characteristics, Grade 5 students of Cohort 1 teachers who were also taught by Cohort 1 teachers in the prior year had significantly higher scale scores than "low" dosage and control group students (γ_{01k} = 4.06, t = 2.70, p = 0.01; Exhibit 5.1). This main effect of dosage was not evident in a similar analysis of Grade 4 reading outcomes (γ_{01k} = -0.99, t = -0.67, p = 0.51).

Exhibit 5.1. Main Effect of Dosage (Years of LETRS Exposure) on Average KSA Reading Scores, Grade 5



Special education students in Grades 4 and 5 who were exposed to 2 years of LETRS-trained teachers significantly out-performed their peers with fewer LETRS-trained teachers in reading. The impact of an additional year of exposure to Cohort 1 teachers also had a significant impact on students who were identified as having received special education services. The interaction effect of dosage on special education status was significantly positive in both Grade 4 and Grade 5 analyses. While students receiving special education services showed, overall, significantly lower average reading scores than their peers not receiving such services, the impact of 2 years of exposure to LETRS-trained teachers was significantly positive. Students identified as receiving special education services who were taught by Cohort 1 teachers for 2 years had significantly higher scale scores than their peers receiving services in the lower dosage group and the control group (Grade 4: γ_{01k} = 3.46, t = 3.54, p < 0.001, Exhibit 5.2; Grade 5: γ_{01k} = 2.16, t = 2.26, p = 0.02, Exhibit 5.3).

Exhibit 5.2. Interaction between Dosage (Years of LETRS Exposure) and Special Education (SPED) Status on Average KSA Reading Scores, Grade 4

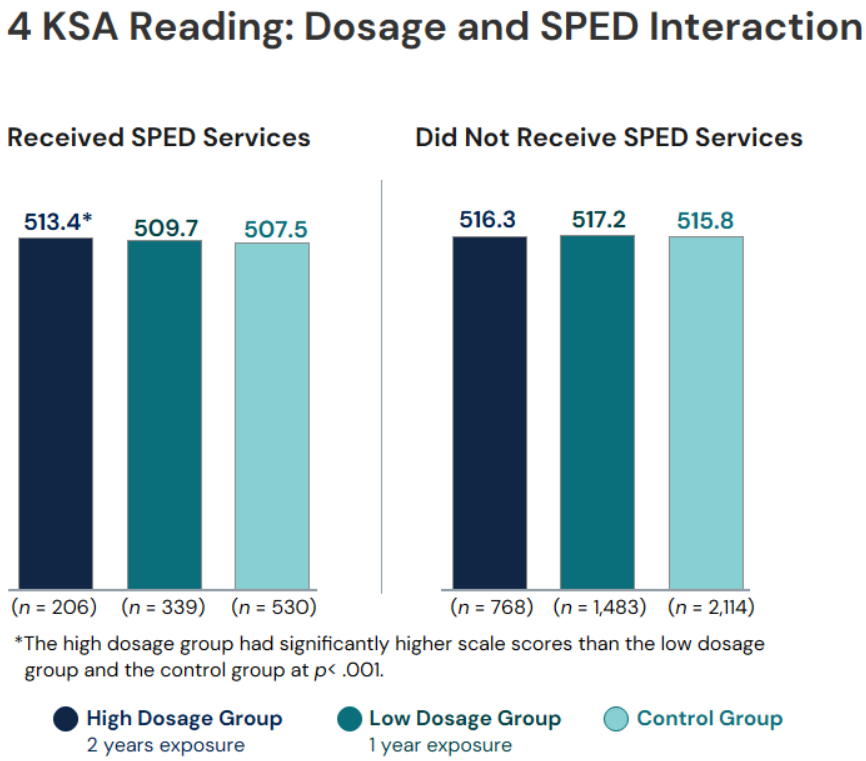
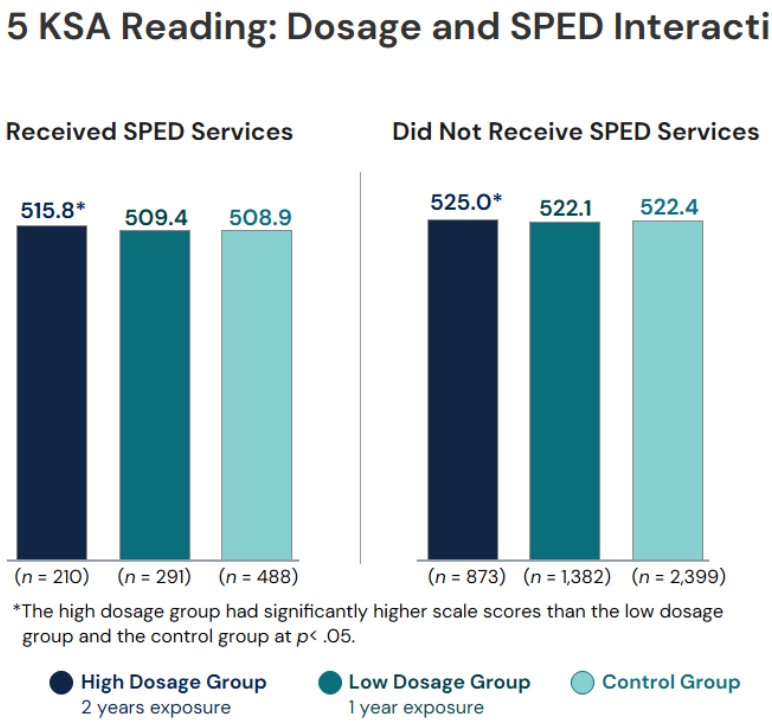


Exhibit 5.3. Interaction between Dosage (Years of LETRS Exposure) and Special Education (SPED) Status on Average KSA Reading Scores, Grade 5



Student Outcomes on the i-Ready Reading Assessment

A small number of districts in Kentucky agreed to share their students' scores on the i-Ready reading assessments at the end of the 2023–2024 school year (Curriculum Associates, 2024). This series of formative assessments is typically administered to students in Kindergarten through Grade 5—first in the fall to establish a beginning-of-year baseline, then again in the winter and spring to assess progress in overall reading ability as well as specific dimensions of literacy skills (e.g., phonological awareness, comprehension, vocabulary, etc.).

Nine districts sharing their assessment data had at least one teacher participating in Cohort 1 of LETRS training through the Kentucky Reading Academies, allowing for the comparison of i-Ready progress between LETRS-exposed students and their unexposed peers. Similar to the analysis of KSA assessment data, LETRS-exposed students were matched to a control group of demographic peers via propensity score modeling (PSM), which established statistical equivalence on the available demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, baseline performance) within each grade level.

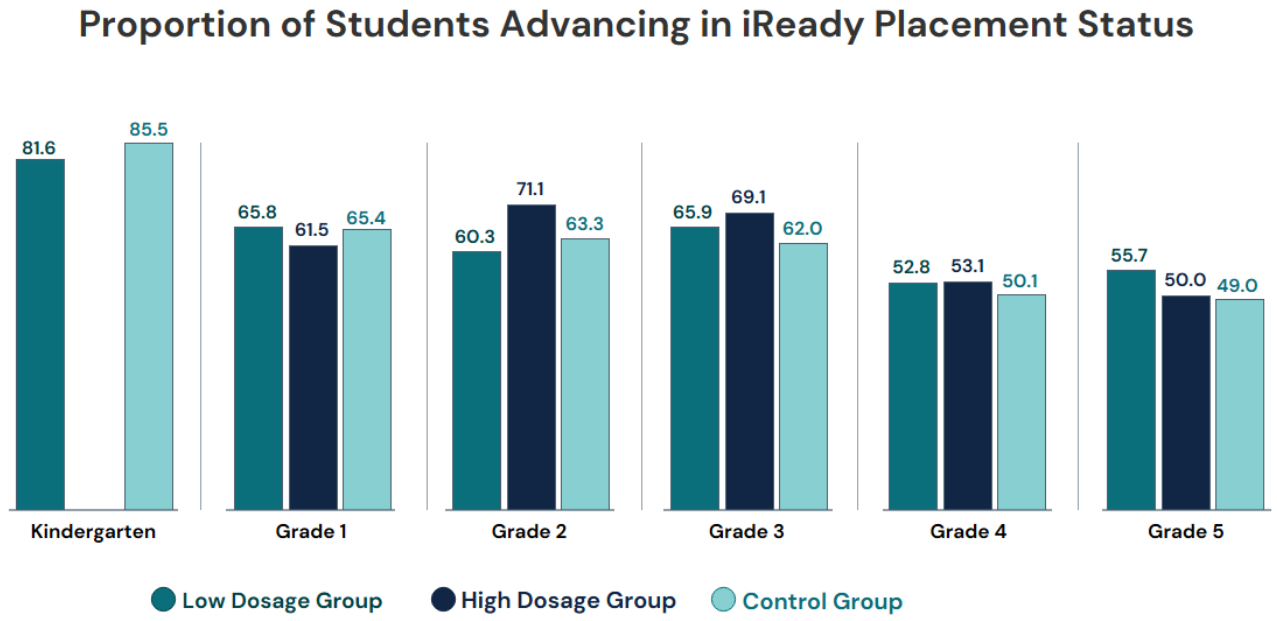
Students were included in the analytic sample if they:

- were flagged as "enrolled" in the 2023–2024 data,
- had valid beginning-of-year (BOY) and end-of-year (EOY) overall placement scores, and
- were identified in either the treatment group (linked to a reading academies-participating teacher) or matched control group (demographic peers in elementary schools without reading academies-participating teachers).

A total of 2,943 students were included in the treatment group, each with a demographic peer resulting in 2,943 students in the control group (N = 5,866 total students in analysis). Approximately 34% of the treatment group were also linked to Cohort 1 teachers in the 2022–2023 i-Ready data, allowing for the additional exploration of a "dosage" effect.

Progress was measured using i-Ready's overall relative placement score, which assigns examinees to one of the following five performance categories: *3 or more grade levels below, 2 grade levels below, 1 grade level below, early on grade level, mid or above grade level*. BOY and EOY relative placement scores were compared to estimate the impact of Kentucky Reading Academies exposure on literacy skills across the 2023–2024 school year. The presence of *any* increase in relative performance level (yes/no) was the specific outcome in the regression analyses outlined below.

Exhibit 5.4. The Proportion of Students Advancing in i-Ready Placement Status, by Dosage and Grade Level



Analysis of i-Ready reading assessment data showed mixed results in literacy progress. Exhibit 5.4 shows the proportion of students within each comparison group that showed any advancement in i-Ready placement from BOY to EOY 2023–2024, by grade level. Dosage is categorized as "low" (linked to Cohort 1 teacher in 2023–2024 only) or "high" (linked to Cohort 1 teacher in both 2023–2024 and 2022–2023).[2] While kindergarteners, overall, were most likely to make progress in literacy placement, none of the within-grade level comparisons between dosage and control groups were statistically significant.[3]

Overall, no statistically significant results were seen in reading progress based on exposure to LETRS-trained teachers. A more robust comparison of the three groups was accomplished with multilevel logistic regression modeling,[4] accounting for the clustering of students within campuses and controlling for student- and campus-level covariates. Student-level covariates included the set of demographics used in the PSM procedure (grade level, gender, and race/ethnicity), while campus-level covariates included campus locale (rural, town, suburban, or city) and the percent of the student body that is identified as economically disadvantaged. Interaction effects between treatment group and student covariates were also explored. Results from these models showed no statistically significant effect of either "high" ($\gamma = 0.02$; $p = 0.92$) or "low" ($\gamma = 0.31$; $p = 0.09$) exposure to LETRS-participating teachers on increased i-Ready relative placement scores.

Some analysis suggests that students in Grade 3 may be more likely to move from reading below grade level to reading at or above grade level, although findings are mixed. One

[2] Note there is no "high" dosage in the kindergarten group. Kindergarten is the lowest grade level available in the i-Ready data, and we are therefore unable to link prekindergarten students in the i-Ready data to Cohort 1 teachers in 2022–2023.

[3] Grade-specific chi-square tests were employed to compare advancing proportions across the three groups. All comparisons were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

[4] SAS PROC GLIMMIX; see Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; see Appendix A for methodological details

significant treatment effect did emerge while exploring alternative ways to account for progress in i-Ready scores. In addition to exploring whether exposure to LETRS-trained teachers had an impact on *any* increase in placement level, movement from "below grade level" categories (i.e., *3 or more grade levels below, 2 grade levels below, 1 grade level below)* to "at or above grade level" placement categories (i.e., *early on grade level, mid or above grade level)* was assessed for each treatment and control group, within available grade levels. In Grade 3, students who received any exposure to LETRS-trained teachers had significantly higher proportions of students moving from below to at or above grade level from BOY to EOY in 2023–2024 (31.1% vs. 23.5%, $\chi^2 = 5.59$, $p < 0.05$, N = 758). However, these results did not retain statistical significance when the more robust, multilevel modeling framework was applied, suggesting either influential covariate(s) and/or inadequate power to detect a treatment effect.

VI. Conclusions and Next Steps

Throughout this evaluation, more than 1,700 participants (including LETRS participants, coaches, and administrators) shared their feedback and experiences through focus groups, surveys, and case studies. Across these experiences, as well as the Year 1 evaluation conducted previously, numerous common themes emerged across our data, lending confidence to these findings. This evaluation sought to address three primary research questions related to the benefits of participating in the Kentucky Reading Academies, the Kentucky Reading Academies' five literacy goals for educator and student learning, and the benefits of the literacy coaching model. In addition, this Year 2 evaluation also explored two additional research questions related to the extent to which contextual factors shaped participation and subsequent implementation of the reading academies as well as the differences in skills and beliefs by cohort of participation.

In examining trends by these research questions, participants benefitted from new and increased knowledge, implemented new or modified literacy strategies in their classroom practice (including through the use of HQIRs and with the support of SLCSs), and saw promising indicators of student growth as a result. Each of these trends is aligned to research questions and relevant literature in the discussion.

Discussion of Key Findings

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 widely across districts and schools, with individual participation influenced by both intrinsic motivation (personal commitment to literacy improvement) and extrinsic factors (administrative encouragement or incentives). Those who participated in the reading academies with colleagues in their building reported feeling more supported and more deeply engaged in their participation while those participating by themselves felt isolation and expressed a desire for more widespread participation. Across all cohorts of the reading academies, LETRS continued to receive praise as one of the most impactful professional development experiences. Educators appreciated its alignment with structured literacy and its practical, immediately applicable strategies. LETRS participation was reported to deepen educators' understanding of literacy concepts and terminology—even for experienced teachers—and empowered them to better explain reading strategies to students.

> *"Several of my students—they don't hear the sound; they don't hear the blends … . The LETRS training has been great for training me how to teach them and then implementing that … so far this year, I feel like I'm seeing a lot of success."*
>
> – Special education teacher, Cohort 1

Educator knowledge: Cohorts who were further along in their LETRS coursework consistently and significantly outperformed teachers in their literacy knowledge compared with those who had not yet progressed as far in the program, suggesting a positive relationship between LETRS exposure and literacy knowledge. Teachers involved in the reading

academies reported a deeper understanding of why students struggle with reading, especially in areas such as phonemic awareness and how the brain learns to read. Educators also reported that LETRS improved their knowledge of how to use targeted assessments to identify student needs more precisely and how to apply evidence-based strategies in their classroom instruction.

Educator beliefs: Educators across all cohorts reported greater alignment with beliefs about the phonics approach than beliefs about the whole-word or meaning-based approach to early literacy at each data collection point. These beliefs did not significantly differ by cohort or change significantly as participants advanced through LETRS, suggesting that other factors may influence educators' beliefs about early literacy more strongly than participation in the reading academies, such as the broader emphasis on the science of reading and the influence of HQIR implementation across the state.

***Classroom instruction*:** Implementation of structured literacy in classroom instruction was a key focus of this second year of evaluation, which led to a focus on Cohort 1 educators who had completed their professional learning and were able to implement strategies from across the LETRS program into their instruction. Overall, LETRS professional learning was widely seen as impactful in transforming literacy instruction, particularly when paired with an aligned HQIR and supported by a SLCS (discussed further in Research Questions 2 and 3). Cohort 1 educators reported implementing a wide range of strategies in their classrooms, including word mapping, vocabulary activities, story frameworks, and phonics instruction. Teachers shared specific examples of LETRS strategies that they were using in their classrooms, which reflect how LETRS has influenced both instructional methods and the materials used in classrooms, enhancing whole-class instruction with evidence-based literacy strategies. These practices 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; Seidenberg et al., 2020).

For students requiring additional support, educators—particularly special education teachers and reading interventionists—reported using LETRS resources to guide Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction. Teachers and interventionists regularly administered LETRS screeners and assessments (ranging from weekly to quarterly) to facilitate more precise, data-driven interventions to address specific literacy weaknesses or gaps in understanding. Given that the research literature has shown that using diagnostic assessments to provide customized intervention can improve students' literacy skills, this trend is particularly encouraging (e.g., Catts et al., 2001). Special education teachers reported that LETRS strategies were highly applicable across various instructional settings. They used techniques related to phonics, phonemic awareness, decoding, and morphology, often in collaboration with general education teachers who had also completed LETRS. This shared training allowed for more cohesive co-teaching and flexible student grouping.

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 across all cohorts reported increased knowledge about student literacy, with analysis demonstrating that this knowledge increases during the 2 years of participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies. Specific knowledge gains reported by educators related to technical knowledge, such as how the brain processes written language, morphology, and the role of spelling in reading as well as practical skills including segmenting sounds and how to teach phonics and phonemic awareness across multiple grade levels. This is particularly promising, given that research has found teachers who are more knowledgeable in early literacy have students with higher reading gains (Piasta et al., 2009)

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.

As discussed under Research Question 1, participation in and completion of the reading academies was credited with transforming literacy instruction by educators across cohorts. Educators across cohorts reported that implementing instructional strategies learned through LETRS was challenging while participation in the reading academies was ongoing. This was largely attributed to the significant time commitment required by LETRS that limited the amount of time available to make ad hoc adjustments to classroom instruction. Survey data showed that most teachers across all cohorts were using LETRS strategies regularly, but Cohort 1 teachers—who had the most exposure—were significantly more likely to report ease in selecting and applying those strategies. This suggests that greater program exposure and time for practice contribute to increased confidence and capacity for successful implementation of instructional strategies. Indeed, Cohort 1 teachers, in particular, reported that applying LETRS principles became easier after completing the full training, especially with time to reflect and plan over the summer. They found resources such as instructional videos and the print manual especially helpful for ongoing reference after the program was completed. Cohort 2 teachers also reported greater confidence in using resources provided by LETRS, such as progress monitoring tools compared to Cohort 3 participants, suggesting that teachers' capacity to use these tools increases over time. Reading interventionists and special educators also generally felt an increased capacity to implement LETRS, especially when their schools provided aligned instructional resources.

> *"I felt that it's easier to implement the strategies that I've learned now that I'm finished with LETRS. The second year of LETRS has been more applicable with some of my struggling readers this year."*
> – Grade 3 teacher, Cohort 1

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

By the 2024–2025 school year, a majority of school districts had adopted an HQIR for literacy, with 87% of surveyed educators indicated their district had selected a core HQIR from a list of approved, green-rated programs by spring 2025. Most of the selected core HQIRs included supports for Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction, and over half also reported using supplemental

resources. However, HQIRs were being implemented at very high rates, with more than 80% of educators working in districts that had adopted an HQIR also reporting implementation of that HQIR. While some educators felt their HQIR aligned well with LETRS and structured literacy, others noted only partial alignment or cited other challenges with HQIR implementation including frequent curriculum changes or the use of multiple programs simultaneously. SLCSs were able to mitigate many of these challenges both with individual teachers and across whole buildings, which is discussed further under Research Question 4.

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

During this second year of the evaluation, teachers and administrators continued to report increased use of universal screeners and diagnostic assessments to measure student growth and identify areas where students needed extra support. These participants shared examples of using these assessments individually and across classrooms or grade levels to provide more tailored instruction, particularly to struggling students. This continues to be a promising trend, as research has shown that using diagnostic assessments to provide customized intervention can improve students' literacy skills (Catts et al., 2001).

Through these assessments and other markers of student progress, teachers and SLCSs reported substantial improvements in students' foundational literacy skills after implementing LETRS strategies. Educators shared numerous examples of growth in areas such as spelling, decoding, and phonemic awareness as well as attitudinal improvements such as confidence and independence in reading. Teachers with younger students, particularly in kindergarten and Grade 1, reported that students showed increased self-reliance in spelling due to the explicit, systematic instruction. Coaches and administrators also reported noticable student gains in reading fluency, vocabulary, and engagement with complex texts.

> *"For the end-of-the-year [assessment], my kindergarten teacher has 95% of her kindergarteners on grade level. Yes. So that was super, super exciting."*
> – State Literacy Coaching Specialist

Special education teachers and reading interventionists also highlighted their use of diagnositic assessments to track student progress and reported marked progress among students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 services, including those with significant cognitive disabilities or speech delays. Educators reported numerous examples of students who began to isolate sounds, decode words, and engage more deeply in reading through hands-on tools and targeted instruction. Case studies also showed districtwide improvements, such as a sharp reduction in the number of students on reading improvement plans and increased proficiency rates. Teachers across roles shared powerful stories of transformation, including non-readers reaching grade level, students with ADHD thriving through hands-on learning, and noticeable improvements in writing due

> *"This is my tenth year teaching and I've always taught second grade and I've never seen writing like I've seen the last 2 years, because the programs have us doing so much more explicit modeling and this is what a sentence is and this makes a sentence."*
> – Grade 2 teacher, Cohort 1

to more explicit modeling. These outcomes underscore the broad and meaningful impact of LETRS on individual student literacy development.

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

This Year 2 evaluation began to demonstrate positive, statistically significant growth among students who were taught by LETRS-trained teachers. KSA Reading assessment data, taken during the prior school year (2023–2024) found that Grade 5 students who had LETRS-trained teachers in two consecutive years scored significantly higher than students who only had a single LETRS-trained teacher or those who did not have any LETRS-trained teachers. This trend also persisted among students receiving special education services, with students in Grade 4 and in Grade 5 who had two consecutive years of LETRS-trained teachers outperforming their counterparts who had only one year or no LETRS-trained teachers across two years. These data lag behind the rest of this evaluation, which focused on the 2024–2025 academic year, and has significant findings only in the upper grades.

Qualitative findings from this evaluation found that teachers frequently reported difficulty fully implementing LETRS strategies into their classroom instruction until they had completed the 2-year professional learning. This timeline means that the current 2024–2025 school year is the first with LETRS graduates from Cohort 1, which suggests that most teachers did not start fully implementing LETRS approaches and strategies into their classroom until the 2024–2025 school year. This, alongside the more wide-spread implementation of HQIRs and the targeted deployment of SLCSs, suggests that student literacy growth will continue to progress in subsequent years, as more students have the opportunity to be exposed to multiple years of LETRS teachers as well as curriculum that is aligned with structured literacy.

In addition to being supported by the qualitative findings of this study, other states that have implemented similar training programs aligned with the science of reading have demonstrated that 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), suggesting that Kentucky students have yet to demonstrate their largest literacy assessment gains. Also similar to this study, 3 years after Colorado's teacher training mandate, increases in teachers' knowledge of literacy skills were seen as well as a gradual decline in the number of students struggling with reading (Grogan et al., 2023; Grogan et al., 2024). In addition, North Carolina only saw impacts of its training after their first cohort completed professional learning (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2023), which would align with KSA data that will be available in the subsequent year of this evaluation.

Research Question 4: To what extent are the school-based literacy coaches effective in supporting and achieving positive literacy outcomes?

State Literacy Coaching Specialists were in place in 23 schools across Kentucky, supporting 148 individual teachers as well as the broader community of educators in each building. A subset of 100 coached educators were included in an observation database where 58 were participants of the LETRS for Educators PL and 42 did not participate in LETRS. Coaches engaged with teachers in a five-phase coaching cycle (Goal Setting and Planning, Learning Supports, Feedback and Practice, Midcycle Check-in, Final Feedback and Practice) that prioritized multiple rounds of feedback and practice. In addition, coaches observed and rated teachers in instructional practice related to foundational skills as well as comprehension in reading and writing. Overall, teachers and their supporting administrators placed a high value on the SLCSs and reported that coaches were particularly crucial in their support for HQIR implementation and their modeling of and direction in structured literacy implementation in the classroom. These themes align with findings from the KDE's internal survey of teachers participating in coaching, which also found a strong perception of SLCSs' support (Hill, 2025).

Although some educators initially expressed hesitation about working with literacy coaches, most came to appreciate the coaches' expertise, modeling, and practical support, especially in phonics instruction. Coaches were seen as deeply knowledgeable and genuinely invested in teacher success. Teachers described coaches as approachable, knowledgeable, and instrumental in breaking down dense content during PLCs, ultimately enhancing their ability to deliver strong literacy instruction. This perception aligns with research that has shown that coaching-based professional development can lead to significant improvements in teacher instructional practice (Cronen et al., 2008). Focus group participants especially valued modeling, co-teaching, and collaborative planning, which helped them internalize best practices and build trust in their coaches. Surveyed teachers, regardless of LETRS participation, reported strong agreement that coaching improved their instructional strategies and helped them implement next steps to enhance student learning. Administrators reported that coaches were especially valuable in schools with limited LETRS participation, where many teachers lacked foundational knowledge of structured literacy.

Coaches' primary role was to support teachers in their implementation of structured literacy strategies, which benefited all participating teachers, with LETRS participants receiving more of an initial benefit from coaching. Initially, teachers with LETRS training reported greater confidence in their foundational literacy knowledge and instructional flexibility, particularly when responding to student needs. They felt more prepared to explain their instructional decisions and adapt their teaching, while non-LETRS teachers initially struggled with shifting from older practices to evidence-based methods. However, coaching helped bridge this gap, with even initially resistant teachers gaining a better understanding of foundational literacy through support from literacy coaches.

Observation data showed that LETRS-trained teachers outperformed their non-LETRS peers in foundational literacy instruction during midyear evaluations, particularly in phonemic awareness, phonics, instructional practices, and student engagement. However, by the end of the year, differences between the two groups leveled out. In comprehension-focused lessons, both groups performed similarly across all timepoints in areas like using high-quality texts and effective

questioning. LETRS-trained teachers did show a midyear advantage in fostering student engagement, but again, this difference diminished by year's end. These findings suggest that while LETRS provides an initial boost in instructional quality, sustained coaching plays a key role in supporting all teachers' growth over time. This is a promising finding not only for teachers receiving coaching, but also for their students, since research has shown that literacy coaching positively impacts student achievement, particularly in early grades such as those that are the focus of Kentucky's reading initiatives (Kraft et al., 2018).

In addition to the documented increases in educator knowledge, findings from teachers and coaches highlight significant shifts in classroom practice that were reported to yield measurable student benefits. Educators reported regular implementation of evidence-based strategies such as orthographic mapping, sound walls, explicit writing models, and systematic phonics instruction, which enhanced both core instruction and targeted interventions. SLCSs observed that teachers demonstrated increased confidence and instructional precision, reporting that even educators who were initially reluctant to adopt new practices did incorporate structured literacy practices when provided with modeling and feedback. These changes in instruction corresponded with reports of notable student growth, including descriptions of some kindergarten classrooms achieving near-universal grade-level proficiency; special education students demonstrating new decoding skills; and broader improvements in fluency, spelling, and independent writing across older grades.

> *"[My coach and I] would go to classrooms and walk through together. And … we'd come out and we'd debrief … . She would teach me. So then when I would give feedback to the teacher, I could be very specific. … without her, we would have all been way off track even with the right resource."*
> – School administrator

The integration of coaching support, particularly alongside LETRS, was regarded as a critical factor in ensuring the fidelity of implementation and the effective use of HQIRs. Teachers cited the individualized support, goal setting related to HQIRs, ongoing opportunities for reflection, and practical tools—such as lesson modeling and student work analysis protocols—as building their confidence and instructional effectiveness. Administrators also reported that coaches supported building-wide implementation of their HQIR, helping educators manage the complexity of new materials introduced alongside other curricula during PLCs. This finding aligned with an internal KDE survey of administrators with coaches that found that coaches had increased administrators' confidence in leading HQIR-related professional learning (Hill, 2025). By the year's end, coaches' ratings of HQIR implementation integrity had significantly improved among coached teachers, regardless of whether or not the coached teachers had also participated in LETRS, highlighting the central role coaches played in successful HQIR adoption.

Exploratory Research Question 1: What organizational/community contextual factors affect participation in the reading academies and implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies? To what extent does district support/buy-in influence positive literacy outcomes for teachers and students?

The biggest contextual factor supporting participation in the reading academies was administrative or district support for participation. Participants referenced a variety of support mechanisms, including covering the costs of substitutes, providing teacher stipends as

participation incentives, and allowing time for teachers to collaborate and discuss LETRS learnings with their peers. Group participation in the reading academies was also reported to support individual involvement and completion while educators who were the only LETRS participants in their buildings often felt isolated and struggled to align their practices with peers.

Another key contextual factor influencing implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies was in-building collaboration, which was credited with fostering shared learning, motivation, and alignment across classrooms. Teachers who participated in LETRS alongside colleagues reported feeling more supported and confident, especially when they could engage in regular PLCs or grade-level meetings that tied LETRS strategies to their HQIR curricula.

SLCSs were in place in 23 schools across Kentucky. This contextual factor further enhanced implementation by offering personalized guidance, modeling lessons, and reinforcing LETRS-aligned practices, especially when both coaches and administrators were trained in LETRS. This benefit also extended to the entire building when SLCSs shared guidance on HQIR implementation and structured literacy instructional practices with administrators or at PLCs.

A broader culture of continuous learning also emerged as a critical factor supporting classroom instruction. Schools that emphasized professional growth, maintained a growth mindset, and prioritized doing what's best for students created environments where LETRS strategies could thrive. Regular PLCs, both within and across schools, provided structured time for collaboration, resource sharing, and instructional planning. These meetings often included data reviews using web-based integration platforms, allowing educators to reflect on student progress and adjust instruction accordingly.

This administrative and district support also played a key role in supporting positive literacy outcomes for students—when principals and district leaders were LETRS-trained, teachers felt more understood and better supported. Teachers cited regular PLCs, led by supportive administrators or teacher leaders, that leveraged LETRS tools and resources as well as data from screeners and assessments to tailor student instruction. This data-driven, collaborative approach helped ensure fidelity to evidence-based practices and supported sustained implementation of LETRS strategies. Ongoing support for administrators, provided by SLCSs or district staff, also contributed to successful implementation of structured literacy. Administrators who worked with a coach felt like they were better able to identify evidence-based literacy instruction in the classroom because of the support from the literacy coach. Overall, participation and implementation were most successful in schools with strong leadership that was committed to structured literacy, collaborative structures, and a shared commitment to literacy improvement across grade or school levels.

Exploratory Research Question 2: To what extent does cohort participation impact literacy skills and beliefs?

The Kentucky Reading Academies has enrolled three cohorts of participants into the LETRS for Educators professional learning program. This evaluation sought to explore the possibility that the cumulative influence of literacy initiatives throughout Kentucky may have caused a shift in school cultures related to literacy that shaped the understanding of Cohort 3 participants in ways that were not true for earlier cohorts.

In terms of beliefs and perceptions, all cohorts expressed high satisfaction with LETRS and acknowledged its positive impact on their instructional practice. Cohort participation appears to have a moderate impact on teachers' knowledge of structured literacy. Cohort 3 began their LETRS experience with slightly lower literacy knowledge than Cohort 2, although this group was comprised of more early-career educators than previous cohorts, which may account for this difference. However, midpoint assessments showed no statistically significant differences in literacy knowledge across cohorts, suggesting that LETRS participation can mitigate for baseline knowledge. Similarly, at the beginning of their LETRS participation, Cohort 3 teachers held significantly stronger beliefs in the whole-word approach compared to Cohort 2, a difference that may be attributed to their lower baseline literacy knowledge. In contrast, Cohort 1 teachers, evaluated at the midpoint of their LETRS training, demonstrated significantly weaker beliefs in the whole-word approach than both Cohorts 2 and 3. This suggests that Cohort 1 participants may have entered the program with a stronger initial alignment to evidence-based literacy practices, potentially due to prior exposure or greater familiarity with structured literacy concepts that motivated their participation in LETRS in the first place.

LETRS exposure rather than cohort participation seemed to have the largest influence on teachers' ability to implement structured literacy strategies into classroom instruction. Cohort 1 teachers, who had the longest exposure to LETRS, reported greater ease in implementing LETRS strategies and demonstrated higher confidence and comfort in applying evidence-based practices. Similarly, Cohort 2 teachers reported significantly stronger agreement that LETRS equipped them with the skills to use progress-monitoring tools effectively, compared to Cohort 3. This indicates that while all cohorts benefited from the training, those further along in the program (like Cohorts 1 and 2) experienced greater gains in both practical application and belief in the program's value. Overall, cohort participation influenced educators' literacy implementation, but the depth of impact was closely tied to the duration of LETRS exposure rather than other external factors.

Recommendations for Ongoing Implementation of Structured Literacy

Many educators who participated in the surveys and focus groups provided recommendations for strengthening ongoing implementation of structured literacy through HQIRs, LETRs participation, and engagement with the SLCSs. These recommendations are summarized below for the KDE's consideration.

Recommendations Related to LETRS Participation and Completion

- The KDE and individual school districts can continue to cultivate administrator understanding of LETRS and structured literacy to promote a culture that motivates participation in these key literacy initiatives.
- Participants in LETRS Cohort 4 can be thoroughly informed about the anticipated workload of the program and, where possible, provided supports such as substitutes or stipends to facilitate their ongoing involvement and completion.
- Many schools and districts have provided teachers with stipends or substitute teachers to facilitate their participation in the reading academies. However, participants also reported that adjusting classroom instruction to incorporate LETRS strategies can take a long time. Districts can consider providing additional time or resources to program completers to

adjust their classroom instruction and sequencing to ensure comprehensive LETRS implementation across their HQIR. This could be done by grade-level leads or other building leaders and then shared more broadly to increase efficiency.

Recommendations for Implementing Structured Literacy Across Kentucky

- In light of the critical role that initial and ongoing administrator support plays in successful implementation of structured literacy, the KDE can continue to enhance administrator buy-in for LETRS participation, HQIR implementation, and partnership with SLCSs.
- Teachers reported that opportunities to collaborate with grade-level teachers in their building, such as through PLCs, helped to solidify and extend their understanding of LETRS strategies and their use in classroom instruction. The KDE and SLCSs can work with administrators to facilitate PLCs or similar sessions that offer educators a chance to brainstorm and share feedback on the implementation of structured literacy in their classrooms.
- Informal, observational walkthroughs give district and school leaders—like administrators, coaches, and literacy leads—a chance to regularly visit classrooms and see how Tier I literacy instruction is being delivered using the HQIR. The KDE and districts can provide targeted support for or modeling of this type of classroom observation/fidelity walk that monitors HQIRs and structured literacy implementation and provides tailored, supportive feedback to strengthen implementation and improve student literacy outcomes.
- SLCSs were widely regarded as essential in supporting correct implementation of LETRS strategies and HQIR materials. SLCSs can continue to partner with educators, providing actionable goals and key modeling opportunities as part of each coaching cycle. Furthermore, the KDE can work to increase the number of coaches available to individual teachers and to increase the recommended amount of time that coaches are spending with entire grades or buildings, reflective of findings that show benefits beyond just the coached individuals.
- LETRS-trained educators with coaches reported that the coaching cycle was helpful, but some reported that more honest conversations and differentiation of feedback were desired. Some teachers reported a concern that the coaches may be holding back from providing constructive feedback to preserve the rapport that had been built, especially when working with veteran teachers. The KDE can continue to support the SLCSs in delivering targeted, appropriate feedback, even to LETRS-trained educators.
- This study found that students receiving special education services who were also exposed to 2 years of LETRS Cohort 1 teachers scored significantly higher than their peers in “low” dosage or control groups on the KSA for Reading. The KDE can continue to invest in special education LETRS-trained teachers and provide opportunities for these teachers to collaborate within their districts to share and extend the resources, strategies, and approaches to teaching structured literacy that are successful with these students.
- Cohort 1 teachers reported greater ease in identifying, selecting, and implementing instructional strategies than those who were still enrolled in LETRS coursework. The KDE can work to communicate to LETRS participants, administrators, and state legislators that full

implementation is more prevalent after completion of the reading academies in order to set appropriate expectations for student growth.

Next Steps and Considerations

The significant growth in teacher knowledge, reported implementation of LETRS strategies and HQIRs, more widespread use of diagnostic assessments to tailor instruction, and findings from across states with similar initiatives suggest that the significant reading growth seen among a subset of Kentucky fifth-graders is likely to extend and expand in subsequent years due to the investment in literacy by the KDE. This, alongside Kentucky's ongoing investment in a fourth cohort of LETRS participants, could merit further evaluation of the state's literacy initiatives. In light of that, there are several potential next steps for further study:

1. During the 2025–2026 academic year, both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 of the reading academies will have completed the LETRS program. This will provide a much larger sample of educators with which to examine implementation trends, facilitators, and barriers. For example, the KDE could explore which, if any, mitigating factors support implementation such as coordinated PLCs related to structured literacy, the number of LETRS-trained teachers in a building, or LETRS-trained administrators.

2. Subsequent KSA Reading data should continue to be examined to determine trends in student literacy growth. These data could be analyzed to assess the benefits of a single LETRS-trained teacher versus consecutive LETRS-trained teachers, to examine the benefits of a teacher who has completed LETRS training versus those who have not yet completed or have not gone through training at all, or to further explore the unique role of LETRS-trained teachers on special education students.

3. Administrators and educators reported that SLCSs had a perceived outsized benefit on HQIR and LETRS implementation. The KDE could explore the ways in which the combination of LETRS-trained teachers, green-rated HQIR implementation, and coaching support has affected student outcomes compared to LETRS training and HQIR implementation in isolation.

4. Teachers and administrators reported using a wide range of supplemental curriculum resources alongside their green-rated HQIRs. These supplementation materials could be examined more closely to assess the extent to which they provide a unique benefit to teachers or students.

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Appendix A: Detailed Methodology

Appendix A: 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 Lexia Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (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 and two exploratory research questions that together seek to help the Kentucky Department of Education (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 Questions 1–3 were addressed in the first year of the evaluation; the third research question, which explored the extent to which each element of LETRS influenced educators, was thoroughly addressed in Year 1. For the final year of this evaluation, ICF continued to explore Research Questions 1, 2, and 4 and added two additional exploratory 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?

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

Research Question 3 (addressed entirely in Year 1): 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 (addressed entirely in Year 2): When the literacy coaching model is established, to what extent are the school-based coaches effective in supporting and achieving positive literacy outcomes?

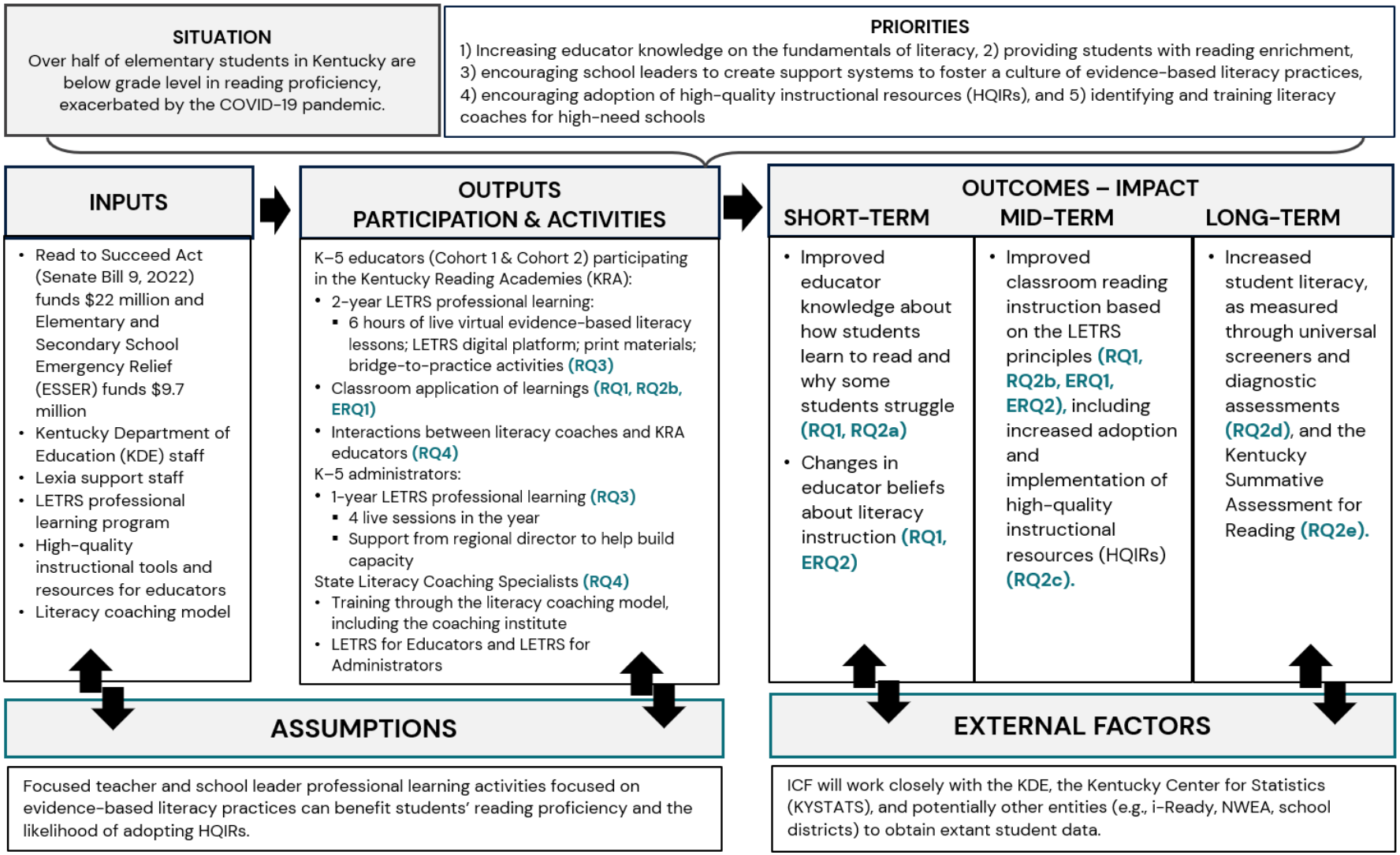
Exploratory Research Question 1: What organizational/community contextual factors affect participation in the reading academies and implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies? To what extent does district support/buy-in influence positive literacy outcomes for teachers and students?

Exploratory Research Question 2: To what extent does cohort participation impact literacy skills and beliefs?

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 A.1). The Kentucky Reading Academies program, supported by school-based coaching through State Literacy Coaching Specialists (SLCSs), 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 (HQIRs; Intermediate-Term Outcomes), which will in turn positively impact student literacy in Grades K–3 (Long-Term Outcomes).

Exhibit A.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, support staff (e.g., reading interventionists), State Literacy Coaching Specialists, and district- and school-based administrators. 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 second year of this evaluation consisted of five types of data sources:

1. Two rounds of surveys with teachers and administrators participating in the LETRS professional learning program and a single survey with teachers participating in the coaching model with State Literacy Coaching Specialists;
2. Fall focus groups with teachers participating in the LETRS professional learning program with a focus on implementation of LETRS in classroom practice and spring focus groups with teachers, administrators, and coaches participating in the coaching model with State Literacy Coaching Specialists;
3. Extant data from the Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) and i-Ready, including de-identified demographic and academic data from both teachers and students;
4. Extant data from TNTP that documents a subset of state literacy support coach observations; and
5. In-depth case studies at three schools, which included classroom observations of teachers from Cohort 1 of LETRS, focus groups with literacy-focused instructional staff, interviews with school and district administration, and a review of relevant extant data about each school.

Instrument Design and Development

Instruments were developed in September 2024 and in January 2025. All instruments were reviewed by the KDE and reviewed and approved by ICF's Institutional Review Board and can be found in Appendix B.

Teacher Surveys

The teacher surveys consisted of six sections: 1) background characteristics; 2) Teacher Knowledge of Early Literacy Skills (TKELS; Folsom et al., 2017); 3) Teacher Beliefs Survey (TBS; Bills, 2020); 4) classroom implementation, including self-reported LETRS progress and use of LETRS materials; and 5) adoption and implementation of high-quality instructional resources (HQIRs).

Coached teachers also received a survey about the effectiveness of coaching support. The TKELS and the TBS are validated instruments, while the rest of the survey was developed by ICF staff. Not all components were included in the fall and spring surveys; included components are outlined in Exhibit A.2.

Exhibit A.2. Components and Schedule of the Teacher Survey

Cohorts	Fall 2024	Spring 2025
Cohort 1	-	Classroom practice (including implementing learning from LETRS, and support at Tiers 1, 2, and 3) HQIR adoption and implementation Effectiveness of coaching support
Cohort 2	-	Literacy Skills (TKELS) Literacy Beliefs (TBS) Classroom practice (including implementing learning from LETRS, and support at Tiers 1, 2, and 3) HQIR adoption and implementation Effectiveness of coaching support
Cohort 3	Literacy Skills (TKELS) Literacy Beliefs (TBS) HQIR adoption and implementation	Literacy Skills (TKELS) Literacy Beliefs (TBS) Classroom practice (including implementing learning from LETRS, and support at Tiers 1, 2, and 3) HQIR adoption and implementation Effectiveness of coaching support

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 with 1 - *Strongly disagree* to 6 - *Strongly agree*. The TBS consists of 7 code-based items involving beliefs about the phonics approach (e.g., Poor phonemic awareness contributes to early reading failure); 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 the word out.); and 5 neutral items that 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

In the second year of evaluation, ICF conducted eight virtual focus groups and four interviews across fall 2024 and spring 2025 (Exhibit A.3). The goals of these virtual focus groups and interviews was to understand the extent to which Cohort 1 teachers are implementing their LETRS

learning into classroom practice; how instructional staff (including reading interventionists, specialists, and special education teachers) are providing targeted supports at Tiers 1, 2, and 3; administrator perspectives of supporting evidence-based literacy instruction; and how coaching support is perceived. In addition to virtual focus groups, additional focus groups and interviews were conducted with staff at sites selected for the case studies (see section on Case Studies below for additional details).

Exhibit A.3. Components of the Virtual Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

Fall 2024	Spring 2025
2 groups of Cohort 1 educators on implementation post-LETRS	**1 group** of administrators about implementation at their schools/districts, with a focus on the extent to which the full package (e.g., HQIR, LETRs, coaching) is making a difference
2 groups of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 reading specialists/interventionists to understand their experiences with LETRS, the extent to which it is shifting their knowledge/beliefs, and how it is supporting their practice **2 group** of special education teachers (from Cohorts 1 & 2) to understand targeted supports through the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework; will sample inclusion and self-contained teachers	**2 separate interviews** of non-LETRS teachers who are receiving coaching **2 separate interviews** of educators with LETRS participation (Cohort 1, Cohort 2, and/or Cohort 3) who are also receiving coaching
–	**1 group** of State Literacy Coaching Specialists (SLCSs) on their role, involvement, and success stories

Case Studies

ICF conducted three case studies with schools that had fully invested in the reading academies program and structured literacy. ICF worked with the KDE to identify potential case study sites, prioritizing those with all components of the reading academies and trying to maximize diversity of school locations, demographics, and literacy experiences. These case studies included the following methods:

1. Observations of classrooms of Cohort 1 teacher to capture implementation post-LETRS completion. 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;

2. On-site, in-person focus groups and interviews with administrators and school educators (number of groups varied by site, but included no less than 1 focus group and 2 interviews);
3. On-site or virtual focus groups with district-level staff for each site;
4. Additional survey analysis of district participants; and
5. Review of additional materials (e.g., recruitment materials, learning community agendas, staff meeting notes, etc.).

Case study focus group protocols were developed to reflect the evaluation research questions, with a particular emphasis on Exploratory Research Question 1 as well as 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 was determined by examining two different student assessments:

1. The Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA), specifically the content area assessment for reading (KDE, 2025). 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).
2. i-Ready Diagnostic Reading Assessments, administered by Curriculum Associates. This series of formative assessments is typically administered to students in kindergarten through Grade 5—first in the fall to establish a beginning-of-year baseline, then again in the winter and spring to assess progress in overall reading ability as well as specific dimensions of literacy skills (e.g., phonological awareness, comprehension, vocabulary, etc.). This assessment is utilized only in select districts across Kentucky.

Data Collection

This evaluation included two rounds of data collection, with teacher surveys and focus groups occurring in fall 2024 and spring 2025. On-site case study data collection took place only in the spring of 2025. Student assessment data was collected from the 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 spring administrations.

Sampling Approaches

Focus Group Participants

For the second year of the evaluation, ICF conducted eight virtual focus groups and four individual interviews across fall 2024 and spring 2025. The primary goals of these focus groups were to explore:

1. How Cohort 1 teachers are implementing their LETRS learning in classroom practice;
2. The ways instructional staff—including reading interventionists, specialists, and special education teachers—are providing targeted supports across Tiers 1, 2, and 3;
3. Administrator perspectives on supporting evidence-based literacy instruction; and
4. Perceptions of coaching support.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify participants who could provide relevant insights aligned with these goals. This approach allowed the evaluation team to intentionally select individuals based on their roles, experiences, and participation in key program components. Finally, this approach ensured that participants represented a range of perspectives and experiences critical to understanding the implementation and impact of the reading academies' literacy initiatives.

Fall 2024 Focus Groups Included:

1. LETRS Cohort 1 educators to discuss post-training implementation;
2. Reading specialists and interventionists from Cohorts 1 and 2 to share how LETRS has influenced their knowledge, beliefs, and instructional practices;
3. Special education teachers from Cohorts 1 and 2 to examine how they are delivering targeted supports within the MTSS framework.

Spring 2025 Focus Groups Included:

4. Administrators working with State Literacy Coaching Specialists (SLCSs) to reflect on the impact of LETRS implementation and the integration of the full literacy support package (e.g., HQIR, LETRS, coaching);
5. SLCSs to discuss their roles, involvement, and success stories.

Spring 2025 Individual Interviews Included:

6. Educators from any LETRS cohort who are also receiving coaching support; and
7. Non-LETRS educators who are receiving literacy coaching to understand broader coaching impacts.

Case Study Sites

In selecting case study sites across Kentucky, particular attention was given to ensuring representation from across geographic regions, including representation from rural areas, which comprise a significant portion of the state's educational landscape and are often underrepresented in statewide initiatives and narratives (Trinidad & Paperny, 2019). The team developed a matrix to identify potential case study sites based on the following criteria, employing purposive sampling:

1. Full implementation of all components of the reading academies;
2. A high number of participating teachers, including active involvement from school or district administrators;
3. Evidence of incentivized participation strategies to encourage engagement; and
4. Use of a green-rated high-quality instructional resource (HQIR).

These criteria were considered to ensure that selected sites reflect strong, sustainable implementation practices and offer valuable insights into the conditions that support effective, evidence-based literacy instruction.

Participant Recruitment and Data Collection

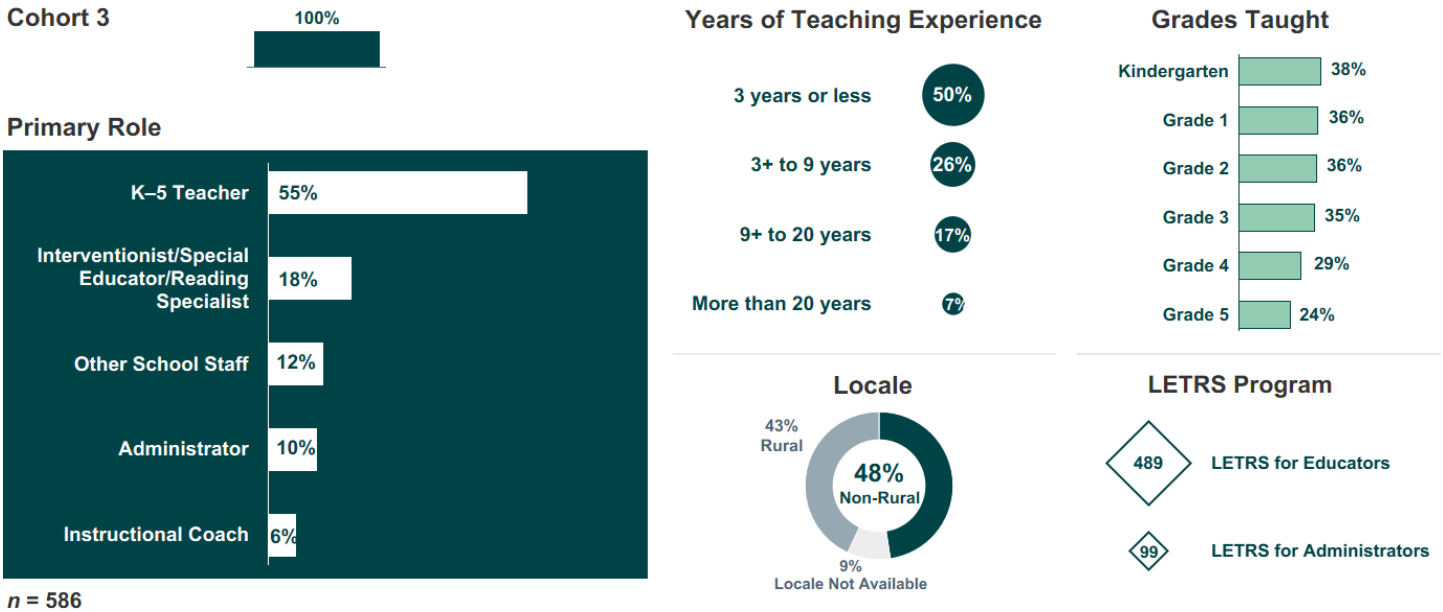
Prior to beginning data collection for this year's evaluation, ICF sent study notifications to district and school administrators informing them of this study and upcoming data collection efforts so that they would know the study was valid.

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 period, 586 Cohort 3 LETRS participants took the survey, which represented 27% of all Cohort 3 participants. Among these respondents, the majority were enrolled in LETRS for Educators (83%), approximately half (50%) had 3 years or less of teaching experience, and the majority were K–5 teachers (55%; Exhibit A.4). Slightly less than half (48%) worked in non-rural schools versus 42% in rural schools.

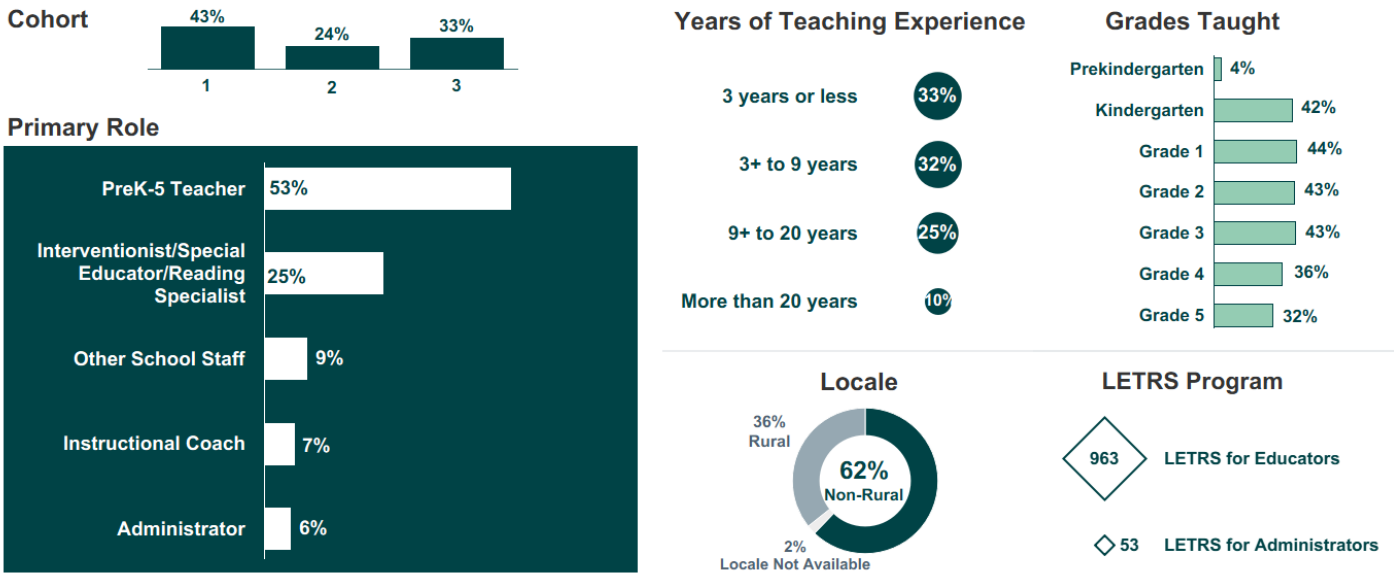
Exhibit A.4. Demographics of Survey Participants in Fall 2024



n = 586

Spring Survey Participants. During spring data collection, 1,059 respondents included 441 Cohort 1 participants, 244 Cohort 2 participants, and 330 Cohort 3 participants. Among these respondents, the majority (62%) worked in non-rural school districts, were PreK–5 teachers (53%), and participated in LETRS for Educators (95%; Exhibit A.5). About a third of respondents indicated they had 3 years or less of teaching experience (33%), and another third had between 3 and 9 years of teaching experience (32%), while 10% of all survey respondents had been in the teaching profession for more than 20 years.

Exhibit A.5. Demographics of Survey Participants in Spring 2025



n = 1,059

In contrast, spring 2025 recruitment faced challenges, with lower-than-expected response rates from teachers and coaches. To support participation, the KDE issued a follow-up email to all coaches and coached educators, informing them of the opportunity to join the focus groups. Despite this effort, participation remained limited. In response, ICF offered individual interview opportunities to both LETRS-trained and non-LETRS educators who worked with a State Literacy Coaching Specialist. This adjustment resulted in four individual interviews, helping to supplement the data collected during the spring cycle.

Fall Focus Groups. During the last week of September and first week of October, 38 participants engaged with ICF staff for a focus group discussion. Individuals were selected through purposive sampling following outreach from the KDE and then follow-up emails by ICF staff with a link to SignUpGenius, which allowed participants to select a date and time that worked best for their schedules. Of these participants, 14 were special educators (Cohorts 1 and 2), 12 were reading interventionists (Cohorts 1 and 2), and 12 were classroom teachers who had completed LETRS as part of Cohort 1.

Spring Focus Groups. During the first 2 weeks of April, two focus groups were held with five State Literacy Coaching Specialists and two administrators. All SLCSs had completed LETRS training, one of the two administrators was a member of LETRS Cohort 1, and the other administrator had planned to enroll in Cohort 4.

Spring Interviews. During the second and third weeks of April, four individual interviews were held. Two participants were LETRS trained and two had not participated in LETRS; all four had worked with a State Literacy Coaching Specialist and had completed a coaching cycle.

Case Study Recruitment and Data Collection

To initiate Year 2 case study recruitment, the KDE distributed a study notification email to school districts. This communication included context about potential outreach from ICF. Following this, ICF sent initial participation requests to district and school administrators who met the sampling criteria. All contacted sites had been pre-approved by the KDE, which also provided ICF with the necessary contact information.

A total of eight schools were contacted. ICF held four informational meetings with selected sites to explain the purpose of the case studies within the broader third-party evaluation. These meetings covered the research team's guiding questions, expectations for participation, and available incentives. All four schools initially agreed to participate; however, one later withdrew due to concerns about overburdening staff already engaged in multiple school initiatives.

With three sites confirmed, ICF team members collaborated with building principals to schedule site visits, including setting dates, times, and visit itineraries. In February, three two-person ICF teams conducted site visits across eastern, western, and northern Kentucky.

Site Descriptions and Data Collection Activities

Eastern Kentucky Site: A K–8 school with just under 300 students.
Data Collection:

1. 1 interview with the building administrator
2. 2 focus groups (educators and district administrators)
3. 1 Grade 4 classroom observation
4. 1 observation debrief with the observed teacher

Western Kentucky Site: A PreK–6 school with approximately 400 students.
Data Collection:

1. 1 interview with the district supervisor
2. 2 focus groups (educators and administrators)
3. 1 combined Grades 3/4 classroom observation
4. 1 observation debrief with the observed teacher

Northern Kentucky Site: A PreK–5 school with just over 500 students.
Data Collection:

1. 2 focus groups (educators, building administrators, and district administrators)
2. 1 Grade 2 classroom observation
3. 1 Grade 1 intervention observation
4. Observation debriefs with the observed teachers

Across all three sites, a total of 24 school-based participants were involved. These included district superintendents, principals, assistant principals, literacy coaches/consultants, literacy lead teachers, interventionists, and classroom teachers.

Secondary Data Collection

During the first year of the evaluation, 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 the 2023–2024 academic year, 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 began during the first year of the evaluation 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 available until this second year of the evaluation. Curriculum Associates was able to provide ICF with data from 10 districts across Kentucky, for the purposes of this evaluation. Nine of those districts included data from at least one LETRS

participant and were included in this evaluation. This data included district- and campus-level characteristics and de-identified student characteristics (e.g., demographics, course enrollment, i-Ready diagnostic data).

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 reported through the teacher surveys, are provided for fall 2024 and spring 2025 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 for 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 vs. non-rural schools), or the distribution of a student body by race/ethnic background. Disaggregating data by subgroups such as these allows 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, perceptions of buy-in with the school’s HQIR, 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.

The use of interviews, focus groups (fall, spring, during site visits), and case studies helped the research team get a full picture of how the reading academies as a comprehensive program was working. Fall focus groups with teachers who had completed LETRS training helped shed light on

how they were applying what they learned in their classrooms. Additional conversations with teachers, administrators, and SLCSs focused on how coaching supported both knowledge-building and the implementation of evidence-based literacy. The three in-depth case studies were especially helpful in answering one of the key exploratory questions of the evaluation: *What organizational/community contextual factors affect participation in the reading academies and implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies? To what extent does district support/buy-in influence positive literacy outcomes for teachers and students?* Through classroom observations and conversations with administration and staff, it became clear that leadership buy-in, access to aligned materials, and time for collaboration made a difference. In schools where administrators were actively involved and supportive, teachers felt more confident and better equipped to use LETRS strategies effectively. By pulling together findings from all of these data sources, the research team was able to identify common themes and build a clearer understanding of what has enabled program success.

Finally, thematic findings were also compared with findings from the Year 1 evaluation as well as data from this year's teacher survey, coached participants survey, and data from KYSTATS and i-Ready to determine alignment or divergence.

Inferential Analysis

Teacher Outcomes

Teacher literacy knowledge and beliefs were assessed using two primary approaches in this year's evaluation. First, cohort comparisons were made at different stages of the LETRS professional learning program—at the beginning, middle, and end—using analysis of variance (ANOVA) for three groups and t-tests for two groups. These analyses provided insight into differences in teacher outcomes between groups, although they did not account for prior performance on the TKELS and TBS measures.

Second, within-cohort comparisons were conducted to examine whether educators in each cohort demonstrated growth on TKELS and TBS. To examine change in literacy knowledge 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.

Given that repeated observations 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 for all three cohorts.

$$Y_{ti} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{10} TIME_{ti} + (\mu\_0i + \mu\_1i)$$

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.* Y_{00} represents the overall intercept as the baseline (i.e., initial time point) mean of the outcome. The terms inside the parentheses represent the random effects at the teacher levels, where μ_{0i} and μ_{1i} represent unexplained variance in the initial status or rate of change, respectively.

Student Outcomes

KSA - Reading

A hierarchical linear modeling (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 2023–2024 and 2022–2023 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 162 teachers, 145 campuses, and 5,582 students were selected for analysis. For Grade 5, a total of 122 teachers, 117 campuses, and 5,955 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):

$$Y_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 DOSAGE_i + \beta_2 SPED_i * DOSAGE_i + \sum_{p=1}^{P} \beta_p X_{pi} + \sum_{q=1}^{Q} \beta_q X_{qj} + \sum_{s=1}^{S} \beta_s X_{sk} + e_k + e_{j(k)} + e_{i(j(k))}$$

where Y_{ijk} refers to the performance of student *i* taught by teacher *j* within campus *k*; β_0 refers to the overall average KSA Reading scale score; β_1 is the main effect of LETRS dosage (1 or 2 years of exposure to any LETRS-participation teacher) on the outcome; and β_2 is the coefficient representing the interaction between a student's special education status and LETRS exposure (which emerged as a significant interaction term of interest after exploratory analyses). 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.

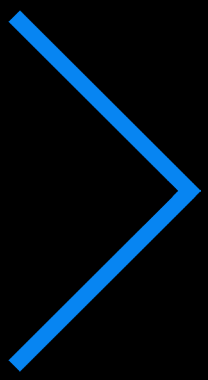
Curriculum Associates – i-Ready Assessments

As described in Section V, a multilevel logistic regression was used to obtain estimates for the effect of Kentucky Reading Academies (KRA) exposure on whether a student sees an increase in their i-Ready placement from the beginning-of-year (BOY) to end-of-year (EOY) in 2023–2024. Prior to the calculation of a treatment effect, KRA-exposed students were matched to demographic peers using propensity score modeling (PSM; with greedy nearest neighbor approach without replacement). This approach was similar to what was employed within the KSA Reading analysis; however, identifying demographic peers for teachers was not feasible given the lack of teacher-specific characteristics in the data. A limited number of student demographic fields were available and adequately populated (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity); prior performance was also included in the PSM procedure, which yielded successfully balanced comparison groups.

In order to be considered in the analytic subset, students must have had both BOY and EOY placement results for the 2023–2024 school year, meet either treatment or control criteria, and have valid demographic and prior performance data. Students in kindergarten through Grade 5 had satisfactory sample sizes for inclusion in the analysis. The equation for the multilevel logistic regression is as follows:

$$Logit(odds_{ij}) = \beta_{00} + \beta_{10}DOSAGE_{ij} + \sum_{p=1}^{P} \beta_{1p}X_{pij} + \sum_{q=1}^{Q} \beta_q X_{qj} + u_{0j}$$

Where $Logit\ (odds_{ij})$ refers to the binary achievement outcome for student *i* within campus *j* (i.e., any advancement in placement level vs no advancement), β_{00} refers to the overall log-odds of any increase in placement, and β_{10} is the main effect of LETRS dosage (1 or 2 years of exposure to any LETRS-participation teacher) on the outcome. β_{1p} represents the association between student characteristic, X_{pij}, and the outcome; β_{0q} represents the association between campus characteristic, X_{qj}, and the outcome. The random variance component, μ_{0j}, estimates the deviation of the campus-specific slopes around the fixed slope, β_{00}.



Appendix B: Instruments

Appendix B: 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 24-25 SY.
3. Please indicate the name of the school in which you are currently working in the 24-25 SY.
4. Were you working in a different school from the one indicated in the 2023-2024 SY?
   a. Yes
   b. No **(*skip Q5and Q6*)**
5. Please indicate the school district in which you worked in the 2023-2024 SY.
6. ***[show Q6 if Yes on Q4 is selected]*** Please indicate the name of the school in which you worked in the 2023-2024 SY.
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 than 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. Please select the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS®) professional learning program you are currently participating in. *(select all that apply)*
    a. LETRS for Educators
    b. LETRS for Administrators

12. Did you participate in the Kentucky Reading Academy in the previous year (23-24 SY)?
    a. Yes
    b. No

13. Please indicate the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) professional learning program you participated in the previous year.

    a. LETRS for Educators
    b. LETRS for Administrators

Section 2: Teacher Knowledge of Early Literacy Skills

Form A

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 one vowel sound
    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 letter sounds 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 sounds 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 **not** phonetically irregular?
    - a. done
    - b. give
    - **c. peach**
    - d. friend

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

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. is practiced with whole words
    b. uses two cueing systems
    c. identifies and manipulates individual sounds
    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: Classroom Practice [Spring Administration Only]

1. Please rate your level of satisfaction with the LETRS professional learning program you completed/are completing.
    a. Strongly dissatisfied
    b. Dissatisfied
    c. Satisfied
    d. Strongly satisfied

2. Have you implemented instructional strategies from the LETRS for Educators PL?
    a. Yes
    b. No

3. Please rate your level of ease in identifying and selecting appropriate instructional strategies from the LETRS for Educators PL in your classroom practice.
    a. Very difficult
    b. Difficult
    c. Neutral
    d. Easy
    e. Very easy

4. Please rate your level of ease in implementing instructional strategies from the LETRS for Educators PL in your classroom practice.
    a. Very difficult
    b. Difficult
    c. Neutral
    d. Easy
    e. Very easy

5. How frequently do you implement instructional strategies from the LETRS in your classroom?
    a. Daily
    b. A few times a week
    c. Once a week
    d. A few times a month
    e. Rarely

6. What challenges have you faced in implementing instructional strategies from LETRS? *(select all that apply)*
    a. Lack of time to plan for implementation
    b. Lack of buy-in/support from school administration.
    c. Difficulty integrating LETRS instructional strategies with the existing curriculum
    d. Other (please describe): _____

7. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements as they relate to your literacy instructional practice.

LETRS PL has...	***Strongly disagree***	***Disagree***	***Agree***	***Strongly agree***	***Not applicable***
a. Enhanced my ability to implement evidence-based practices to improve student literacy outcomes.					
b. Increased my confidence in identifying and implementing					

appropriate literacy instructional strategies needed to improve student reading.					
c. Improved my ability to provide differentiated literacy instruction to accommodate students at Tier 2.					
d. Improved my ability to deliver targeted literacy instruction for students requiring Tier 3 interventions.					
e. Helped me identify appropriate literacy strategies necessary to improve student reading proficiency					
f. Deepened my understanding of the literacy curriculum I teach.					
g. Helped me effectively integrate the school district's literacy curriculum into my instructional practice.					
h. Provided me with the skills to use appropriate progress monitoring tools in my literacy instruction					
i. Deepened my understanding to use data from student reading assessments to tailor instruction					

Section 5: High-Quality Instructional Resource Adoption

8. 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. Great Minds: Wit & Wisdom 2016 *(Grades K-5)*
    g. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: Into Reading 2020 *(Grades K-5)*
    h. Imagine Learning f/k/a LearnZillion: Imagine Learning EL Education K-5 Language Arts 2019 *(Grades K-5)*
    i. Learning A-Z: Foundations A-Z 2023 *(Grades K-2)*
    j. McGraw-Hill Education: Wonders 2020 *(Grades K-5)*
    k. McGraw-Hill Education: Wonders 2023 *(Grades K-5)*
    l. Open Up Resources: EL Education K-5 Language Arts 2017 *(Grades K-5)*
    m. Reading Horizons: Reading Horizons Discovery 2024 *(Grades K-2)*

n. Savvas Learning Company: Savvas Essentials: Foundational Reading 2023 *(Grades K-2)*
o. Savvas Learning Company: myView Literacy 2020 *(Grades K-5)*
p. Savvas Learning Company: ReadyGEN 2016 *(Grades K-5)*
q. William H. Sadlier, Inc.: From Phonics to Reading 2020 *(Grades K-2)*
r. Other (please describe): _____
s. I don't know which HQIR my school district has adopted.

9. 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
    c. I don't know

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

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

12. 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

13. 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.

   _____

Kentucky Reads to Succeed – Survey on the Coaching Framework

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 2024-2025 SY.

3. Please indicate the name of the school in which you are currently working in the 2024-2025 SY.

4. Please select your primary role at your school.
   a. PreK-5 Teacher
   b. Administrator (please specify): _____
   c. Instructional Coach
   d. Interventionist/Special educator/Reading specialist
   e. Other School Staff (please describe): _____

5. 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 than 9 years and 20 years or less
   d. More than 20 years

6. Do you provide reading instruction or support to PreK-5 students?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7. What grade level(s) do you teach or support? (*select all that apply)*
   - Prekindergarten
   - Kindergarten
   - Grade 1
   - Grade 2
   - Grade 3
   - Grade 4
   - Grade 5

8. Did you participate in the Kentucky Reading Academies LETRS professional learning? *(select all that apply)*
   a. Yes, in Cohort 1/Phase 1 (Beginning Fall of 2022)
   b. Yes, in Cohort 2/Phase 2 (Beginning Fall of 2023)
   c. Yes, in Cohort 3/Phase 3 (Beginning Fall of 2024)
   d. No, I did not participate in a LETRS PL.

9. Which Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) professional learning program you are currently participating in or have completed? *(select all that apply)*
   a. LETRS for Educators
   b. LETRS for Administrators

Section 2: Coaching support

10. Are you engaged in a coaching cycle with the State Literacy Coaching Specialist (SLCS) provided by the Kentucky Department of Education?

    a. Yes
    b. No

11. How frequently did you work with the State Literacy Coaching Specialist (SLCS) so far this school year?
    a. Once a month
    b. Once every two weeks
    c. Once a week
    d. More than once a week

12. Please indicate how helpful the various activities with the State Literacy Coaching Specialist (SLCS) were to your classroom practice.

Activities	***Not Applicable***	***Not at all helpful***	***Slightly Helpful***	***Helpful***	***Very Helpful***
a. Setting a developmental goal(s) (i.e., a SMART goal)					
b. Discussion(s) about a progression of action steps					
c. Classroom observations					
d. Participation in PLC(s) or CoPs with SLCS					
e. Other professional learning opportunities					
f. Coach modeling and/or co-teaching					
g. Lesson and/or unit internalization					
h. Mid-cycle check-in					

i. Review data to monitor progress on developmental goal(s)					
j. SLCS feedback of instructional practice					

13. Please rate your level of agreement regarding the following statements as they relate to your interactions with the State Literacy Coaching Specialist (SLCS).

	Not applicable	***Strongly disagree***	***Disagree***	***Agree***	***Strongly agree***
a. My literacy coach collaborated with me to set clear and actionable developmental goals that are aligned to the Kentucky Instructional Practice Guide (IPG).					
b. My literacy coach provided effective support to enhance my teaching practices.					
c. I received constructive feedback from my literacy coach that helped me refine my instructional strategies.					
d. My literacy coach regularly checked in to monitor my progress and adjust support as needed.					
e. My literacy coach facilitated or supported PLCs or CoPs that contributed to my professional growth.					
f. Post-observation discussions with my literacy coach led to meaningful improvements in my teaching.					
g. My literacy coach assisted me in identifying and implementing specific next steps to enhance student learning outcomes.					
h. My literacy coach adjusted their support based on my individual needs and the dynamics of my classroom.					

i. The coaching cycle has positively influenced my instructional practices.					
j. The coaching cycle has positively influenced student literacy development in my classroom.					

Closing remarks/ Wrap-up

Please use this space for any additional comments, questions, or concerns regarding your involvement in the coaching cycle _____

Teacher/Educators Focus Group Protocol Fall 2024

Cohort 1 Educators Post LETRS

BACKGROUND – INTRODUCTION

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 name of your school.
    b) how long you have been an educator and how many years of experience teaching literacy you have.
    c) how long have you been in this school.

2) Please share, if you know, how many other teachers or administrators in your building are finished with or still participating in the LETRS program (any cohort).

3) Please share what HQIR is being used at your school / district and when it was adopted.

REFLECTION OF EXPERIENCE & PERCEIVED READINESS

4) Now that you have completed LETRS professional learning offered through the Kentucky Reading Academies, how would you describe your overall experience as a participant?
    a) **Follow up:** Previous focus groups indicated that it could be difficult to try and implement whilst in the middle of participating in the LETRS program. Do you notice a difference in your ability to implement strategies this year now that you've completed the program?

5) How prepared do you feel to implement the strategies you learned from LETRS into your literacy lessons? Are there any specific concepts that you see yourself needing more support to implement?
    [Probe for: *need of additional support in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc.]*

6) In what ways is your district and/or school supporting classroom teachers with their implementation of learning from LETRS into the classroom?
    [Probe for: administrator support, Communities of Practice/PLCs, grade level or team meetings; logistical support including time off during day to plan, sub coverage, informal mentoring, etc.]

CLASSROOM PRACTICE & IMPLEMENTATION

7) What strategies or practices from LETRS have you already implemented into your *whole-class* literacy instruction? Or, if you have yet to implement, what strategies or practices from LETRS do you see yourself implementing into your *whole-class* literacy instruction?

a) **Follow up:** Are these strategies and practices aligned with or do they differ from the HQIR literacy curriculum?

[*Probe for: examples about phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc. AND congruencies or discrepancies between HQIR and LETRS concepts or strategies]*

8) What strategies or practices from LETRS have you already implemented into your more *targeted*, or supplemental Tier 2 literacy instruction? Or, if you have yet to implement, what strategies or practices from LETRS do you see yourself implementing into your more *targeted*, or supplemental Tier 2 literacy instruction?
   a) **Follow up**: Are these strategies and practices aligned with or do they differ from the HQIR literacy curriculum?

   [*Probe for: responsive and differentiated instructional strategies/support that extend beyond whole group lesson, use of diagnostic assessments to determine need; progress monitoring AND congruencies or discrepancies between HQIR and LETRS concepts or strategies*]

9) What strategies or practices from LETRS have you already implemented into your most intensive, or individualized Tier 3 literacy instruction? Or, if you have yet to implement, what strategies or practices from LETRS do you see yourself implementing into your most intensive, or individualized Tier 3 literacy instruction?
   [Probe for: responsive and individualized instructional strategies/support that extend beyond tier 2 support, use of diagnostic assessments to determine need; progress monitoring]

10) What barriers do you anticipate facing, or have you already faced, when it comes to implementing what you learned from LETRS into your literacy instruction?

PERCEIVED STUDENT IMPACT

11) If applicable, what changes have you seen in your students' literacy progress since you have started incorporating LETRS strategies?
    [*Probe for: specific examples of student literacy progress because of LETRS strategies*]

12) Besides state literacy assessments, in what ways and how often do you track students' literacy progress?
    [*Probe for: literacy assessments/tools, informal observations, etc. AND frequency of progress monitoring*]

13) In what ways has your LETRS training helped you interpret student literacy data?

[*Probe for: ways LETRS helps educators address student literacy data, need for additional supports in data interpretation and next steps, etc.*]

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

14) For those of you with colleagues in the building that have completed or are going through LETRS, how have you been able to collaborate or share ideas around incorporating strategies or concepts from LETRS into your instruction?

15) In what ways, if at all, have you collaborated with other teachers across the district or commonwealth in the LETRS program?
[Probe for: virtual collaboration as well as in-person]

16) In what ways, if at all, have you collaborated or shared your LETRS learning with other teachers NOT in the LETRS program?
[*Probe for: ways in which ideas about LETRS concepts or instructional strategies have been shared with teachers with no LETRS experience*]

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

17) Before we close, what else would you like to share in general or about implementing the strategies you learned from LETRS for Educators or the HQIRs your district adopted?

Teacher/Educators Focus Group Protocol Fall 2024

Cohort 1 & 2 Reading Specialist & Interventionist

BACKGROUND – INTRODUCTION

1) Let's start out with some introductions. Let's go around and have everyone say:
    a) your name, current position, grades you serve, and name of your school.

2) Please type in the chat box the answers to the following:
    a) how long you have been an educator and how many years of experience teaching literacy you have.
    b) how long have you been in this school.
    c) what cohort you are in.

3) Please type in the chat box, if you know, how many other teachers or administrators in your building are finished with or still participating in the LETRS program (any cohort).

4) Please type in the chat box what HQIR is being used at your school / district and when it was adopted.
    a) Follow Up: In what ways does the HQIR used in the district/building *align with* or *deviate from* the concepts or strategies you learned in during LETRS for Educators Professional Learning?

REFLECTION OF EXPERIENCE & PERCEIVED READINESS

5) How would you describe your overall experience as a participant in the LETRS professional learning offered through the Kentucky Reading Academies?

6) How prepared do you feel to implement the strategies you learned for LETRS into your literacy lessons?
    a. If applicable, what strategies or practices have you already tried implementing? [Probe for: specific examples and how it went]
    b. What specific concepts do you see yourself needing more support to implement?

    [Probe for: *need of additional support in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc.]*

7) In what ways is your district and/or school supporting reading and intervention teachers with their implementation of learning from LETRS into the classroom?
    [Probe for: administrator support, Communities of Practice/PLCs, grade level or team meetings; logistical support including time off during day to plan, sub coverage, etc.]

8) What challenges or barriers, if any, have you experienced during your participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies? *[Probe for: issues with time, workload, school support, or anything else specifically related to LETRS PL]*

LITERACY KNOWLEDGE, BELIEFS, AND INSTRUCTION

9) In what ways, if at all, do the concepts and strategies learned in LETRS differ from what you learned when you sought your reading/literacy certification?
[*Probe for: differences in EPP philosophy and instructional approaches]*

10) How do you think your reading instruction has changed since you engaged with the LETRS Professional Learning? In other words, in what ways is the training helping you evolve as a teacher of reading?
[*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]*

11) How has your participation in LETRS, if at all, influenced what you believe are the reasons why students struggle with reading?
[*Probe for: changes in instruction, using reading support programs and other types of intervention*]

CLASSROOM PRACTICE & IMPLEMENTATION

12) What strategies or practices from LETRS have you already implemented into your more *targeted*, or supplemental Tier 2 literacy instruction? Or, if you have yet to implement, what strategies or practices from LETRS do you see yourself implementing into your more *targeted*, or supplemental Tier 2 literacy instruction?
[*Probe for: responsive and differentiated instructional strategies/support that extend beyond whole group lesson, use of diagnostic assessments to determine need; progress monitoring*]

13) What strategies or practices from LETRS have you already implemented into your most *intensive*, or individualized Tier 3 literacy instruction? Or, if you have yet to implement, what strategies or practices from LETRS do you see yourself implementing into your most *intensive*, or individualized Tier 3 literacy instruction?
[*Probe for: responsive and individualized instructional strategies/support that extend beyond tier 2 support, use of diagnostic assessments to determine need; progress monitoring*]

14) What barriers do you anticipate facing, or have you already faced, when it comes to implementing what you learned from LETRS into your literacy instruction?

[*Probe for: personal barriers of time, structural barriers at the school or district level]*

PERCEIVED STUDENT IMPACT

15) If applicable, what changes have you seen in your students' literacy progress since you have started incorporating LETRS strategies?
[*Probe for: how that compares to progress prior to LETRS; specific examples of student literacy progress because of LETRS strategies*]

16) Besides state literacy assessments, in what ways and how often do you track students' literacy progress?
[*Probe for: literacy assessments/tools, informal observations, etc. AND frequency of progress monitoring*]

17) In what ways has your LETRS training helped you interpret student literacy data?
[*Probe for: ways LETRS helps educators address student literacy data, need for additional supports in data interpretation and next steps, etc.*]

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

18) In what ways, if at all, have you collaborated with or supported teachers in the building ***with or without*** LETRS experience with concepts or strategies you learned in the LETRS program?
[*Probe for: specifics on how (if at all) they have provided LETRS support to classroom teachers that has influenced Tier 1 instruction and/or how they have supported Special Education teachers using LETRS training, PD or Training they have been asked to provide to staff*]

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

19) Before we close, what else would you like to share in general or about teaching literacy, HQIRs, the Kentucky Reading Academies program, or the LETRS professional learning?

Teacher/Educators Focus Group Protocol Fall 2024

Cohort 1 & 2 Special Education Teachers

BACKGROUND – INTRODUCTION

1) Let's start out with some introductions. Let's go around and have everyone say:
    a) your name, current position, grades you serve, and name of your school.
2) Please type in the chat box the answers to the following:
    a) how long you have been an educator and how many years of experience teaching literacy you have.
    b) how long have you been in this school.
    c) what cohort you are in.

3) Please type in the chat box, if you know, how many other teachers or administrators in your building are finished with or still participating in the LETRS program (any cohort).

4) Please type in the chat box what HQIR is being used at your school / district and when it was adopted.
    a) Follow Up: In what ways does the HQIR used in the district/building *align with* or *deviate from* the concepts or strategies you learned in during LETRS for Educators Professional Learning?

REFLECTION OF EXPERIENCE & PERCEIVED READINESS

5) How would you describe your overall experience as a participant in the LETRS professional learning offered through the Kentucky Reading Academies?

6) How prepared do you feel to implement the strategies you learned for LETRS into your literacy lessons? Are there any specific concepts that you see yourself needing more support to implement?
[Probe for: *need of additional support in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc.]*

7) In what ways is your district and/or school supporting special educators with their implementation of learning from LETRS into the classroom?
[Probe for: administrator support, Communities of Practice/PLCs, department meetings; logistical support including time off during day to plan, sub coverage, etc.]

8) What challenges or barriers, if any, have you experienced during your participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies?

[Probe for: issues with time, workload, school support, or anything else specifically related to LETRS PL]

LITERACY KNOWLEDGE, BELIEFS, AND INSTRUCTION

9) In what ways did your special education degree program address early literacy instruction for students with disabilities?
    a) **Follow up:** In what ways, if at all, do the concepts and strategies learned in LETRS differ from what you learned when you sought your special education certification? [*Probe for: differences in EPP philosophy and instructional approaches]*

10) How do you think your reading instruction has changed since you engaged with the LETRS Professional Learning? In other words, in what ways is the training helping you evolve as a teacher of reading?
    [*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]*

11) How has your participation in LETRS, if at all, influenced what you believe are the reasons why students struggle with reading?
    [*Probe for: changes in instruction, using reading support programs and other types of intervention*]

CLASSROOM PRACTICE & IMPLEMENTATION

12) What strategies or practices from LETRS have you already implemented into your literacy instruction during *collaboration time*? This could include during co-teaching or when supporting students with IEPs in a general education setting. Or, if you have yet to implement, what strategies or practices from LETRS do you see yourself implementing into your literacy instruction during *collaboration time*?
    [*Probe for: responsive and individualized instructional strategies/support, examples including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc.]*

13) What strategies or practices from LETRS have you already implemented into your literacy instruction during *resource time*? Or, if you have yet to implement, what strategies or practices from LETRS do you see yourself implementing into your literacy instruction during *resource time*?
    [*Probe for: responsive and individualized instructional strategies/support, use of diagnostic assessments to determine need; progress monitoring*]

14) What strategies or practices from LETRS have you already implemented into your literacy instruction that occurs in a *self-contained* setting? Or, if you have yet to implement, into your literacy instruction that occurs in a *self-contained* setting?
[*Probe for: responsive and individualized instructional strategies/support, use of diagnostic assessments to determine need; progress monitoring*]

15) What barriers do you anticipate facing, or have you already faced, when it comes to implementing what you learned from LETRS into your literacy instruction?

PERCEIVED STUDENT IMPACT

16) If applicable, what changes have you seen in your students' literacy progress since you have started incorporating LETRS strategies?
[*Probe for: how this differs from past years; specific examples of student literacy progress because of LETRS strategies*]

17) Besides state literacy assessments, in what ways and how often do you track students' literacy progress?
[*Probe for: literacy assessments/tools, informal observations, etc. AND frequency of progress monitoring*]

18) In what ways has your LETRS training helped you interpret student literacy data?
[*Probe for: ways LETRS helps educators address student literacy data, need for additional supports in data interpretation and next steps, etc.*]

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

19) In what ways, if at all, have you collaborated with or supported classroom teachers in the building ***with or without*** LETRS experience with concepts or strategies you learned in the LETRS program? (This might only apply to inclusion special education teachers)
[*Probe for: specifics on how (if at all) they have provided LETRS support to classroom teachers that has influenced Tier 1 instruction and/or how they have supported Special Education teachers using LETRS training, PD or Training they have been asked to provide to staff*]

20) How has building and district administration supported LETRS implementation?
[Probe for: specific examples]

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

21) Before we close, what else would you like to share in general or about teaching literacy, HQIRs, the Kentucky Reading Academies program, or the LETRS professional learning?

LETRS Cohorts 1-3 for Educators Focus Group Protocol – Spring 2025

BACKGROUND – INTRODUCTION

1) Let's start out with some introductions. Let's go around and have everyone say:
    a) your name and current position, including grades you are teaching
    b) how long you have been an educator and how many years of experience teaching literacy you have,
    c) how long have you been in this school, and
    d) which Cohort of LETRS you are a part of, and
    e) what month you began working with the State Literacy Coaching Specialist.

REFLECTION OF EXPERIENCE & LITERACY KNOWLEDGE

2) What changes have you noticed in your literacy knowledge or instruction that you can associate with your LETRS learning**?**
   [Probe for: Increased teacher knowledge regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle and /or increased teacher capacity to incorporate instructional strategies aligned to their new learning; increased capacity to support colleagues as they incorporate evidence-based instructional strategies into their classroom practice]

3) What strategies or practices from LETRS have you already implemented into your literacy instruction?
   [*Probe for: examples about phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc. Additionally, probe for if these or other strategies were also used in Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction.]*

4) Are there any ways in which teachers in your building are collaborating or sharing ideas about the implementation of LETRS strategies or concepts into classroom instruction?
   [*Probe for: ways in which ideas about LETRS concepts or instructional strategies have been shared with teachers with no LETRS experience*]

5) What barriers, if any, have you encountered when implementing what you learned from LETRS into your literacy instruction?
   [Probe for: structural vs. personal barriers]

COACHING EXPERIENCE

6) What were your initial expectations when you first started with the State Literacy Coaching Specialist?

7) Now I'd like to hear how your State Literacy Coaching Specialist is supporting educators in your building. I'd like us to go around and each share 1) how many teachers the coach in

your building is supporting, 2) how frequently you interact with the coach, and then 3) what activities in a typical month of coaching support look like.

8) Depending on how far along you are with the literacy coach, how would you describe your experience thus far? Or, if you have already completed a full coaching cycle, how would you describe your overall experience?

9) Think about the area of literacy that you are receiving or have received coaching support to align with evidence-based instructional practices. How did coaching help you in this area? *[Probe for: specific ways the coach was able to support the teacher with the area of instruction; how the coaching cycle supported this learning; perceived effectiveness of the coaching support]*

10) What changes have you noticed in your overall literacy knowledge or instruction that you can associate with your school-based literacy coaching?
[Probe for: Increased teacher knowledge regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle and /or increased teacher capacity to incorporate instructional strategies aligned to their new learning; increased capacity to support colleagues as they incorporate evidence-based instructional strategies into their classroom practice]

11) What specific strategies or practices learned during the coaching cycle <u>have you already implemented</u> into your literacy instruction?
[*Probe for: specific examples of strategies or practices that relate to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc. Additionally, probe for if these or other strategies were also used in Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction.]*

12) How, if at all, has your State Literacy Coaching Specialist helped support you in implementing LETRS strategies or practices?

13) What phases of the coaching cycle – for example, goal setting, learning supports like PLCs or co-teaching, mid-cycle check-ins, or feedback like observation debriefs – which of those phases have you found to be the most helpful?
[Probe for: what phases were the most helpful: Goal Setting and Planning (including backwards mapping and action steps), Learning Supports, Feedback and Practice, Mid-Cycle Check-Ins]

<u>CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT IMPACTED PARTICIPATION & IMPLEMENTATION</u>

14) In what ways has your school or district supported teachers with their participation in coaching from a State Literacy Coaching Specialist or implementation of learning from coaching sessions into the classroom?
[Probe for: administrator support, Communities of Practice/PLCs, grade level or team meetings; logistical support including time off during day to plan with the coach, sub coverage, etc.]

15) What barriers, if any, have you encountered when implementing what you learned during literacy coaching into your literacy instruction?
[Probe for: structural vs. personal barriers]

16) How prepared did you feel to implement the strategies you learned from the State Literacy Coaching Specialist into your literacy instruction? Are there any specific concepts that you see yourself needing more support to implement?
[Probe for: need of additional support in any of the following instructional areas, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc.]

17) In what ways has the State Literacy Coaching Specialist supported your school's literacy initiatives, including LETRS implementation, HQIR implementation, or other efforts?

HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES (HQIRS).

18) What HQIR was selected by your district? Overall, how have teachers in your school responded to the new instructional resources?
[Probe for: any reactions to the HQIR mandate]

19) What role, if any, has your State Literacy Coaching Specialist played in helping you to implement the new HQIR for reading?
[*Probe for: congruencies or discrepancies between HQIR and evidence-based literacy instruction learned during coaching sessions, including concepts or strategies]*

20) What impact do you feel the HQIR has had on student literacy outcomes for students in your school so far?
[Probe for: any data or observations that highlight improvements or areas needing further attention]

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

21) Before we close, what else would you like to share in general or about the Kentucky Reading Academies, literacy coaching, or the HQIRs your district adopted?

Non-LETRS for Educators Focus Group Protocol - Spring 2025

BACKGROUND – INTRODUCTION

1) Let's start out with some introductions. Let's go around and have everyone say:
    a) your name and school, including grade(s) you teach
    b) how long you have been an educator and how long have you been in this school
    c) how many years of experience teaching literacy you have
    d) what month you began working with the State Literacy Coaching Specialist provided by KDE

REFLECTION OF EXPERIENCE & LITERACY KNOWLEDGE

2) What were your initial expectations when you first started with the State Literacy Coaching Specialist?

3) Now I'd like to hear how your State Literacy Coaching Specialist is supporting educators in your building. I'd like us to go around and each share 1) how many teachers the coach in your building is supporting, 2) how frequently you interact with the coach, and then 3) what activities in a typical month of coaching support look like.

4) Depending on how far along you are with your literacy coach, how would you describe your experience thus far? Or, if you have already completed a full coaching cycle, how would you describe your overall experience?

5) Think about the area of literacy that you are receiving or have received coaching support to align with evidence-based instructional practices. How did coaching help you in this area?
[Probe for: specific ways the coach was able to support the teacher with the area of instruction; how the coaching cycle supported this learning; perceived effectiveness of the coaching support]

6) What changes have you noticed in your overall literacy knowledge or instruction that you can associate with your State Literacy Coaching Specialist?
[Probe for: Increased teacher knowledge regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle and /or increased teacher capacity to incorporate instructional strategies aligned to their new learning; increased capacity to support colleagues as they incorporate evidence-based instructional strategies into their classroom practice]

7) What specific strategies or practices learned during the coaching cycle have you already implemented into your literacy instruction?
[*Probe for: specific examples of strategies or practices that relate to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic*

assessments, etc. Additionally, probe for if these or other strategies were also used in Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction.]

8) What phases of the coaching cycle – for example, goal setting, learning supports like PLCs or co-teaching, mid-cycle check-ins, or feedback like observation debriefs – which of those phases have you found to be the most helpful?
[Probe for: what phases were the most helpful: Goal Setting and Planning (including backwards mapping and action steps), Learning Supports, Feedback and Practice, Mid-Cycle Check-Ins]

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT IMPACTED PARTICIPATION & IMPLEMENTATION

9) In what ways has your school or district supported teachers with their participation coaching from a State Literacy Coaching Specialist or in implementation of learning from coaching sessions into the classroom?
[Probe for: administrator support, Communities of Practice/PLCs, grade level or team meetings; logistical support including time off during day to plan with the coach, sub coverage, etc.]

10) What barriers, if any, have you encountered when implementing what you learned during literacy coaching into your literacy instruction?
[Probe for: structural vs. personal barriers]

11) How prepared do you feel to implement the strategies you learned from the State Literacy Coaching Specialist into your literacy instruction? Are there any specific concepts that you see yourself needing more support to implement?
[Probe for: need of additional support in any of the following instructional areas, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc.]

HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES (HQIRS)

12) What HQIR was selected by your district? Overall, how have teachers in your school responded to the new instructional resources?
[Probe for: any reactions to the HQIR mandate]

13) What ongoing support or professional development has been provided in your school to ensure the successful implementation of these resources?
[Probe for: any support given by the school-based literacy coach, especially within the context of the coaching cycle]

14) What impact do you feel the HQIR has had on student literacy outcomes for students in your school so far?
[Probe for: any data or observations that highlight improvements or areas needing further attention]

15) What role, if any, has your State Literacy Coaching Specialist played in helping you to implement the new HQIR for reading?
[*Probe for: congruencies or discrepancies between HQIR and evidence-based literacy instruction learned during coaching sessions, including concepts or strategies]*

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

16) Before we close, what else would you like to share in general or about the literacy coaching or the HQIRs your district adopted?

School-Based Administrator Focus Group Protocol - Spring 2025

BACKGROUND – INTRODUCTION

1) Let's start out with some introductions. Please state:
   a) your name, current position, and school
   b) how long you have been in education and, how long have you been an administrator in this school.
   c) if any, how many years of experience teaching literacy you have.
   d) if you have participated in LETRS for Educators or LETRS for Administrators and which Cohort you were part of.
   [Probe for: which one – for LETRS for Educators or LETRS for Administrators]

REFLECTION OF EXPERIENCE & LITERACY KNOWLEDGE

2) Depending on how far you are in your LETRS coursework, how would you describe your overall experience as a participant? Or, if you have already completed LETRS, how would you describe your overall experience as a participant?

3) What changes have you noticed in your own literacy knowledge that you can associate with LETRS learning?
   [Probe for: Increased knowledge regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle and /or increased ability to discuss literacy, increased capacity to support teachers as they incorporate LETRS instructional strategies into their classroom practice]

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT IMPACTED PARTICIPATION & IMPLEMENTATION

4) In what ways have you, as an administrator, supported teachers with their participation in LETRS or implementation of learning from LETRS into the classroom?
   [Probe for: encouragement to participate; logistical support including time off during day to plan, sub coverage, informal mentoring, etc.; targeted instructional support (if LETRS participant), establishment of Communities of Practice/PLCs, directives to discuss LETRS during grade level or team meetings;]

5) In what ways has your district supported teachers with their participation in LETRS or implementation of learning from LETRS into the classroom?
   [Probe for: encouragement to participate; stipend or rank-change offered for participation/completion; district deployment of any additional personnel (e.g., district-level literacy coaches, funds for substitute teachers brought in to cover for teachers during LETRS training, etc.), funds for technologies (e.g. laptops, iPads, 1:1 devices, etc.), or any additional materials or funds allocated to support implementation (e.g. HQIRs, classroom materials to support students' LETRS learning)]

6) How, if at all, have teachers been able to collaborate or share ideas about the implementation of LETRS strategies into classroom instruction?
    a) In what ways have you or district administrators been able to initiate or support this collaboration?
    [*Probe for: ways in which ideas about LETRS concepts or instructional strategies have been shared with teachers with no LETRS experience or between LETRS trained instructional staff*]

7) As far as you know, what barriers have educators encountered when implementing what they learned from LETRS into their literacy instruction?

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

8) When were educators at your school first able to begin implementing what they learned from LETRS into their classroom instruction?

9) What strategies or practices from LETRS have you observed being implemented into literacy instruction at your school?
[Probe for: observed examples about phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc.]

10) What impact have these strategies or practices from LETRS had on student literacy outcomes so far?
[Probe for: any data or observations that highlight improvements or areas needing further attention]

11) How do you perceive the strategies and practices mentioned above align with, or differ from, the HQIR literacy curriculum chosen for your school?
[*Probe for: congruencies or discrepancies between HQIR and LETRS concepts or strategies]*

12) As far as you know, what barriers have educators encountered when implementing what they learned from LETRS into their literacy instruction?

HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES (HQIRS)

13) Describe the process your district followed to adopt high-quality instructional resources (HQIRs) for reading and writing.
[Probe for: key steps and who was involved in the decision-making process; length of process; support from KDE resources; make sure to record the HQIR that was chosen]

14) How have teachers responded to the new instructional resources?

[Probe for: reactions to the HQIR mandate]

15) What ongoing support or professional development has been provided to ensure the successful implementation of these resources?

16) What impact has the new HQIR had on student literacy outcomes so far?
[Probe for: any data or observations that highlight improvements or areas needing further attention]

COACHING

17) How has the State Literacy Coaching Specialist supported your school's literacy initiatives, particularly the implementation of the HQIR for reading at the Tier 1 level?
[Probe for: specific examples of how the strategies or interventions they have helped teachers implement have impacted teaching practices and student learning; support provided that aligns with district selected HQIR]

18) Thinking broadly, to what extent has the State Literacy Coaching Specialist contributed to increasing teacher knowledge about how students learn to read and why some students struggle, perhaps through PLCs or Communities of Practice?
[Probe for: specific examples of professional development or training sessions that have been particularly impactful]

19) At a more individual level, in what ways have you seen teachers improve in their teaching practices or instructional strategies as a result of coaching support? Do you have any particular success stories you can share?

20) In what ways have you seen the State Literacy Coaching Specialist contribute to achieving measurable improvements in student literacy skills at your school?
[Probe for: specific data or noticeable changes in literacy performance that can be attributed to support from the school-based literacy coach]

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

21) Before we close, what else would you like to share in general or about LETRS for Educators (or, if applicable, LETRS for Administrators), coaching, or the HQIRs your district adopted?

State Literacy Coaching Specialists Focus Group Protocol - Spring 2025

BACKGROUND – INTRODUCTION

1) Let's start out with some introductions. Let's go around and have everyone say:
    a) your name and school(s), including grades you are supporting
    b) how long you have been an educator and how many years of experience teaching literacy you have,
    c) how long have you been in this school and how many teachers you are coaching, and
    d) whether or not you completed LETRS for educators.

REFLECTION OF EXPERIENCE WITH COACHING

2) What were your initial expectations when you first started working with teachers as a State Literacy Coaching Specialist? To what extent have those expectations been met?

3) Thus far, how would you describe your overall experience as a State Literacy Coaching Specialist?

4) Which of the coaching activities – for example, goal setting, classroom observations, mid-cycle check-ins – have you found to be the most beneficial to teachers?

5) Are there any coaching activities that have not seemed that impactful or beneficial to teachers?

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT IMPACTED PARTICIPATION & IMPLEMENTATION

6) In what ways has the school that you are working in supported you and the teachers you work with during their participation in literacy coaching or implementation of learning from coaching into the classroom?
[Probe for: administrator support, Communities of Practice/PLCs with coach, grade level or team meetings that include coach; logistical support including time off during day to plan with the coach, sub coverage, etc.]

7) In what ways has the district that you are working in supported you and the teachers you work with in their participation in literacy coaching or implementation of learning from coaching sessions into the classroom?
[Probe for: incentives; buy-in]

8) Across the teachers that you support through coaching, are there any factors or characteristics that seem to contribute to greater success in accomplishing the goals that are set?
[Probe for: internal motivation; involvement in LETRS; supportive school environment]

9) What barriers, if any, have you encountered when coaching teachers?
[Probe for: structural vs. personal barriers; completion of any steps in the coaching cycle]

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF LITERACY COACHING

10) What changes have you noticed in teachers' overall literacy knowledge that you can associate with your coaching?
[Probe for: Increased teacher knowledge regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle; increased capacity to support colleagues as they incorporate evidence-based instructional strategies into their classroom practice]

11) In what ways have you seen teachers improve in their teaching practices or instructional strategies as a result of your coaching support? Do you have any particular success stories you can share?
    a) Do any of these strategies or practices come directly from LETRS?
[*Probe for: specific examples observed related to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc.]*

12) How do you think the support you provide as a literacy coach has contributed to positive literacy outcomes *from students* at your school? Do you have any particular success stories you can share?
[Probe for: specific data or noticeable changes in literacy performance that can be attributed to support from the school-based literacy coach]

13) In what ways does the support you provide as literacy coach also support the school's literacy initiatives, including the implementation of district-selected high-quality instructional resources (HQIRs) for reading at Tier 1?
[Probe for: specific examples of how the evidence-based strategies they have helped teachers implement have impacted teaching practices and student learning; support provided that aligns with district selected HQIR]

HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES (HQIRS)

14) Have you been a part of providing ongoing support or professional development to teachers in your school to ensure the successful implementation of these resources?
[Probe for: support and professional development being provided by the literacy coach]

15) From your perspective, how have teachers in your school responded to the new instructional resources?
[Probe for: reactions to the HQIR mandate]

16) From your perspective, what impact has the new HQIR had on student literacy outcomes in students at your school so far?
[Probe for: any data or observations that highlight improvements or areas needing further attention]

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

17) Before we close, what else would you like to share in general or about the literacy coaching model or the HQIRs your district adopted?

Case Study: Teacher & Literacy-Specific Instructional Staff Focus Group Protocol - Spring 2025

BACKGROUND – INTRODUCTION

1) Let's start out with some introductions. Let's go around and have everyone say:
    a) your name and current position, including grades you are teaching
    b) how long you have been an educator and how many years of experience teaching literacy you have,
    c) how long have you been in this school, and
    d) which Cohort of LETRS you are a part of.

REFLECTION OF EXPERIENCE & EDUCATOR KNOWLEDGE

2) Now that you have completed LETRS professional learning offered through the Kentucky Reading Academies, how would you describe your overall experience as a participant?

3) Approximately when did you start implementing what you learned from LETRS into your classroom instruction?

4) How prepared do you feel to implement the strategies you learned from LETRS into your literacy lessons? Are there any specific concepts that you see yourself needing more support to implement?
   [Probe for: *need of additional support in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc.]*

5) What changes have you noticed in your literacy knowledge or instruction that you can associate with your LETRS learning?
   [Probe for: Increased teacher knowledge regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle and /or increased teacher capacity to incorporate instructional strategies aligned to their new learning]

6) In what ways would you say that your classroom instruction differs from other literacy instruction occurring at your school?

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT IMPACTED PARTICIPATION & IMPLEMENTATION

7) In what ways has your school supported teachers with their participation in LETRS or implementation of learning from LETRS into the classroom?
   [Probe for: administrator support, Communities of Practice/PLCs, grade level or team meetings; logistical support including time off during day to plan, sub coverage, informal mentoring, etc.]

8) In what ways has your district supported teachers with their participation in LETRS or implementation of learning from LETRS into the classroom?

9) What barriers, if any, have you encountered when implementing what you learned from LETRS into your literacy instruction?
[Probe for: structural vs. personal barriers]

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

10) What strategies or practices from LETRS have you already implemented into your literacy instruction?
[*Probe for: examples about phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc. Additionally, probe for if these or other strategies were also used in Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction.]*

11) How do the strategies and practices mentioned above align with, or differ from, the HQIR literacy curriculum?
[*Probe for congruencies or discrepancies between HQIR and LETRS concepts or strategies]*

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

12) If applicable, in what ways have school-based literacy coaches supported your LETRS learning and implementation? Note: This will only be asked of coaching sites.

13) How have you been able to collaborate or share ideas around incorporating strategies or concepts from LETRS into your instruction?

14) In what ways, if at all, have you collaborated with other teachers across the district or commonwealth in the LETRS program?
[Probe for: virtual collaboration as well as in-person]

15) In what ways, if at all, have you collaborated or shared your LETRS learning with other teachers NOT in the LETRS program? (e.g., grade-level cohorts, staff trainings, interventionists, etc.)
[*Probe for: ways in which ideas about LETRS concepts or instructional strategies have been shared with teachers with no LETRS experience*]

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

16) Thinking broadly about literacy instruction – both in your classroom as well as lesson planning, collaboration, or professional development – what stands out to you as a success story?

17) Before we close, what else would you like to share in general or about implementing the strategies you learned from LETRS for Educators or the HQIRs your district adopted?

Case Study: Principal Interview Protocol – Spring 2025

BACKGROUND – INTRODUCTION

1) Let's start out with some introductions. Please state:
    a) your name, current position
    b) how long you have been in education and, how long have you been an administrator in this school.
    c) if any, how many years of experience teaching literacy you have.
    d) if you have participated in LETRS for Educators or LETRS for Administrators and which Cohort you were part of.

2) Before we get into specific questions, could you give me an idea of what some of the strengths and weaknesses of literacy instruction are or have been at your school?

REFLECTION OF EXPERIENCE & LITERACY KNOWLEDGE

3) Based on how far you are in your LETRS coursework, how would you describe your overall experience as a participant?
    a) **If Relevant:** Now that you have completed LETRS coursework, how would you describe your overall experience as a participant?

4) What changes have you noticed in your own literacy knowledge that you can associate with LETRS learning?
    [Probe for: Increased knowledge regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle and /or increased ability to discuss literacy, increased capacity to support teachers as they incorporate LETRS strategies into their classroom practice]

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT IMPACTED LETRS PARTICIPATION & IMPLEMENTATION

5) In what ways have you, as an administrator, supported teachers with their participation in LETRS or implementation of learning from LETRS into the classroom?
    [Probe for: encouragement to participate; logistical support including time off during day to plan, sub coverage, informal mentoring, etc.; targeted instructional support (if LETRS participant), establishment of Communities of Practice/PLCs, directives to discuss LETRS during grade level or team meetings;]

6) In what ways has your district supported teachers with their participation in LETRS or implementation of learning from LETRS into the classroom?
    [Probe for: encouragement to participate; stipend or rank-change offered for participation/completion; district deployment of any additional personnel (e.g., district-level literacy coaches, funds for substitute teachers brought in to cover for teachers during

LETRS training, etc.), funds for technologies, or any additional materials or funds allocated to support implementation]

7) As far as you know, what barriers have educators encountered when implementing what they learned from LETRS into their literacy instruction?

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

8) When were educators at [name of case study school] first able to begin implementing what they learned from LETRS into their classroom instruction?

9) What strategies or practices from LETRS have you observed being implemented into literacy instruction at [name of the case study school]?
[Probe for: observed examples about phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc.]

10) How do you perceive the strategies and practices mentioned above align with, or differ from, the HQIR literacy curriculum chosen for your school?
[*Probe for: congruencies or discrepancies between HQIR and LETRS concepts or strategies]*

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

11) In what ways have you supported teacher collaboration or the sharing of ideas about the implementation of LETRS strategies or concepts into classroom instruction?

12) If applicable, in what ways have you observed school-based literacy coaches supporting LETRS learning and implementation?

13) In what ways, if at all, are you aware of educators with LETRS experience collaborating or sharing LETRS learning with other teachers NOT in the LETRS program? [*Probe for: ways in which ideas about LETRS concepts or instructional strategies have been shared with teachers with no LETRS experience*]

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

14) Thinking broadly about literacy instruction in your school, particularly among those who have gone through or are completing LETRS training, what stands out to you as a success story?
[*Probe for: differences between LETRS and non-LETRS participants; if this success seems common or unique to this school*]

15) Before we close, what else would you like to share in general or about LETRS for Educators (or, if applicable, LETRS for Administrators) or the HQIRs your district adopted?

Case Study: District Administrator Interview Protocol - Spring 2025

BACKGROUND – INTRODUCTION

1) Let's start out with an introduction. Please indicate:
    a) your name, current position.
    b) how long you have been in education and how long have you been an administrator in this district.
    c) if any, how many years of experience teaching literacy you have.
    d) if you have participated in LETRS for Educators or LETRS for Administrators. If yes, please also indicate what cohort you joined.
    [Probe for: which one – for LETRS for Educators or LETRS for Administrators or both]

2) So today we're talking about [name of elementary school]. Before we get into specific questions, could you give me a high-level overview of what makes that school unique compared with other schools in your district, particularly around literacy instruction, but more broadly is helpful, too.

3) In a typical month, how often do you interact with administrators within [name of the case study school]?
    a) What about individual educators, interventionists, or coaches within [name of case study school]?
    b) Are those interactions and the frequency of those interactions the same or different from how you interact with other schools within this district?

REFLECTION OF EXPERIENCE & LITERACY KNOWLEDGE

4) Based on how far you are in your LETRS coursework, how would you describe your overall experience as a participant?
    a) Now that you have completed LETRS coursework, how would you describe your overall experience as a participant?

5) What changes have you noticed in your own literacy knowledge that you can associate with LETRS learning?
    [Probe for: Increased knowledge regarding how students learn to read and why some students struggle and /or increased ability to discuss literacy, increased capacity to support district personnel as they incorporate LETRS instructional strategies into classroom practice]

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT IMPACTED LETRS PARTICIPATION & IMPLEMENTATION

6) As far as you know, in what ways has the school level administration at [name of the case study school] supported teachers with their participation in LETRS or implementation of learning from LETRS into the classroom?
[Probe for: encouraged participation; logistical support including time off during day to plan, sub coverage, informal mentoring, etc.; targeted instructional support (if LETRS participant), establishment of Communities of Practice/PLCs, directives to discuss LETRS during grade level or team meetings;]

7) In what ways has your district supported principals and/or teachers at [name of the case study school] with their participation in LETRS or implementation of learning from LETRS into the classroom?
[Probe for: district deployment of any additional personnel, incentives or rank-change opportunities for participation/completion; funds for technologies, or any additional materials or funds allocated to support implementation (e.g., HQIRs, classroom materials to support students' LETRS learning)]

8) In what ways, if any, has or does the literacy support that the district provided to [name of the case study school] differ from the literacy support the district provides to other schools within the district?
    a) Are there any elements of literacy instruction or buy-in related to the Kentucky's new reading initiatives that seem unique to you at [name of elementary school] compared with other schools in your district?
    [Probe for: teaching experience, overall participation in LETRS, supportive community, supportive school admin, etc.]

9) As far as you know, what barriers have educators encountered when implementing what they learned from LETRS into their literacy instruction?
[Probe for: push-back from parents related to new literacy instruction; limited number of LETRS participants in the school; not enough time to incorporate strategies into lesson plans; challenges implementing new curriculum alongside LETRS strategies]

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

10) Do you have a sense about when educators at [name of case study school] were able to begin implementing what they learned from LETRS into their classroom instruction?

11) What strategies or practices from LETRS have you observed, or know are being implemented into literacy instruction at [name of the case study school]?
[Probe for: knowledge of or observed examples about phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, use of screeners and diagnostic assessments, etc.]

12) To what extent do you think that the strategies and practices mentioned above align with, or differ from, the HQIR literacy curriculum chosen for use at [name of the case study school]?
[*Probe for: perceived congruencies or discrepancies between HQIR and LETRS concepts or strategies]*

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

13) Are there ways in which you or other district staff have supported educator collaboration, or the sharing of ideas related to implementing LETRS strategies? Either as [name of case study school] or more broadly across the district.

14) If applicable, in what ways have you observed school-based literacy coaches supporting LETRS learning and implementation at [name of the case study school]?

15) In what ways, if at all, are you aware of principals or educators with LETRS experience collaborating or sharing LETRS learning with other teachers NOT in the LETRS program, either at [name of the case study school] or other schools across the district?
[*Probe for: ways in which ideas about LETRS concepts or instructional strategies have been shared with teachers with no LETRS experience*]

EVALUATION

16) Have you or others in the district conducted any scans or systematic data collection related to the implementation of LETRS learning and how that may be impacting student-, classroom-, or school-level trends or outcomes?
    a) If applicable, what district, or site-level evaluations have been performed relating to the implementation of LETRS learning?

[Probe for: any comparison of student literacy scores in LETRS classrooms vs. non-LETRS classrooms]

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

17) Thinking broadly about literacy instruction in [name of school], particularly among those who have gone through or are completing LETRS training, what stands out to you as a success story?
[*Probe for: differences between LETRS and non-LETRS participants, if this success seems common or unique to this school*]

18) Before we close, what else would you like to share in general or about LETRS for Educators (or, if applicable, LETRS for Administrators) or the HQIRs your district adopted?

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