

## **An Evaluation of How LETRS is Shaping Educator Practices and Student Learning Outcomes**

In 2023, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) partnered with ICF, an independent research firm, to conduct an evaluation aimed at addressing four key research questions. These questions were designed to help the KDE and other stakeholders understand how participation in the Kentucky Reading Academies is shaping educator practices and student learning outcomes.

The evaluation revealed several significant trends. Participants reported gains in knowledge, shifts in beliefs about how students learn to read and the reasons some may struggle, as well as the implementation of new or adapted teaching strategies. Early signs of positive student outcomes were also observed. Each of these trends is further explored in relation to the specific research questions.

For more detailed insights, explore the following documents:

### [Executive Summary](#)

- Evaluation Research Question: When the literacy coaching model is established, to what extent are the school-based coaches effective in supporting and achieving positive literacy outcomes? (Addressed in Year 2 of this evaluation.)

### [Evaluation Report](#)

- Folsom and colleagues (2017) found positive educator and student outcomes for a statewide early literacy professional development initiative involving online modules, in-person workshops, and literacy coaches embedded at high-need schools.
- A 2009 study by Piasta and colleagues found that first-grade teachers' level of understanding of phonology, orthography, and morphology could predict the word-reading gains of first-grade students, with more knowledgeable teachers (i.e., scoring at the 50th percentile or higher) producing students with higher gains than less knowledgeable teachers (i.e., scoring in the lowest 25th percentile).
- The goals for this evaluation are to better understand the extent to which the Kentucky Reading Academies program is meeting its goals of influencing education knowledge, beliefs, and classroom instruction through the LETRS professional learning program and the eventual coaching model. This evaluation will also make recommendations based on the study findings related to the effectiveness of the professional learning and coaching model.
- Classroom practice and instruction were observed during February and March of 2024 using the Coach's Classroom Observation Tool (CCOT) (Folsom et al., 2017) to capture ratings of early literacy skills instruction, student engagement during instruction, and teaching competencies. The 44 observed teachers then completed brief reflections about the observed instruction and the role that LETRS played in their instruction.
- All teachers were assessed as maintaining either medium (34%) or high student engagement (66%) during the observation, defined as having either most or all students actively engaged in a learning activity.
- Observed teachers received high average ratings across each competency, receiving the highest average score for planning and for personal characteristics (see Exhibit 17 below).

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

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

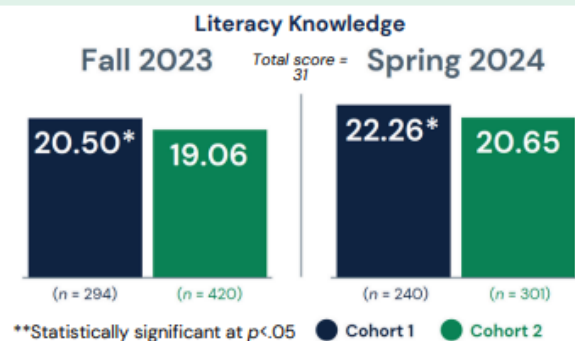
- Both cohorts reported that they needed additional time to reflect on and plan how to fully apply LETRS strategies in their own classrooms. With two cohorts of administrators and the first cohort of teachers now through the LETRS program as of spring 2024, the KDE could explore opportunities to encourage school- or district-level implementation of LETRS practices. The incorporation of coaches into the Kentucky Reading Academies in the 2024–2025 school year may be one important strategy for supporting implementation of evidence-based reading practices in schools and districts across the commonwealth.
- 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.

### Impact on Teacher and Student Outcomes

#### SUMMARY AND FINDINGS: YEAR 1

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

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



### Preliminary Findings Infographic

- Evaluation of the Kentucky Reading Academies:** ICF conducted an external evaluation on whether and how the reading academies initiative has accomplished its goals. Data sources included: Surveys and focus groups of LETRS participants Classroom observations Data from the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA)

