

KENTUCKY READING RESEARCH CENTER

PROVEN PATHS to LITERACY

2025 Annual Report

Our first year: turning evidence into action

A message from our Executive Director



Dr. Terry Scott

The Kentucky Reading Research Center has wrapped up its first year—and what a year it's been. We've built a team of experts, launched meaningful research, and forged relationships with educators across the Commonwealth.

While we remain independent in our research, we have worked hand-in-hand with the Kentucky Department of Education not just as collaborators on paper, but as true partners—meeting regularly, trading ideas, tackling challenges together, and always keeping Kentucky's students at the center of every decision. This kind of partnership is vital; it allows us to keep the rigor of research intact while staying grounded in the real literacy needs of Kentucky's schools.

People have asked, "If we already understand the science of reading and have identified best practices for instruction, why keep researching these concepts?" Our answer is simple: because the work is never really done. Medical researchers advance knowledge by building on prior discoveries; even when they identify an effective treatment, they keep striving to improve it and ultimately eradicate the disease. Similarly, we can't stop investigating literacy once we know some approaches work. Literacy is one of the strongest predictors of success in school, career, and life. To stop short of learning how to continually improve would mean leaving too many students behind.

Our foundation: science, advocacy, and sharing what works

At the heart of the Kentucky Reading Research Center is a commitment to the scientific method and probability. We believe in following the evidence wherever it leads, but we also know that evidence alone can be confusing. For almost every teaching method or strategy, someone can point to a study that says it works. That's why we don't just ask "Is there evidence?" We go deeper.

We look at the full body of research, comparing results across studies, student populations, and classroom settings. We pay attention to the probability that an approach will work; we're looking for the practices with the strongest and most consistent track record of helping students learn to read.

Once high-probability practices have been identified, it's our responsibility not just to publish them, but to advocate for them. Ignoring what the science tells us, or choosing methods with less probable outcomes, is more than just inefficient—it's a missed opportunity for students who can't afford to lose ground.

That's why our mission goes beyond research. We see ourselves as translators of the science of reading, making it accessible, practical, and actionable for Kentucky teachers, administrators, policymakers, and families. By promoting what works—and by being clear about what doesn't—we help ensure that every child in Kentucky has the best possible chance to succeed.

What we've focused on this year

Clearinghouse.
We have begun building an easy-to-use hub that translates research into practice for everyone—teachers, administrators, families, and policymakers. Instead of reinventing the wheel, we focus on the five pillars of literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. But our clearinghouse goes deeper than just posting information. We also offer tutorials, videos, and practical guides that help people put research into action.

Research.
Each year, we will design original studies alongside KDE to answer pressing questions about reading instruction in Kentucky. This year, our focus has been on what



makes literacy teaching effective—not only the "what" (curriculum and critical literacy domains) but also the "how" (explicit instruction, student engagement, practice, and feedback). We have also begun exploring how student behavior intersects with literacy instruction, because teachers consistently tell us that classroom behavior is one of the biggest challenges they face.

Evaluation.
We're required by law to annually evaluate KDE's Read to Achieve program, a competitive grant to support schools in implementing a reading intervention program and evidence-based instructional strategies to support primary students reading at low levels and needing accelerated learning. We have continued the survey approach from previous years to maintain consistency, but we are also piloting new research tools to gather richer insights. These pilot efforts will give us better data to help guide improvements in the future.

Looking ahead

We're proud of the foundation we've built in our first year, and we know the real work is just beginning. Literacy is too important for quick fixes; it demands steady, ongoing attention. We're grateful for our strong partnership with KDE, for the educators across Kentucky who collaborate with us, and for colleagues in the Commonwealth and nationwide who share in this work. The challenge is big, but we're in it for the long haul—and we believe lasting change is within reach.

About the Executive Director

Dr. Terry Scott is a Professor and Distinguished University Scholar in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville. His research interests focus on effective instruction, school-wide prevention systems, classroom management, and scientific research in education. He has worked with students with challenging behaviors across a variety of settings—including all levels of public school. Scott has authored more than 100 publications, including five books, on a variety of issues in the areas of behavioral disorders and behavioral support systems. He has successfully competed for more than $36 million in grant funding over the course of his career.

Kentucky's hub for evidence-based reading research, resources, and results.

The Kentucky Reading Research Center serves as a resource hub and clearinghouse for educators, administrators, policymakers, and families committed to advancing literacy outcomes across the Commonwealth.

Our mission is to make high-quality, research-based information accessible and actionable—whether in the classroom, in policy planning, or at home. From foundational literacy to adolescent, family, and adult education, we offer resources tailored to every stage of reading development.

The Kentucky Reading Research Center is guided by a dedicated team of researchers, an advisory board of nationally known subject matter experts, and highly engaged partners at the Kentucky Department of Education. Together, they ensure the center's work is informed by evidence, shaped by experience, and focused on improving literacy outcomes across the Commonwealth.

Our work spans the full continuum of literacy development—including foundational, adolescent, family, and adult literacy—and is designed to support systemic improvement efforts. By grounding our resources in rigorous research and translating that research into practical application, the Center is playing a vital role in Kentucky's efforts to ensure that every learner has access to high-quality literacy instruction.

We support decision-making and literacy advancement through resources for four distinct audiences.

Educators

Classroom-focused tools and strategies to support instruction aligned with scientifcally-based reading research. These include evidence-based interventions, instructional guides, and professional learning resources tailored to all literacy levels.

Education and Civic Leaders

Synthesized research reviews, policy briefs, and implementation guidance grounded in the science of reading. These resources are designed to inform state and local policy decisions, guide strategic planning, and support the development of effective literacy initiatives at scale.

Parents and Caregivers

Accessible, research-informed materials help families support reading development at home. Our resources include reading strategies, developmental benchmarks, and guidance for engaging with schools and educators to reinforce literacy skills.

Educator Preparation Providers

Research reviews, curricular resources, and professional standards alignment to help teacher preparation programs integrate evidence-based literacy instruction into coursework and clinical practice.



Meet Our Team

The Center's research team brings deep expertise in literacy research, early and adolescent literacy instruction, special education, behavioral disorders, and program evaluation. With a longstanding history of collaboration with educational cooperatives, school districts, and individual schools, the team is well-versed in supporting systems-level improvement across the state.

Our collective work spans the evaluation of reading models, instructional programs, coaching strategies, and high-leverage practices aimed at accelerating K–12 reading proficiency.

Team members have a consistent record of publishing in peer-reviewed journals and securing significant funding through competitive grants and contracts, further demonstrating their capacity to deliver high-quality, impactful research aligned with state education priorities.

Alongside this core expertise, additional members of the team contribute essential skills in classroom observation, project management, outreach, and advocacy. A full list of our team and partners is available at **kyreadingresearch.org/about-us/our-team**.

Dr. Amy Lingo

Founding Director



Before joining Georgia Southern University as Dean of the College of Education in 2024, Lingo spent nearly 20 years at the University of Louisville College of Education and Human Development, where she served in several leadership roles, including Interim Dean from 2019 to 2024. She has numerous peer-reviewed articles, diverse conference presentations, and more than $14 million in grant funding as either PI or co-PI. Her research interests include life-long literacy, positive behavior supports in school settings, academic interventions for students with learning disabilities, and relationships between challenging behaviors and academic achievement.





Dr. Caitlin Criss

Co-Principal Investigator

Criss is an Assistant Professor of Elementary and Special Education at Georgia Southern University. She uses her passion for positive-based interventions to improve classroom culture for students and teachers. She studies the use of feedback and coaching to increase the use of evidence-based practices in the classroom. In addition to her work with the Kentucky Reading Research Center, her current research projects include increasing teachers' use of positive-based classroom management practices through performance feedback, goal-setting, and self-monitoring using virtual reality technology.



Dr. Erin Hogan

Co-Principal Investigator

Hogan is an Assistant Professor of Literacy in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville. She has expertise in literacy instruction and intervention, especially for middle-grade students and emergent bilinguals, as well as effective systems of teacher learning, including professional development and coaching. Her work has been published in journals including *Review of Educational Research, Contemporary Educational Psychology,* and *Teacher Education and Special Education*.



Dr. Todd Whitney

Co-Principal Investigator

Whitney is an Associate Professor in the Department of Special Education, Early Childhood, and Prevention Science at the University of Louisville College of Education and Human Development. He began his educational career teaching elementary students with mild to moderate disabilities in resource and collaboration settings. Whitney has 14 peer-reviewed publications, one book, two book chapters, and 50 conference presentations to his credit. His research areas of interest include evidence-based academic and behavioral interventions for students with disabilities and the effective use of evidence-based instructional practices to increase student engagement.

The Science Behind Our Work



Kentucky fourth-graders who are proficient readers

33%

2024 NAEP Scores

Kentucky adults who read below an eighth-grade level

60%

Appalachian Learning Initiative

What we know about scientifically-based reading research.

The Kentucky Reading Research Center was established to help ensure that every Kentuckian—child, adolescent, or adult—has access to the instruction and support needed to become a skilled reader. Decades of research show that students who do not master foundational reading skills by the end of third grade often struggle long-term with vocabulary, comprehension, and motivation, which limits later academic and career success. These challenges can be prevented when students receive evidence-based instruction and timely intervention.

Despite strong scientific consensus about how reading develops, many students across Kentucky continue to struggle. Research has consistently shown that explicit instruction in areas like phonics, phonemic awareness, and fluency is essential, particularly for students who do not naturally pick up these skills through exposure alone. These principles apply not just to young children but also to adolescents and adults who may need structured support to catch up or build new skills.

Finally, the Center recognizes that literacy development begins at home and continues across a lifetime. That's why our work includes outreach to families and communities, and future initiatives will focus on strengthening family, adult, and workplace literacy. In partnership with the Kentucky Department of Education, the Center is committed to supporting efforts across the Commonwealth to raise literacy outcomes at every stage of life.

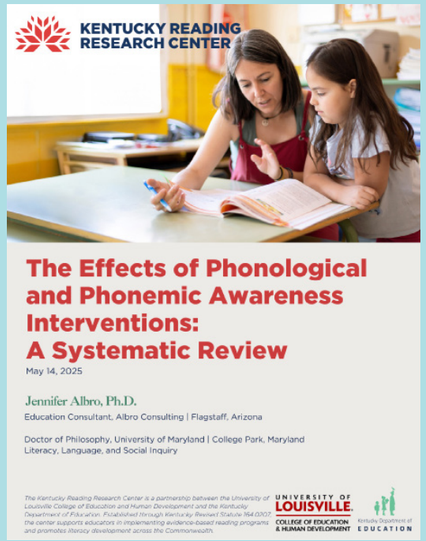
Our research clearinghouse

Curated, research-based resources on literacy instruction.

As part of our mission to improve reading outcomes across the Commonwealth, the Kentucky Reading Research Center is developing a statewide Literacy Research Clearinghouse—designed to be trusted source for evidence-based insights in literacy education. This growing, comprehensive resource translates the last decade of scientifically-based reading research into accessible, actionable guidance for educators, school and district leaders, families, and educator preparation programs.

Housed on our website, the Clearinghouse offers clear, research-backed summaries that distill hundreds of studies on foundational, adolescent, adult, and family literacy. Currently featured are reviews of phonological and phonemic awareness instruction for K–3 students and multisyllabic word reading interventions for adolescent learners. In the coming year, we will expand our offerings to include evidence reviews and resources focused on family and adult literacy—areas often overlooked in national discussions but critical to Kentucky's workforce and educational pipeline. Visit **kyreadingresearch.org/clearinghouse** to access these resources.

By connecting research to practice, this initiative supports more informed decision-making in classrooms and communities. It also provides legislators, civic leaders, and education policymakers with a centralized, credible source for understanding what works in literacy instruction and why. With its continued growth, the Clearinghouse is poised to be a vital resource in the Commonwealth's effort to raise reading achievement at every stage of life.





Evaluation of the Read to Achieve Program



One of the Kentucky Reading Research Center's key activities in its first year was a comprehensive evaluation of the state's Read to Achieve (RTA) grant program. Established in 2005, RTA provides competitive grants to elementary schools to support reading interventions for students in grades K–3 who are reading below grade level. Participating schools are required to implement tiered interventions as part of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), along with a strong core reading program.

The evaluation included a statewide survey of 149 RTA-funded schools, along with in-depth observations and interviews in a representative sample. The study examined school staff perspectives on literacy impact, instructional capacity, and implementation practices, as well as how these factors correlate with student reading outcomes.

Findings from this evaluation offer valuable insights into Kentucky's early literacy efforts and help identify promising practices and areas for improvement in meeting the needs of struggling readers.

Our National Advisory Board

The Kentucky Reading Research Center has recruited a National Advisory Board that includes foremost experts in scientifically based reading research. These distinguished scholars will help guide the Center's efforts to provide accessible resources and insights for educators, families, and policymakers.



Dr. Michael Coyne

Professor of Special Education at the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut, Head of the Department of Educational Psychology, and Co-Director of the Center for Behavioral Education and Research. His research focuses on beginning reading instruction and intervention, multi-tiered systems of support, school-based experimental research, and effective practices for students with learning disabilities. Coyne has directed multiple grants and contracts funded by the U.S. Department of Education and is currently a Principal Investigator of the National Research Network on Integrated MTSS.



Dr. Holly Lane

Irving and Rose Fien Professor of Education at the University of Florida and Director of the University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI). Her research focuses on preventing reading difficulties through effective early literacy instruction, the remediation of literacy skills for students with dyslexia, and methods for helping pre-service and practicing teachers be effective reading teachers and interventionists. Lane has directed many grants to support reading research and the development of teachers and researchers. She is also the author of numerous literacy-related publications, including *UFLI Foundations: An Explicit and Systematic Phonics Program.*



Dr. David Paige

Professor of Literacy and Director of the Jerry L. Johns Literacy Clinic at Northern Illinois University. His research and school-based work in literacy spans the K-12 continuum, where he has worked extensively with schools and districts to implement research-supported instruction. He conducts professional development on reading-related topics, including foundational skills, fluency development, text implementation, critical thinking, and knowledge development. Additionally, he has engaged in numerous school- and district-based reading improvement initiatives in Kentucky and several other states.



Dr. Deborah Reed

Director of the Tennessee Reading Research Center and a Professor at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. She has worked for more than 20 years on technical assistance and research projects exploring and implementing evidence-based literacy instruction and assessment practices. She served at the Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University and the Iowa Reading Research Center at the University of Iowa. Reed also led the production of teacher training modules that have been completed by over 12,000 educators to date and has been awarded more than $25 million from diverse funding sources, including the Institute of Education Sciences, multiple state education agencies, and private foundations.



Dr. Sharon Vaughn

Manuel J. Justiz Endowed Chair in Education and Executive Director of The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk at the University of Texas at Austin. A key stakeholder in developing and empirically validating effective reading instruction across the developmental continuum, she has extensive experience as PI of U.S. Department of Education and National Institute of Child and Human Development-funded research. She has received over $150 million in federal grant funds, including as a grantee in the Institute for Education Sciences Reading for Understanding initiative that was at the forefront of the field's work on the science of reading.



Dr. Jade Wexler

Professor of Special Education in the Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education at the University of Maryland. Her research focuses on improving literacy outcomes for secondary students with reading difficulties and disabilities via teacher professional development and the establishment of sustainable school-wide literacy models. She has been the principal investigator and co-principal investigator on several federally funded adolescent literacy-focused grants totaling approximately $8 million.

How the Kentucky Reading Research Center was established

In 2022, State Sen. Stephen West (R-27), chair of the Senate Education Committee, and State Rep. James Tipton (R-53), chair of the House Education Committee, co-sponsored the Read to Succeed Act, which called for a multifaceted approach to improve reading outcomes for all students. The Kentucky General Assembly responded and appropriated $22 million in funding to support the implementation of the act's comprehensive efforts, among them a statewide reading research center.

During the 2023 Kentucky General Assembly session, Sen. West sponsored Senate Bill 156, which called on Kentucky Department of Education to use a competitive bid process to find the next statewide reading research center.

The Kentucky Department of Education selected the University of Louisville's College of Education and Human Development to create the Kentucky Reading Research Center to support educators in implementing reliable, replicable reading programs and promote literacy development.



State education leaders announced the launch of the Kentucky Reading Research Center in Bourbon County in June 2024. Top row, left to right: Kentucky Commissioner of Education Robbie Fletcher, Sen. Stephen West, Rep. James Tipton, and Bourbon County Superintendent Larry Begley. Bottom row, left to right: KDE Chief Academic Officer Micki Ray, Former Interim Commissioner of Education Robin Fields Kinney, Kentucky Reading Research Center Founding Director Amy Lingo, and University of Louisville President Gerry Bradley.

Photo by Crystal Sicard, Kentucky Department of Education

Kentucky Revised Statute 164.0207 requires the following duties of the statewide reading reserch center (effective July 1, 2024):

1. A statewide reading research center shall be established under this section to support educators in implementing reliable, replicable evidence-based reading programs, and to promote literacy development, including cooperating with other entities that provide family literacy services. The center shall be responsible for:
   a. Developing and implementing a clearinghouse for information about programs addressing reading and literacy from early childhood and the elementary grades (P-5) through adult education;
   b. Providing advice to the Kentucky Board of Education regarding matters relating to reading;
   c. Collaborating with the Kentucky Department of Education to assist districts with students functioning at low levels of reading skills to assess and address identified literacy needs;
   d. Providing research and data on evidence-based, high-yield instructional practices and coaching strategies for early childhood educators and classroom teachers, including adult education teachers, implementing selected reliable, replicable evidence-based reading programs;
   e. Developing and implementing a comprehensive research agenda evaluating early reading models, instructional resources, and evidence-based practices needed to accelerate student performance toward proficiency in reading;
   f. Assisting middle and high schools in the development of comprehensive adolescent reading plans and maintaining a repository of instructional materials or summary materials that identify comprehension best practices in the teaching of each subject area and a list of classroom-based diagnostic reading comprehension assessments that measure student progress in developing students' reading comprehension skills; and
   g. Evaluating the reading and literacy components of the model adult education programs funded under the adult education and literacy initiative fund created under KRS 151B.409.

2. The center shall review national research and disseminate appropriate research abstracts, when appropriate, as well as conduct ongoing research of reading programs throughout the state. Research activities undertaken by the center shall consist of descriptive as well as empirical studies.
   a. The center may contract for research studies to be conducted on its behalf.
   b. The research agenda should, at a minimum, consider the impact of various reading and intervention programs:
      1. In eliminating academic achievement gaps among students with differing characteristics, including subpopulations of students with disabilities, students with low socioeconomic status, students from racial minority groups, students with limited English proficiency, and students of different gender;
      2. In schools with differing characteristics, such as urban versus rural schools, poverty versus nonpoverty schools, schools with strong library media center programs versus schools with weak library media center programs, and schools in different geographic regions of the state;
      3. In terms of their costs and effectiveness; and
      4. In maintaining positive student progress over a sustained period of time.

3. The center, in conjunction with the Kentucky Department of Education, shall establish annual goals and performance objectives related to the functions described in this section. The center shall submit an annual report of its activities, the effects of those activities on state performance levels in reading and writing, and the outcomes of all annual goals and performance objectives to the Kentucky Department of Education no later than September 1 of each year. Based on the annual outcomes, the Kentucky Department of Education shall make programming and funding recommendations to the Governor, the Legislative Research Commission, and the Interim Joint Committee on Education by October 1 of each year.

4. The Kentucky Department of Education shall, through a competitive request for proposals process, select the administrator of the statewide reading research center for approval by the Kentucky Board of Education. The selected administrator shall be contracted for five (5) years, unless funding is not available or the administrator requests to discontinue the contract. For each five (5) year period thereafter, contingent upon funding, the Kentucky Department of Education shall issue a new request for proposals for the administration of the center.

KENTUCKY READING RESEARCH CENTER

A partnership of the

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE + Kentucky Department of EDUCATION

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