

K-3 Literacy In Kentucky: Progress, Practices, And Policy Considerations

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Research Report No.

Legislative Research Commission

Frankfort, Kentucky
legislature.ky.gov

Draft presented October 6, 2026 to the
Education Assessment and Accountability Review Subcommittee

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Foreword

In October 2025, the Education Assessment and Accountability Review Subcommittee approved a research agenda for the Office of Education Accountability that included this report. The report reviews actions taken by Kentucky school districts to implement provisions of KRS 158.305 that include adoption of evidence-based reading programs, universal screeners, and diagnostic assessments; identification of students who require additional support or who may need to be retained in kindergarten or first grade; provision of enrichment programs to support intensive intervention; and educator training and support. In addition, the report reviews district and school performance relative to peer districts and schools.

OEA would like to thank Micki Ray Marinelli and additional staff at the Kentucky Department of Education for their assistance with this study.

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Legislative Research Commission
Frankfort, Kentucky
October 2026

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Summary

Kentucky’s “Read to Succeed” Act of RS 2022 and subsequent legislation introduced early literacy policies for kindergarten through third (K-3) grades that include requirements for instructional materials grounded in scientific research; the identification and support of students who are not progressing to meet grade-level standards; parent communication and read-at-home plans; and, beginning in SY 2026, the identification of students for retention in kindergarten (permitted) and first grade (required).

This study reviews districts’ actions to implement required reforms since they have been introduced, examining:

- whether and how districts are complying with basic requirements of the reforms;
- whether teachers report conditions necessary to meet students’ literacy needs; and
- trends in state, district, and school-level reading performance.

Data are based primarily on a survey of district staff who oversee K-3 literacy across the commonwealth. The study also includes student performance; demographic, and programmatic data from the Kentucky Department of Education and data from a small sample of Kentucky K-3 teachers.

Overall, the study finds that almost all districts have adopted required reading programs and assessments, and most are implementing reading improvement plans. The majority of teacher survey respondents reported sufficient access to instructional materials, training, and support and that they are able to meet students’ basic instructional needs. Statewide, 3rd grade reading proficiency rates have increased since the reforms were implemented even as national test scores have declined and the number of students with limited English Proficiency has increased.

As challenges, the study notes broad variation among districts in how students are identified for intensive support and potential grade retention; a perception by about one-third of teachers that schools are not meeting the basic needs of students who are far below grade level, have disabilities or have limited English Proficiency; uneven academic progress among districts and schools since 2022; and continued very low 3rd grade reading performance in some districts and schools even after taking demographic characteristics of students into account.

Major Findings

Instructional Materials And Assessments

Almost all Kentucky districts report implementation of key policy requirements, including the adoption of evidence-based comprehensive reading programs (96 percent), universal screeners (99 percent), and diagnostic assessments (99 percent). Most districts (approximately 95 percent) have also adopted supplemental instructional programs to support specific skills such as phonics or writing as well as intervention programs to support students who need intensive support in specific skill areas.

Identifying Students For Reading Improvement Plans Or Retention

Districts vary greatly in how they make decisions and set performance thresholds for the identification of students who receive reading improvement plans or who must be retained. Thresholds for both reading improvement plans and retention can range from the 5th to the 50th percentile. Any future attempts to standardize the thresholds used by districts will be complicated by the fact that districts have adopted one of eight different KDE-approved universal screeners (though the majority of districts have adopted either i-Ready or Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)).

In keeping with KRS 158.305 (9)(a)(2), about 15 percent of districts require retention for first-grade students who do not meet thresholds set by the district on their universal screener. The remainder use screener data in combination with other sources of data to identify students for retention; delegate decisions to schools; or, in 7 districts, do not use screener data to inform retention decisions.

In explaining the approach taken by their districts, many survey respondents expressed concern about the use of universal screener alone to make consequential decisions for young students. Third-grade retention policies in other states often contain provisions that address concerns about possible measurement error by providing opportunities for test retakes and by allowing for a variety of good cause exemptions from retention policies.

Language Essentials For Teachers Of Reading and Spelling (LETRS)

While not yet required to do so, approximately 19 percent of Kentucky educators have completed Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training on the science of reading. Additionally, approximately 13 percent will be enrolled in LETRS during SY 2027 and SY 2028. While the lowest-performing districts have LETRS completion rates slightly greater than their peers, participation varies among districts. As of SY 2026, 15 of the lowest-performing districts and 41 of the lowest-performing schools did not have any LETRS-trained educators, or had less than half the state average of LETRS-trained educators.^a

Teachers' Perceptions Of Instructional Conditions And Challenges

Almost all teachers (95 percent) reported that they can meet the basic literacy learning needs of students reading at grade level. The majority of teachers also reported being able to meet the basic needs of students with more specific learning needs, but more than one-third reported being unable to meet the basic needs of students who are reading far below grade level (40 percent), students with Limited English Proficiency (33 percent), and students with disabilities (32 percent).

Most districts report the use of diagnostic assessments to identify characteristics of dyslexia in some classrooms. However, only 40 percent report that resources to assist in the instruction of

^a Almost all districts have educators who are in the process of completing or have begun LETRS training in SY 2026.

these students exist in most classrooms, and only 31 percent report that teachers in most classrooms have been trained in methods to support students with characteristics of dyslexia.

Major challenges related to meeting student needs identified by the greatest percentage of teachers were student misconduct (53 percent) and a lack of parent support (51 percent). These contextual factors should be taken into account when considering actions to assist the lowest performing school districts.

Student Achievement

Kentucky's 4th grade reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) increased slightly between 2022 and 2024 while national scores decreased. In 2024, Kentucky's 4th graders scored just above the national average and above all but one of its surrounding states (Indiana).

From 2022 to 2025, 3rd grade proficiency increased by 2 percentage points, but progress among districts was uneven. Proficiency increased by 5 percentage points or more in more than one third of districts (38 percent) and decreased by 5 percentage points or more in almost one fourth of districts.

In 2025, 47 percent of 3rd grade students were proficient or distinguished on the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA). Proficiency rates ranged from 15 percent to 77 percent among districts and from 10 percent to 85 percent among schools. In schools with the lowest proficiency rates, the percentage of LEP students was three times the state rate, and the percentage of students who were black, Hispanic, or otherwise not white was over 2.4 times the state rate.

OEA analyzed district and school performance in light of student demographic characteristics to identify schools that were very low performing even when student demographic characteristics were taken into account. The analysis indicated 25 districts and 71 schools in which 3rd grade reading performance was over one standard deviation below the mean in comparison to the performance of all students as well as demographically similar students.

Finally, the report identifies unusual and unexplained variation among districts and schools in the reading proficiency rates of students who have Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) because they have a disability that qualifies them for special education services. Statewide, students with IEPs performed 24 percentage points below their peers without IEPs in SY 2025, yet their performance exceeded their peers in 17 districts and 81 schools—often by wide margins. Proficiency rates of students with IEPs exceeded those of students without IEPs by more than 20 percentage points in 5 districts and 24 schools. These data raise concerns about the comparability of reading proficiency rates for students with IEPs among districts and schools.^b

^b OEA has identified these patterns in previous reports and indicated possible differences among districts and schools in the criteria used to identify students as eligible for IEPs or in the use of testing accommodations.

Future Considerations

In light of findings in this report, the General Assembly may wish to consider future actions to clarify or amend requirements of KRS 158.305 or to support K-3 literacy. It might:

- clarify minimum universal screener thresholds that districts must use to identify students who require reading improvement plans or who must be retained;
- clarify whether students must be identified for retention based on universal screener data alone or whether other types of data may be used in combination;
- provide for the possibility of test retakes and additional good cause exemptions;
- require clear communication about the thresholds for retention with parents or guardians whose students are in danger of being retained;
- require KDE to develop and disseminate guidance to school districts based on these clarifications; and
- based on evaluation data demonstrating effects of existing grants or supports, consider extending or expanding support for lowest-performing schools or districts.

Chapter 1

Introduction And Policy Background

This study reviews actions taken by Kentucky school districts in accordance with KRS 158.305.

This study reviews districts' actions to implement literacy practices required in KRS 158.305 for grades kindergarten through third grade. These practices, which are similar to "science of reading" reforms introduced in other states, require districts to adopt instructional materials and assessments aligned with the science of reading; implement reading improvement plans for students who are not progressing to proficiency; and, beginning in 2026, identify students who have had a plan but did not meet grade-level benchmarks for retention in kindergarten (permitted) and first grade (required).

Most districts have adopted the required instructional and testing materials, but the threshold to identify students for additional supports and potential retention varies considerably among districts.

The study finds very high compliance in the adoption of required instructional materials and assessments but wide variation among districts and schools in the practices used to identify students who need reading improvement plans or who must be retained. The study also finds progress in third-grade reading performance by the majority of districts but continued low performance in many districts and schools.

A lack of parental support and student misconduct were identified by K-3 teachers as the greatest challenges to literacy instruction. Teachers generally report that they can meet the needs of students reading at grade level, but results are less positive for other student groups.

Almost all K-3 teachers survey respondents report being able to meet the basic instructional needs of students on grade level but at least one third expressed concerns about meeting the needs of students who are far below grade level, who have limited English proficiency, or who have a disability. As the greatest barriers in meeting students' literacy needs, teachers identified student misconduct; lack of parent support; and inadequate numbers of staff.

Description Of The Report

Study Request

In October, 2025, EAARS requested that OEA study Kentucky districts' implementation of statutory provisions for early literacy in grades K-3, including adoption of approved reading programs, universal screeners, and diagnostic assessments; identification and support of students needing additional intervention; and requirements to identify students for 1st grade retention beginning in SY 2026. The study request specified data collection through a survey of Kentucky districts and requested a summary of district and school performance relative to peer districts and schools.

Data Used For the Report

Data for the report come primarily from a survey of Kentucky school districts. The report also includes teacher survey data and student-level performance data from the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE).

The study relies largely on district self-report. Where possible, OEA verified district-reported data against data from KDE.

Findings of the report are based primarily on an OEA survey of all Kentucky districts conducted following the completion of the 2025-2026 school year (SY 2026).^a The study also includes data from a survey submitted to all classroom and exceptional child teachers instructing students in grades K-3 during the 2026 school year; staff analysis of student-level 3rd grade performance on the Kentucky Summative Assessment in the 2025 school year; interviews with Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) staff who oversee implementation of early literacy policies in the commonwealth; and interviews with superintendents or district literacy staff in six districts across the commonwealth.^b

Limitations. Related to policy implementation, the study relies largely on self-reporting by district survey respondents. Where possible, OEA verified district reports through data available through KDE or on the OEA teacher survey. Due to the low response rate of 10 percent on OEA's teacher survey, it is unclear whether teachers' responses are reflective of the state as a whole. As described in Appendix A, however, staff analysis indicates that schools represented by respondents were generally representative of demographic and performance variations in schools across the state.^c

Organization Of The Report

Chapter 1 reviews performance trends.

The remainder of Chapter 1 reviews performance trends in Kentucky and the nation and describes key elements of early literacy reforms and supports for kindergarten through third grade.

Chapter 2 reviews district implementation of policies, and challenges to implementation.

Chapter 2 describes districts' implementation of required literacy reforms; educator participation rates in Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training; and challenges teachers report in meeting students' literacy needs.

Chapter 3 summarizes student performance.

Chapter 3 summarizes 3rd-grade performance by district and school, taking student characteristics into account.

^a OEA received responses from 167 out of 171 (98 percent) of Kentucky districts.

^b Districts were geographically representative of the commonwealth and included districts of varying sizes, performance levels, and demographic characteristics.

^c Data in the report are calculated from respondents who indicated their district or school. These totaled 8 percent of surveys sent.

Performance Trends, Kentucky And Nation

Fourth Grade Reading

Figure 1.A shows 4th grade reading scores since 2002 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for Kentucky and the nation, and Table 1.1 compares Kentucky's 2024 score to the nation and surrounding states.

Between 2002 and 2015, 4th-grade NAEP reading scores for Kentucky improved, eventually exceeding the national average.

Kentucky's performance increased steadily from 2002 through 2015 when it outperformed the nation. In 2015, 129 school districts in Kentucky performed above the national average on the 4th grade NAEP according to Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA) estimates.^d SEDA uses NAEP data to convert state test scores, down to the district level, onto a standardized scale.^{ef}

4th grade NAEP reading scores for Kentucky began to decline in 2015. This trend continued through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like many states, Kentucky's reading scores began to decline in 2015 and continued to do so through 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. As shown in Appendix B, 4th grade reading NAEP scores dropped during this period in the nation and all but one of Kentucky's surrounding states.^g

Decreases in reading scores from 2019 to 2022 were associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. As shown in Appendix B, Kentucky's decreases in 4th grade reading exceeded the nation's in both the 2015-2019 and 2019-2022 time periods.

4th grade NAEP reading scores for Kentucky increased in 2022 and 2024.

While national performance continued to decline through 2024, Kentucky's performance increased after 2022 and it outperformed the nation and—with the exception of Indiana—all of its surrounding states.

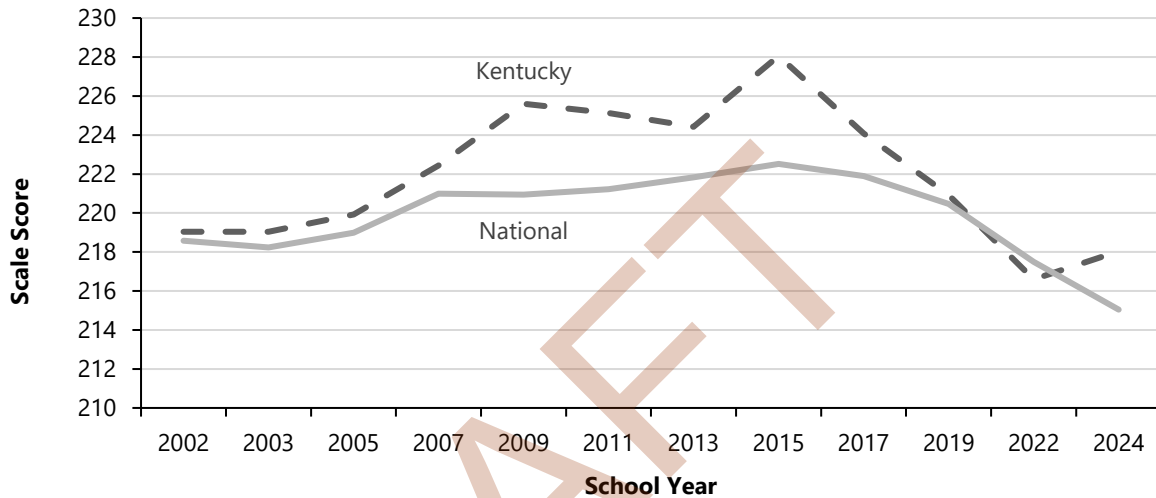
^d Fahle, E. M., Saliba, J., Min, J., Reardon, S. F., Shear, B. R., Shim, J., Kalogrides, D., & Ho, A. D. (2026). Stanford Education Data Archive Technical Documentation: SEDA 2025.1.

^e Linear interpolation is used to estimate NAEP scores for years in which it was not administered, and linear extrapolation is used to estimate scores for 3rd grade students.

^f In 2015, 133 districts performed above the national average for 3rd grade reading. By 2019, only 99 districts did so.

^g Scores in Tennessee remained the same from 2015 to 2019.

Figure 1.A
4th Grade NAEP Reading Scores
Kentucky and Nation
2002 To 2024



Source: National Center for Education Statistics.

Appendix B also provides NAEP data for Mississippi, which implemented “science of reading” reforms in 2013 and whose gains have outpaced the nation’s since then.

Table 1.1
4th Grade NAEP Reading Scores
Kentucky And Surrounding States
2024

State	2024
Indiana	220
Kentucky	218
Ohio	216
Tennessee	215
National	215
Illinois	214
Virginia	214
Missouri	212
West Virginia	206

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Eighth Grade Reading

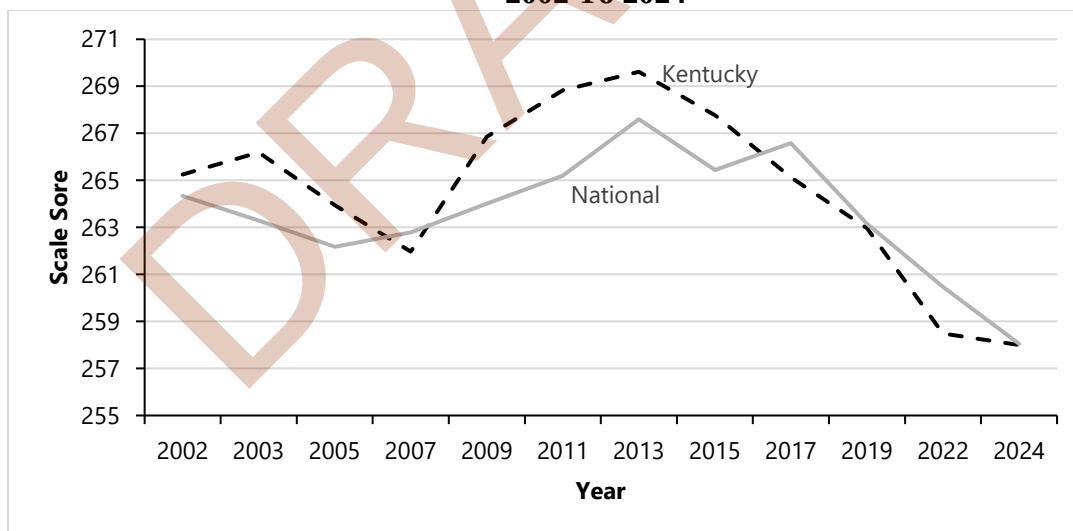
Figure 1.B shows 8th-grade NAEP reading scores for Kentucky and the nation, and Table 1.2 compares Kentucky's 2024 scores to the nation and surrounding states.

8th grade NAEP reading scores were consistently above the national average before declining at a more aggressive rate than the national average in 2015.

On the 8th-grade reading NAEP assessment, Kentucky also consistently outscored the nation through 2015. While Kentucky's scores declined more than the nation's between 2015 and 2019, they stabilized after the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas national scores continued to drop.

On the 2024 8th-grade reading exam, Kentucky students scored at the national average and below surrounding states Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, and Tennessee.

Figure 1.B
8th Grade NAEP Reading Scores
Kentucky And Nation
2002 To 2024



Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Table 1.2
8th Grade NAEP Reading Scores
Kentucky And Surrounding States
2024

State	Score
Indiana	262
Illinois	262
Ohio	260
Tennessee	259
Kentucky	258
National	258
Virginia	256
Missouri	255
West Virginia	247

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Interpreting Pre-COVID Declines

Possible causes of pre-COVID drops in national reading scores include relaxation of federal accountability measures and students' increased use of digital devices in and outside of the classroom. Pre-COVID performance drops were concentrated primarily among the lowest-performing students.

National Declines. National research has shown that pre-COVID performance drops were concentrated among the lowest-performing students. Researchers have suggested several possible reasons for the decline in reading scores prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, including a relaxation of accountability measures associated with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and an increase in both in- and out-of-school in young children's use of cell phones and digital devices.¹ While declines between 2019 and 2022 are also associated with remote learning that occurred through the 2020 and 2021 school year, the cause of the pre-COVID drops has not been definitively established.

International testing data shows that reading scores in most industrialized western nations began to drop in 2015, and have continued to decline.

International Declines. Recent data from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) show a pre-COVID drop in reading scores of 15-year-old students among most western industrialized nations and continuing declines through 2025. Researchers hypothesize links with “declining levels of reading for enjoyment and the shift towards digital reading—skimming social media feeds and rapidly processing information.” Results also show growing gaps among the highest and lowest performers, especially in the United States.²

Between 2015 and 2019, the percentage of Kentucky students with LEP increased considerably and the percentages with IEPs or who were economically disadvantaged also increased.

Demographic Shifts In Kentucky. Appendix C shows that, from 2015 to 2019, the percentage of students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) nearly doubled at the 4th grade level and grew by about 50 percent at the 8th grade level. In addition, the percentage of economically disadvantaged students and students with individualized educational programs (IEPs) increased slightly. It is likely that these demographic shifts contributed to, though do

not entirely explain, Kentucky's declining performance from 2015 to 2019.

Differences In Kentucky State Assessment And NAEP Trends 2015-2019

While Kentucky's NAEP reading scores dropped between 2015 and 2019, proficiency rates on state tests did not.

Although Kentucky's 4th and 8th reading performance decreased on the National Assessment of Education Progress between 2015 and 2019, state proficiency rates did not decline on Kentucky's 4th grade state test and increased by more than 8 percentage points on its 8th grade test. Appendix C shows performance designations on the Kentucky state test (Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress, K-PREP) in 2015 and 2019 at the 4th and 8th grade levels.

NAEP tests only a sample of Kentucky students, calculates scores differently, and does not permit a reader accommodation.

Annual differences between Kentucky state trends and NAEP might be explained by differences in the schools that are sampled to take the NAEP versus the performance of all schools. Additionally, NAEP trends report average scale scores that may be more sensitive to changes at the bottom or top of the performance distribution than proficiency rates. Because students with IEPs or LEP are permitted a reader accommodation on Kentucky state tests but are not on NAEP, their scores may be relatively lower on NAEP versus state tests.^{h 3}

These factors do not, however, explain divergent trends in 8th grade reading scores.

These considerations do not, however, explain why Kentucky's 8th grade NAEP scores decreased from 2015 to 2019 while scores increased on Kentucky's 8th grade reading test.ⁱ

^h Kentucky permits reading test passages to be read to students with IEPs or LEP if the need for that accommodation is documented and NAEP does not. Kentucky permits a human or text-to-speech (TTS) reader to read directions, prompts, situations, and passages exactly as written. According to the National Center for Educational Outcomes, "Twenty-nine states allowed text-to-speech (TTS) as an accommodation on reading passages. Ten states prohibited it on reading passages (with three states also prohibiting it on questions)"

ⁱ KRS 158.6453 (14) requires KDE to "gather information to establish the validity of the assessment and accountability program. It shall develop a biennial plan for validation studies that shall include but not be limited to the consistency of student results across multiple measures, the congruence of school scores with documented improvements in instructional practice and the school learning environment, and the potential for all scores to yield fair, consistent, and accurate student performance level and school accountability decisions." These validation studies have not addressed inconsistencies in NAEP and K-PREP trends from 2015 to 2019.

National Reforms That Incorporate Science Of Reading

Recent policy reforms in many states address instructional materials and methods grounded in the “Science of Reading.”

Over the last two decades, many states have seen gains in elementary reading outcomes following policies focused specifically on reading instruction in the early grades. The most recent wave of legislation has required that instructional methods and materials be grounded in decades of reading research known as the “Science of Reading.” The science of reading is associated with reforms adopted by Mississippi in 2013 and more recently by a number of other states.

The “Science of Reading” refers to a body of peer-reviewed research on how students learn to read. It focuses on developing students’ ability to decode and manipulate words.

The term “Science of Reading” refers to a large body of peer-reviewed research on how children learn to read. It identifies a set of necessary components for effective early literacy instruction. KDE defines the science of reading as a:

structured literacy approach that emphasizes highly explicit and systematic teaching of foundational skills (e.g. decoding, spelling) and higher-level literacy skills (e.g., reading comprehension, written expression). It prepares students to decode words explicitly and systematically by emphasizing oral language abilities essential to literacy development, including phonemic awareness, sensitivity to speech sounds in oral language, and the ability to manipulate those sounds.⁴

Enacted reforms often include policies for the identification and support of struggling readers, and professional development for teachers.

The reforms share common components that include the early identification of struggling readers; support targeted at identified skill deficits; and the involvement of families in literacy support. Many of the reforms include various forms of support, including professional development or literacy coaching.

A number of states require students who do not meet performance standards on 3rd-grade state reading tests to be retained. These policies often include opportunities for test retakes; good cause exemptions; and resources to support students in danger of retention.

In Mississippi, Florida, and a number of other states, early literacy policies also require the retention of 3rd-grade students who do not meet certain reading performance thresholds on the state 3rd-grade reading test.¹ These laws are often accompanied by state-defined opportunities for test retakes; “good cause” exemptions for students with disabilities or Limited English Proficiency and other locally-defined categories; and resources to support students in danger of retention.⁵

¹ State reading policies related to 3rd grade-retention, including whether it is required or permitted, are often modified. Recent estimates by exceleed indicate at least 18 states have some form of 3rd grade retention law.

The effects of retention continue to be debated, but research suggests it is most effective when implemented with comprehensive reforms and support.

While the effects of retention on students continue to be debated among researchers and educators, recent research syntheses indicate that retention is more likely to benefit students if it is accompanied by additional supports for students who are retained or in danger of retention and if implemented as part of a comprehensive literacy reform.^{k6}

Ideally, clear performance expectations might align behavior of educators and parents to support students in danger of retention.

Ideally, clear performance expectations might introduce greater accountability for parents and educators to intervene with students in danger of being retained and prevent retention for many. Preliminary research conducted in Michigan and Ohio shows performance boosts for students who were flagged for being in danger of retention but were not ultimately retained.⁷

Kentucky Early Literacy Policies, Grades K-3

Recent legislation in Kentucky, beginning with the “Read to Succeed” Act of 2022 introduced a variety of practices similar to those found in other states with reforms based on the science of reading.

Kentucky’s “Read to Succeed” Act of 2022 and subsequent legislation in 2023 and 2024 amended KRS 158.305 to require Kentucky school districts to implement a variety of practices similar to those adopted in Mississippi and other states that adopted reforms based on the science of reading.¹ Table 1.3 summarizes these requirements, each of which is explained in greater detail in Chapter 2.

^k KDE staff note, in particular, the potential benefits of state support for high-impact tutoring for students in danger of retention, citing research that has demonstrated significant learning gains. Louisiana, Massachusetts, and a number of other states provide such funding.

¹ SB156 of RS2023 required districts to adopt KDE-approved comprehensive reading programs based on the science of reading, and HB 240 of RS 2024 permitted kindergarten retention and required first grade retention.

Table 1.3
Literacy Requirements Of KRS 158.305 For Grades K-3 *

Requirements	Year Required
Adoption of KDE-approved common, comprehensive reading programs	SY 2024**
Adoption and use of KDE-approved screening and diagnostic assessments	SY 2024
Evidence of multi-tiered systems of support and evidence provided to KDE	SY 2024
Reading improvement plans for struggling readers guided by reading improvement teams	SY 2024
Accelerated interventions and enrichment programs for struggling readers***	SY 2024
Parent communication and read at home plans for struggling readers	SY 2024
1 st grade retention for students not meeting grade-level benchmarks or other preparedness measures****	SY 2026**

*Some of the statutory requirements also apply to upper elementary grades.

** SB156 of RS2023 required that districts adopt KDE-approved programs. The legislation did not specify a year of adoption but would have been in effect for SY 2024.

***HB 253 of RS 2026 required KDE to establish a list of evidence-based interventions. The legislation specified that these interventions exclude those using a 3-cueing system defined as “any model of teaching students to read based 19 on meaning, structure and syntax, and visual cues, which may also be known as “MSV.”” It also required districts to ensure by SY 2030 that no programs that use 3 cueing were in use.

****The statute addresses identification of kindergarten students for possible retention but does not require it. Students would be identified in SY 2026 and retained in SY 2027.

Dyslexia Policies

Prior to 2026, KRS 158.307 permitted local school boards to develop policies to identify and support students displaying traits of dyslexia.

Prior to RS 2026, KRS 158.307 permitted but did not require local school boards of education to develop policies to identify and support students displaying characteristics of dyslexia in kindergarten through the third grade. As defined in the statute, dyslexia is a “specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities.”^m

Districts that adopted these policies were required to provide KDE with data on their implementation.

Districts that adopted policies were required to provide KDE with data on the number of identified students, the tools and supports used to identify and monitor students' progress, the number of students receiving intervention supports, and the number of personnel trained to administer dyslexia evaluation tools.

^m Statute also notes that “These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”

Beginning in SY 2028, all districts will be required to implement these policies, and provide required data to KDE.

In the 2026 legislative session, the statute was amended to require all school districts to adopt policies and to submit required data to KDE by June 30th, 2028.

K-3 Literacy Supports

Kentucky's early literacy requirements have also been accompanied by requirements for technical support and a variety of school- and district-level grants from both state and federal sources.

KDE Guidance And Resources

KDE provides several resources to assist in the implementation of early literacy policy. These include web-based resources as well as support networks and teacher professional development.

As required by KRS 158.305, KDE provides technical assistance and training to school districts, upon request, and maintains web-based resources related to early literacy such as the implementation of MTSS. It has also developed web-based resources that provide guidance on screening students for strengths and needs and evidence-based instructional tools. In addition, the department provides guidance on the adoption of evidence-based reading programs, universal screeners, and diagnostic assessments. The department operates the Kentucky Early Literacy Leadership Network (KyELLN) to provide regional principal support and sponsors an annual Read to Succeed conference. Finally, KDE oversees provision of LETRS training, literacy coaches, and Read to Achieve grants funded by the General Assembly.

LETRS

LETRS is an online, asynchronous professional learning program based on the science of reading. LETRS is available at no cost to teachers and administrators in Kentucky.

Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) is an online, professional learning course for elementary school teachers and administrators. LETRS is based on the principles of the science of reading, more specifically, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. With support from the General Assembly, LETRS has been available to teachers and administrators at no cost since 2022.

Those enrolled in LETRS may complete the training at their own pace, over the course of two years, with the coursework for each year requiring approximately 60 hours of work across four units of study.

LETRS training has previously been optional, but moving forward elementary educators will be required to take LETRS or an alternative program approved by KDE. Approximately one-third of eligible educators have completed or are currently enrolled in LETRS.

During the years reviewed by this report, educators were not required to complete the LETRS program, though almost one-third of educators have already completed or are enrolled in SY 2027. HB 253 of RS 2026 requires that “by June 30, 2029, all interdisciplinary early childhood through grade five (5) educators have completed a science of reading professional learning program approved by the department.” In the future, elementary educators will therefore be required to take LETRS or another program approved by KDE.

Literacy Coaching

KDE regional literacy directors oversee literacy coaches placed in schools with the greatest need.

Beginning in SY 2025, KDE state regional literacy directors have overseen literacy coaches placed in schools with the greatest literacy needs. Coaches lead teacher professional learning communities and support the implementation of evidence-based reading programs in designated schools. Regional principal support leaders work alongside literacy coaches to strengthen leadership in literacy and build systems that improve outcomes for teachers and students across schools. Literacy coaches assisted 23 schools in SY 25, 31 in SY 26, and 41 in SY 27.

Read to Achieve Grants

The RTA grant program provides renewable, two-year grants to fund reading intervention programs. In SY 2026, 150 schools in 56 districts received RTA funding.

The RTA grant program provides competitive, renewable two-year grants worth 70,000 dollars per year to schools to fund reading intervention programs for students in kindergarten through third grade.⁸ In SY 2026, 150 schools across 56 different districts were awarded RTA grant funding.

RTA recipient schools must provide matching funds towards their reading intervention program, utilize a KDE-approved comprehensive reading program for tier-one literacy instruction, submit universal screener data to KDE for students receiving intervention, and participate in high-quality curriculum-based professional learning.

Reading Diagnostic Fund Mini-Grants

The Reading Diagnostic Intervention Fund provides grant funding to support early literacy education.

Reading Diagnostic Intervention Fund mini-grants provided grants of 40,000 dollars to help districts select high-quality instructional resources to support intervention through structured literacy practices and improve the skills of struggling readers in grades K-3.

Federal Grants

Since 2017, Kentucky has received two five-year federal grants, worth a total of nearly \$100 million.

Comprehensive Literacy Grants. Since 2017, Kentucky has received two substantial five-year federal grants to support literacy: the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (SRCL) grant of \$44.3 million in 2017 and the Kentucky Comprehensive Literacy Grant (KyCL) of almost \$54 million in 2024.

The SRCL focused on developing district and school literacy leadership teams to identify specific supports for at-risk learners from birth to grade 12. The KyCL provides competitive funding to districts to support adoption of high-quality instructional materials and professional learning tied to the curriculum. Since 2021, 52 Kentucky districts have received funding through these federal grants.

Federally required comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) grants also provide support that should assist in improving reading outcomes.

Comprehensive Support And Improvement Grants. Federal policy requires states to identify the bottom 5 percent of Title I schools, by grade level, based on a school's performance in the state accountability system for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) grants. The accountability rating at the elementary level is comprised primarily of student performance on reading and mathematics assessments. Thus, schools identified for CSI grants have reading proficiency rates far below state averages. While CSI grants are not specifically oriented towards reading, they provide substantial grants to support evidence-based interventions and also have support from KDE staff trained to assist schools in developing improvement plans and instructional systems. KDE must also require professional learning related to instructional materials and assessments in reading and mathematics for teachers in CSI schools.

¹ Brooke Donald. "U.S. Student Achievement Was Falling Long Before Pandemic, Study Finds." Stanford Accelerator For Learning. May, 2026.

² Stephen Sawchuck. "Reading Ability Craters On PISA International Exam, Both In the United States And Abroad." *Education Week*. Sept. 8, 2026.

³ Deb A. Albus et. al. "Text-to-Speech Accommodation Policies in 2018-19." National Center on Educational Outcomes. Aug, 2020. Web.

⁴ KDE science of reading quote .

⁵ <https://earlyliteracymatters.org/literacy-map/>

⁶ <https://www.ecs.org/early-grade-literacy-is-third-grade-retention-effective/>;
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED678324>

⁷ Jordan Berne et al. “The Impacts Of Grade Retention Policy With Minimal Retention.” National Bureau of Economic Research, 2025; Sarah Souders and Robert Bifulco. “The Effect Of Retention Threat On Student Learning Gains: Evidence From Ohio.” Annenberg Institute. EdworkingPaper No.26-1527.
⁸

DRAFT

Chapter 2

District Implementation Of Statutory Provisions For Early Literacy

Almost all districts report adoption of required instructional materials and assessments.

This chapter reviews districts' actions to implement statutory requirements for early literacy in grades K-3. It finds that almost all districts have reported adoption of the required evidence-based instructional materials and assessments, and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).

Districts vary in methods to identify students for additional support or grade retention.

Most districts appear to be providing struggling students with reading improvement plans. However, the methods used to identify those students vary broadly among districts, as do methods for identifying students for possible grade retention. This variation may be leading to inconsistent messaging to parents, teachers, and students about the level of performance necessary to advance in the early grades.

While almost all teachers report being able to meet the basic needs of students on grade level, they are less confident with struggling readers.

While a majority of teachers reported being able to meet students' basic literacy needs on the OEA teacher survey, they were less likely to report that basic needs are met for students who are far below grade level, have limited English proficiency, or have a disability. Challenges remain, therefore, in ensuring that policies achieve their desired effects for all students. The top challenges reported by teachers in being able to meet students' literacy needs were student misconduct, a lack of parent support, and insufficient numbers of staff to assist students who need additional support.

Data

Data presented in this chapter is gathered primarily from an OEA survey of district staff. Additional data were collected in an OEA survey of early literacy educators.

Data in this chapter are taken primarily from OEA's 2026 survey of districts. Data from OEA's 2026 survey of K-3 teachers provide additional context and support for data collected from district staff.^a Data presented from this survey are calculated from the

^a Because of the low and non-random response rate on the teacher survey, the degree to which teacher survey data reflect views of all teachers in the state is not clear. However, the survey includes responses from over half of elementary schools in the commonwealth, and the demographic and student performance profile of those schools with at least one respondent and those without are generally similar. As such, while the results should be interpreted with caution, OEA staff are confident the data gathered from it can be used to glean meaningful insight into the relative strengths and challenges in implementation of early literacy policy at the classroom level.

approximately 600 respondents who indicated their school and district location.

Instructional Materials And Assessments

Almost all districts report adopting the required instructional and testing materials, as well as implementing a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS).

Table 2.1 shows near-universal compliance with the statutorily required provisions of KRS 158.305 related to curriculum and assessment. Almost all districts reported the adoption of KDE-approved comprehensive reading programs, universal screeners, and diagnostic assessments. Additionally, all districts have reported the adoption of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). Additional detail about these required adoptions follows the table.

Table 2.1
District-reported Adoptions Of Statutorily Required
Elements Of K-3 Literacy Programs

Required Program Elements	Districts Reporting Adoption	
	Number	Percent
KDE-approved common comprehensive reading program	165	96%
KDE-approved universal screener	170	99
KDE-approved diagnostic assessment	170	99
Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)	171	100

Sources: Reading program and assessment data are derived primarily from responses of 167 districts to the OEA K-3 literacy district survey. Program and assessment data for the remaining districts were derived from information submitted by schools to KDE, when available. MTSS adoption was reported by districts in a KDE survey.

Appendix D identifies the reading programs, universal screeners, and diagnostic assessments adopted by individual districts. Appendix E reports the total number of each program or assessment adopted statewide.

Common Comprehensive Reading Programs

KDE maintains a list of pre-approved instructional resources. Alternative reading programs may be selected if they are aligned with KAS and can demonstrate evidence of external validity and reliability.

Districts may select from the list of KDE-approved comprehensive reading programs, also known as high-quality instructional resources (HQIR). These are programs that KDE has determined to be valid, reliable, and aligned with Kentucky academic standards (KAS).¹ Districts may select alternative reading programs if they can demonstrate alignment with KAS and provide evidence of external validity and reliability.²

Ninety-six percent of districts have adopted a KDE approved reading program.

As noted in Table 2.1, 165, or 96 percent of districts have already adopted a reading program approved by KDE. Sixty-five percent have been using these programs for 3 years or more.^b The

^b Based on 167 districts that responded to the 2026 OEA survey.

programs districts most commonly reported as having adopted are Amplify – Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA), Houghton Mifflin Harcourt – Into Reading, and McGraw-Hill Education – Wonders. Appendix E shows the total number of programs adopted across the commonwealth.

Of the districts that have not yet adopted an approved program, three have been in communication with KDE about their intention to adopt a program in the near future that would be approved by KDE, and three are using programs that are not approved.

Data indicate multiple KDE-approved reading programs are being used in some districts.

On the OEA district survey, three districts reported use of more than one KDE-approved program. OEA analysis of data submitted by individual schools to KDE indicates that some schools are not using the common reading program adopted by the district. In 15 districts, at least one school reported using a reading program approved by KDE but other than the program adopted by the district, as reported to OEA.

Ninety-five percent of districts report the use of a supplemental instructional program.

Supplemental Instructional Programs. Almost all (95 percent) of districts reported the use of additional instructional programs to supplement their comprehensive reading programs. The most widely used supplemental instructional programs are the University of Florida Literacy Institute Foundations (UFLI, 129 districts), Heggerty Literacy (82 districts), and Lexia (35 districts). Appendix E shows the additional instructional programs reported by districts on OEA’s 2026 survey.^c

Ninety-six percent of districts report the use of additional enrichment or intervention programs.

Enrichment And Intervention Programs. Through MTSS, districts are required to provide interventions matched to individual student strengths and needs. Though not required to use specific programs, most districts (96 percent) report their adoption or use. The most commonly reported intervention programs are UFLI (135 districts) and Orton-Gillingham (63 districts).^{d3} Appendix E shows the number of districts adopting various programs.

^c UFLI is the a phonics curriculum developed by the University of Florida Literacy Institute that is a structured literacy program that teachers reading and spelling together. Heggerty provides a variety of programs that include phonemic awareness, targeted interventions; foundational reading; and writing. is program that; Lexia programs provide resources that align curriculum, professional learning, and embedded assessments that provide data in real time.
^d Orton Gillingham is a “ a direct, explicit, multisensory, structured, sequential, diagnostic, and prescriptive way to teach literacy to individuals for whom reading, writing, and spelling do not come easily, such as those with dyslexia.” Vendor materials note that it should be understood as an approach rather than a method and that its effectiveness relies on training and experience of the instructor.

Assessments

Districts must adopt and administer universal screener exams at the beginning and end of the school year.

Universal Screeners. Districts must adopt and administer universal screener exams to identify students at risk of failing to meet grade-level literacy benchmarks. Screeners must be given within the first 45 days of the school year for kindergarteners, the first 30 days for first graders, and the final 14 days for both kindergarteners and first graders. KDE currently maintains a list of 14 different approved universal screeners and recommends that screeners be given at least three times a year.⁴

I-Ready, MAP, And STAR are the most commonly used universal screeners and diagnostic assessments.

The most commonly selected screeners are i-Ready Diagnostic (76 districts), Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) growth (55 districts), and Star Literacy Assessments (29 districts)^e.

Diagnostic Assessments. Schools must administer KDE-approved diagnostic assessments to students identified by a universal screener as needing additional support to reach grade-level literacy benchmarks. Diagnostic assessments further examine students' literacy skills to determine which component in their skill set requires accelerated intervention.⁵ The KDE currently maintains a list of eight approved diagnostic assessments.⁶

The diagnostic assessments most commonly adopted by districts are i-Ready Literacy Tasks (78), MAP Reading Fluency (53), STAR CBM: Selected Measures (31), and STAR Phonics (22).

Almost half of districts administer an additional formative or benchmark assessment.

District Formative Or Interim Assessments. While not required for adoption, KRS 158.6453(8) permits districts to “select and use commercial interim or formative assessments or develop and use its own formative assessments to provide data on how well its students are growing toward mastery of Kentucky academic standards.” Almost half (82) of all districts reported administering these types of assessments, in addition to the universal screener in grades K-3. Of those districts, most administer these tests in grades K-3. The frequency of these assessments ranged broadly, from one time to 10 times per year. As interim or formative assessments, districts most often mentioned unit or chapter tests associated with their reading programs. Other types included district-developed assessments to measure state standards or other commercial assessments of specific skills such as writing/handwriting or phonics.

^e Star Reading or Star Early Literacy

Teachers appear to have been appropriately trained to administer and interpret these assessments in most but not all schools.

Teacher Training To Support Required Adoptions

Almost two-thirds of respondents on the OEA teacher survey indicated that they received training sufficient to implement their district's reading program and universal and diagnostic screeners, while about one-fifth disagreed.^f These data suggest that, while teachers have been appropriately trained in the majority of schools, investments made in reading programs and assessments may not yet be yielding their full benefits in others.

Multi-tiered Systems Of Support (MTSS)

All districts in the commonwealth report implementing MTSS in the elementary grades.

Districts are required to implement MTSS—a tiered delivery system for early literacy instruction that includes a continuum of interventions, based on research, and matched to student needs. Districts must annually provide evidence of implementation to KDE. Data collected by KDE through a survey of school districts indicates that all elementary schools in the commonwealth have adopted an MTSS for reading and writing in grades K-5.^g

According to KDE, the first tier of an early literacy MTSS is general early literacy education, provided using a comprehensive reading program (or HQIR). Tier-two supports are generally provided in a small-group setting, while tier-three supports, the most intensive form of support, are typically provided in a one-on-one setting.⁷

Most districts report providing additional supports before- or after-school or during holiday or summer breaks.

In addition to supports provided during the school day, 87 percent of districts report that they provide before- or after-school tutoring and 59 percent report providing additional support during holiday or summer breaks. Appendix F shows the proportion of students reported by districts to have these supports.

District-required Practices

More than one-third of districts report that they require specific instructional practices, such as the amount of time for literacy instruction, in all of their elementary schools.

As described in Appendix F, more than one-third of districts have specific requirements for how various components of their early literacy MTSS should be implemented in schools. For example, 43 percent of districts require specific amounts of instructional time for literacy. The appendix provides examples of district-required practices associated with different aspects of MTSS.

^f The remainder did not agree or disagree.

^g In addition to reporting the existence of these systems, districts are required to provide at least two documents as evidence.

District requirements may be supported by district-funded literacy support staff. Appendix F also shows the percentage of districts that fund various literacy support positions.

Reading Improvement Plans

Reading improvement teams are responsible for developing reading improvement plans for each student who needs accelerated intervention.

Reading improvement teams at each school are responsible for using data from universal screeners and diagnostic assessments to develop a reading improvement plan (RIP) for each student determined to need accelerated interventions to progress toward proficient performance in reading. Each plan should guide the provision of support and intensive instructional services and include quarterly progress monitoring.^h

RIPs must be developed, implemented, and monitored by reading improvement teams comprised of the student's parent or guardian, at least one of the student's regular education teachers, a representative of the local education agency who is knowledgeable about the reading curriculum, and any school staff with specialized certifications in language instruction or special education services.⁸

Parents of students with reading improvement plans must receive read-at-home plans.

In addition to the supports provided at school, parents or legal guardians of students receiving a reading improvement plan should also receive a read-at-home plan that includes information on how to participate in regular parent-guided home reading.

To assist schools in development, KDE provides a reading improvement plan template that can be modified at the district level and is stored in Infinite Campus. The template facilitates required progress monitoring and is accompanied by videos and additional guidance. Districts may also develop their own templates, consistent with statutory requirements.

^h KRS 158.305 (1)(i), and KRS 158,305(7). This plan should also be developed in collaboration and accordance with any existing program services plan, individualized education program, or Section 504 Plan unless the program services plan, individualized education program, or Section 504 Plan already addresses improving reading.

Variation Among Districts In Methods Used To Identify Students For Plans

Most districts (80) percent direct use of universal screener data to identify students for reading improvement plans, while 20 percent delegate this responsibility to schools.

Schools use data from universal screeners to identify students who may need a RIP. Each RIP should be based on additional data about a student's particular learning needs as indicated by diagnostic assessments and other sources of data. Eighty percent of districts report that the district determines how screeners are used to identify students, while 20 percent report that schools, teacher teams, or even individual teachers determine their use.

Districts vary greatly in the thresholds they set to identify students who need a plan. Thresholds range from under the 10th percentile rank to over the 50th percentile rank.

Among districts that set decision rules for screener use, substantial variation exists in the thresholds used to identify students who may need a plan. Table 2.2 illustrates the broad range in performance in thresholds for student percentile rank under which a student would be evaluated for a plan. Thresholds range from under the 10th percentile rank to over the 50th percentile rank.

**Table 2.2
Universal Screener Percentile Thresholds
Used By Districts To Identify First Grade
Students To Evaluate For Reading Improvement Plans**

Student Percentile Range	District Count Out Of 90*
0-5	0
6-10	10
11-15	7
16-20	20
21-25	16
26-30	13
31-40	18
41-50	5
> 50	2

*Includes only the 90 districts that set thresholds at the district level using percentile ranks.

Source: OEA K-3 literacy district survey

Districts vary considerably in the percentage of 1st grade students with RIPs. This is likely due to differences in both student performance levels and thresholds for identification.

As reported by districts, the proportion of first-grade students with a RIP ranged from 5 percent or fewer in 22 districts to greater than 50 percent of students in 7 districts. This great range likely reflects variation in both the performance level of students among districts as well as the thresholds used by districts to identify students for plans.

Very low thresholds used in some districts may fail to identify students who may benefit from plans.

Districts have latitude to interpret statutory language directing identification of students for RIPS. As a result, it may be that very low thresholds in some districts fail to identify students who may benefit from plans, whereas the very high thresholds in others result in a volume of plans that may be difficult to implement well. In addition, because these thresholds also factor into identifying students who may be retained, their broad range among districts contributes to substantial variation within the commonwealth in how students are identified for retention.

Implementation Of Reading Improvement Plans

Most teachers report that their schools are implementing reading improvement plans. Only two thirds report that they participate in plan development and 18 percent report that parents support read-at-home plans.

A large majority of teacher survey respondents reported that their schools are implementing RIPS (81 percent) and have formally designated teams that provide support for early literacy instruction (74 percent). Among classroom teachers who teach students far below grade level, 66 percent reported participating in plan development. Among teachers in schools with RIPS, 18 percent reported that parents support read-at-home plans.

Table 2.3
Reading Improvement Plan Implementation
As Reported By Educators, SY 2026

Components Of Reading Improvement Plan Process	Percent Of Teachers	Denominator
Plans exist at the school*	81%	All teacher respondents
Teachers receive at least moderate support for early literacy from a formally designated team	74	All teacher respondents
Teachers participate in plan development**	66	Teachers with 6 plus years of experience
Parents support read-at-home plans***	18	Teachers reporting their school has RIPS

Source: OEA K-3 literacy teacher survey.

Due to the low response rate on the OEA teacher survey, the degree to which the data reported in the table above is representative of teachers or schools across the state is unclear. However, the data do indicate that RIPS are not being implemented in some schools.ⁱ In addition, the data suggest a need for greater attention within the commonwealth to communication with and accountability for parents and legal guardians of students with RIPS.

ⁱⁱ Data from this relatively small sample of teachers indicate that, as reported by at least one teacher, RIPS are not being implemented in at least 17 schools.

Retention

Data reported in this section demonstrate considerable variation among districts and schools in the way statutory requirements of KRS 158.305 (9) for first-grade retention, which went into effect at the end of the 2025-2026 school year, are implemented and understood.

The statute also permits the retention of kindergarten students who are not prepared for first grade. Data related to first-grade retention are reported in this chapter, but OEA observed similar findings in the range of thresholds established to identify kindergarten students for possible retention.

Statutory Requirements

Beginning in SY 2026, a first-grade student who had an RIP and did not meet grade-level benchmarks on the universal screener was required to be retained.

As outlined in KRS 158.305 (9)(a)(2), beginning in the 2025-2026 school year,

A first-grade student who had a reading improvement plan for the school year shall remain in first grade for an additional school year if a school determines that the student:

- a. Did not meet grade level benchmarks in reading while in first grade as determined by the universal screener given in accordance with subsection (6) of this section;
- b. Did not master the Kentucky reading academic standards for first grade students based on (districts' standards-aligned interim or formative assessments)^j assessments given in accordance with KRS 158.6453(8); or
- c. Is not properly prepared to be successful in the second grade.

Retention is permitted but not required for kindergarten students.

The statute permits but does not require retention for kindergarten students.

Of the retention criteria mentioned in the statute, the universal screener is the only metric used in all districts that might be used to set clear state-level standards for grade retention. For this reason, OEA sought to understand how districts were using universal screener data to make retention decisions.

^j These are described in the statute as “assessments given in accordance with KRS 158.6453(8)”. KRS 158.6453(8)

States that “A local school district may select and use commercial interim or formative assessments or develop and use its own formative assessments to provide data on how well its students are growing toward mastery of Kentucky academic standards”

Variation In Decision-making Process

Almost half of districts report that the district determines use of universal screener data to identify students for retention. The remainder delegate decision making to schools or teacher teams.

As with RIPs, some districts direct implementation of statutory requirements for retention while others allow schools to determine implementation. Almost half (47 percent) of districts reported that the district determines the use of universal screener data for retention. Districts also indicated that the use of data is decided at the school level (24 percent), by teacher teams (10 percent), and by individual teachers (2 percent). Seven districts report that universal screener data is not used in the district to make retention decisions.

Variation In Thresholds

Districts that determine the use of universal screener data for retention most often reported that these decisions are based on a student's percentile rank score (51 districts) rather than scale score (9 districts) or RIT score (2 districts). Thirteen districts reported using a variety of indicators. Scale scores and RIT scores assess students' mastery of tested content, whereas percentile ranks compare student performance to a larger tested population.

Universal screener thresholds set by individual districts to identify students for retention ranged from the 5th to the 50th percentile.

As shown in Table 2.4, the thresholds set by individual districts for the retention of first-grade students range very broadly, from the 5th to the 50th percentile. Staff analysis indicated similar variation, even among districts using the same universal screener and among districts that identify students for retention using scale or RIT scores

Table 2.4
Percentile Rank Thresholds Used By Districts
To Identify Students For First Grade Retention

Student Percentile Range	District Count Out of 47*
0-5	3
6-10	10
11-15	1
16-20	10
21-25	10
26-30	4
31-40	5
41-50	4

*Responses are reported from those districts that reported district-level decision-making and use of percentile ranks to set thresholds.

Source: OEA K-3 literacy district survey

Measurement Issues

Districts vary greatly in their interpretation of the standard that must be met for students to meet “grade-level benchmarks” referenced in statute.

Consistent with vendors’ technical documents, KDE has provided guidance on performance levels that would constitute grade-level benchmarks based on the proportion of questions answered correctly. Most districts use percentile ranks to identify students. Percentile ranks reference the performance of the larger student population rather than mastery of standards.

Many survey respondents opined that multiple measures of achievement are most appropriate to determine content mastery of young children.

Multiple Screeners And Measurement Categories. KRS 158.305 uses the term “grade-level benchmark” to identify the threshold to be used when making decisions to retain students. As described above, districts interpret that term very differently. Measurement of primary grade children in the commonwealth is complicated by the use of many different types of screeners, all of which use different terms and performance ranges relevant to grade levels. While most screeners link test metrics to 3rd grade test proficiency rates, those linking studies may not extend to the first grade or kindergarten.

In its guidance for each approved universal screener, KDE has identified performance designations that would indicate whether a student is below benchmark. Appendix G shows this guidance for I-Ready, MAP, and STAR assessments. The guidance is consistent with performance designations as they are established in universal screener technical documents. In these documents, performance levels are associated with scale scores or RIT scores that indicate a level of mastery based on the questions that are answered correctly. Currently, most districts setting thresholds report use of percentile ranks, which measure students against tested populations rather than content mastery benchmarks. Additional KDE guidance and training may be necessary to ensure comparability in districts’ use of universal screener data to identify students who may need to be retained.

Preference For Multiple Measures. Many comments submitted by district staff indicated caution about using universal screener data alone to determine student readiness to progress to the next grade. Screeners are, by design, short assessments that are not designed to measure full mastery. In addition, some children may fail to demonstrate skills that they possess in the screener test environment on a particular day. This may be of particular concern for those universal screeners that are very short. As shown in Appendix G, testing times for universal screeners are as long as 45 minutes for MAP and I-Ready and as short as 5 minutes for Acadience.^k

As will be shown in the section that follows, most districts report use of screener data, in combination with other sources, to make

^k KRS 158.305 specifies that universal screeners be valid and reliable but does not specify that they be valid and reliable for purposes of identifying students for grade retention.

decisions about retention. Other sources include diagnostic assessments, classwork, or the district's formative or benchmark assessments.

The majority of districts that administer their own formative or interim assessments noted that students may demonstrate mastery on these assessments even if they do not on a universal screener.

In some cases, students who do not meet grade-level benchmarks on the universal screener may appear prepared to move to the subsequent grade by other measures. The majority of respondents from districts that administer their own formative or interim assessment indicated that students who do not meet grade-level benchmarks on the universal screener may appear prepared to advance to the next grade on the district formative or benchmark assessment; 44 percent reported that this sometimes happens and 38 percent reported that this often happens.

Interpretation Of Statutory Requirements For Retention

KRS 158.305 requires first-grade students with a RIP to be retained if they “did not meet grade level benchmarks in reading while in first grade as determined by the universal screener.” While the statute lists other sources of evidence, they are not indicated as alternative measures of readiness for students who have an RIP and do not meet benchmarks on the universal screener.

Only 15 percent of districts report use of universal screener data to identify students for required retention. Most report use of multiple measures and 7 report that they do not use universal screener data at all.

As shown in Table 2.5, only 26 of 171 districts reported to OEA that they direct the use of universal screener data to require retention for first-grade students. More often, districts direct the use of screener data to identify students for possible retention, considering additional sources of evidence before rendering a final decision. Sixty-one districts report that the use of screener data for retention is determined at the school level. Responses from OEA's teacher survey, reported below, suggest that school-level decision makers also rarely require retention based on universal screener data alone.

Table 2.5
Use Of Screener Data To Identify Students For
First-Grade Retention

District Response	Districts Out of 171	
	Number	Percent
District directs use of screener data to identify students for required first-grade retention. *	26	15%
District directs use of screener data to identify students for possible grade retention.	57	33
District reports that decisions are made at the school level	69	40
District does not use screener data for retention	7	4
No information provided **	12	7

*5 districts, or 3 percent of all districts, reported that they require use of universal screener data for kindergarten retention

**Four districts did not answer the survey, and an additional 20 did not provide the requested information on this survey question.

Source: Staff compilation of OEA K-3 literacy district survey

Teacher survey data also indicate that universal screener data is not commonly used to identify students for required retention.

Teachers' Reports On Use Of Screener Data. Responses from the OEA teachers survey, aggregated at the school level, also indicate variation among schools in the commonwealth in the use of universal screener data to identify students for required versus possible retention in the first grade. Of the 355 schools for which at least one response was received, 11 percent (38 schools) had survey respondents who universally indicated use of screener data for required retention. Nineteen percent (67 schools) had survey respondents who universally indicated use of survey data for possible retention. In most schools, responses were mixed, or respondents were unsure. In 4 schools (1 percent of all represented), respondents indicated that screener data was not used. Responses were similarly mixed when asked about retention practices in kindergarten, though smaller percentages indicated use of screener data for required retention (6 percent).

Differing Interpretations Of Statutory Requirements For Retention Of First Grade Students. While KRS 158.305 (9)(a)(2) requires retention of first grade students who have a RIP and do not meet grade-level benchmarks during the school year, only 15 percent of districts report that they require retention based on screener data. It is not clear whether districts are deliberately modifying statutory requirements during implementation or whether they understand the statute to direct use of screener data in combination with other data to require retention.

OEA interviews of district staff also indicated varying interpretations of the statute. Some districts believe the statute

gives them flexibility in retention decisions, whereas others understand it to require retention for certain students.

Challenges Anticipated With Retention Requirement.

Almost one-third of districts reported that they anticipated challenges in meeting requirements for first-grade retention. Challenges included accommodating large numbers of retained students and convincing parents that students should be retained.

Almost one-third (31 percent) of districts reported that they anticipated challenges meeting requirements for first-grade retention, but only 5 percent of districts reported anticipating major challenges. Given that only 15 percent of districts report that they use universal screener data to require retention, it is not clear how many districts would report challenges under a strict interpretation of the statutory requirements. As challenges, respondents reported concerns about space and resources to accommodate the large number of students who might be retained in a district with many low-performing students. In addition, respondents noted difficulty in communicating the necessity of retention to parents, even in cases when there had been frequent communication from the beginning and throughout the year. Convincing parents that their children should be retained was noted as especially difficult when parents had knowledge of similarly achieving students who were not retained in other schools or districts. In some cases, parents would report their intention to withdraw their child to homeschool rather than being retained.

In keeping with many respondents' concerns about using universal screener data alone to require retention, one respondent suggested that Kentucky permit students who fail to meet benchmarks on the universal screener to retest:

Taking the spring assessment during the last two weeks of school can make the final parent meeting to discuss retention difficult. We'd also like to be able to retest the student before school begins, but having access to the universal screener can be difficult due to rostering in (Infinite Campus). We'd like to be able to check growth, especially if a student has participated in intervention throughout the summer.

Current Retention Patterns

In SY 2025, about 3 percent of students were retained in kindergarten and first grades. Retention rates had been higher following the COVID-19 pandemic.

As shown in Table 2.6, retention has been relatively uncommon in the commonwealth in recent years. In 2025, the percentage of all students who were retained in the same grade from the previous year was 3 percent in kindergarten and first grade and much lower in subsequent grades. Retention rates were much greater for students with IEPs.

Appendix H provides retention patterns in the last 10 years. It shows that retention rates increased following the COVID-19 pandemic, but have since returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Table 2.6
Count And Percentage Of Students Repeating a Grade
By IEP Status, SY 2025

	K	1	2	3	4
IEP	890 (7%)	606 (5%)	267 (2%)	81 (1%)	54 (0%*)
Non-IEP	696 (2)	804 (2)	445 (1)	167 (0*)	118 (0*)
All	1586 (3)	1410 (3)	712 (1)	248 (0*)	172 (0*)

Note: 0*= more than zero and less than 1.

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Department of Education

Alternatives To Retention

Most survey respondents reported increased levels of Tier II and Tier III supports as alternatives to retention.

Survey respondents were asked to describe district practices in place, other than retention, to address the needs of students who are far below grade level. The majority of comments submitted by districts reported use of Tier II or Tier III interventions to assist those students.

In one district, students are grouped by grade-level content during the literacy block and those below grade level receive daily intervention during a schoolwide intervention period that incorporates all available school staff.

In several districts, additional steps were reported. For example, one district's daily literacy blocks are organized by grade-level bands, regardless of students' actual grade level. In this district, students far below grade level are instructed during the literacy block with students who have similar skill needs; to the extent possible, students are instructed with same-age peers. In addition, students far below grade level receive Tier III interventions to assist them in progressing towards grade level performance. These interventions are provided daily during the dedicated literacy block using classroom teachers, elective teachers, instructional assistants, and tutors, all of whom have been trained to provide the interventions through a scripted program. Appendix F describes additional strategies—including summer school—described in several other districts.

Considerations For The General Assembly

Given the inconsistent implementation of retention requirements among districts, the General Assembly might consider clarification or adjustment to the statutory requirements for retention.

As described in this chapter; some districts interpret retention provisions of KRS 158.305 to require retention when a student fails to achieve grade-level benchmarks on the universal screener. In contrast, other districts understand that retention is required but interpret the statute to permit the use of universal screener data in combination with other sources to identify students for retention.

Given the inconsistency among districts in their understanding and implementation of retention requirements and concerns among some educators about use of screener data alone to require retention, the General Assembly might consider some clarifications or adjustments to the requirements or supports for retention and whether districts or schools should be setting thresholds to identify students for retention.

The use of multiple screeners by Kentucky districts complicates communication about or monitoring of retention requirements by KDE.

The use of multiple universal screeners by Kentucky districts complicates communication from KDE to districts about the implementation of retention requirements and also makes it very difficult for KDE to monitor implementation.

The General Assembly might consider additional good cause exemptions or test retakes.

Given the concern among many districts about using universal screener data alone to determine retention, the General Assembly might also consider flexibilities offered in some other states such as additional good cause exemptions from retention or permitted retakes.¹

Students With Characteristics Of Dyslexia

As of SY 2026, Anchorage Independent was the only district to establish policies for the identification and support of students with characteristics of dyslexia.

As of the SY 2026, KRS 158.307 permitted but did not require districts to establish policies related to the identification and support of students with characteristics of dyslexia. Anchorage Independent was the only school district in Kentucky to have established these policies as of that year.⁹ See Appendix I for review of data submitted by Anchorage Independent to KDE.

All districts have access to guidance, training, and technical assistance from KDE. As required by KRS 158.307, KDE has developed a dyslexia toolkit based on evidence-based practices for instructing students with characteristics of dyslexia.

Just over half of districts reported administering diagnostic assessments to identify students but less than one third reported that most teachers were trained to support these students.

As shown by Table 2.7, some districts reported implementing practices to support dyslexic students in most or all classrooms. Just over half (53 percent) reported the administration of diagnostic assessments to identify students, while 40 percent reported that resources are available in most classrooms to assist students once they are identified. Districts were less likely to report training of most or all teachers, however (31 percent).

¹ KRS 158.305 already permits good cause exemptions for students with IEPs and those who have already been retained.

Table 2.7
Percent Of Districts Reporting
Practices That Support Identification And Support Are Implemented
In Most Or All Classrooms

Type Of Support	Percent Of Districts
Diagnostic assessments administered to identify students with characteristics of dyslexia	53%
Resources to assist with instruction of students with characteristics of dyslexia	40
Teachers trained in methods for assisting students with characteristics of dyslexia	31

Source: OEA K-3 literacy district survey

Less than one fourth of teacher survey respondents reported sufficient resources for students with characteristics of dyslexia.

Teacher survey respondents indicated a need for greater support. Only 23 percent of teachers agreed that their schools had resources to support students with characteristics of dyslexia. Fifty-one percent of teachers disagreed, with 32 percent strongly disagreeing.^m

Educator Training And Support

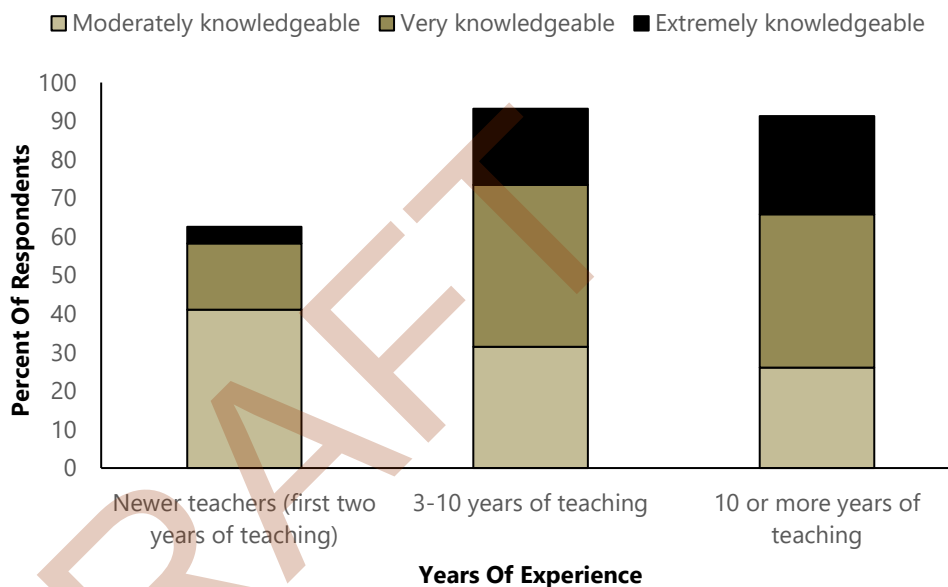
District survey respondents report that almost all experienced teachers and over one half of newer teachers are at least moderately knowledgeable about the science of reading.

As shown in Figure 2.A, over 90 percent of district survey respondents considered teachers with 3 years or more experience to be knowledgeable about teaching practices currently recommended by KDE based on the science of reading. Most respondents described these more experienced teachers as very or extremely knowledgeable. Sixty-two percent of district respondents rated newer teachers as knowledgeable, but only 21 percent reported that they are very or extremely knowledgeable.ⁿ¹⁰

^m The remaining teachers did not agree or disagree.

ⁿ SB 9 of RS 22 required Kentucky teacher preparation programs to include evidence-based reading instructional programming related to reading instruction in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension” and on related assessment and progress monitoring practices. A 2026 third-party evaluation by ICF found that 37 of 47 programs reviewed received a holistic score of “meeting expectations.”

Figure 2.A
Districts' Reports Of Educator Knowledge
Teaching Practices Based On The Science Of Reading



Source: OEA K-3 literacy district survey

Percent Of LETRS-Trained Educators

As of SY 2026, 19 percent of educators had completed LETRS training.

Statewide, 3,444 (19 percent) of educators had completed LETRS training as of SY 2026 and an additional 2,338 (13 percent) were in the process of completing the training in SY 2027.^o

Educators. Figures 2.A and 2.B illustrate the range among districts and schools in the total percent of educators who had completed LETRS training from SY 2022 through SY 2026.

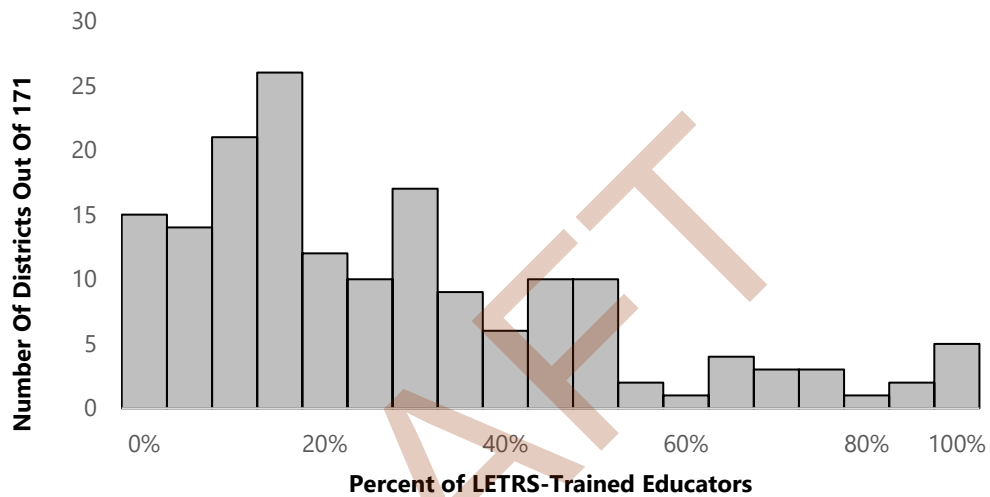
Completion rates ranged from 0 to a 100 percent among districts and schools. Fifteen districts and 161 schools had no LETRS trained educators as of SY 2026.

At the district and school level, the percentage of LETRS-trained educators ranged broadly, from 0 to 100 percent. Fifteen districts and 161 schools had no LETRS-trained educators. Appendix J shows the percent of educators who have completed LETRS in

^o The percentage of LETRS-trained educators was calculated by taking the total number of educators who had completed their LETRS training since 2022 and dividing it by the number of Kindergarten Instructors, Primary Classroom Instructors, Elementary School Instructors, and Exceptional Child Instructors or Reading Consultants at elementary schools, in the Professional Staffing Database.

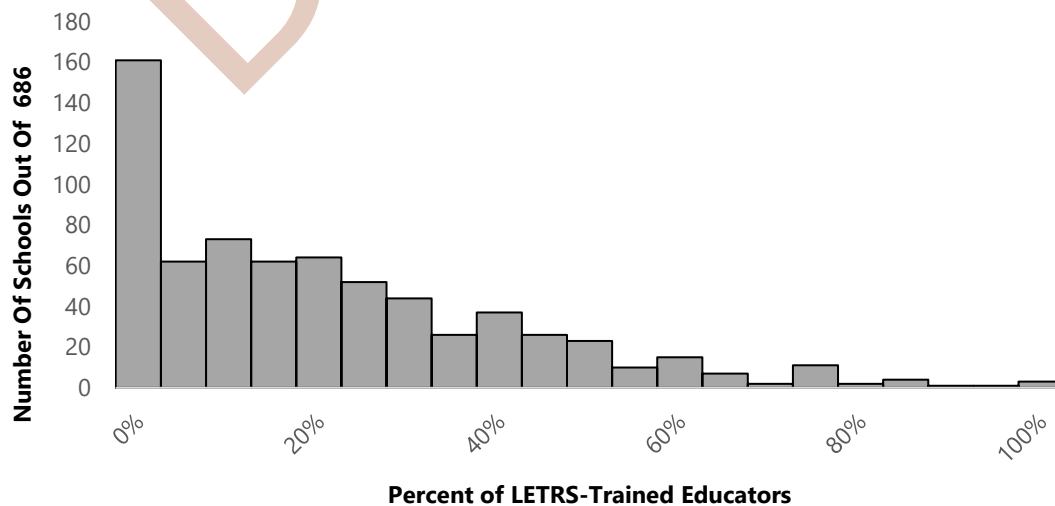
each district and whether any are in the process of completing training in SY 2027.

Figure 2.B
Percentage Of Educators, By District,
Who Had Completed LETRS Training By 2026



Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

Figure 2.C
Percentage Of Educators, By School,
Who Had Completed LETRS Training By 2026



Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

As of SY 2026, 4 of the lowest-performing districts and 27 of the lowest-performing schools had no educators who had completed LETRS training.

Staff analysis indicates that in the lowest-performing districts, educators completed LETRS training at a higher rate (22 percent) than the state (19 percent), but completion varied among those districts.^P As of 2026, 4 of the lowest-performing districts had no educators who had completed LETRS, and an additional eight had less than half the state rate of LETRS completers.

In the lowest-performing schools, educators completed LETRS training at a slightly lower rate (18 percent) than the state, with completion varying among schools. As of 2026, 27 of the lowest-performing schools had no educators who had completed LETRS and an additional 14 had less than half the state rate of LETRS-trained educators.

As of SY 2026, almost one administrator for every Kentucky elementary school had completed LETRS training, though completion varied broadly among districts.

Administrators. As of the end of SY 2026, 635 administrators had completed LETRS training. Statewide, this is almost one administrator for every elementary school. Administrator participation varied by district, however. Appendix J shows administrators who had completed training as of SY 2026 as a ratio of elementary schools in each district. The appendix also shows whether each district had administrators in the process of completing training in SY 2027.

Teachers were more than 1.5 times as likely to report strong instructional support from LETRS-trained administrators than from administrators who were not LETRS-trained.

Staff analysis of OEA teacher survey data indicates that teachers who reported LETRS-trained administrators were much more likely to report strong or very strong support from their administrators in meeting students' early literacy needs than those who did not report LETRS-trained administrators (62 percent and 39 percent, respectively).

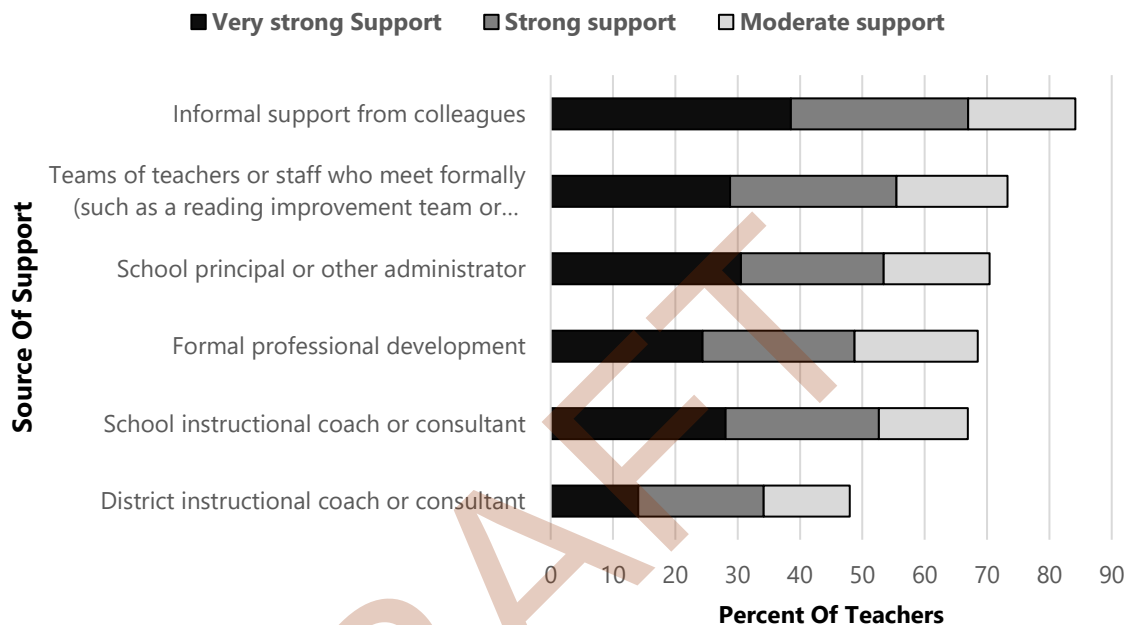
Sources of Support

At least two-thirds of teacher survey respondents indicated at least moderate support from professional development, instructional coaches, and administrators. The strongest support was indicated from colleagues or teacher teams.

As shown in Figure 2D, support from formal professional development, school instructional coaches, professional learning communities, and principals or administrators was indicated by at least two-thirds of teachers as providing at least moderate support, though the majority of those teachers indicated strong or very strong support. The forms of support identified by the most teachers as strong or very strong were informal support from colleagues or formal support from teacher teams (67 percent and 55 percent, respectively).

^POEA considers lowest-performing districts of schools to be those in which average student scale scores are one standard deviation or more below the mean.

Figure 2.D
Support For Teachers In Meeting
Students Literacy Needs



Source: OEA K-3 literacy teacher survey

Districts' Reported Need For Additional Professional Development.

More than 70 percent of district administrators reported at least some need for more professional development, though relatively small percentages indicated a strong need.

More than 70 percent of districts reported at least some need for more professional development or support for teachers and administrators, though a smaller percentage reported this as a high need. Districts were most likely to report a high need for additional mentoring for teachers (25 percent), followed by formal professional development for teachers (18 percent) and formal professional development or ongoing mentoring for administrators (16 percent).

Meeting Students' Literacy Needs

Ninety-five percent of teacher survey respondents reported being able to meet basic instructional needs for students on grade level.

Teachers were asked to identify how well they felt able to meet student needs with the resources available. Table 2.8 shows that almost all (95 percent) of respondents reported that they were able to meet at least the basic needs of students on grade level and 65 reported that most or all of these students' needs could be met.

Teachers were much less likely to report being able to meet the needs of students who were far below grade level, had limited English proficiency, or had a disability.

Respondents were slightly less likely to indicate an ability to meet the basic needs of students above or below grade level (82 percent and 78 percent, respectively), though the great majority felt their basic needs could be met.⁴ Teachers were much less likely to report they could meet the needs of students reading far below grade level. Forty-one percent of respondents reported an inability to meet the basic needs of these students, while almost one-third reported being unable to meet basic needs of English learners and students with IEPs.

Table 2.8
Teachers' Reported Abilities To Meet Student Needs
With The Resources Available

Student Group	Needs Are Unable to Be Met	A Few Needs Are Met	Basic Needs Are Met	Most Needs Are Met	All Needs Are Met
Students Reading Above Grade Level	4%	13%	26%	39%	18%
Students Reading At Grade Level	1	5	30	41	24
Students Reading Below Grade Level	3	19	31	31	15
Students Reading Far Below Level	14	27	24	24	12
English Learner Students	10	24	31	24	11
Students with an IEP	6	26	24	29	16

Note: Sums may not total due to rounding.

Source: OEA K-3 literacy teacher survey

Top challenges reported by teachers in meeting students' literacy needs were student misconduct and lack of parent support. Over one half reported strong or extreme challenges.

As shown by Table 2.9, the top challenges reported by teachers in meeting students' early literacy needs—student misconduct and lack of parent support— were not directly related to literacy instruction. Over half of respondents reported that these challenges were strong or extreme. Related to student misconduct, one teacher commented, “classroom instruction is interrupted so much that learning is not taking place. We receive little support from our district with these disruptive behaviors.”

Student misconduct and lack of parent support were followed by insufficient numbers of support staff; 43 percent of teachers reported this as a strong or extreme problem.

⁴ Percentages for meeting basic needs total those reporting basic needs, most needs, or all needs are met. Percentages reporting inability to meet student needs sum those reporting being unable to meet needs of meet a few needs.

Table 2.9
Challenges Reported By Teachers As Strong Or Extreme
In Meeting Students' Literacy Needs

Challenge	Percent Of Teachers
Student misconduct	53%
Lack of parental support	51
Insufficient numbers of staff for students needing additional support	43
Insufficient amount of planning time (for tasks such as reviewing data, developing intervention plans, or communicating with parents)	34
Large class size	33
Insufficient amount of time for literacy instruction (Tier 1)	18

Note: Sums may not total due to rounding.
Source: OEA K-3 literacy teacher survey

A 2025 OEA report indicated student misconduct as a major challenge in some schools, especially in the younger grades. In some cases, extreme behavior of some students requires other students and the teachers to evacuate the classroom.

OEA's 2025 OEA study, *Student Discipline In Kentucky Schools*, found that elementary schools, in particular, are facing challenges with students as young as pre-kindergartners who cause classroom disruptions due to difficulty regulating extreme behavior such as screaming, throwing objects, and overturning furniture. Seventeen percent of elementary principals described these challenges as major or extreme. Seventy-two percent of elementary principals reported incidents in which it was necessary to require a regular classroom teacher and all but the disruptive student(s) to evacuate the classroom, due to this extreme behavior. OEA's 2024 *Student Achievement In Kentucky Schools* report found that lowest- and highest-performing schools were distinguished from each other more by indicators related to student behavior and school culture and climate than by any other data available for the study.¹¹

Student misconduct was also identified as a primary challenge by teachers in schools with Read to Achieve grants.

A 2025 report from the Kentucky Reading Research Center on the Read to Achieve Grant Program also identified student misconduct as a primary challenge to effective early literacy instruction according to teachers surveyed. Interventionists also reported student behavior as the most frequent impediment to effective early literacy instruction, behind only time.¹²

¹ "Implementing Kentucky's *Read to Succeed Act* within an MTSS Framework". Kentucky Department of Education, [Web](#).

² "2026 Approved K-12 High-Quality Instructional Resources for Reading and Writing". Kentucky Department of Education, March 2026, pp. 1-2. [Web](#).

³ Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners And Educators. "What Is The Orton-Gillingham Approach?" [Web](#).

⁴ "KDE Approved Universal Screener Assessments". Kentucky Department of Education, [Web](#).

⁵ KRS 158.792 (1)(b)

⁶ “KDE Approved Diagnostics Comparison Chart”. Kentucky Department of Education, [Web](#).

⁷ “Implementing Kentucky’s *Read to Succeed Act* within an MTSS Framework”. Kentucky Department of Education, [Web](#).

⁸ KRS 158.305 (1)(j)

⁹

¹⁰ ICF Incorporated, LLC. *Educator Preparation Providers Third-Party Evaluator: 2025-2026 Annual Report Executive Summary*. June, 2026.

¹¹ Commonwealth of Kentucky. Office of Education Accountability. *Student Achievement: Lessons Learned From Kentucky’s Relatively Highest- And Lowest-Performing Schools*.

¹² Terry Scott, Ph.D., Sangbaek Park, Ph.D., and Amy Lingo, Ed.D. Annual Report on Kentucky’s Read to Achieve Grant Program. Kentucky Reading Research Center. October 2025. Web.

DRAFT

Chapter 3

Third Grade Reading Performance Trends

Kentucky has made steady gains in reading proficiency even as national scores have declined.

This chapter shows steady state-level progress in reading proficiency after SY 2022 on the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA), even in the face of declining scores of students in the nation generally and increases in Kentucky in the percentages of test-takers who had limited English proficiency. The chapter also shows wide variation among districts and schools in their degree of progress and proficiency rates in SY 2025.

Some districts and schools remain very low performing, even after student demographic characteristics are taken into account.

Lower proficiency rates in districts and schools are associated with, but not entirely explained by, higher percentages of students from lower-achieving subgroups such as those with limited English proficiency. Even after taking student demographic characteristics into account, 25 districts and 71 schools performed far below the state average in SY 2025, however.^a

Proficiency rates for IEP students range extremely broadly among districts and schools. Unexplained variation may affect comparability of scores in some cases.

The chapter also notes broad and unexplained variation in some districts and schools in the proficiency rates of students with IEPs compared to students without IEPs. This variation may affect comparability of district and school proficiency rates in some cases.

Reading Proficiency Changes From SY 2022 to SY 2025

Since SY 2022, reading proficiency rates have increased by 2 percentage points for 3rd graders and by more for 4th and 5th graders (4 and 5 percent, respectively).

Between SY 2022 and SY 2025, proficiency rates increased by 2 percentage points at the 3rd grade level, 4 percentage points at the 4th grade level, and 5 percentage points at the 5th grade level. Proficiency rates are not sensitive to increases in performance in the lower performance designations. During these years, the percentage of 3rd grade students who were novice decreased by 3 percentage points, yet there was no corresponding increase in the percentage of students who were proficient.

^a As explained in Appendix L, OEA considers very low performance to be one standard deviation or more below the mean.

Table 3.1
KSA Reading Proficiency Rates, 3rd – 5th Grades
SY 2022-SY 2025

Grade	2022	2023	2024	2025	Change 2022- 2025
3	45%	46%	47%	47%	2%
4	46	48	50	50	4
5	45	48	46	50	5

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Percentages of LEP students increased from 8.6 to 9.5 percent during this time period.

It should be noted that the percentage of 3rd grade reading test-takers with limited English proficiency increased during this time period, from 8.6 percent in 2022 to 9.5 percent in 2025. Under static conditions, this change would likely be associated with a decrease in the percentage of students who are proficient.

Uneven Change Among Districts

Third grade proficiency increased by 5 percentage points or more in over one third of districts but dropped by 5 percentage points or more in almost one fourth of districts.

Between SY 2022 and SY, changes in proficiency rates were uneven among districts. Third-grade proficiency increased by 5 percentage points or more in well over one-third of districts (38 percent) but decreased by 5 percentage points or more in almost one-fourth of districts. Appendix D shows the change in 3rd grade proficiency rates from SY 2022 to SY 2025, by district. ^b

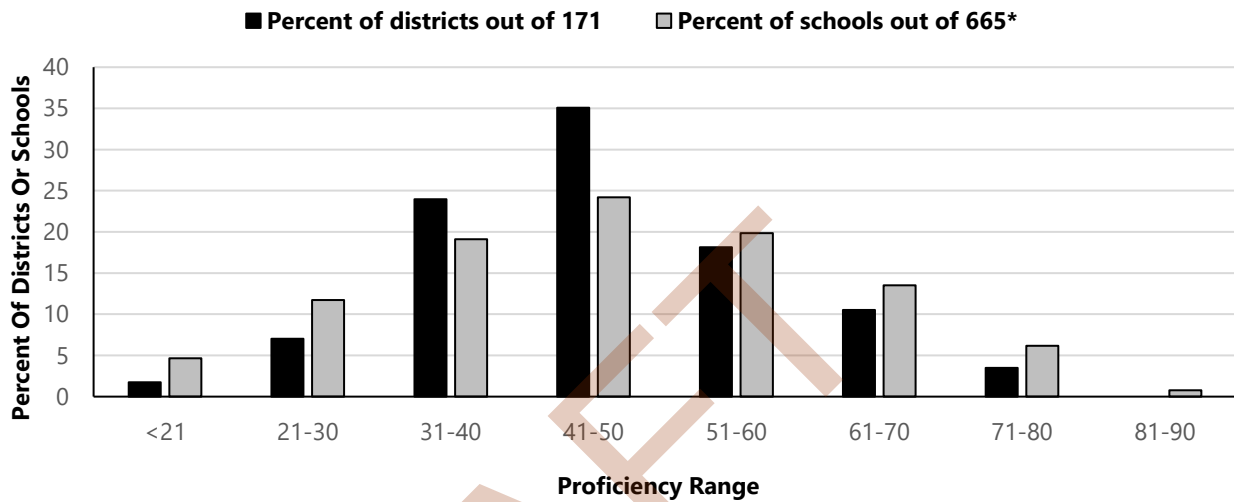
Third Grade Proficiency SY 2025

In 2025, 47 percent of 3rd grade students were proficient or distinguished in reading on the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA). Proficiency rates ranged from 15 percent to 77 percent among districts and from 10 percent to 85 percent among schools.

Figure 3.A shows the percentage of districts and schools by proficiency rate range. A total of 9 percent of districts and 17 percent of schools had proficiency rates below 30 percent. In contrast, 15 percent of districts and 21 percent of schools had proficiency rates that exceeded 60 percent.

^b When the performance of all students in grades 3 through 5 are taken into account, however, a greater percentage of districts increased by 5 percentage points or more (44 percent), and a smaller percentage decreased by 5 percentage points or more (12 percent). At the school level, 45 percent of schools increased by 5 percentage points or more from SY 22 – SY 25, while 15 percent decreased.

Figure 3.A
Percent Of Districts Or Schools
By Range Of 3rd Grade KSA Reading Proficiency, SY 2025



*Data for 21 schools was not reportable due to federal reporting rules related to student privacy. ^c
Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Figure 3.B shows a geographic map of 3rd grade proficiency rates by Kentucky district. Darker colors indicate higher scores.

^c Explain FERPA

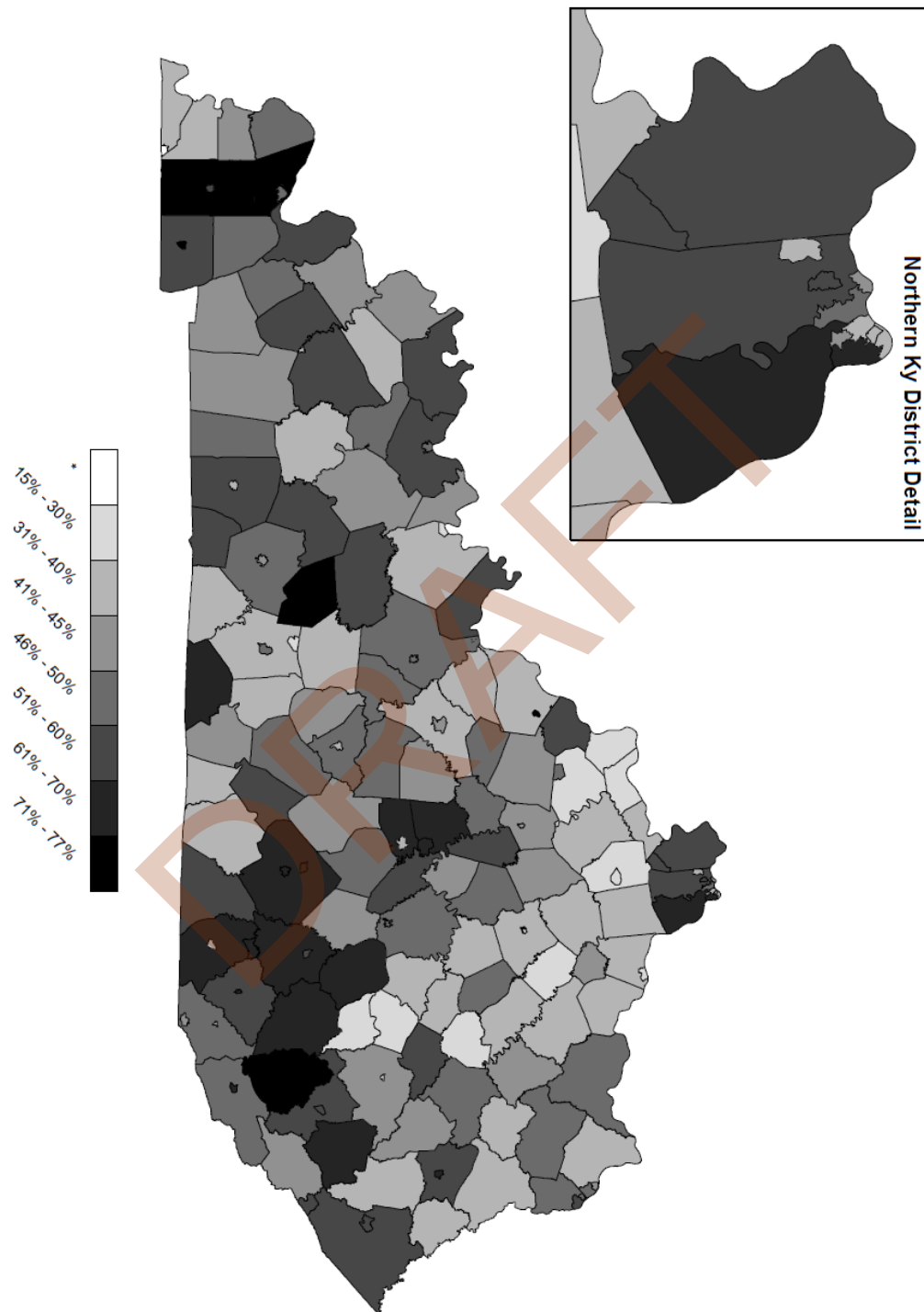
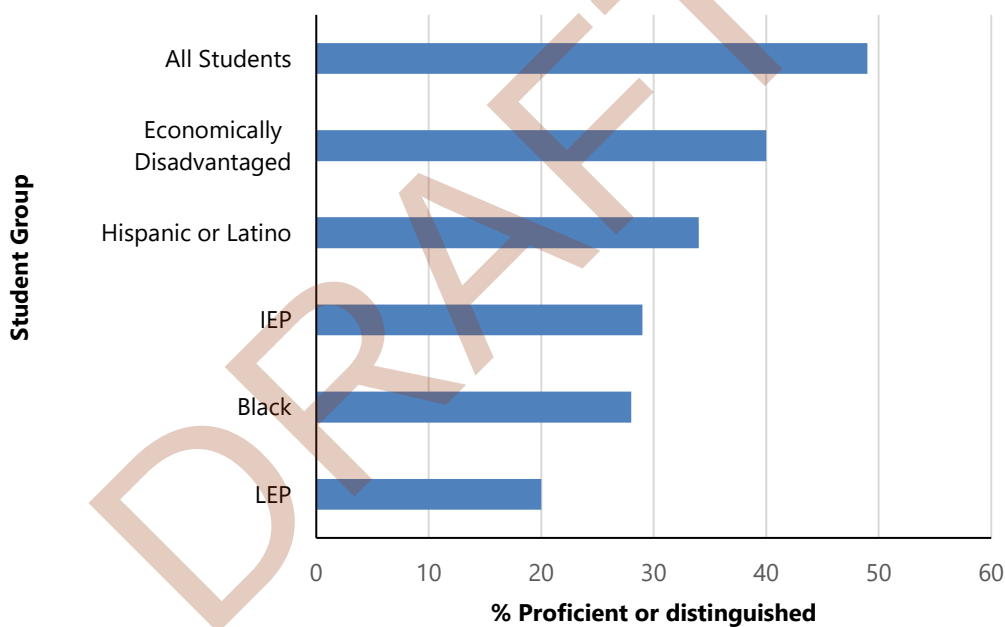


Figure 3.B
Percent Of Students Proficient Or Distinguished
KSA 3rd Grade Reading, SY 2025

As shown by Figure 3.C, proficiency rates of students with limited English proficiency (20 percent), who were Black (28 percent) , or who had an IEP (29 percent) were far below the state average of 47 percent. Students who were Hispanic or economically disadvantaged also scored below state averages (34 percent and 40 percent, respectively).

Figure 3.C
3rd Grade KSA Reading Proficiency
By Student Subgroup, SY 2025



Note: IEP = students who qualify for an Individualized Education Program because they have a disability. LEP = students with Limited English Proficiency

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Schools with the lowest proficiency rates, on average, had three times the percentage of LEP students .

Table 3.2 shows an association between schools' 3rd-grade proficiency rates in SY 2025 and the percent of students in the school who were economically disadvantaged, were not white, or had limited English proficiency. As proficiency rates decreased, the percentage of students in those groups increased, on average. In schools with proficiency rates below 20 percent, the percentage of LEP students was three times the state rate, and the percentage of students who were not white was over 2.4 times the state rate.

Table 3.2
Demographic Characteristics Of Schools By
3rd Grade Reading Proficiency Range, SY 2025

Proficiency Range	Number of Schools	Average Of Schools In Range			
		Economic Disadvantage	IEP	Non-white	LEP
<21	31	87%	17%	78%	30%
21-30	78	77	18	42	16
31-40	127	72	20	28	9
41-50	161	67	20	23	6
51-60	132	60	19	22	6
61-70	90	56	18	19	5
71-80	41	58	21	11	2
>80	5	59	20	14	5
State	665	64	18	30	9.6

Note: Demographic characteristics are based on 3rd grade tested populations and include only those schools for which proficiency rates were publicly reported.

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

District And School Performance Relative To Peer Districts And Schools

Using methods described in Appendix K, OEA analyzed school performance in light of student demographic characteristics to identify the proportion of schools and districts that were very low performing even when student demographic characteristics were taken into account. Note that this analysis is based on aggregate information for each student's scale score rather than their performance designation as novice, apprentice, proficient, or distinguished. Schools and districts identified as lowest-performing using this method are also far below average when ranked by proficiency rate.

Even after taking student demographic characteristics into account, OEA identified 71 schools and 25 districts that performed very far below their peers.

As shown in Appendix K, the analysis showed that, of the 108 lowest-performing schools, 71 were still classified as the lowest performing when the performance of their students was compared to similar peers across the state. Of the 31 lowest-performing districts, 25 were lowest-performing when the performance of their students was compared to similar peers across the state. These results indicate that student demographic characteristics are associated with third-grade reading performance but do not fully account for the performance of the lowest-performing schools and districts.

Broad Variation In Reading Performance Of Students With IEPs

Statewide, students with IEPs perform far below those who did have IEPs

In comparing students with IEPs in schools and districts with their peers across the state, OEA staff identified unexplained differences in the performance of students with IEPs. Statewide, students with IEPs, on average, are proficient at much lower rates than their peers without IEPs (29 percent and 53 percent, respectively). In some districts and schools, however, students with IEPs perform far above those without IEPs.

Proficiency rates of students with IEPs exceed those of students without IEPs by more than 20 percentage points in 5 districts and 24 schools.

As shown in Appendix L, proficiency rates of students with IEPs increase, on average, in districts and schools as the percentage of test-taking students with IEPs increases. In districts and schools with the highest percentages of test-taking students with IEPs, students with IEPs commonly outscore students without IEPs. Proficiency rates of students with IEPs exceed those of students without IEPs by more than 20 percentage points in 5 districts and 24 schools.

OEA has identified these patterns in previous reports and indicated possible differences among districts and schools in the criteria used to identify students as eligible for IEPs and possible variation in test taking conditions.

These data raise concerns about the comparability of reading proficiency rates for students with IEPs among districts and schools. OEA has identified these patterns in previous reports and indicated possible differences among districts and schools in the criteria used to identify students as eligible for IEPs as well as possible variation among districts and schools in test-taking conditions.^d

Considerations For Future Action In Lower-Performing Schools

This chapter has shown increased reading proficiency statewide since SY 2022 but continued very low performance in about 10 percent of schools in SY 2025, even after student demographic characteristics were taken into account.

A variety of supports are currently being implemented in Kentucky schools and districts to assist schools in improving early literacy outcomes.

As described in Chapter 1, a variety of supports are currently being implemented in Kentucky schools and districts. Staff analysis indicates that all but one of the lowest-performing elementary schools and more than half of very low-performing elementary schools have received at least one form of support aimed at improving early literacy outcomes between SY 2022 and SY 2027.

^d *Student Achievement: Lessons From Kentucky's Relatively Higher- and Lower-Performing Schools, 2024, p. 71. ; Effectiveness And Efficiency Of Kentucky School Districts, 2023, p.26.*

These supports include designation as a school required to undergo Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) per federal accountability provisions, a Read to Achieve Grant, or a KDE-assigned literacy coach. ^e

As sufficient data becomes available, it will be important to understand the strengths and limitations of existing supports relative to the needs of particular schools.

Data available for this study are insufficient to indicate the relative success of these supports, as SY 2025 was the most recent year for which reading performance data were available. Additionally, many of the supports were implemented in that year and subsequent years. Given the state and federal investments in these supports, it will be important, however, to understand their strengths and limitations relative to the needs and conditions in particular schools.

In some schools, contextual factors such as student misconduct or teacher turnover can undermine the effectiveness of instructional reforms. Literacy support in these schools may be more effective if implemented in combination with efforts to address those challenges.

Research conducted previously by OEA in lowest-performing schools has demonstrated that contextual challenges such as teacher turnover, school culture/climate, and student behavior are barriers to instructional reforms in some schools.¹ Teacher turnover can undermine the collegial support networks identified by teachers surveyed for this study as the most effective form of support for early literacy instruction.^f In addition, benefits to the school of literacy coaching or other instructional supports may be lost if teachers who received the support leave the school.

Student misconduct was identified by both teachers surveyed for this study and a recent evaluation of the Read to Achieve program as the top barrier to supporting students' literacy needs². Literacy supports provided to schools in which teacher turnover or student misconduct is a major concern may be more effective if implemented in combination with efforts to address those challenges.

¹ *Student Achievement: Lessons From Kentucky's Relatively Higher- and Lower-Performing Schools*, 2024, pages 97-102.

² Terry Scott, Ph.D., Sangbaek Park, Ph.D., and Amy Lingo, Ed.D. *Annual Report on Kentucky's Read to Achieve Grant Program*. Kentucky Reading Research Center. October 2025, page 29.

^e Staff considered lowest-performing schools to be those in which 21 percent or less of students were proficient in reading in SY 2025 and very low performing schools to be those in which 21-30 percent of students were proficient.

^f See Table 2.D in Chapter 2.

Appendix A

Teacher Survey Response Rate Analysis

The OEA teacher survey was distributed to those coded in KDE's Certified Staffing Database as kindergarten instructors, primary classroom instructors, or exceptional child instructors in schools with elementary students. The survey received 727 total responses, 599 of which indicated the district and school in which they are employed. From those 599 responses, 387 of the 728 Kentucky schools in which K-3 is taught and 141 of 171 school districts are represented. Counting only those responses used, the response rate for this survey was approximately eight percent.

The OEA teacher survey did not use random sampling, and as such, any data reported from it should be interpreted with caution. However, analysis of the differences between those schools with at least one respondent and those without for 12 KDE teacher working conditions survey questions related to professional development opportunities, satisfaction with the work environment, school safety, and the availability of additional resources indicates that the two populations are generally similar.

Table A.1 displays the average response between those schools with at least one respondent on the OEA teacher survey and those with none. Additionally, p-values generated from a t-test, indicating whether the difference between the mean response for the two groups is statistically significant, are provided.

Table A.1
Response Weighting KDE 2026 Working Conditions Survey
Schools With And Without Survey Responders

Question	Schools with no responses	Respondent Schools	P-Value
Overall, how positive is the working environment at your school?	3.95	3.85	0.02
How valuable are the available professional development opportunities at your school?	3.67	3.60	0.03
How useful do you find the feedback you receive on your teaching?	3.89	3.87	0.53
How much trust exists between school leaders and faculty?	4.03	3.93	0.02
To what extent does the quality of the resources at your school need to improve?	3.56	3.53	0.55
At your school, how crowded do the learning spaces feel?	3.53	3.51	0.59
How important is it for your school to hire more specialists to help students?	2.42	2.41	0.91
How many more resources do you need to adequately support your students?	3.59	3.60	0.71
Overall, how much does your school struggle due to a lack of resources?	3.69	3.69	0.94
How respectful are the relations between students and teachers?	4.07	4.01	0.02
How often does student behavior disrupt the learning environment at your school?	2.87	2.81	0.13
Overall, how safe is the school environment?	4.29	4.29	0.97

Respondent schools provided, on average, significantly lower responses on the KY Impact survey for how positive their working environment is, how valuable available PD opportunities are, how much trust exists between school leaders and faculty, and how respectful the relationships between students and staff are. For the other eight questions analyzed, the difference in the responses provided by schools with respondents and those without was not statistically significant.

Appendix B

NAEP 4th And 8th Grade Reading

Table B.1
4th Grade NAEP Reading Test Scores
Kentucky, Surrounding States, Nation, And Mississippi
SY 2002-SY 2024

	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2022	2024
Illinois	NA	216	216	219	219	219	219	222	220	218	218	214
Indiana	222	220	218	222	223	221	225	227	226	222	217	220
Kentucky	219	219	220	222	226	225	224	228	224	221	217	218
Mississippi	203	205	204	208	211	209	209	214	215	219	217	219
Missouri	220	222	221	221	224	220	222	223	223	218	213	212
Ohio	222	222	223	226	225	224	224	225	225	222	219	216
Tennessee	214	212	214	216	217	215	220	219	219	219	214	215
Virginia	225	223	226	227	227	226	229	229	228	224	214	214
West Virginia	219	219	215	215	215	214	215	216	217	213	205	206
National	219	218	219	221	221	221	222	223	222	220	217	215

Source: National Center for Educational Statistics.

Table B.2
8th Grade NAEP Reading Test Scores
Kentucky, Surrounding States, Nation, And Mississippi
SY 2002-SY 2024

	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2022	2024
Illinois	NA	266	264	263	265	266	267	267	267	265	262	262
Indiana	265	265	261	264	266	265	267	268	272	266	261	262
Kentucky	265	266	264	262	267	269	270	268	265	263	258	258
Mississippi	255	255	251	250	251	254	253	252	256	256	253	253
Missouri	268	267	265	263	267	267	267	267	266	263	258	255
Ohio	268	267	267	268	269	268	269	266	268	267	262	260
Tennessee	260	258	259	259	261	259	265	265	262	262	258	259
Virginia	269	268	268	267	266	267	268	267	268	262	260	256
West Virginia	264	260	255	255	255	256	257	260	259	256	249	247
National	264	263	262	263	264	265	268	265	267	263	260	258

Source: National Center for Educational Statistics.

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Appendix C

K-PREP Scores and Student Population Characteristics SY 2015 And SY 2019

Table C.1
K-PREP Reading Performance Designations
4th and 8th Grades, SY 2015 and SY 2019

		Novice	Apprentice	Proficient	Distinguished	Proficient/ Distinguished
4	2015	18.8%	29%	37.8%	14.4%	52.2%
	2019	19.2	27.8	37.6	15.4	53
	2015- 2019	0.4	-1.2	-0.2	1	0.8
8	2015	21.5	24.4	36.5	17.6	54.1
	2019	17.3	20.1	35.6	27	62.6
	2015- 2019	-4.2	-4.3	-0.9	9.4	8.5

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

Table C.2
FRL, IEP, LEP As A Percent Of K-PREP
4th And 8th Grade Tested Populations
SY 2015 and SY 2019

Grade	Year	Economically Disadvantaged	IEP	LEP
4	2015	63%	14%	3%
	2019	64	16	5.6
8	2015	59	11	2
	2019	60	11	3

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

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Appendix D

Early Literacy Curriculum and Assessment Adoption by District

Table D.1
KDE-Approved Reading Programs And Assessments By District, SY 2027

District	% Proficient And Distinguished - 3rd Grade Reading 2025	Change In % Proficient & Distinguished 22-25	Comprehensive Reading Program (HQIR)	HQIR KDE- Approved	Universal Screener	Diagnostic Assessment
Adair County	50	9%	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Allen County	37	-2	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	FastBridge (aReading)	i-Ready
Anchorage Independent	74	3	Amplify - CKLA	Y	MAP	MAP
Anderson County	50	-2	Literacy Footprints, Guided Reading, Coach Digital, Study Island.	N	MAP	MAP
Ashland Independent	51	0	Magnetic Foundations	N*	i-Ready	i-Ready, STAR Phonics
Augusta Independent	21	-17	Amplify - CKLA	Y	mCLASS	STAR Phonics
Ballard County	49	0	Great Minds Wit & Wisdom	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Barbourville Independent	66	18	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Bardstown Independent	42	6	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	Acadience Reading, i- Ready
Barren County	39	-10	Amplify - CKLA	Y	MAP	MAP
Bath County	36	-9	Benchmark Advance	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Beechwood Independent	60	2	HMH - Into Reading	Y	MAP	Acadience Reading
Bell County	48	13	Amplify - CKLA	Y	MAP	MAP
Bellevue Independent	34	19	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	MAP	MAP

District	% Proficient And Distinguished - 3rd Grade Reading 2025	Change In % Proficient & Distinguished 22-25	Comprehensive Reading Program (HQIR)	HQIR KDE- Approved	Universal Screener	Diagnostic Assessment
Berea						
Independent	46	7	i-Ready	N	i-Ready	i-Ready
Boone County	54	-5	Amplify - CKLA	Y	MAP	MAP
Bourbon County	36	-13	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	STAR CBM
Bowling Green Independent	41	-4	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	i-Ready	Amira, i- Ready
Boyd County	49	3	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	STAR CBM
Boyle County	68	5	District created curriculum	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Bracken County	35	3	Amplify - CKLA	Y	MAP	MAP
Breathitt County	45	18	Great Minds Wit & Wisdom	Y	MAP	MAP
Breckinridge County	38	-16	HMH - Into Reading	Y	MAP	MAP
Bullitt County	40	-10	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Burgin Independent	67	5	Benchmark Advance	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Butler County	53	15	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Caldwell County	51	7	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Calloway County	57	4	HMH - Into Reading	Y	MAP	MAP
Campbell County	64	-2	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	MAP	Acadience Reading, MAP
Campbellsville Independent	38	13	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Carlisle County	42	9	HMH - Into Reading	Y	STAR	STAR Phonics
Carroll County	24	6	HMH - Into Reading	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Carter County	50	-3	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Casey County	45	2	MGH - Wonders	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Caverna Independent	23	-16	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	MAP	MAP

District	% Proficient And Distinguished - 3rd Grade Reading 2025	Change In % Proficient & Distinguished 22-25	Comprehensive Reading Program (HQIR)	HQIR KDE- Approved	Universal Screener	Diagnostic Assessment
Christian County	44	7	HMH - Into Reading i-Ready Magnetic	Y	MAP	MAP
Clark County	39	-7	Literacy	N*	i-Ready	i-Ready
Clay County	70	18	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Clinton County	31	7	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	MAP	MAP
Cloverport Independent	20	-27	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	MAP	MAP
Corbin Independent	70	18	Amplify - CKLA	Y	MAP	MAP
Covington Independent	46	9	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	STAR	STAR CBM
Crittenden County	45	-17	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Cumberland County	45	-2	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Danville Independent	34	7	HMH - Into Reading, Open Up - K-5	Y	i-Ready	Amira, i- Ready
Daviess County	52	8	Great Minds, Wit & Wisdom, Open Up K-5	Y	MAP	MAP
Dawson Springs Independent	40	-14	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Dayton Independent	37	-6	Amplify - CKLA	Y	Acadience	Acadience Reading
East Bernstadt Independent	59	-8	HMH - Into Reading	Y	MAP	MAP
Edmonson County	74	7	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	STAR CBM
Elizabethtown Independent	49	0	Open Up - Bookworms	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Elliott County	37	5	HMH - Into Reading	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Eminence Independent	49	8	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready, STAR CBM
Erlanger- Elsmere Independent	32	2	Open Up - K-5	Y	MAP	Acadience Reading, STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Estill County	34	6	i-Ready Reading	N	i-Ready	i-Ready

District	% Proficient And Distinguished - 3rd Grade Reading 2025	Change In % Proficient & Distinguished 22-25	Comprehensive Reading Program (HQIR)	HQIR KDE- Approved	Universal Screener	Diagnostic Assessment
Fairview Independent	50	-7	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Fayette County	50	2	Benchmark Advance	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Fleming County	35	2	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	N/A	N/A
Floyd County	37	5	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	MAP	MAP STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Fort Thomas Independent	67	-1	Amplify - CKLA	Y	STAR	STAR Phonics
Frankfort Independent	44	1	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Franklin County	44	4	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Fulton County	39	10	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Fulton Independent	*	N/A	HMH - Into Reading	Y	MAP, AMIRA	Amira, MAP
Gallatin County	36	-1	Open Up - K-5	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Garrard County	54	15	HMH - Into Reading	Y	i-Ready	Amira, i- Ready
Glasgow Independent	47	-2	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Grant County	28	-9	Open Up - K-5	Y	MAP	MAP STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Graves County	72	9	Amplify - CKLA	Y	STAR	STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Grayson County	53	-6	Amplify - CKLA	Y	STAR	STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Green County	41	-9	Open Up - K-5	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Greenup County	32	-1	Great Minds - Wit & Wisdom	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Hancock County	41	-10	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	MAP	MAP
Hardin County	48	1	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Harlan County	47	5	Amplify - CKLA	Y	STAR	STAR Phonics

District	% Proficient And Distinguished - 3rd Grade Reading 2025	Change In % Proficient & Distinguished 22-25	Comprehensive Reading Program (HQIR)	HQIR KDE- Approved	Universal Screener	Diagnostic Assessment
Harlan Independent	62	-7	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	MAP	MAP
Harrison County	39	-2	HMH - Into Reading	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Hart County	36	-9	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready i-Ready, STAR Phonics
Hazard Independent	54	17	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	i-Ready	
Henderson County	57	6	Fountas and Pinnel Classroom	N*	MAP	MAP
Henry County	30	-9	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Hickman County	34	-8	HMH - Into Reading	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Hopkins County	56	12	HMH - Into Reading	Y	MAP	MAP
Jackson County	62	2	HMH - Into Reading	Y	STAR	i-Ready STAR Phonics
Jackson Independent	22	N/A	Amplify - CKLA	Y	Exact Path	
Jefferson County	34	-4	Imagine Learning	Y	MAP	MAP
Jenkins Independent	54	26	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	MAP	MAP
Jessamine County	43	2	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Johnson County	56	8	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	STAR CBM
Kenton County	58	3	Amplify - CKLA	Y	MAP	MAP
Knott County	62	19	Great Minds, Wit & Wisdom	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Knox County	55	17	Amplify - CKLA	Y	MAP	MAP
LaRue County	46	2	HMH - Into Reading	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Laurel County	68	-4	HMH - Into Reading	Y	i-Ready	Amira
Lawrence County	40	-9	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	STAR	STAR CBM
Lee County	22	-9	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Leslie County	77	26	Amplify - CKLA	Y	MAP	MAP
Letcher County	41	4	Amplify - CKLA	Y	MAP	MAP
Lewis County	49	4	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready

District	% Proficient And Distinguished - 3rd Grade Reading 2025	Change In % Proficient & Distinguished 22-25	Comprehensive Reading Program (HQIR)	HQIR KDE- Approved	Universal Screener	Diagnostic Assessment
Lincoln County	49	15	HMH - Into Reading	Y	i-Ready	Amira, i-Ready
Livingston County	56	13	HMH - Into Reading	Y	MAP	MAP
Logan County	51	14	Open Up - K-5	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Ludlow Independent	44	0	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	MAP	STAR CBM
Lyon County	48	-21	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	STAR	STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Madison County	46	-2	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	i-Ready	MAP
Magoffin County	44	6	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Marion County	50	10	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Marshall County	46	1	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	STAR Phonics
Martin County	34	9	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Mason County	39	4	HMH - Into Reading	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Mayfield Independent	53	4	HMH - Into Reading	Y	STAR	STAR Phonics
McCracken County	71	11	HMH - Into Reading	Y	STAR	STAR CBM
McCreary County	58	20	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	MAP	MAP, STAR Phonics
McLean County	46	-4	Imagine Learning	Y	MAP	MAP
Meade County	55	-3	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	MAP	MAP
Menifee County	25	13	HMH - Into Reading	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Mercer County	61	31	Benchmark Advance	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Metcalfe County	32	6	Open Up - K-5	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Middlesboro Independent	45	25	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Monroe County	69	-4	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready

District	% Proficient And Distinguished - 3rd Grade Reading 2025	Change In % Proficient & Distinguished 22-25	Comprehensive Reading Program (HQIR)	HQIR KDE- Approved	Universal Screener	Diagnostic Assessment
Montgomery County	48	1	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	MAP	MAP
Morgan County	49	0	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Muhlenberg County	37	0	Magnetic Literacy	N*	i-Ready	i-Ready
Murray Independent	77	-7	HMH - Into Reading	Y	MAP	Acadience Reading STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Nelson County	39	15	Imagine Learning	Y	i-Ready	
Newport Independent	34	11	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	ROAR	i-Ready
Nicholas County	30	-7	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Ohio County	44	4	Benchmark Advance	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Oldham County	57	2	Benchmark Advance, Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Owen County	36	15	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	MAP	MAP
Owensboro Independent	47	9	Open Up - K-5	Y	MAP	MAP
Owsley County	15	-16	Amplify - CKLA	Y	MAP	MAP
Paducah Independent	49	2	HMH - Into Reading	Y	STAR	STAR CBM
Paintsville Independent	67	4	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	MAP	MAP
Paris Independent	26	0	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Pendleton County	37	-11	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	STAR CBM
Perry County	57	8	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Pike County	58	8	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	MAP	MAP
Pikeville Independent	53	-14	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	STAR CMB, STAR Phonics
Pineville Independent	32	-6	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready

District	% Proficient And Distinguished - 3rd Grade Reading 2025	Change In % Proficient & Distinguished 22-25	Comprehensive Reading Program (HQIR)	HQIR KDE- Approved	Universal Screener	Diagnostic Assessment
Powell County	40	15	HMH - Into Reading	Y	MAP	MAP
Pulaski County	61	4	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Raceland- Worthington Independent	44	-11	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Robertson County	42	12	HMH - Into Reading	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Rockcastle County	41	-13	Benchmark Advance	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Rowan County	41	-1	Open Up - K-5	Y	MAP	MAP
Russell County	51	-6	HMH - Into Reading	Y	MAP	MAP
Russell Independent	49	2	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	Amira
Russellville Independent	33	-1	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	STAR CBM
Science Hill Independent	63	-7	Savvas - ReadyGEN	Y	MAP	MAP
Scott County	45	-2	Great Minds, Arts and Letters	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Shelby County	41	5	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	MAP	MAP STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Simpson County	53	-3	Amplify - CKLA	Y	STAR	STAR Phonics
Somerset Independent	64	12	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	MAP	MAP
Southgate Independent	43	N/A	HMH - Into Reading	Y	MAP	MAP
Spencer County	50	2	Savvas - myView Literacy	Y	FastBridge (earlyReading)	STAR CBM
Taylor County	50	0	HMH - Into Reading	Y	MAP	MAP
Todd County	50	8	HMH - Into Reading	Y	MAP	Amira, MAP STAR CBM, STAR Phonics
Trigg County	45	-6	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	STAR Phonics
Trimble County	24	-13	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready

District	% Proficient And Distinguished - 3rd Grade Reading 2025	Change In % Proficient & Distinguished 22-25	Comprehensive Reading Program (HQIR)	HQIR KDE- Approved	Universal Screener	Diagnostic Assessment
Union County	41	-2	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	STAR Phonics
Walton- Verona Independent	58	1	Amplify - CKLA	Y	MAP	MAP
Warren County	49	10	HMH - Into Reading	Y	i-Ready	Amira, i- Ready
Washington County	44	4	Great Minds, Wit & Wisdom	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Wayne County	39	3	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready
Webster County	32	-14	Imagine Learning	Y	MAP	MAP
Whitley County	64	5	HMH - Into Reading	Y	MAP	STAR CBM
Williamsburg Independent	33	-11	Amplify - CKLA	Y	i-Ready	MAP
Williamstown Independent	26	-10	Amplify - CKLA	Y	STAR	STAR CBM
Wolfe County	52	7	McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	Y	STAR	i-Ready
Woodford County	57	2	HMH - Into Reading	Y	i-Ready	i-Ready, STAR CBM

*Henderson County has indicated to KDE that it will adopt an approved reading program in its next cycle. Ashland and Clark Counties are using a reading program that KDE has indicated it will approve in the future.

**Not approved

Source: OEA K-3 literacy district survey responses from 167 districts and additional information, as available from KDE.

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Appendix E

Summary Information on Early Literacy Assessment, Curriculum, and Resources Adopted by Districts

Tables E.1 – E.5 compile information provided by 167 districts on OEA’s 2026 K-3 Literacy survey of all Kentucky Districts. Note that information compiled in Chapter 2, Table 2.1 includes information from the four districts that did not respond to the OEA survey, if schools in those districts had previously reported the information to KDE.

Table E.1
Comprehensive Reading Programs Adopted in Kentucky By Districts, SY 2027

HQIR	Number of Districts
Amplify - Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA)	39
Benchmark Education Company - Benchmark Advance	6
Great Minds - Wit & Wisdom(with a high-quality foundational skills adoption)	4
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt - Into Reading	30
Imagine Learning f/k/a LearnZillion - Imagine Learning EL Education K-5 Language Arts	4
McGraw-Hill Education - Wonders	31
Open Up Resources - Bookworms Reading and Writing	1
Open Up Resources - EL Education K-5 Language Arts	6
Other/multiple (please specify)	24
Savvas Learning Company - myView Literacy	19
Savvas Learning Company - ReadyGEN	1
No Response / None Indicated	6

Source: OEA District survey

Table E.2
Universal Screeners Adopted By Kentucky Districts, SY 2027

Universal Screener	District Count
Acadience Reading K-6	1
Exact Path Assessment for Reading	1
FastBridge AdaptiveReading Assessment (aReading)	1
FastBridge earlyReading Assessment (earlyReading)	1
i-Ready Diagnostic for Reading	75
Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) GROWTH	55
Other (please specify)	2
Star Literacy Assessments (Star Reading and Star Early Literacy)	29
No Response / None Indicated	6

Source: OEA District survey

Table E.3
Diagnostic Assessments Adopted By Districts, SY 2027

Diagnostic Assessment	District Count
Amira Diagnostic	8
Acadience Reading Diagnostic: PA & WRD	6
Grey Oral Reading Test (GORT)	0
i-Ready Literacy Tasks	75
Map Reading Fluency	53
STAR CBM: Selected Measures	30
STAR Phonics	21
TOWRE-2	0
Other	9
No Response / None Indicated	6

Source: OEA District survey

Table E.4
Additional Literacy Programs Used By Kentucky Districts, SY 2027

Additional Literacy Programs	District Count
UFLI (University of Florida Literacy Institute) Foundations	128
Reading Mastery	17
Heggerty Literacy	81
Lexia	35
McGraw Hill (SRA) Reading Laboratory	2
Other (please specify)	41
Not Using Additional Literacy Programs	4

Source: OEA District survey

Table E.5
Additional Interventions Used By Kentucky Districts, SY 2027

Intervention Program	District Count
21st Century Tutoring	25
Save the Children	21
Hindman Settlement School	7
Scholastic RISE	3
Reading Recovery	6
UFLI	134
Orton Gillingham	64
Other	38
No Data Reported	8

Source: OEA District Survey

Table E.6
Use Of Additional Intervention Programs By School District

Status	District Count
Using Intervention Program(s)	163
Not Using Intervention Program(s)	4
No Response / None Indicated	4

Source: OEA District survey

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Appendix F

District Role—Additional Supports Or Direction

This appendix summarizes survey data illustrating variation among districts in the additional supports provided to students and families (Table F.1), the presence of additional district-funded staff (Table F.2), and additional direction related to early literacy practices (Table F.3)

Table F.1 summarizes the proportion of K-3 students or families reported by districts as receiving before- or after-school tutoring, instruction during summer or holiday breaks, parental workshops, or full-day preschool.

Table F.1
Proportion Of Students Or Families Benefiting From
Additional Supports By District

	Before Or After School Tutoring	Instruction During Summer Or Holiday Breaks	Workshops Or Other Supports For Parents	Full Day Pre-K
This support is not available	5%	30%	7%	28%
Up to ten percent	34	30	36	12
Between ten and thirty percent	36	20	23	12
Between thirty and fifty percent	8	3	9	11
Over fifty percent	5	3	12	24
N/A	13	14	13	13

*No information provided by district due to nonresponse on survey or individual question
Source: Staff analysis of OEA district survey.

Table F.2 shows the percent of districts reporting at least one of various district-funded literacy positions. The most commonly reported position was literacy specialist (44 percent). Less common were literacy coaches (20 percent), district literacy coordinators (16 percent), and other literacy positions (11 percent).

Table F.2
Percent Of Districts Reporting One Or More
District- Funded Positions Related To Early Literacy

Position	Percent Of Districts
District Literacy Coordinator	16%
District Literacy Coach(es)	20
District Literacy Specialist(s)	44
Other District Literacy Position(s)	11

Source: OEA district survey.

Table F.3 shows the percentage of districts that reported specific requirements for how various early literacy practices are implemented in schools. Districts most commonly report having specific requirements for the amount of instructional time.

Table F.3
Percent Of Districts Reporting
Specific District-Required Early Literacy Practices

Practice	Percent Of Districts
Amount of instructional time devoted to early literacy	43%
Practices used in Tier I instruction	42
Practices used in Tier II instruction	38
Practices used in Tier III instruction	39
Reading improvement teams	34
Professional learning	37
Read-at-home plans	33

Source: OEA district survey.

Instructional Time

Of the 67 districts that responded to this question, the most commonly reported amounts of time dedicated to early literacy instruction were 90-110 minutes (30 districts) and 120-140 minutes (28 districts); fewer reported 60-80 minutes (3 districts) or 150 minutes or more (6 districts).

Tier I

Examples of direction provided by districts beyond implementation of HQIRs were:

- “Learning target, body of lesson on target, skills block of time, formative assessment on target, embedded decoding and encoding (Steps in Ideal Lesson) required in all classrooms (Madeline Hunter research)”
- “Explicit instruction in foundational literacy skills, daily opportunities for reading and writing, small-group differentiated instruction based on grouping data.”
- “Requirement that the 5 literacy components are included in tier 1 reading instruction: phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency learning.”

Tier II

Specific directions provided by districts related to Tier II most often related to the use of data to identify skill deficits to be addressed by research-based interventions. Additional examples were most often related to the amount of time or the types of instructional materials. Examples include:

- “30 mins of Tier 2 instruction 3x/week min”
- “Tier II students receive an additional 30 minutes instruction past tier 1”
- i-Ready My Path prescriptive lessons, UFLI
- “In addition to, as needed, pull-out intervention time that is unavoidable, schools are required to have a school-wide intervention period that includes all staff in the building.”

Tier III

Examples of district direction related to Tier III include

- “30 mins of Tier 3 instruction 5x/ week”
- “explicit and systematic phonics instruction based on the science of reading, small groups targeted on specific goals, phonemic awareness, fine motor skills to promote handwriting and pathways in letter formation, multisensory instruction, word building and word chaining, decodable texts, high frequency word instruction, immediate corrective feedback, continuous progress monitoring and charting toward goals, evidence-based intervention programs”
- “pulled for small group instruction 3-4 times week, teacher led, use of interactive manipulatives, weekly monitoring, data driven specific instruction.”
- “Tier III students receive an additional hour past tier 1”
- “Win time, 45 minutes”

Reading Improvement Teams

Districts reported requiring that reading improvement teams meet as often as once a week and as little as four to five times a year. Several districts reported additional detail. For example:

- “All staff are members of Professional Learning Communities that meet once a week to review student data, discuss instruction, intervention, and enrichment strategies. Additionally, teachers participate in Data Review Team meetings monthly to discuss students in intervention progress towards goals. Tier Movement can occur in this data review team meetings per data collected by teacher.”
- “Whole child PLCs are conducted to review intervention data. This data is used to create flexible groups based on students' needs. Our MTSS system outlines the requirements of reading intervention teams.”

Professional Learning

Examples of district-directed professional learning includes:

- “Teachers and interventionists participate in ongoing professional learning related to structured literacy, HMH implementation, UFLI alignment, lesson internalization, assessment and data analysis, questioning, differentiation, and evidence-based intervention. Collaborative planning, PLCs, coaching cycles, and district training support consistent implementation.”
- “PD via UFLI, Science of Reading, iReady, Scarborough Rope, reading research, time to work on standards and curriculum to understand and internalize what they’re teaching, analyze results from common assessments and exit slips to clear up misconceptions and make amendments to curriculum collectively as a grade level teaching group.”
- “Yearly PD provided by the district and CKEC and KEDC.”
- “Professional learning is provided for Tier 1-3 each year. PL is provided by vendors for most HQIR, PL for HQIR is also continued throughout the year as collaborative district sessions prior to each unit in the HQIRs- led by district and school leaders. PL for HQIR is also embedded into coaching cycles completed by principals and instructional coaches- with support from district staff as needed.”

Read-At Home-Plans

Examples of district direction include:

- “Families of students who need additional literacy support receive information about the student’s needs and practical activities for home practice. Plans may include reading appropriate texts, practicing high-frequency words and phonics skills, building fluency through repeated reading, and discussing texts to strengthen vocabulary and comprehension.”
- “All parents must receive a Read at Home plan in their preferred language.”
- “District template adapted from KDE model”

Strategies Other than Retention

The following are examples of actions taken by districts, other than grade retention, to support students who are far below grade level:

- “We have interventionist trained in Build and Take Flight. All teachers in K2 have Orton Gillingham and 2-5 have UFLI. First grade students who are not on level are invited to an intense summer program using these SOR strategies and must attend a required number of days to be able to qualify for promotion.”
- “We have a thorough system of interventions and supports, school-wide RTI systems, weekly and bi-monthly student needs meetings, and an intensive summer reading program.”
- “Small group instruction with literacy coach. Each elementary school has an assigned literacy coach.”
- “We offer extensive intervention during the school day, ESS after school two days a week, and a three-week summer school focused primarily on literacy. We also are trained(ing) in SDI, co-teaching, and evidence-based practices using scaffolds and opportunities to respond so that the learning gaps are progressively filled.”

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Appendix G

KDE Guidance For Universal Screeners

Tables G.1 – G.3 illustrate the type of guidance provided by KDE for each approved universal screener. It includes benchmarks and interpretations that can be used to determine which students are below benchmark on each screener. Consistent with the technical materials for each vendor, benchmarks are based on thresholds derived from criterion-referenced scores. As was shown in Chapter 2, most districts are determining grade-level benchmarks using percentile rank data.

Table G.1
KDE Guidance NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)

Universal Screener	
Variable	Details
Description	MAP Growth is a web-based computer adaptive assessment used to identify students at risk of poor academic outcomes in reading for grades K-12.
Rapid Automatic Naming (RAN)	Not included in MAP Growth, but a dyslexia screener is available with the license for the MAP Fluency assessment.
Cost	\$7.50 per student
Frequency	3 times per year with an optional summer administration
Length	45 minutes per student on average
Delivery Method	Online
Languages Available	English/Spanish
Norms Available	Norm referenced and criterion referenced
Benchmarks and Interpretations	<u>Achievement Quintiles</u> Students achieving these benchmarks are considered At or Above Benchmark : High, High Average Students achieving these benchmarks are considered Below Benchmark : Average, Low Average, Low

Table G.2
KDE Guidance I-Ready

i-Ready Inform™ Assessment for Reading Curriculum Associates	
Universal Screener	
Variable	Details
Description	The i-Ready Inform for Reading, a web-based adaptive screening assessment for K-12, is part of i-Ready's integrated teaching and learning system.
Rapid Automatic Naming (RAN)	Additional to i-Ready Inform. Included as part of the i-Ready Literacy tasks.
Cost	\$8.25 per student
Frequency	3 times per year
Length	45 minutes per student on average
Delivery Method	Online
Languages Available	English and Spanish
Norms Available	Norm referenced and criterion referenced
Benchmarks and Interpretations	<u>Overall Relative Placements</u> Students achieving these benchmarks are considered At or Above Benchmark: Early on Grade Level, Mid on Grade Level or Above Grade Level. Students achieving these benchmarks are considered Below Benchmark: Three Grades Below, Two Grades Below, One Grade Below.
Classification Accuracy	Meets or Exceeds KDE Criteria of area under curve .7
Validity	Meets or Exceeds KDE Criteria of .7
Reliability	Meets or Exceeds KDE Criteria of .6
Technical Information	i-Ready Summary of Technical Information

Table G.3
KDE Guidance Star Literacy Assessments

STAR Literacy Assessments Renaissance	
Universal Screener	
Variable	Details
Description	Star Early Literacy is a computer adaptive assessment of foundational reading, language and vocabulary for grades K-3. Star Reading is a computer-adaptive assessment of reading comprehension and overall reading achievement for students in grades K-12
Rapid Automatic Naming (RAN)	Not part of the computer adaptive assessments but available in the broader STAR CBM reading assessment suite.
Cost	Star Early Literacy and Star Reading — \$5.36 per student
Frequency	3-5 times per year
Length	Star Early Literacy- approximately 12 minutes, on average Star Reading- approximately 20 minutes, on average
Delivery Method	Group administered, Online
Languages Available	English and Spanish
Norms Available	Norm referenced and criterion referenced
Benchmarks and Interpretations	<u>Renaissance Benchmark Category</u> Students achieving these benchmarks are considered At or Above Benchmark : At/Above Benchmark Students achieving these benchmarks are considered Below Benchmark : On Watch, Intervention, Urgent Intervention

Table G.4
KDE Guidance Acadience Literacy Assessments

Acadience Reading K-6	
Universal Screener	
Variable	Details
Description	Acadience Reading is a curriculum-based assessment of early literacy and reading skills for grades K-6. The Reading Composite Score (RCS) serves as the universal screener and provides the best overall estimate of the student's reading proficiency for the student's grade level and time of year.
Rapid Automatic Naming (RAN)	Available as an optional measure
Cost	\$3.00 per student (Manual Entry) \$7.95 -\$9.45 per student (Digital Entry) Materials available as free download
Frequency	3 times per year (F/W/S)
Length	5-10 minutes per student on average
Delivery Method	Online/Paper
Languages Available	English and Spanish
Norms Available	Yes – Norm referenced and criterion referenced assessment
Benchmarks and Interpretations	<u>Performance Levels</u> Students achieving these benchmarks are considered At or Above Benchmark : At Benchmark, Above Benchmark Students achieving these benchmarks are considered Below Benchmark : Not on Benchmark, Below Benchmark, Well Below Benchmark

Appendix H

Retention Trends, SY 2016-SY 2025

Table H.1
Count and Percentage of Non-IEP Students Repeating a Grade
Kindergarten – 4th Grade
SY 2016-SY 2025

Year	K	1	2	3	4
2016	965 (2%)	1654 (4%)	667 (2%)	356 (1%)	171 (0%)
2017	872 (2)	1589 (4)	633 (2)	366 (1)	173 (0)
2018	1131 (3)	1700 (4)	671 (2)	410 (1)	218 (1)
2019	770 (2)	1552 (4)	567 (1)	325 (1)	205 (0)
2020	777 (2)	1203 (3)	576 (2)	297 (1)	179 (0)
2021	661 (2)	1020 (3)	333 (1)	208 (1)	129 (0)
2022	1820 (4)	2081 (6)	985 (3)	541 (1)	436 (1)
2023	1099 (3)	1096 (3)	604 (2)	324 (1)	152 (0)
2024	771 (2)	825 (2)	385 (1)	178 (1)	142 (0)
2025	696 (2)	804 (2)	445 (1)	167 (0)	118 (0)
Average	956 (3)	1352 (4)	587 (2)	317 (1)	192 (0)

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Department of Education

Table H.2
Count and Percentage of IEP Students Repeating a Grade
Kindergarten – 4th Grade
SY 2016-SY 2025

Year	K	1	2	3	4
2016	901 (9%)	1063 (9%)	331 (3%)	174 (2%)	49 (1%)
2017	793 (8)	1075 (9)	369 (3)	173 (2)	54 (1)
2018	1000 (10)	1189 (10)	326 (3)	157 (1)	50 (0)
2019	842 (7)	1186 (10)	358 (0.03)	158 (1)	82 (1)
2020	855 (8)	946 (8)	312 (3)	150 (1)	64 (1)
2021	691 (7)	873 (7)	210 (2)	128 (1)	52 (1)
2022	1244 (12)	1289 (12)	525 (5)	249 (2)	177 (2)
2023	1119 (9)	846 (6)	364 (3)	143 (1)	58 (1)
2024	876 (7)	624 (5)	230 (2)	119 (1)	38 (0)
2025	890 (7)	606 (5)	267 (2)	81 (1)	54 (0)
Average	921 (8)	970 (8)	329 (3)	153 (1)	68 (1)

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Department of Education

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Appendix I

Summary Of Dyslexia Information Provided By Anchorage Independent To KDE

Anchorage Independent Policies

As of the 2024-2025 school year, Anchorage Independent reported using MAP Growth as their universal screener for students in kindergarten through the third grade. Additionally, those students in kindergarten through the third grade who are new to the district also receive the MAP Dyslexia Screener.

Students who demonstrate potential for displaying the characteristics of dyslexia on their screener exams first receive 6 to 12 weeks of intervention support designed to target the areas in which they are identified as deficient. Intervention services may be delivered in either the general education or special education setting, or a combination of the two.

If a student shows continued deficiencies, they are administered the Level 1 screener, which in Anchorage Independent is the AIMSweb Plus Early Literacy Profile. Following this, the Student Teacher Assistance Team (STAT) reviews the student's data and progress to determine next steps.

If the Level 1 screener indicated that a student is displaying characteristics of dyslexia, they will again receive 6 to 12 weeks of targeted interventions. If they continue to display deficiencies, they will be referred to the STAT team.

Intervention services are provided to students regardless of whether they have been diagnosed with dyslexia. However, if a student does receive a diagnosis, it is considered by the district when developing an identified student's intervention plan.

Anchorage Independent Data

For the 2024-2025 school year, Anchorage Independent reported that 64 (41%) students in kindergarten through the third grade were screened or evaluated for dyslexia. Of those students, 50 (32%) were participating in interventions in the school, and eight (5%) were identified as displaying characteristics of dyslexia. Additionally, five district personnel or licensed professionals were reported as being trained to administer the dyslexia screening tools.

Sources:

KRS 158.307

Anchorage Independent School District. "Anchorage School Dyslexia Toolkit for Families, Updated Summer 2023".

Anchorage Independent School District. "2025-2025 Dyslexia Reporting to KDE".

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Appendix J

LETRS-Trained Educators And Administrators By District

Table J.1 shows the percent of educators who had completed LETRS training as of 2026 as well as the number of administrators that had completed training, as a ratio of elementary schools in the districts. The table also indicates whether educators or administrators were enrolled in SY 2027.

Data are calculated from those that completed KDE-sponsored LETRS training. It does not include data for educators who may have completed LETRS training using local or grant funds, prior to the establishment of the Kentucky Reading Academies. KDE has identified Hancock and Robertson Counties as two such counties.

Table J.1
Total Educators And Administrators Completing LETRS Training By SY 2026
And LETRS Enrollment SY 2027

District	Completed By SY 2026		Enrolled SY 2027	
	Percent Of Educators	Ratio Of Administrators To Elementary Schools	Teachers Enrolled	Administrators Enrolled
Adair County	21%	1.0	Y	N
Allen County	29	8.0	Y	Y
Anchorage Independent	100	1.0	Y	Y
Anderson County	72	0.7	Y	Y
Ashland Independent	45	0.4	Y	N
Augusta Independent	63	1.0	N	N
Ballard County	23	0.0	Y	N
Barbourville Independent	100	1.0	Y	N
Bardstown Independent	31	4.0	Y	N
Barren County	66	1.3	Y	Y
Bath County	56	0.0	N	Y
Beechwood Independent	86	1.0	Y	N
Bell County	0	0.8	Y	Y
Bellevue Independent	50	2.0	Y	Y
Berea Independent	35	0.0	Y	N
Boone County	71	1.1	Y	Y
Bourbon County	27	0.3	Y	N
Bowling Green Independent	8	0.6	Y	Y
Boyd County	27	1.3	Y	Y
Boyle County	24	1.0	Y	N
Bracken County	100	1.0	N	N
Breathitt County	100	6.5	Y	Y
Breckinridge County	42	0.0	Y	N
Bullitt County	15	0.2	Y	Y
Burgin Independent	14	0.0	Y	N
Butler County	4	0.0	N	N

District	Completed By SY 2026		Enrolled SY 2027	
	Percent Of Educators	Ratio Of Administrators To Elementary Schools	Teachers Enrolled	Administrators Enrolled
Caldwell County	3	3.0	Y	N
Calloway County	59	1.0	Y	N
Campbell County	27	0.0	Y	N
Campbellsville Independent	67	5.0	Y	Y
Carlisle County	0	0.0	N	N
Carroll County	58	4.0	Y	Y
Carter County	48	0.5	Y	N
Casey County	12	0.7	Y	Y
Caverna Independent	100	2.0	Y	N
Christian County	22	0.4	Y	Y
Clark County	2	0.0	Y	N
Clay County	0	0.0	N	N
Clinton County	0	0.0	N	N
Cloverport Independent	9	0.0	Y	Y
Corbin Independent	67	4.0	Y	Y
Covington Independent	42	3.0	Y	Y
Crittenden County	6	0.0	Y	N
Cumberland County	100	0.0	Y	N
Danville Independent	0	1.0	N	N
Daviess County	36	0.8	Y	Y
Dawson Springs Independent	11	0.0	Y	Y
Dayton Independent	0	0.0	N	N
East Bernstadt Independent	43	0.0	Y	N
Edmonson County	79	0.5	N	N
Elizabethtown Independent	4	2.5	Y	Y
Elliott County	5	1.0	Y	Y
Eminence Independent	91	0.0	N	N
Erlanger-Elsmere Independent	97	0.8	Y	N
Estill County	12	1.5	Y	Y
Fairview Independent	73	2.0	Y	N
Fayette County	18	0.8	Y	Y
Fleming County	36	0.3	Y	N
Floyd County	16	0.1	Y	Y
Fort Thomas Independent	93	0.7	Y	N
Frankfort Independent	15	5.0	Y	Y
Franklin County	38	2.5	Y	Y
Fulton County	57	0.0	Y	N
Fulton Independent	88	0.0	N	Y
Gallatin County	4	1.0	Y	Y
Garrard County	10	0.7	Y	Y
Glasgow Independent	15	0.0	N	N
Grant County	100	1.5	Y	Y
Graves County	62	2.8	Y	Y
Grayson County	6	0.0	Y	N
Green County	18	2.0	Y	N

District	Completed By SY 2026		Enrolled SY 2027	
	Percent Of Educators	Ratio Of Administrators To Elementary Schools	Teachers Enrolled	Administrators Enrolled
Greenup County	50	0.3	Y	N
Hancock County	0	0.0	N	N
Hardin County	5	0.1	Y	N
Harlan County	17	0.0	Y	Y
Harlan Independent	30	1.0	N	N
Harrison County	51	0.3	Y	N
Hart County	11	2.4	Y	Y
Hazard Independent	0	0.0	Y	Y
Henderson County	21	0.1	Y	Y
Henry County	69	1.7	Y	N
Hickman County	27	1.0	Y	N
Hopkins County	44	0.0	Y	Y
Jackson County	3	0.3	Y	Y
Jackson Independent	50	1.0	N	Y
Jefferson County	58	1.3	Y	Y
Jenkins Independent	0	0.0	N	N
Jessamine County	72	1.2	Y	Y
Johnson County	60	4.2	Y	Y
Kenton County	80	1.0	Y	Y
Knott County	42	0.3	Y	Y
Knox County	48	1.7	Y	Y
LaRue County	53	2.5	Y	Y
Laurel County	8	0.5	Y	Y
Lawrence County	53	0.7	Y	Y
Lee County	100	1.0	Y	N
Leslie County	19	0.0	Y	N
Letcher County	62	0.6	Y	Y
Lewis County	19	1.0	N	Y
Lincoln County	8	0.4	Y	Y
Livingston County	64	0.0	Y	N
Logan County	55	0.0	Y	Y
Ludlow Independent	0	1.0	N	Y
Lyon County	14	1.0	N	N
Madison County	2	0.0	Y	N
Magoffin County	25	0.0	Y	Y
Marion County	77	0.5	Y	Y
Marshall County	57	1.0	Y	Y
Martin County	63	1.0	Y	Y
Mason County	12	1.0	Y	Y
Mayfield Independent	17	2.0	Y	Y
McCracken County	31	1.4	Y	Y
McCreary County	10	1.5	Y	N
McLean County	43	0.3	Y	Y
Meade County	33	0.3	Y	N
Menifee County	31	1.0	Y	N

District	Completed By SY 2026		Enrolled SY 2027	
	Percent Of Educators	Ratio Of Administrators To Elementary Schools	Teachers Enrolled	Administrators Enrolled
Mercer County	12	1.0	Y	N
Metcalfe County	69	2.0	Y	Y
Middlesboro Independent	6	0.0	Y	N
Monroe County	100	2.0	Y	N
Montgomery County	26	1.0	Y	Y
Morgan County	7	0.0	Y	N
Muhlenberg County	12	0.6	Y	Y
Murray Independent	2	0.0	Y	N
Nelson County	23	1.0	Y	Y
Newport Independent	33	5.0	Y	Y
Nicholas County	100	1.0	Y	Y
Ohio County	0	0.0	Y	N
Oldham County	70	2.1	Y	Y
Owen County	58	3.0	Y	Y
Owensboro Independent	100	0.0	Y	N
Owsley County	0	1.0	Y	N
Paducah Independent	25	1.0	Y	Y
Paintsville Independent	21	2.0	Y	Y
Paris Independent	100	2.0	Y	Y
Pendleton County	11	0.0	Y	N
Perry County	8	0.2	Y	Y
Pike County	44	0.6	Y	Y
Pikeville Independent	45	4.0	Y	Y
Pineville Independent	69	4.0	Y	N
Powell County	9	0.7	Y	Y
Pulaski County	66	1.1	Y	Y
Raceland-Worthington Independent	68	1.0	Y	N
Robertson County	0	1.0	Y	Y
Rockcastle County	82	1.0	Y	Y
Rowan County	84	2.3	Y	Y
Russell County	20	0.3	Y	Y
Russell Independent	70	4.0	Y	Y
Russellville Independent	100	7.0	Y	Y
Science Hill Independent	24	0.0	Y	N
Scott County	19	0.3	Y	Y
Shelby County	14	1.0	Y	Y
Simpson County	26	1.0	Y	N
Somerset Independent	17	0.0	Y	N
Southgate Independent	0	0.0	N	N
Spencer County	9	0.0	Y	Y
Taylor County	52	2.0	Y	N
Todd County	24	0.5	Y	N
Trigg County	34	0.0	Y	N
Trimble County	0	0.0	Y	N

District	Completed By SY 2026		Enrolled SY 2027	
	Percent Of Educators	Ratio Of Administrators To Elementary Schools	Teachers Enrolled	Administrators Enrolled
Union County	38	0.3	Y	Y
Walton-Verona Independent	100	0.0	Y	N
Warren County	43	0.7	Y	Y
Washington County	100	3.0	Y	Y
Wayne County	100	1.0	Y	Y
Webster County	22	2.3	Y	Y
Whitley County	16	0.2	Y	Y
Williamsburg Independent	13	0.0	Y	N
Williamstown Independent	30	2.0	N	Y
Wolfe County	80	0.0	Y	N
Woodford County	81	0.8	Y	Y

*Because educators completed LETRS training prior to the establishment of the Kentucky Reading Academies, data on the number of educators completers were not available through KDE. On the OEA district survey, Hancock county reported that all educators have been LETRS trained.

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

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Appendix K

District And School Performance And Characteristics Actual And Impact Scores

Using methods described at the end of this appendix, OEA analyzed differences in the performance of schools and districts based on the actual scale scores of their 3rd grade students and the “impact” scores that compare students in each school and district with demographically similar students across the state.

As will be shown in this appendix, the performance of some schools and districts is relatively higher or lower once the performance of their students is compared to peers across the state. The appendix will also show the proportion of districts and schools in which performance is very high or very low as determined by both their actual and impact scores. Schools and districts that are identified as very high or very low are much different from other schools and districts as indicated by reading scores that are at least one standard deviation above or below the mean for all schools.

Table K1
Demographic Characteristics Elementary Schools
By Actual 3rd Grade Scale Score Category, 2025

Actual Score Category	Number Of Schools	Economically Disadvantaged	Black Or Hispanic	LEP	IEP
Highest	107	52%	15%	3%	18%
High	144	59	36	14	17
Average	177	65	29	9	20
Low	118	63	19	5	19
Lowest	140	69	56	20	15

Note: Includes only A1 schools enrolling 3rd grade students

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

Table K.2
Demographic Characteristics Elementary Schools
By Impact 3rd Grade Scale Score Category, SY 2025

Impact Score Category	Number Of Schools	Economically Disadvantaged	Black or Hispanic	LEP	IEP
Highest	121	69%	18%	5%	20%
High	82	64	26	5	19
Average	187	59	36	14	17
Low	221	62	39	13	17
Lowest	75	61	16	4	17

Note: Includes only A1 schools enrolling 3rd grade students

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

Table K.3 Actual And Impact 3rd Grade Reading Score
Of Kentucky Districts, SY 2025

Actual Score Category	Impact Score Category					Total
	Highest	High	Average	Low	Lowest	
Highest	22	5	2	2		31
High	6	10	7			23
Average	2	10	26	12		50
Low			3	26	7	36
Lowest				6	25	31
Total	30	25	38	46	32	171

Note: Includes only A1 schools enrolling 3rd grade students

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

Table K.4 Actual And Impact 3rd Grade Reading Score
Of Kentucky Schools, SY 2025

Actual Score Category	Impact Score Category					Total
	Highest	High	Average	Low	Lowest	
Highest	81	22	7	1		111
High	21	70	45	8		144
Average	1	27	97	49	1	175
Low		2	38	80	28	148
Lowest			4	33	71	108
Total	103	121	191	171	100	686

Note: Includes only A1 schools enrolling 3rd grade students

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education

Statistical Methods Used For 3rd Grade Actual Versus Impact Scores (OLS Model)

Ordinary Least Squares Linear Regression Models Reading And Math Model

Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression modeling was used to quantify the relationship between student, community, and school characteristics with the academic performance in reading for 3rd grade students. The models were structured with the standard scores for 3rd grade reading as the dependent variable.^a

The model controlled for student-level subgroup categories for race and ethnicity, gender, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, participation in an individualized education program (IEP), students with limited English proficiency (LEP), and whether a student was homeless. These student-level characteristics are represented in the equations for the model as (β DEMO).

The model also controlled for whether a student attended a school that had 75 percent or more of its population receiving free or reduced-price lunch as an indicator for attending a “high poverty” school (β SchoolPoverty).

The final student-level control used was whether a student moved schools during the 2025 school year (β Moved).

The model also included a community characteristic control for the percentage of residents that had earned a bachelor’s degree or more by zip code (β BachelorZip). The bachelor’s degree data by zip code was obtained from the American Community Survey, and was matched up to the zip code of student residence for each observation.^b The residual error term finishes the equation (ϵ). The full equation is represented by Model 1.

Model 1: Standard Score = $\alpha + \beta$ DEMO + β SchoolPoverty + β Moved + β BachelorZip + ϵ

Computed Beta Coefficients And Explained Variance

Table A.1 shows the beta coefficients and standard errors for the model. The school level model had R-squared values greater than 13 percent. The R-squared value represents the percentage of variance explained by the model.

Nearly all the control variables in each version of the model have strong statistical significance. Most of the control variables have negative coefficients, which means those factors according to the model were associated with lower reading scores relative to other students. FRPL status and IEP status were among the strongest negative predictors from the student demographic controls.

^a Standard scores were computed for 3rd grade reading by year independently. For instance, standard scores for 3rd grade KPREP reading were computed at the student level for school years 2024 and 2025.

^b If a student-level zip code was not available, a district-level percentage of residents that earned a bachelor’s degree or more was used.

The percentage bachelor's degree by zip code and other race were associated with higher scores relative to other students according to the model. The beta coefficient for percentage bachelor's degree by zip code indicates that for every 1 percent increase in the percent of the population with bachelors' degrees, the expected scores for reading and math would increase by approximately 0.007 standard deviations. For example, if a particular zip code had 50 percent of its residents with bachelor's degrees, that would be associated with an expected increase in reading and math scores by more than a third of one standard deviation.

The other control variables are categorical and not continuous like the percent bachelor's degree variable. Therefore, the coefficients are only applied to students that are in the populations of controlled variables in the model. For example, a student with FRPL status would have a negative beta coefficient of -0.3094, but a student not eligible for FRPL would not have this coefficient applied when computing the expected scores.

Students can be in more than one control group, for instance a student could be eligible for FRPL and could have moved at least once during the observation period. In this instance the coefficients for each of those variables would be applied to that student observation during the computation of expected scores.

Table L.1
Regression Output For 3rd Grade Reading
2025 School Year

	2025 Model	
	Coefficient	Standard Error
Controls		
Black	-0.3601	0.0114
Hispanic	-0.0402	0.0168
Other race	0.2160	0.0204
Male	-0.0499	0.0085
IEP	-0.3468	0.0116
LEP	-0.5325	0.1673
Homeless	-0.0870	0.0228
FRPL	-0.3094	0.0097
School FRPL population - 75 percent or greater	-0.0381	0.0099
Moved at least once	-0.2450	0.0197
Percent Bachelor's degree by zip code	0.0070	0.0003
Intercept	0.2388	0.0132
R-squared	0.1258	
Number of observations	49,382	

Note: The intercept (α) represents the control group mean for 3rd grade reading for the 2025 school years. Beta coefficients have been rounded to the nearest ten-thousandth. FRPL= free or reduced-price lunch; IEP= individualized education program; LEP= limited English proficiency. All of the control variable for each model had t-statistics and p-values that indicate a confidence interval for beta coefficients greater than 99 percent.

Source: Staff analysis conducted on data from the Kentucky Department of Education and The US Census Bureau

Appendix L

Reading Proficiency Of IEP And Non-IEP Students By District And School

Table L.1 shows an association between the percentage of test-takers with IEPs and the reading proficiency rates of IEP students in a district. On average, as the percentage of test-taking students with IEPs increases, so do the proficiency rates of students with IEPs. In 17 districts, proficiency rates of students with IEPs exceeded proficiency rates of students without IEPs. In the majority of those districts, the percentage of test-taking students with IEPs exceeded 25 percent.

Table L.1
Elementary Reading Proficiency Rates By District, IEP Status
And Percent Of Test-taking Students With IEPs, SY 2025

Percent Of All Tested Students With IEPs	Number Of Districts	Average Proficiency Rate		Number Of Districts Proficiency Of Students With IEPs Greater Than Students Without IEPs
		IEP	Non IEP	
6 to 10	4	35	70	
11 to 15	34	25	54	
16 to 20	83	28	51	2
21 to 25	35	37	52	6
>25	15	52	50	9
State	171	29	53	17

Note: Includes scores of all 3rd-5th grade students

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Table L.2 shows similar data for schools. As the percent of test-taking students with IEPs increases so, on average, do the proficiency rates of students with IEPs. Statewide, students with IEPs outscored students without IEPs in 74 schools.

Table L.2
Elementary Reading Proficiency Rates By School, IEP Status
And Percent Of Test-taking Students With IEPs, SY 2025

Percent Of All Tested Students With IEPs	Number Of Schools	Average Proficiency Rate		Number Of Schools Proficiency Of Students With IEPs Greater Than Students Without IEPs
		IEP	Non IEP	
5 to 10	40	24%	61%	
11 to 15	178	25	53	1
16 to 20	244	27	51	12
21 to 25	148	35	52	27
26 to 30	46	47	56	14
31 to 40	26	54	51	14
>40	9	70	55	6
State				
	691	29	53	74

Note: Staff analyzed performance of 3-5th grade students in all schools. The analysis includes only schools with 10 or more tested students in those grades.

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education .

As shown in Table L.3, students with IEPs outscored students without IEPs by more than 20 percentage points in 24 schools and 5 districts.

Table L.3
Number Of Schools Or Districts
IEP Proficiency Exceeds Non-IEP Proficiency
By Degree Of Difference, SY 2025

Difference IEP – Non IEP	Number of Schools	Number of Districts
>50	2	
31-50	10	1
21-30	12	4
11 to 20	21	4
6 to 10	12	3
1 to 5	17	5
Total	74	17

Note: Includes only schools with 10 or more tested students in grades 3-5.

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education .

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