

# Pennsylvania Department of Education Reading Leadership Council Meeting #1

Meeting Notes

March 24, 2025

© 2025 WestEd. All rights reserved.



WestEd is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that aims to improve the lives of children and adults at all ages of learning and development. We do this by addressing challenges in education and human development, increasing opportunity, and helping build communities where all can thrive. WestEd staff conduct and apply research, provide technical assistance, and support professional learning. We work with early learning educators, classroom teachers, local and state leaders, and policymakers at all levels of government.

For more information, visit [WestEd.org](https://www.wested.org). For regular updates on research, free resources, solutions, and job postings from WestEd, subscribe to the E-Bulletin, our semimonthly e-newsletter, at [WestEd.org/subscribe](https://www.wested.org/subscribe)

# Table of Contents

Meeting Date and Time	1
Attendees	1
Welcome, Purpose Setting, Sunshine Act	2
Public Comment	5
Participant and Facilitator Introductions	5
Establish Working Agreements	5
Overview of the Act	6
Overview of the Approach	7
Committee Input on Considerations	9
Next Steps and Closure	10

# Reading Leadership Council Meeting #1

## Meeting Date and Time

The Reading Leadership Council met on March 24, 2025, from 12– 2:30 p.m.

## Attendees

### Pennsylvania Department of Education Staff

- Kate Bacher, Structured Literacy Advisor
- Jennifer Wicht, English Language Arts Education Advisor

### Council Members

- Dr. Kathleen Biddle, Professor of Education Emerita, Juniata College
- Dr. Paula Berry, Principal, Armstrong School District
- Dr. Robert Dill, Assistant Superintendent, Forest Hill School District
- Dr. Nyshawan Francis-Thompson, Chief of Curriculum and Instruction, School District of Philadelphia
- Mrs. Allyson Gates, Special Education Supervisor, Altoona Area School District
- Mrs. Kathleen Hawkins, Reading Specialist/Title I, Curwensville Area School District
- Mrs. Kristyn Kahalehoe, Kindergarten Teacher, School District of Philadelphia
- Dr. Greg Milbrand, Assistant Superintendent, Cumberland Valley School District
- Mr. Scott McClelland, First Grade Teacher, West Branch School District
- Dr. Ernie Ortiz, Principal, Pennsbury School District
- Mr. Robert Palazzo, Supervisor of Curriculum, Student, & Community Services, Panther Valley School District
- Mrs. Medina Reynolds, Instructional Coach, Warren County School District

- Dr. Diane Santori, Professor & Chair of Literacy Department, West Chester University
- Mrs. Lauren Smith, Speech-Language Pathologist, State College Area School District
- Ms. Kim Tesluk, Reading Specialist, Scranton School District
- Dr. Mary Jean Tecce DeCarlo, Clinical Professor of Literacy Studies, Drexel University School of Education
- Mrs. Heather Spotts, MTSS & Structured Literacy Professional Development Specialist, State College Area School District

### Liaisons and Invited Guests

- Dr. Brian Campbell, Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE)
- Dr. Stacey Cherny, Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN)
- Dr. Brian Gasper, Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE)
- Nicole Hendrickson, Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE)
- Julie Kane, Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE)
- Cindy Mierzejewski, Evidence Resource Center (ERC)
- Dr. Laura Mikowychok, Evidence Resource Center (ERC)
- Dr. Maryann Perry, National Center on Improving Literacy (NCIL)
- Dr. Carissa Pokorny-Golden, Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE)
- Dr. Dan Richards, Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU 14)
- Barry Wiestling, Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL)

### WestEd Staff

- Amaal Awadalla—Program Manager, Literacy
- Julie Colton—Operations Coordinator
- Katie Grogan—Senior Research Associate, Literacy
- Liz Jameyson—Program Manager, Literacy
- Amanda Nabors—Research Associate, Literacy
- Robin Sayers—Research Associate, Literacy
- Elizabeth Zagata—Program Manager, Special Education

### Welcome, Purpose Setting, Sunshine Act

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and WestEd facilitated a meeting of the Reading Leadership Council to discuss the implementation of *Act 135: Structured Literacy – Literacy Achievement for All Pennsylvanians*. The Act aims to expand access to Structured Literacy and improve literacy outcomes statewide.

WestEd provided an overview of the Council’s role in advising PDE on curriculum materials, intervention approaches, universal reading screeners, and professional development programs

to support local educational agencies (LEAs). The responsibilities of Council members, liaisons, and WestEd were outlined.

The meeting also addressed Pennsylvania's Sunshine Act, highlighting that public attendees are observers and that public comment periods are not intended for discussion with the Council or PDE representatives.

## Welcome

- **Jennifer Wicht**, ELA Content Advisor at PDE, shared her background and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to collaborate with participants.
- **Kate Bacher**, Structured Literacy Advisor for PDE, introduced herself and welcomed Council members and participants.
- **WestEd staff** introduced themselves, reviewed meeting logistics, and ensured participants had access to meeting resources via Google Drive.

The WestEd facilitator provided an overview of *The Pennsylvania Act 135 of 2024: Structured Literacy – Literacy Achievement for All Pennsylvanians*. The Act aims to expand access to Structured Literacy in Pennsylvania schools and enhance literacy outcomes for all students.

As part of the Act, PDE was tasked with establishing a Reading Leadership Council to advise on the development and maintenance of

- Reading instruction curriculum materials
- Intervention approaches
- Universal reading screeners
- Professional development training program lists

These resources will support LEAs across the Commonwealth in making informed decisions regarding programming, processes, and purchases to best meet students' literacy needs.

## Role of the Reading Leadership Council

The facilitator outlined the role of the Reading Leadership Council, which is to provide guidance, share perspectives, and contribute expertise on curriculum, interventions, universal screeners, and professional development lists.

During Phase 1, the Council will fulfill this role by

- Participating in two full Council meetings
  - March 24, 2025, 12:00–2:30 p.m.
  - May 14, 2025, 12:00–2:30 p.m.

- Attending two committee meetings focused on their specific areas of expertise

Committee	Council Members
<b>Reading Curriculum Materials Committee</b>	Mr. Scott McClelland, Mrs. Medina Reynolds, Dr. Nyshawan Francis-Thompson, Dr. Diane Santori, Dr. Robert Dill
<b>Intervention Materials &amp; Practices Committee</b>	Mrs. Allyson Gates, Dr. Ernie Ortiz, Mrs. Heather Spotts, Dr. Kathleen Biddle, Dr. Madison Weary
<b>Reading Universal Screeners Committee</b>	Ms. Kim Tesluk, Mr. Robert Palazzo, Mrs. Lauren Smith, Dr. Amy Smith, Mr. Scott Pyne
<b>Professional Development Training Programs Committee</b>	Dr. Mary Jean Tecce DeCarlo, Ms. Kristyn Kahaleho, Mrs. Kathleen Hawkins, Dr. Paula Berry, Dr. Greg Milbrand

### Role of the Liaisons

The WestEd facilitator described the role of the liaisons, which is to observe the process, provide perspectives, and share expertise as needed.

Liaisons represent the following organizations:

- PDE
- Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN)
- Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL)
- Evidence Resource Center (ERC)
- National Center on Improving Literacy (NCIL)

### Role of WestEd

The facilitator explained that WestEd is responsible for planning and facilitating Reading Leadership Council and committee meetings in collaboration with PDE.

### Sunshine Act

WestEd provided an overview of the Sunshine Act, Pennsylvania’s open meeting law.

## Public Comment

No members of the public provided comment.

## Participant and Facilitator Introductions

The meeting included introductions from Council members, PDE staff, and WestEd staff, setting the stage for collaboration and discussion.

## Establish Working Agreements

The WestEd facilitator introduced working agreements, outlining their role in fostering shared understanding, enhancing communication, and supporting productive collaboration within the Council. Drafted agreements were presented for consideration, and Council members participated in a reflection activity to evaluate their own experiences working on teams. This exercise encouraged members to identify conditions that promote effectiveness and provided an opportunity to refine, edit, or add to the proposed agreements.

## Working Agreements for the Reading Leadership Council

The WestEd facilitator introduced the working agreements for the Reading Leadership Council, emphasizing their role in fostering shared understanding, enhancing communication, building trust and respect, promoting productive collaboration, improving efficiency, and encouraging diverse perspectives.

### Proposed Working Agreements

The following working agreements were outlined:

- Each Council member's voice carries equal weight.
- Engage collaboratively and collegially.
- Challenge ideas, not individuals.
- Share insights based on personal expertise and experience.
- Honor and respect the expertise and experience of others.
- Listen attentively and actively.
- Maintain confidentiality by refraining from sharing unfinished work products outside Council and committee meetings.



Following this, the facilitator led a reflection exercise, prompting Council members to draw from their past experiences working in teams, identify conditions that supported their effectiveness, and propose additional working agreements.

### Additional Working Agreements Suggested by the Council

- Adhere to internal deadlines.
- Challenge ideas, not individuals, using evidence-based practices in structured literacy.
- Seek to understand divergent perspectives and remain open to new ideas.
- Follow through on commitments and remain actively engaged.
- Begin and conclude meetings on time.
- Listen attentively and remain fully present.

## Overview of the Act

The WestEd facilitator provided an overview of *Act 135: Structured Literacy – Literacy Achievement for All Pennsylvanians*, outlining its purpose, expected deliverables, and implementation timeline. The Act is designed to expand access to Structured Literacy, improve literacy achievement, and equip educators with the necessary training and resources to support high-quality reading instruction and interventions. By June 1, 2025, PDE is required to develop and publish lists of

- evidence-based reading instruction (EBRI) and curriculum materials (K–3),
- literacy intervention materials and approaches,
- K–3 reading universal screeners, and
- professional development training programs.

The facilitator then provided further details on the statutory requirements for materials' inclusion on each list:

### EBRI & Curriculum Materials

- Aligns with the Pennsylvania Standards and the Science of Reading
- Includes a logical scope and sequence for explicit, systematic, and cumulative instruction
- Incorporates phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle, decoding, encoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and building content knowledge

- MAY NOT include three-cueing, which is a model of teaching students to read based on meaning, structure, syntax, and visual cues (MSV)

### Literacy Intervention Materials and Approaches

- Evidence-based, skill-based specialized reading, writing, and spelling instruction
- Systematic, explicit, and intensified based on the needs of the student
- Includes phonemic awareness, decoding, encoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension

### K–3 Reading Universal Screeners

- Aligns with the essential components of evidence-based reading instruction
- Includes phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle, decoding, encoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension
- Is administered to all students in early elementary to determine if a student is at risk for developing reading difficulties and in need of further diagnostic assessment and targeted intervention
- It is used as part of a tiered support system, such as a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS)
- Measures students' reading knowledge and skills against national norms

### Professional Development Training Programs

- Evidence-based intervention practices in Structured Literacy
- Explicit and systematic instruction in phonological and phonemic awareness
- Alphabetic principle, decoding and encoding, fluency, and vocabulary
- Reading comprehension and building content knowledge

## Overview of the Approach

To meet the goals of Act 135, the Council will follow a structured approach by leveraging existing educational clearinghouses. Lists will be compiled from multiple clearinghouses (a clearinghouse might include repositories at federally funded centers, private centers, nonprofits, or other agencies, such as state educational agencies) to provide LEAs with comprehensive information for decision-making.

The facilitator explained that the Council will pull from a number of well-known clearinghouses relevant to each type of deliverable, detailed below.

## Use Existing Clearing Houses

Pull from and check alignment with well-known educational clearinghouses:

- EdReports
- The Reading League
- National Center on Intensive Intervention
- International Dyslexia Association
- States with similar reading laws
- Pennsylvania Evidence Resource Center and other evidence clearinghouses (e.g., What Work Clearinghouse (WWC), ESSA, Best Evidence Encyclopedia)
- 

The facilitator then explained how rubrics vary depending on the review tools used and the elements included but emphasized that all rubrics will follow the same evaluation approach for alignment, as outlined in the list below. She presented a sample rubric and list, illustrating how different clearinghouses may have varying ratings of curricula. She invited the Council to consider the criteria for including or excluding materials when clearinghouses disagree, as well as additional factors, such as the age of the curricula, which may be relevant for the lists. She also provided further insights into the objectives of list-building, which are detailed below.

## Develop Rubrics

Develop rubrics to check the alignment of existing tools with key Act 135 elements:

- Emphasize key alignment areas.
- Rate alignment with existing tools as “yes” aligned, “partially” aligned, or “no” not aligned to Act 135.
- Include considerations for alignment elements that require discussion.

## Build Lists

Build lists that compile information from across existing clearinghouses:

- Compile lists across different clearinghouse reviews.
- Design lists to use with guidance.
- Do not design lists as endorsement of materials.
- Create comprehensive lists for LEAs to use with guidance in making curricula and training decisions.

Finally, the facilitator clarified that once the lists are finalized and guidance for their use is developed, the goal is to utilize the lists to support curricular and training interventions, as outlined below. She provided a sample of what the guidance document might look like, including the information it may contain, such as an overview of the clearinghouse review and how the curriculum aligns with the Act.

## Create Guidance

Create guidance to support LEA use of lists:

- Develop guidance documents that provide information on a given clearinghouse, overall alignment with Act 135, and specific alignment when available.
- Use guidance with lists to support curricular and training decisions.

The facilitator presented a sample rubric and list, highlighting how different clearinghouses may rate the same curriculum differently. The Council was invited to consider criteria for inclusion and exclusion when discrepancies occur, along with additional factors such as the age of the curriculum materials.

## Committee Input on Considerations

The WestEd facilitator shared committee assignments with Council members and outlined the next steps, establishing that each committee will meet twice before the next full Council meeting and report on their progress at that time.

The facilitator provided examples of the work committees will engage in, including determining thresholds for inclusion on Act 135 lists.

Threshold considerations should be broadly applicable, relevant to the tasks, and grounded in evaluation criteria.

## Examples of Appropriate Considerations

- Resource publication year
- Resource vetted by a recognized clearinghouse

## Examples of Inappropriate Considerations

- Excluding specific companies by name
- Mandating the inclusion of specific resources
- Proposing the removal of statutory requirements from Act 135

The facilitator then invited and responded to Council members' questions regarding the establishment of thresholds, including:

- It is acceptable to reference resources by name in committee meetings.
- Accreditation status (e.g., IDA accreditation) may be a valid consideration for some materials under the broader category of "reviewed and accredited by existing clearinghouses."
- For the initial list publication by June 1, only established programs will be considered.
- Cost to districts may be a relevant factor in decision-making.

Council members had the opportunity to contribute via chat, verbal discussion, or by adding input to their committee Google Docs note catchers.

## Next Steps and Closure

Before closing, WestEd invited final questions and outlined the next steps for the Council. Each committee will meet twice before the next full Council meeting on May 14, at which time members will share updates on their work.