

Pennsylvania Department of Education Reading Leadership Council Meeting #4

Meeting Notes

October 16, 2025

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Reading Leadership Council Meeting #4

Meeting Date and Time

The Reading Leadership Council met on October 16, 2025, from 12 to 2 p.m.

Attendees

- Kate Bacher, Structured Literacy Advisor, Pennsylvania Department of Education
- Jennifer Wicht, English Language Arts Education Advisor, Pennsylvania Department of Education
- Council members, liaisons, and invited guests
- WestEd staff
 - Amaal Awadalla—Program Manager, Literacy
 - Anna Sullivan—Program Coordinator
 - Katie Grogan—Senior Research Manager, Literacy
 - Amanda Nabors—Research Associate, Literacy
 - Elizabeth Zagata—Program Manager, Special Education

Welcome, Purpose Setting, and the Sunshine Act

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and WestEd facilitated a meeting of the Reading Leadership Council to discuss 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 Act, which requires PDE to publish lists of professional development training programs, reading universal screeners, reading instruction curriculum materials, and literacy intervention materials and approaches with the advisement of a Reading Leadership Council.

Liaisons, guests, and members of the public were also welcomed. Liaisons represent the following groups:

- Pennsylvania Department of Education
- 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)

The meeting 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.

Act 135 Professional Development Guidance

An overview of Act 135 was shared, outlining Pennsylvania's commitment to strengthening literacy instruction through expanded access to Structured Literacy. The Act focuses on three main goals:

- expanding access to Structured Literacy to boost reading achievement for all students
- preparing educators to provide high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction and targeted interventions
- supporting schools in offering professional development focused on foundational reading skills and Structured Literacy practices

The facilitator noted that professional development training programs are one of the four key focus areas of Act 135.

Professional Development Training Requirements

Under Act 135, all professional development programs must include the following:

- evidence-based intervention practices centered on Structured Literacy

- explicit and systematic instruction in phonological and phonemic awareness
- the alphabetic principle, decoding, encoding, fluency, and vocabulary development
- reading comprehension and strategies for building content knowledge

Focusing on the “How” of Professional Development Implementation

The WestEd facilitator then shared that this meeting was that today’s meeting is focused on operationalizing professional development under Act 135, considering how to move from guidance to sustained practice and making this work actionable at a local level.

Building Systems and Structures for Effective Professional Development

The WestEd facilitator explained that there are three areas to consider when building systems and structures for effective professional development:

- **Determine Professional Learning Needs:** Build consistent processes to analyze data, gather feedback, and prioritize professional learning aligned with Structured Literacy and Act 135.
- **Design and Sustain Learning Systems:** Develop coherent frameworks such as professional learning communities (PLCs), coaching cycles, mentoring structures, and protected collaboration time that embed continuous learning into daily practice.
- **Measure and Strengthen Impact:** Establish systems to monitor implementation, assess outcomes, and use results to refine supports and sustain instructional improvement over time.

Providing Input

Determine Professional Learning Needs

Council members were then prompted to provide input on questions that focused on determining professional learning needs. Council members responded to the following questions:

1. How can local education agencies (LEAs) design coherent systems for collecting and analyzing data to guide decisions about literacy professional learning priorities?
2. What system-level structures or guiding principles should define how LEAs conduct and use structured literacy needs assessments?

Design and Sustain Learning Systems

Council members were then prompted to provide input on questions that focused on designing and sustaining learning systems. Council members responded to the following questions:

1. What systems, structures, or leadership practices most effectively sustain professional learning over time (e.g., coaching models, PLCs, leadership teams, or aligned accountability processes)?
2. What systemic challenges most often disrupt, or derail, sustained implementation of professional learning within LEAs?
3. What supports would help an LEA sustain the implementation of structured literacy professional learning (e.g., PLC structures, implementation guides)?

Measure and Strengthen Impact

Council members were then prompted to provide input on questions that focused on measuring and strengthening impact. Council members responded to the following questions:

1. How can LEAs establish consistent systems for monitoring the impact of professional learning on educator practice and student outcomes?
2. What key indicators or metrics should be included in a system to assess the effectiveness of structured literacy professional learning across schools and districts?
3. What structures (e.g., data review cycles, reflection protocols, or collaborative analysis teams) can ensure that professional learning data is used to inform ongoing improvement?

Considerations in the Professional Development Guidance Document

The Council members were then prompted to review the considerations that were included on the professional development guidance document. Council members were asked to identify any gaps in the questions or any necessary changes.

Communicating to the Field

Next, Council members were asked to think about the most effective ways to reach and engage educators in the field, considering the following question: What formats or communication

methods would be most effective for sharing guidance and examples of effective professional development systems and structures with LEAs?

Public Comment

One member of the public provided comment.

Next Steps and Closure

WestEd and PDE expressed gratitude to Council members for their contributions throughout the process and shared that upcoming meetings are scheduled as follows:

- **December 11, 2025, 12–2 p.m.**