

Pennsylvania Department of Education Reading Leadership Council Meeting

Meeting Notes

April 9, 2026

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Reading Leadership Council Meeting

Meeting Date and Time

The Reading Leadership Council met on April 9, 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
- Stacey Cherny, Special Assistant to the Secretary of Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education
- Council members, liaisons, and invited guests
- WestEd staff
 - Amaal Awadalla, Program Manager, Literacy
 - Katie Grogan, Senior Research Manager, Literacy
 - Amanda Nabors, Research Associate, Literacy
 - Robin Sayers, Research Associate, Literacy
 - Elizabeth Zagata, Program Manager, Literacy
 - Kim Mapote, Program Coordinator

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 the implementation of **Pennsylvania Act 135 of 2024, Structured Literacy: Literacy Achievement** for All Pennsylvanians, and **Act 47 of 2025**.

Together, these Acts aim to expand access to Structured Literacy and strengthen literacy outcomes statewide. Act 135 focuses on increasing access to high-quality Structured Literacy practices across Pennsylvania schools, while Act 47 codifies the state's commitment by requiring evidence-based reading curriculum, comprehensive teacher training, early literacy screening, and targeted support for students with reading deficiencies. WestEd provided an overview of the legislation, highlighting PDE's responsibility to publish approved lists of professional development programs, universal screeners, core reading curricula, and intervention approaches, with guidance from the Reading Leadership Council.

Liaisons, guests, and members of the public were welcomed. Liaisons represented 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.

PDE Updates

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) shared that it remains focused on clear communication, strong partnerships, and providing resources to support local educational agencies (LEAs) in implementing structured literacy. PDE is conducting direct outreach to schools, in collaboration with Intermediate Units, to finalize survey responses that will inform the state's implementation plan.

The department also noted that a refresh of materials and professional learning is underway, including the addition of new professional development options from the International Dyslexia Association. PDE, in collaboration with the Reading Leadership Council, is reviewing universal screener requirements to ensure alignment with legislative expectations while also meeting the practical needs of schools.

In addition, the Structured Literacy Glossary continues to evolve, incorporating Council feedback to ensure it is both comprehensive and user-friendly. PDE is also regularly updating

and posting Act 47 FAQs on the Structured Literacy landing page to support field understanding. PDE emphasized that the work of the Reading Leadership Council is essential in helping the department build a coherent, student-centered approach to literacy across the state.

Dr. Stacey Cherny shared that she has transitioned into her new role as Special Assistant to the Secretary for Structured Literacy. She has more than 25 years of experience as an educator, having served in multiple teaching and administrative roles, most recently at PaTTAN as the statewide lead for literacy. Dr. Cherny expressed her enthusiasm for supporting the Council's ongoing work.

Reading Universal Screeners: Legislative Context and Effective Practices

A WestEd facilitator provided an overview of the requirements and considerations for selecting and implementing reading universal screeners under Acts 135 and 47. The facilitator highlighted that universal screeners must assess key components of evidence-based reading instruction, be administered to all early elementary students within a tiered system of support, and reliably identify students at risk for reading difficulties. The facilitator referenced important selection criteria, including technical quality, efficiency, and the ability to provide timely, actionable data to inform instruction and intervention. The facilitator also noted that, under Act 47, LEAs will be required to screen all K–3 students three times annually using PDE-approved tools beginning in the 2027–28 school year. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that screening is part of a comprehensive system in which results are used to drive targeted support, inform instruction, and engage families, supported by ongoing educator training and inclusive practices for diverse learners.

Considerations and Criteria for the Selection of Universal Screeners

A WestEd facilitator introduced five key categories that other states have used to organize criteria and considerations for selecting a universal reading screener: content, administration and support, data, technical considerations, and attention to diversity. It was noted that while many of these areas are reflected in current Pennsylvania law, other states have incorporated additional criteria that may be useful to consider as Pennsylvania continues to operationalize its requirements. The facilitator explained that criteria represent the essential components of a high-quality screener, while considerations are preferred features that enhance usability and effectiveness but are not required.

Council Input: Guidance Document

A WestEd facilitator asked Council members to review the Reading Universal Screener Guidance Document and consider whether any of the identified considerations should be elevated to required criteria. In addition, Council members provided input on the criteria and

considerations for selecting high-quality screeners in Pennsylvania. Specifically, they were asked to reflect on which criteria within the five categories—content, administration and support, data, technical considerations, and attention to diversity—should be further explored or strengthened.

Public Comment

No one from the public provided comment.

Next Steps and Closure

Future meetings are planned as follows:

- June 11, 2026
- August 13, 2026
- October 15, 2026
- December 10, 2026

PDE staff thanked the WestEd facilitators and Council members for their work and attendance today and closed the meeting.