



The Reading League Press Kit

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About Us

We believe that all children can learn to read and all teachers can learn to teach them. Yet, after decades of education policy changes and increased testing, much of reading education is failing millions of children in acquiring life's most important education endeavor towards knowledge and fulfillment. Only a third of students in the U.S. achieve reading proficiency. Low literacy levels contribute to poor physical health, mental health, employment opportunities, and quality of life. Students who struggle to read often feel alone, as do the educators and parents who experience frustration when they cannot find adequate information and guidance.

The Reading League (TRL) is a national not-for-profit organization based in Syracuse, New York with the mission to advance the awareness, understanding, and use of scientifically aligned reading instruction. TRL's founders have spent decades on the frontlines of reading instruction and witnessed the vast amount of time, money, and energy that are spent on programs and procedures that fail to produce strong readers. But we know that when educators and parents are empowered with the knowledge, preparation, and support they need — young people have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The Reading League aims to build a national pipeline of diverse stakeholders to help schools, teachers, and learners achieve success. TRL partners with school systems to provide professional development training, establishes state chapters to mobilize educators locally, publishes a peer-reviewed practitioner journal, and produces materials and events that provide clear translation of the research into practice to ensure teachers have what they need to be successful.

The Reading League is reimagining the future of reading education and accelerating the global movement toward reading instruction rooted in science. With knowledge, preparation and support, we can unleash the power of educators to enable millions of students to succeed. Contact us to learn more!



Fact Sheet

- **Established:** 2015
- **Headquartered:** Syracuse, New York
- **Staff Size:** 9
- **TRL Chapters:** IN, KS, LA, MI, VT, PA, WI, OK, NJ, OH, CO, IL and growing
- **Leadership:**
 - Maria Murray, Ph.D. CEO & President
 - Heidi Beverine-Curry, Ph.D. Vice President of Professional Development
 - Christine Goodman, CPA, Vice President of Finance and Human Resources
 - Laura Stewart, National Director
 - Toni Ann Walsh, Vice President of Marketing and Development
- **Mission:** Our mission is to increase the awareness, understanding, and use of evidence-aligned reading instruction.
- **Vision:** Our vision is that all educators who teach reading will have the knowledge to implement evidence-aligned practices that will lead to successful reading outcomes for all learners.
- **5 Keystone Principles of The Reading League**
 - Children’s current and future lives are heavily influenced by their ability to read.
 - All teachers need to be adequately prepared to teach all children to read.
 - Effective instruction and curricula are two controllable factors that positively influence reading outcomes.
 - Decades of research provide evidence about effective reading instruction that needs to be made available to teachers.
 - Effective reading instruction requires expertise and ongoing support.
 - All children deserve a chance to learn to read and all teachers can learn to teach them.
- **Products & Services:**
 - Professional development partnerships with schools
 - Annual National Conference
 - Speaking engagements and presentations upon request



- The Reading League Journal
- Live Events featuring in-person attendance or virtual streaming
- Online Academy
- Professional development content via TRL's YouTube channel and www.thereadingleague.org website
- Reading League chapters in other states
- The Reading League's Reading Buddies television show

- **Social Media:**
 - **The Reading League**
 - Facebook: www.facebook.com/thereadingleague
 - Twitter: twitter.com/reading_league
 - YouTube: www.youtube.com/channel/UCm9TD9u7xGdRUaGjHkOthxw
 - LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-reading-league>
 - Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/thereadingleague/>
 - **The Reading League's Reading Buddies**
 - Facebook: www.facebook.com/ReadingBuddiesTRL
 - Twitter: www.twitter.com/readingbuddies
 - YouTube: www.youtube.com/channel/UCS7JPyTm7Af_1Y-wl9YT9HQ
 - Instagram: www.instagram.com/readingbuddiestrl/



Key Data Points on Reading Achievement

- The past 40 years have yielded significant, interdisciplinary insights into the science of reading, gathered from developmental psychology, cognitive neuropsychology, developmental linguistics, and educational research. Indeed, this is the most studied aspect of human learning. (TRL)
- Research suggests that about 40 percent of children learn to read despite the instruction they receive. ([IDA](#), 2018)
- Only a third of students in the U.S. achieve reading proficiency. NAEP routinely reports that “only a third of American students are proficient or better,” no matter the subject, the age of the students, or their grade level. ([NAEP](#), [Washington Post](#), 2019)
- Only 35 percent of fourth-graders were proficient in reading in 2019, down from 37 percent in 2017; 34 percent of eighth-graders were proficient in reading, down from 36 percent. Overall student progress in reading has stalled in the last decade, with the highest performers stagnating and the lowest-achieving students falling further behind. ([NAEP](#), [New York Times](#), 2019)
- The average eighth-grade reading score declined in more than half of the states compared with 2017, the last time the test was given. The average score in fourth-grade reading declined in 17 states. ([NAEP](#), [New York Times](#), 2019)
- 53 percent of black students and 46 percent of Hispanic students scored at a “below basic” level. Only 24 percent of white students could not reach the “basic” level. When controlling for poverty, black children are still about 50 percent more likely to score below basic than white children. ([NAEP](#), 2019)
- Research shows that strong classroom instruction combined with supplementary, focused interventions reduces the incidence of reading failure to about 5 percent of students or fewer at the first-grade level. (Foorman, Breier, & Fletcher, 2003; Mathes et al., 2005; Torgesen, 2004, 2005)
- New data and analyses from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) find significant progress on the science of reading instruction in teacher preparation. For the first time since NCTQ began publishing program ratings in its 2013 Teacher Prep Review, the number of programs in the nation to embrace reading science has crossed the halfway mark, with 51 percent of 1,000 evaluated traditional elementary teacher preparation programs across the country now earning an A or B grade for



their coverage of the key components of the science of reading—up from just 35 percent 7 years ago. ([NCTQ 2020](#))

- Research has revealed a validated formula for skilled reading comprehension, known as the Simple View of Reading. Decoding (Word Recognition) x Language Comprehension = Reading Comprehension. ([Center for Development & Learning, 1986](#))

Successful Outcomes

- The **Lyncourt Union Free School District in Syracuse, New York** was struggling. From 2008 to 2018, the school district saw significant demographic changes and an increase in poverty and homelessness among its students, which resulted in declining reading achievement. In 2016, the Lyncourt School District partnered with The Reading League to work to address this continuous downward trend. The Reading League provided Lyncourt’s educators with knowledge of evidence-aligned research and practices, then provided professional development training to help support the implementation of those practices in the classroom.

Through extensive training with district teachers, The Reading League provided the knowledge necessary to transform reading instruction. In just 2 years, the district saw a 31 percent increase in students reading at or above grade level, and now over 70 percent of students are reading at or above proficiency levels. ([Lyncourt Case Study](#))

- **Mississippi**, which has for years been at or near the bottom of most state education rankings, was the only state in the nation to post significant gains on the 2019 NAEP assessments. Despite high poverty, [fourth-graders in Mississippi scored better](#) than the nation’s average in math and tied in reading, and outperformed the nation’s fourth-grade gains in both reading and math. Black, white, and Hispanic students from low-income backgrounds are achieving higher scores than the national average. To accomplish this, they aligned with the science of reading. The state passed a Literacy-Based Promotion Act, putting an end to the promotion of students beyond third-grade unless they can read. They trained K-8 educators on how to teach foundational reading skills and provided support via highly trained reading coaches in its lowest-performing districts.



Staff Bios

Maria Murray, Ph.D., Founder & CEO

Maria S. Murray is the founder, CEO and President of The Reading League. A pioneer in the “science of reading” movement, she has been active in this field for more than 20 years. Prior to founding The Reading League, Maria was an associate professor at SUNY Oswego where she taught courses related to literacy assessment and intervention for 10 years. Passionate about the prevention and remediation of reading difficulty, Maria consistently strives to increase educator knowledge and strengthen the connections between research and practice. She received her Ph.D. in Reading Education from Syracuse University, where she taught as an adjunct and served as project coordinator for Benita Blachman’s numerous federally funded early reading intervention grants for 12 years.

Heidi Beverine-Curry, Ph.D., Vice President of Professional Development

Heidi Beverine-Curry is a co-founder and Vice President of Professional Development for The Reading League, where she designs, supervises, and delivers educator learning opportunities. Before working for The Reading League full-time, Heidi spent 21 years working in public schools where she made use of her certifications in Elementary Education, K-12 Special Education, and K-12 Reading Education. When Heidi began her doctoral coursework in Reading Education in 2006, she became a champion for evidence-aligned literacy instruction and has led a number of successful reform efforts. Heidi was an adjunct professor at Syracuse University and SUNY Oswego, where she specialized in teaching clinical reading intervention coursework.

Toni Ann Walsh, Vice President of Marketing and Development

Toni Ann Walsh is the Vice President of Marketing and Development at The Reading League. She has 20 years of nonprofit development experience in healthcare and anti-poverty areas where she has been directly responsible for multimillion-dollar development programs with diverse fundraising streams including major gifts, workplace giving, grant writing, mass-market events, direct mail/annual appeal, corporate giving, and planned giving. She also has an extensive background in nonprofit management and facility operations. Most recently, Toni was Chief Strategy Officer at the Alzheimer’s Association, Central New York



Chapter for 13 years, where she increased fundraising revenues from \$156,000 to \$4.5 million. She is a member of the Association for Fundraising Professionals, Vice President of the Rockwell/Wheeler Parent Teacher Organization and a 40 Under 40 Award recipient.

Christine Goodman, Vice President of Finance and Human Resources

Christine Goodman is the Vice President of Finance and Human Resources at The Reading League. She is a Certified Public Accountant with both national and regional accounting firm experience. Prior to coming to The Reading League, she worked for 11 years at Vera House, a local Syracuse nonprofit, as the Director of Finance & Human Resources. She graduated from the Whitman School of Management at Syracuse University with a degree in Accounting.

Laura Stewart, National Director

Laura Stewart is the National Director for The Reading League. In this role, she empowers educators through (inter)national presentations on the science of reading and other related topics. Laura previously served as a teacher, administrator, adjunct professor, and director of numerous professional development initiatives around the country. She was the Vice President of Professional Development for the Rowland Reading Foundation and was the Chief Academic Officer for Professional Development at Highlights for Children. Laura sits on the advisory board of the International Foundation of Effective Reading Instruction and serves on the Illinois governor's Task Force for At-Risk Youth. She is a certified LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) trainer.

Kelli Johnson, Reading Coach Director

Kelli Johnson is the Reading Coach Director at The Reading League. She began her career as an elementary school teacher and, after 9 years, began teaching (under)graduate courses and supervising student teachers at Syracuse University. Kelli also served as an Elementary Literacy Specialist for a federally funded research project and as an independent consultant for public and private schools in Central and Northern New York. Kelli received her degree in Elementary Education from SUNY Geneseo and graduated from Syracuse University with an M.S. in Learning Disabilities, where she studied under Dr. Benita Blachman.

Madeline Chilbert, Events Manager

Madeline Chilbert is the Events Manager at The Reading League. She started her career at a national conference planning company. Maddy has extensive experience in speaker care, event execution, and sponsor relations. She has been a part of The Reading League since 2019 and is dedicated to taking the organization's events to the next level, providing



practitioners across the country with information and access to key events throughout the year. Managing live and online events, conferences, and fundraising opportunities, Maddy focuses on building The Reading League's reputation among its peers. Maddy graduated from SUNY Cortland with a degree in Communications.

Katie Sojewicz, Professional Development Coordinator

Katie Sojewicz is the Professional Development Coordinator at The Reading League. Katie has been involved in education for 25 years. She was a classroom teacher in the Syracuse City School District, where she taught Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade, as well as two years as Reading Specialist. In addition to her classroom and school experience, Katie has worked as a Field Supervisor for student teachers at Syracuse University, and as a professional tutor and adjunct professor at Onondaga Community College in the Reading Department. Katie was a Reading Coach with The Reading League for three years. Along with coaching at two schools in the Skaneateles School District, Katie worked with Fairley Elementary School in the Hannibal Central School District as part of the Oswego County Literacy Initiative (OCLI). OCLI is a collaboration between all nine Oswego County school districts, the CNYOC Teacher Center, CiTi BOCES and The Reading League. Katie is currently the PD Coordinator at The Reading League. Katie also teaches a graduate class, *Language and Literacy Development for All Learners*, at SUNY Oswego. Katie has the unique perspective of being on the Syracuse City School District School Board, where she is currently serving her second year as President of the Board.

Andrea Simone, Office Manager

Andrea Simone is an Office Manager with The Reading League. In this role, Andrea handles a wide range of administrative and support tasks to ensure organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Andrea is native to Syracuse and has worked in the nonprofit community for the past 14 years, supporting mission-driven programs that improve awareness, education, and prevention throughout the Syracuse community. Andrea graduated from Onondaga Community College.



FAQs

Does The Reading League provide direct service to children?

No, The Reading League does not work directly with children. Our mission focuses on elevating the knowledge and skills of educators so that they can learn how to most effectively teach their students how to read.

Is The Reading League only for educators who work with students who struggle with learning to read?

No. The Reading League helps educators maximize reading achievement for all students. General and special education classroom teachers are both critically important to helping more children learn to read. When teachers provide “core,” or “Tier 1,” evidence-based instruction grounded in science, fewer children experience difficulty and need extra help. All types of educators at all grade levels – including speech and language pathologists/therapists, school psychologists, administrators, librarians, middle and high school content teachers, special area teachers, and more – have an important role to play in the prevention and remediation of reading difficulty.

Don't colleges/universities provide teachers with this knowledge during their preparation programs?

Not necessarily. Much of the science of reading comes from disciplines outside of schools of education (e.g., neuroscience, linguistics, cognitive psychology, etc.). Therefore, professors who teach in schools of education are often unfamiliar with the scientific evidence base. But that is changing as we continue to build a science of reading movement, working together with researchers, practitioners, experts, and academics, to get more evidence-based instruction into the classroom.

Don't school districts provide teachers with this knowledge once they are hired?

Not necessarily. School district administrators and teachers who plan professional development experiences are often not aware of the scientific evidence on how students learn to read. Schools tend to implement popular, heavily advertised approaches and materials that they assume are grounded in research. Sadly, the profit-driven commercial entities that dominate the educational marketplace are often not yet aligned with the science of how students best learn to read.

Is The Reading League just about teaching phonics?

Not at all. We tend to do a lot of work around phonics and phonemic proficiency because the research on teacher knowledge indicates that these are the areas in which educators have the most significant gaps. However, The Reading League also addresses vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, early speech, and language development, response to intervention,



assessment, text types, writing, and other related topics. Check out our [YouTube Channel](#) for a sampling of our past Live Events and professional development videos.

Does The Reading League have an instructional program? Do you recommend a particular program or strategy?

The Reading League does not have an instructional program. We understand that educators — not programs — teach students. That being said, some published instructional programs are more informed by the existing evidence-based research than others. When teachers build their knowledge, they are better positioned to make informed choices when selecting instructional programs, materials, and approaches in the classroom.

Does The Reading League provide direct service to adults who want to become better readers?

Not yet. At this time, we do not have the capacity to do this important job, but we hope to get there someday. Sadly, far too many adults did not have their literacy instructional needs met when they were in school. We recognize that evidence-based instruction can help adults as well. It is never too late to learn to read.

It can be tough to get school districts on board with a new approach. How do you propose they do this?

The Reading League’s mission is to elevate the knowledge and skills of all educators in all school districts. However, we know that change can be slow. For some school districts, they may not have the budget or capacity to implement new processes or professional development programs, particularly if they’ve already invested in a certain method. But, as The Reading League continues to expand and our membership and chapters continue to grow, we see an increased eagerness to try something new from school districts across the country. It is our goal to make evidence-based reading instruction the norm across the country.

Where does The Reading League operate?

While The Reading League is headquartered in Syracuse, New York, we work all across the country. Our members reside in all 50 states and our new chapter program has already expanded in numerous states. If you’re interested in joining or starting a chapter in your state, you can find out more [here](#).

How much does it cost to work with The Reading League?

Cost depends on the extent of our work with the school district. To inquire, we invite you to email Heidi Beverine-Curry at heidi@thereadingleague.org for more information.

How does The Reading League fund its work?

We do incur operating costs (e.g., video recording, photocopying, conference expenses, insurance) and personnel costs (e.g., tech support, school-based reading coaches). And while some of our work is led by volunteers, The Reading League relies on donations, grants, corporate sponsors, Live Event raffles, and merchandise sales to continue providing our services to educators. In addition, subscription to our peer-reviewed Journal also



support these services. Please consider supporting The Reading League through a personal donation or any of the other avenues above. Because The Reading League is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, your donation is tax-deductible.

I am a New York State teacher who needs CTLE hours for certification purposes. Will my attendance at The Reading League Live Events or Annual Conference count toward this requirement?

Yes. The Reading League is an NYSED approved CTLE agency, and you will be provided with a certificate of attendance if you attend (in-person) our Live Events, Annual Conference, or professional development trainings at our headquarters.

What is the science of reading?

The science of reading is a body of empirical research derived from multiple disciplines (cognitive psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, etc.). The findings from thousands of research studies reveal how the brain reads, and why it has difficulty doing so sometimes. Most importantly, the science of reading has revealed which instructional approaches advantage all learners – in all areas of reading (phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, spelling, comprehension, etc.). It is NOT just about phonics. The science of reading is best portrayed via these research-validated frameworks – the Simple View of Reading, Scarborough’s Rope, and Seidenberg and McClelland’s Four-Part Processor. You can read more about the science of reading [here](#).

How does The Reading League partner and work with school districts?

We work with school districts in whatever way best suits their capacity and their needs. Whether through a series of trainings with educators or by providing resources, we make sure district educators feel empowered and knowledgeable about how to bring the science of reading into their classrooms.



Case Study

The Reading League – Lyncourt Union Free School District

The Lyncourt Union Free School District in Syracuse, New York was struggling. From 2008 to 2018, the school district experienced significant demographic changes and an increase in poverty and homelessness among its students, which resulted in declining reading achievement. Poverty and home instability are highly correlated with low reading achievement.

For all students, reading is the foundation for future academic success and opportunities throughout their lives. Students who experience poverty or are learning English as a new language are especially at risk of falling behind without proper instruction.

After becoming increasingly concerned with declining reading achievement, the Lyncourt Union Free School District reached out to The Reading League for help. In 2016, Lyncourt and TRL partnered to address the growing gap in reading achievement. TRL conducted a series of professional development trainings for district educators on evidence-aligned practices. After the initial trainings, TRL provided ongoing support and collaboration via weekly coaching to ensure they had the knowledge and resources needed to be successful.

"Partnering with Lyncourt educators was an incredible experience. We worked together with the school district hand-in-hand every step of the way to ensure every teacher was invested in with the resources and knowledge they needed to be successful. We are thrilled that these joint efforts have made such a difference in the way Lyncourt teaches its students, and we look forward to continuing our work together." — Dr. Maria Murray, CEO and President, The Reading League

In just 2 years, the district saw a 31 percent increase in students reading at or above grade level, and 70 percent of students were reading at or above proficiency levels. The gaps between students of different backgrounds and income levels started to close and teachers reported feeling more empowered when planning, instructing, and teaching their students.

"We invested not just in elementary classroom teachers, but our ENL teachers, our teachers who are reading specialists, our special education teachers. And we've even been working with teacher assistants, just training everybody." — Amy Rotundo, Data and Curriculum Coordinator, Lyncourt Union Free School District



Of the 18 school districts in Onondaga County, New York, Lyncourt tied for first place for the largest increase in 3–8 literacy proficiency in statewide testing. Overall, Lyncourt had 6 percent more students achieve proficiency on the New York State assessment — 5 percent beyond the state average.

While there is more work to do, after working with The Reading League, the Lyncourt Union Free School District reversed its downward literacy trend associated with high rates of poverty and has helped to provide a brighter future for its students.

What is *The Reading League Journal*?

A journal for educators by educators.

The Reading League Journal (TRLJ) is the only publication to connect the science of reading to educators' professional practices in the classroom. Launched in January 2020, TRLJ consists of peer-reviewed articles written by educators and researchers for every stakeholder involved in helping more people learn to read — from teachers to school psychologists to school board members and more.

Published 3 times a year, TRLJ features articles that translate the scientifically proven approaches for teaching reading in ways that are digestible and useful to practitioners in the field, tells of school systems and individuals that have successfully implemented these practices, and provides professional development to provide educators with the knowledge needed to enable their students to succeed.

As of March 1, 2021, we are excited to share that all subscriptions to The Reading League Journal now include a digital version of every issue via our new online subscriber portal, in addition to the mailed print publications. The digital editions will be available to all subscribers. Current subscribers can also purchase a digital version of back issues they may have missed prior to subscribing through the digital portal [here](#).

To become a subscriber to TRLJ, a subscription must be purchased separately from the free membership. If you are currently a paid member of The Reading League, you will continue to receive your journal issues for the remainder of your current subscriber plan. When your TRLJ subscription expires, you will remain on our email list, but will have to subscribe again to receive TRLJ. TRLJ requires an annual fee.



Building a national movement requires knowledge, preparation, and support. We thank you for your commitment to bringing the science of reading to classrooms everywhere and invite you to join us on this journey. Join us.

Questions?

Email Toni Ann Walsh, Vice President for Marketing and Development at toni@thereadingleague.org.