# Frequently Asked Questions: Statewide Training Opportunity and Other Key Information for Reading Specialists

The Virginia Literacy Act (VLA) passed by the Virginia Legislature in 2022, seeks to improve K-8 literacy outcomes for all students in the Commonwealth. As part of this legislation, all reading specialists are required to receive training in evidence-based literacy instruction (EBLI) and science-based reading research (SBRR).

Virginia Literacy Partnerships (VLP) at the University of Virginia is leading the design, development, and facilitation of a statewide knowledge-based professional development training series for reading specialists. This training series will also prepare reading specialists to support the implementation of VLA.

Questions and answers are grouped by category below.

## Professional Learning for Reading Specialists:

1. What is covered in the statewide training for reading specialists?
	* The training seeks to integrate the shifts the Commonwealth is making in literacy practice including implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction (EBLI) and science-based reading research (SBRR) into classroom practice. While a portion of this training will be focused on ensuring all reading specialists understand EBLI/SBRR, much of the training will be focused on application of these practices.
	* The training includes a two-day in-person institute, an online Canvas course and monthly virtual synchronous “Zoom” sessions facilitated by regional literacy coaches.
	* The VALUE professional learning series (<https://literacy.virginia.edu/value-series>) is a set of free resources separate from the in-person institutes and online course - available now to all educators across the Commonwealth and updated frequently.
2. Is participation required at the two-day institute and the Canvas course? If my reading specialist(s) have already received training in the knowledge basis, do they need to attend?
	* Yes, all reading specialists are required to attend all of the components – even if they’ve received other EBLI/SBRR training.
	* While reading specialists may benefit from entering this training with an established understanding of EBLI/SBRR, this training was created to bridge the knowledge of theory and science to classroom application by focusing on Virginia-specific implementation.
	* Divisions may still choose to provide professional learning in addition to the statewide training and the VDOE will provide a list of options by the start of the 2024-2025 school year as required by law.
3. Is there a cost to attend the training?
	* No. There are no fees to attend the institute sessions or the online Canvas course.
4. Will lodging/transportation be reimbursed for the two-day institute?
	* VLP will provide a $250 stipend for any person traveling more than 60 miles to attend an institute. For others, the cost of lodging and transportation will not be covered by the state.
	* Breakfast and lunch will be provided.
5. Will reading specialists be paid a stipend for attending the training?
	* The state will *not* provide a stipend for attending the training, nor will the VDOE provide funding for substitutes. The two day in-person and monthly sessions were timed to overlap with the school/contract year.
6. Will there be any continuing education credits or badges/certificates for attending all of the training?
	* Yes, at the end of the two-day reading institutes, participants will receive a certificate with 15 professional development hours.
	* After completing the online Canvas coursework, participants will receive a certificate of approximately 90 professional development hours.
7. If a reading specialist is unable to attend the two-day in-person institute component, is there a virtual option? Will the sessions be recorded for later reference?
	* There are no virtual options currently available. School divisions are asked to make every effort to ensure all reading specialists attend.
8. Will participants be directed to attend specific locations based on their geography or can attendees choose a session that works for their schedule?
	* Divisions will be directed to a specific location based on their proximity, but exceptions can be made to accommodate reading specialist availability.
9. How does a reading specialist register for the training? And what specific roles can register?
	* A communication will be sent in May to each division ELA coordinator with instructions on how to register. This communication will include guidance on how many individuals to register and the assigned training location.
10. Is there a maximum capacity at each training location? Is a division limited to one reading specialist per 550 students to attend the training?
	* Each training location will have a limited number of seats and the communication to each division will include guidance on which individuals to register (including a maximum number).
11. Can literacy coaches, Title I reading teachers, reading interventionists or other staff who support literacy efforts attend?
	* The priority for this training is staff who will work as reading specialists in the 2023-2024 school year. Schools will be responsible for ensuring that these staff are registered.
	* If there is additional capacity, the VDOE will communicate this to the field during the summer.
12. Where can the Canvas course be found? And can it be accessed before the institutes?
	* Reading Specialists will receive information on the Canvas course during the institutes.
	* The Canvas course will open in Fall 2023.
13. What is the role of the regional literacy coaches?
	* The VLA also provides for regional literacy coaches (staffed through VLP) to provide professional development and support to division-level literacy personnel and reading specialists as they implement evidence-based literacy instruction.
	* Coaches will be able to provide some on-site support when requested by divisions, weekly online office hours to answer questions, and will facilitate the Canvas course as well.

## Professional Learning for Teachers, Administrators and Other Staff

1. Will the free statewide training be different for administrators, reading specialists, and teachers?
	* Given the vital role reading specialists will play in the implementation of VLA, training for reading specialists has been expedited to begin the Summer of 2023, with continued training to occur monthly during the 2023-2024 school year
	* Training for other staff is still in development and will begin in the Summer of 2024 and continue throughout the 2024-2025 school year. All the training will be aligned and differentiated to support implementation.
2. How might other roles (division or school level leaders) build understanding of what the reading specialists are experiencing?
	* All staff who lead or support literacy efforts are encouraged to visit the [VALUE Professional Learning series](https://literacy.virginia.edu/value-series) and complete the modules.
	* The VDOE will publish a one-pager for administrators about the training series; what their reading specialists are experiencing and how administrators can support VLA implementation during the 2023-24 school year in preparation for 2024-25.
3. Will there be a list of approved professional development providers – for teachers and other staff? When?
	* VLA calls for VDOE to create a list of professional development programs aligned with EBLI/SBRR to be approved by the VBOE. From subsection C of §[**22.1-253.13:5**](http://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/22.1-253.13%3A5):*The Department shall also create a list of professional development programs aligned with science-based reading research and evidence-based literacy instruction that includes programs that provide training in dyslexia for reading specialists as required by subsection G of §* [***22.1-253.13:2***](http://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/22.1-253.13%3A2)*. The list shall be approved by the Board.*  This list will be provided in the 2023-24 school year. Because the statewide option will be free for all divisions, VDOE and its partners have been prioritizing the development of the statewide option which covers both EBLA/SBRR and Virginia-specific implementation.

## Preparing for the 2024-2025 Reading Specialist Requirement:

1. What is the role of the reading specialist? Are reading specialists doing coaching of other teachers or working directly with students? How is the reading specialist similar or different than other roles – literacy coach, Title 1 or 2 reading staff, etc.?
	* The reading specialist plays a critical role, in consultation with classroom teachers, to coordinate and oversee intervention for students not meeting literacy benchmarks. A reading specialist, in collaboration with the teacher of any student who receives reading intervention services, shall develop, oversee implementation of, and monitor student progress on a student reading plan.
	* Reading Specialists will be involved in coaching teachers as they implement EBLI.
2. Does a reading specialist need the reading specialist endorsement?
	* Yes, someone serving in the reading specialist role as outlined in the VLA will need to hold a Reading Specialist endorsement beginning in the 2024-25 school year.
3. What is the role of reading specialists as dyslexia advisors?
	* According to the legislation, § [**22.1-253.13:2**](http://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/22.1-253.13%3A2), section G, *each local school board shall employ one reading specialist for each 550 students in kindergarten through grade three. Each such reading specialist shall have training in science-based reading research and evidence-based literacy instruction practices. In addition, each such reading specialist shall have training in the identification of and the appropriate interventions, accommodations, and teaching techniques for students with dyslexia or a related disorder and shall serve as an advisor on dyslexia and related disorders.*
	* Note that the Reading Institute will discuss dyslexia and the Canvas course will have a module on dyslexia.
4. Will reading specialists be paid more as a result of this training and/or these new expectations?
	* The VDOE is not requiring nor funding a pay increase as a result of completing this training.
5. When is the staffing ratio required (1 Reading Specialist for every 550 students) and how is it funded?
	* This staffing ratio is effective beginning in the 2024-25 school year. This new staffing standard for reading specialists is funded within the Standards of Quality (SOQ) and was included in Basic Aid payments to local school divisions beginning in the 2022-2023 school year.
	* Title I funds cannot be used to pay for the salary of the reading specialist(s) required to meet the 550 students to 1 reading specialist student/teacher ratio.

## **Reading Plans/Templates:**

1. When will the student reading plan template be available and what is the expectation?
	* Templates will be available during the 2023-2024 school year, but implemented during Fall 2024
	* Reading specialists will receive training on the student reading plans as part of the statewide training.
2. When will the template for the division literacy plan become available and what is the expectation?
	* Templates will be available during the 2023-2024 school year
	* New division literacy plans will need to be submitted in the 2024-2025 school year.
3. Who is responsible for the student reading plans? Who is responsible for the district literacy plan?
	* School divisions have discretion to determine which staff are responsible.

For additional questions, please contact vla@doe.virginia.gov.