



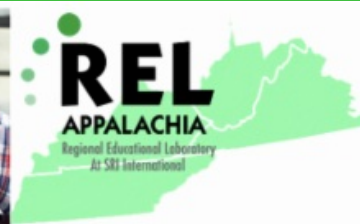
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## MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR

As a resident and parent in the REL Appalachia (REL AP) region, I have the honor to serve the amazing and diverse REL AP communities throughout Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. As the Director of REL AP, I am thrilled to be leading an incredibly talented team of researchers, technical assistance providers, and communications experts who work in partnership with equally talented leaders in school districts, state departments of education, and elsewhere to carry out and use research to improve student academic outcomes in the region.



Our current efforts span the continuum of needs in the four-state region. In collaboration with our partners, we are supporting schools' efforts to improve early literacy practices and mathematics instructional practices for upper-elementary and middle school students, and to align teaching methods with effective practices that benefit students. We also have a range of research, technical support, and dissemination activities underway to help students, educators, policymakers, and community members improve their understanding of the diverse range of academic and nonacademic experiences that high school graduates need to be ready for life after high school—whether it be their first step in a career, technical training, or the pursuit of a college degree. Finally, the REL Appalachia team is supporting state leaders' efforts to strengthen approaches to communicating important data and research findings to local educators, parents, and communities.

With our partners, REL Appalachia conducts research, supports implementation, assesses impact, and creates informational tools for educators in Appalachia, as well as education policymakers and practitioners across the country. We look forward to serving this region, and beyond, for years to come.

Deborah Jonas, PhD  
Director, REL Appalachia

## PROJECT UPDATES

REL Appalachia works in partnership with school districts, state departments of education, and other education stakeholders in the region to develop high-quality research and to use and disseminate the

research findings to improve student outcomes. These partnerships combine rigorous research with responsive training, coaching, and technical support and practitioner-focused information sharing to ensure that evidence informs practice in a timely manner to benefit students.

## Partnerships at a Glance



### Tennessee Early Literacy Partnership

Our Early Literacy Partnership is working with Tennessee Department of Education representatives to improve early literacy outcomes by:

- Supporting districts and schools in implementing the Tennessee Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI<sup>2</sup>) framework and evaluating its effect on students' literacy.
- Supporting implementation of effective literacy practices in all Tennessee schools.
- Disseminating findings to influence and support regional practice and policy.



### Kentucky Rural College Readiness Partnership

Our Rural College Readiness Partnership is working with district leaders in Clay, Jackson, Knox, and Owsley counties in eastern Kentucky to bolster and support students' participation in postsecondary opportunities by:

- Increasing understanding about nonacademic supports and promoting rural high school students' successful college enrollment and completion.
- Developing methods to assess the contribution of the diverse interventions and supports that students and families can access in eastern Kentucky to strengthen high school graduates' transition to and success in college.



### West Virginia Workforce Readiness Partnership

Our Workforce Readiness partnership works with career and technical education leaders from the West Virginia Department of Education and secondary schools that are implementing Simulated Workplace programs to better prepare graduates for college and careers by:

- Assessing alignment of Simulated Workplace high school programs with postsecondary and workforce opportunities.
- Supporting efforts to use data and evidence to enhance continuous improvement of workforce development instructional programs.
- Co-developing materials to inform educators, parents, and policymakers about Simulated Workplace programs and their benefits to students and to West Virginia's communities.



### Virginia Student Success in Mathematics Partnership

Our Student Success in Mathematics partnership works with leaders from five small-city school divisions where the majority of students live in poverty-Charlottesville, Harrisonburg, Staunton, Waynesboro, and Winchester-to improve mathematics instruction and student academic outcomes by:

- Ensuring that all students master algebraic concepts no later than grade 9.
- Supporting teachers in delivering effective mathematics instruction.
- Providing evidence-based interventions for students who struggle in math.



### Virginia Improving Postsecondary Transitions Partnership

Our Improving Postsecondary Transitions partnership works with representatives from the Virginia Department of Education, the Virginia Community College System, and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to increase traditionally underserved students' success in postsecondary education and careers by:

- Identifying, developing, and supporting use of effective practices that strengthen high school graduates' transition to college and careers.

- Answering regionally relevant research questions about credentialing practices in local industries.



### The Cross-state Communicating Data to Facilitate Action Partnership

Our Cross-State Partnership to Effectively Communicate Data and Evidence collaborates with state departments of education and welcomes our partners across all four of the REL AP states: Kentucky Center for Education & Workforce Statistics, Tennessee Department of Education, Virginia Department of Education, State Council for Higher Education in Virginia, Virginia Community College System, and West Virginia Department of Education. Together we will work to bolster our state agencies' abilities to present data in ways that produce useful insights for acting on information by:

- Defining approaches to displaying data and evidence that are grounded in research.
- Providing training on appropriate and effective use of data and data displays to enhance local users' data literacy.
- Designing a range of data tools and resources.

## STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

### Who We Are

#### Dr. Lydotta Taylor, West Virginia Liaison and Kentucky Math Partner

Lydotta Taylor has worked with the REL for more than 16 years, assisting with projects in all four states (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia). Lydotta has personal ties to the region, currently living in West Virginia and having received her undergraduate, master's, and doctorate degrees from West Virginia University. In her role with REL Appalachia, Lydotta works closely with the West Virginia Department of Education leaders and the REL AP team to support statewide efforts to strengthen career and technical education programs. In Kentucky, Lydotta uses her extensive experience and professional expertise as a former mathematics and STEM education teacher to provide professional development to support Clay and Jackson counties in strengthening the implementation of their middle school math curricula. Lydotta's academic career had a clear focus on STEM education and she earned her doctorate in curriculum and instruction with a minor in STEM professional development. When she is not busy working on the REL, Lydotta enjoys spending time with her family, cherishing the moments when her grown children are in the same location. Her daughter is the executive director of the West Virginia Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association in Morgantown, West Virginia and her son works in human resources in Houston, Texas. Together they love to travel, go for rides in their convertible, and exercise.



#### Ms. Aliya Pilchen, Lead of Ask-A-REL service and partnership liaison for the Virginia Improving Postsecondary Transitions partnership

In her first year working with the REL, Aliya Pilchen has taken on the responsibility of managing the [Ask-A-REL](#) service and serving as the partnership liaison for the Virginia Improving Postsecondary Transitions partnership. The Ask-A-REL program provides references, referrals, and brief responses to questions about available education research submitted by stakeholders from the four REL AP states. Aliya's responsibilities include monitoring the incoming Ask-A-REL requests, communicating with requestors to clarify and understand the context of their questions, and working with the Ask-A-REL team to prepare high-quality responses. As a northern Virginia native, Aliya also has enjoyed being able to support the Virginia partnership in a variety of ways and learning more about the diverse needs of the state. Aliya received a Bachelor of Arts degree in public policy studies from Duke University and received her master's degree in education policy and management from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling, watching Duke basketball, and playing with her family's labradoodle, Rudy.

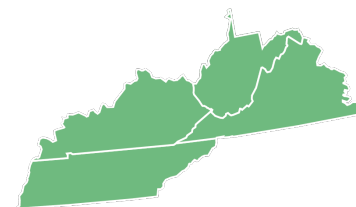


## COMING SOON...

from REL Appalachia

#### Kentucky Rural College Readiness Partnership

REL AP staff will be meeting with representatives from Clay and Jackson counties (Kentucky) in September for an "Implementation research kick-off." The meeting is the first in a series of activities



designed to increase local educators' success in monitoring and improving teachers' use of curricula in their classrooms so that ultimately they maximize the benefits of instructional strategies and curricular materials for students. In this first meeting superintendents, district leaders, and REL AP staff will discuss implementation research and the methods and tools available to use research to improve teachers' use of curricula, and select a framework for understanding implementation of the local mathematics curriculum. Together local leaders and REL AP staff will finalize the plan for developing and carrying out implementation research locally in eastern Kentucky. In October and beyond, Clay and Jackson county teachers and REL staff will meet regularly to develop measures for tracking implementation of the mathematics program that reflects their local context.

### Virginia Improving Postsecondary Transitions Partnership

The Virginia Improving Postsecondary Transitions partnership is excited to host a bridge event at Mountain Empire, Southwest Virginia and Wytheville community colleges. The purpose of this October 24 event is for middle and high school educators to build awareness of the benefits of postsecondary education and training, the primary barriers to access, and the opportunities available in the region, as well as to foster communication and collaboration among K-12 and postsecondary programs offered in the region. Keep an eye out for registration information, coming soon! For more information, please contact Aliya Pilchen, [Aliya.Pilchen@sri.com](mailto:Aliya.Pilchen@sri.com).

*NOTE: This introductory newsletter is being sent once to educational leaders in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. To continue to receive emails from REL Appalachia, please subscribe at the link below.*

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#### REL Appalachia

[RELAppalachia@sri.com](mailto:RELAppalachia@sri.com)

Independent, Unbiased Research Support for  
Your State's Education Priorities



[ASK-A-REL](#)

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