

Athens City Schools

Foundational Literacy Skills Plan

First Approved: April 13, 2023

Approved: June 10, 2024

This Foundational Literacy Skills Plan has been approved by the Tennessee Department of Education and meets the requirements of the *Tennessee Literacy Success Act*. All portions of the Foundational Literacy Skills plan were submitted to the department and approved. To view the supplemental artifacts, please contact the district directly.

Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades K-2

Athens City Schools adopted the Expeditionary Learning (EL) Foundational Skills Curriculum, which is grounded in reading science, aligned to Tennessee ELA standards, and approved by the State Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission. EL uses foundational skills as the primary form of instruction for daily foundational skills instruction in grades K-2.

K-2 students have 140 minutes of daily ELA instruction, with 70 minutes dedicated to explicit and systematic foundational literacy skills instruction, which includes whole-group, grade-level direct instruction, and practice. Instruction includes activities that build phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and sentence composition. Teachers also supplement phonological and phonemic awareness using TN's Sounds First curriculum.

The skills block consists of two major chunks. The first 20 minutes consist of whole-group grade-level direct instruction and practice. During this time, students engage in familiar instructional routines used consistently over one or more modules that address grade-level standards, ensuring that all students have access to grade-level instruction.

The next 45-50 minutes include differentiated small-group instruction focusing on introducing new material, reteaching, or extending based on students' needs. The teacher meets with three groups per day. Students reading below grade level meet with the teacher every day, and students reading at or above grade level meet with the teacher once or twice weekly. The Skills Block ensures that by the end of grade 2, students acquire the depth of skills they need in the Reading Foundations standards to navigate grade-level text independently.

For example, students in first grade learn about "silent e." The first instruction cycle focuses on understanding how the 'e' can change CVC words with a short vowel sound to CVCe words with a long vowel sound. Students engage in activities such as spelling to complement reading and interactive writing, and they have ample time to practice their new code knowledge using the curriculum's decodable readers. There are four cycles, or four weeks of instruction on this pattern using all vowels, including a cycle that teaches about dropping the "silent e" when adding inflectional endings.

The benchmark assessment is administered at the beginning, middle, and end of the year to place students into a reading phase. Teachers provide learning opportunities to meet the needs of students based on their phase. Depending on the grade level, cycle assessments are administered every cycle 1-2 times per module to assess students' progress toward mastery of skills taught up to a given point in the curriculum. Cycle assessments also support teachers in helping students set personal goals around reading proficiency.

An additional 70 minutes of ELA instruction consists of module lessons that build language skills, knowledge about the world, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing through high-quality, content-rich literary and nonfiction texts.

Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades 3-5

Athens City Schools has an integrated literacy block for grades three through five grounded in reading science, aligned to Tennessee ELA standards, and approved by the state Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission. During the integrated ELA block that meets an evidence-based approach to applying foundational skills within daily lessons, students receive 110 minutes of ELA instruction with 70 minutes devoted to the module lesson and 45 minutes to ALL (Additional Language and Literacy) Block.

Foundational skills instruction is embedded throughout the content modules, including morphology, grammar, spelling, writing, and fluency. ALL (Additional Language and Literacy) Block (45 minutes of daily instruction) then gives students the differentiated practice and support required to demonstrate mastery of those skills. Teachers provide explicit vocabulary instruction in most K-5 lessons (e.g., unpacking academic vocabulary in a learning target, focusing on vocabulary words in text); students learn to analyze the morphology of words; students are exposed to and analyze complex sentence structures in written and spoken language; students engage in frequent Language Dives about the meaning and purpose of a compelling sentence from a complex text followed by practice using the language structures; students practice reading text fluently, receive peer or teacher critique, and then perform or record that text.

Students engage in more practice and reinforcement of the learning in module lessons through five components during ALL Block. They rotate through three of the five components daily:

- Independent Reading: Content-related reading at students' independent reading levels; free choice reading.
- Additional work with Complex Text: Rereading complex text from the module with a specific focus—for example, making inferences.
- Reading and Speaking Fluency/GUM (grammar, usage, and mechanics): practice with oral reading, speaking with expression, and grammar rules.
- Writing Practice: writing fluency practice; quick writes; additional practice with specific skills.
- Word Study and Vocab: structural analysis of specific words; vocabulary work from module content.

Module lessons explicitly teach and formally assess all literacy standards. All modules use rich, authentic texts throughout. All daily instruction includes components of knowledge-building for 70 minutes per day. Students in grades 3-5 consistently read complex text to gain deeper content

knowledge of the topic and further familiarize themselves with the structures, syntax, and vocabulary of complex text. The curriculum also engages students in work around fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills are not taught in isolation but are embedded within the lesson to ensure continuity, cohesion, and connection.

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades K-2

Imagine Learning EL Education (formerly LearnZillion Expeditionary Learning) K-5

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades 3-5

Imagine Learning EL Education (formerly LearnZillion Expeditionary Learning) K-5

Supplemental Instructional Materials

ACS teachers supplement phonological and phonemic awareness using TN's Sounds First curriculum in grades K-2.

Universal Reading Screener for Grades K-5. This screener complies with RTI2 and Say Dyslexia requirements

Tennessee Universal Reading Screener (aimswebPlus): Grades K-5

Intervention Structure and Supports

All students participate in the AimswebPlus universal screening in the fall, winter, and spring following the K-3 and 4-8 Minimum URS Matrix. The assessments determine which students are at-risk for a reading deficiency or significantly at-risk for one. Instructional coaches share results with grade level teachers during PLCs. Results are compared to multiple data sources, including classroom assessments and teacher input, to confirm or challenge. Diagnostic data is analyzed to determine specific students' skill gaps.

Intervention schedules align with expectations outlined in the RTI² manual. Students identified as at-risk receive an additional layer of instruction in Tier II using research-based materials and strategies. Tier II requires high-quality intervention matched to students' needs and provided by trained personnel in a group of five to eight students in grades K-5. The ELA intervention provides 30 minutes of extra small group instruction each day and Tier I instruction during a grade level time in the master schedule.

Significantly, at-risk students receive Tier III intervention in addition to Tier I instruction. Tier III instruction involves intensive instruction in groups of three to five students in grades K-5, providing research-based materials and strategies that meet the specific needs of each student. Tier III intervention consists of at least 45-minute sessions five days a week delivered by a trained instructor and implemented with fidelity during a grade-level time in the master schedule.

Interventions are evidence-based and differentiated by Tier II and III as outlined in the RTI² framework. Evidence-based interventions address specific students' skill gaps, including Sound Sensible, Heggerty, and SPIRE. Expeditionary Learning also contains an assessment and remediation guide in which teachers can access strategies that directly address skill gaps. If an intervention is not

proving to be effective, more comprehensive, strategic interventions (such as SPIRE) become an option.

Students are administered survey-level assessments to determine if they have characteristics of dyslexia. Students who demonstrate characteristics of dyslexia receive more intense intervention through research-based programs such as SPIRE, which meets the Say Dyslexia Law requirements. Families are informed that SPIRE is used to support those students, as it is based on the Orton-Gillingham approach of systematic, explicit, sequential, phonics-based instruction and is considered a strong support for those students. The intervention occurs daily during grade-level time in the master schedule for RTI.

Tier II and III students are progress monitored using an instrument aligned to each specific area of need every ten days of instruction, with parents receiving a progress report every 4.5 weeks. Data teams include the principal, classroom teachers, interventionists, school counselors, ESL teachers, special education teachers, and other staff, as necessary. Teams meet every four weeks to review progress using data from formative assessments and progress monitoring data to determine if a change in instruction is needed. The data team also considers other variables (attendance, engagement). This data informs whether to continue, discontinue, recommend a more intense tier, or consider eligibility for special education services.

Parent Notification Plan/Home Literacy Reports

At the onset of each year, our district sends home a Family Guide to RTI that shares information with parents, such as what the RTI framework is, what it looks like, its key components, and ways parents can provide support at home. Our district notifies parents in grades K-5 if their child is “at-risk” for or “significantly at-risk” for a reading deficiency immediately after schools complete the fall universal screening through a Home Literacy Report. Students’ scores are communicated in parent-friendly language that clearly explains student skill gaps and the depth and extent of student needs. Parents are informed of the intervention their student will receive and how much time they will receive services each day. Also included is information about the importance of being able to read by the end of third grade and the pathway to 4th grade. We also include no-cost activities for families to do at home to support learning. Additionally, our district holds parent conferences twice a year for teachers to share information with parents about their child’s progress in reading. These communications go out to parents with students in grades K-3 three times annually and are shared annually in grades 4 and 5.

Every four weeks, parents receive a report of their child’s progress or lack thereof. In the parent notifications/communication, data teams note any changes being made if the child is not showing sufficient progress, as evidenced by progress monitoring and universal screening data, as well as recommended activities to support students in specific deficit areas.

Our curriculum also contains parent-friendly letters for the primary grades that outline the foundational skills and knowledge domains for the coming week. These letters inform and equip parents to work with their children.

Professional Development Plan



K-5 educators must participate in the free Reading 360 Early Literacy Training series developed by the Tennessee Department of Education. The Reading 360 Early Literacy Training Course 1 provides educators with critical content knowledge about phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary. The professional learning was developed by TNTP, experienced training providers with a proven track record of supporting districts with foundational skills. The training requires teachers to demonstrate their knowledge and competency with the content through an assessment at the end of the asynchronous module. The Reading 360 Early Literacy Training is free of MSV and cueing strategies. K-5 educators will complete the Early Literacy Course 1 asynchronous modules through the Fall and Spring of each school year and upload their certificate in TNCompass.

Upon completion of Course 1, teachers are encouraged to take their learning further by participating in the free, in-person, five-day TDOE Early Reading Course II Training. This training is a valuable opportunity to deepen their understanding and application of the module content. Educators new to ACS are also required to take the Early Literacy Training Course 1 within the first year of employment.

Additionally, ACS will continue participating in the Literacy Implementation Grant by engaging in monthly webinars and learning walks, convening to build leadership capacity, and partnering with TNTP to support our district's commitment to intellectual prep. Improvement cycles will focus on intellectual prep, lesson observation, and student work analysis. Instructional coaches will support teachers through co-planning, in-class coaching, modeling, data analysis, and co-teaching.