

## **Houston County Schools**

Foundational Literacy Skills Plan

Last Updated: October 31, 2023

Approved: June 12, 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**

Houston County School District uses a foundational skills curriculum focused on a sounds-first approach grounded in reading science and aligned to Tennessee ELA standards. This curriculum uses foundational skills as the primary form of instruction and has a designated block of time (60 minutes daily) for foundational skills instruction in grades K-2. This instructional time includes activities that build phonological awareness, phonics practice, and fluency practice in addition to comprehension and vocabulary work (“word work”). During that instruction, teachers explicitly teach a sound, the students practice the sound aloud (learning how to produce pure sound), the teacher models writing the sound, the students refer to their individual code chart on which they write the sound, and then students apply the skill in independent practice (small group or individual).

Our improvements for next year are grounded in a non-negotiable designated time for teachers and district/school administrators to collaborate as they solve problems of practice and as they internalize the instructional plan through unit-level and lesson-level preparation. Along with this collaborative planning the district will utilize the TN Foundational Skills IPG during class walkthroughs in order to collect data and determine trends that need to be addressed in professional development throughout the year.

### **Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades 3-5**

Our district has an integrated literacy block for grades three (3) through five (5) grounded in the science of reading research as well as the research of Wiley Blevins and is aligned to Tennessee ELA standards. Our adopted curriculum materials, Benchmark Advance, was selected from those 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, our students receive a total of 110 minutes of ELA instruction. Although the daily schedule is not the same each day, all daily instruction includes components for knowledge-building (to build and improve the ability to comprehend complex texts and apply that knowledge as they listen, read, write, think, and speak) for about 70 minutes per day and foundational skills instruction that includes fluency, grammar, morphology, spelling, and writing for at least 40 minutes per day.

Our adopted curriculum also engages students in work around fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills are not taught in isolation, but are embedded within the lesson to ensure continuity, cohesion, and connection.

Our improvements for next year are grounded in a non-negotiable designated time for teachers and district/school administrators to collaborate as they solve problems of practice and as they internalize the instructional plan through unit-level and lesson-level preparation. Along with this collaborative planning, the district will use the TN Foundational Skills IPG during class walkthroughs to collect data and determine trends that need to be addressed in professional development throughout the year.

### **Additional Supports**

Houston County is dedicated to improving student literacy for all students, focusing on support for our identified subgroups. Our improvements for next year include:

- a non-negotiable designated time for teachers and district/school administrators to collaborate as they solve problems of practice and as they internalize the instructional plan through unit-level and lesson-level preparation;
- along with this collaborative planning, the district will utilize the TN Foundational Skills IPG during class walkthroughs in order to collect data and determine literacy instructional trends that need to be addressed in professional development throughout the year;
- we are making changes to master schedules to ensure adequate literacy instructional time is provided without interruption;
- we will be placing teachers in key areas according to instructional strengths to best support subgroups; and
- ensuring our professional development will be ongoing for teachers to fully understand best practices and pedagogy surrounding reading instruction with a continued focus on specific subgroups of students.

### **Approved Instructional Materials for Grades K-2**

Benchmark Advance (K-5)

### **Approved Instructional Materials for Grades 3-5**

Benchmark Advance (K-5)

### **Supplemental Instructional Materials**

Our district has adopted an approved curriculum for ELA instruction, however; we have chosen to supplement it in several ways. Our district will use the Tennessee Foundational Skills Curriculum Supplement to further address foundational skills in daily instruction. This supplement allows us to focus more deeply on the phonological awareness and advanced phonemic awareness skills that are crucial for success all the way through second grade. We also use the sounds-first activities as our daily warm up in all elementary schools across the district.

## **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**

In the fall, students are given a universal screener to determine which students have a significant reading deficiency, scoring below the 15th percentile, or are “at-risk,” scoring between the 16th and 40th percentile. Our grade-level teachers and principals review the universal screener data to determine which students fall into these categories and need additional support. Those students demonstrating need are classified as in need of Tier II or Tier III instruction. Students classified as Tier II or Tier III are given a diagnostic assessment to determine specific deficits to best assign students to a small group with an intervention that will narrow skill gaps. Students receive daily, small-group intervention for at least 45 minutes in their area of greatest deficit.

We have research-based options for reading intervention support available to our students who are “at-risk” and/or who have been identified with a significant reading deficiency. Our adopted ELA curriculum contains an assessment and remediation guide in which teachers can find activities that directly address specific skill gaps. They can tailor this to the needs of their RTI group of students. If that intervention is not proving to be effective, more comprehensive, strategic interventions (such as SPIRE) become an option. Data teams meet every 4 ½ weeks to determine if a change in the intervention or the person providing the intervention is warranted. The data team also looks at other variables (attendance, engagement) as part of the decision-making process before a change is made to the programming, materials, or provider.

Our students receive explicit instruction in their area of deficit in small groups using research-based materials and strategies. These students are also screened using additional survey level assessments to determine if they have characteristics of dyslexia. Students who do demonstrate those characteristics receive intensive intervention as outlined in the Say Dyslexia Law using programs that meet the law’s requirements. Our district uses a research-based supplemental program as one intervention for students with characteristics of dyslexia. Our district notifies families of students who demonstrate characteristics of dyslexia. Families are notified that the SPIRE curriculum 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.

Intervention takes place daily during a grade-level time in the master schedule just for RTI. When students are in their RTI groups, they work on activities and assignments that make them stronger in that skill. For example, students who need instruction in comprehension may read a new text and answer scaffolded questions, all related to the knowledge-building unit they are studying in Tier I instruction. Students who need fluency support may receive intervention using the SPIRE program.

### **Parent Notification Plan/Home Literacy Reports**

Our district notifies families in grades K-5 if their child has a significant reading deficiency (as evidenced by students scoring below the 15th percentile) or is at-risk of a significant reading

deficiency (as evidenced by students scoring between the 16th and 40th percentile) immediately after the district's schools complete the fall universal screening. Students' scores are communicated in family-friendly language that provides a clear explanation of student skill gaps and the depth and extent of student needs. The families are told what intervention their student will receive and the amount of time each day the student will receive services. This is coupled with a description of the importance of being able to read on grade level by the end of grade 3 and includes information on the promotion pathway to grade 4.

Our district explains to families how students are assessed and what a "significant reading deficiency" means. Families are subsequently notified of their child's progress, or lack of progress, after the 4 ½ week data team meetings. In the family 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 (that do not require purchased resources) that will support students around the deficit (activities are not tailored by child but tailored by skill deficit generally). These communications go out to families with students in grades K-3 three times annually and are shared in grades 4 and 5 annually.

Additionally, the ELA curriculum contains family letters in the younger grades that outline the foundational skills and knowledge domains for the coming week that will inform and equip families to work with the child. Families can better understand how to support their students through questions about their texts and through an awareness of what foundation skills their children are learning.

### **Professional Development Plan**

Teachers in our district have or will participate in the free and optional Reading 360 Early Literacy Training series developed by the Tennessee Department of Education. Our plan for providing PD for all K-5 teachers is as follows:

June – All teachers in grades PreK-5 will engage in Week 1 of the Early Reading Training series, asynchronously. This training will focus on foundational reading development and instruction and is grounded in a phonics-based approach. We will ensure that our educators earn a completion certificate.

July – Our district has recommended Course 2 of the Early Reading Training for all teachers in grades Pre-K through 5 who have not already completed this course. The participating teachers also include interventionists, special education teachers, and elementary supervisors. This training emphasizes practical classroom application of research findings around strong instruction in phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary. This course will be completed asynchronously.