

McMinn County Schools

Foundational Literacy Skills Plan

Last Updated: April 25, 2023

Approved: May 29, 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

Our district uses the Skills Block portion of Expeditionary Learning, which is grounded in the Science of Reading, aligned to the TN ELA Standards, and approved by the state Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission. The Skills Block serves as the primary delivery method of the district's daily foundational skills instruction. The one-hour K-2 Reading Foundations Skills Block uses a structured phonics approach based on the Science of Reading. The Skills Block is designed to ensure that, by the end of grade 2, students acquire the depth of skills needed in the Reading Foundations standards to navigate grade-level text independently. The lessons and assessments address the TN Reading Foundations standards and some Language standards associated with spelling and letter formation and include explicit instruction and student practice in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

McMinn County Elementary Schools use literacy blocks that span at least 120 minutes daily in grades K-2, with 60 minutes dedicated to foundational skills instruction. The K-2 Skills Block focuses on three of the Five Components of Reading. The K-2 Skills Block, like the K-2 module lessons and K-2 Labs, is divided into four eight-week-long modules that span an entire year. In the K-2 Skills Block, each module is broken into seven five-day "cycles" of instruction. These cycles include an intentional sequence of Instructional Practices (simple routines such as Chaining or Spelling to Complement Reading); each build on the previous lesson's learning and connects to the next lesson's learning.

The K-2 skills block is divided into two major chunks: 15-20 minutes of whole group instruction and 40-45 minutes of differentiated small group instruction which includes independent work time. The teacher meets with 2-3 differentiated small groups based on student microphases.

Expeditionary Learning benchmark assessments are tightly aligned with the phases and microphases to assist teachers in pinpointing and tracking students' progression through the phases toward mastery of taught skills. This targeted information empowers teachers, students, parents, and school leaders with common language to discuss, plan, and set goals around students' strengths and areas of need. Benchmarks are administered three times each year. Cycle assessment administration ranges from every cycle to 1-2 times per module depending on grade level. Snapshot

assessments are available in kindergarten and grade 1, with a shift to exit tickets in Grade 2. In both cases, these assessments are used to track progress toward mastery of daily learning targets.

McMinn County's focus in foundational skills instruction for next year is to move toward more engaging hands-on station activities relevant to grade level expectations, cycle words, and decodables along with accurate administration of microphase benchmarks and facilitation of microphase instruction as intended by the HQIM. The Foundational Skills IPG tool will be used to provide timely feedback regarding HQIM implementation as intended with goals of receiving mostly "yes" ratings for all Core Actions.

Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades 3-5

Our district uses Expeditionary Learning, which is grounded in the Science of Reading, aligned to the TN ELA Standards, and approved by the state Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission. McMinn County Elementary Schools utilize at least 90-minute literacy blocks daily in grades 3-5. Students in grades 3-5 consistently read complex text to gain deeper content knowledge of the topic and further familiarize themselves with complex text structures, syntax, and vocabulary. 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 60 minutes per day and foundational skills instruction that includes fluency, grammar, morphology, spelling, and writing for at least 30 minutes per day.

Our adopted curriculum, Expeditionary Learning, 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. Foundational skills instruction is embedded in this program throughout the content modules and reinforced in the ALL (Additional Language and Literacy) Block. Students build background knowledge and vocabulary, both domain-specific and academic, through reading in the content modules. In the ALL Block, AIR (accountable independent reading) time builds knowledge and increases vocabulary acquisition. As students learn more about a topic, Expeditionary Learning demands they read additional difficult texts on the same topic to improve foundational reading and comprehension skills.

In grades 3-5, phonics instruction should focus on the structure of words, including syllabication patterns, more complex spelling patterns, and the morphology of words (i.e., affixes and roots) related to word meaning. The ALL Block gives students opportunities to practice all aspects of word study in various activities, including vocabulary games, vocabulary squares, and Frayer Models. In addition, students read more fluently when they have a greater understanding of the standard conventions of written English. These skills are addressed within the GUM (Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics) portion of ALL Block.

Explicit vocabulary instruction is a key feature of the Expeditionary Learning Curriculum in grades 3-5. In addition to this explicit vocabulary instruction, students receive implicit instruction in general academic and domain-specific vocabulary through exposure to many complex informational and

literary texts. In the ALL Block, students have additional time to practice module related word analysis through word study games and activities.

McMinn County's focus in literacy instruction in grades 3-5 next year is to move towards a more unified preparation and implementation of ALL Block to enhance literacy while specifically focusing on the GUM (Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics) and Word Study and Vocabulary portions.

Additional Information

McMinn County is dedicated to improving student literacy. Our goal is for our schools to continue to receive additional targeted supports from district Instructional Coaches. Two coaches have been assigned to support the identified TSI school and another low-performing school. One coach, funded by ESSER, had been assigned to the third school to be available to support teachers daily. Each of these principals participate in a bridge conference at the beginning of the year to analyze data, identify teachers who need additional support, and create goals with action steps for the year. District Supervisors provide support as thought-partners, co-observers, and planners of PD based on trends from IPG learning walks. A Southeast Core Consultant has been assigned to the TSI school as a thought partner and collaborator. One school participates in the LIN network and receives additional support from the vendor consultant to ensure HQIM implementation. These schools have developed and will utilize data tracking to ensure students make progress or are provided with additional interventions. The district will utilize RTI² Specialists to provide additional support to T1-3 interventionists as they analyze data to determine the appropriate grouping and interventions to close gaps and accelerate students toward mastery.

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades K-2

Imagine Learning EL Education (formerly LearnZillion Expeditionary Learning)

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades 3-5

Imagine Learning EL Education (formerly LearnZillion Expeditionary Learning)

Supplemental Instructional Materials

We supplement with Best for All Central items. The TN Foundational Literacy Skills (TNFSCS) Lessons are used to supplement during small group instruction and for Tier 2-3 interventions.

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

Our district administers the Tennessee Universal Reading Screener (aimswebPlus) to students in grades K-5.

Supplemental Screeners

EL Benchmarks are administered 3 times per year in grades K-2 and for 3-5 at risk students to determine the present microphase. This information is then used to group students for small group instruction using the lesson conversion chart provided by the HQIM.

Intervention Structure and Supports

McMinn County's Universal Screener/Benchmark is given to all K-5 students three times per year.

RTI² School-level teams consider all available student data including classroom performance, grades, formative/summative assessments, and teacher observation to determine intervention placement. RTI² Data Team Meetings are used to determine placement, intensity, and scheduling of students into Tier II, Tier III, and Tier I (on and above grade level) intervention groups.

Instruction is delivered during an intervention period of 45 minutes daily with all students receiving leveled instruction by certified or highly trained personnel within each tier group. Interventions are evidence-based and differentiated based by Tier II and III and address specific student skill gaps.

Survey-level/diagnostic assessments are conducted to inform specific intervention needs for students in Tier II and Tier III and are used to guide small-group instruction. Expeditionary Learning assists teachers in directly addressing skill gaps as determined by the student's microphase. Supports are provided that include systematic, sequential, phonics-based instruction in foundational reading skills using materials from the Expeditionary Learning Skills Block as acceleration and either TN Foundational Skills Lessons or other dyslexia-specific interventions for remediation.

Progress Monitoring for students in Tier II and Tier III on their specific skill gaps occurs bi-weekly and is administered by certified or highly trained personnel. School data teams meet every 9 weeks to review student progress and determine if a change in the intervention or in the intervention provider is needed.

Fidelity monitoring is completed at least three times per 8-10 data points to ensure instruction is implemented with reliability and validity. Persons monitoring fidelity may include principals, assistant principals, and district personnel; will adhere to the specified number of direct and indirect checks per the state RTI² framework.

Parent Notification Plan/Home Literacy Reports

Immediately following the completion of Universal Screening (three times each school year), McMinn County Schools sends notification to parents of students in grades K-5 indicating whether their child is "at-risk" for or has a significant reading deficiency as evidenced by students scoring at or below the 40th percentile. Students' scores are communicated in a parent-friendly literacy report which provides a clear explanation of student skill gaps and the depth and extent of student needs. The parents are told of the intervention their student will receive and how much time each day they will receive intervention services. This is coupled with a description of the importance of being able to read by the end of 3rd grade and information on the pathway to 4th grade.

The district defines how students are assessed and what is meant by a "significant reading deficiency" to enhance parent understanding. Data teams meet to review and discuss student progress every 9 weeks. Following the data team meetings, parents receive communication which includes the following information: whether the child is/is not making sufficient progress (as evidenced by progress monitoring and universal screening data and additional student data), any changes being made if there is no evidence of sufficient progress, and recommended activities that

will support students in skill deficit (tailored to the general skill deficit and not requiring purchased resources). These communications go out to parents of students in grades K-5 at 4.5-week intervals throughout the school year.

If a student is identified as having characteristics of dyslexia, a letter of explanation is sent to the family with the opportunity to schedule a meeting. The letter requests permission to develop an ILP-D plan in TN Pulse. If the family approves, a team develops the ILP-D in TN Pulse, and the student receives the dyslexia-specific interventions and accommodations identified in the plan. If the family does not approve for an ILP-D to be developed, the team still assigns the student to an intervention group using a dyslexia specific intervention.

Additionally, the Expeditionary Learning Curriculum contains parent letters in grades K-2 that outline the foundational skills and knowledge domains for the coming unit to inform and equip parents to work with their child(ren). Families can better understand how to support their student(s) through questioning them about texts and by developing an awareness of what foundational skills their child(ren) are learning. K families will receive a copy of these letters in their welcome folder at registration. Families of grades 1-2 can access these letters through links on district and school social media websites.

Professional Development Plan

McMinn County Schools provides 5 In-service days and 2 Professional Development days per school year. During these days, K-5 teachers participate in explicit professional development related to grade level standards, HQIM implementation, and Foundational Skills instruction. Sessions are provided by experienced and effective district Instructional Coaches, LIN Consultants, or vendor trainers. Throughout the year, teachers receive additional job-embedded professional development through bi-weekly PLCs, lesson modeling, and thought partnering with district instructional coaches and grade level colleagues. Finally, teachers receive actionable feedback to improve instruction using the IPG tool and TEAM rubric.

Teachers in McMinn County Schools will or have participated in the Reading 360 Early Literacy Training series developed by the Tennessee Department of Education. This is a free opportunity for teachers. All teachers in K-5 will have access to complete at least Week 1 asynchronously using the TEACH ALL platform.

Additional Information about this Foundational Literacy Skills Plan

McMinn County Schools' district leaders partner closely with Southeast Core Consultants using the TDOE Implementation Framework to plan and implement professional development, monitor progress using the IPG, and provide feedback to school leaders. In 2024-2025, the district is moving into phase 2 of implementation and toward ownership at the school and teacher level for intellectual preparation while also introducing student work analysis as we believe this will best inform targeted instructional planning to improve student learning toward grade level mastery of standards. With new teachers, needs improvement teachers, and successful teachers all at different points along the way, we view this as a fluid process and utilize district Instructional Coaches to differentiate PD along the way.