

Memphis Shelby County Schools

Foundational Literacy Skills Plan

Last Updated: June 3, 2024

Approved: July 24, 2025

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

Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) utilizes the McGraw-Hill Wonders high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) for grades k-2 foundational skills instruction. Wonders is a comprehensive, evidence-based English Language Arts (ELA) program aligned to TN Academic Reading Foundational Literacy Standards.

While Wonders incorporates key components of literacy to promote speaking and listening development, explicit phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, fluency, vocabulary acquisition, grammar, and writing tasks in addition to text comprehension, foundational skills instruction is demonstrated as the primary form of instruction—exceeding 45 minutes, daily. The MSCS K-2 ELA instructional framework outlines the 120-minute comprehensive literacy block components including the following: explicit, systematic instruction in phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary. Additionally, the curriculum embeds foundational skills in the vocabulary and comprehension lessons throughout the ELA block during whole group instruction, small group instruction, and literacy workstations.

Wonders is grounded in evidence-based methods to teach foundational skills in grades k-2. Through the gradual release of responsibility, teachers engage students in explicit, direct whole group instruction, and they provide students with guided and collaborative practice with phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Teachers lead small groups of students in differentiated skills-focused lessons to meet the variety of literacy needs. Literacy workstations are implemented to ensure students have multiple, varied opportunities to practice and apply foundational literacy skills and strategies collaboratively and independently.

During whole group instruction, teachers utilize toolkit resources such as word building cards to support student development of sound awareness and letter sound correspondence. Teachers explicitly model and guide students in letter/sound practice with blending and segmenting consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words. Students practice identifying, reading, and writing CVC words both in and out of context.

During small group instruction, teachers work with flexible student groups to address specific foundational literacy skill deficits. Simultaneously, students work in pairs or small group to complete standards aligned tasks from the Workstation Task Cards.

Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades 3-5

Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) utilizes McGraw-Hill Wonders high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) for grades 3-5 foundational skills instruction. Wonders incorporates key components of literacy including morphology, grammar, spelling, fluency, vocabulary, and writing in addition to text comprehension. The MSCS ELA instructional framework for grades 3-5 outlines the 90-minute comprehensive literacy block to ensure explicit, systematic instruction in morphology, grammar, spelling, fluency, vocabulary, and writing in addition to text comprehension. Additionally, the curriculum embeds foundational skills (30 minute minimum) in the vocabulary and comprehension lessons throughout the ELA block.

Included in the instructional framework is the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) where teachers engage students in explicit, direct whole group instruction to support student development of fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Teachers lead small groups of students in differentiated lessons to meet their varied literacy needs. Literacy workstations are implemented to ensure students have multiple, varied opportunities to practice and apply foundational literacy skills and strategies collaboratively and independently.

Embedded vocabulary is provided alongside explicit instruction to maximize word acquisition and understanding. Teachers utilize an instructional toolkit of vocabulary strategies that students employ to tackle unfamiliar words. For example, teachers utilize the Vocabulary Visual Cards to engage students in the Define/Example/Ask routine (ex. cooperate- to work together to get something done/I cooperate with my sister to clean our room/How do you and your family cooperate to get jobs done?). Teachers intentionally employ the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) model to ensure students receive whole group and small group instruction that allows the opportunity to become independent and critical thinkers and learners as they engage in collaborative discussions and literacy workstations.

Additional Supports

MSCS has outlined several strategies to drive literacy success for all students and support all identified schools.

Specialized Education Assistants (SEAs) play a crucial role in K-2 classrooms, supporting teachers in implementing learning goals and enhancing students' literacy skills during the 120-minute literacy block. They provide targeted assistance to reinforce essential skills and concepts.

To streamline lesson planning, detailed lesson plans and daily PowerPoints for K-5 ELA instruction are meticulously crafted. These resources align with rigorous standards and significantly reduce teachers' preparation time, ensuring a structured approach to instruction. Each PowerPoint integrates with MSCS curriculum maps and the Wonders instructional flow, maintaining a coherent teaching framework that includes:

- Explicit Instruction: Direct teaching of concepts.

- Gradual Release: Progression from teacher-led to independent practice.
- Foundational Skills: Aligned instruction in literacy fundamentals based on the Science of Reading.

Lessons include relevant standards, agendas, instructional strategies, required materials, and links to supplementary resources. For grades 3-5, PowerPoints build on the Wonders curriculum, incorporating additional high-quality materials for deeper understanding.

Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools have access to enhanced planning materials for small group instruction. Resources like Content Collaboratives offer monthly planning support, while videoed lessons aid professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals.

For Exceptional Education, Extended School Year (ESY) services help maintain students' IEP goals, and programs like TeachTown and Reading Horizons support students with special needs. Similarly, English Language Learner (ESL) programs, such as Learning A-Z and Footsteps2Brilliance, provide essential literacy support and resources for multilingual learners, fostering language acquisition and foundational literacy skills.

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades K-2

McGraw Hill Wonders

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades 3-5

McGraw Hill Wonders

Supplemental Instructional Materials

Schools labeled as high-priority leverage grant funds to purchase and implement Magnetic Reading. Magnetic Reading is leveraged as a tool to support basic reading skills addressed as a Tier II and III intervention implemented across grades K-5.

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

We administer the approved iReady Suite to our K-5 students as our universal reading screener.

We also administer the Tennessee Universal Reading Screener, aimswebPlus, to our 3rd grade students in the spring.

Intervention Structure and Supports

MSCS schedules student tiered intervention that is aligned to the expectations outlined in the RTI Manual. The interventions are evidence-based and differentiated based on student need (Tier II and III). Students are initially placed in a tier based on multiple student data points including universal reading screener data. Each intervention addresses student specific skills gaps. These gaps are progressed monitored, with the progress monitoring data along with multiple student data being used by the MSCS data teams to inform decisions about potential changes to the duration, material, or intensity when a student is not showing progress.

Curriculum Associates i-Ready intervention platform and i-Ready Teacher Toolbox are utilized to provide academic interventions (Tier II, Tier III, and At-Risk) for students in grades K-5. The i-Ready tool provides individualized learning paths for students and skills-based small group guidance and instructional resources for teachers, targeting the following ELA domains: Phonological Awareness, High-Frequency Words, Phonics, Vocabulary, and Comprehension (Literature & Informational Text). The Tennessee Minimum Universal Reading Screener Matrix is utilized to ensure the required assessments are administered to all students. Students found to have characteristics of dyslexia may meet criteria for an Individualized Learning Plan-Dyslexia (ILP-D).

Following the administration of the i-Ready reading diagnostic, K-5 students are administered additional skills-based measures by way of the i-Ready literacy tasks as part of the universal screening, benchmarking, and screening for characteristics of dyslexia. Any student can receive additional screening to determine possible deficits and characteristics of dyslexia. Using the Characteristics of Dyslexia Decision Making Crosswalk, students displaying deficits in 50% or more of the grade-appropriate subtests, is the next data point that the school-based RTI² Data Team must consider prior to developing an ILP-D or providing dyslexia specific intervention. The RTI² Data Team is able to move forward with initiating an ILP-D only if students meet both of these previously described requirements provided the parent and team agree that the student demonstrates characteristics of dyslexia.

MSCS is engaged in the final stages of a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a dyslexia specific intervention tool. This tool will be in addition to the iReady Teacher Toolbox lessons by addressing a more specific area of identified need in phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, sound symbol recognition, decoding skills, encoding skills, and/or rapid automatized naming. Implementation will begin during the 2025-2026 school year.

The following best practices, when combined with iReady lessons, assist in addressing components of a dyslexia specific intervention:

- **Multisensory/Multi-modal:** i-Ready instruction for reading engages students' auditory, visual, and tactile senses in many lessons. Audio support is available in all content. Audio and visual feedback reinforces correct responses and redirects students on any misunderstandings. Lessons incorporate visual cues—including color changes, bounce, and highlighting text—to help students connect letters, word parts, and patterns to the corresponding sounds in words. Visual presentations within lessons include graphic organizers and pictures for reinforcing instruction, along with accompanying audio support.
- **Explicit:** The highly scaffolded lessons in i-Ready Instruction follow a consistent instructional strategy that begins with explicit instruction. During explicit instruction, students work through a tutorial that explains the topic or skill and calls upon students to access prior knowledge and models the skill in engaging real-world scenarios. Teachers can access small group materials to support explicit instruction during face-face small group time, via the Tools for Instruction and Ready Teacher Toolbox.
- **Aligned to Deficit:** The i-Ready experience begins with the in-depth Diagnostic assessment that identifies student's overall performance level in reading, by domain and subskill level. This ensures that online lessons in i-Ready Instruction, teacher-led instructional activities

from the included Tools for Instruction lesson plans or the optional Ready Teacher Toolbox, and any existing instructional materials are targeted to students' specific skill deficits and instructional levels.

- **Language Based:** i-Ready vocabulary lessons and vocabulary tools for Instruction lesson plans include many opportunities for students to make sense of what they are reading. Practice includes decoding, encoding, and spelling patterns. Every lesson ends with an engaging text, where students are challenged to use what they learned to decode and make meaning, to deepen their understanding of what they are reading.
- **Systematic and Cumulative:** i-Ready Instruction is systematic, clear, and precise, with topics and skills that are carefully sequenced and broken down into small, essential components and taught individually. Upon completion of the Diagnostic assessment, i-Ready determines student performance level within each domain of reading and then automatically places students at the appropriate level within a logical sequence of lessons. Lessons are designed to help students master simple skills, before progressing to more complex skills, beginning at the student's functional level, and then allowing the student to progress to higher and more complex levels. The lessons from i-Ready Teacher Toolbox follow a consistent progression of skills and standards across all grade levels.

Parent Notification Plan/Home Literacy Reports

Information about how students score is regularly communicated with parents to bridge the connection between school and home. The RTI² Data Team reviews multiple sources of data to determine the appropriateness of RTI² skills-based interventions. Student intervention plans are subsequently developed and monitored in PCG TNPulse MTSS add-on. Parent communication is generated in TNPulse MTSS add-on and disseminated to parents regarding initial intervention placement and monthly student progress within intervention. Data teams can develop Academic Support Plans for at risk students, using the plans to track supports and progress around specific literacy deficits.

Structures are in place for notifying parents of students with significant literacy deficiencies. For all students K-8, MSCS includes in the home literacy report (three times each year), the student's instructional reading performance level on the quarterly report card and provides the student's iReady family report which offers additional information about reading performance along with no cost literacy support suggestions and recommended texts. The home literacy reports for parents clearly articulate (1) the importance of being able to read by third grade, (2) student scores in parent-friendly language, (3) explanations of a student's specific skill gaps, (4) how the school will intervene and support students in their identified literacy skills deficits areas, and (5) no-cost activities for families to support learning at home. Parents also receive information on the pathways to 4th grade.

Parents of students in grades K-2 also receive a quarterly literacy report which communicates the aforementioned information, as well as their child's progress toward the Literacy Success Act Criteria. The K-2 quarterly home literacy reports include the results of each administration of the universal screener, quarterly report card grades, and formative assessment scores.

Parents of students in grades 3-5 receive a quarterly home literacy report as well. The 3-5 benchmark home literacy reports include the results of each administration of the universal screener, report card grades, and formative assessment scores. Samples of parent communication for grades K-2 and 3-5 are included in this plan.

Given the size of our district, it is essential to use multiple communication methods with our families and staff to ensure they understand the law and the 4th grade promotion pathways under Policy 49-6-3115(a)(1) for students in grade 3 with an achievement level of "approaching" or "below" on the ELA portion of the student's most recent TCAP test.

MSCS will keep parents of 3rd and impacted 4th graders informed about the state's promotion law, its expectations for each grade, and the promotion pathways. This communication will take various forms, including home literacy report letters, emails, school-level parent meetings, and district-level parent meetings. Our district will host monthly virtual "ParTea About Literacy" meetings from December through March, providing parents with updates and addressing their concerns.

MSCS will host "radio talks" where parents could call in, ask questions, and learn about next steps. Parents and staff can access information about the law, exemptions, and promotional pathways on our Literacy Commitment website. We have found all these communication methods to be extremely helpful.

Professional Development Plan

TDOE Reading Training: Throughout the 25-26 school year all MSCS teachers are encouraged to complete the Tennessee Early Reading or Secondary Literacy Training to enhance their teacher toolbox for supporting reading skills in K-12 classrooms. A plan is in place to ensure all new teachers complete this training.

School leaders and teachers participate in various professional learning opportunities throughout the year, categorized into three tracks: Novice, Focus, and Proficient. This organization allows for targeted and intentional professional development, providing choice based on effectiveness levels. Novice and Focus Track participants must complete a minimum of 60 hours of professional learning, with 45 hours provided by district or school leaders. Those in the Proficient Track are required to complete at least 40 hours, with 25 hours from district leaders. Required topics include curriculum overview, gradual release, student-centered strategies, and support for students with dyslexia.

Professional learning is grounded in the Science of Reading (SoR) and focuses on foundational literacy aligned with Tennessee state standards. Activities include:

- Year-long professional development in phonics-based training, addressing all learners' needs.
- Utilizing High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) to optimize the 90-minute literacy block, ensuring balanced instruction.
- Collaborating with community organizations like ALL Memphis for foundational literacy training for leaders.
- Leveraging K-5 Standards Guides to deepen teachers' understanding of grade expectations.

- Virtual sessions on the Wonders curriculum, focusing on foundational literacy and assessment strategies.
- Ongoing training for multilingual learners' literacy development aligned with SoR.

For Exceptional Education, initiatives include the Exceptional Education Institute, Para University, co-teaching professional development, monthly meetings for exceptional educators, and mentoring for new educators to enhance instructional practices and improve student outcomes. These opportunities foster collaboration and support continuous professional growth.