

Memphis Shelby County Schools

Foundational Literacy Skills Plan

Previous Update: July 24, 2025

Approved: June 30, 2026

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

Included in the instructional framework is the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR), in which teachers engage students in explicit, direct whole-group instruction to support students' 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 that students have multiple, varied opportunities to practice and apply foundational literacy skills and strategies, both collaboratively and independently. Teachers intentionally employ the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) model to ensure students receive whole-group and small-group instruction that provides opportunities to become independent, critical thinkers and learners as they engage in collaborative discussions and literacy workstations.

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 use Vocabulary Visual Cards to engage students in the Define/Example/Ask routine (e.g., 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?). Together, these intentional practices ensure that vocabulary instruction is meaningful, transferable, and equips students with the skills and confidence to independently understand and use new words across contexts.

Additional Supports

Specialized Education Assistants (SEAs) play a critical role in K-2 classrooms by supporting teachers during the 120-minute literacy block and reinforcing key literacy skills through targeted student support. Their work helps ensure that students can access and engage with grade-level learning.

To strengthen instruction, K-5 ELA lesson PowerPoints have been developed to streamline planning and align to rigorous standards. These resources are fully integrated with MSCS curriculum maps and the Wonders instructional framework, providing a cohesive structure that includes explicit instruction, gradual release of responsibility, and foundational skills aligned to the Science of Reading. Each lesson includes standards, agendas, instructional strategies, materials, and links to

supporting resources. In grades 3–5, PowerPoints extend Wonders with additional high-quality materials to deepen student understanding.

CSI schools receive enhanced support through small group planning resources, Content Collaboratives, and video-based professional learning for teachers and paraprofessionals. Fourteen state-identified schools will also benefit from differentiated district support, including learning walks, targeted professional development, and ongoing collaboration focused on strengthening instructional practices and improving literacy outcomes.

Additional support includes ESY services for Exceptional Education students to maintain IEP goals, along with programs such as TeachTown and Reading Horizons. Multilingual learners are supported through ESL resources like Learning A–Z and Footsteps2Brilliance, which promote language development 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

K–2 teachers and assistants in CSI schools use Magnetic Reading Foundations as a supplemental resource during small-group instruction within the ELA block, alongside Wonders. This approach ensures targeted support for foundational literacy skills while maintaining alignment to core instruction. All staff members responsible for administering Magnetic Reading Foundations lessons receive full training on the curriculum to ensure effective and consistent implementation.

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 with the expectations outlined in the updated RTI Manual. The interventions are evidence-based and differentiated according to student needs (Tiers 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 progress 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 adopted Reading Horizons Discovery (K-3) and Elevate (4-12) as the dyslexia specific intervention curriculum in June 2025 and completed year one of implementation during the 2025-26 school year. The Reading Horizons curriculum addresses phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, sound symbol recognition, decoding and encoding skills through a systematic approach that is also multi-modal and explicit, seeking to address student deficit areas. Students are able to have repeated practice opportunities throughout lessons that allow them to reach mastery before they advance to the next lesson. Teachers can make adjustments to the instruction when students are not successful by increasing practice opportunities to include 1:1 support in deficit areas as needed so that students can be successful.

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 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

MSCS will provide comprehensive professional development in foundational literacy, aligned with the Science of Reading, for all K-5 teachers. All current teachers have completed the state-required Early Reading Training. To ensure sustainability, the district will partner with Human Resources to identify newly hired K-5 teachers monthly and monitor completion of the required modules of the Early Reading Training, providing ongoing communication and support to ensure timely completion.

Professional learning is structured through a yearlong K-5 ELA Professional Learning Catalog that provides targeted, job-embedded support. New teachers will participate in "Getting Started with Wonders" sessions to build foundational knowledge of curriculum materials and instructional structures across grade bands.



Additionally, all teachers will engage in a sequenced Early Literacy Series, aligned to the Science of Reading, focused on phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Each session connects these components to Wonders and supports implementation across whole group, small group, and literacy workstations. Teachers also have access to sessions on ELA Standards Guides to strengthen standards-based planning and targeted learning opportunities, such as Purposeful Questioning, to deepen instructional practice. Ongoing support is provided through synchronous sessions and on-demand learning via the Wonders platform.

For Exceptional Education, professional learning includes the Exceptional Education Institute, Para University, co-teaching training, monthly meetings, and mentoring for new educators to strengthen instructional practices and improve student outcomes.