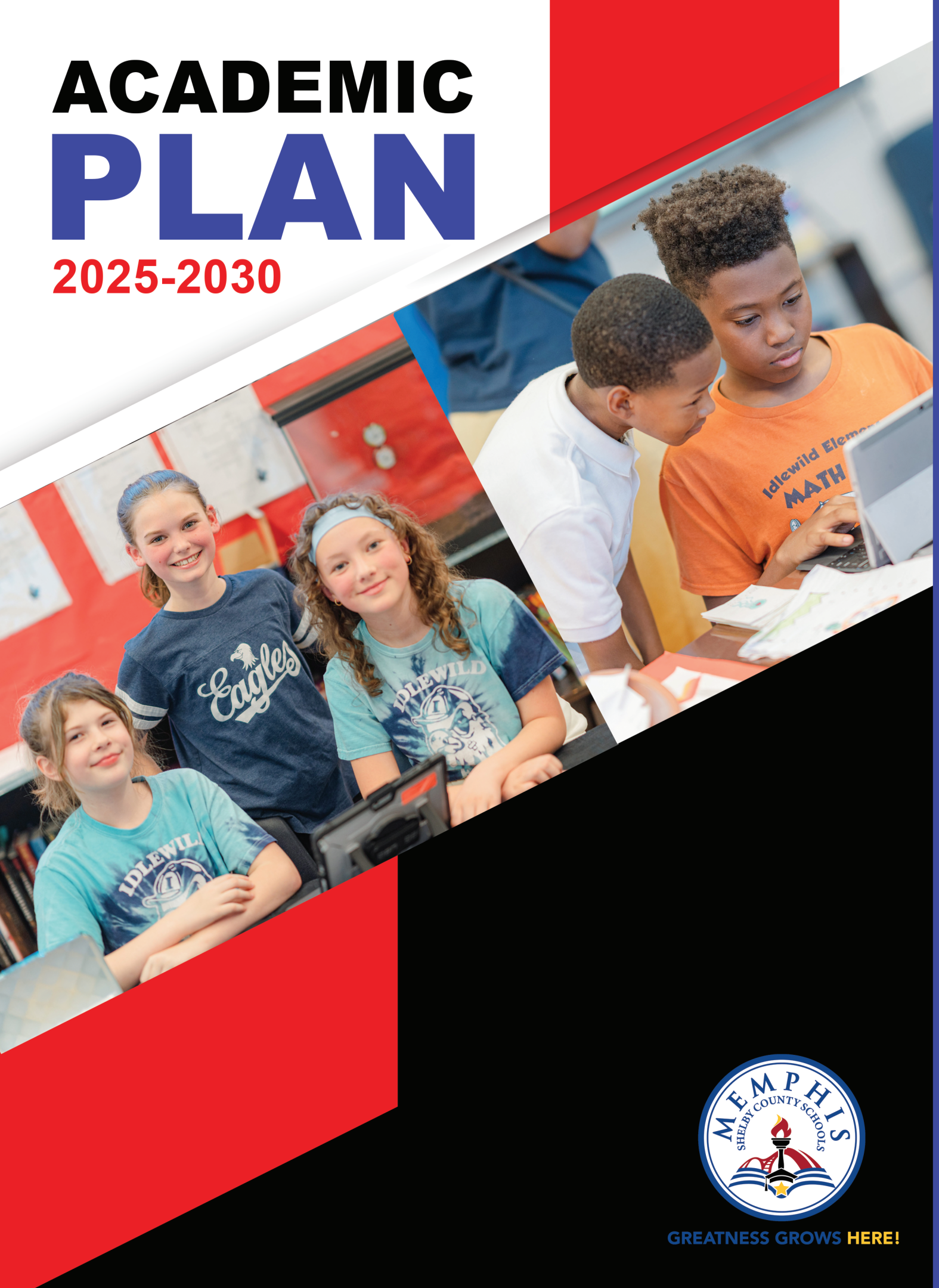


ACADEMIC PLAN

2025-2030



GREATNESS GROWS **HERE!**

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Introduction

Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) launches the 2025-2030 Academic Plan as a blueprint for equity-driven transformation designed not merely to improve a school system, but to confront and dismantle the structural forces that have long stratified opportunity in our city.

This plan is written for students, families, educators, school leaders, district staff, and civic partners who share a commitment to academic excellence, equity, and the belief that every child deserves access to world-class learning.

Rooted in the belief that brilliance is evenly distributed but opportunity is not, this plan advances the work initiated through the Superintendent's 100-Day Entry Plan by codifying instructional coherence, strengthening system design, and translating shared vision into sustained, measurable change. While the Executive Summary outlines the district's goals and theory of action, this Introduction provides the context and conditions that make this transformation both urgent and necessary.

This document is organized into eight sections that provide a clear line from vision and data to instructional strategy, implementation systems, and progress monitoring.

MSCS serves over 110,000 students across more than 220 schools, making it Tennessee's largest school district and one of the 25 largest in the nation. The overwhelming majority of students are Black or Brown and economically disadvantaged. In a city where child poverty rates exceed 40%, and in neighborhoods such as 38126 which surpasses 70%, public education must operate not only as an instructional institution, but as a liberatory one.

The urgency for redesign stems from longstanding systemic conditions that have limited access to rigorous instruction, disrupted learning pathways, and produced inequitable academic outcomes. These challenges do not reflect a crisis of student ability, but a failure of system design.

The Academic Plan responds to this reality with a PK–12 vertically aligned instructional model anchored in the MSCS Instructional Spine, a framework that unifies standards, instructional practice, leadership actions, and monitoring systems. The spine defines how Tier 1 instruction is implemented across all schools, ensuring coherence from classrooms to cabinet. At its center is the Instructional Core, the dynamic intersection of teacher expertise, student engagement, and high-quality content that determines the strength of every learning experience.

Tier 1 refers to high-quality, grade-level, standards-aligned instruction delivered to all students in core subjects, ELA, math, science, and social studies. It is the district's first and most essential opportunity to ensure learning access and success for every child.

Instructional coherence means that every element of the system, curriculum, assessments, professional learning, and leadership, reinforces the same high-quality Tier 1 expectations across every school.

The plan is explicitly structured around the seven research-based pillars identified by the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS), aligning MSCS with national urban education standards.

These pillars are:

- Governance & Leadership
- Rigorous Academic Standards
- High-Quality Curriculum & Instructional Materials
- Aligned Professional Learning & Capacity Building
- Teacher Quality, Talent Pipelines, & Retention
- Accountability & Data Systems
- Support for Chronically Low-Performing Schools & Students

This work is guided by four enduring imperatives:

1. Leadership requires building deep bench strength across school and district roles to drive sustained instructional excellence.
2. Teacher Effectiveness demands clarity and support for delivering Tier 1, standards-aligned instruction through curriculum alignment, coaching, and consistent walkthrough tools.
3. Student Engagement calls for nurturing belonging, relevance, and culturally responsive learning that restores joy and accelerates achievement.
4. Equity of Access compels us to guarantee that every student, regardless of race, ZIP code, disability, home language, or learning difference, experiences rigorous instruction and meaningful, accelerated pathways.

The plan draws from both national research and local community wisdom. It integrates guidance from The New Teacher Project (TNTP), the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS), Hanover Research, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Paul Bambrick-Santoyo's instructional leadership frameworks, and the University of Virginia's 90-Day Planning Model. It also reflects feedback from students, educators, families, and civic partners who shaped its vision for coherence, relevance, and equity. Importantly, it builds on lessons from Memphis' own reform history, including the iZone and Achievement School District, recognizing both their contributions and their limitations in producing sustained, system-wide improvement.

Implementation will occur in strategic phases led by the Superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, Deputy Chief of Academics, and Regional Superintendents, and will be monitored through quarterly milestone reviews. Results will be tracked through both internal monitoring systems and public-facing dashboards, ensuring transparency for families, schools, and the MSCS Board of Education.

Sustainability will continue to be supported through strategies such as university partnerships, leadership pipelines, and real-time data tools that enable adaptive monitoring and responsive support. It will also be reinforced through braided funding strategies and long-term commitments from philanthropic, municipal, and higher education partners.

Aligned to the MSCS Board of Education’s adopted student outcome goals and guardrails, this plan translates vision into coherent systemwide design, progress monitoring, and accountability for results.

As the plan unfolds, every component, from leadership and standards to curriculum, professional learning, and data use, will function as an interdependent system centered on rigorous Tier 1 instruction.

These design elements are anchored by two integrated outcomes:

1. Student Academic Outcomes, which strengthen Tier 1 instruction, teacher capacity, and instructional leadership, and Student Experience, which enhances academic conditions, identity, and well-being to accelerate engagement and achievement.
2. This is not a plan for incrementalism. It is a strategy for transformation. It prioritizes Tier 1 instruction, equity of access, and professional excellence. These are non-negotiables that will not be compromised. And that transformation begins now.

This plan transforms Memphis-Shelby County Schools into a coherent instructional system where rigorous Tier I instruction becomes the consistent experience of every student – in every classroom, in every school, every day.



Executive Summary

MSCS, Tennessee's largest district and one of the nation's most culturally vibrant urban systems, serves more than 100,000 students across 220 schools. The Academic Plan 2025-2030 provides a coherent PK-12 blueprint to dramatically strengthen instructional quality, accelerate student achievement, and close long-standing opportunity gaps with urgency and precision.

This plan is written for students, families, educators, school leaders, district staff, and civic partners who share a commitment to academic excellence, equity, and the belief that every child deserves access to world-class learning. It is shaped by community wisdom, rooted in the lived experiences and aspirations of Memphis families, students, and educators, and informed by input from 106 principals, 2,300 teachers, 1,500 families, and 45 academic leaders.

Grounded in national research from the CGCS, TNTP, NAEP, and Hanover Research, the plan establishes a unified instructional system anchored in the Tennessee Academic Standards and organized through the MSCS Instructional Spine, a vertically aligned framework that integrates standards, curriculum, leadership actions, and monitoring systems. At its core is the Instructional Core: the dynamic interplay between student engagement, teacher expertise, and high-quality content that determines the strength of every learning experience.

The district's work is driven by a clear theory of action:

If MSCS aligns instruction to rigorous standards and high-quality materials, builds teacher and leader capacity, and ensures that all students, particularly those furthest from opportunity, experience consistent access to strong Tier 1 instruction, then student outcomes will rise.

This theory of action is the organizing principle for every academic decision, from curriculum development and leadership pipelines to walkthrough tools, professional learning, and data systems.

The urgency for coherence is unmistakable. In 2023-2024, proficiency levels illuminate both the depth of unfinished learning and the magnitude of the work ahead.



ELA and Math Proficiency by Subgroup (2023-2024)

Subgroup	ELA Proficiency (%)	Math Proficiency (%)
All Students	23.7	18.5
Black or African American	20.8	15.5
Hispanic	24.5	20.8
White	55.9/54.6	48.6
Asian	65.2	60.7
Economically Disadvantaged	17.5	13.3
English Learners	8.8	10.7
Students with Disabilities	8.8	6.5
Gifted	92.3	85.6
Homeless	12.4	8.3
All Students	23.7	18.5
Black or African American	20.8	15.5
Hispanic	24.5	20.8

These disparities reflect systemic misalignment, not student ability. The Academic Plan defines the systems required to dismantle these barriers.

Graduation and ACT ≥ 21 by Subgroup

Subgroup	Graduation Rate %	ACT ≥ 21 (%)
All Students	83.4	16.5
Black or African American	84.3	12.8
Hispanic	80.2	16.2
White	80.1	62.5
Economically Disadvantaged	81.1	9.8
English Learners	69.8 (w/T1-4)	1.5
Students with Disabilities	73.6	3.3
Non-Econ Disadvantaged	87.8	28.3

To accelerate achievement and close opportunity gaps, MSCS has established ambitious, attainable 2030 targets, aligned to state expectations and CGCS benchmarks:

Academic Goals for 2025-2030

Indicator	2023-24 Baseline	2030 Target
ELA Proficiency (Grade 3)	27.5%	52.0%
ELA Proficiency (Grades 3–12)	23.7%	51.0%
Math Proficiency (Grades 3–12)	18.5%	47.0%
Science Proficiency (Grades 3–12)	26.6%	52.0%
Social Studies Proficiency	25.1%	51.0%
On-Time Graduation Rate	83.4%	95.0%
ACT Composite ≥21	16.5%	35.0%

A non-negotiable pillar of this plan is that by 2030, 75% of students will read on grade level by the end of third grade, grounded in the Science of Reading, SEA tutoring, culturally responsive materials, early diagnostics, and strong Tier 1 instruction. Third-grade literacy is the most predictive milestone for long-term academic success and anchors the plan’s urgency.

Achieving these goals requires a coherent system, not isolated initiatives. The plan is therefore organized around seven interdependent pillars, drawn from national CGCS research and embedded throughout every strategy:

- 1. Governance & Leadership
- 2. Rigorous Academic Standards
- 3. High-Quality Curriculum & Instructional Materials
- 4. Professional Learning & Capacity Building
- 5. Teacher Quality, Talent Pipelines & Retention
- 6. Accountability, Progress Monitoring & Data Systems
- 7. Support for Chronically Low-Performing Schools & Students

Each pillar defines the systems, structures, and metrics required to deliver excellent Tier 1 instruction across all schools in the MSCS district.



Implementation Snapshot

Implementation will occur through a structured 24-month roadmap led by the Superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, Deputy Chief of Academics, and Regional Superintendents. Progress will be monitored through quarterly milestones, role-specific expectations, and public-facing dashboards to ensure accountability and transparency.

Sustainability will be supported by braided funding strategies and long-term commitments from philanthropic, municipal, and higher education partners. Strategic partnerships with universities and talent organizations will extend MSCS' leadership pipelines and coaching pathways.

Equity as a System Design Principle

MSCS defines equity as giving every student what they need to thrive, not equal inputs, but the right ones. This commitment is embedded across curriculum, interventions, school support, resource allocation, and performance monitoring. By raising the floor without lowering the ceiling, this plan ensures that Memphis brilliance is recognized, nurtured, and elevated.

The Academic Plan 2025-2030 is not just a strategy. It is a promise that a ZIP code will no longer determine opportunity. That coherent system can drive collective excellence, and through leadership, equity, and sustained instructional focus, Greatness Grows Here for every child.

This plan transforms Memphis-Shelby County Schools into a coherent instructional system where rigorous Tier 2 instruction becomes the consistent experience of every student – in every classroom, in every school, every day.



Data Narrative

Purpose

The PK-12 Data Narrative operates as the diagnostic foundation of the MSCS Academic Plan. Its purpose is to illuminate systemwide performance patterns, identify the structural causes of underperformance, and demonstrate how the Seven Pillars must operate together to strengthen Tier 1 instruction. This narrative is not a retrospective report, but an analytic engine that informs strategy, coherence, and accountability.

Tier 1 Instruction as the Central Lens

Across all grade bands, the data converge on a single, unambiguous finding: Tier 1, grade-level instruction is the primary determinant of student achievement and equity in MSCS. Schools with consistent, standards-aligned Tier 1 implementation outperform peers regardless of demographics or baseline performance. Intervention alone cannot compensate for weak core instruction, a pattern consistent with national CGCS analyses.

Systemwide Root Causes

Analysis across PK-12 reveals three systemic challenges:

1. Inconsistent implementation of rigorous Tier I instruction. Variability across classrooms, schools, and content areas, particularly math, suppresses growth and amplifies subgroup gaps.
2. Misalignment between materials, professional learning, and monitoring systems. Curriculum, walkthrough tools, and coaching often operate in isolation, weakening coherence.
3. Uneven educator and leader capacity. High novice-teacher rates, out-of-field placements, and inconsistent supervision reduce instructional quality.

These root causes shape the grade-band patterns that follow.

Systemwide Data Drivers

Four districtwide trends appear across all grade bands:

1. Early gaps persist and widen without strong Tier 1 instruction.
2. Math underperformance is structural, not isolated.
3. Subgroup disparities intensify at transition points.
4. Intervention access is insufficient to counter weak Tier 1 instruction.

These trends mirror national patterns identified by the CGCS and form the basis for the strategic priorities of the Academic Plan.

Alignment to the Seven CGCS Pillars

Each grade-band narrative ties directly to the system levers in the CGCS framework:

- **Pillar I:** Governance & Leadership
- **Pillar II:** Rigorous Academic Standards
- **Pillar III:** High Quality Curriculum & Instruction Materials
- **Pillar IV:** Professional Learning & Capacity Building
- **Pillar V:** Teacher Quality, Talent Pipelines & Retention
- **Pillar VI:** Accountability, Progress Monitoring & Data Systems
- **Pillar VII:** Support for Chronically Low-Performing Schools & Students

BIRTH-GRADE 2 DATA NARRATIVE

Tier 1 Anchor

Readiness data across Birth-Grade 2 confirm that the earliest years of schooling determine the trajectory for third-grade proficiency and long-term academic outcomes. Where Tier 1 instruction is strong, particularly in foundational literacy, oral language, and early numeracy, students demonstrate accelerated growth regardless of demographic group. Where Tier 1 is inconsistent, readiness gaps expand rapidly and persist into elementary and middle grades.

1. Demographics and Enrollment Trends

Between 2020-2024, Pre-K enrollment rebounded from a pandemic-driven decline, increasing to 4,763 students across 258 classrooms. K-2 enrollment increased by over 1,300 students. Instructional complexity intensified:

- EL enrollment increased by 80% in Pre-K and reached 12.7% in K-2
- SWDs now represent 12.9% of K-2 enrollment (3,398 students)
- 66% of K-2 students are economically disadvantaged

These shifts require highly aligned, developmentally appropriate Tier 1 instruction supported by multilingual and special education expertise.



2. Academic Performance and Growth

Kindergarten readiness, measured by i-Ready national percentile benchmarks, remained stagnant at 34.4% in 2022-2024. Students who attended MSCS Pre-K performed better (40.5%), yet still below the 50th percentile expectation. Using the 65th percentile proxy for future TCAP proficiency:

- <30% of kindergarteners
- <25% of grade 1 students
- ≈21% of grade 2-3 students would meet proficiency expectations if assessed today. ELs show stronger growth trajectories than proficiency levels, indicating the value of strong language-rich instruction.

Intersectional Growth (2023-2024)

Student Group	ELA Growth	Math Growth
EL + IEP	8.4%	0.1%
McKinney-Vento 1	8.7%	15.2%
SWD (non-EL)	24.1%	21.3%

These data reveal layered inequities requiring differentiated support within Tier 1.

3. Intervention Access and Effectiveness

Response to Instruction & Intervention served 24.8% of K-2 students in 2023-2024, with only 12.8% in Tier 3 literacy and 2.9% receiving math intervention. SEA tutoring reached 1,550 early-grade students; SEA students outperformed peers by 4.3 percentage points in ELA.

Math intervention remains significantly underbuilt, projecting later math lags.

4. Instructional and Leadership Capacity

Teacher effectiveness declined from 61.7% to 37.8% (2020-2024). The early grades are disproportionately staffed with:

- 30% novice teachers
- ~1,000 annual permit-pathway teachers
- 350+ out-of-field placements
- Only 45% of principals earned Level of Effectiveness (LOE) 4/5 ratings.
- Walkthroughs reveal variability in foundational literacy, early numeracy routines, and coaching quality.

5. Strategic Implications

- Strengthen Tier 1 Early-Grade Instruction (Pillars II, III, IV)
 - Establish a districtwide definition of strong Pre-K–2 instruction aligned to the Instructional Spine and Tennessee standards.

- Protect Tier 1 blocks from pull-outs and interruptions.
 - Use model classrooms, coaching cycles, and exemplars for foundational literacy and numeracy.
- Improve Pre-K to Kindergarten Coherence (Pillars III, IV, VI)
 - Align Brigance indicators with K readiness expectations.
 - Implement Pre-K + K transition PLCs.
 - Advance Early Numeracy (Pillars II, III)
 - Increase math RTI to $\geq 15\%$ of K–2 students.
 - Implement SEA-like math supports.
 - Accelerate Subgroup Growth (Pillars III, VII)
 - Deploy multilingual coaches to early-grade schools.
 - Introduce districtwide early oral-language routines.
 - Stabilize the K–2 Workforce (Pillars I, V)
 - Reduce out-of-field placements to <100 by 2026.
 - Expand Grow Your Own pipelines by 25%.
 - Strengthen Principal Supervision of Early Grades (Pillars I, VI)
 - Anchor Principal walkthroughs in Pre-K-2 look-fors.
 - Monitor transition fidelity (PK $\rightarrow$ K $\rightarrow$ 1 $\rightarrow$ 2) in CompStat cycles.

Closing Insight

Birth-Grade 2 is the foundation of the MSCS pipeline. Early academic gaps are not developmental inevitabilities; they are symptoms of instructional variability. The data show that when high-quality Tier 1 instruction is consistently implemented and supported by targeted interventions, students exceed expected growth norms, especially English Learners and early-grade students who participate in SEA tutoring. The district's next leap depends on strengthening and sustaining high-quality Tier 1 instruction from the earliest years.



GRADES 3-5 DATA NARRATIVE

Tier 1 Anchor

Grades 3-5 are the academic hinge of the PK-12 pipeline. By this stage, foundational literacy and early numeracy must convert into mastery of grade-level content, evidence-based reasoning, and increasingly complex tasks. The data make clear that the strength and consistency of Tier 1 instruction, not intervention, is the most significant determinant of performance in these grades. Schools with strong implementation of state standards, aligned materials, and disciplined instructional monitoring show faster growth across all student groups, especially English Learners (ELs). Where Tier 1 is inconsistent, unfinished learning widens rapidly and persists through middle school.

1. Demographics and Enrollment Trends

Between 2020-2021 and 2023-2024, enrollment in Grades 3-5 grew by 5.8%, increasing from 11,594 to 12,265 students. Demographic shifts indicate rising instructional complexity and need for coherent Tier 1 practices:

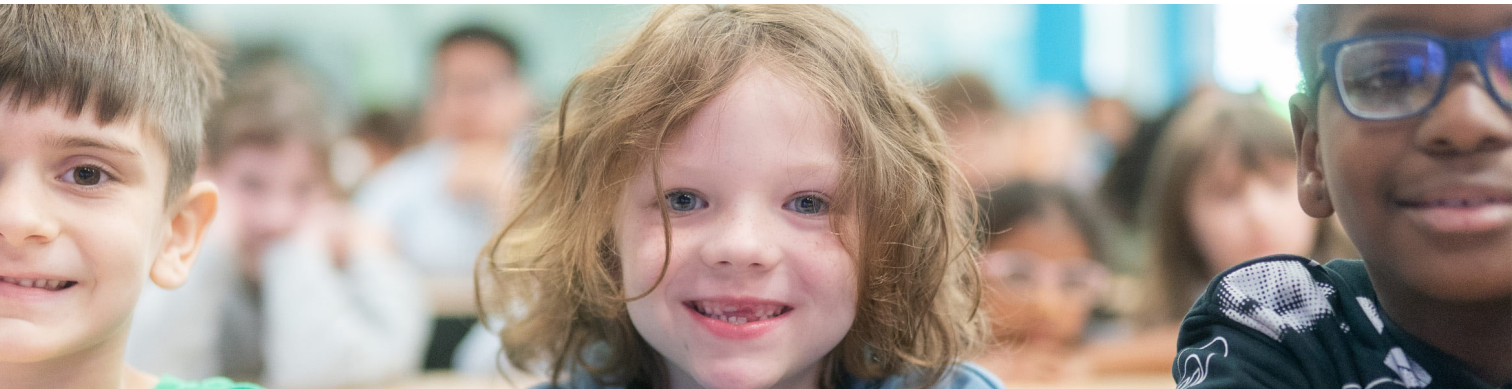
- Black students: 68.1% → 74.0%
- Hispanic students: 19.6% → 14.9%
- English Learners: 9.9% → 13.3%
- Students with Disabilities: 11.5% → 13.0%
- Economically Disadvantaged students: 60.0% → 66.0%

The rising EL and SWD populations demand Tier 1 instruction integrates language development, explicit vocabulary routines, and accessible scaffolds across content areas.
Academic Performance & Trend Analysis

2. Academic Performance & Trend Analysis

ELA Proficiency in Grade 3-5 has Shown Sustained Improvement

Grade	2021 Proficiency	2024 Proficiency
3	14.7%	27.5%
4	15.4%	29.0%
5	13.9%	23.8%



These gains reflect stronger implementation of ELA standards, expanded SEA supports, more consistent use of the district’s core language arts curriculum for Grades K-5, and more disciplined progress monitoring. Yet significant gaps remain between MSCS and statewide performance, particularly among Economically Disadvantaged students, Students with Disabilities, and English Learners.

Subgroup Insight:

- ED students: 21.8%
- Students with Disabilities: 14.6%
- ELs with Transitional 1-4: 24.5%

ELs demonstrate some of the fastest gains districtwide, particularly in schools with structured co-teaching, sheltered instruction, and regular ESL-general education co-planning.

Mathematics: Urgent, Systemwide Underperformance

Despite modest gains from 2021 to 2024, math proficiency remains critically low:

Grade	2021 → 2024 Proficiency
3	9.5% → 26.1%
4	10.7% → 23.4%
5	9.1% → 22.2%

Statewide proficiency in Grades 3-5 math is 43.1%, meaning MSCS trails the state by nearly 20 percentage points. Subgroup disparities are substantial:

- Grade 5 SWDs: 7.7%
- ED students: 15.0%
- ELs in Transitional years 1–4: 22.4%

While math growth is improving, the scale of need far exceeds current intervention reach. The data confirm that without stronger Tier 1 math instruction aligned to the Instructional Practice Guide (IPG), high-rigor tasks, and coherent coaching, acceleration will remain limited.

Science: A Relative Strength

Science proficiency continues to outpace math and often aligns more closely with ELA for ELs. Grade 4 EL proficiency reached 30%, and Grade 5 EL proficiency reached 23.5%, indicating that content-rich, inquiry-based instruction can be a lever for multilingual acceleration.

Schools implementing the 5E model with fidelity, integrating literacy structures into science, and embedding weekly lab experiences show the highest growth.

3. Intervention Access & Implications

- Over 5,100 students received literacy intervention, compared to 662 in math (Tier 2 + Tier 3).
- Fewer than 2.5% of McKinney-Vento students received math intervention, despite deep academic risk.
- Literacy benefits from SEA's strong infrastructure. Math lacks an equivalent system.
- The imbalance in intervention access predicts the persistent math lag across Grades 3-5 and into middle school.

4. System Conditions Influencing Instructional Quality

- **Teacher Capacity**
 - Level 4/5 teachers decreased from 61.7% to 37.8% (2020-2024).
 - High numbers of out-of-field placements continue across math and upper elementary.
- **Leadership Capacity**
 - Principal effectiveness in monitoring Tier 1 remains uneven, especially in math.
 - Schools with consistent walkthrough cycles and coached teacher planning show significantly higher growth.
- **Student Learning Conditions**
 - Chronic absenteeism and mobility disproportionately affect ELs, SWDs, and ED Students.
 - Schools with strong routines for attendance monitoring show narrower proficiency gaps.

5. Strategic Implications

- **Strengthen and Model High-Quality Tier 1 Instruction in Every Classroom (Pillars II, III, IV, VI)**
 - Establish and implement a districtwide definition of high-quality Tier 1 reading, writing, and math instruction aligned with the Tennessee standards, IPG, and Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) rubric.
 - Use model lessons, learning labs, and exemplar video libraries to norm rigor and student expectations across all classrooms.
 - Require aggressive monitoring aligned to grade-level standards, particularly in math.
- **Deepen Math Recovery and Real-Time Responsiveness (Pillars II, III, VII)**
 - Expand SEA-like math intervention models.
 - Provide math-specific coaching support in all schools performing below 30% proficiency.
 - Implement diagnostic-to-intervention protocols that reduce delays in support for high-need students.
- **Codify and Scale Effective EL Instruction (Pillars III, IV, VII)**
 - Expand sheltered instruction routines across all subjects.
 - Provide structured co-planning time between ESL and general education teachers.
 - Integrate vocabulary, discourse, and language routines into Tier 1 math and science.

- **Guarantee Access to Supports for High-Risk Students (Pillars V, VI, VII)**
 - Expand access to intervention for McKinney-Vento students, SWDs, and ELs flagged by early warning indicators.
 - Create automatic referral triggers based on benchmark and attendance risk data.
- **Align Math Coaching, Curriculum, and Progress Monitoring (Pillars I, III, VI)**
 - Ensure that every Tier 1 math classroom receives consistent coaching tied to district look-fors.
 - Integrate math fidelity monitoring into CompStat cycles.

Closing Insight

Grades 3-5 are the hinge of the MSCS pipeline. Early academic gaps are not developmental inevitabilities; they are symptoms of instructional variability. The data show that when high-quality Tier 1 instruction is consistently implemented and supported by targeted interventions, students exceed expected growth norms. The district's next leap depends on strengthening and sustaining high-quality Tier 1 instruction in these grades so that momentum is built, not lost, before middle school.



GRADES 6-8 DATA NARRATIVE

Tier 1 Anchor

Grades 6-8 are the academic fulcrum between foundational skills and discipline-specific mastery. The data confirms that the consistency and rigor of Tier 1 instruction, particularly in mathematics, text complexity, academic discourse, and science inquiry, determines whether middle school becomes a springboard or a barrier to high school readiness. Schools with coherent Tier 1 implementation, aligned planning structures, and consistent instructional monitoring demonstrate stronger growth across all student groups, especially ELs and students exiting EL services. Where Tier 1 is inconsistent, unfinished learning widens sharply, and subgroup disparities accelerate.

1. Demographics and Enrollment Trends

Between 2020-2024, Grades 6-8 enrollment declined by 4.7% (13,412 → 12,775). The demographic composition reflects increasing instructional complexity and rising needs for coherent Tier 1 systems:

Student Group	2020-21	2023-24
Black	73.2%	73.2%
Hispanic	16.1%	15.2%
English Learners	8.4%	9.5%
SWDs	12.6%	14.2%
Economically Disadvantaged	64.1%	70.1%

These patterns mirror those seen earlier: EL, SWD, and ED enrollment increases require Tier 1 instruction that integrates language supports, scaffolds, vocabulary routines, and consistently rigorous tasks across all content areas.

2. Academic Performance & Trend Analysis

ELA proficiency improved modestly from 2021 to 2024:

Grade	2021	2024
Grade 6	13.3%	18.3%
Grade 7	13.9%	19.8%
Grade 8	10.8%	14.7%

Despite improvements, MSCS remains 14-17 points behind statewide proficiency rates for Grades 6-8.

Subgroup disparities remain pronounced:

- ELs in Transitional Years 1–4: 3.8% → 6.5% (Grade 8)
- SWDs: 10.6% → 5.1%
- ED students: 6.7% → 10.0%

Schools with structured co-teaching, WIDA-aligned planning, and consistent progress monitoring show faster EL gains, but implementation remains uneven.

Math proficiency increased but remains critically low:

Grade	2021	2024
Grade 6	7.6%	13.6%
Grade 7	7.3%	17.5%
Grade 8	8.0%	17.7%

State math proficiency in Grades 6-8 is 35%-38%, double MSCS rates.

Subgroup proficiency is especially concerning:

- ELs in Transitional Years 1-4: 12.3% (Grade 8)
- SWDs: 4.8%
- ED students: 12.0%

The data confirms that math underperformance is systemwide and cannot be corrected through intervention alone without dramatically strengthening Tier I instruction.

Science proficiency shows promising growth:

Grade	2021	2024
Grade 6	15.2%	24.7%
Grade 7	15.1%	29.0%
Grade 8	10.0%	18.8%

EL students show notable strength in science when instruction is inquiry-based, literacy-integrated, and anchored in the 5E model. Schools embedding weekly labs and structured discourse routines demonstrate the largest gains.

3. Intervention Access and Implications

Middle school intervention capacity remains insufficient to offset core instructional variability:

- No SEA programming in Grades 6-8
- Tier 2/3 math intervention reach remains extremely limited
- RTI²-A remains compliance-oriented, not outcome-driven
- Students with multiple risk indicators (EL + SWD + ED) are significantly under-served
- Students experiencing housing instability, who face the highest academic risk, have minimal access to targeted math or literacy intervention.

Key pattern:

Intervention does not reach the scale of need and cannot compensate for weak Tier 1 instruction.

4. System Conditions Influencing Instructional Quality

- **Teacher Workforce Capacity**
 - Level 4/5 teachers declined from 61.7% → 37.8%.
 - High out-of-field placements in math (91).
 - Permit pathway teachers remain elevated.
 - These conditions reduce the consistency of rigorous Tier 1 instruction, particularly in math and science.
- **Leadership Capacity**
 - Principal supervision of instruction varies widely across middle schools
 - Schools with consistent use of district walkthrough tools show significantly stronger ELA and science growth.
 - Coaching structures in math are uneven and often disconnected from instructional materials.
- **Student Learning Conditions**
 - Chronic absenteeism disproportionately affects ELs, SWDs, and ED students.
 - High mobility rates (especially among McKinney-Vento students) interrupt instructional continuity.
 - Schools that implement daily routines for attendance and re-entry show narrower subgroup gaps.

5. Strategic Implications

- Strengthen and Model High-Quality Tier 1 Instruction in Every Middle School Classroom (Pillars II, III, IV, VI)
 - Establish a districtwide definition of strong middle-grades Tier 1 instruction in ELA, math, and science aligned with Tennessee standards, IPG, TEAM, and the Instructional Spine.
 - Use model classrooms, learning labs, and exemplar video libraries to norm expectations for rigor and student tasks .
 - Require aggressive monitoring cycles in all middle school math classrooms.
 - Integrate literacy routines (annotation, evidence-based writing, structured discourse) across all content areas.

- **Accelerate Math Recovery with Tier 1 First, Then Intervention (Pillars II, III, VII)**
 - Provide math-specific coaching in all schools below 30% proficiency.
 - Expand math intervention capacity using SEA-like structures.
 - Implement diagnostic-to-intervention protocols aligned to benchmark data.
- **Elevate English Learner Instruction Across All Middle School Subjects (Pillars III, IV, VII)**
 - Scale sheltered instruction routines into math, science, and social studies.
 - Provide co-planning time for ESL staff and content teachers .
 - Embed vocabulary, language routines, and sentence stems into Tier I instruction.
- **Guarantee Access to Supports for High-Risk Students (Pillars V, VI, VII)**
 - Create automatic referral triggers in middle school for students flagged by attendance, mobility, or proficiency data.
 - Expand intervention access for McKinney-Vento students, SWDs, and ELs in Transitional Years 1-4.
- **Strengthen Leadership Coaching and Accountability Structures (Pillars I, VI)**
 - Embed middle-grades fidelity metrics into CompStat cycles.
 - Increase coaching for principals on mathematics supervision, observation, and feedback.
 - Align middle school instructional leadership teams (ILTs) to a single districtwide monitoring structure.

Closing Insight

Grades 6-8 are the system's turning point. The data confirm that middle school is not simply a bridge between elementary and high school; it is the determinant. Where Tier 1 instruction is coherent, rigorous, and consistently monitored, students accelerate. Where it is fragmented or inconsistent, early gaps widen into high school readiness barriers. The district's next phase of improvement depends on treating middle school as an instructional proving ground: a place where strong Tier 1 instruction is modeled, monitored, and mastered. Strengthening Tier 1 in Grades 6-8 is essential to ensuring that students enter high school prepared not only to graduate, but to thrive.



GRADES 9-12 DATA NARRATIVE

Tier 1 Anchor

Grades 9-12 represent both the culmination of the PK-12 pipeline and the launchpad into college, career, and workforce pathways. The data show clearly that high school outcomes, ACT readiness, credit accumulation, graduation, and postsecondary access, are direct reflections of the strength of Tier 1 instruction in earlier grades and the consistency of core instruction in high school itself. Schools with coherent Tier 1 expectations, aligned materials, strong ILTs, and consistent academic monitoring demonstrate significantly stronger proficiency, graduation, and credential outcomes. Where Tier 1 instruction is fragmented or inconsistently supervised, disparities widen sharply and compound across subgroups.

In high school, Tier 1 must include rigorous grade-level tasks, text complexity aligned to ACT readiness, disciplined math instruction connected to Algebra I/II standards, writing across content areas, and explicit support for multilingual learners and students with disabilities. High-quality Tier 1 instruction, not remediation, remains the single greatest determinant of equitable on-time graduation and postsecondary readiness.

1. Demographics and Enrollment Trends

Enrollment in Grades 9-12 increased slightly from 25,157 → 25,624 (2020-2024). The population remains diverse and includes rising numbers of students requiring multilayered academic support:

Student Group	Percentage (2023-24)
Black	71.5%
Hispanic/Latino	19.2%
English Learners	7.8%
Students with Disabilities	13.4%
Economically Disadvantaged	58.2%



High schools serve the most academically and socially diverse learners in the district, requiring Tier 1 instruction that integrates literacy routines, content-specific discourse, supports for multilingual learners, accommodations for SWDs, and aligned college- and career-readiness expectations.

2. Academic Performance & Trend Analysis

Between 2020 and 2024, high school proficiency increased across all tested subjects:

Subject	2020-21	2023-24
English II	19.5%	36.7%
Algebra I	5.0%	13.6%
Geometry	6.6%	19.9%
Biology	22.9%	27.4%

While gains are promising, especially in English II and Geometry, proficiency remains well behind statewide performance, reflecting persistent unfinished learning and uneven Tier 1 implementation.

Subgroup Performance (2023-24)			
Subgroup	ELA	Math	ACT ≥ 21
All Students	27.9%	14.8%	16.5%
Economically Disadvantaged	21.1%	11.4%	9.8%
English Learners (Transitional 1–4)	8.3%	5.9%	1.5%
Students with Disabilities	5.4%	3.8%	3.3%

These patterns mirror Grades 3-8 and confirm that Tier 1 variability, particularly in math discourse, writing expectations, and scaffolded supports, suppresses performance.

3. ACT Readiness and College/Career Access

- ACT Performance (2023-24)
- 29.2% met English Benchmark
- 10.1% met Math Benchmark
- 20.0% met Reading Benchmark
- 10.4% met Science Benchmark
- 6.1% met ALL FOUR benchmarks (a key postsecondary readiness indicator)

The district’s ACT composite declined from 17.3 → 16.4 (2020-2024), underscoring the impact of Tier 1 variability and the need for consistent literacy, writing, and problem-solving routines across content areas.

Graduation and College/Career Readiness

Indicator	2020	2024
Graduation Rate	77.7%	83.4%
College/Career Readiness (CCR)	49.6%	61.3%

The district is making progress, but readiness indicators remain heavily stratified by subgroup, particularly for SWDs, ELs, and economically disadvantaged students.

4. Early Postsecondary Opportunities (EPSOs)

Access is expanding, but performance remains uneven:

- Dual Enrollment: 7.6% → 12.1%.
- AP Pass Rates (District): 53.9% → 50.0%.
- AP Pass Rates (Charter): 17.0% → 26.3%.
- EPSO Participation (AP/DE/Dual Credit combined) continues to grow.
- Only 23.8% of students completed a full Program of Study in 2023-24.

Participation is rising, but course-taking does not consistently translate to mastery, reflecting inconsistent rigor, insufficient scaffolds for multilingual learners, and high variability in instruction.

5. Postsecondary Outcomes

Data show improvement, particularly for students with disabilities:

- Postsecondary enrollment for SWDs increased from 9.9% → 23.8%.
- 2023-24 data show 80.2% of SWDs achieved a successful postsecondary outcome (employment, enrollment, or training).
- Programs such as Tiger LIFE and Project SEARCH demonstrate strong completion rates and workforce outcomes.

These successes illustrate the potential impact of coherent Tier I instruction paired with strong transition planning and targeted supports.

6. Intervention Access and Implications

Intervention reach remains extremely limited in high school:

- Literacy Tier 3: 269 students.
- Math Tier 3: 109 students.
- RTI reach overall: only 2.1% of high school students.

Intervention structures cannot meaningfully shift outcomes at this scale. High school success requires Tier 1 improvements in credit-bearing courses, not reliance on sparse remediation. Students experiencing housing instability, ELs, and SWDs have the least access to intervention, despite being the highest-need populations.

7. Conditions Influencing Instructional Quality

- **Teacher Capacity**
 - Level 4/5 teachers declined from 61.7% → 37.8%
 - 354 out-of-field placements (including 91 in Math, 82 in Science)
 - ~1,000 annual permit-pathway entrants
 - These patterns reduce content expertise and instructional consistency across high schools.
- **Leadership Capacity**
 - Only 45% of high school principals earned LOE 4/5.
 - ILT effectiveness and fidelity vary significantly.
 - Schools with strong supervision of Tier 1 (aligned to the IPG and TEAM rubric) show higher ACT growth and ELA proficiency.
- **Student Learning Conditions**
 - Chronic absenteeism and mobility disrupt credit accumulation.
 - Ninth grade on-track status is highly predictive of graduation.
 - Schools prioritizing attendance routines and ninth-grade academies see improved credit attainment.

8. Strategic Implications

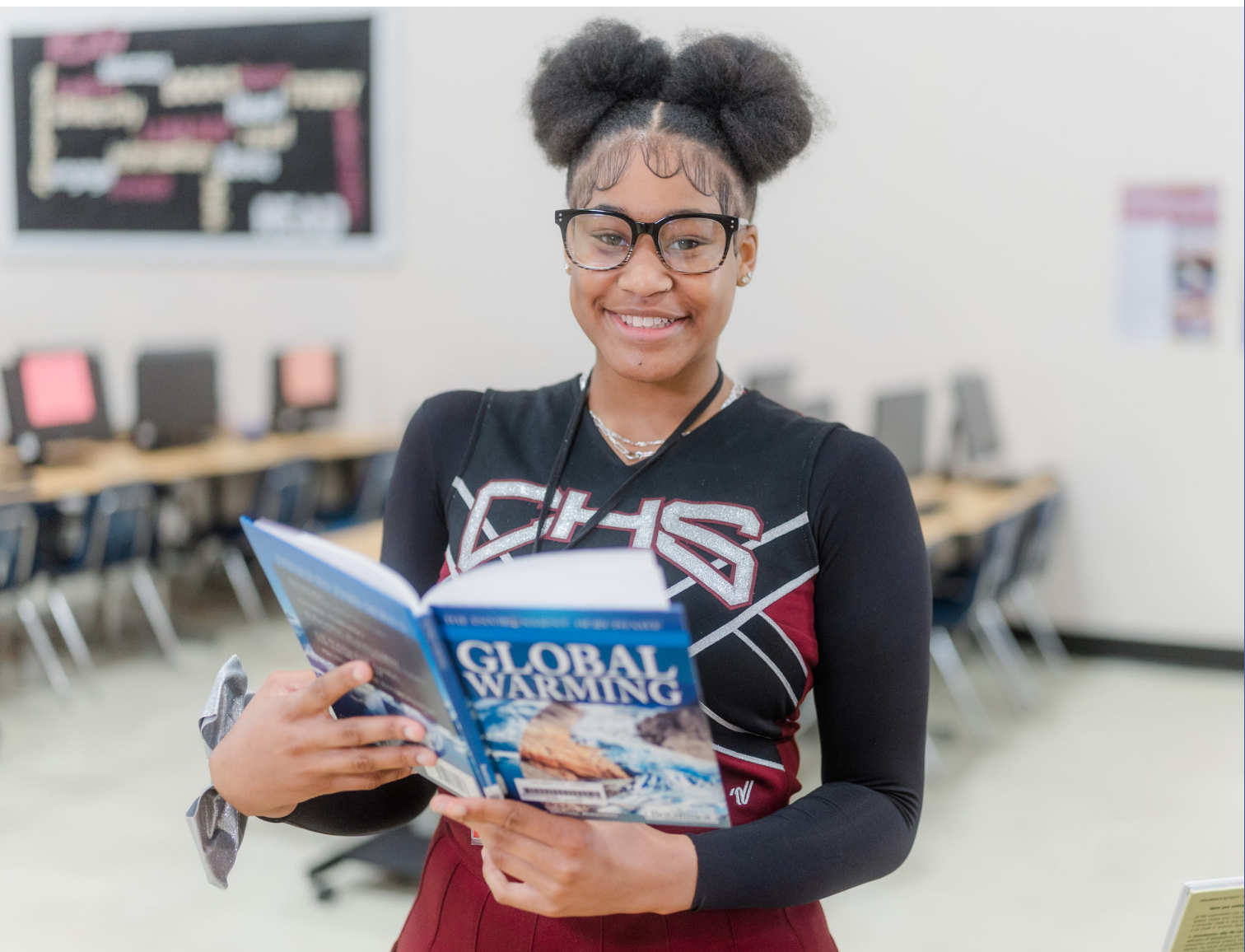
- **Strengthen High School Tier 1 Instruction Across All Core Subjects (Pillars II, III, IV, VI)**
 - Define and model what strong Tier 1 instruction looks like in high school ELA, math, biology, U.S. history, and ACT prep.
 - Embed reading, writing, discourse, and problem-solving routines across content areas.
 - Use model lessons, lab classrooms, and video exemplars to norm expectations.
- **Improve Algebra I and Foundational Math Instruction (Pillars II, III, VII)**
 - Provide math-specific coaching in all high schools below 20% proficiency.
 - Align Tier 1 math instruction to the district's curriculum, IPG, and ACT expectations.
 - Build diagnostic-to-intervention protocols that allow immediate support.
- **Expand Literacy Across the Content Areas (Pillars III, IV)**
 - Embed daily writing-to-learn routines.
 - Strengthen text complexity across disciplines.
 - Use ACT-aligned reading strategies in all core courses.
- **Strengthen Supports for ELs and SWDs in Tier 1 (Pillars III, IV, VII)**
 - Scale co-teaching and sheltered instruction.
 - Provide targeted scaffolds for academic vocabulary and extended writing.
 - Align accommodations to standards-based tasks.
- **Rebuild Consistent Early Postsecondary Opportunity Preparation Systems (Pillars II, III, V, VII)**
 - Strengthen AP/DE instruction through content coaching and expectations for rigor.
 - Expand structured supports (AVID-style routines, tutoring, Saturday academies).
 - Monitor EPSO quality, not just access, through fidelity checks.

- **Strengthen Leadership Coaching and Accountability (Pillars I, VI)**
 - Embed ACT readiness metrics and subgroup performance into principal supervision.
 - Integrate high school fidelity measures into CompStat.
 - Provide executive coaching to principals on scheduling, supervision, and ILT coherence.

Closing Insight

Grades 9-12 reflect the cumulative strength, or strain, of the entire PK-12 system. The data show both progress and persistent gaps: proficiency is rising, CCR is improving, and programs like Project SEARCH demonstrate what is possible when coherence and support align. Yet ACT readiness, math proficiency, and subgroup disparities remain urgent challenges that Tier 1 instruction must address head-on.

High school success is not determined in isolation. It is the product of coherent Tier 1 systems, strong leadership, aligned materials, and disciplined instructional monitoring. For MSCS students to graduate prepared for college, career, and life, Tier 1 instruction in Grades 9-12 must be rigorous, equitable, and consistently implemented across every classroom, in every school, every day.



Academic Vision, Instructional Theory of Action, and Strategies for Improvement

Academic Vision:

Memphis-Shelby County Schools will lead the nation in rigorous, equity-centered instruction, where every student, in every school, experiences excellent teaching, engaging content, and deep learning. Anchored in the Instructional Core and the cultural brilliance of Memphis, we will graduate students who are academically strong, artistically and athletically developed, and prepared to lead, create, and thrive in a changing world.

This vision is a system-wide call to action. It confronts the unfinished work of public education in Memphis: persistent achievement gaps, uneven instructional quality, and chronic barriers to opportunity, particularly for Black, Brown, multilingual, and economically disadvantaged students. MSCS is not merely aspiring to improve; we are committed to transforming our instructional model so that student outcomes are no longer predictable by ZIP code, race, or income.

At the heart of this vision is the Instructional Core + Leadership, the dynamic intersection of teacher expertise, student engagement, high-quality content, and the leadership that activates and sustains them. When all four elements are strong, and tightly aligned, learning accelerates. When any one element falters, achievement stalls. This vision holds every system, school, and stakeholder accountable for strengthening the core in every classroom, every day.

Theory of Action (2025-2030):

If we align instruction to high-quality content, build teacher and leader capacity, and ensure that all students, especially those furthest from opportunity, consistently access rigorous, engaging learning environments, then student outcomes will rise.

This academic vision does not exist in isolation; it drives the design of walkthrough tools, instructional calendars, coaching protocols, resource allocation, and performance management systems. It shapes every element of our academic infrastructure.

To actualize this vision, MSCS will:

- Focus the District on Instructional Improvement: Ensure that the district's governance bodies and leadership prioritize student achievement.
- Ensure Access to Rigorous Content and Curriculum: Guarantee that every student receives grade-level, standards-aligned, and culturally affirming materials that promote inquiry, knowledge-building, and high expectations across all subjects.
- Strengthen Teaching Practice: Equip educators with deep content knowledge, inclusive pedagogy, and real-time data tools to deliver instruction that is precise, culturally responsive, rigorous, and engaging.
- Deepen Student Engagement: Design learning environments that foster curiosity, build identity, and connect rigorous academic content to students lived experiences, passions, and future aspirations.

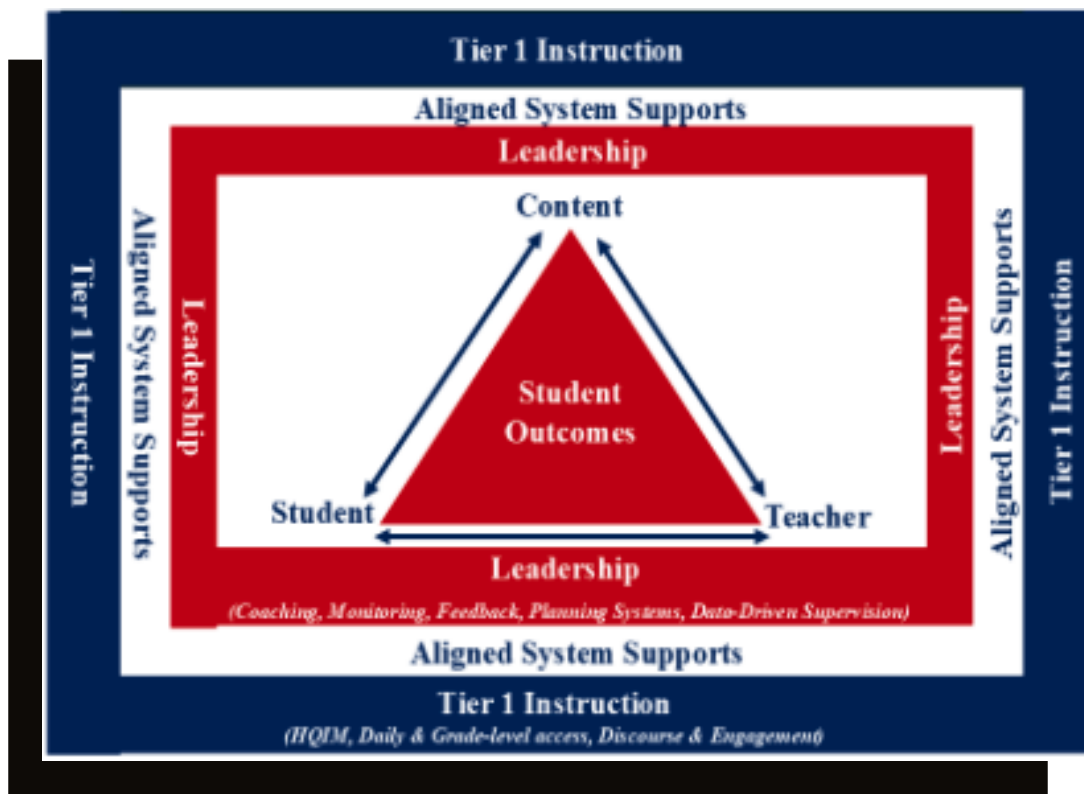
- Elevate Instructional Leadership: Develop school and district leaders who are equipped to coach, model, and monitor rigorous, high-quality instruction daily ensuring fidelity, feedback, and results across every campus.

This vision is bold by necessity. In a city shaped by struggle and brilliance, our schools must be engines of both justice and possibility. That means every child, regardless of background, deserves access to world-class teaching, high-quality learning, and the opportunity to become a leader.

Success will not be measured by intent, but by outcomes: increased early-literacy rates, higher graduation rates, ACT scores above benchmark, and deeper student belonging. These are the metrics of transformation.

Bridge to the Plan's Design

To deliver this vision at scale, MSCS will operate as one coherent instructional system. This plan prioritizes rigorous Tier 1 instruction as the primary driver of achievement and equity, supported by aligned standards, high-quality materials, consistent planning expectations, job-embedded professional learning, strong instructional supervision, and transparent progress monitoring. The seven pillars that follow define how the district will align governance, academics, talent, and accountability so that excellence is not dependent on school-by-school variation but becomes the consistent experience of students across MSCS.



The Seven Pillars as an Integrated Instructional System

Together, the seven pillars function as an integrated instructional system rather than a collection of parallel initiatives. Governance sets direction and protects focus. Rigorous academic standards define what every student must know and be able to do. High-quality curriculum operationalizes those standards into coherent, daily learning experiences. Professional learning and teacher quality systems build the adult capacity required to deliver that curriculum with skill and consistency. Accountability and data systems monitor execution and surface risk in time to act. And differentiated support for chronically low-performing schools ensures that the benefits of a strong instructional system reach every student, not just those in higher-performing schools. When these seven pillars are aligned and mutually reinforcing, they create the conditions for every MSCS student to experience strong Tier 1 instruction every day – which is the single most powerful lever for academic growth, literacy, and long-term postsecondary success.

PILLAR I: Governance & Leadership

Purpose & Research Base

Pillar I establishes governance as the driver of instructional coherence and student outcomes across all seven pillars. Governance and leadership coherence ensure that MSCS operates as a unified academic system focused on measurable student outcomes rather than disconnected initiatives. This pillar establishes the leadership conditions required to accelerate academic growth, strengthen educator effectiveness, and prepare students for postsecondary and global workforce success.

National research from the CGCS, TNTP, and NAEP consistently demonstrates that districts improve outcomes at scale when leadership actions reinforce the same instructional expectations systemwide and when governance structures protect focus over time. Districts that fragment priorities, allow competing initiatives, or tolerate variability in instructional expectations experience inconsistent outcomes and widening inequities.

District data indicate that MSCS has experienced variability in instructional quality, uneven implementation of Tier 1 instruction, and inconsistent follow-through across schools and regions. This pillar responds by establishing the governance conditions that make the district's Theory of Action executable, ensuring that alignment to high-quality content, leadership capacity-building, and equitable access to rigorous Tier 1 instruction are sustained across all schools.

The Board of Education has adopted three student outcome priorities that focus the district's work and sustain coherence over time. This pillar reflects those governance decisions by naming the Board's priorities, defining the evidence used to monitor progress, and clarifying the monitoring routines used to determine whether progress is on track and whether system response is required.

District governance will prioritize the following three Board-adopted student outcome priorities:

- Improving academic growth, achievement, and literacy levels for all students.
- Recruiting and retaining the most effective teachers and leaders in the nation for our students.
- Preparing students for the global workforce through rigorous coursework, certifications, and high-quality facilities and learning environments.

These priorities serve as the organizing framework for district decision-making, monitoring routines, resource allocation, and accountability structures.

Board Governance Anchors Reflected in Pillar I

- **Student Outcome Goal 1:** Academic Growth & Literacy: Increase proficiency and growth in ELA, math, and science with particular focus on third-grade reading and middle school mathematics acceleration. Monitoring evidence includes TCAP proficiency and TVAAS growth disaggregated by subgroup; i-Ready benchmark trajectories; and third-grade literacy rates.
- **Student Outcome Goal 2:** Talent Excellence: Increase the percentage of highly effective teachers and principals, reduce out-of-field placements, and improve retention of top-tier educators. Monitoring evidence includes teacher and leader retention rates by school and grade band; out-of-field placement counts; instructional effectiveness ratings; and teacher-level student outcome progress patterns.
- **Student Outcome Goal 3:** College, Career & Workforce Readiness: Expand access to rigorous coursework, industry certifications, early postsecondary opportunities, and high-quality facilities. Monitoring evidence includes on-time graduation rate, ACT composite and benchmark rates, dual enrollment and AP participation and pass rates, industry certification completion, CCR composite, and Program of Study completion rates.
- **Monitoring cadence and meeting structure:** Quarterly Board progress monitoring sessions tied to each of the three Board priorities, presented by the Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer, with interim monthly CompStat reviews led by Regional Superintendents. An annual Board retreat will assess goal-year trajectories and authorize strategic adjustments.
- **Evidence/data reviewed to monitor progress toward goals:** Academic dashboards; literacy milestone data; teacher effectiveness and retention metrics, course rigor participation data, credential attainment rates, graduation and postsecondary readiness indicators, and facility readiness data, all disaggregated by subgroup.
- **Roles responsible for preparing and presenting evidence:** The Chief Academic Officer, supported by the Deputy Chief of Academics and Regional Superintendents, prepares and presents academic goal evidence. The Chief of Human Resources prepares talent and retention evidence. The Chief of Staff coordinates the annual Board reporting calendar and ensures all data is disaggregated prior to Board review.

What MSCS Will Do to Fulfill This Pillar

To fulfill the expectations of Governance and Leadership Coherence and advance the Board's three student outcome priorities, MSCS will:

- Anchor all academic decision-making to the Board's three priorities and a single instructional vision. All district strategies, resource allocation, and improvement efforts will be explicitly aligned to the three Board priorities named above. No academic initiative will receive district-level support or funding unless it is directly traceable to at least one of those priorities. This alignment ensures clarity, focus, and consistency over time.
- Focus governance on academic growth and literacy. All governance bodies and leadership structures will prioritize Tier 1 instructional quality as the primary driver of student achievement. This includes protecting instructional time, prioritizing early literacy acceleration and math recovery as systemwide imperatives, embedding subgroup performance accountability into all monitoring cycles, and aligning resource allocation to schools with the greatest instructional need.
- Build and sustain a nationally competitive talent pipeline. District leadership will establish governance conditions that attract, develop, and retain highly effective educators by expanding leadership pipelines in partnership with universities and national talent organizations; aligning performance management systems to instructional impact and student growth; implementing differentiated support and retention incentives for high-performing teachers and leaders; and strengthening principal supervision structures focused on instructional leadership. Talent pipeline strength and strategic educator placement will be treated as core governance levers for improving academic outcomes, making Pillar I and Pillar V inseparable in execution.
- Align system leadership to college, career, and workforce readiness. Governance structures will ensure instructional rigor and postsecondary preparation remain central by expanding access to Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, industry credentials, and career pathways; ensuring facilities modernization supports innovative instructional programming; monitoring participation and performance in rigorous coursework disaggregated by subgroup; and integrating workforce readiness metrics into district accountability dashboards.
- Establish and protect districtwide instructional non-negotiables. Rigorous Tier 1 instruction aligned to the Tennessee Academic Standards, delivered using district-adopted curriculum with integrity, will be the default expectation across all schools and classrooms.
- Reduce initiative fragmentation and protect instructional focus. MSCS will limit competing academic initiatives and ensure all district-led efforts directly support Tier 1 instructional quality, curriculum implementation, and effective instructional supervision.
- Align accountability systems to instructional quality and student access to grade-level content. District accountability practices will prioritize evidence of strong Tier 1 instruction, consistent use of high-quality materials, and student engagement with rigorous, standards-aligned tasks.

- Ensure consistent instructional expectations across schools and regions. Common monitoring tools, planning expectations, and instructional indicators will reduce variability in practice and ensure students experience consistent rigor regardless of school or assignment.
- Use data to identify and respond to instructional risk early. The district will prioritize early identification of implementation gaps, instructional drift, and emerging inequities, enabling timely support before challenges become systemic.
- Center equity in all governance decisions. Staffing, supervision, intervention, and resource allocation decisions will prioritize schools and student groups with the greatest instructional need, ensuring equitable access to strong Tier 1 instruction.
- Trigger defined system response when evidence shows progress is off track. When monitoring reveals stalled progress, widening inequities, or missed implementation expectations connected to any Board priority, governance structures will activate escalation to the Superintendent and Board via a formal Concern or Critical status designation; an intensified support plan will be developed within 30 days; reallocation of regional coaching and leadership resources and inclusion of the priority will be on the next Board progress review agenda. Intensified monitoring will continue until instructional expectations are met and progress is restored.

How Progress Will Be Monitored

Progress under Pillar I will be monitored through regular, embedded systemwide review cycles designed to determine whether governance and leadership actions are producing the instructional conditions required for strong Tier 1 instruction and measurable gains on each of the Board's three student outcome priorities. Monitoring is not optional, episodic, or informational – it is the primary mechanism through which the district protects instructional coherence and enforces alignment to the Academic Vision and Theory of Action.

Board Monitoring of Student Outcome Priorities

Progress under Pillar I is monitored against the Board of Education's three adopted student outcome priorities: (1) academic growth, achievement, and literacy; (2) talent excellence through recruitment and retention; and (3) college, career, and global workforce readiness. Board monitoring is anchored to a defined set of priority-aligned evidence reviewed on an established cadence to determine whether the district is on track and whether system response is required.

Board Monitoring Structure

- Student outcome priorities monitored: Academic growth and literacy; teacher and leader recruitment and retention; college, career, and workforce readiness.
- Evidence/data used to monitor progress: TCAP proficiency and TVAAS growth by subgroup; third-grade literacy rates; teacher and leader retention and effectiveness indicators; graduation rate; ACT benchmarks; dual enrollment, AP, and industry credential data; and facility readiness indicators.

- Monitoring cadence and meeting structure: Quarterly Board progress reports; monthly CompStat reviews led by Regional Superintendents; and an annual Board strategic retreat.
- Monitoring artifacts reviewed: Public-facing academic dashboards; priority-aligned progress briefs; equity analyses disaggregated by subgroup; and talent and workforce readiness scorecards.
- How monitoring findings are communicated internally for action: Quarterly synthesis reports distributed to Regional Superintendents, school principals, and district cabinet; findings tied to each Board priority inform coaching plans, resource realignment, and professional learning adjustments.

These monitoring cycles establish clear system non-negotiables. Across MSCS, students must have daily access to grade-level instruction aligned to the Tennessee Academic Standards. Instructional time must be protected. District-adopted curriculum must be used as intended. When evidence shows these conditions are not present, system response is required.

The district will examine multiple forms of evidence to assess whether leadership actions reinforce these expectations, including patterns in instructional supervision, consistency of grade-level rigor in classrooms, alignment between professional learning and instructional practice, and the extent to which early indicators of instructional risk prompt timely intervention. Monitoring will prioritize identifying variability across schools and regions and determining whether leadership actions are reducing – or reinforcing – inequitable access to strong Tier 1 instruction.

When monitoring reveals instructional drift, inconsistent implementation, or stalled progress on any Board priority, governance structures will trigger defined system response. This response may include recalibration of priorities, targeted leadership support, reallocation of resources, and/or intensified monitoring until instructional expectations are met. Reflection without adjustment is insufficient; monitoring under this pillar requires evidence of action aligned to identified need.

Progress will be judged not by the presence of structures, plans, or completed activities, but by evidence that leadership alignment is resulting in consistent instructional expectations, strong supervision of teaching and learning, and improved student outcomes across schools — particularly for students furthest from opportunity. In this way, governance functions as an active performance management system anchored to the Board's three priorities, ensuring the Academic Plan directs decisions, actions, and accountability throughout the system over time.



PILLAR II: Rigorous Academic Standards

Purpose & Research Base

Rigorous academic standards are the district's definition of readiness and the district's equity line in the sand. This pillar ensures that MSCS operates from one clear expectation for what every student should know and be able to do, in every grade and course, every day. It is the direct academic expression of Board Priority 1 – improving academic growth, achievement, and literacy for all students – and the standards foundation upon which Tier 1 instruction, third-grade literacy acceleration, and postsecondary readiness are built.

In MSCS, those expectations are the Tennessee Academic Standards, and they function as the non-negotiable foundation for instruction, tasks, and assessment design across the district.

This pillar responds directly to the district's persistent pattern of uneven access to grade-level work where the level of rigor students experience can vary by school, classroom, course pathway, or subgroup. MSCS cannot deliver on its Academic Vision or execute its Theory of Action if rigorous standards are treated as optional, interpreted inconsistently, or replaced by below-grade-level assignments in the name of "support." Standards-aligned Tier 1 instruction is the primary mechanism through which this pillar delivers on Board Priority 1, ensuring every student – regardless of subgroup, ZIP code, or school assignment – experiences the academic growth and literacy gains the Board has committed to achieving by 2030.

District information indicates that standards familiarity has not been consistent across roles and schools. This pillar therefore establishes not only what standards will be used, but also how the district will ensure that staff understand and can apply those standards in daily instruction.

The district's commitment is explicit: standards-aligned, grade-level learning is the default experience for every student, and scaffolding will be used to increase access to rigor, not to reduce it. Rigorous academic standards also underpin Board Priorities 2 and 3: only a district that recruits, supports retention of, and deeply develops educators versed in grade-level standards can deliver them consistently, and only a district that holds standards high across every course and credential pathway can prepare students for the demands of the global workforce.

What MSCS Will Do to Fulfill This Pillar

To meet the expectations of Rigorous Academic Standards, MSCS will:

- Establish Tennessee Academic Standards as the single academic baseline across PK-12. Standards will be the required starting point for unit design, daily planning, instructional tasks, and feedback across all schools, grade levels, and courses.
- Define "grade-level work" with precision and guardrails. MSCS will clarify what counts as standards-aligned rigor (cognitive demand, disciplinary thinking, text/task complexity, and evidence of student thinking) so that "alignment" is not subjective or school-dependent (exemplars – examples of what is expected).

- Require standards-first planning and task design. Planning expectations will prioritize: (1) naming the targeted Tennessee standard(s), (2) identifying the standard's full rigor, (3) selecting/designing tasks that match that level of rigor, and (4) anticipating misconceptions and success criteria aligned to the standard.
- Establish a district approach for ensuring staff familiarity with the Tennessee Academic Standards. MSCS will implement a defined process for building staff understanding of the standards and supporting educators in applying them in planning, instruction, and task design. The district will specify:
 - The audiences who will participate: All instructional staff, including teachers (PK-12), special populations educators (SPED and EL), gifted educators, school leaders, instructional support staff, district academic teams, and new teacher hires through onboarding (within the first 10 instructional days). (Add new teachers hired on time for school to start).
 - The professional learning and support for content and focus areas: Tennessee Academic Standards unpacking and application (intent, rigor, and vertical progression); standards-to-tasks alignment and task quality (cognitive demand, text/task complexity, evidence of student thinking); success criteria and student work exemplars; common misconceptions and responsive instructional moves; scaffolds that preserve rigor for multilingual learners and students with disabilities; and assessment alignment to standards as applicable.
 - The delivery structure and schedule: District launch learning for all instructional staff followed by job-embedded PLC cycles (unpack → plan → teach → analyze student work → adjust), supported by leader/coach calibration sessions and targeted coaching for educators needing intensified support; new teacher hires complete onboarding within the first 10 instructional days.
 - The artifacts or evidence that will be produced: Standards unpacking tools; standards-aligned task exemplars and revised tasks; lesson/unit plans that name targeted standards, intended rigor, and success criteria; annotated student work samples aligned to standard expectations; PLC products (misconception trackers, re-teach plans); and walkthrough look-fors documenting standards evidence in instruction.
 - How understanding and application will be verified: Pre/post checks for standards understanding; monthly standards-to-tasks alignment checks using a district verification tool; review of planning artifacts for standards-first alignment; walkthrough evidence confirming the standard is in play through the task; student work reviews against standards-based success criteria; and leader/coach calibration protocols to confirm consistent judgments of rigor and alignment.
- Protect grade-level access for every student through acceleration, not remediation as the default. Students who are low performing will receive daily access to grade-level standards with targeted support and strategic unfinished learning support without replacing grade-level instruction with below-level content.

- Set districtwide expectations for scaffolds that preserve rigor. Scaffolds for multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students requiring additional support will be designed to maintain the cognitive demand of the Tennessee standard while increasing access (e.g., language support, chunking, multiple representations, strategic pre-teaching of prerequisite skills).
- Codify what must be true in every classroom, every week. Across MSCS, students must routinely encounter standards-aligned tasks, speak/write using disciplinary language, and produce work that demonstrates reasoning, analysis, and mastery aligned to Tennessee expectations so that rigor is an observable instructional condition, not an aspiration.

How Progress Will Be Monitored

Progress under Pillar II will be monitored through standards-alignment evidence cycles that answer one question: Are students consistently experiencing grade-level work aligned to the Tennessee Academic Standards without predictable variation by school, course pathway, or student groups?

MSCS will monitor standards rigor using three recurring evidence streams, with clear cadence:

1. Monthly Standards-to-Tasks Checks (system-level and school-level). Each month, schools and district teams will sample assignments/tasks from priority grades and courses and verify: (a) the targeted Tennessee standard, (b) match between the standard's rigor and the task's cognitive demand, and (c) evidence that students are producing work aligned to the standard, not just completing activities.
2. Quarterly Student Work Reviews anchored to grade-level expectations. Each quarter, district and regional reviews will analyze student work artifacts against Tennessee standard success criteria to determine whether student products reflect grade-level complexity and whether scaffolds are increasing access while maintaining rigor.
3. Ongoing Walkthrough Look-Fors focused on standards evidence. Routine classroom observations will prioritize standards indicators visible in instruction: the grade-level standard in play, the rigor of the task students complete, and evidence of student thinking aligned to the Tennessee expectation so that standards alignment is monitored as lived classroom practice, not paperwork.

In addition, MSCS will monitor whether the district's process for building standards familiarity is being implemented and whether it is strengthening educators' ability to plan and deliver standards-aligned instruction. The district will define the evidence used to monitor this work, including:

- **Implementation indicators for the standards familiarity process:** Participation and completion rates by role/school/region; evidence that required PLC cycles (unpack → plan → teach → analyze → adjust) occur as scheduled; completion of monthly standards-to-tasks checks and quarterly student work reviews; completion of leader/coach calibration sessions; and completion of onboarding training for new teacher hires within the first 10 instructional days.
- **Measures of educator understanding and application:** Standards-to-task alignment rates from monthly task checks; planning artifact quality (standards-first alignment, rigor match, clear success criteria); walkthrough evidence that grade-level standards are driving instruction and tasks; student work evidence meeting standards-based success criteria; and calibration agreement rates among leaders/coaches when judging alignment and rigor.
- **The cadence for reviewing this evidence:** Monthly review of standards-to-tasks checks and walkthrough trends; quarterly review of student work, calibration outcomes, and patterns in rigor/equity; and post-training-cycle reviews within two weeks of each major training sequence to determine impact and needed adjustments.
- **How findings will trigger support or adjustments:** Targeted coaching cycles and reteaching supports for schools/teams below defined alignment thresholds; differentiated professional learning for roles/grade bands with recurring gaps; refinement of training content and exemplars when evidence shows limited transfer to practice; escalation to intensified monitoring and support when misalignment persists across cycles; and updates to planning tools, task exemplars, and guidance to address systemwide patterns.

Findings will trigger system response when misalignment appears, particularly when patterns show predictable reductions in rigor for multilingual learners, students with disabilities, or historically underserved student groups. Progress will be measured by the consistency of grade-level standards-aligned tasks and student work, and by shrinking variance across schools so that access to Tennessee rigor is no longer dependent on assignment, campus, or teacher.



PILLAR III: High-Quality Curriculum & Instructional Materials

Purpose & Research Base

In MSCS, variability in curriculum use and instructional practice is not a matter of individual preference or local discretion; it is a system-level failure that undermines equity and achievement. When students experience different levels of rigor, coherence, or access to grade-level work based on school assignment or classroom placement, the district has not fully delivered on its academic responsibility. This pillar is the operational core of Board Priority 1 – improving academic growth, achievement, and literacy for all students – and directly supports Board Priority 3 by ensuring the rigorous coursework and instructional quality needed to prepare students for postsecondary and global workforce success. Consistent, high-quality curriculum implementation is the primary lever through which literacy gains, math acceleration, and subgroup equity are achieved at scale.

This pillar establishes the expectation that high-quality curriculum and instructional materials are implemented consistently and with integrity across all schools. Instructional excellence cannot be episodic or dependent on individual capacity; it must become the predictable experience of students throughout MSCS. Strong curriculum implementation also reinforces Board Priority 2: when materials are clear, well-sequenced, and fully supported, recruitment and retention of effective teachers improves because educators are not left to build coherence on their own.

In this plan, “curriculum” refers to the district’s defined expectations for what is taught, in what sequence, and at what depth of understanding. It is distinct from adopted instructional materials or texts. Adopted texts and resources support instruction, but they do not by themselves define the districtwide curriculum.

Addressing instructional variability is not an implementation detail. It is a core system obligation essential to executing the district’s Theory of Action and realizing the Academic Vision. High-quality Tier 1 instruction is the primary mechanism through which academic standards, curriculum, and professional learning translate into student achievement. This pillar establishes the curriculum and materials conditions required to ensure that every student, in every classroom, consistently experiences rigorous, grade-level learning that advances mastery and accelerates growth.

National research from the CGCS, TNTP, and decades of instructional improvement literature confirms that districts improve outcomes at scale when Tier 1 instruction is coherent, standards-aligned, and consistently implemented across classrooms.

When Tier 1 instruction is strong, the need for remediation decreases, student engagement increases, and achievement gaps narrow. When Tier 1 instruction is inconsistent, interventions expand, inequities deepen, and outcomes stagnate.

District data reveal persistent variability in instructional rigor, student engagement, and access to grade-level tasks across schools and grade bands. This pillar responds directly to those patterns by establishing districtwide expectations that strengthen instructional practice, reduce variability, and ensure that Tier 1 instruction functions as the district's most powerful equity strategy through coherent curriculum and materials implementation.

What MSCS Will Do to Fulfill This Pillar

To fulfill the expectations of Curriculum and Materials Coherence and ensure consistently strong Tier 1 instruction across the district, MSCS will:

- Develop and maintain a districtwide academic curriculum aligned to the Tennessee Academic Standards. The district will establish a curriculum that is explicitly tied to the Tennessee Academic Standards and that defines the intended grade-level learning sequence and expectations across PK-12. The curriculum will specify:
 - **The grades/courses included in the district curriculum:** PK-12 across core content areas, including all grade-level ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies courses, and all required and tested high school courses, with explicit curriculum guidance for intervention/acceleration connections that keep grade-level standards as the anchor.
 - **The curriculum structure and components (e.g., units, learning outcomes, pacing expectations):** A district curriculum that includes year-long scope and sequence; unit maps; priority standards and standard bundles; unit learning outcomes and success criteria; pacing guidance with guardrails; lesson internalization supports; required texts/tasks/problem sets aligned to unit intent; embedded formative checks; misconception guidance and re-engagement supports; and required planning artifacts that connect curriculum → tasks → student work. (Coherence, Curriculum reflects the vision of the district and the level of depth required)
 - **How standards alignment will be documented within curriculum materials:** Standards alignment will be documented through standard codes embedded at unit and lesson levels; a standards-intent statement clarifying what the standard requires; a curriculum standards map showing when standards are introduced, practiced, and assessed; and alignment verification tools that connect standards to curriculum tasks and assessment items.
- Define the depth of understanding and rigor expectations within the curriculum. The district curriculum will clearly communicate the level of rigor and depth of understanding expected for key concepts and skills so that Tier 1 instruction is not limited to coverage or activity completion. The curriculum will define:
 - **What "mastery" looks like for priority concepts and skills:** Mastery is defined as independent and accurate performance of grade-level standards at the intended depth of understanding, demonstrated through reasoning, explanation, modeling, use of evidence, academic language, and application to new contexts, aligned to clear success criteria and performance descriptors for priority skills.

- **Expectations for cognitive demand and complexity within tasks:** Tasks must consistently reflect the full rigor of the Tennessee Academic Standards, including routine expectations for high-cognitive-demand work (analysis, argument, modeling, problem-solving, synthesis) and explicit guardrails against topic-level activities that do not require standards-level thinking; the curriculum will specify required task types and the minimum rigor threshold for priority standards.
- **Examples or indicators of student work aligned to the expected rigor:** The curriculum will include annotated exemplars (meets/exceeds/approaching), common misconception samples, and standards-based work indicators that show what rigorous student products look like (e.g., explains reasoning, cites evidence, uses precise vocabulary, models with representations, revises thinking based on feedback or counterevidence).
- Clarify the relationship between curriculum, adopted materials, and planning. Instructional expectations will reinforce alignment between the district curriculum, district-adopted materials, lesson planning, and enacted instruction so that what is intended is consistently what students experience. Where adopted materials do not fully meet the curriculum expectations, the district will address those gaps through defined actions rather than leaving solutions to individual schools.
- Identify gaps between the district curriculum and adopted materials and define how those gaps will be filled. MSCS will conduct a review to determine where adopted materials do not fully support the curriculum's standards alignment, sequence, or rigor expectations. The district will specify:
 - **The process used to identify gaps in materials relative to curriculum expectations:** MSCS will conduct a recurring materials-to-curriculum alignment review that includes: standards coverage checks; rigor and cognitive demand checks; coherence checks across units/grade levels; accessibility checks for multilingual learners and students with disabilities; and classroom usability checks informed by teacher implementation evidence, producing a gap log that is reviewed and updated on a defined cycle.
 - **The types of gaps identified (e.g., standards coverage, rigor, tasks, texts, supports):** Gaps will be categorized as standards omissions, partial alignment, insufficient rigor, weak text/task complexity, inadequate opportunities for discourse/writing/reasoning, assessment misalignment, and insufficient scaffolds/access pathways that preserve grade-level demand for multilingual learners and students with disabilities.
 - **How gaps will be filled (e.g., supplemental resources, developed tasks, revised guidance):** A cross-functional Curriculum & Materials Gap Review Team will own gap identification and resolution. Curriculum & Instruction (content leads) will lead the review and author the gap log; the Assessment team will verify standards-to-item/task alignment and ensure gaps are reflected in common assessment design; SPED and ML/EL teams will validate accessibility, scaffolds, and rigor preservation; Regional instructional leads/coaches will test usability and implementation feasibility in classrooms. Final approval of gap-closure resources and guidance will be issued by the district academic lead responsible for curriculum, with required implementation communicated through regional supervision structures.

- **Who is responsible for gap identification and resolution:** A cross-functional Curriculum & Materials Gap Review Team will own gap identification and resolution. District content leads (Curriculum & Instruction) will lead the review cycle, maintain the gap log, and develop gap-closure resources and guidance. The Assessment team will verify standards-to-task/item alignment and adjust district assessments to reflect intended rigor. SPED and ML/EL teams will validate accessibility, scaffolds, and rigor preservation for students with disabilities and multilingual learners. School-based implementers (instructional coaches/teacher leaders) will field-test usability and provide implementation feedback based on classroom evidence. Final approval and publication of gap-closure packs and required-use guidance will be issued by the district curriculum lead, with implementation expectations communicated through regional supervision structures.
- **The timeline for completing gap-filling actions:** Gap-filling will follow a two-tier timeline: (1) Rapid-cycle fixes for high-impact gaps (standards omissions, insufficient rigor, inaccessible tasks/materials) will be developed, vetted, and published within 6–10 weeks of identification, with immediate implementation guidance. (2) Annual refresh cycle: comprehensive curriculum/materials revisions and larger gap closures will be completed prior to the start of the next school year, informed by the year's implementation evidence (task samples, student work reviews, walkthrough trends) and student outcome data.
- Establish a clear, shared definition of high-quality Tier 1 instruction driven by curriculum expectations. Instructional expectations will prioritize daily access to grade-level standards, use of high-quality instructional materials aligned to the curriculum, engagement with complex academic tasks, and evidence of student thinking across content areas.
- Prioritize instructional rigor and cognitive demand aligned to standards and curriculum. Classroom instruction will emphasize sense-making, academic discourse, problem-solving, and knowledge-building, ensuring that students are actively engaged in learning that reflects the depth and complexity of the Tennessee Academic Standards as defined in the district curriculum.
- Strengthen instructional responsiveness to student needs without lowering rigor. Tier 1 instruction will incorporate scaffolds and supports that provide access to rigorous content for multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students requiring additional academic support while maintaining grade-level expectations.
- Reduce variability in curriculum implementation and instructional practice across classrooms and schools. District expectations for curriculum use, planning, instruction, and student engagement will be applied consistently to ensure that instructional quality does not depend on school assignment or classroom placement.
- Position curriculum-driven Tier 1 instruction as the primary driver of equity and achievement. Instructional improvement efforts will prioritize strengthening core classroom practice through consistent curriculum implementation rather than expanding remediation as the default, ensuring that all students benefit from high-quality instruction first.

How Progress Will Be Monitored

Progress under Pillar III will be monitored through regular, embedded review processes designed to determine whether the district curriculum is clearly defined, aligned to the Tennessee Academic Standards, supported by adequate instructional materials, and implemented with the rigor and consistency required to improve student outcomes at scale. Monitoring will focus on curriculum quality, materials adequacy, curriculum implementation, and student access to grade-level learning, not on instructional activity or compliance alone.

The district will examine evidence in four areas:

1. Curriculum-to-Standards Alignment Evidence. Reviews will examine whether the district curriculum explicitly reflects the Tennessee Academic Standards, including how alignment is documented and how rigor expectations are defined within curriculum components.
2. Materials Adequacy and Gap Resolution Evidence. Reviews will examine whether adopted materials support the district curriculum's standards alignment, sequence, and rigor expectations and whether identified gaps have been addressed through defined district actions.
3. Curriculum Implementation and Standards-to-Tasks Evidence. Reviews will examine alignment between the district curriculum, lesson planning, and classroom tasks, including evidence that students are engaging with tasks that match the rigor and intent of the standards as defined in the curriculum.
4. Student Work Evidence Anchored to Curriculum Expectations. Reviews will examine patterns in student work to determine whether students are producing work that reflects the expected depth of understanding, reasoning, and mastery aligned to grade-level standards.

Monitoring will prioritize identifying curriculum implementation variability and inequitable access to rigorous instruction, particularly for student groups historically furthest from opportunity. When reviews show misalignment, inconsistent implementation, unresolved materials gaps, or reductions in rigor, findings will trigger system response, including refinement of curriculum guidance, adjustments to materials supports, recalibration of professional learning, and targeted action where Tier 1 instruction is not yet producing the desired level of rigor and student engagement.

Progress will be measured by evidence that curriculum expectations are clear and standards-aligned, materials gaps are identified and resolved, curriculum implementation is consistent across schools, and students are routinely experiencing rigorous, grade-level learning that advances mastery, reduces reliance on remediation, and contributes to improved academic outcomes. Progress will also be disaggregated by subgroup to ensure curriculum implementation is closing – not widening – gaps for multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students, directly advancing the Board's commitment to academic growth and literacy for all students.

PILLAR IV: Professional Learning & Capacity Building

Purpose & Research Base

Professional learning is the primary mechanism through which district expectations for standards, curriculum, and instruction become consistent classroom practice. This pillar establishes the systemwide conditions required to ensure that educators and leaders continuously build the knowledge and skills necessary to deliver high-quality Tier 1 instruction for every student. It directly advances all three Board priorities: strengthening educator capacity to drive academic growth and literacy gains (Priority 1); developing and retaining teachers and leaders who deliver nationally competitive instruction (Priority 2); and building the instructional expertise needed to prepare students for rigorous postsecondary and global workforce pathways (Priority 3).

Research from the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS), TNTP, and decades of instructional improvement literature demonstrates that districts improve outcomes at scale when professional learning is coherent, job-embedded, and tightly aligned to instructional priorities. Professional learning is most effective when it strengthens daily practice, reinforces shared expectations, and is directly connected to what educators are expected to plan, teach, and assess.

District data indicate variability in instructional practice, uneven lesson internalization, and inconsistent follow-through on feedback across schools. These patterns reflect gaps in adult capacity – not effort. This pillar responds by ensuring that professional learning builds shared understanding, strengthens instructional skill, and reduces variability in Tier 1 instruction across MSCS. High-quality professional learning also directly supports Board Priority 2: districts that invest in educator development improve both recruitment and retention of teachers and leaders at higher rates because growth, not just compensation, is what sustains the most effective educators over time.

To ensure that professional learning results in consistent changes in instruction and measurable gains for students, this pillar makes explicit what professional learning will focus on, how it will be differentiated based on educator need, and how its effectiveness will be evaluated based on



growth in student outcomes.

What MSCS Will Do to Fulfill This Pillar

To build adult capacity aligned to the Academic Vision and Theory of Action, MSCS will:

- Align professional learning to district instructional priorities. All professional learning will reinforce the Tennessee Academic Standards, district-adopted curriculum, and expectations for high-quality Tier 1 instruction, ensuring coherence between what educators learn and what students experience.
- Make the content of professional learning explicit and anchored to daily instructional demands. Professional learning will focus on the specific knowledge and skills educators and leaders must use to plan and deliver rigorous, standards-aligned instruction. Professional learning content will include:
 - **Tennessee Academic Standards understanding and application in planning and instruction:** Explicit standards unpacking (standard intent, rigor, and vertical progression) and standards-first planning routines that require teachers to (1) name the standard, (2) identify the full cognitive demand, (3) plan aligned tasks and success criteria, and (4) anticipate misconceptions and evidence of mastery.
 - **Curriculum internalization (unit intent, lesson sequence, and intended rigor):** Unit and lesson internalization protocols that require teachers and leaders to analyze unit purpose, lesson sequence, essential question(s), prerequisite knowledge, key vocabulary, and where rigor is built so instruction matches the curriculum's intended depth and coherence rather than pacing-only coverage.
 - **Task quality and cognitive demand aligned to grade-level expectations:** Task analysis and revision practice using a district task-quality tool to verify alignment to standard intent, text/task complexity, and cognitive demand, including upgrading low-rig or tasks to grade-level tasks that require reasoning, evidence, modeling, and/or writing.
 - **Instructional moves that surface and respond to student thinking:** Core instructional moves that make student thinking visible (cold call, turn-and-talk with accountability, strategic questioning, checks for understanding, re-engagement, error analysis, and real-time adjustments) with explicit practice on how to respond when misconceptions emerge.
 - **Academic discourse routines and evidence of student reasoning:** Districtwide discourse routines that increase equity of voice and require students to speak/write in complete thoughts using discipline-specific language (discussion stems, partner routines, accountable talk moves, and structured argumentation), with teacher facilitation moves that press for evidence and reasoning.
 - **Student work analysis to identify misconceptions and adjust instruction:** Recurring student work protocols (analyze → diagnose → plan re-teach/re-engagement → adjust next steps) anchored to standards-based success criteria, including identification of misconception patterns and planning targeted re-engagement tasks tied to grade-level standards.

- **Scaffolds that preserve rigor for multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students needing additional support:** High-leverage scaffolding practices that maintain grade-level demand (language supports, chunking, multiple representations, worked examples, guided practice, assistive tools, structured note-catchers) with explicit guidance on what is not allowed (lowered texts/tasks as the default or replacement instruction).
- **Assessment practices aligned to standards and curriculum expectations (as applicable):** Training on designing/selecting formative assessments aligned to unit outcomes and standards rigor; interpreting results quickly; using item/task analysis; and implementing re-teach/re-engagement cycles so assessment evidence leads directly to instructional action.
- **Leader and coach skill development for observation, feedback, and implementation support:** Calibration and skill-building for leaders/coaches on standards-and-curriculum look-fors, identifying the highest-leverage bite-size feedback, conducting coaching cycles (see it/name it/do it), monitoring implementation, and supporting teacher internalization and task quality through weekly coaching routines.
- Prioritize job-embedded learning grounded in daily instructional work. Professional learning will be embedded in planning, observation, feedback, and analysis of student work, positioning classrooms and PLC structures as the primary sites of adult learning.
- Ensure coherence between professional learning and instructional feedback. Coaching, observation, and professional learning will reinforce the same instructional priorities so that improvement efforts are cumulative rather than fragmented or episodic.
- Differentiate professional learning based on educator experience, prior training, and student progress. Professional learning will be structured to ensure that educators receive the level and type of support needed to strengthen Tier 1 instruction, including differentiation based on:
 - **Educator experience levels (e.g., novice, developing, veteran):** A tiered professional learning pathway that differentiates frequency and intensity of support: novice educators receive accelerated foundational training and weekly coaching; developing educators receive targeted cycles based on evidence; veteran educators engage in advanced internalization, task quality, and leadership-of-learning modules with opportunities to lead PLC learning.
 - **Prior professional learning received and demonstrated proficiency:** Placement based on completion history and demonstrated transfer to practice (planning artifacts, walkthrough evidence, and student work), not just attendance, so educators who show proficiency move to advanced learning while those without evidence of transfer receive targeted support.

- **Student progress and instructional evidence indicating need for intensified support:** Intensified support triggered by patterns in student outcomes and leading indicators (misalignment in tasks, weak student work against success criteria, walkthrough trends, assessment results, or stalled growth), with priority given to teams where gaps persist across monitoring cycles.
 - **The process used to identify placement into differentiated learning pathways:** MSCS will assign educators to differentiated professional learning pathways using a monthly evidence cycle that reviews (1) standards-to-tasks checks (minimum two task samples), (2) one planning artifact, (3) walkthrough/coaching evidence (minimum two touchpoints), (4) student work (minimum six samples aligned to the targeted standard), and (5) the most recent short-cycle assessment evidence. Educators will be placed into an Intensive, Targeted, or Sustain/Extend pathway based on the number and pattern of evidence sources indicating misalignment to standards and rigor, with a two-week checkpoint and an end-of-cycle review to recalibrate placement based on updated evidence.
 - **How differentiated learning will be delivered while maintaining coherence to district expectations:** Professional learning will be delivered through a recurring 4-week cycle that includes (1) a district/region anchor session to introduce the focus skill and model expectations, (2) weekly PLC-based internalization and task work using district protocols, (3) job-embedded coaching cycles (observe → feedback → practice) aligned to the same focus skill, and (4) a student work review at the end of the cycle to verify transfer and determine next-step support. New hires will receive the foundational sequence within their first 10 instructional days, then enter the next scheduled cycle.
- Differentiate professional learning to support equitable access to grade-level instruction. Professional learning will strengthen educators' capacity to provide effective scaffolds and supports for multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students requiring additional academic support without lowering expectations.
 - Build leadership capacity to support instructional improvement. Professional learning will ensure that school and district leaders are equipped to observe instruction, provide high-quality feedback, and support consistent implementation of Tier 1 expectations across classrooms and schools.

How Progress Will Be Monitored

Progress under Pillar IV will be monitored through evidence that professional learning is resulting in measurable changes in instructional practice, not simply participation or completion. Monitoring will focus on whether adult learning is reducing instructional variability and strengthening access to rigorous, grade-level instruction across MSCS.

The district will examine evidence from instructional observations, planning artifacts, feedback cycles, and student work to determine whether professional learning priorities are visible in classroom practice. Reviews will assess alignment between professional learning focus areas and observed improvements in instructional rigor, coherence, and responsiveness to student needs.

In addition, MSCS will evaluate the effectiveness of professional learning based on growth in student outcomes. The district will define:

- **Student outcome measures used to evaluate professional learning impact:** MSCS will use district common assessments/CFAs and benchmarks tied to the same standard bundles addressed in professional learning, standards-aligned short-cycle formative checks (e.g., exit tickets/quizzes) using common success criteria, and student work outcomes scored against district standards-based success criteria; all measures will be disaggregated by student groups (including multilingual learners/English learners and students with disabilities) to verify impact and equity.
- **How student growth will be determined for this purpose:** Growth will be determined through pre/post analysis within the same instructional cycle for the same targeted standards (baseline to end-of-cycle), including changes in the percentage of students meeting success criteria, movement across performance levels, and growth metrics available in district assessment platforms where applicable.
- **The cadence for reviewing student outcome growth in connection to professional learning:** The district will conduct a two-week post-cycle “early impact” review using student work and formative evidence to confirm transfer to instruction, a six-week “outcome impact” review using CFA/benchmark results to confirm learning gains and student groups gap movement, and a quarterly synthesis to identify patterns across schools, regions, grade bands, and content areas.
- **How findings will be used to revise professional learning content, delivery, and supports:** Findings will drive concrete adjustments, including revising the professional learning scope and sequence, publishing updated exemplars/task models where misalignment persists, increasing coaching intensity and frequency where transfer is weak, reallocating supports to priority schools/teams with stalled growth, and shifting from training-only to coached implementation expectations until evidence shows improved instruction and student outcome gains.

Monitoring will also assess whether professional learning support is timely, targeted, and responsive to identified instructional gaps. When professional learning does not result in improved instructional practice and evidence of student outcome growth, the district will adjust content, delivery, or support to ensure adult learning translates into classroom impact.

Progress will be measured by evidence that educators are increasingly able to plan and deliver high-quality Tier 1 instruction, that leaders are effectively supporting instructional improvement, and that professional learning is contributing to more consistent instructional experiences and improved student outcomes across schools. All progress measures will be disaggregated by subgroup – with particular attention to outcomes for multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students furthest from opportunity – to ensure professional learning is reducing inequities, not reinforcing them. When evidence shows that professional learning is not resulting in improved instructional practice or measurable subgroup gains, the district will trigger defined system response: recalibration of content and delivery, reallocation of coaching resources, and intensified support cycles until instructional improvement and student outcome growth are restored.

PILLAR V: Teacher Quality, Talent Pipelines & Retention

Purpose & Research Base

Teacher quality and stability are foundational to sustaining instructional improvement. Even the strongest standards, curriculum, and professional learning systems cannot deliver results if schools experience chronic turnover, uneven preparation, or persistent gaps in instructional expertise. This pillar is the direct operational expression of Board Priority 2 – recruiting and retaining the most effective district leaders and teachers in the nation – and the primary human capital lever for achieving Board Priority 1 academic growth and literacy gains. A stable, high-quality teaching workforce is not an HR outcome; it is an academic equity strategy. Teacher effectiveness determines whether every student, regardless of subgroup or school assignment, experiences the rigorous Tier 1 instruction required to reach grade-level proficiency and postsecondary readiness. This pillar establishes the districtwide conditions required to ensure that every classroom is led by a well-prepared teacher and that instructional quality is not undermined by instability.

Research from the CGCS, TNTP, and national workforce studies consistently demonstrates that districts improve outcomes at scale when talent systems are intentionally aligned to instructional priorities and when avoidable turnover particularly in schools serving students furthest from opportunity is reduced. High-performing districts treat teacher quality and retention not as isolated human resources functions, but as core academic strategies tightly connected to instruction.

District data indicate that MSCS experiences uneven distribution of experienced teachers, higher rates of turnover in priority schools and early grades, and persistent challenges in maintaining a stable pipeline of educators prepared to deliver rigorous Tier 1 instruction. This pillar responds by aligning recruitment, development, placement, and retention efforts to the district's Academic Vision and Theory of Action so that instructional quality is strengthened and sustained over time. The connection to student outcomes is direct: every point of academic growth and every literacy gain the Board has committed to achieving by 2030 depends on classrooms led by well-prepared, supported, and retained educators. Teacher quality is not a precondition for academic growth – it is academic growth.

To directly accelerate student learning, this pillar establishes a district practice of analyzing patterns of student outcome progress associated with teachers. This analysis is designed to identify where instructional impact is strongest, where additional instructional support is needed, and how the district can more effectively retain and deploy talent. This analysis is not an evaluation system; it does not replace or modify the district's formal evaluation framework and does not independently result in employment action.

Implementation of this practice will occur in accordance with applicable Board policy, state and federal law, and any relevant collective bargaining agreements and related procedures.

What MSCS Will Do to Fulfill This Pillar

To ensure a strong, stable, and instructionally aligned teaching workforce, MSCS will:

- **Align talent systems to instructional priorities:** Recruitment, placement, development, and retention efforts will be explicitly connected to expectations for high-quality Tier 1 instruction. Teacher quality will be defined by instructional practice, responsiveness to feedback, and impact on student learning not by tenure, credentials alone, or isolated outcome measures.
- **Strengthen and sustain instructional talent pipelines:** MSCS will maintain multiple entry and preparation pathways aligned to district curriculum and instructional expectations, reducing reliance on emergency staffing, permit-only placements, and persistent out-of-field assignments.
- **Prioritize stability in high-need grades and schools:** Talent strategies will intentionally address chronic instability in early grades, tested subjects, multilingual learner and inclusion settings, and schools serving students with the greatest instructional need. Workforce stability is treated as a prerequisite for instructional coherence and improvement.
- **Use instructional evidence to inform talent supports:** Instructional evidence including planning artifacts, observation feedback, coaching notes, and patterns in student learning will be used to guide professional learning, coaching, and resource allocation so that talent actions reinforce Tier 1 instructional quality.

Teacher-Level Student Outcome Progress Analysis

MSCS will analyze patterns of student outcome progress associated with teachers to inform instructional support, retention strategy, and voluntary leadership-of-learning opportunities. This work functions as a continuous improvement and talent-management tool, not as an evaluation system.

- **Student outcome measures used for analysis:** District-created CFAs aligned to priority standards; benchmark assessments; standards-aligned short-cycle formative checks; and student work evaluated against district success criteria. No single measure is used in isolation.
- **Definition of progress or growth:** Progress is defined as evidence of student movement toward grade-level, standards-based success criteria over time, including improvement in student work quality, increased proportions of students meeting expectations, and positive trends across comparable instructional cycles.
- **Cadence for analysis** Teacher-level progress analysis will be conducted quarterly, aligned to benchmark and progress-monitoring cycles. Reviews occur within instructional planning and support structures, not personnel review, disciplinary, or evaluative forums.

Parameters and Safeguards for Appropriate Use

- Teacher-level reports and any individually identifiable results are confidential personnel information and will be maintained, accessed, and shared only in accordance with district confidentiality requirements and applicable law.
- Use is limited to instructional improvement, coaching, retention planning, and voluntary deployment decisions.
- No public ranking, labeling, or comparison of teachers and no dissemination beyond authorized instructional support structures.
- No single data source or cycle may be used to draw conclusions about instructional impact.
- Student population, course assignments, and instructional context must be considered in all reviews.
- Results are explicitly separated from summative evaluation processes unless otherwise defined by policy or agreement.

Decision Rights & Governance

To ensure consistency, trust, and appropriate use:

- School leaders use teacher-level progress analysis to inform coaching, professional learning, and instructional support planning.
- Regional leaders monitor patterns across schools to ensure equitable access to support and to identify retention risks or staffing instability.
- District leadership uses aggregated patterns (not individual results) to guide pipeline investments, retention strategy, and systemwide talent planning.

No individual-level decisions regarding evaluation, discipline, or employment action may be made solely based on this analysis.

Teacher Feedback & Professional Agency

Findings from teacher-level progress analysis will be shared directly with teachers in instructional contexts that emphasize growth and agency. Teachers will engage in reflective conversations focused on instructional practice, access to targeted support, and opportunities for professional growth. Teachers will be informed when analysis contributes to eligibility for voluntary leadership roles or advanced learning opportunities.

Connection to Differentiated Supports

Findings will inform targeted coaching, professional learning adjustments, curriculum internalization support, and peer learning opportunities. Follow-up reviews will occur in subsequent cycles to monitor instructional growth and adjust supports as needed.

Targeted Retention Strategies for High-Impact Teachers

MSCS will identify teachers demonstrating consistent positive student outcome progress and prioritize actions to reduce avoidable attrition particularly in high-need contexts.

Retention strategies include:

Priority access to advanced professional learning, voluntary leadership-of-learning opportunities, reduced non-instructional load where feasible, and compensation incentives aligned to district policy and funding.

Priority placements include:

Early grades (PK-3), tested content areas, multilingual learner and inclusion settings, and schools identified as priority or turnaround sites.

Retention strategies are deployed to stabilize access to effective instruction for students furthest from opportunity and to prevent predictable patterns of talent loss in historically under-resourced schools.

Strategic Deployment with Commensurate Compensation (Voluntary)

MSCS will deploy teachers demonstrating strong instructional impact into optional additional responsibilities that extend their influence while maintaining classroom assignment.

Roles may include:

Instructional lead teacher, mentor teacher for novice educators, model classroom host, curriculum internalization facilitator, and PLC lead aligned to district priorities.

Selection criteria:

Demonstrated instructional practice, evidence of student progress, responsiveness to feedback, and voluntary participation.

Compensation:

Stipends or supplements aligned to role scope and time commitment, implemented in accordance with district compensation policy and collective bargaining agreements.

Ensuring Equitable Access to Effective Teachers

MSCS will monitor system-level patterns to prevent predictable inequities in access to experienced and supported teachers. When inequities emerge, adjustments will be made through recruitment, placement, support, deployment, or retention strategies not individual corrective action.

How Progress Will Be Monitored

Progress under Pillar V will be monitored through regular review of workforce stability, instructional alignment, and talent distribution to determine whether teacher quality and retention efforts are strengthening Tier 1 instruction across the district.

Monitoring focuses on system patterns, not individual personnel decisions, and includes:

- Retention and mobility trends by grade band, subject, and school.
- Distribution of experienced and supported teachers.
- Appropriate and consistent use of teacher-level progress analysis.
- Alignment between identified instructional needs and delivered support.
- Stability in early grades, tested subjects, and priority schools.

Board-Level Monitoring

The Board of Education will monitor Pillar V through aggregate, non-identifiable indicators, including districtwide retention trends, staffing stability in high-need areas, and progress toward equitable access to effective teachers. Individual teacher data will not be presented to or reviewed by the Board.

When patterns indicate risk to instructional continuity or equity, MSCS will adjust recruitment, placement, support, deployment, or retention strategies to protect instructional quality and student learning. Workforce monitoring will be disaggregated by subgroup, school type, and priority designation to ensure that students furthest from opportunity – including multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students – are not disproportionately served by the least experienced or least supported educators. When monitoring reveals systemic inequity in teacher distribution or persistent retention gaps in high-need schools, the district will trigger defined system response: activation of targeted recruitment and retention incentives, priority reallocation of coaching and leadership support, and escalation to district leadership with a required corrective action plan within 30 days. Progress will be judged by evidence of equitable access to effective teachers across all schools, reduced out-of-field placements, and improved student outcome growth in schools where talent strategies have been deployed.



PILLAR VI: Accountability, Progress Monitoring & Data Systems

Purpose & Research Base

Accountability and data systems exist to improve instruction, not to manage compliance or sort schools or educators into categories. This pillar establishes the districtwide conditions required to ensure that progress monitoring and accountability function as continuous feedback mechanisms that strengthen Tier 1 instruction, surface instructional risk early, and trigger timely, equitable system response. Pillar VI is the measurement architecture for all three Board priorities: it tracks academic growth and literacy progress (Priority 1), monitors educator recruitment and retention trends (Priority 2), and measures student access to and success in rigorous coursework, credentials, and postsecondary pathways (Priority 3). A governance system is only as strong as the data it uses to make decisions, and this pillar ensures that every monitoring cycle produces actionable evidence tied directly to the Board's adopted student outcome goals.

Research from the CGCS, TNTP, and national assessment organizations consistently demonstrates that districts improve outcomes at scale when accountability systems are disciplined, limited in number, and tightly connected to instructional action. High-performing districts use data to ask better questions about instruction and system conditions not simply to report results after opportunities to intervene have passed.

District data indicate that while MSCS collects extensive information on student performance, instructional practice, and school conditions, variability in data use, delayed response to early indicators, and inconsistent linkage between data and instructional adjustment have limited system impact. This pillar responds by clarifying how accountability, progress monitoring, and data systems operate together to support the district's Theory of Action and ensure that student learning drives instructional, leadership, and resource decisions.

Accountability under this plan is defined by a limited, clearly specified set of indicators and evidence sources, used consistently across the system. These indicators inform instructional improvement and system response and do not replace or modify educator evaluation systems required by Tennessee statute or State Board policy, including the TEAM.

In addition, the MSCS Board of Education will monitor progress toward Board-adopted student outcome goals using a defined, transparent, and state-aligned data set. This pillar explicitly distinguishes between instructional accountability, educator evaluation, and Board governance oversight, ensuring clarity, transparency, and legal defensibility.

Accountability Data Definitions & Governance

MSCS will operate from the following explicit definitions and controls:

- I. Authoritative Indicator Set (Capped)** The district accountability framework is limited to the following indicators. No additional indicators may be added to the accountability set without district approval.

- A. Student Outcome Indicators
 - 1. TCAP proficiency
 - 2. TVAAS growth
 - 3. Graduation rate
 - 4. Postsecondary readiness (ACT benchmarks, industry credentials, dual enrollment)

II. Leading Instructional Indicators

- A. Attendance and chronic absenteeism
- B. Standards alignment of instructional tasks
- C. Student work quality against district success criteria
- D. Short-cycle formative assessments

III. Instructional Condition Indicators

- A. Curriculum use fidelity
- B. Standards-aligned planning
- C. Observation look-fors aligned to state standards and district expectations

IV. Definitions, Calculation Rules & Version Control

- A. Indicator definitions, calculation rules, inclusion criteria, and interpretation guidance are published and aligned to Tennessee Department of Education guidance.
- B. The Academic Plan Glossary and technical appendices serve as the single source of truth for definitions and calculations.
- C. Any updates to definitions are versioned, time-stamped, and communicated prior to implementation.

V. Disaggregation Requirements

All indicators are disaggregated by race/ethnicity, economic disadvantage, English Learner status, disability status, grade band, school type, and region, as applicable.

- A. Data Governance & Access
 - 1. Data quality checks ensure timeliness, completeness, and accuracy prior to review.
 - 2. Access to dashboards and reports is role-based and aligned to instructional responsibility.
 - 3. Student- and subgroup-level data are handled in accordance with district confidentiality requirements and applicable law.

VI. Review Cadence, Decision Rights & System Response

- A. Weekly: Attendance and early warning indicators
- B. Monthly: Leading instructional and condition indicators
- C. Quarterly: Student outcome trends and Board reporting

VII. Decision Rights

- A. Teachers & PLCs: Instructional adjustment and planning
- B. Principals & ILTs: School-level response and support alignment
- C. Regional Superintendents: Regional coherence, escalation, and resource alignment
- D. District Academic Cabinet: System response, recalibration, and resource allocation
- E. Board of Education: Monitoring progress toward adopted goals using aggregate, non-identifiable data

VIII. Trigger Framework: When response is required to ensure consistency and equity, the following triggers require action:

- A. Watch: One cycle below expected trajectory or early signs of subgroup divergence
Response: Targeted coaching and planning support
- B. Concern: Two consecutive cycles below expected trajectory; attendance below threshold for two monitoring periods; subgroup gap widening
Response: Intensified instructional support, leadership coaching, and resource adjustment
- C. Critical: Persistent underperformance across three cycles; stalled growth combined with instructional condition gaps
Response: Escalation to regional/district intervention and formal support plan
- D. Initial response occurs within 30 days, with monitored adjustment in the next instructional cycle.

What MSCS Will Do to Fulfill This Pillar

- Align accountability to the Academic Vision and Theory of Action. Tier 1 instructional quality is the primary driver of improvement.
- Operate a coherent progress-monitoring framework. A disciplined indicator set reduces fragmentation and competing data demands.
- Prioritize leading indicators over lagging outcomes. Monthly review of early signals triggers intervention before gaps widens.
- Ensure data systems support instructional action. Dashboards connect directly to PLCs, ILTs, CompStat, and regional routines.
- Require response, not just review. Monitoring must result in documented instructional adjustment and support.
- Use disaggregated data to drive equitable response. Persistent gaps for multilingual learners/English learners, students with disabilities, and lowest-performing students require targeted action, not explanation.

Board Monitoring & Governance

The Board of Education will monitor progress toward its adopted goals using a defined, state-aligned data set:

- Board-adopted goals monitored: (1) Academic growth and literacy – proficiency, TVAAS growth, and third-grade reading rates; (2) Teacher and leader recruitment and retention – retention rates by school and grade band, out-of-field placements, and instructional effectiveness trends; (3) College, career, and global workforce readiness – graduation rate, ACT benchmarks, dual enrollment and AP participation and pass rates, industry credential attainment, and Program of Study completion
- Measures: TCAP proficiency and TVAAS growth disaggregated by subgroup; third-grade literacy rates; teacher and leader retention rates and out-of-field placement counts; graduation rate; ACT composite and benchmark rates; dual enrollment, AP, and industry credential participation and completion; CCR composite; and Program of Study completion rates
- Cadence: Quarterly
- Artifacts: Public dashboards, progress briefs, and equity analyses

The Board does not review individual educator data.

How Progress will be Monitored

Progress under Pillar VI is monitored through embedded review cycles focused on decision quality and follow-through, not data volume.

Monitoring verifies:

1. Clarity and consistency of accountability measures
Evidence: Published definitions, dashboards, protocols
Frequency: Quarterly
2. Timely system response to leading indicators
Evidence: Coaching plans, instructional adjustments
Timeline: Within one monitoring cycle
3. Board monitoring of goal-aligned outcomes
Evidence: Board-approved indicators
Cadence & artifacts: Quarterly dashboards and briefs

Monitoring also assesses whether data systems reduce variability across schools by making expectations, progress, and inequities visible and actionable. Where inequities persist, findings trigger recalibration of support.

Closing Standard

Progress under this pillar will be measured by evidence that:

- Accountability definitions are clear and consistently applied.
- Data enable earlier instructional action.
- Monitoring results in improved instructional conditions.
- Student learning improves equitably across MSCS.

Accountability is not an endpoint. It is the mechanism through which MSCS ensures every student benefits from strong Tier 1 instruction and that the system responds decisively when they do not.



PILLAR VII: Support for Chronically Low-Performing Schools & Students

Purpose & Research Base

Chronically low performance is not a failure of effort by students or educators; it is a signal of system conditions that have not yet been fully aligned to support strong Tier 1 instruction at scale. This pillar establishes how Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) will provide differentiated, intensive, and sustained support to a limited number of schools and student populations where outcomes have remained persistently below expectations while maintaining high academic standards and clear instructional expectations. Pillar VII is the equity guarantee embedded in all three Board priorities. It ensures that Board Priority 1 – academic growth and literacy for all students – is not driven by averages that mask the students furthest from opportunity. It ensures that Board Priority 2 talent strategies are deployed with greatest intensity where instructional instability is highest. And it ensures that Board Priority 3 workforce and postsecondary readiness are not reserved for students in high-performing schools but is actively built into turnaround pathways for every MSCS student. Where the system has not yet reached every child, this pillar is the mechanism that closes that gap.

Research from the CGCS, TNTP, and national turnaround studies consistently demonstrates that districts do not succeed by attempting to turn around large numbers of schools simultaneously. Sustainable improvement occurs when districts focus deeply on a small, clearly defined cohort, strengthen Tier 1 instruction as the primary lever, stabilize leadership and staffing, and align resources and accountability to a narrow set of instructional priorities. When turnaround efforts rely primarily on remediation without strengthening the instructional core, gaps persist. When the instructional core is strengthened, outcomes improve. A critical and often underestimated component of turnaround success is the intentional effort to recruit and retain strong teachers and leaders specifically into the highest-need schools – not just to fill seats, but to build the instructional stability that makes sustained improvement possible.

District data indicate that a subset of MSCS schools and specific student groups within them experience persistent challenges in proficiency, growth, attendance, and access to grade-level work. These challenges disproportionately affect lowest-performing students, multilingual learners/English learners, and students with disabilities, and often coincide with instructional variability and instability in staffing or leadership. This pillar defines how the district will intervene deliberately and equitably to ensure that these students receive stronger, not diluted, instruction, and that turnaround efforts are coherent, resourced, and sustainable.

What MSCS Will Do to Fulfill This Pillar

Limit the number of priority turnaround schools to a manageable cohort.

At any given time, MSCS will focus intensive turnaround efforts on up to 15 schools, designated as iZone schools. Schools will be identified based on placement in Tier 3, or proximity to Tier 3, under the Tennessee state accountability tiering system.

Designation as an iZone school reflects eligibility for intensified support and does not constitute a separate accountability rating or sanction beyond those defined by the state accountability system.

The district will specify:

- **Selection criteria:**

Placement in Tier 3 or closest to Tier 3 using the most recent state data (achievement and growth), with consideration of persistence of underperformance and readiness for intensive intervention to ensure resources are deployed where most effectively.

- **Confirmation & communication:**

Annual district review; formal designation by the Superintendent; written communication outlining expectations, supports, monitoring cadence, roles, and decision timelines.

- **Duration of intensified support:**

A minimum of three years of sustained support, recognizing the time required to stabilize instructional conditions and produce durable gains. Schools may remain beyond three years if state accountability status indicates continued priority need.

- **Exit criteria:**

A school exits the iZone when it exits the state priority list under Tennessee accountability, based on the most recent available data. Exit is confirmed through district review to ensure Tier 1 systems, leadership stability, and support for sustained improvement are in place.

Turnaround Non-Negotiables (Required in Every iZone School)

All iZone schools will implement the following with fidelity; MSCS will supply capacity and monitoring to ensure execution:

1. High-quality instructional materials (HQIM) implemented with unit internalization aligned to Tennessee Academic Standards.
2. Weekly PLC cycles focused on priority standards, student work analysis, and responsive planning.
3. Common instructional walkthrough look-fors aligned to district expectations, with feedback and follow-up coaching.
4. Protected intervention time with guardrails ensuring interventions accelerate grade-level access and do not replace core instruction.

5. Integrated attendance–instruction routines to address barriers limiting access to Tier 1 learning.

Identify priority schools and students using clear, transparent criteria

MSCS will use multiple measures to identify schools and student groups requiring intensified support:

- **School identification measures:**
State proficiency and growth; district benchmark trends; instructional monitoring evidence; attendance and engagement; leadership and staffing stability.
- **Student-group identification measures:**
Disaggregated achievement and growth; early warning indicators; progress monitoring; access-to-rigor evidence.
- **Explicit inclusion:**
Identification will intentionally surface lowest-performing students, ML/EL, and students with disabilities, ensuring these groups are not masked by averages.

Strengthen Tier 1 instruction as the primary intervention

Turnaround efforts prioritize core instructional quality, curriculum implementation, and instructional supervision aligned to district expectations and Tennessee Academic Standards. Tier 1 strengthening is the central strategy; all additional supports reinforce never substitute for grade-level instruction.



Define how remedial work fits within the Academic Plan

Intervention and remediation function to accelerate access to grade-level content, not replace it:

- **Additional supports:** Standards-aligned intervention blocks; high-dosage tutoring; SEA-aligned tutoring; targeted small-group instruction; extended learning time.
- **Connection to standards:** Interventions align to current units and grade-level standards, providing just-in-time scaffolding for unfinished learning.
- **Guardrails:** No systematic removal from grade-level instruction; replacement instruction that lowers rigor is prohibited except where legally required for individualized services.

Provide differentiated, sustained support aligned to diagnosed need

- **Support model:** Embedded instructional coaching; leadership coaching; planning and curriculum internalization support; targeted professional learning.
- **Intensity calibration:** Monthly review of instructional and student-outcome evidence to adjust support.
- **Delivery & oversight:** District turnaround teams; regional instructional leads; school leadership; specialized support staff.

Minimum Resource Entitlements for iZone Schools

Each iZone school receives a defined support package, differentiated by need:

Instructional coaching: Increased ratios relative to non-iZone schools.

Leadership support: Regular leader coaching and problem-solving cycles.

Planning support: Protected planning time and facilitation for unit internalization and PLCs.

Student support: Priority access to tutoring and intervention staffing.

Resource allocation: Additional time, staffing, and funds aligned to diagnosed needs.

Establish explicit support for priority student groups

MSCS ensures equitable access to rigorous learning for:

- **Multilingual learners/English learners:** Sheltered instruction routines; language objectives aligned to content; co-planning with ESL staff; scaffolds preserving cognitive demand.
- **Students with disabilities:** Alignment of IEP services to grade-level instruction; co-teaching; accommodations tied to standards-based tasks; collaboration across general and special education.
- **Lowest-performing students:** Accelerated instruction; targeted re-engagement; tutoring; frequent progress monitoring while maintaining grade-level access.

Decision Rights & Escalation

- School leaders: Own school-level turnaround plans and daily execution.
- Regional leaders: Ensure coherence, monitor progress, and escalate when stalled.
- District leadership: Approve entry/exit confirmation; allocate resources; intensify or recalibrate supports.
- Escalation path: Classroom → School → Region → District, based on persistence and severity.

How Progress Will Be Monitored

Progress is monitored through intensified review cycles focused on trajectory of improvement, not immediate status change.

Cadence & evidence

- Monthly: Instructional reviews (walkthroughs, planning artifacts, student work, coaching logs).
- Quarterly: Outcome reviews (growth trends, subgroup analyses).
- Attendance: Ongoing monitoring of trends and intervention follow-through.

Student-group measures & triggers

- Measures: Growth trends; standards-aligned progress monitoring; access-to-rigor indicators; attendance for ML/EL, students with disabilities, and lowest-performing students.
- Triggers: Two consecutive cycles of stalled growth, reduced access to grade-level tasks, or widening subgroup gaps.
- Response: Immediate recalibration of support (coaching intensity, instructional adjustments, resource reallocation).

Post-Exit Glide Path (Sustainability)

For 12-18 months after exit, schools receive lighter-touch supports to prevent backsliding:

- Quarterly check-ins on Tier I fidelity and outcomes.
- Access to coaching on demand.
- Re-entry criteria defined if indicators regress.

Closing Standard

Success under this pillar will be measured by evidence that chronically low-performing schools and students experience stronger instructional conditions, accelerated learning, and closing gaps in access and outcomes over time through turnaround efforts that are focused, equitable, and sustainable. Specifically, success means: rising literacy rates and academic growth among students in iZone schools, directly advancing Board Priority 1; improved teacher and leader retention and instructional effectiveness in the highest-need schools, directly advancing Board Priority 2; and expanded student access to rigorous coursework, credentials, and postsecondary pathways from within turnaround schools, directly advancing Board Priority 3. A district that improves its averages while leaving its lowest-performing schools and students behind has not fulfilled its Board priorities. This pillar exists to ensure that does not happen.



Glossary

- **Academic Vision:** The district's articulated description of the desired future state for teaching, learning, and student outcomes, defining the learning experience MSCS commits to delivering for every student.
- **Acceleration:** Instructional approaches that ensure students engage in grade-level standards while strategically addressing unfinished learning, without replacing grade-level instruction with below-level work.
- **Accountability:** The district's structured expectations, monitoring processes, and required responses used to ensure actions result in improved instructional quality and student outcomes.
- **ACT:** A nationally recognized college-readiness assessment used as an indicator of postsecondary preparedness.
- **Assessment System:** The coordinated set of formative, benchmark, and summative assessments aligned to Tennessee Academic Standards and instructional priorities.
- **Belonging:** A student's sense of inclusion, connection, and academic safety that supports engagement and persistence in rigorous learning environments.
- **Benchmark Assessment:** A standards-aligned assessment administered periodically to measure progress toward grade-level expectations and inform instructional adjustments.
- **Common Formative Assessment (CFA):** is a type of formative assessment that is administered to all students across different classrooms or sections, with the goal of monitoring student learning in real time and guiding instruction.
- **CGCS (Council of the Great City Schools):** A national organization supporting improvement in large urban school districts through research, frameworks, and best practices.
- **Chronically Low-Performing Schools:** Schools demonstrate persistent academic underperformance that requires sustained, intensive district support to stabilize and improve instructional conditions.
- **Coherence:** The alignment of standards, curriculum, instruction, professional learning, leadership actions, and accountability around shared instructional expectations.
- **Cognitive Demand:** The level of thinking required by a task, including reasoning, analysis, synthesis, and problem-solving, rather than recall or procedural completion alone.
- **CompStat:** A structured, recurring performance review process that uses evidence to diagnose implementation gaps, monitor progress, and trigger system response.
- **Corrective Action:** Required district or school actions taken when monitoring reveals instructional drift, lack of fidelity, or stalled progress.

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- **Curriculum:** The district-adopted sequence of standards-aligned content, materials, tasks, and guidance that defines what is taught at each grade or course level.
 - **Curriculum Fidelity:** Implementation of district-adopted curriculum as designed, preserving rigor, sequence, and instructional intent.
 - **Data Narrative:** An evidence-based synthesis of performance patterns used to identify root causes, justify priorities, and inform system design.
 - **Differentiation:** Instructional adjustments in support, pacing, or representations that increase access to grade-level learning while maintaining standards-based rigor.
 - **Disaggregated Data:** Student performance data analyzed by subgroups to identify disparities in access, opportunity, and outcomes.
 - **Early Warning Indicators:** High-leverage indicators (e.g., attendance, behavior, course performance) used to identify instructional or student risk early and prompt timely response.
 - **ELA (English Language Arts):** Instruction focused on reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language development.
 - **EL / ML (English Learner / Multilingual Learner):** A student developing English proficiency while engaging in academic content.
 - **Equity:** The commitment to allocating resources, support, and instructional conditions based on student need so all students can meet rigorous expectations.
 - **Evidence Cycles:** Recurring processes for collecting, analyzing, and acting on instructional and student-learning evidence.
 - **Fidelity Monitoring:** The systematic examination of whether instructional practices, curriculum, and supports are implemented as intended.
 - **Formative Assessment:** Ongoing checks for understanding used during instruction to adjust teaching in real time.
 - **Grade-Level Instruction:** Instruction aligned to the Tennessee Academic Standards for the student's enrolled grade or course.
 - **Grade-Level Work:** Tasks, texts, and learning experiences that reflect the full rigor and intent of grade-level standards.
 - **High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM):** Standards-aligned, content-rich curriculum resources designed to support rigorous instruction when used with fidelity.
 - **Implementation Fidelity:** The degree to which strategies, materials, and practices are enacted as designed to produce intended outcomes.

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- **Instructional Access:** Students' consistent opportunity to engage in grade-level standards through instruction that preserves rigor.
 - **Instructional Conditions:** The structures, practices, expectations, and supports that determine the quality of teaching and learning.
 - **Instructional Coherence:** The consistency with which instructional expectations are reinforced across classrooms, schools, and system levels.
 - **Instructional Core:** The relationship between student learning, teacher practice, and academic content.
 - **Instructional Core + Leadership:** The instructional core activated and sustained through effective instructional leadership actions.
 - **Instructional Drift:** A gradual deviation from agreed-upon instructional expectations, including reduced rigor or inconsistent curriculum use.
 - **Instructional Leadership:** Leadership practices that prioritize teaching and learning by shaping expectations, monitoring instruction, and supporting improvement.
 - **Instructional Look-Fors:** Observable indicators used during walkthroughs to assess alignment to instructional expectations.
 - **Instructional Spine:** The district's organizing framework that aligns standards, curriculum, professional learning, leadership supervision, and accountability around Tier 1 instruction.
 - **Instructional Supervision:** Leadership actions focused on observing instruction, providing feedback, and strengthening instructional practice.
 - **Intervention (Tier 2 / Tier 3):** Targeted supports provided in addition to Tier 1 instruction to address specific learning needs.
 - **Job-Embedded Professional Learning:** Professional learning embedded in daily instructional work, including planning, coaching, modeling, and feedback.
 - **Leadership Development Week (LDW):** A district-defined professional learning experience designed to strengthen instructional leadership capacity.
 - **Leadership Labs:** Structured learning environments where leaders observe, analyze, and practice instructional leadership using real evidence.
 - **Leading Indicators:** Early measures that predict future performance and signal whether strategies are on track.
 - **Lagging Indicators:** Outcome measures that reflect results after instruction has occurred.
 - **Lesson Internalization:** The process by which educators deeply understand lesson goals, standards, task rigor, and success criteria prior to instruction.

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- **Monitoring:** A disciplined, recurring process for reviewing evidence to determine fidelity, progress, and required system response.
 - **MSCS (Memphis-Shelby County Schools):** The public school district serving Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee.
 - **NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress):** A national assessment providing comparative data on student achievement trends.
 - **Opportunity Gaps:** Differences in access to rigorous instruction, resources, and support that contribute to outcome disparities.
 - **Performance Targets:** Defined benchmarks used to assess progress toward instructional and student-outcome goals.
 - **Pillar:** One of seven CGCS-aligned system conditions required for districtwide improvement at scale.
 - **PLC (Professional Learning Community):** A structured team process focused on planning, student evidence, and instructional improvement.
 - **Priority Schools:** Schools identified for intensified academic support based on performance patterns and instructional conditions.
 - **Professional Learning:** The district's system for building educator knowledge and skill through aligned training, coaching, and practice.
 - **Progress Monitoring:** Frequent checks of implementation and student learning used to guide instructional and system adjustments.
 - **Remediation:** Instruction focused on below-grade skills; in MSCS, remediation does not replace access to grade-level instruction.
 - **Rigor:** The degree to which instruction and tasks reflect appropriate cognitive demand and disciplinary thinking aligned to standards.
 - **RTI² (Response to Instruction and Intervention):** Tennessee's framework for delivering tiered academic and behavioral supports.
 - **Scaffolding:** Temporary supports that increase access to grade-level learning without lowering rigor.
 - **Standards-Aligned Instruction:** Instruction in which tasks, materials, and assessments reflect the intent and rigor of standards.
 - **Student Engagement:** Active cognitive, behavioral, and emotional participation in rigorous learning tasks.
 - **Student Work Evidence:** Artifacts demonstrating student understanding, reasoning, and mastery of standards.

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- **Students Furthest from Opportunity:** Student groups historically experiencing systemic barriers to academic success.
 - **Subgroup:** A defined student group used for equity analysis and targeted support.
 - **Summative Assessment:** An assessment administered after instruction to evaluate mastery of standards.
 - **System Response:** Required district or school actions triggered when monitoring reveals risk, misalignment, or stalled progress.
 - **Targeted Support:** Strategic actions designed to address identified gaps while maintaining grade-level instruction.
 - **TCAP (Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program):** Tennessee's statewide assessment system aligned to state standards.
 - **Tennessee Academic Standards:** State-adopted learning expectations define what students should know and be able to do by grade or course.
 - **Theory of Action:** A cause-and-effect statement describing how district strategies will lead to improved student outcomes.
 - **Tier 1 Instruction:** Grade-level, standards-aligned core instruction provided to all students as the primary lever for equity and achievement.
 - **TNTP (The New Teacher Project):** A national organization providing research and tools focused on teaching quality and system improvement.
 - **Unfinished Learning:** Skills or concepts students have not yet mastered that must be addressed while maintaining grade-level instruction.
 - **Walkthrough:** A short, frequent classroom observation focused on priority instructional look-fors and student evidence.



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