

ALBEMARLE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

PRE K-12 LITERACY IN ACPS

“WE BELIEVE
LITERACY
IS A **HUMAN**
RIGHT.”

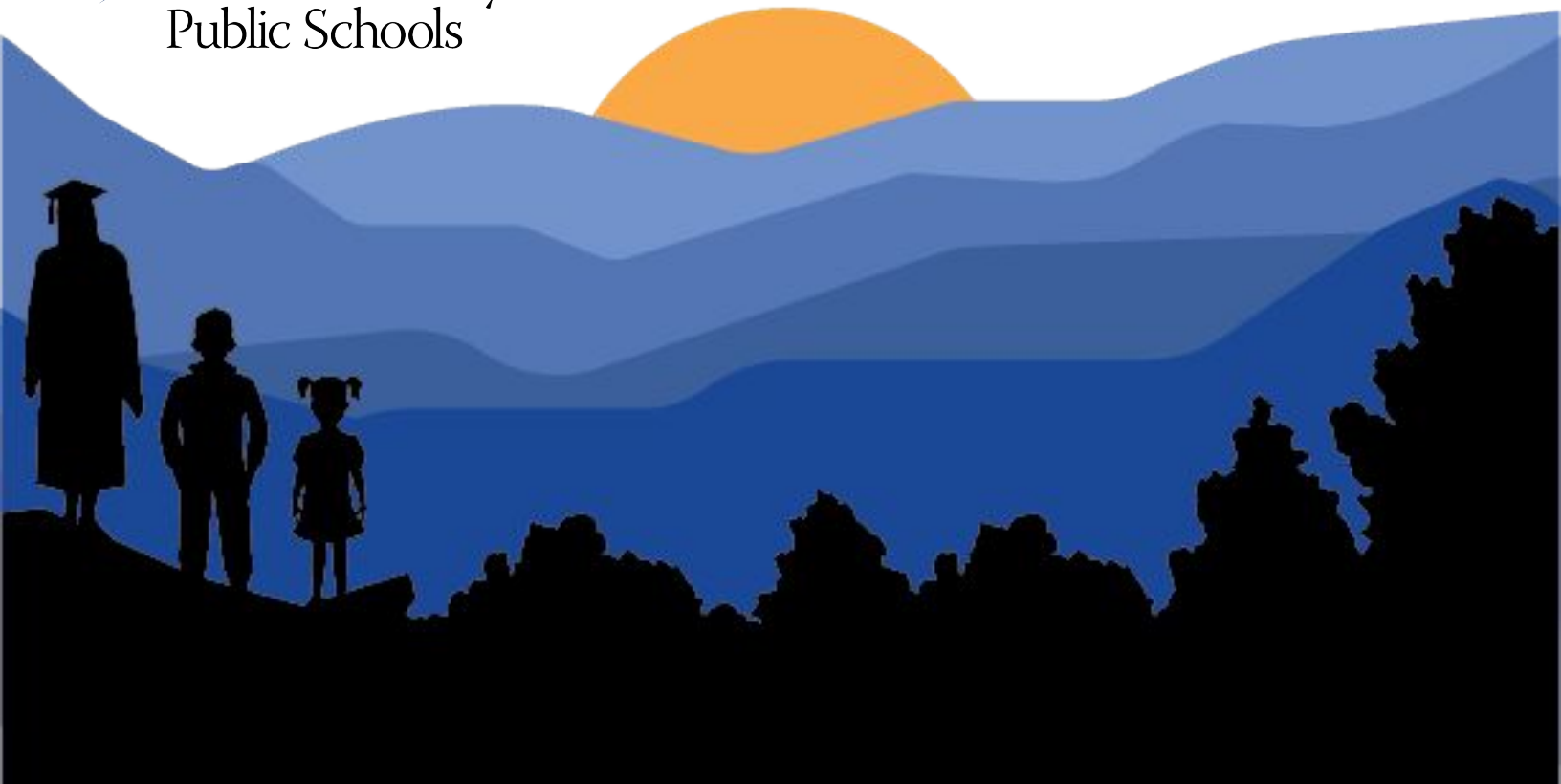
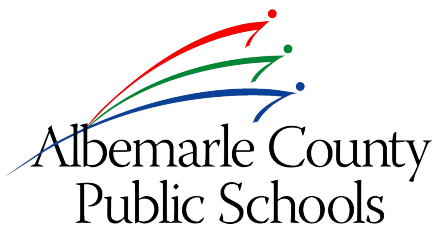


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ACPS LITERACY BELIEF STATEMENT

“WE BELIEVE
LITERACY
IS A **HUMAN**
RIGHT.”

We believe literacy development is strengthened through partnerships between schools, families, and communities.

We believe reading instruction includes explicit, systematic teaching of both word recognition and language comprehension.

We believe integrating reading, writing, research, communication, critical thinking, and collaboration in literacy instruction deepens student learning.

We believe literacy is the act of constructing meaning from text. Literacy instruction is the responsibility of every educator across all content areas and all grade levels.

We believe the ultimate goal of literacy is to ensure that every student becomes an independent reader, writer, and communicator, and is able to explore and fully participate in a global society.

We believe that every student is entitled to receive evidence-based literacy instruction, opportunities, and resources.

INTRODUCTION

Our goal in creating the Division Literacy Document is to sharpen our methods of improving student growth and achievement in literacy. This document aligns with the vision, mission, values, and goals of the ACPS Strategic Plan, our *Framework for Quality Learning*, and the Science of Reading.

VISION

Our learners are engaged in authentic, challenging and relevant learning experiences, becoming lifelong contributors and leaders in our dynamic society.

MISSION

Working together as a team, we will end the predictive value of race, class, gender, and special capacities for our children's success through high-quality teaching and learning for all. We seek to build relationships with families and communities to ensure that every student succeeds.

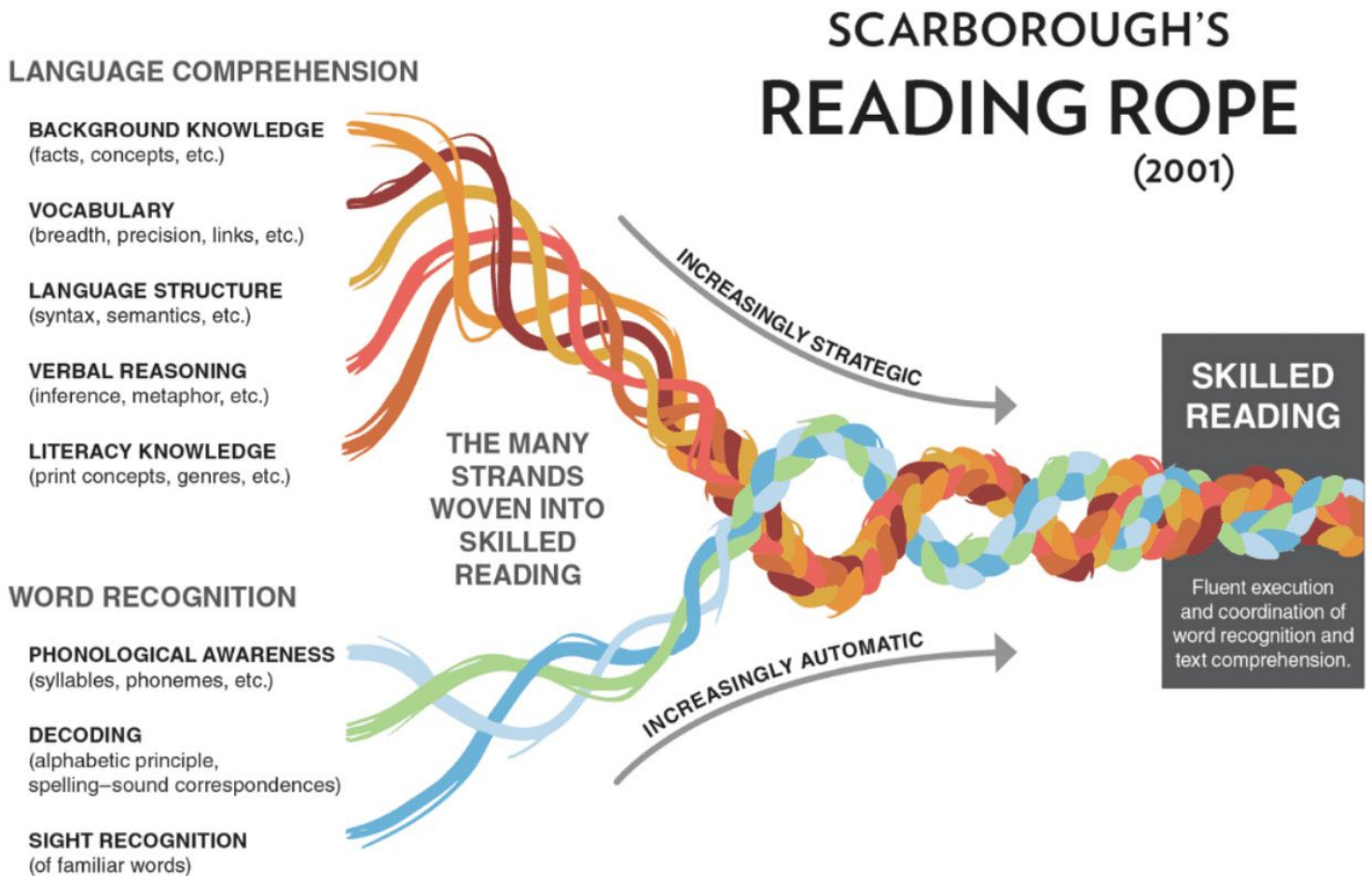
High-quality instruction for all students drives our mission. The dual values of excellence and equity demand that we take action to mitigate barriers and provide opportunities for every student to be academically successful. We provide every student with the level of support necessary to thrive.

The [Framework for Quality Learning \(FQL\)](#) articulates how our values of excellence and equity manifest in our teaching. This research-based framework anchors our instructional decisions by insisting students engage in high-quality teaching by design, not by chance. By deliberately and systematically designing learning experiences that “*teach up*,” we provide everyone the same opportunity to access important ideas and higher-level thinking and signal high expectations for all learners. We provide appropriately challenging learning experiences for all students, committing to high-quality teaching that works for everyone in the classroom.

Literacy instruction is shifting to align with current cognitive research. The research that supports these shifts is known as The Science of Reading. **The Science of Reading is an expansive body of scientific research that tells us how the brain learns to read and write.** This research draws on thousands of studies conducted around the world across multiple disciplines — and in multiple languages — over the last 50 years. What this body of research tells us is 1) how skilled reading and writing develop, 2) what skills are involved and how these skills work together, 3) why some students have difficulty, and 4) how we can most effectively assess and teach students at all stages of reading and writing development.

INTRODUCTION

Scarborough's Reading Rope is a common visual that represents the components that come together to create skilled reading (Hollis Scarborough, 2001). **Each strand of the Reading Rope is important and requires explicit exposure, instruction, and practice in the classroom.**



The Virginia Department of Education states, “Students benefit from explicit and systematic instruction in all areas of literacy including phonological and *phonemic awareness*, *phonics*, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing. The 2024 English Standards of Learning lay the groundwork for teachers to use an evidence-based approach that starts with a strong foundation, develops a rigorous progression, and creates an intentional focus on applying skills to rigorous texts and learning experiences that will create a clear roadmap for all of Virginia’s students to achieve college, career, and military readiness by the end of their high school careers.”

INTRODUCTION

With the recent passing of the Virginia Literacy Act and the 2024 English Standards of Learning, we have purposefully reviewed curricular resources, *instructional frameworks*, *pacing guides*, and assessments. **This Literacy Document must be actionable to move literacy education forward in Albemarle County.** We are committed to supporting our teachers and families as we work together to ensure that all students succeed as confident readers, writers, researchers, and communicators.

This Literacy Document provides an overview of the main components of literacy education in Albemarle County Public Schools: Literacy in Pre-Kindergarten Classrooms, Literacy in Elementary Classrooms, Literacy in Secondary Classrooms, Supporting Success for All, Professional Learning, and Family and Community Engagement. Each of these components is unique but does not exist in isolation. Rather, **these components are deeply interrelated and must work in tandem to ensure an effective literacy program** across all of our schools.



PRESCHOOL LITERACY

Albemarle County Public Schools preschool programs are designed to serve the most at-risk four-year-olds in our community through a grant partnership between ACPS and the VDOE-Virginia Preschool Initiative, as well as the Special Education program.

Within this preschool environment, effective early literacy instruction is designed to provide children with developmentally appropriate settings, materials, experiences, and the social/emotional support that encourages early forms of reading, writing, speaking, and listening to develop as a step towards conventional literacy.

The preschool literacy program is grounded in science-based reading research while remaining focused on student engagement and *differentiation* through the use of thoughtful, evidence-based instructional practices.

All preschool classrooms use a VDOE and ACPS School Board vetted and approved literacy resource known as Teaching Strategies: The Creative Curriculum for Preschool as our core program to help guide, support, and assess our literacy instruction. This student-centered, curiosity about the world we live in, hands-on, integrated content-focused program allows children to engage deeply in the investigation of a variety of topics young children encounter in their everyday lives.

Teachers work daily to develop valuable dispositions of early literacy through their thoughtful and intentional design of instruction. This instruction is aligned with the Virginia Department of Education ELDS (Early Learning Developmental Standards). If you visit any ACPS preschool classroom, you will see daily activities that work to cultivate the following dispositions in our youngest learners:

- Desire to be read to
- Willingness to listen to stories
- Enjoyment of songs, poems, rhymes, books, and use of dramatic play
- Exploration of print forms
- Exploration of spoken language and oral communication skills
- Curiosity about words, letters, and how they work together
- Playfulness with words
- Creativity with writing

PRESCHOOL LITERACY

The table below demonstrates the types of learning activities all ACPS preschool students engage in daily and how these activities support and develop the 5 Essential Components of Effective Literacy as outlined in the Science of Reading research.

Essential Early Learning PreK Teaching Strategies	Science of Reading: 5 Essential Components of Effective Literacy Instruction
Rich Teacher Talk	Vocabulary Development
Storybook Read Alouds	Comprehension Development
Phonological Awareness Activities	Phonemic Awareness Development
Alphabet Activities	Phonics Development
Shared Book Experiences	Comprehension & Vocabulary Development
Integrated, Content-Focused Activities	Comprehension & Vocabulary Development
Emergent Writers Activities	Phonics & Comprehension Development
Emergent Reading Activities	Fluency Development

To better understand a child's literacy learning experience, you can learn more about each of the 8 strategies that are routinely used in our classrooms by clicking on the hyperlink or turning to page 16.

While the research shows that each of these activities is critical to developing early literacy acquisition, we know that what is most important to young children is making it accessible and fun. Therefore, preschool teachers are experts at making learning look like play. The general benefits of play for children's literacy development are well documented, showing that a literacy-enriched play environment exposes children to valuable print experiences and helps them practice narrative skills (Christie & Roskos 2003.)

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PRESCHOOL LITERACY

Literacy Assessments in Preschool:

Research provides evidence that specific early literacy concepts can predict young students' later reading achievement (DeBruinParecki, 2004). These reading concepts include letter knowledge, *phonemic awareness*, *decoding*, oral language *fluency*, and comprehension. An effective reading program includes assessments of all of these concepts for several purposes.

All PreK students are screened using the state-approved Literacy Screener. With the information from the screener, as well as the reliance on the students' families as collaborative partners, teachers make informed decisions about instruction to meet the individual needs of their students. Informal assessments continue throughout the year.

Consistent formative assessment, maintained through observational notes, allows the teacher to make informed decisions about what instruction is appropriate for each child and adjust his/her instruction accordingly to meet individual needs. Each family, prior to the completion of the PreK school year, meets with his/her teacher to review the student's comprehensive progress to determine kindergarten readiness in the area of literacy development.



ELEMENTARY LITERACY

ACPS is committed to ensuring our K-5 students receive core literacy instruction grounded in scientific research and evidence-based practices. By providing teachers with high-quality instructional materials aligned with state standards, we ensure that all students are engaged in active and intentional work that reflects grade-level expectations.

HMH Into Reading, Virginia is our K-5 *guaranteed viable curriculum*. It serves as the foundation for language arts instruction and follows a progression that reflects how students gain new skills. The goal of reading is to understand what has been read. In service of this goal, students in elementary classrooms continuously work on both *word recognition* and *language comprehension* skills. This helps build and refine their ability to extract meaning from various types of text. At every grade level, HMH literacy modules are grounded in science and social studies topics that allow students to synthesize and apply their literacy skills and learning across subject areas.

All ACPS students, regardless of grade or current reading ability, are exposed to engaging, inclusive, and authentic literature every day as part of the language arts block. Teachers use classroom data and their knowledge of best practices to plan responsive, systematic reading instruction for students, embedding appropriate *scaffolds* while ensuring rigorous, standards-aligned instruction for all.

KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 2

Literacy instruction in early elementary classrooms lays the foundation for students to become successful readers, writers, and communicators. In our K-2 classrooms, there is an emphasis on *decoding* instruction. Teachers provide *explicit instruction* in *phonological awareness* and *phonics* as students learn to decode (read) and encode (spell) regular and irregular words. Students refine their *decoding* skills by working with the sounds that make up words and learning which written letters or letter combinations produce these sounds.

This systematic *phonics* instruction follows a *scope and sequence* that helps students build automatic *word recognition* and *fluency*. At this level, students read, but are not limited to, *decodable text* that allows them to practice the *phonics* patterns (letter-sound relationships) that have been taught. *Phonics* knowledge is further reinforced through daily spelling and writing instruction that allows students to practice and grow their abilities as writers as they move through the writing process.

K-2 students engage in daily shared reading experiences of high-quality texts to develop *background knowledge*, content expertise, and an expanded vocabulary, which are critical components of *reading comprehension*. Students have opportunities to question, share, and reflect with others as they build oral language, reading, and writing skills.

ELEMENTARY LITERACY

GRADE 3 THROUGH GRADE 5

In our upper elementary classrooms, literacy instruction is also aligned with evidence-based practices in a comprehensive literacy framework consisting of both word knowledge and *language comprehension*.

Teaching focuses on *decoding*, *fluency*, vocabulary, comprehension, knowledge building, and writing. Advanced *phonics* emphasizes word analysis through the study of prefixes, suffixes, and roots. Students learn to generate the meaning of new words based on what they already know about other words and word parts. The components of *language comprehension* are taught through systematic instruction that provides reading experiences across a variety of genres and text structures. These experiences engage students in conversations and written responses that develop vocabulary, promote critical thinking, and deepen *background knowledge* regardless of prior experiences.

Teachers explicitly teach *encoding*, grammar, mechanics, and the writing process in addition to regularly conferencing with students to provide targeted feedback about their reading and writing.

ACPS elementary educators design learning experiences with one goal in mind: to ensure that ALL students can read, write, think, and communicate with grade-level competency.



SECONDARY LITERACY

At the secondary level, students continue to refine *decoding* and *fluency* and demonstrate an expanded depth of literary concepts. Students engage with texts across multiple content areas with increasing knowledge of specialized terms. As indicated by the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL), secondary students continue to approach literacy in a systematic, comprehensive framework that encompasses skills surrounding reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Students continue to build upon word analysis skills developed in the upper elementary grades, expand vocabulary, and read and write in a variety of formats for different audiences and purposes.

ACPS structures common pacing and quarterly assessments to align with instruction across the division. These common reference points allow teachers to participate in professional dialogue and examine data at the school and division levels to learn from each other's practice. As teachers instruct on the Virginia English SOL, their instruction is also structured around the [Framework of Quality Learning \(FQL\)](#) that connects with large concepts in the form of Unit *Essential Questions* and *Enduring Understandings*. This practice of panning out to a larger conceptual question in both reading and writing engages student curiosity and fosters a mindset of lifelong learning.

Secondary teachers prepare students in grades 6 through 12 for a broad range of reading designed to develop multiple literacies. Literacy has expanded meaning and impact for today's students and future citizens. Literacy is the ability to construct meaning across multiple landscapes from financial literacy to digital and media literacy.

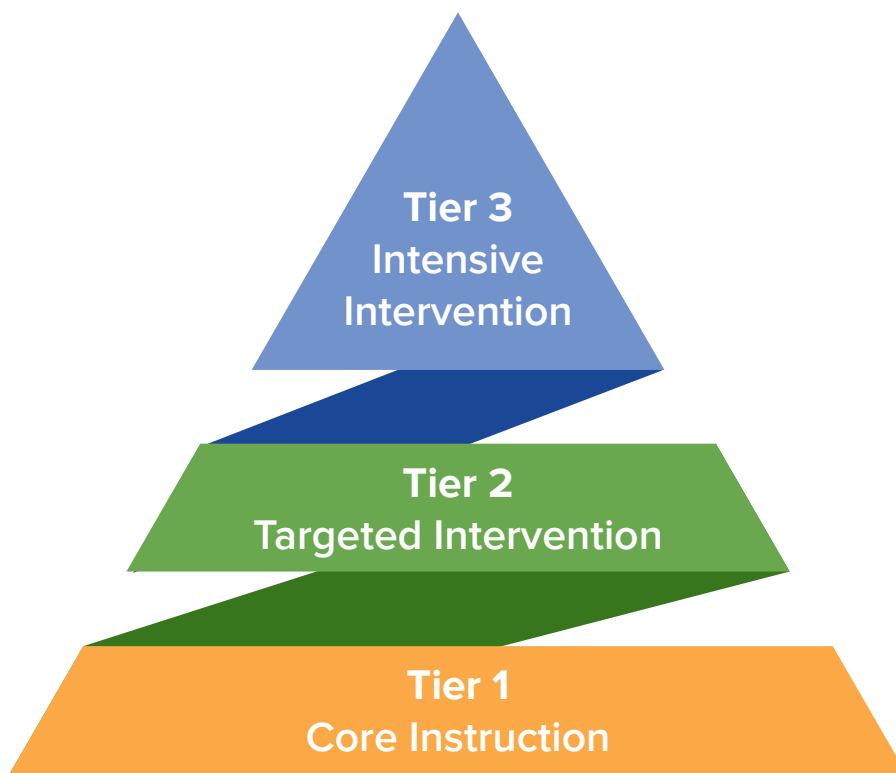
Understanding this reality, instruction is designed with explicit teaching and modeling of a variety of strategies that students can use to self-monitor comprehension and critically question elements of perspective and bias. Instruction also integrates the writing process including revision and a feedback cycle that guides students on how to use details, develop arguments, and ensure audience understanding.

Our secondary literacy program develops critical thinking skills needed to read and research complex information and communicate with clarity and accuracy for different purposes. Centering student voice and identity, ACPS emphasizes reading and writing that is inclusive and culturally responsive to the wide array of students served in our community. We seek for students to experience literature serving as a window into another culture or a reflection of one's own identity (Rudine Sims Bishop, 2016). These components are the levers fulfilling the mission of creating competent readers and communicators who meaningfully engage in a global society.

SUPPORTING SUCCESS FOR ALL LEARNERS

PURPOSE STATEMENT

Monitor the progress of all students using data to drive intentional and collaborative literacy instruction to meet the needs of all learners.



Multi Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is a systemic approach:

- **Tier I:** All students will be part of strong core instruction.
- **Tier II:** Even with strong core instruction, some students will need targeted support to be successful.
- **Tier III:** Even with strong core instruction and targeted support, a few students will need intensive support to be successful.

SUPPORTING SUCCESS FOR ALL LEARNERS

What does this look like at the Division Level, School Level, and Student Level?

DIVISION LEVEL

Coordinate and oversee literacy screening for all Pre-K through 5 students and 6 through 12 students who do not demonstrate proficiency based on Standards of Learning (SOL) Assessments.

Use a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) to inform administrators and school-based intervention teams to standardize practices of interventions, special education decisions, and scheduling priorities in each school.

Provide high-quality professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices that align with evidence-based literacy instruction and improved student outcomes.

Provide an Assessment list that clarifies expectations around different types of assessment, their purpose, and how data should be used and interpreted by staff and caregivers.

Use data and staffing to guide schools on how to provide interventions for students to become proficient readers, writers, and learners.

Facilitate meetings across the division to monitor for consistency, use of approved evidence-based resources, and ensure additional support is provided and communicated.

Provide time for English Learner teachers, SPED teachers, classroom teachers, and interventionists to collaborate.

SCHOOL LEVEL

Use job-embedded professional development strategies to ensure interventionists and teachers are best prepared to offer instruction using approved evidence-based materials to students most in need.

School data teams use all available data to determine the school-wide literacy components that need extra support. Components include *phonemic awareness*, *phonics*, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing.

Use progress monitoring for students receiving additional support and instruction.

Administrators and teachers use classroom observations and walkthroughs to monitor instruction.

Use data protocols to recognize and celebrate individual student growth and determine future learning goals by providing *scaffolds*, supports, extensions, and choices for learners.

STUDENT LEVEL (PK-5)

Elementary students receive core high-quality literacy instruction each day. Data is used to inform students in need of extra support. These students receive additional literacy support each week.

School-based intervention meetings are held with caregivers of students most significantly at risk for literacy achievement or who are not making adequate growth to strengthen the student reading plan.

Reading specialists and interventionists complete written reports and share the reports and progress with families.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

PURPOSE STATEMENT

Provide high-quality professional learning that results in shifts in teacher practices that align with evidence-based literacy instruction and improved student outcomes.

- Align professional learning experiences to ACPS literacy belief statements.
- Provide all educators (school administrators, specialists, reading specialists, instructional coaches, special education teachers, English Learner teachers, etc.) professional learning experiences to support the implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction.
- Ensure professional learning supports evidence-based literacy instruction and aligns with best practice as identified in Learning Forward's [Professional Learning Standards](#) (2023).
- Develop a balance of professional learning experiences:
 - Solicit feedback in a variety of ways.
 - Use data to inform professional learning opportunities.
 - Include a variety of opportunities for teachers and staff to engage in professional learning to support evidence-based literacy instruction. Examples may include but are not limited to asynchronous, synchronous, in-person sessions, workshops, coaching, school-based, division-based, etc.
 - Learning experiences incorporate opportunities to engage in a learning cycle.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PURPOSE STATEMENT

Engage all families and our community to value and participate in the literacy development of all ACPS students.



“Establishing connections with families and local communities can help enhance understanding of students’ cultural experiences and facilitate shared understandings about learning. Family involvement facilitates student learning, so creating opportunities for family and community involvement in the work of the classroom is vital.” (APA, 2015, p.21)

How We Work Together to Support Literacy Goals

- Partner with families to enhance and support classroom learning.
- Offer opportunities at school for family activities to celebrate literacy.
- Cultivate partnerships between the school division and community organizations to support literacy goals outside of school.
- Connect students and families with community resources and local organizations to support literacy goals at school.

How We Share and Use Literacy Data

- Help all families understand what literacy data (universal screeners, progress reports, testing information, report cards, etc.) means for their child, their goals, and how to support them.
- Share school-level and division-wide literacy data with the broader community to promote accountability within the division towards achieving literacy goals.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Background Knowledge: Knowing that stems from previous experience; the knowledge someone already possesses prior to reading a text. (*International Literacy Association, 2024*)

Decodable Text: A story or book that is controlled based on the phonics taught up to that point in the scope and sequence, with an emphasis on the target skill for that instructional cycle. (e.g. week of instruction) (*Blevins, 2021, p.6*)

Decoding: Action that happens while reading. Decoding is breaking down written words into their component sounds and blending these sounds together to form spoken words.

Differentiation: Instruction designed to be specific for individuals or groups of learners to enhance the learning of skills, concepts, and strategies. Modifying the content, the style of teaching, and the product signifies that a customized experience that grew out of a student's specific learning needs has occurred. (*International Literacy Association, 2021*)

Encoding: Action that happens while writing or spelling. Encoding is breaking down a spoken word into its individual sounds and assigning those sounds to letters to be able to write or spell that word.

Enduring Understandings: Key concepts, principles, or ideas that students should grasp and retain over time. These understandings are designed to be long-lasting and transferable, meaning they can be applied across different contexts and situations.

Essential Questions: A question that lies at the heart of a subject or a curriculum ... and promotes inquiry and uncoverage of a subject. Essential questions do not yield a single straightforward answer, but produce different plausible responses, about which thoughtful and knowledgeable people may disagree. (*Wiggins & McTighe, 2005*)

Evidence-based Literacy Instruction (EBLI): Classroom practices that are based on clear and convincing evidence from well-designed research and data analysis. (*Reading Rockets*)

Explicit instruction: Instruction that does not leave anything to chance and does not make assumptions about skills and knowledge that children acquire on their own. (*Torgesen, 2004*)

Fluency: The ability to act (speak, read, write) with ease and accuracy. Research indicates that oral reading fluency is the ability to read text accurately, with sufficient speed, prosody, and expression. It is an essential component of reading because it permits the reader to focus on constructing meaning from the text rather than on decoding words. (*International Literacy Association, 2024*)

Guaranteed Viable Curriculum: Guaranteed: All students will be taught the same skills and concepts regardless of the teacher to whom they have been assigned; **Viable:** The curriculum can be taught in the amount of time a teacher has to teach.

Instructional Frameworks: Structures tied to Virginia Standards of Learning that guide educators in designing, delivering, and assessing instruction. These frameworks provide a systematic way of organizing instructional practices, strategies, and resources to enhance teaching and learning effectiveness.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Language Comprehension: Language comprehension is the ability to understand the different elements of spoken or written language, like the meaning of words and how words are put together to form sentences. Language comprehension is one of the building blocks of reading comprehension. *(NWEA, 2024)*

Pacing Guides: Instructional planning tools used by educators to outline the sequence and timing of instruction over the course of the school year. These guides provide a roadmap for teachers to ensure that they cover the required curriculum content within the allotted time frame.

Phonics: The study of the relationships between letters and the sounds they represent; also used to describe reading instruction that teaches sound-symbol correspondences as “the phonics approach.” *(Moates, 2020)*

Phonemic Awareness: An awareness of individual sounds/phonemes in spoken words. It represents the most precise subcategory of phonological awareness. Because letters are designed to represent spoken phonemes, phonemic awareness is the type of phonological awareness that is essential for reading. *(Kilpatrick, 2015, p. 363)*

Phonological Awareness: Having an awareness of the speech sounds in spoken words. The ability to recognize and manipulate these speech sounds. Examples include rhyming words or clapping syllables.

Reading Comprehension: Reading comprehension is the ability to read text, process it and understand its meaning. It relies on two, interconnected abilities: word reading (being able to decode the symbols on the page) and language comprehension (being able to understand the meaning of the words and sentences). *(Zimmerman and Hutchins, 2003)*

Reading Comprehension Strategies: Intentional actions taken by readers to enhance comprehension, particularly when reading a difficult text. Some popular strategies include visualizing, self-questioning, monitoring, summarizing, and using text structure. *(International Literacy Association, 2024)*

Scaffolds/Scaffolded Reading: Reading a text with the guidance or support of a teacher. The provision and gradual withdrawal of teaching support through modeling, questioning, feedback, and so forth for a student's learning growth across successive attempts, thus transferring more and more responsibility to the student. *(International Literacy Association, 2024)*

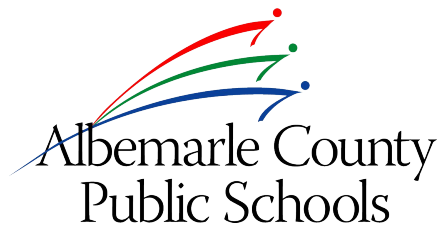
Scope and Sequence: Structure of a curriculum that includes the skills, strategies, content, and the order in which it will be taught. *(International Literacy Association, 2024)*

Teaching Up: An instructional approach for providing students with equitable access to challenging learning opportunities, along with the scaffolding they need to be successful. *(Tomlinson)*

Word Recognition: The act of seeing a word and recognizing its pronunciation immediately and without any conscious effort.

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PRE K-12 LITERACY in ACPS

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