Houston County Schools

Foundational Literacy Skills Plan

Previous Update: May 19, 2025

Approved: May 18, 2026

This Foundational Literacy Skills Plan has been approved by the Tennessee Department of Education and meets the requirements of the *Tennessee Literacy Success Act.* All portions of the Foundational Literacy Skills plan were submitted to the department and approved. To view the supplemental artifacts, please contact the district directly.

Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades K-2

Houston County School District uses a foundational skills curriculum, Amplify, focused on a sounds-first approach grounded in reading science and aligned to Tennessee ELA standards. This approved curriculum uses foundational skills as the primary form of instruction and has a designated block of time (60 minutes daily) for foundational skills instruction in grades K-2. This instructional time includes activities that build phonological awareness, phonics practice, and fluency practice in addition to comprehension and vocabulary work ("word work"). During that instruction, teachers explicitly teach a sound, the students practice the sound aloud (learning how to produce pure sound), the teacher models writing the sound, the students refer to their individual code chart on which they write the sound, and then students apply the skill in independent practice (small group or individual).

Our improvements for next year are grounded in a non-negotiable designated time for teachers and district/school administrators to participate in shared learning and cycles of improvement which include unit and lesson preparation, student work analysis, and the monitor/reflect/determine focus phase. The district will utilize the TN Foundational Skills IPG during class walkthroughs in order to collect data and determine trends that need to be addressed as our focus area for each cycle.

Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades 3-5

Our district has an integrated literacy block for grades three (3) through five (5) grounded in the science of reading research as well as the research of Wiley Blevins and is aligned to Tennessee ELA standards. Our adopted curriculum materials, Benchmark Advance, was selected from those approved by the state Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission. During the integrated ELA block that meets an evidence-based approach to applying foundational skills within daily lessons, our students receive a total of 110 minutes of ELA instruction. Although the daily schedule is not the same each day, all daily instruction includes components for knowledge-building (to build and improve the ability to comprehend complex texts and apply that knowledge as they listen, read, write, think, and speak) for about 70 minutes per day and foundational skills instruction that includes fluency, grammar, morphology, spelling, and writing for at least 40 minutes per day.

Our adopted curriculum also engages students in work around fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills are not taught in isolation, but are embedded within the lesson to ensure continuity, cohesion, and connection.

As indicated in the previous section, our improvements for next year are grounded in a non-negotiable designated time for teachers and district/school administrators to participate in shared learning and cycles of improvement which include; unit and lesson preparation, student work analysis, and the monitor/reflect/determine focus phase. The district will utilize the TN Foundational Skills IPG during class walkthroughs in order to collect data and determine trends that need to be addressed as our focus area for each cycle.

Additional Supports

For the 2026–2027 school year, the district is strengthening systems of support for teachers and students through a more intentional and collaborative approach to instructional planning and continuous improvement. In partnership with our CORE support team, the district is refining clear expectations, protocols, and structures for collaborative planning and lesson preparation that will be implemented at the start of the school year. These structures are designed to strengthen instructional consistency, improve the quality of Tier I instruction, and ensure teachers have dedicated opportunities to analyze student learning and plan targeted supports.

In addition, the district has revised the 2026–2027 school calendar to include embedded PLC days throughout the year. These designated collaboration days will provide teachers and school leaders with protected time to engage in unit and lesson preparation, student work analysis, data review, and shared problem-solving focused on improving student outcomes.

To further support instructional growth, the district will conduct ongoing literacy learning walks using the Tennessee Foundational Skills Instructional Practice Guide (IPG). These classroom visits will be purposeful and data-driven, allowing district and school leaders to identify instructional trends, celebrate effective practices, and provide timely coaching and support aligned to teacher and student needs.

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades K-2
Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades 3-5
Benchmark Advance

Supplemental Instructional Materials
Our district has adopted an approved curriculum for ELA instruction, however; we have chosen to supplement it in several ways. Our district will use the Tennessee Foundational Skills Curriculum Supplement to further address foundational skills in daily instruction. This supplement allows us to focus more deeply on the phonological awareness and advanced phonemic awareness skills that are crucial for success all the way through second grade. We also use the sounds-first activities as our daily warm up in all elementary schools across the district.

Universal Reading Screener for Grades K-5. This screener complies with RTI^2 and Say Dyslexia requirements

Tennessee Universal Reading Screener (aimswebPlus): Grades K-5

Intervention Structure and Supports

In the fall, all students are given a universal screener to help determine which students have a significant reading deficiency (Tier III), scoring below the 15th percentile, or are "at-risk" (Tier II), scoring between the 16th and 40th percentile. The RTI teachers facilitate collaboration among administration and classroom teachers to review beginning of the year (BOY) screening data and classroom performance, TCAP results, prior intervention outcomes, and teacher observation data for each student to determine student intervention placements. Those students demonstrating need are classified as in need of Tier II or Tier III instruction. Students classified as Tier II or Tier III are given a diagnostic assessment to determine specific deficits in order to best assign students to a small group with an intervention that will narrow skill gaps. All students identified as Tier II and Tier III receive daily, small-group intervention for at least 45 minutes (some receiving one hour) in their area of greatest deficit. A crosswalk is completed for every student who falls below the 25th percentile to determine if they meet the criteria to be identified as having characteristics of dyslexia.

Students who are placed in Tier III receive the most intensive interventions and explicit instruction in their area of deficit in small groups daily and are progressed monitored every two weeks. Students who are placed in Tier II receive interventions and explicit instruction in their area of deficit in small groups daily and are also progress monitored every two weeks.

As noted on both elementary schools' master schedules, intervention takes place daily during a grade-level time set aside specifically for RTI^2. Our adopted ELA curriculum contains an assessment and remediation guide in which teachers can find activities that directly address skill gaps. They can tailor this to the needs of their RTI group of students. If that intervention is not proved to be effective, more comprehensive, strategic interventions become an option. We use the Lexia program (both online and printable lessons), various skill-based activities, letter naming, letter sounds, phoneme segmenting, word reading fluency, passage reading fluency, or reading comprehension based upon individual student needs, as well as book studies with the 4th/5th graders. We have the Wilson Reading program available, if needed, for Tier III students who do not make progress with our other supports. The other supports are utilized with both Tier II and Tier III at different levels, such as extended time, etc. We are very student specific in our skill-based activities.

Our school-based data teams meet every 4 to 4.5 weeks to evaluate student data and determine their progress. Data teams determine if a change in the intervention intensity, duration, or the person providing the intervention is warranted. The data team considers progress monitoring data and other variables (attendance, engagement) as part of the decision-making process before a change is made to the programming or provider.

Our students receive explicit instruction in their area of deficit in small groups using research-based materials and strategies. These students are also screened using additional survey level

assessments to determine if they have characteristics of dyslexia. Students who do demonstrate those characteristics receive intensive intervention as outlined in the Say Dyslexia Law using programs that meet the law's requirements. Our district uses a research-based supplemental program as one intervention for students with characteristics of dyslexia. Our district notifies families of students who demonstrate characteristics of dyslexia. Families are notified that the ELA curriculum is used to support those students, as it is based on the sounds first approach of systematic, explicit, sequential, phonics-based instruction and is considered a strong support for those students.

Intervention takes place daily during a grade-level time in the master schedule just for RTI. When students are in their RTI groups, they work on activities and assignments that make them stronger in that skill. For example, students who need instruction in comprehension may read a new text and answer scaffolded questions, all related to the knowledge-building unit they are studying in Tier I instruction.

Houston County Schools uses the TN Universal Reading Screener aimswebPlus as our universal reading screener for grades K-5 for benchmarking and progress monitoring. AimswebPlus complies with RTI^2 and Say Dyslexia requirements. The screener is used to assess reading at the beginning, middle, and end of the year for grades K-5. Additionally, the TN Universal Reading Screener (aimswebPlus) is used for a spring data point for 3rd grade.

Parent Notification Plan/Home Literacy Reports

Houston County Schools notifies parents in grades K-5 if their child is "at-risk" for or has a significant reading deficiency immediately after the schools complete the fall universal screening. Students' scores are communicated in parent-friendly language which provides a clear explanation of student skill gaps and the depth and extent of student needs. The parents are told which intervention their student will receive and the amount of time each day the student will receive services. This is coupled with a description of the importance of being able to read by the end of 3rd grade as well as 4th grade promotion pathways as provided by the state.

The district explains how students are assessed and what a "significant reading deficiency" means. Parents are notified of their child's progress, or lack of progress, after the first 4 ½ week data team meetings. In the parent notifications/communication, data teams note the intervention(s) and any changes being made if the child is not showing sufficient progress as evidenced by progress monitoring and universal screening data as well as recommended activities (that do not require purchased resources) that will support students in the area of deficit. These communications go out to parents who have students in grades K-3 three times a year and are shared in grades 4 and 5 annually.

In addition to the above, our curriculum contains parent letters that outline the foundational skills and knowledge domains for the coming units. These letters help families support their child's learning by providing simple activities that they can do at home to reinforce the skills being taught in the classroom.

Professional Development Plan

All current K–5 teachers in the district have completed the required Early Reading Training provided by the Tennessee Department of Education through the TeachALL Learning Platform. In addition, the district has established a process to ensure that any newly hired K–5 teachers complete the required Early Reading Course or Secondary Literacy Course, as appropriate to the grade level they teach. These trainings are grounded in research-based literacy practices and emphasize practical classroom application of effective instruction in phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

To build upon this foundational training, the district will provide ongoing literacy-focused professional development throughout the 2026–2027 school year. Teachers will participate in continuous learning opportunities centered on strengthening Tier I literacy instruction, implementing evidence-based foundational skills practices, analyzing student data and work samples, and aligning instruction to student needs. Professional development will also include instructional coaching, collaborative planning and preparation, literacy learning walks using the Tennessee Foundational Skills Instructional Practice Guide (IPG), and cycles of continuous improvement designed to support high-quality literacy instruction in every classroom.