**Murfreesboro City Schools**

Foundational Literacy Skills Plan

Last Update: May 5, 2025

Approved: May 5, 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**

Murfreesboro City Schools (MCS) uses the state-approved Open Up Resources Expeditionary Learning (EL) Education Skills Block curriculum as its core foundational literacy program for grades K–2. This curriculum is grounded in the science of reading and aligned with Tennessee ELA standards, emphasizing foundational skills as the primary mode of instruction in early literacy. All K–2 classrooms implement a daily literacy block of at least 120 minutes, including a minimum of 60 minutes dedicated specifically to foundational skills instruction.

The Skills Block curriculum follows a structured phonics approach based on Dr. Linnea Ehri's Phase Theory, which explains how students develop letter-sound connections as they learn to read and write. The goal is for all students to reach the Late Consolidated Alphabetic phase by the end of second grade, enabling them to independently read and understand grade-level texts. To support this progression, the curriculum systematically addresses key components of foundational literacy, including print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Instruction within the Skills Block is explicit and systematic, incorporating both whole-group and small-group teaching. Teachers provide direct instruction and guide students through targeted practice activities designed to strengthen core literacy skills. Lessons and assessments are closely aligned with the Reading Foundations standards, ensuring that instruction is standards-based and measurable. Because of its strong research foundation, MCS expects the Skills Block curriculum to be implemented with high fidelity as the primary literacy instructional resource in K–2 classrooms.

In addition to core instruction, MCS supports phonics development through the use of Age of Learning's My Reading Academy, a digital platform aligned with the science of reading. This tool provides supplemental instruction through engaging videos, interactive games, and digital texts that reinforce phonics, fluency, and overall reading development.

During the 2025–26 school year, MCS refined its implementation of the Skills Block curriculum by streamlining benchmark assessments to improve usability and efficiency. The district also expanded professional development opportunities for teachers, focusing on how to analyze assessment data to effectively group students and tailor instruction. These efforts are designed to ensure that teaching is both responsive to student needs and efficient in addressing skill gaps.

Looking ahead, MCS plans to strengthen its use of multiple data sources to guide instruction. Teachers will rely on daily checks for understanding, as well as whole-group, small-group, and benchmark assessments, to make informed instructional decisions. This data-driven approach aims to improve the precision of small-group instruction, allowing teachers to better meet individual student needs.

Ultimately, MCS seeks to increase the number of students who begin the school year at their appropriate developmental microphase and to ensure that more students achieve grade-level proficiency in foundational reading skills by the end of each year. By maintaining a strong focus on evidence-based practices, structured instruction, and continuous improvement through data use, the district is working to build a solid literacy foundation for all students in the early grades.

**Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades 3-5**

MCS adopted the state-approved Open Up Resources Expeditionary Learning curriculum, a curriculum grounded in the science of reading and aligned to Tennessee ELA standards, for grades 3-5. The curriculum provides for an integrated literacy block that is comprised of knowledge-building Module lessons and a foundational skills-grounded Additional Language and Literacy Block (ALL Block). During this integrated ELA block, students in grades 3-5 receive 90 to 120 minutes of daily literacy instruction. Instruction includes 60 minutes of knowledge-building in Module lessons and 30-60 minutes of dedicated foundational skills instruction during ALL Block; however, foundational skills instruction is embedded in all aspects of their 90-120 minute literacy block.

This foundational skills instruction in ALL Block includes an evidence-based approach in teacher-directed small-group instruction, student independent/partner practice, and accountable independent reading. Instruction and practice includes work in word work, spelling, morphology, grammar, fluency, comprehension, and writing. These foundational skills are an extension of the work from the knowledge-building Module lessons to ensure coherence for students.

For example, during the ALL Block, students practice word analysis of additional words from the Module lesson complex text and engage with word study games and activities to apply what they learned. They use passages from the Module lesson to engage in evidence-based fluency practice, including goal-setting, self-assessment, and peer feedback. They also use content from the Module lesson to emphasize and practice sentence composition foundational skills, with both teacher-directed instruction and independent practice. All activities include explicit supports for morphology, syllabication, spelling, vocabulary development, comprehension, and fluency, differentiated for students who are working above, on, or below grade level, as well as English Language Learners.

Foundational skills are also explicitly addressed with the use of EL Unlock Phonics, a structured phonics curriculum, developed by EL Education and offered through Kiddom. It focuses on building foundational reading skills, particularly decoding and encoding, through interactive digital learning, virtual coaching, and classroom teacher conferences. This instruction is provided to students who are identified as having a phonics-related gap as determined by a curriculum-based encoding assessment.

Improvements for next year will include additional professional learning in both ALL Block and Unlock Phonics, a clear expectation statement for using both resources regularly and with integrity,

and walkthrough tools for leaders to help them measure quality of implementation and respond to improve.

**Additional Supports**

For schools with TVAAS levels that are significantly below expectations, the district will partner with the school to develop customized action plans. The goal of these action plans will be to improve: 1) the quality of intellectual prep and the PLC, 2) the quality of foundational skill instruction, and 3) student work and EL Skills Block Benchmark Assessment outcomes.

Intellectual preparation/the PLC will be strengthened through a consistent weekly meeting structure that includes goal-setting, student work analysis, lesson internalization, and team common commitments. Quality will be measured through data gathered using a conversation rubric.

Foundational skills instruction will be strengthened through the intellectual preparation mentioned above, weekly walkthroughs from school leaders, feedback targeted to the team's goals, and coaching as needed. Quality will be measured through data gathered using the Foundational Skills Instructional Practice Guide (IPG).

Student work will be strengthened through the above strategies as well as common next instructional steps determined through the student work analysis. Quality will be measured through the student work data gathered in the PLC.

Stepback meetings will be held every 6-8 weeks to monitor progress and plan for improvement. These meetings will include Literacy Learning Walks, data dashboard analysis, and subsequent action planning.

To address the needs of subgroups of concern, the district will implement the Access for All PLC Protocol to include ESL, SPED, intervention, and tutor support providers at least monthly in PLCs to ensure that support for these students is coherent and targeted.

**Approved Instructional Materials for Grades K-2**

Open Up OUR Expeditionary Learning

**Approved Instructional Materials for Grades 3-5**

Open Up OUR Expeditionary Learning

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

MCS uses the Tennessee Universal Reading Screener, aimswebPlus, as our primary universal screener and progress-monitoring tool for K-5 reading, which meets the criteria for the dyslexia screening requirements. All students, K-5 are administered the aimsweb assessment three times per year.

**Intervention Structure and Supports**

In the fall, K-5 students are given a universal screener (aimswebPlus) to determine which students have significant reading areas of need or are “at-risk” in reading proficiency. Stakeholders then have data team meetings (interventionists, grade-level teachers, instructional coaches, administrators, school psychologists) who analyze the universal screener data to determine which students’ ‘flag’ on the universal screener along with any additional stakeholder student concerns. Data team members then analyze and discuss other sources of data (historical data, classroom performance, grades, attendance) when determining which students demonstrate areas of need.

Once students are identified as having a reading area of need, survey level diagnostic assessments (aimsweb) are administered. Teams then use the data to determine intervention placement (Tier 2/Tier 3), instructional scaffolds needed, and Tier 1 differentiation, access based on student need. If a student indicates areas of need at the word level and meets the criteria for characteristics of dyslexia, the student is then placed in a dyslexia specific intervention, targeting his/her foundational skill area of need. Students receive daily intervention instruction for at least 45 minutes in the area of greatest need. We have research-based options for reading intervention support available to our students who are “at-risk” and/or who are identified with a significant reading deficit.

The EL Skills Block curriculum includes directions for developing student Acceleration Plans, which guides teachers in locating instruction/practices within the curriculum that directly address skill gaps for Tier 1 reteach/remediation and accelerating through cycles in which students do not show skill gaps. Teachers can tailor this to the needs of their intervention group of students. If the intervention does not indicate effectiveness over time via the use of progress monitoring data, more comprehensive, strategic interventions (such as UFLI) may be an option.

Students are progress monitored bi-weekly, using aimswebPlus. Data teams meet every 4.5-6 weeks to determine if a change in the intervention or the person providing the intervention is needed based on student response to the intervention provided—via use of progress monitoring data and/or teacher concerns. The data team also looks at other variables (attendance, historical data, etc.) as part of the decision-making process before a change is made to the instruction/ program or provider. Students receive explicit instruction in their area of need, in small groups, using research-based materials and strategies. MCS has systematic procedures at all levels of assessment, instruction, and intervention to meet the needs of students with characteristics of dyslexia. School based data teams utilize multiple sources of data to determine if a student requires a dyslexia-specific intervention based on his/her reading profile.

Tier 1: All K-5 students are provided with a skills-based assessment three times per year (aimswebPlus) for reading, to identify students who may struggle in the area of foundational skills and comprehension (basic skills needed for a particular grade level). All K-5 students are provided with a standards-based assessment, to determine Tier 1 strengths and needs. K-2 standards-based assessment/placement will be Age of Learning (My Reading Academy) and 3-5 standards-based assessment will be SchoolNet. Students who need on-grade level foundational skills support receive targeted foundation skills instruction using EL Curriculum, Age of Learning, or Unlock

Phonics.

Tier 2: Students who flag on the universal screener and historically struggle in Tier 1, along with other sources of data, are discussed and considered for Tier 2 interventions. Some of the reading interventions for Tier 2 reading include: TNFSCS Phonological Awareness Manuals (in combination with other intervention programs), Tools4Reading, and Florida Center for Reading Research.

Tier 3: Students who flag on the universal screener and historically struggle in Tier 1 and/or Tier 2, along with other sources of data, are discussed and considered for Tier 3 interventions. A change in intervention is discussed if the student does not demonstrate progress, via the use of progress monitoring data, teacher anecdotal notes and data team decision making. The reading interventions for Tier 3 reading are: TNFSCS Phonological Awareness Manuals (in combination with other intervention programs), ReadingDoneRight (PA), 95Percent, 95Percent multi-syllable routines or UFLI, all targeted to students' specific area of need.

All interventions listed are systematic, explicit, and research-based. The interventions are cumulative in nature, ensuring students are fluent and automatic with a skill prior to moving to the next level. All interventions listed have a multisensory component, are explicit and systematic which supports students with characteristics of dyslexia.

BOOST is the name for our district's targeted intervention one-hour block of time. Students receive targeted instruction based on his/her area of need and level of instruction needed. Each school in the district schedules 60 minutes each day to address students' needs. Some students may receive on grade level Tier 1 reteach while another student may receive Tier 3 targeted, explicit instruction in his/her area of need.

**Parent Notification Plan/Home Literacy Reports**

MCS notifies parents in grades K-5 if their child has a significant reading gap (as evidenced by students scoring at or below the 15th percentile) or is at-risk of a significant reading deficit (as evidenced by students scoring between the 16th-40th percentile) immediately after the completion of each universal screener benchmark (fall, winter, spring). Students' scores are communicated in parent friendly language that provides a clear explanation of student skill gaps and the depth and extent of student needs. An explanation of the intervention the student will receive and the amount of time each day the student will receive services based on his/her intervention services (tier) are included. This is coupled with a description of the importance of being able to read proficiently by the end of third grade. Parents also receive information explaining the fourth-grade promotion pathway for students in third grade, which entails an achievement level of 'approaching' or 'below' on the ELA portion of the most recent TCAP assessment.

The district explains how students are assessed and what a "significant reading deficit" means. Parents are subsequently notified of their child's progress, or lack of progress, every 4 ½ week period with a letter and a progress monitoring graph. In the parent notification, data teams note any changes made, if the child is not showing sufficient progress, as evidenced by progress monitoring and universal screening data. Parents are also provided recommended 'at home' practice/activities that do not require purchased resources and will support students in the area of need. These

communications go out to all K-3 parents three times per year, following each universal screener benchmark. Communications go out to all 4th-5th grade parents after each fall universal screener benchmark and to all 4th-5th grade intervention students after each universal screener benchmark.

The district also follows the guidelines set in T.C.A. S49-1-229 to inform parents if their child meets the criteria for characteristics of dyslexia. The universal screener is administered which assesses letter knowledge, RAN, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency and encoding. If a student's data indicates his/her universal screener composite score falls below 25% AND 50% his/her subtests fall below the 25%, AND other sources of data indicate (historical data, classroom performance, attendance, grades) an area of need, the data team then determines the student has characteristics of dyslexia. There may be instances when the universal screener data does not reflect the student's typical performance, and a case-by-case decision will be made by the school data team. Once a determination is made, the school data team will: Notify the student's parent(s) in writing and/or via phone call. The district will provide the student's parent(s) or legal guardian with information and additional TDOE dyslexia specific resource materials to support understanding of characteristics of dyslexia. The materials will detail for parents the appropriate tiered dyslexia specific interventions the child will receive.

Progress monitoring reports indicating the student's response to intervention services are provided every 4.5 weeks. The school/district leadership team and/or an ESL liaison have a plan in place when there is difficulty reaching parents. In addition, MCS provides Parent University sessions annually which support parents with helping their child with foundational skills, language acquisition skills, comprehension skills, TCAP information and writing supports. The parent sessions detail the importance of supporting their child at home with practical ideas and activities with an emphasis on early literacy foundational skills, language acquisition, decoding, and encoding skills. Free resources to use at home are provided at many of the parent university sessions.

**Professional Development Plan**

All current Murfreesboro City Schools (MCS) teachers have completed the Tennessee Department of Education's Early Reading Training series. The district also has a clear plan to ensure that any new teachers complete this training, including required sessions during New Teacher Orientation and ongoing access to Reading 360 Early Literacy coursework to maintain 100% completion.

MCS provides a comprehensive professional development (PD) plan for K–5 teachers. In July 2026, teachers will participate in a Summer Literacy Institute, selecting two week-long sessions focused on foundational skills instruction through EL Education's Skills Block and knowledge-building through Module and ALL Block instruction. These sessions emphasize phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, with demonstrated mastery through assessments.

New Teacher Orientation will include required training on EL Education curriculum components, benchmark assessments, student grouping, and lesson planning. Later in July, a district-wide conference will offer targeted sessions on small-group instruction strategies, use of My Reading Academy, supports for multilingual learners, and effective independent practice.

An August 2026 mandatory PD day will provide grade-band-specific training. K–2 teachers will focus on benchmark assessment use and targeted instruction; grades 3–4 will strengthen ALL Block implementation and address skill gaps; grades 5–6 will use Course Mojo to improve writing and foundational skills integration.

Throughout the year, teachers will engage in monthly PD tracks based on experience level, ranging from foundational implementation to advanced data-driven instruction and teacher leadership. Ongoing support includes coaching from the district literacy coordinator and RTI specialist, with targeted assistance for priority schools, interventionists, and data-driven instructional planning.