

Rhea County Schools

Foundational Literacy Skills Plan

Approved: May 14, 2021

Updated: June 3, 2022

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

Beginning in fall of 2021, Rhea County Schools implemented Expeditionary Learning by LearnZillion, now Imagine Learning, for the kindergarten through second grade English Language Arts state-approved curriculum. This curriculum is based on research from the Phase Theory by Dr. Linnea Ehri. Aligned to the TN ELA standards, this curriculum is essential to meeting the expectations of grade level proficiency on state assessments for students. This includes two hours of daily literacy instruction with one hour of foundational skills focus and one hour devoted to module knowledge building lessons. Teachers provide instruction to all Tier I students using these high-quality instructional materials. The EL curriculum is divided into four eight week-long modules that allow for intentional and sequential foundational skills instruction. Included in the Foundational Skills block is a focus on print concepts, phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and word recognition, word and sentence composition, vocabulary, and fluency all in service of comprehension. With a strong emphasis on explicit and systematic phonics instruction, students will decode, encode, learn high frequency words, and practice spelling patterns in both large and small differentiated groups.

Whole group phonics-based instruction follows familiar strategies and routines to support developing phonological awareness and the learning of phonemes and graphemes, blending, segmenting, orthographic mapping while practicing spelling patterns, and other components of literacy foundational skills through a gradual release approach. Teachers deliver explicit instruction around sounds and letters and then provide activities for students to apply their new learning.

For example, after explicit instruction of a particular phoneme and the represented grapheme, students listen for and produce the target sound and participate in a practice activity. Chaining is an example of a daily instructional practice for both decoding and encoding words. During small group time, students apply letter-sound knowledge in reading decodable texts with support from the teacher while other students engage in Word Work activities such as word sorts, word ladders, or using Elkonin boxes to build and write words. Comprehension is addressed through teacher questioning that requires text evidence to support answers. Other students may build fluency through reading word lists and decodable texts. Reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills are developed within the lessons.

Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades 3-5

Rhea County Schools adopted and began implementation of the Expeditionary Learning curriculum for grades third through fifth in the fall of 2021. The curriculum is designed for two hours of daily instruction through lessons that develop readers who can read grade level complex connected text with fluency and expression and writers who can compose using the correct conventions of language. This curriculum is aligned to the TN ELA standards and is divided into Content Based Literacy that builds knowledge through Module Lessons and the All Language and Literacy Block (ALL) that allows students to engage with the complex texts through listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Focusing on the grade level standards, teachers provide direct instruction in a whole group format and then meet with groups of students daily for reteaching or extending earlier instruction while other groups of students engage in independent, purposeful centers that provide reinforcement opportunities in the areas of foundational skills within the ALL Block. Students in grades three through five participate in the ALL Block heterogeneously for additional practice opportunities both in and out of connected text. Task cards include activities around grammar, usage, and the mechanics of language and the morphology and meaning of words. Vocabulary is embedded and taught through specific routines and protocols provided by the curriculum. Students also have opportunities during the ALL Block for accountable independent reading of complex text and writing with a purpose across different modalities. It is within the ALL Block that students build fluency and stamina in both reading and writing. Students work with literacy tools such as vocabulary squares and fluency passages independently and in small groups.

For example, in Module 2, Unit 3, Lesson 2, a fourth-grade lesson, students identify the learning targets of the day which include forming and using irregular verbs with future tense, using text features to find information, and gathering information to take notes. These learning targets are evidence of lessons that build knowledge while teaching foundational skills. The lesson begins with a read aloud text and writing prompt, with discussion around an exemplar response to the prompt using discussion protocols. As skills are not taught in isolation, instruction on verb tense is provided during the lesson. The instructional materials include a Parts of Speech Anchor Chart, Rules for Forming and Using Verbs in Future Tense Anchor Chart, and sentence strips. Students continue to develop understanding of future tense during the guided practice opportunity. The teacher provides support for academic and domain specific vocabulary, and students record words in a vocabulary log. The teacher models how to complete a Research Note Catcher to record information found within a complex text. Students then research independently with a different complex text gathering information for their own note-catchers. Teacher- directed small group lessons center around additional work with complex text while the ALL-Block activities include task cards for reading, writing, listening, and speaking through activities around reading fluency passages, exploring conjunctions, and language dives.

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades K-2

K-5 Expeditionary Learning by LearnZillion, now Imagine Learning

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades 3-5

K-5 Expeditionary Learning by LearnZillion, now Imagine Learning

Additional Information about Instructional Materials

Pre-Kindergarten teachers in Rhea County Schools will implement a sounds first approach to develop phonological awareness during early childhood. Using the Tennessee Foundational Skills Curriculum Supplement and the Big Day in Pre-K curriculum, teachers will prepare our Pre-Kindergarten students for later success in foundational skills through carefully designed and sequenced activities around literacy. Children will gain experience working with rhyming words, detecting syllable breaks, phoneme identification and manipulation, and work with onsets and rimes. The Tennessee Foundational Skills Curriculum Supplement Cumulative Assessment is administered to Pre-Kindergarten students at the end of each year.

Rhea County Schools participated in many of the programs of the Reading 360 initiative. The district enrolled families of students in grades Kindergarten through fourth in the Ready4K Program to provide facts, tips, and support to parents, and enrolled 1,052 students in the K-3 Home Delivery Program. RCS provided our families with the opportunity to register for the free decodable texts provided by TDOE. These programs equip parents with recommended resources and supports for ongoing reading practice at home.

Universal Reading Screener for Grades K-5. This screener complies with RTI² and Say Dyslexia requirements.

Rhea County Schools will administer the Tennessee Universal Reading Screener --AimsWeb Plus program application developed by Pearson as our universal screener three times a year to students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Screening windows open in the fall, winter, and spring of each school year for this diagnostic. This screener meets the criteria developed by Tennessee Department of Education to comply with the requirements of the Response to Intervention and Say Dyslexia law. Portfolio assessment will be used for students in Pre-kindergarten.

Intervention Structure and Supports

After analysis of each benchmark assessment and using multiple sources of data such as teacher input and curriculum-based assessments, teachers identify and provide interventions to support those students who have a significant reading deficiency. An identified Tier II student receives an additional 30 minutes of instruction in the areas in which the student showed lack of progress or demonstrated skills significantly below grade level. An identified Tier III student receives an additional 45 minutes of intensive instruction, in areas in which the student has shown a lack of progress or demonstrated skills significantly below grade level.

Interventionists use the SPIRE placement assessment to identify specific deficits and to place students in appropriate tiered support groups. Through the RTI² process, students are provided instruction by highly trained literacy interventionists and have a progress monitoring opportunity at least every two weeks using the AimsWeb Plus tool for Tier II and Tier III students. Interventions are research-based and align with best practice strategies to close achievement gaps. The intervention program used is SPIRE4th edition, which allows instruction to be systematic, explicit, multisensory, cumulative, language based, and aligned to deficits. Interventionists complete Student Intervention Plans to document the skill area addressed, duration of implementation, and the researched based strategy used for each student.

Teachers, interventionists, school psychologists, and administrators hold data team meetings on a regular basis to track data and make decisions about needed supports to implement within instruction, a change of interventionist, a change of Tier group, or a change regarding the intervention being used. The Reading Interventionists tailor data driven, differentiated support to students in the areas of need. Students are referred for more comprehensive evaluations based on the rate of improvement. Rhea County Schools report data from the Universal Screeners to TDOE as required.

Parent Notification Plan/Home Literacy Reports

Rhea County Schools provides written notification to any parent of a student who has been identified as being at risk of having or having a significant reading deficiency. For students in kindergarten through third grade this is three times annually; after each diagnostic assessment. For students in 4th and 5th grade, this is annually. The phrase “at-risk of significant reading deficiency” refers to students in kindergarten through third grade who have demonstrated limited progress in foundational literacy skills and/or significantly less progress in comparison to his or her peers. Specific scores that identify a student to be in the at-risk for a significant reading deficiency category is determined through an equating process. “A significant reading deficiency” refers to students in kindergarten through third grade who demonstrates a lack of significant progress and/or skills significantly below grade level based on universal screening data. Specific scores that identify a student with a significant reading deficiency is determined through an equating process. A student with a significant reading deficiency in fourth or fifth grade, would score at the approaching proficiency or below proficiency on the English language arts portion of the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) assessment.

As part of our kindergarten through third grade Parent Notification Plan, we provide details about how children are identified as needing additional explicit instruction and that once identified, children are placed in small groups to meet their needs by trained interventionists who use proven research- based strategies. Parents receive a letter from the school about their child’s foundational and comprehension skill deficits, the multi-tiered supports implemented at the school through the RTI program, and the amount of time devoted each day for intervention. For students who are receiving Tier II or Tier III support, the district monitors progress bi-monthly, and provides reports to parents every four- and one-half weeks.

For notification to parents of fourth and fifth grade students, we provide details about the child’s performance on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP). Parent friendly language describes the child’s score category on the assessment and the areas of student learning that teachers will work to strengthen.

Also included in both plans are suggested reading activities to be completed at home for additional support. Information about dyslexia and our Response to Intervention program is also included. Links to available resources to learn more about the characteristics of dyslexia are provided along with information about how to contact the school’s special education coordinator if necessary.

For example, a link to the IDA Dyslexia Basics: <https://dyslexiaida.org/dyslexia-basics/> is provided in the letter to parents. The district notes the importance of reading proficiently at grade level by the end of third grade and provides examples of positive outcomes for those who achieve this goal.

Professional Development Plan

RCS strengthens educator effectiveness in teaching literacy by providing professional growth opportunities. In the spring of 2021, kindergarten through fifth grade teachers, literacy coaches, interventionists, ELL teachers, special education teachers, and elementary administrators in the district participated in the asynchronous Week One of Reading 360 Early Literacy Training Series provided by TDOE. This training included a summative assessment. The Rhea County Department of Education partnered with TDOE to host Week Two of this training series for the K-2 teachers, interventionists, and instructional coaches in our district in June of 2021. These combined trainings provided the current research, effective application strategies, and instructional materials to support the teaching of foundational skills. The district plans to work with all teachers and administrators during the summer of 2022 and beyond to ensure our teachers and leaders receive the foundational skills instruction training necessary to meet the licensure requirements of the Tennessee Literacy Success Act.

Additionally, RCS partnered with the vendor to bring professional development using the Expeditionary Learning curriculum to our district. These sessions were grade specific for K-2, and grade band specific for 3-5, and provided an opportunity to unpack the curriculum and to become aware of all the resources and materials available for instruction and support. Follow up virtual calls with the vendor have been scheduled for quarterly review of data. This will provide the necessary support using our high-quality instructional materials for foundational skills. The district literacy coaches engage teachers with ongoing professional development and support around foundational skills as needed during district wide professional development days and in grade level PLCs. Instructional coaches provide job embedded professional growth opportunities for teachers to learn, apply, and reflect upon new teaching strategies. Literacy coaches conduct classroom observations using the IPG tool to ground coaching conversations in standards aligned content, teacher directed instruction, student practice, assessment, and differentiation to promote effective teaching strategies.

Additional Information about this Foundational Literacy Skills Plan

Our district recognizes the effects of the summer slide on children when they are not in regular school session. Therefore, we have developed state and local partnerships to promote literacy throughout our school district. Beginning summer 2021, The Book Bus rolls into communities on a regular basis. Through Read Aloud Story Time and the opportunity to acquire free books of choice, it is our goal that children will become more successful readers. From what is known as The Matthew Effect, successful readers are more motivated to read, grow vocabulary, strengthen comprehension, increase practice, and develop automaticity. The Book Bus prepares children for and instills a lifetime love of reading through engaging summer programs in their own neighborhoods. Rhea County Schools is committed to promoting literacy in our communities.