Rhea County Schools

Foundational Literacy Skills Plan

Previous update: May 14, 2026

Approved: October 1, 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

Rhea County Schools implements 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 used as our primary form of instruction and 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 gain practice with decoding, encoding, learning high frequency words, and spelling patterns in both large and small differentiated groups. Teachers also have the TN Foundational Skills Curriculum Supplement materials available for sounds first and early reading activities.

Whole group explicit, 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. Students in grades kindergarten through second grade also participate in the TNFSCS Sounds First activities during the Foundational Skills block.

Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades 3-5

Rhea County Schools adopted the Expeditionary Learning curriculum for grades third through fifth and will proceed with its implementation. The curriculum is designed for daily instruction through an evidence-based approach to 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 (ALL) Block that allows students to engage with complex texts through listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Focusing on the grade level standards, teachers provide direct instruction in a whole group format with a minimum of 30 minutes of integrated foundational skills instruction 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 comprehension. The curriculum and instruction includes explicit student supports for fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Additional Supports

RCS implements collaborative planning for grade level teachers, special education teachers and ELL teachers to address the needs of all learners. Through collaborative planning, the teachers were able to identify opportunities within the curriculum's daily lessons to embed foundational skills and make decisions for each student to fully access the learning material. The curriculum provides suggestions with various levels of support for English language learners and students with disabilities.

- For students with disabilities, teachers provide IEP-aligned/504- aligned supports that eliminate barriers for students to engage in the work of the lesson. Scaffolds may include but are not limited to graphic organizers, sentence frames, and word banks.
- For English language learners, teachers provide ILP-aligned and data-informed integrated scaffolds and language-based supports that eliminate barriers for students to engage in the work of the lesson. These supports may include the use of visuals and allowing students to express themselves in their home language.

Working with instructional coaches, teachers began to develop student work analysis as part of the cycle of continuous improvement to make instructional decisions for all learners which include students from various subgroups, ED, SWD, and ELL. Many supports such as the High-Quality Scaffolding Tools and the Crosswalks were shared with teachers.

The district leadership team conducts Literacy Learning Walks to provide additional opportunities for coaching teachers.

CASE assessments are given to third, fourth, and fifth grade students throughout the year to identify areas for improvement and areas of strength. Teachers analyze CASE data to make decisions about student groupings, reteaching opportunities, and priority standards.

After school tutoring is provided for students who were identified as needing extra support based on TCAP data. Students are also placed in summer school sessions to further address their learning deficits. Students with disabilities are also provided additional tutoring opportunities.

These efforts will continue into the 2026-27 school year.

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades K-2
Imagine Learning EL Education (formerly LearnZillion Expeditionary Learning)

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades 3-5
Imagine Learning EL Education (formerly LearnZillion Expeditionary Learning)

Supplemental Instructional Materials

The Tennessee Foundational Skills Curriculum Supplement (Sounds First) is used in grades Pre-K-2 for the purpose of strengthening phonological awareness.

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

iReady Grades K-5

We also administer aimswebPlus to our third graders for the spring benchmark.

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 a Survey Level Assessment to identify specific deficits and to place students in appropriate tiered support groups.

Through the RTI^2 process, students are provided with instruction by highly trained literacy interventionists and have a progress monitoring opportunity at least every two weeks. We use the iReady tool for Tier II and Tier III students, while Easy CBM is used for students receiving special education services. Interventions are research based and align with best practice strategies to close achievement gaps. Various intervention programs are used including Reading A-Z, Florida Center for Reading Research, Moby Max, IXL, Sounds Sensible, and SPIRE, along with teacher created materials. Interventionists complete Student Intervention Plans to document the skill area addressed, duration of implementation, and the researched based strategy used for each student. All intervention schedules and expectations are aligned with the RTI^2 manual.

Teachers, interventionists, school psychologists, and administrators hold data team meetings every 4.5 weeks to track data, including progress monitoring, 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 demonstrate 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 are 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 4th and 5th grade students, we provide the same in addition to 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 in all home literacy reports. Also included in both plans are suggestions for no cost 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 information about the promotion pathways.

Professional Development Plan

RCS shares information about the Early Reading Courses I and II with all teachers. These sessions address how phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and fluency skills are taught.

Teachers receive training in using the screener and progress monitoring tools to collect and review data. Using the data to drive instruction is an ongoing collaborative conversation among classroom teachers, reading interventionists, principals, and district leaders.

The district team participates in Literacy Learning Walks in every elementary school to gather data about trends in teaching practices and to facilitate coaching sessions as needed for the observed

teachers. This job embedded professional development in grades K-2 primarily focuses on systematic sounds first activities and materials, effective instructional practices, and student practices using reading, writing, listening, and speaking in addition to the knowledge building observations. In grades 3-5, the Knowledge Building IPG tool is used, and the team has specific look fors for embedded foundational skills instruction. These LLWs will continue throughout the school year. In upcoming sessions, teachers will participate in PLCs that focus on intellectual preparation and student work analysis.

The LLW team identified scaffolding as an area of focus, therefore, professional development around scaffolding strategies for all students' success is planned for the 2026 school year. Educators will explore practical techniques to break down complex skills and content into manageable steps, ensuring students of varying abilities can access and master learning objectives. The session emphasizes differentiated support and the gradual release of responsibility. In addition to these professional development opportunities, building leaders will have campus specific sessions for extended learning for teachers and paraprofessionals.

Partnerships with the Acceleration for All (A4A) and the All Access Learning Network (AALN) provide additional opportunities for district leaders, building leaders, and educators to receive coaching support. Communities of Practice sessions, asynchronous online modules from the A4A and the Early Literacy Network will be shared with leaders and teachers.