

Unicoi County Schools

Foundational Literacy Skills Plan

Last Updated: October 31, 2023

Approved: June 21, 2024

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

Unicoi County Schools teachers deliver lessons from Amplify CKLA, a foundational skills curriculum focused on a sounds-first approach grounded in reading science and aligned to Tennessee ELA standards as approved by the state Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission. Each day students receive 60 minutes of instruction in foundational skills. The CKLA Skills Strand provides comprehensive instruction in foundational reading skills, such as phonological awareness, phonics, and word recognition; language skills, including conventions of English, spelling, and grammar; reading comprehension; and writing instruction enabling students to develop the reading skills required to meet Tennessee's academic standards. Students also participate in 60 minutes of knowledge-building instruction. The Knowledge Strand is centered around complex narrative and informational read-aloud texts and focuses on background knowledge and vocabulary acquisition, analysis of complex text, and speaking and listening enabling students to develop the reading skills required to meet Tennessee's academic standards. There is a flexible amount of additional independent or group reading time and differentiated small-group instruction including intervention and tutoring.

Principles of Instruction for CKLA K-2 Lessons include 1) explicit foundational skills and language instruction, 2) maximizing vocabulary acquisition through contextualized, content-based, and constant exposure, 3) building background knowledge for strong comprehension, 4) fostering "wonderful conversationalists", and 5) building analysis and expression in reading and writing. The CKLA Research Base for Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) is built on decades of early literacy research that demonstrates the importance of wide-ranging background knowledge and explicit and systematic instruction in foundational skills.

Our district has adopted Amplify CKLA 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.

Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades 3-5

Unicoi County Schools teachers deliver an integrated literacy approach for grades three (3) through five (5) grounded in reading science and aligned to Tennessee ELA standards. Our Amplify CKLA curriculum materials are approved by the state Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission. Each day students in grade 3 receive 90-120 minutes of instruction. Students in grades 4 and 5 receive 60-90 minutes of instruction. This 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). Within the ELA block students receive a minimum of 30 minutes of dedicated foundational skills instruction that includes fluency, grammar, morphology, spelling, and writing. Students engage 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.

The integrated ELA block meets an evidence-based approach to applying foundational skills within daily lessons. In Grades 3–5 students move fluidly between reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language activities. Through these activities, students continue to build background knowledge, with an increasing emphasis on individual and small group interaction with complex text enabling students to develop the reading skills required to meet Tennessee’s academic standards. Principles of CKLA 3-5 Instruction include 1) analysis and expression in reading and writing, 2) fostering “wonderful conversationalists”, 3) explicit language instruction, 4) a rich variety of texts and contexts, 5) maximizing vocabulary acquisition through contextualized, content-based, and constant exposure, and continuing to build background knowledge for strong comprehension. The CKLA Research Base for Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) is built on decades of early literacy research that demonstrates the importance of wide-ranging background knowledge and explicit and systematic instruction in foundational skills.

Additional Information

In partnership with TNTP and the Literacy Implementation Network, UCS will continue to deepen practices and protocols to support students in the knowledge and skills necessary to interact with complex text and grade-level content. TNTP Consultant, Kaycee Eckhardt oversees our Customized Learning Plan, providing targeted and differentiated support driven by cycles of data for improvement. District support from Kaycee occurs bi-weekly with the district team and extends to monthly support at the district and school levels through differentiated support at the school level (Touchpoint Days). Current professional learning includes 1) Intellectual Preparation, 2) Student Work Analysis, 3) Feedback Loops, and 4) Evidence-Based Improvement. Additionally, structures within First Network allow for district and school leaders to participate in Regional Learning Walks, Content-Based Webinars, and Network Best Practice Sharing for learning, sharing, and norming/calibrating on the IPG. Additionally, in 2024-25 UC Schools will continue to deepen the alignment, coordination, and communication between student support and core instruction so that priority-identified students have access to a strong continuum of student support beyond but aligned with daily instruction. In addition, district and school-level approaches/structures to student

support will be assessed, defined, and communicated. Current targets include strengthening 1) HQIM Tier 1 Supports, 2) Instructional Coherence and Acceleration, 3) Data-Based Decision-Making Processes/ Coordination and Communication, and ensuring approaches are defined, communicated, executed, and monitored.

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades K-2

Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades 3-5

Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts

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

i-Ready Suite K-5

Our district also administers the Tennessee Universal Reading Screener (aimswebPlus) to students in third grade for the Spring Benchmark.

Intervention Structure and Supports

In the fall, winter, and spring Unicoi County students are given a universal screener (iReady) to determine which students have a significant reading deficiency or are “at-risk.” Our interventionists, grade-level teachers, and principals review universal screener data to determine which students score between the 0-40th percentile. Those students demonstrating need are then referred for high dosage-low ratio tutoring, Tier II intervention, or Tier III intervention. Reading interventions are aligned with students’ areas of need and designed to improve a student’s foundational literacy skills for each student identified as having a significant reading deficiency.

Students are identified based on the results from iReady as 1) Mid or Above Grade Level, 2) Early on Grade Level, 3) One Grade Level Below, 3) Two Grade Levels Below, or 4) Three or More Grade Levels Below. Students who are in the “Two Grade Levels Below” and “Three or More Grade Levels Below” are flagged for the possibility of “a significant reading deficiency” and RTI Intervention. Grade-level data meetings at each school led by the school interventionist determine if students are eligible to be referred to RTI based on identifying students’ scores from the universal screener, attendance history, past retention, classroom work samples, and other relevant assessments. If students need

intervention, teachers complete a referral form, then students are given Aimsweb Curriculum-Based Measures (CBM) to provide another data point. Based on the above information, the RTI team decides if students receive intervention.

Once students are in RTI, they (K-8) take the AimswebPlus benchmark assessment. Students who receive a score of IA in a category are given a Survey Level Assessment (SLA) to determine student needs. In addition, students in grades 3-5 are given the Phonics and Word Reading Survey (PWRS), and students in K-2 (unless needed in another grade level) are given the Phonological Awareness Skills Screener (PASS). This data enables us to identify and target specific student needs. Identified 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.

Our district RTI² structure follows Tennessee's RTI² framework and implementation guide. Our purpose in RTI is to help serve students who need extra support to meet the demands of the Tennessee State Standards. Our goal is for students to receive intervention if needed and return to Tier I as confident students who can academically perform at grade level. We rely on multiple data points to make decisions about students entering and moving within the tiers and aligning interventions to the needs of the students.

Tier II Structure: 1) Grade-level data meetings led by the school interventionist are held every quarter to determine and discuss possible referrals of students who may be at risk of having a significant reading deficiency based on the universal screener. 2) Grade-level data meetings are followed by a meeting with the RTI team to determine who is eligible for RTI. 3) We are currently transitioning RTI interventions to reflect the new guidelines as outlined in the August 2023 RTI² manual by providing Tier II students grade-level content with supports. Students placed in Tier II receive whole group, small group, and individual instruction within a structured RTI block. Students receive 30 minutes of instruction with trained personnel who teach grade-level standards while targeting the individual needs of students based on data such as the universal screener, Aimsweb assessment, and pre/posttests of the taught standard. 4) Students are progress monitored bi-weekly to determine progress. 5) If there is a lack of progress in Tier II after four data points, students' performance as a whole student is discussed by the RTI team meeting. Attendance, possible trauma, and other factors beyond intervention will be explored before a change of the intervention and/or another variable is changed. 6) If a change of intervention is needed, it can include a change of instructor, time of intervention, length of intervention, change of group, or change of the intervention itself.

Tier III Structure: 1) Students enter Tier III after receiving Tier II intervention for 6-8 weeks with no progress made after a change of intervention in Tier II, or students who are below the 10th percentile may enter Tier III. 2) A ROI (Rate of Improvement) is completed for Tier II students to determine if there is progress before changing the Tier. Students are progress monitored bi-weekly to determine if there is a lack of progress in Tier III. 3) After four data points, students' performance

is discussed by the RTI team meeting. Attendance, possible trauma, and other factors beyond intervention will be explored before a change of the intervention and/or another variable is changed. 4) Once in Tier III, students receive a more intense intervention than what was received in Tier II which includes up to 45 minutes of instruction from our school interventionist with the goal of a 1:3 group ratio. 5) Once there are 6-8 data points after a change in intervention, a ROI and GAP analysis is completed to determine if students may be referred for SPED.

Our district has an aligned approach to intervention in that we offer the same high-quality, research-based interventions at each of our elementary schools through strategic planning. Students receive daily, small-group intervention. We have research-based options for reading intervention support available to our students who are “at-risk” and/or who have been identified with a significant reading deficiency. Our ELA curriculum (Amplify CKLA) 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 proving to be effective, more comprehensive, strategic interventions become an option *Orton Gillingham (OG) is described as, “an explicit, sequential, systematic, and multi-sensory approach used to teach literacy.” This intervention is used for Tier II and Tier III students in grades K-5 for phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency intervention, depending on the needs of the student and prior interventions used. The International Dyslexia Association has given the OG approach accreditation for reading instruction for students with dyslexia. OG is delivered by an OG-trained interventionist. Sound Partners is, “an explicit, balanced, phonics-based tutoring program that provides individual instruction in early reading skills.” A K-3, Tier II, or Tier III intervention, Sound Partners targets phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary. It may be delivered by teachers or instructional assistants trained by another interventionist in the district. *mCLASS is the intervention component of our current ELA adoption of CKLA’s Amplify. mCLASS is an “integrated literacy system based on the science of reading” and includes a brief, built-in dyslexia screener. This intervention generates lessons based on the skill needs of the students. Interventionists, who are trained, deliver this intervention to Tier II or Tier III students based on the prior interventions, the grade of the student, and student needs.

Parent Notification Plan/Home Literacy Reports

Our district notifies parents of students who are found to have or be “at-risk” for a significant reading deficiency immediately following the fall universal screening. 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. Parents are given information about what 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. Additionally, they are given information about 4th-grade promotion pathways for students in grade 3 with an achievement level of “approaching” or “below” on the ELA portion of the student’s most recent TCAP test. For grades K-3 parents will be notified of universal screening results three times and for grades 4-10 parents will be notified at a minimum after the first universal screening. Parents are also provided free activities they can use to support student learning at home.

In addition to sending the results, mid-term grades, and RTI progress reports are sent at mid-term and the end of the nine weeks that further inform the parent of student progress. Parents can access student grades through Skyward and iReady progress through the student login. Additionally, the ELA curriculum (Amplify, CKLA) contains parent letters in the younger grades that outline the foundational skills and knowledge domains for the coming week that will inform and equip parents to work with the child. Families can better understand how to support their student(s) through questions about their texts and through an awareness of what foundational skills their child(ren) are learning. Beyond Home Literacy Reports, families can find information on Unicoi Schools RTI Webpage and Unicoi Schools Pathways to Grade 4 Resource Page.

Professional Development Plan

Unicoi County Schools teachers including new teachers to our district must participate in the Tennessee Department of Education sponsored state's early literacy courses. Participants work through online modules, and the training is estimated at 30 hours or one week of professional learning. Teachers may submit their certificate of completion for PDP credit. This course on foundational literacy skills instruction is available, at no cost, to teachers in kindergarten through grade five (K-5) and includes training in phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary. Upon completion of the course, teachers demonstrate their knowledge through a competency-based and performance-based assessment. Early Reading Training - Week 1 fulfills TLSA Licensure Requirements.

In addition, all teachers have participated in onboarding and ongoing implementation support provided through Amplify's Professional Development team and the Literacy Implementation Network partnership with TNTP. Teachers and administrators receive ongoing feedback and support through Literacy Learning Walks using the Tennessee Instructional Practice Guide. This occurs two to three times annually.

Unicoi County Schools is also a participant in the Literacy Implementation/ Early Literacy Network, supporting teachers and leaders in implementation of high-quality instructional materials through ongoing professional learning in both strands of literacy instruction: knowledge building and foundational skills. Within the network our local K-2 teachers collaborate with others across the district and state, sharing resources and strategies focused on early literacy. Unicoi County has established a Teacher Leader and Collaborative model to provide ongoing support for teachers as evidenced through Unicoi County Schools Professional Development Plan.