

Tennessee School for the Blind
Foundational Literacy Skills Plan
Approved: May 19, 2021

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

Tennessee School for the Blind (TSB) uses a foundational skills curriculum grounded in reading science and aligned to the Tennessee ELA standards as approved by the state Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission and has been made available in accessible formats (braille and large print). This 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”). Students will also be given a technology evaluation and learning media assessment to determine which devices and type of media are necessary to aid in accessing the instructional materials. Braille students may receive push-in or pull-out braille instruction. All students will have materials that are accessible to their learning medium (braille or large print). Accessibility devices and software are readily available for student use. Students receive explicit instruction on how to access and use this technology.

Phonics instruction for students who are blind and visually impaired is supported through a variety of instructional modifications. These modifications could include utilizing tactile symbols, shapes, and letters. Teachers may also create phonic boxes containing objects and phonic cards to match sounds to objects. These tactile materials may be used to put letters together so that students may sound out the combinations and words. For students who will eventually be braille readers, these tactile symbols and shapes are crucial to developing pre-braille skills.

An example of synthetic phonics instruction for kindergarten students during the first quarter would be teaching sound discrimination. Students will develop an understanding that words are made up of sounds. The teacher may say the word boy emphasizing the initial /b/ sound. They may tell the child that the word boy is made up of sounds. They would then tell the child to listen to the sound /b/ heard first in the word boy. Then the teacher would say the words bee and me and ask which word begins with the sound /b/ like boy. Exercises such as this are critical in developing foundational reading skills such as phonetic awareness.

Our improvements for next year center around the full implementation of the newly adopted, high quality instructional materials (Wonders Series) and student data analysis. Working with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET), the instructional leadership team and teachers will receive

explicit professional development on student data analysis and will use this information to inform instruction. This will be incorporated into the school's newly restructured PLCs and time will be specifically dedicated to supporting reading instruction.

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 reading science and aligned to Tennessee ELA standards. Our curriculum materials are 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 90 minutes of ELA instruction. 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 60 minutes per day and foundational skills instruction that includes fluency, grammar, morphology, spelling, and writing for at least 30 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.

For example, a fourth-grade class is studying fairy tales. They would begin by activating prior knowledge and reading independently and/or aloud (The Princess and the Pizza from the Wonders series). After the reading or read-aloud of the on-grade level complex text, students would utilize the story to work on skills. The teacher may have the students summarize the story and then dive into a comprehension strategies and skills (e.g. making predictions and skills such as sequencing). Students would respond to a series of scaffolded questions and unpack the most essential vocabulary ("word work"). For this lesson, the vocabulary strategy of focus is context clues and synonyms. Students may focus on a particular writing trait based on a previously posed essential question. For this example, the essential question is "Where do good ideas come from?". The writing trait would be ideas with an emphasis on descriptive details. Other skills addressed may be inflectional endings and fluency (intonation). Foundational skills instruction is embedded in all aspects of this 90-minute block and is dedicated to developing students' holistic literacy approach to fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension coherently as recommended by research.

Braille students may receive push-in or pull-out braille instruction. All students will have accessible learning media (braille or large print). Accessibility devices and software are readily available for student use. Students receive explicit instruction on how to access and use this technology. These decisions are driven by student need and their IEP.

Our improvements for next year center around the full implementation of the newly adopted, high quality instructional materials (Wonders Series) and student data analysis. Working with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET), the instructional leadership team and teachers will receive explicit professional development on student data analysis and will use this information to inform instruction. This will be incorporated into the school's newly restructured PLCs and time will be specifically dedicated to supporting reading instruction.

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades K-2

McGraw Hill - K-5 Wonders

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades 3-5

McGraw Hill - K-5 Wonders

Additional Information about Instructional Materials

TSB has adopted the Wonders reading series which explicitly addresses foundational reading skills. TSB has also incorporated other materials to supplement the Wonders program and help meet the unique needs of our student population. For braille readers, teachers have access to the Building on Patterns series produced by the American Printing House for the Blind. This series blends those foundational reading skills with the development of braille knowledge.

TSB has a large population of students who are on alternative assessments and have intellectual disabilities. Teachers who serve students with moderate to significant intellectual disabilities have access to the MEville to WEville series. This series specifically targets pre-readiness literacy skills and what it means to be a reader. This program features vocabulary linked by themes across lessons, letter and rhyming lessons, and informal assessments for monitoring student progress. Students who are non-verbal have access and utilize communication devices to demonstrate reading abilities.

As previously mentioned, we also ensure all materials are in an accessible format based on the student's need and accessibility devices and software programs are readily available.

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

easyCBM

Intervention Structure and Supports

In the fall, students are given a universal screener (easyCBM) to determine which students have a significant reading deficiency or are "at-risk". Our grade-level teachers, data team and building level administrators review universal screener data to determine which students score between the 0-25th percentile. 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. Students receive daily, small-group intervention for at least 45 minutes in their area of greatest deficit.

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 recently adopted ELA curriculum (Wonders) contains an assessment and remediation guide in which teachers can find activities that directly address skill gaps (Tier II). 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 (such as MEville to WEville, UEB Braille Too Curriculum, Word Study (Ganske & Bear materials), the Heggerty Curriculum, and Fountas and Pinnell) become an option. Data teams meet

every 4-6 weeks to determine if a change in the intervention or the person providing the intervention is warranted. The data team also looks at 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 materials as interventions for students with characteristics of dyslexia. Our district notifies families of students who demonstrate characteristics of dyslexia. TSB designs a specific program for each student based on their specific needs and IEP. Because of the complexity of our student needs, no one program universally addresses deficiencies. We utilize a combination of materials (Fountas & Pinnell-Literacy Leveled Interventions, Haggerty Curriculum, UEB Braille Too: The Next Generation, and Word Study) to address phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, sound-symbol recognition, decoding skills, and encoding.

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.

Parent Notification Plan/Home Literacy Reports

Our district plans to notify parents in grades K-5 if their child is "at-risk" for or has a significant reading deficiency (as evidenced by students scoring in the 0-25th percentile) immediately after the school completes the fall universal screening. Students' scores will be communicated in parent-friendly language that provides a clear explanation of student skill gaps and the depth and extent of student needs. The parents will be told 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. The district will define how students are assessed and what a "significant reading deficiency" means. Parents will subsequently be notified of their child's progress, or lack of progress, after each data team meeting. In the parent notifications/communication, data teams will note 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 (activities are not tailored by child, but tailored by skill deficit generally). These communications go out to parents with students in grades K-3 three times annually and are shared in grades 4 and 5 annually.

Additionally, grades K-2 teachers will communicate weekly with parents about upcoming literacy skills that are being covered and provides suggestions on how they can support these at home.

Because all students at TSB have an IEP, parents also receive detailed, quarterly progress reports which provide an additional opportunity to communicate student progress with respect to reading.

Professional Development Plan

Teachers in our district will participate in the free and optional Reading 360 Early Literacy Training series developed by the Tennessee Department of Education. Our plan for providing PD for all K-5 teachers is as follows:

May 2021 – All teachers of grades in grades Pre-K through five will engage in Week 1 of the Early Literacy Training series, asynchronously. This training will focus on foundational reading development and instruction and is grounded in a phonics-based approach. We will ensure that participating educators earn a completion certificate prior to starting Week 2 work in June.

June-July 2021 – Our district has registered for the cohort-based, in-person training offered as Week 2 of the Early Literacy Training series for all teachers in grade Pre-K through five. This week will emphasize practical classroom application of research findings around strong instruction in phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary.

We plan to include our ESL instructor and newly hired interventionist teachers (ESSER 3.0 grant funded positions for next school year) during the summer of June 2022. Because we are a state special school for students who are blind and visually impaired, all teachers instruct special education students.