



LEA Final Report

Local Education Agency	Allegany County Public Schools
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Study Purpose and Approach

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB) contracted with the Maryland Initiative for Literacy & Equity (MILE) to evaluate literacy instruction across all 24 Maryland LEAs. This evaluation stems from a [joint resolution](#) by MSDE and AIB in November 2023. The evaluation was designed to focus on collaboration and capacity-building across all stakeholder groups, ultimately leading to statewide recommendations for technical assistance supporting reading development for all students in Maryland. Standard protocols were developed by translating IDA’s Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading and effective implementation research into key success indicators through joint collaboration with MILE and AIM Institute for Learning & Research. All protocols are available for review upon request, although MILE and AIM Institute for Learning & Research maintain ownership, and other users may not adapt these protocols.

Allegany County Public Schools (ACPS) was evaluated between March and May 2024. This data collection included the county’s K-5 literacy plan, focus groups with teachers and principals, and targeted classroom observations. All data collection protocols, including the classroom [observation protocol](#), are aligned with a standard set of drivers and [indicators](#) of effective literacy instruction.

Review of K-5 Literacy Plans

The LEA’s K-5 literacy plan was provided to MILE in January 2024. Two literacy experts reviewed it using a standard rubric developed for the purpose. After the initial review, the literacy experts provided written and oral feedback in March 2024 to ELA leadership to revise the plan. The LEA submitted a revised plan in May and included it in this review.

Review of 6-12 Literacy Plans

The LEA’s 6-12 literacy plan was provided to MILE in July 2024. Again, two literacy experts reviewed it using a standard rubric developed for the purpose. However, no focus group, interview, or school visit data was gathered for grades 6-12 as part of the evaluation process.

Focus Groups

Two teacher focus groups, several individual interviews, and one principal focus group were conducted to review literacy implementation across the district. Nine district teachers, principals, and staff participated in interviews and focus groups, providing insight into literacy implementation in schools and classrooms. Although the research team protected participant privacy, LEA staff knew which individuals were included in each prospective sample.

Classroom Observations

The same rubric used to analyze the literacy plans helped inform the data collection protocols to observe literacy implementation across the district. Eight classroom observations were



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conducted in one school to provide data on classroom literacy implementation. Note, however, that these visits were limited in scope and not designed to capture a representative sample due to time constraints. One literacy expert conducted classroom observations using a standard observation protocol for about 20 minutes. LEA staff members were present during classroom observations.

Introductory Statement

ACPS developed and began implementing the Comprehensive Literacy Plan in the 2023-24 school year. During this period, the district also adopted new evidence-aligned instructional materials. Since 2022, 3rd-grade MCAP proficiency rates have risen over the past three testing cycles from 38.8% to 44.3% in 2023 and projected 49.3% in 2024 (EOY).

The district was evaluated according to the [EPIS Framework](#), which evaluates system-wide implementation of evidence-based practices according to the stages of Exploration, Adoption/Preparation, Implementation, and Sustainment. The findings from the Allegany County Public Schools (ACPS) literacy plan review highlight several strengths and areas for improvement across various domains regarding embracing and enacting evidence-based literacy practices.

In terms of **Curriculum and Instruction**, ACPS demonstrates alignment with evidence-based literacy practices through the implementation of multiple curricula: Frog Street (PK), Heggerty (PK-2), Superkids (K-2), Amplify's CKLA (3-5) and HMH Into Literature (6-12) with consistent and engaging literacy instruction. However, challenges in implementing structured literacy are noted in intermediate grades, suggesting a need for more rigorous lesson design and differentiated learning opportunities to enhance student engagement and achievement. Since 2020, ACPS has supported **Professional Learning** by providing LETRs training, starting with reading specialists and special education teachers, then PK-5 teachers in 2022 through 2024, and curriculum training. Additional job-embedded coaching is occurring through 5 district-level literacy coaches and a train-the-trainer model to have school-based leaders able to provide support, particularly through grade-level professional learning communities. The primary recommendation is to expand training to paraprofessionals who are increasingly taking on the role of interventionists. In addition, the **Multi-tiered Support Systems** are comprehensive, with strong routines in place utilizing data-driven approaches such as DIBELS and curriculum assessments for screening and progress monitoring and Tier II and III intervention programs (Foundations/Geodes, LETRS Lit Kits, Orton-Gillingham, etc.). While teachers have multiple resources for intervention support and are the primary interventionists for Tier II, the staffing support may not be enough to meet the needs of the students. ACPS has strong **Instructional Leadership** with a goal of 70% of administrators being knowledgeable and actively supporting effective literacy instructional practices, including consistent data monitoring (at least 3x/year) and planning. Lastly, ACPS has a strong **Community Culture and Engagement** through monthly

literacy nights and community partnerships. Recommendations encourage further integration of families and communities to support the district's instructional goals.

The reviewers evaluated the implementation plan (Comprehensive Literacy Plans) for detailed strategies and approaches. Then, they determined the strength and consistency of implementation through observations of classroom instruction, interviews with administrators, and focus groups with teachers and support staff. The reviewers identified ACPS as being in the **(middle) implementation phase** as they secure the routines around the key drivers of Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Learning, Multi-tiered systems of support, Instructional Leadership, and Community Engagement. Based on the key findings, the recommended goals are to address the challenges regarding the need for more staffing to assist the struggling learners, meeting time, and data review, analysis, and implementation of change.

Secondary

The HMH Into Literature curriculum is designed to incorporate five core components that address the diverse needs of English learners through tailored support. The district emphasizes the enhancement of vocabulary development within the curriculum and strategic plan, highlighting the significance of complex texts that enable students to engage with new language and cognitive frameworks. Allegany's educational philosophy underscores the necessity for all students to participate in evidence-based writing, utilizing a Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP)-aligned writing rubric to assess growth over the academic year. To support literacy development, the district employs a variety of assessments, implements Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in lesson planning, and provides ongoing coaching for English Language Arts (ELA) teachers to effectively accommodate the needs of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), while also promoting collaboration and data analysis to inform instructional practices.

Key Findings: Strengths & Opportunities

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction: *(Middle) Implementation*

Grades K-5

ACPS's curriculum is aligned with the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS) and has adopted structured literacy and knowledge-building programs.

The MILE team observed the full implementation of the structured literacy program and routines for the progression of Tier I/core instruction in whole-group and small-group instruction. However, the team did not observe explicit writing instruction.

Teachers reported the programs' benefits and how they have impacted student skills.

Grades 6-12

The HMH Into Literature curriculum is designed to encompass five core components, addressing the diverse needs of English learners through individualized support within the adopted curricula. The district emphasizes that curriculum and instruction will focus on enhancing students' vocabulary development. The secondary literacy strategic plan highlights the importance of complex texts, which provide students with opportunities to engage with new language, knowledge, and cognitive frameworks. Additionally, Allegany's educational philosophy asserts that all students should engage in evidence-based writing to analyze complex texts, and the district plans to utilize a Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP)-aligned writing rubric to evaluate growth in writing tasks from the beginning to the end of the academic year.

2.0 Professional Learning: *(Middle) Implementation*

Grades K-5

ACPS teaching staff was trained in the LETRS and SuperKids programs. Additionally, the district has trained teachers to adjust instruction for the components of structured literacy using data and student performance on formative assessment and provided job-embedded training for teaching staff and administration.

Training is aligned by content area and across schools every month with grade-level professional learning communities to ensure consistency in their professional learning.

The MILE team observed evidence of the training in implementing structured literacy within classrooms.

Grades 6-12

Elementary and secondary English Language Arts (ELA) teachers will receive ongoing coaching to enhance their implementation of curricular materials, with a particular focus on accommodating the needs of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Teachers are encouraged to reflect on how the internalization of unit and lesson plans influences their instructional practices and to share trends with literacy coaches and school

leaders during regular data meetings aimed at reviewing student literacy achievement and providing tiered literacy support. Additionally, new ELA teachers will receive comprehensive support to effectively utilize their curricular resources, while school leaders, literacy coaches, and literacy educators—including those in Special Education—will engage in professional development that aligns with the district’s literacy philosophy, exemplified through consistent coaching cycles and the establishment of a monthly collaborative planning schedule.

3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems: (Middle) Implementation

Grades K-5

ACPS understands the need for more personnel to meet the needs of struggling learners. Based on the staffing available to them, schools have created schedules to meet the needs of their students. They use data from nationally normed screening tools, and meetings are held to discuss the student's progress and form groups. Due to district financial restraints, the classroom teacher is the primary teacher for Tier 2 instruction.

Grades 6-12

At the beginning of the academic year, several assessments are administered, including the HMH Growth Measure, NWEA MAP, and i-Ready. The "ACPS_Data Meetings" document outlines the progress monitoring protocols for secondary education, incorporating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles within the lesson planning templates for both elementary and secondary levels. In middle schools, 80-minute literacy blocks consist of 40 minutes dedicated to Tier I instruction and 40 minutes allocated to Literacy Lab, where students are grouped according to individual needs; high schools additionally offer Developmental Reading courses for Grades 9-10 and Comprehension Skills classes for Grades 11-12 to support students facing challenges in reading proficiency, utilizing resources such as HMH, Foundations, Read 180, and iReady.

4.0 Instructional Leadership: (Middle) Implementation

Grades K-5

ACPS administration participated in LETRS training for administrators to articulate the benefits and support the opportunities structured literacy has provided their students in learning to read and reading to learn. District and school leadership have plans for reviewing data and completing analysis. At least once a month, School Improvement Team meetings and staff meetings share progress on goals.

Grades 6-12

Grades 6-12 English Language Arts teachers participate in training focused on the administration and data analysis of the HMH Growth Measure, as well as collaborative sessions for MCAP writing and rubric analysis. Supported by literacy coaches, teachers triangulate these data points to assess whether students meet benchmark criteria, with calendar and data meetings meticulously documented. Additionally, Allegany County Public Schools has created a learning walk tool derived from the Instructional Practices Guide (IPG) to monitor progress, aligning with the district's literacy beliefs and incorporating specific curricular observations.

5.0 Community Culture and Engagement: *(Middle) Implementation*

Grades K-5

ACPS has implemented structured literacy programs and supports, and there is a focus on engaging the community in culture and learning through a monthly program to communicate the instructional programs to the community. The MILE team observed that schools engage parents in monthly meetings to explore the curriculum and its implementation. Title I and community schools have been particularly active in utilizing their resources to engage families and communities.

School administrators reported that they are searching for partner schools to work with to meet the communities where they are in their understanding of the learning occurring across the district.

Grades 6-12

District leaders and members of the literacy task force will engage central office staff, school leaders, coaches, elementary and secondary English Language Arts teachers, and community stakeholders in Allegany's educational vision and beliefs, fostering enthusiasm and empowerment to implement this vision within classrooms and communities. Additionally, they will support the planning and facilitation of monthly literacy nights and family engagement events at the Judy Centers, enhancing community involvement in literacy initiatives.

Recommendations: Next Steps

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction

Grades K-5

We recommend that ACPS ensure teachers in grades 3-5 receive training on evidence-based writing practices. The district provides teachers with training on scaffolding and differentiation, especially for grade 3 Tier 2 groups. Professional learning on scaffolding and differentiation for Tier 2 groups has been facilitated through CKLA implementation training, TNTP consultations, and literacy data analysis meetings led by literacy coaches. During these meetings, targeted supports for students within the core program are determined, with plans for effective writing instruction set for the 2024-2025 school year. TNTP will provide professional development on the Writing Studio, an ancillary product of CKLA, focusing on effective scaffolds for writing development. Additionally, ACPS is piloting the Amplify CKLA literacy program in grades K-2 across five schools, which, if fully implemented in the following school year, would enhance programming consistency across grades.

Grades 6-12

The feedback emphasizes the need for a thorough evaluation of the secondary curriculum to ensure it includes the five core components and integrates the CRSE framework as outlined by Muhammad (2023). It is crucial that educators receive

comprehensive training on this framework and its associated literacy practices. Additionally, the current focus on explicit instruction for pre-kindergarten through third grade should be expanded to include all grade levels, especially secondary education. Finally, targeted strategies for vocabulary development, text structure instruction, and writing integration must be implemented to effectively support the diverse needs of secondary students.

2.0 Professional Learning

Grades K-5

We recommend that ACPS train paraprofessionals on structured literacy programs to increase their understanding of the purpose of using them and assist with building the routines required for them. In grades 4 and 5, teachers have had the opportunity to participate in voluntary science of reading training through LETRS and TNTP. Additionally, some paraprofessionals are being trained to assist with supplemental literacy instruction. However, the minimal qualifications required for hiring paraprofessionals often limit their effectiveness and reliability in delivering quality instruction.

Grades 6-12

It is important to ascertain how frequently teachers engage in collaborative planning and conduct lesson studies, as these practices can significantly improve instructional quality. Additionally, understanding how student needs are taken into account in the distribution of resources is essential for equitable support across the program. It is crucial to clarify the specific training that intervention and special education providers will receive at the secondary level to ensure they are well-equipped to support diverse learners effectively.

3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems

Grades K-5

MTSS exists within ACPS. However, focus groups reported multiple constraints. Literacy coaches hold monthly meetings at the school level to review and analyze student data. However, it is sometimes difficult to find time to meet consistently. Additionally, the MILE team observed that small group Tier 2 instruction only lasts for 15 minutes in some classrooms.

We recommend that the district schedule Tier 2 instruction for an additional 15-20 minutes to meet the standards for high-quality supplemental instruction.

Additionally, the district should discuss how staffing might be reconfigured to provide more Tier 3 opportunities for students and establish an identified protocol for data analysis and student movement in and out of Tier 2 and 3 instruction. ACPS emphasizes the importance of classroom teachers being well-versed in the instructional components of all three tiers in a multi-tiered system of support, particularly after receiving training in the science of reading. Teachers are expected to facilitate students' reading development by implementing supplemental instruction in small, targeted groups (Tier II). Elementary classrooms feature a 120-minute literacy block, supplemented by an additional 30-minute period for Tier II and Tier III instruction, allowing teachers to address core program components and provide

targeted support to struggling students. During screening data analysis meetings, literacy coaches guide teachers in reviewing data, examining recommended mClass DIBELS groups, and discussing the need for secondary screeners. The Decision Tree for Universal Screening and Progress Monitoring, included in the literacy plan, will be utilized to ensure students are effectively placed in interventions that address their skill deficits and to determine benchmarks for advancing or exiting support levels.

Grades 6-12

Additional information is needed regarding the scheduling of secondary meetings to ensure effective collaboration among educators. What is the nature of Tier 1 instruction at the high school level, and how are Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions differentiated within this context? The district should specify the literacy areas targeted by each intervention and provide comprehensive details on the interventions, including student profiles, group sizes, and duration, while also clarifying the implementation of a gradual release model for secondary interventions.

4.0 Instructional Leadership

Grades K-5

It is recommended that ACPS create a focused walk-through tool to systematically observe structured literacy practices and provide educators with direct feedback informed by research-based diagnostic instruments. Additionally, district leadership should establish clear parameters to ensure that school-based data meetings occur regularly, as indicated by focus groups. The district should also develop protocols for School Improvement Teams (SIT) to analyze data and effectively communicate findings to both staff and the community, enhancing understanding of school performance. Finally, in collaboration with TNTP, ACPS is refining learning walk tools and training administrators on implementing a structured coaching and feedback cycle to improve instructional practices aligned with the science of reading and the ACPS literacy plan.

Grades 6-12

It would be beneficial to clarify the connection between professional development for secondary instructors and the current literacy initiative. Additionally, providing further explanation of how this alignment contributes to the overall effectiveness of the literacy plan and enhances instructional practices among secondary educators would be helpful.

5.0 Community Culture and Engagement

Grades K-5

Given that school leadership reported that that individual schools are independently reaching out to their neighboring schools to partner around community initiatives, we recommend that ACPS support these efforts in a centralized manner through communication portals and internal resource hubs to facilitate the process of collaboration for school leaders to maximize the reach events may have with families and communities and reduces the burdens on individual schools.



ACPS implements the Raising a Readers (RAR) program for families of children in Pre-K 3, Pre-K 4, and kindergarten, which includes high-quality book borrowing and weekly exchanges, professional development for teachers, structured literacy events for families, and library field trips. The Early Learning Program Specialist coordinates these activities with staff and families, and the district is considering the establishment of a resource hub for schools. Additionally, plans are being finalized for Title I Coordinators to collaborate with Literacy Supervisors to co-develop a family literacy event that will provide information on the district's literacy plan, instructional focus areas aligned with the science of reading, screening, and intervention strategies, and ways families can support reading at home. This event will be accessible to all schools, with encouragement for school leaders to host it.

Grades 6-12

It would be beneficial to provide details on the family engagement methods utilized at the secondary level and the frequency with which they occur.