



LEA Final Report

Local Education Agency

Anne Arundel County Public Schools

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.

The evaluation of Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) was conducted 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 both written and oral feedback in March 2024 to ELA leadership for revision of the plan. The LEA submitted a revised plan in May and included it as part of 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. A total of 26 district teachers, principals, and staff participated in seven interviews and three 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 used in the observation of literacy implementation across the district. 68 classroom observations were conducted across 8 schools 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 and lasted for about 20 minutes. LEA staff members were present during classroom observations.



Success indicators through 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.

LEA Background and Context

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) embraces a comprehensive approach to literacy embedded in the Science of Reading (SoR) research. The literacy vision for the district is to build literacy skills and a breadth of knowledge by adopting evidence-based practices that immerse students in diverse experiences using complex texts. During the 2023-24 school year, the district began adopting evidence-aligned curricula, training its leadership and school personnel in the SoR and structured literacy practices. The district leadership and ELA coordinators developed a well-detailed, ambitious Comprehensive Literacy Plan (CLP). In the spring of 2024, the district adopted a new literacy curriculum, CKLA/Amplify, which had a pilot rollout during the data collection for this review. Professional learning for the new curriculum is being unveiled between spring and fall 2024, and additional training on the science of learning for school leaders.

The district was evaluated according to the [EPIS Framework](#), which evaluates system-wide implementation of evidence-based practices according to stages of exploration, adoption/preparation, implementation, and sustainment. Because of the recent adoption and transition of evidence-based literacy practices, the detailed implementation plan highlighted in the CLP is not evident in the observed classroom practices and staff responses. As for **Curriculum and Instruction**, AACPS has aligned its curriculum with Maryland standards and begun implementing Amplify CKL, though adoption was recent and limited to early adopter classrooms. The District has initiated a dual-language program for MLs at one elementary school—a noted shortage of printed culturally relevant texts and inconsistent phonics alignment across lessons. **Professional learning** opportunities are robust and include LETRS training for K-5 teachers. Literacy education is supported through regular training sessions led by reading specialists and literacy teachers who collaborate with staff in planning, teaching, and modeling literacy lessons. Budget cuts may impact support as some schools lose literacy teachers, raising concerns about ongoing curriculum implementation and professional development. **Multi-tiered Support Systems** are evidenced through a robust data-driven process, including differentiation, utilizing trend data for pacing, identifying student needs, and setting goals. AACPS uses assessments like i-Ready and Wilson, with ongoing data monitoring and accessible student data, to support Tier 2 and 3 instruction. Teachers noted the need for consistent intervention materials and equitable access to support across the school system. **Instructional Leadership** monitors school and district performance through regular trend analysis conducted three times a year, with principals leading walkthroughs to assess instructional quality. District-designed equity-focused professional learning sessions allow for data review across subgroups. In addition, the consistency of administrator involvement across schools is affected by competing responsibilities. **Community Engagement** is active and involves literacy events for families, home learning materials, and updates on student learning while partnering with organizations like "Pets on Wheels," nonprofits, and PTAs for literacy support. Additional efforts might involve the consistency of literacy initiatives and inclusivity across all schools, particularly those with Title I versus non-Title I distinctions.

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 CCPSD as moving from **preparation to early adoption** in the key drivers of Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Learning, Multi-tiered systems of support, Instructional Leadership, and Community Engagement. The leadership at AACPS has made great strides in the past year to begin this journey. They will need strong support to continue on this path in light of changing fiscal support from ESSER funds.

Secondary

The Advanced English/Language Arts curriculum for grades 6-8 is undergoing revisions to integrate best practices for gifted and talented (GT) students in alignment with the Tier 1 StudySync framework. Additionally, AACPS proposes the implementation of UFLI Foundations, a systematic phonics program designed for secondary newcomer multilingual learners, ensuring they receive explicit instruction during their transitional years. The revision process emphasizes cultural responsiveness and seeks collaboration with the Offices of Equity and Innovation, English Language Development, and Special Education to address the needs of diverse student populations, ultimately empowering bilingual learners as "multilingual global citizens" prepared for academic and cultural success. To enhance literacy instruction, the AACPS professional learning framework equips educators with effective strategies and tools, facilitates collaborative planning and data analysis, and incorporates Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to promote inclusivity. At the same time, ongoing efforts focus on recruiting qualified teachers to maintain program integrity and improve student literacy outcomes across K12.

Key Findings: Current Status of Implementation

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction: *Preparation/Adoption*

Grades K-5

AACPS is aligned with the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS). AACPS has identified classrooms for early adoption of Amplify CKL, which all teachers will access from 2024-2025. CKLA early adopter teachers only began implementing during the last few weeks of the school year.

While teachers have access to a range of grade-level and culturally relevant digital resources for reading and writing instruction, access to printed, culturally relevant, diverse text is limited within schools. Additionally, teachers cannot model lessons and independently identify non-evidence-based supplementary resources.

Additionally, the MILE team observed a misalignment between the phonics and phonemic awareness lessons and texts for decoding practice. The new curriculum for next school year has alignment built across skills within grade levels and horizontal alignment between grade levels. Teachers delivered explicit comprehension skill lessons from the district at the basic level, needing more opportunities for modeling high-leverage practices like making predictions and drawing inferences.

The district has also launched a dual-language program at one elementary school for multilingual learners (MLs). However, few supports for ML speakers were observed in other classrooms.

Grades 6-12

The Advanced English/Language Arts curriculum for grades 6-8 is being revised to incorporate best

practices for gifted and talented (GT) students, aligning with the Tier 1 StudySync framework. Additionally, AACPS recommends implementing UFLI Foundations, a systematic phonics program tailored for secondary newcomer multilingual learners, ensuring that these students receive explicit instruction during their transitional years (grades 6-12). The curriculum revision plan emphasizes cultural responsiveness and involves the Offices of Equity and Innovation, English Language Development, and Special Education to address stakeholder values and support diverse student populations. The overarching goal is to empower bilingual learners as "multilingual global citizens" equipped for academic and cultural success while enhancing literacy instruction across K12 through scientifically grounded methodologies promoting comprehensive language skills.

2.0 Professional Learning: *Preparation/Adoption*

Grades K-5

AACPS provides professional learning opportunities by assessing multiple stakeholder groups' input about student learning needs. The district provided opportunities for K-5 teachers to register for LETRS training.

Literacy teachers and reading specialists receive regular training from the school district on structured literacy practices and then provide the information to teachers and staff in their schools. Teachers also receive building-level support from experienced literacy teachers who co-plan, co-teach, and model literacy lessons. Professional learning occurs at schools mostly through collaborative planning.

Some schools have added additional professional learning sessions and purchased resources, such as Podcasts, to build content knowledge and shift mindsets. However, some schools are losing their literacy teacher in 2024-2025 due to budget cuts. Teachers reported concerns about how they will receive support with a new curriculum.

Teachers and administrators focus on equity-centered professional learning once a month per a district-wide focus. However, teachers reported professional learning about MLs was limited and low-quality.

Grades 6-12

AACPS's professional learning initiatives for secondary literacy are designed to enhance teachers' reading and writing instruction competencies for grades 6-12. Core components of these professional development opportunities include mastery of the curriculum, implementation of the writer's workshop, and explicit instruction in language usage, alongside targeted training in small group instruction via the station rotation model. To facilitate collaborative planning and data analysis, the Secondary Literacy Office advocates for dedicated time for teachers to strategize lesson planning and instructional differentiation, with equitable resource distribution based on student demographics and needs. Furthermore, the incorporation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles aims to foster inclusivity and cultural responsiveness, particularly for historically underserved student populations. At the same time, ongoing efforts to recruit certified teachers and reading interventionists will help sustain program integrity and enhance student literacy outcomes.

3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems: *Preparation/Adoption*

Grades K-5

AACPS Tier 2 and 3 instruction provides opportunities for targeted intervention support based on individual skills and utilizing multiple programs for greatest impact. Data collection on this process is a

highlight of the data-based decision making that is being implemented.

AACPS reviews trend data to monitor alignment and correlate local assessments with state assessments. Building administrators and teachers utilize data to implement pacing conferences, determine students' strengths and weaknesses, identify intervention needs, measure teacher and administration Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), set goals, and guide conferences with students and parents.

AACPS assessments consist of screening, diagnostic, formative, and summative measures. QACPS uses i-Ready and Wilson to assess students throughout the year, and school teams look at reading data consistently, independently, and in collaborative groups. Schools assign TAs to monitor data for students struggling the most in reading. Schools make individual student data accessible to all staff in shared Google drives. However, diagnostic data is not readily available for families.

Additionally, the district utilizes a series of systems and structures to facilitate collaborative analysis of and responsiveness to student progress at each grade level, including data review meetings; however, the outcomes do not align with concrete adjustments needed for instruction.

Teachers informally assess students approaching the standard or performing below level via cruising clipboards, anecdotal notes, or running records and use SLOs to monitor student progress. However, classroom teachers need more access to Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention materials. Differentiated instruction must be more consistent, particularly in grades 3-5.

Implementation fidelity is inconsistent within schools and across the district. Intervention positions are being reduced in some schools in 2024-2025, which will impact the time and intensity of services.

Grades 6-12

The AACPS Data Map for the 2023-2024 academic year outlines an evaluation framework assessing students identified as at risk, specifically through the analysis of test scores comparing those who received interventions with those who did not. The plan emphasizes the integration of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to enhance learning outcomes for all students, particularly focusing on culturally responsive strategies for historically underserved groups, including multilingual learners. It also underscores the necessity for systematic, collaborative planning time for secondary English/Language Arts teachers to effectively analyze assessment data and develop lesson plans aligned with the secondary literacy curriculum. Furthermore, the K-12 Reading Continuum serves as a comprehensive framework for guiding Tier 1 instruction and interventions, detailing processes for identifying students needing Tier 2 or Tier 3 support and establishing exit criteria to transition them back to Tier 1 instruction upon demonstrating adequate progress.

4.0 Instructional Leadership: *Preparation/Adoption*

Grades K-5

AACPS monitors school and district performance to identify trends at least 3x a year.

Principals lead walkthroughs to monitor student progress and teacher instruction throughout the year. Teachers are evaluated on at least one literacy SLO, and principals monitor progress, and progress monitoring aligns with the release of data. While walkthroughs happen, they could be more consistent across schools due to other responsibilities. Principals do not hold teachers accountable to the current curriculum because of the new curriculum that will be in place in 2024-2025.

Literacy teachers meet regularly with administrators and the school leadership team to review data. However, the district does not always provide timely data reports. Additionally, principals lead

intervention lessons, small group lessons, and co-teaching in classrooms.

District-designed monthly equity-focused professional learning provides time to review data trends across subgroups at select meetings.

Grades 6-12

The primary objective is to enhance the College and Career Readiness (CCR) rate among secondary students, aiming to increase proficiency from 61% in Spring 2023 to 70% by Spring 2032, as assessed by the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) English 10. This goal is particularly focused on improving proficiency rates among specific student demographics—Black/African American, Hispanic, Economically Disadvantaged, English Learners, and Students with Disabilities—who currently exhibit lower performance compared to their White and Asian peers. To support this aim, an alternative instructional schedule for grades 6-8 ensures that identified students receive adequate Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions aligned with grade-level standards and demonstrate mastery on quarterly assessments. The AACPS professional learning framework also emphasizes equipping educators with effective strategies and tools. At the same time, a comprehensive "Data Map" facilitates systematic assessment monitoring and the development of data-driven action plans to improve instruction and student outcomes across the district.

5.0 Community Culture and Engagement: *Preparation/Adoption*

Grades K-5

AACPS consistently holds family engagement events, sends home materials to support student and family learning, and makes consistent efforts to keep parents up to date on what students are learning and enable them to support their children at home.

AACPS partners with the following organizations in the implementation of its literacy plan:

- “Pets on Wheels” program where reluctant readers read to dogs at school monthly
- Nonprofit organizations to support literacy efforts
- PTAs

While PTAs are highly engaged with schools, they focus more on social activities than literacy initiatives. School-led community engagement activities also focus on events and not school-based instructional decisions. Additionally, there are differences in the number of community events held in Title I versus non-Title I schools, in part because Title I schools have family engagement staffing to support family events at least once a quarter.

Grades 6-12

Teachers and school leaders, at both the school-based and district levels, are encouraged to engage in collaborative practices that include interdisciplinary reflection, instructional improvement, and the establishment of cross-curricular connections. Effective communication with families and caregivers is essential for gathering grade-level expectations and student progress feedback. Furthermore, collaboration with community stakeholders—including families, caregivers, and local partners—is crucial for fostering student literacy and preparing them to be college- and career-ready and responsible members of society. Community partners will work alongside AACPS educators to discuss curriculum, instruction, and assessment, maximize educational opportunities, support student learning needs, and participate in events that enhance stakeholder engagement and strengthen partnerships.

Recommendations: Next Steps

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction

Grades K-5

The MILE team observed teachers asking effective literal questions when prompting students to cite evidence from the text in most classrooms. However, teachers should have often prompted students to extend their thinking beyond direct questions.

It is our recommendation that AACPS demonstrate comprehension teaching in action by placing models in exemplar lesson plans, incorporating explicit language supports and scaffolds for MLs in all lesson plans, providing classroom teachers with strategies to infuse language supports and scaffolds, especially for MLs and students with exceptional differences, and using learning walks and observations to monitor implementation.

Additionally, we recommend that the district prioritize 2-4 high-leverage scaffolds for district-wide implementation.

Grades 6-12

It is imperative that the revisions to the secondary curriculum incorporate the five essential components and include a robust writing component that is aligned both horizontally and vertically. The considerations primarily address "newcomer multilingual learners," yet the district is praised for its inclusive language emphasizing "all students" and the anticipated interactions between educators and students within the forthcoming curriculum framework. To strengthen these revisions, it is recommended that the MSDE Equity & Excellence framework be explicitly referenced, or the equity framework proposed by Muhammad (2023) could be utilized. Furthermore, curricular updates, commencing in the 2024-2025 school year for grades K-5, should also encompass secondary education, clarifying strategies for vocabulary development—such as direct instruction, word awareness, synonyms, context cues, and morphological knowledge—while also ensuring comprehensive support for reading complex texts through explicit instruction on text structure, strategy use, and opportunities for close reading and extended discussions. Additionally, professional development should equip teachers delivering Tier 1 instruction with the necessary skills to effectively scaffold learning before implementing interventions.

2.0 Professional Learning

It is our recommendation that AACPS require LETRS training for all literacy teachers and extend professional learning on structured literacy practices to grade 4-5 teachers. We also recommend providing K-5 teachers with professional learning on modeling explicit comprehension strategies and skills, including support for designing inferential questions and providing concrete models.

Additionally, we recommend that the district consider featuring CKLA early adopter teachers in a district-wide professional learning event to share successes, lessons learned, and practical applications.

Grades 6-12

The plans outline ongoing professional development (PD) opportunities. Still, it is essential to clarify the intended frequency of these sessions and ensure that content teachers have access to training in

literacy best practices. Further explanation is needed regarding how these initiatives are being implemented at the secondary level and whether the proposed strategies are currently in effect. It is recommended that the explicit applications of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) for marginalized groups be clarified, particularly through collaboration with the Office of Equity. Furthermore, the professional development model should specify how observing and providing feedback to individuals delivering interventions will be integrated. In contrast, clear plans should also be established for training teachers to implement academic interventions—potentially within the station rotation model.

3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems

Grades K-5

We recommend that AACPS develop a plan to communicate with families about student data to coincide with quarterly and monthly school data reviews. To support this, the district should develop user-friendly templates and videos that show families what the data means in accessible language and provide a link to the next steps for instructional support at home. It should also work with the translation office to ensure the content is accessible to all families.

We recommend that the district restructures data meetings and include standard next steps on the agenda. This should include concrete guidance on how to analyze the results, take action in the classroom, and adjust the school culture. It should also include a specific protocol for looking at data and determining next steps.

It is our recommendation that the district provide schools with sample schedules that show how to incorporate intervention blocks 4-5 days a week while having minimal impact on the student instructional day and work with the Curriculum and Instruction Office to make recommendations.

Additionally, we recommend that the district equitably assign intervention teachers to schools across the district.

Grades 6-12

Ongoing monitoring of student data is crucial for facilitating movement in and out of intervention groups based on individual performance and needs; however, clarification is needed on how data assessments inform these shifts in interventions. Additionally, more specificity regarding integrating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) with Tier II and Tier III instruction is essential, emphasizing its utilization by content teachers. Data meetings at the secondary level are aligned with assessment maps but are not conducted monthly; it is important to confirm whether a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) protocol exists for high schools and to identify the stakeholders involved in its implementation. Furthermore, the current K-12 framework lacks components for grades beyond elementary, with insufficient details on dedicated literacy blocks at the middle and high school levels; a comprehensive plan should include information on group size, adaptations based on progress monitoring, and strategies to ensure that interventions are incorporated throughout the school day, particularly as intervention intensity increases.

4.0 Instructional Leadership

Grades K-5

It is our recommendation that AACPS organize learning walks to learn content through rich discussions, look for evidence, and identify areas of success and opportunity. We recommend that the

district develop a transition timeline for principals to understand instructional leadership expectations over a three-year progression, recognizing a gradual increase in teacher expectations after full training.

Additionally, we recommend that the district connect with principals leading instructional activities and have them share with other principals how this practice has informed their leadership practices. The district should provide principals with a timeline on when data reports will be available and work with a principal representative to identify dates that work best for student and school needs.

Grades 6-12

The plan should provide a clearer articulation of short-term objectives leading to mid-term assessment analyses and annual goals. Additionally, a professional development calendar for secondary grades is necessary to facilitate planning; it is important to ascertain whether these plans are disseminated before the start of the school year and to outline the timeline for data assessment. Furthermore, consideration should be given to implementing walkthrough protocols and feedback mechanisms, specifically at the secondary level. Examining how instructional leaders ensure accountability in addressing barriers at both the school and classroom levels is essential.

5.0 Community Culture and Engagement

Grades K-5

It is our recommendation that AACPS survey families to ask ways that the school can partner with them or enlist student leaders to develop a problem, practice, and determine the next steps around family engagement.

Additionally, the district should consider involving family and community representatives on the school instructional team to infuse perspectives about literacy gaps and strengths from different stakeholders.

Grades 6-12

The plan should specify the mechanisms by which feedback is solicited from families and caregivers and the strategies employed to engage families at the secondary level. It is important to incorporate explicit measures for family and community involvement, including methods for capturing and addressing relevant data to enhance participation. Additionally, the prioritization of underserved families needs to be clearly defined, along with strategies for involving these families in implementing the new curriculum and any planned revisions.