



LEA Final Report

Local Education Agency	Baltimore City 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 MILE and AIM Institute for Learning & Research collaboration. 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.

Baltimore City Public Schools was evaluated between February 2024 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 to 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 review, the experts provided written and oral feedback to Baltimore City Public Schools to revise the plan.

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.

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 15 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. In May 2024, 30 classroom observations were conducted 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, which lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. LEA staff members were present during classroom observations.

LEA Background and Context

Baltimore City Public School District (BCPSS) has been working with the Urban District Literacy Collaborative around their model and vision for SoR and “transforming literacy outcomes for (their) Black and Latinx students.” Their guiding questions drive this mission: 1) What are our literacy aspirations for each key stakeholder? 2) What do we need to do to achieve our aspirations? 3) How will we know if we are on track? There is a broad accounting of roles and responsibilities for teachers, leaders, students, and families. The literacy plan reflects engagement with evidence-based literacy practices since 2022.

BCPSS has implemented a structured literacy **Curriculum** for Tiers 2 and 3 aligned with the Science of Reading. This curriculum is supported by allocated small-group instruction time and targeted interventions from Literacy Tutors and Reading Partners. This approach is reinforced by regular academic planning meetings that focus on data-driven solutions to address student needs. **Professional Development** involves monthly Science of Reading sessions for literacy instructors and additional school-based training that targets instructional deficits. The Science of Reading Fellowship and collaborative networks like the 100% Project Network provide foundational knowledge and peer learning opportunities. At the same time, Literacy Coaches are available at each school to support implementation and instructional practices. **MTSS** Support systems feature intervention materials and TSI Tutors that enhance reading comprehension, with targeted assistance plans and additional support from Special Education and ESL instructors for specific reading skills. **Instructional Leadership** involves close collaboration with Literacy Coaches to assess and refine literacy programs, with regular evaluations and coaching based on performance data. **Community Engagement** is actively promoted through initiatives like Literacy Nights, events like Muffins with Moms and Donuts with Dads, and resources like book fairs and library registrations designed to involve families and reinforce literacy development at home.

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. 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 underspecified details in the Comprehensive Literacy Plan led reviewers to conclude that BCPSS is moving from **exploration to adoption** around the key drivers of Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Learning, Multi-tiered Systems of Support, Instructional Leadership, and Community Engagement. Evidence from the observations



suggests that the district is in ***early implementation*** for aspects of Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Learning, Multi-tiered Systems of Support, Instructional Leadership, and Community Engagement, with some indicators such as Professional Learning and Literacy Leadership being retooled in the previous school year or undergoing revision in the coming year (e.g., MTSS).

Secondary

The secondary literacy plan incorporates a multi-tiered system of support that includes intervention strategies to address diverse student needs while enhancing literacy coaches' capacity to facilitate effective school-based learning structures. This enhancement is achieved through various methods, including professional development, unit and lesson internalization, student work analysis, and coaching, thereby promoting rigorous and equitable instruction across all levels.

Key Findings: Current Status of Implementation

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction: *Preparation/Early Adoption Implementation*

Grades K-5

District goals and curricula reflect a commitment to instruction aligned with foundational skills, word recognition (Heggerty, Foundations, and Just Words), language comprehension, and knowledge building (Wit and Wisdom). The foundation skills and comprehension/knowledge-building curriculum were evident in all school visits with established routines and materials. However, in K-2 classrooms, most teachers were not following standard procedures for Foundations (particularly for phonics instruction), and minimal feedback or error correction was observed. During visits to the classroom, there was no evidence of scaffolded instruction for ELs, MLLs, or special education students.

During the school visits, there was evidence of diverse texts such as “The Story of Ruby Bridges,” but teachers report that the Wit and Wisdom curriculum is “hit or miss” with the range of texts provided.

Focus groups with teachers report no time for explicit writing instruction. Students are expected to respond to prompts in the curriculum but struggle due to a lack of explicit instruction on writing skills.

Grades 6-12

Baltimore City Schools have made significant advancements in adopting and implementing high-quality instructional materials for literacy across PreK-8 and high school levels. In developing the curriculum, the district emphasizes culturally responsive teaching practices within literacy instruction. As part of its theory of action, the Local Education Agency (LEA) aims to provide targeted language and literacy support tailored to the needs of students, including multilingual learners. A primary objective is to enhance English language instruction for multilingual learners to foster language and literacy development while also focusing on cultivating literacy content knowledge and instructional expertise to improve student writing in response to curriculum-based tasks.

2.0 Professional Learning: *Preparation/Early Adoption Implementation*

Grades K-5

The district created its evidence-based literacy practice training in 2022 to train K-3 educators and instructional leaders. Teachers reported that some educators have received LETRS and that teachers can self-select participation in monthly Science of Reading professional development sessions. There is also a literacy coach in each school. The 100% Project Network facilitates collaboration among educators to share best practices and strategic planning. The Opportunity Culture Project and Multi-Classroom Leads (MCLs) are also in place. The Science of Reading Fellowship provides veteran and new instructors with foundational knowledge in structured literacy and opportunities to train others.

In interviews with principals, it was reported that training on structured literacy and the

science of reading approach was optional. They were generally unaware of the approach to literacy instruction, with a few referring to the literacy coaches.

Teachers and administrators also reported a need for professional development for ESL teachers, particularly in supporting ML and bi-dialectal students, valuing how students speak at home, and capitalizing on that knowledge to enable greater literacy.

Grades 6-12

The plan articulates a commitment to enhancing the capacity of literacy coaches to promote effective school-based learning structures that support robust literacy instruction at both universal and targeted levels. This is achieved through various methods, including professional development, unit and lesson internalization, student work analysis, and coaching. A vision for vertically aligned professional development aimed at sustainability is established, ensuring high-quality training that focuses on the foundational pillars of reading. This approach fosters teacher growth and empowers educators to deliver rigorous and equitable instruction to all students.

3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems: *Implementation (exploration)*

Grades K-5

While the plan reflects the goal of designing, refining, and implementing MTSS, BCPSS focus groups suggest that the District has established dedicated small group instruction time and adopted a core structured literacy curriculum aligned with the Science of Reading. Literacy Tutors and Reading Partners offer targeted support to Tier 2 and Tier 3 students. Weekly academic planning meetings also address instructional challenges, analyze data, and refine content planning. The district provides intervention materials to instructors and employs TSI (Transitional Supplemental Instruction) tutors to offer additional classroom support and have a measurable impact on reading comprehension based on benchmark data.

Some schools utilize Targeted Assistance Plans (TAP) to deliver highly structured and focused small-group instruction based on specific reading skills, with Special Education and ESL instructors providing additional support. Literacy Coaches and ESL teachers are integrated into some classrooms. However, this may vary from school to school. As reported by some teachers during visits and in focus groups, there is limited job-embedded professional development and planning for small-group instruction. Teachers stated that small group instruction is discussed in certain professional learning venues but must be implemented with ongoing support.

Focus group responses highlighted a need for more training on using intervention materials. Because intervention materials are housed in many locations, determining where, how, and when to find and implement each resource becomes overwhelming.

The District creates a progress monitoring (PM) schedule that schools should follow. Still, instructors shared in focus groups that they feel pressure from the District that compliance is more of a priority than data analysis to support student progress. Teachers noted that PM for students in the “red” is often excessive and takes significant time away from instruction (PM required every three weeks for students in the “red”/”well below” and every six weeks for

students in the “yellow”/”below”). In some schools, MCLs are in charge of progress monitoring, but in schools where there are no MCLs, some instructors must teach and do progress monitoring independently.

Grades 6-12

The secondary literacy plan incorporates a multi-tiered system of support, which inherently includes intervention strategies to address varying student needs.

4.0 Instructional Leadership: *Implementation (exploration)***Grades K-5**

Although the plan reflects a discussion to develop a multi-year approach to professional development, little evidence is included. Focus group feedback suggested that school leaders collaborate with literacy coaches to implement and assess literacy programs, with dedicated time three times a year to monitor performance and identify trends. Administrators, Literacy Coaches, and Multi-Classroom Leads (MCLs) evaluate teachers through two formal and informal observations. Administrators review data with coaches, and principals use the TEACH rubric to evaluate instructor performance, provide feedback, and hold conferences to discuss lesson plans and enhance structured literacy practices. Additional coaching plans are offered to teachers requiring extra support.

While the programs are being implemented, focus groups and observations suggest that standard procedures to ensure fidelity in instruction implementation were not in place. Although teachers appreciated the feedback process from principals, there was an expressed need for principals to receive professional learning on structured literacy and principles from the science of reading.

Grades 6-12

More evidence is needed regarding the multi-year phases of initiatives for high school, although some mid-term goals are delineated for the 2024-2025 academic year.

5.0 Community Culture and Engagement: *Implementation (exploration)***Grades K-5**

While the literacy plan offers limited evidence, focus groups highlighted several initiatives offered through BCPSS that emphasize community, culture, and engagement in literacy development. The Foundations curriculum includes a free home support component, and resources like Wit and Wisdom tip sheets and Amplify home connect sheets are provided to students. Many schools host Literacy Nights with activities for families and offer take-home tools through the Parent Teacher Organization and Literacy Coaches. Events such as Muffins with Moms, Donuts with Dads, Reading Around the World, library registration drives, and Springboard parent workshops foster parental involvement. Additionally, schools facilitate book fairs, bookmobiles, and other workshops to support literacy at home.

Grades 6-12

Ensure the development of a comprehensive plan to engage the community specifically for the secondary education context.

Recommendations: Next Steps

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction

Grades K-5

Curriculum and instruction recommendations include identifying a Tier 1 curriculum that reflects evidence-based literacy practices. Training aligned with the identified curriculum should prioritize the needs of Multi-Language Learners and Special Education students to ensure explicit, systematic, rigorous, and engaging culturally responsive lessons. The curriculum also needs to incorporate explicit teaching of writing skills, such as sentence structure, punctuation, and grammar. The plan should reflect equitable district-wide access to training opportunities, such as Foundations or Orton-Gillingham. Additionally, increased administrative engagement in weekly academic planning meetings is recommended to enhance instructional effectiveness.

As evidenced by BCPSS: *“Year II (2024-2025) of City Schools’ PreK-12 Literacy Plan includes a launch focused on students with disabilities (initiative 2.4), to build capacity of Literacy Coaches and teachers in providing appropriate scaffolds in supporting the needs of students with disabilities.*

City Schools recognizes the need to build awareness and capacity of Literacy Coaches and teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners. As a result, our 2024 Summer CAO Institute focused on diverse learners and will continue into systemic professional learning for the 2024-2025 school year. A focus on meeting the needs of students with disabilities and multilingual learners (MLs) is also evidenced in City Schools’ PreK-8 Literacy Plan under initiatives 2.3 and 2.4.

A focus on writing is evident in City Schools PreK-8 Literacy Plan under initiative 1.3 with a launch in the school year 2024-2025. The focus will include strategies aligned to The Writing Revolution by Hochman & Wexler (2024).

Frog Street is the adopted high quality instructional materials (HQIM) for PreK. Foundations/Heggerty/Wit and Wisdom are the HQIM used for Tier 1 instruction for students in grades K-3. Wit and Wisdom is the adopted HQIM used for Tier 1 instruction 4-8. Odell and Springboard are the adopted HQIM for grades 9-12. Teachers are given training throughout the year for all City Schools’ adopted HQIM during summer institutes and systemic professional learning. Literacy Coaches support teachers with lesson internalization and implementation at the school level. Instructional leaders are invited to participate in collaborative planning sessions with coaches and teachers.”

Grades 6-12

It is recommended that the Local Education Agency (LEA) incorporate a Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education (CRSE) framework into its plan. The LEA should clearly articulate how all students will receive support through explicit, systematic, and scaffolded instruction grounded in evidence-based practices and the principles of effective instruction. Additionally, the LEA needs to specify strategies for enhancing vocabulary

development among secondary students, including direct word instruction, word awareness, and morphology instruction, as the current secondary literacy plan needs to include this information. Furthermore, the LEA should detail its approach to improving language comprehension through explicit instruction in text structure, close reading strategies, and comprehension strategies that currently need to be outlined in the secondary literacy plan. Lastly, the plan should specify how writing instruction will be supported through explicit writing strategy instruction, integration of reading and writing across content areas, and appropriate scaffolding for students requiring additional assistance, as these elements are also not adequately addressed in the existing plan.

2.0 Professional Learning

Grades K-5

Recommendations for professional learning include enhancing the relevance and engagement of professional development (PD) for veteran instructors and ensuring that coaching models, such as those from the Opportunity Culture Project, allow for meaningful discussions beyond strictly set topics. PD should focus on supporting students who need the most help, including those in Special Education and those identified as significantly below grade level. There is also a need for administrative training in the Science of Reading and the placement of Multi-Classroom Leads (MCLs) in all schools requiring support. Additionally, efforts should be made to identify and address the needs of veteran instructors to improve their engagement in PD and to provide specialized instruction support across all instructors. School-based professional development, guided by administrative discretion, often addresses instructional deficits. Continue with the support of coaches as their knowledge and perceived helpfulness varies by school.

As evidenced by BCPSS: *“Through the awarded Shusterman Grant, City Schools has identified professional learning convenings for school leaders and Literacy Coaches for the 2024-2025 school year focused on the science of reading and implementation science.*

Mandatory science of reading professional learning will include ELD teachers who support students in grades K-5 and will also be suggested for ELD teachers in grades 4-12. This is reflected in initiative 1.1 of City Schools PreK-8 Literacy Plan.

Professional learning is provided to content area general education teachers to build capacity in supporting MLs and embedded in content systemic professional learning for the 2024-2025 school year.”

Grades 6-12

Exploring strategies for effectively implementing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at the secondary level is essential. The LEA should delineate which staff members are eligible for various training opportunities. Furthermore, the plan should address how professional development initiatives are tailored specifically for schools offering dual-language programs. Additionally, clarity regarding the scope and sequence of professional learning and the specific supports provided to both intervention and content teachers are necessary. Lastly, establishing a comprehensive system for observation and feedback for teachers delivering interventions is crucial to ensure instructional effectiveness and continuous improvement.

3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems

Grades K-5

The plan suggests that MTSS is being planned and refined. Focus group feedback suggested the inconsistent existence of Tier 2 instruction by teachers and a heavy reliance on tutoring support for Tiers 2 and 3. Recommendations include updating the literacy plan to reflect your efforts in more training on using intervention materials, which are often scattered across various locations, creating challenges in resource management. The district's progress monitoring (PM) schedule, while intended to guide schools, instructors perceived it as prioritizing compliance over meaningful data analysis for student progress. In schools with Multi-Classroom Leads (MCLs), these individuals handle progress monitoring, but teachers are burdened with teaching and monitoring responsibilities in their absence. PM is not mandated for students who meet or exceed grade level, and some teachers find the frequency of PM for students in the "red" to be excessive, detracting from instructional time. Additionally, Literacy Coaches are sometimes diverted from their core responsibilities due to other duties, and ESL teachers often perform roles akin to paraeducators rather than co-teaching as expected.

As evidenced by BCPSS: *“The focus of professional learning and coaching support will include small group instruction and personalized learning aligned to MTSS. This is reflected in City Schools PreK-8 Literacy Plan under initiative 2.1. This initiative has been prioritized for school year 2024-2025 based on quantitative and qualitative data analysis. This professional learning will be provided to school leaders, teachers and Literacy Coaches for PreK-12.*

City Schools Student Success Liaisons-MTSS will provide support for this initiative to include implementing systems/structures/processes for school-based staff to provide Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports, resource mapping, and job-embedded professional learning around data-driven decision making.

City Schools is refining guidance on Tier II and III resources to include increasing the dosage/frequency of existing curricular resources (Foundations, Just Words) and reducing group size.

Since 2019, City Schools has utilized TSI funds for 83 tutors to provide tiered high-dosage tutoring utilizing Foundations materials and are exploring how to effectively scale with TSI funds sunsetting.

City Schools has drafted a professional learning arc for the 2024-2025 school year focused on the effective use of existing Tier II and III resources during personalized learning and small group.

MCLs are a limited district initiative and are, therefore, not a position that exists in all schools. Literacy Coaches will support progress monitoring at all schools and receive consistent training and support for ensuring this process's fidelity during monthly professional learning.”

Grades 6-12

It is important to consider how the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework can be utilized to enhance academic success for all students at the secondary level. Evidence of student advancement and acceleration should be integrated within a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to ensure comprehensive assistance. The LEA must establish a clear and consistent data protocol tailored to the secondary level. Additionally, clarity regarding the setting and schedule for instruction is necessary, along with differentiation strategies implemented at both middle and high school levels. Implementing a robust, evidence-based, and sustainable MTSS protocol is essential for fostering effective instructional practices.

4.0 Instructional Leadership

Grades K-5

Recommendations include providing principals professional development in the Science of Reading and Structured Literacy to assist their staff. To support new instructors, principals might offer optional check-in meetings to ensure the effective implementation of Structured Literacy. Additionally, principals would benefit from "look-for" documents provided by experts in structured literacy to enhance their understanding and ability to support effective classroom practices. New instructors face challenges teaching small groups, highlighting a need for improved support.

As evidenced by BCPSS: *“Through City School Shusterman Grant award, we will be hosting convenings throughout the year for school leaders with their Literacy Coaches focused on the Science of Reading and Implementation Science.*

Implementation/observation protocols for all adopted HQIM are shared, and training for norming on usage began in 2018 and will continue as tools are refined.”

Grades 6-12

Including a comprehensive description of tools designed to support teachers is essential, ensuring alignment with established instructional guides. This process should be explicitly defined at the secondary level, where instructional leaders are accountable for the effectiveness of literacy instruction and support provided to educators. Consider outlining how these tools will be implemented and evaluated to foster continuous improvement in literacy outcomes.

5.0 Community Culture and Engagement

Grades K-5

Recommendations include better engaging students and families with language barriers, such as those not literate in English or their native language. Schools may also benefit from putting systems in place to ensure consistency around Literacy Nights and ways of measuring the impact of those events. Additionally, providing extra resources for families facing language barriers, such as videos or audio options, could enhance engagement and support.

As evidenced by BCPSS: *“City Schools has partnered with ILO to develop Family Guides. Through City Schools’ Shusterman Grant award, we plan to continue this work by hosting family events to support the use of the Family Guides.*



