



LEA Final Report

Local Education Agency	Caroline 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 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.

Caroline County 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 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 review, the literacy experts provided written and oral feedback to Caroline County Public Schools for revision of the plan, which was provided in June 2024 and reviewed again for this report.

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. Nineteen 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. One school site was observed in May 2024 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 15 - 45 minutes. LEA staff members were present during classroom observations.

LEA Background and Context

Caroline County Public Schools (CCPS) has the ambitious goal of having 100% of students on grade level by the end of third grade, with year-over-year gains of around 5% on the path to that goal. In 2022-23, roughly 46% of students in grade 3 and 40% in grade 8 achieved proficiency on the MCAP. The district has embarked on a multiyear effort to embrace evidence-based literacy practices and has developed a solid, comprehensive approach to implementing literacy instruction focused on the learner's needs and aligned to the Science of Reading (SoR) research. The district leadership and ELA coordinators developed a well-detailed, ambitious Comprehensive Literacy Plan (CLP). The district has largely achieved its goals for 2023-24 to have 100% of students in PK-8 receive targeted reading instruction using evidence-based instructional resources, including integrated multi-tiered systems of support based upon the range of evidence collected.

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. For **Curriculum and Instruction**, CCPS has aligned its curriculum with Maryland standards with foundational skills, knowledge building, comprehension, and integrated writing programs. These curricula are rich in diverse text and provide scaffolds for multilingual learners (MLs), and strong implementation was observed. **Professional Learning** opportunities are robust, including LETRS training for K-5 teachers and administrators and expanding to early childhood and secondary. Literacy education is supported through regular training and a robust set of supports from reading specialists/coaches who collaborate with staff in planning, data analysis, and intervention. Teachers and administrators have expressed concern over the potential loss of these supports in light of budgetary challenges. CCPS has a well-developed model for **Multi-Tiered Support Systems** with a robust data-driven process that includes differentiation, push-in and pull-out instruction, and one-on-one teacher-student conferences. Acadience DIBELS and iReady assessments are used for screening, assessment, and progress monitoring with data systems to identify student needs. The greatest challenge is that the literacy specialists are also 50% FTE as classroom teachers, placing an incredible strain on these educators. CCPS has strong **Instructional Leadership** from central administration to school leadership, which is evident in the planning and implementation and reflected in the comments in this report. **Community Engagement** in CCPS is active and involves literacy events for families and partnerships with local organizations. Teachers and administrators spoke about the efforts of schools to reach out to families and communities and the successful events that have been held.

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 CCPS as being in the mode of **sustainability** in the key drivers of Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Learning, Multi-tiered systems of support, Instructional Leadership, and Community Engagement. The leadership at CCPS, in a multiyear effort, has built a model implementation system for literacy. The reports from teachers suggest that it has a substantial impact on both instruction and learning. They will need strong support to continue on this path in light of changing fiscal support from ESSER funds.

Secondary

Monitoring systems have been established to evaluate the implementation of the new Instructional Tiered Support System (ITSS) across all grade levels. The Blueprint Report emphasizes initiatives such as Family Literacy Nights and English Learner (EL) Family Nights and partnerships with organizations like Chesapeake College, Parks and Recreation, and Lions Clubs to foster community engagement. The implementation plan outlines three-year goals with specific short-term objectives, including a detailed schedule for assessments and timelines for administration. Furthermore, the plan includes walkthrough tools and professional development initiatives to support literacy objectives. At the same time, assessments such as the i-Ready Reading Diagnostic and Common Lit series are utilized to identify intervention needs for students in grades 6-12, alongside the consistent use of various instructional resources to enhance foundational reading skills.

Key Findings: Current Status of Implementation

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction: *Implementation (DK, E, P, I, S)*

Grades K-5

CCPS has been running the Foundations curriculum as the core for over ten years; teachers discussed it, and it was observed that there was consistent vertical alignment around the five core components.

Teachers discussed in the focus group that writing and specific literacy skills are systematically integrated into the curriculum. Explicit writing integration was observed in all observed classrooms.

Observed consistent and intentional scaffolding support for ELs and MLLs, including supporting and engaging ELs and MLLs to use their linguistic assets to learn vocabulary and providing additional repetition practice and longer wait time with students with dialectical variations. Teachers reported that having more teaching materials in multiple languages would help meet the needs of all language speakers in the district.

Observed a variety of teaching and independent reading materials to support a multicultural learning environment. For instance, the team observed teachers engaging ELs and MLLs to use their linguistic assets to learn vocabulary. It also observed a lesson about spiders, in which the teacher tied in cultural instruction about their connection to El Salvador.

Grades 6-12

My Perspectives English Language Arts (2017, SAVVAS) serves as the primary instructional material for ELA in grades 6-12, addressing all Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS) and incorporating integrated scaffolds for multilingual learners (MLLs). For Tier I instruction, educators utilize resources, including Turn It In Revision Assistant, Draft Coach, Feedback Studio, Killgallon's sentence composing lessons, and William Van Cleave's Morphology Matters word study programs. Middle school schedules allocate 60 minutes weekly for Tier II small group instruction, focusing on foundational reading skills and reading, writing, and language standards. Similarly, high school schedules provide 60 minutes for targeted instruction in these areas. Additionally, small-group instruction incorporates Lexia Power Up lessons for word study, comprehension, and grammar, enhancing the overall ELA curriculum.

2.0 Professional Learning: *Implementation*

Grades K-5

All K-5 teachers and administrators have received LETRS training over multiple years, and there are plans to expand to include secondary, early childhood, and ML/ELL support staff. This is being sustained by reading specialists who are receiving LETRS facilitator training. The district would like to continue this effort, but this will be a challenge with the end of LEADS/CARES/ESSER funding. Administrators argued that it would be helpful if those trainings were provided in teacher prep programs and formed part of teacher recertification.

Reading specialists are a valuable asset to the district. Teachers described the supports that they provide, including:

- Team teaching
- Data deep dives
- Co-teaching
- Collaborative planning
- Opportunities for feedback
- Flexible and open-ended PD
- Needs-based supports

Teachers reported feeling very confident and supported in literacy instruction. The MILE team heard about strong professional development opportunities around SoR and direct classroom instruction. The team also heard about multiple opportunities for non-evaluative feedback provided to teachers and additional support provided to new teachers, mainly from the literacy specialists. However, literacy coaches described being very strained due to the increasing demands on them.

Materials and resources provided to teachers were described as easy to use and very helpful. Additional professional development, materials aligning with the growing number of language backgrounds, and trained professionals to support MLs were requested in focus groups. The district has a vision and strategy for SoR training to maximize impact. Though the district has a strong strategy for SoR professional development, district administration described it as burdensome to provide or facilitate. Therefore, the district requested state support for this.

Grades 6-12

CCPS general and special education teachers for grades 6-8 are enrolled in Aspire by Lexia, which supports their professional development in literacy. The "Professional Development Plan for Literacy" incorporates metrics for continuous professional learning and emphasizes the implementation of Science of Reading (SoR) best practices through My Perspectives curriculum resources, which include integrated scaffolds for multilingual learners (MLLs). Special education teachers utilize the Orton-Gillingham Plus (OG+) approach, a systematic, multisensory, synthetic, and phonetic method designed for reading intervention at Tier 3. Additionally, the iSPIRE program offers intensive, structured learning experiences tailored to

address students' needs in phonemic awareness, phonics and decoding, spelling, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension for both general and special education teachers.

3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems: *Implementation*

Grades K-5

The “Core, plus more, plus more” mantra supports students receiving supplemental Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction instead of Tier 1 instruction. Teachers discussed that the district provides the tools and supports necessary to target and address needs:

- The district uses multiple data points to monitor progress
- District-wide intervention tools support implementation
- Clear criteria are identified for students to enter Tier 2 and 3
- Teachers feel empowered to use data to make decisions around intervention.

Teachers described Tier 2 programming as very effective and reducing the number of students identified for Tier 3 support. Teachers said they could see their students progress using this targeting skills approach. A staff member from the SST team said that using more data points across more factors has improved SpEd identification and reduced referrals because they can use more targeted data points across more factors.

Progress is monitored through DIBELS, UFLI, and Quick Phonics Screener monthly, and screening using iReady occurs three times a year. The MILE team heard from district ELA leadership and reading specialists that the current model of specialists teaching 50% of the time could be more sustainable. The school district is working to provide additional trained interventionists to offer supplemental Tier 3 instruction before or after school.

Grades 6-12

All students in grades 6-8 are administered the i-Ready Reading Diagnostic three times per year, while students in grades 6-12 complete a writing benchmark assessment during September, January, and May. Beginning in the 2023-24 school year, students will take the Common Lit assessment series to identify initial Tier 2 intervention needs. CCPS Common Unit Assessments are conducted every 3-4 weeks to target specific English Language Arts (ELA) standards, and the DIBELS 8 measures, including Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) and Maze, are used as benchmarks for monitoring progress in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. Additionally, middle and high school schedules allocate 60 minutes per week for Tier 2 small group ELA instruction, focusing on foundational reading skills and standards, with all ELA and reading teachers employing Lexia Power Up tools to address identified deficits, alongside other resources such as CommonLit, My Perspectives, OG+, iSPIRE, and Failure Free for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions.

4.0 Instructional Leadership: *Implementation*

Grades K-5

The district has a robust Integrated Tiered Systems of Support (ITSS) handbook. The process outlined in the ITSS manual documents and monitors short-term, mid-term, and long-term

goals, which are reviewed at least twice monthly.

According to the CLP, the leadership team meets monthly to evaluate progress with ITSS implementation and has a Needs Inventory Rubric. These meetings are used to set goals and develop plans to improve implementation across the district. District and school leaders have been identified as being responsible for monitoring and holding responsibility for the ITSS process and reviews. Multiple teachers in the focus group told us they feel heard and supported by the administration in their literacy implementation, including the non-evaluative walk-throughs described previously.

Grades K-12

The implementation plan delineates three-year goals accompanied by specific short-term objectives. It includes a comprehensive outline of assessments and associated timelines for their administration. Additionally, the plan incorporates walkthrough tools and teacher training initiatives designed to support the attainment of literacy objectives.

5.0 Community Culture and Engagement: *Implementation*

Grades K-5

Teachers discussed community engagement efforts around reading, which were positively received in the community. These included family literacy nights for ML students and partnerships with Chesapeake College, the Parks and Rec Office, and the Lions Club. One school described running a “One School, One Book” event to support literacy engagement that brought nearly 500 people (students and their families) from the community.

Grades 6-12

Monitoring systems have been established to assess the implementation of the new Instructional Tiered Support System (ITSS) across all grade levels. The Blueprint Report highlights initiatives such as Family Literacy Nights and English Learner (EL) Family Nights. Additionally, the report outlines various partnerships with organizations, including Chesapeake College, Parks and Recreation, and Lions Clubs to enhance community engagement and support.

Recommendations: Next Steps

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction

Grades K-5

The district has a robust model and plan in place. The recommendations are to sustain the efforts that are in place and showing signs of impact. The growing number of students from different language backgrounds is leading the district to require additional support in this area.

Grades 6-12

Providing professional development for teachers to support the existing equity frameworks is advisable. Additionally, the Local Education Agency (LEA) should articulate its strategy for vocabulary and morphology instruction in Tier 1, including specific elements that should be consistently integrated across all grade levels. Furthermore, the LEA should clarify its approach to comprehension instruction in Tier 1, detailing the essential components that should be present throughout the grades. Finally, it is recommended that the LEA outline its writing instruction framework in Tier 1, specifying the key elements that should be included across all grade levels.

2.0 Professional Learning**Grades K-5**

Regarding professional learning, the district has a robust model. It has identified that it needs support from the state or other sources to sustain the substantial efforts that have gone into this approach. The valued literacy coaches and specialists have had a profound effect, but it is increasingly more work for these personnel to sustain the effort.

Grades 6-12

It is important to explore how Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) can effectively facilitate ongoing lesson studies among teachers. Additionally, a structured plan for providing feedback and coaching to interventionists regarding their support is essential for enhancing instructional effectiveness.

3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems**Grades K-5**

Sustain the current efforts. The district has a robust model that should be replicated. This is done with support staff who are also 50% FTE as classroom teachers, showing signs of strain.

Grades 6-12

It is essential to clarify how Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can be implemented at the secondary level. Additionally, information on the frequency of data meetings held outside of the Instructional Tiered Support System (ITSS) framework would be beneficial. The time allocation for Tier 1 instruction in middle and high schools and the recommended sizes for small group instruction should also be specified. Furthermore, the LEA should elucidate whether the ITSS document applies to both elementary and secondary students, providing further details regarding the duration and group size for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, as some of this information may be included in the ITSS document but remains unclear in its application to secondary students.

4.0 Instructional Leadership**Grades K-5**

The MILE team does not have any recommendations for this but will provide this direct quote from one of the teachers in the district:

"I feel heard. It's so wonderful. I feel like I have the knowledge that I need and the tools that I need. When I don't have the knowledge or tools they give them to that. I feel well-supported. I taught 16 years in another district and been here for 5—I'm a better reading teacher in the last five years than in the previous 16. I have all of the tools to be successful. I believe I've moved more students than ever. Kudos to Caroline County. I feel confident. I didn't feel confident previously to identify what the child needed and how I can support it. When I was a classroom reading teacher, I was trying to pull resources all the time and it takes so much time. Now, I see all these resources in one place. It's super helpful."

Grades 6-12

It is important to specify the schedule for data meetings in relation to the assessment calendar. Additionally, clarity is needed regarding whether the Instructional Tiered Support System (ITSS) document applies to elementary and secondary students, ensuring its guidelines are universally understood across all grade levels.

5.0 Community Culture and Engagement**Grades K-5**

The district has several activities related to Community Engagement. The MILE team recommends using the Climate Surveys to determine how literacy work impacts school climate and belonging.

Grades 6-12

The plan should include strategies for actively engaging community partners, staff, caregivers, and students, emphasizing the distinct needs of secondary families. Additionally, it is essential to incorporate a framework for collecting and analyzing climate and culture data, ensuring that the unique challenges faced by secondary families are effectively supported and addressed.