



LEA Final Report

Local Education Agency	Carroll County Public Schools
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Study Purpose

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.

The Carroll County Public School District's evaluation was conducted 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 the Carroll County Public School District 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 248 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, 15 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 15 or 20 minutes. LEA staff members were present during classroom observations.

Introductory Statement

Carroll County Public School District (CCPS) embraces a comprehensive approach to literacy embedded in the Science of Reading (SoR) research. The literacy vision for the district is that each student will purposefully and critically engage the text and communicate with accuracy, clarity, and impact. The CCPS literacy mission is to ensure its students can access various text sources for multiple purposes. CCPS has some of the most robust literacy outcomes in the state, particularly among historically underserved populations. The CCPS comprehensive literacy plan outlines curriculum materials to address phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and writing for grades K-5.

The district was evaluated according to the [EPIS Framework](#), in which system-wide implementation of evidence-based practices is evaluated according to stages of Exploration, Adoption/Preparation, Implementation, and Sustainment. For **Curriculum and Instruction**, CCPS demonstrates a strong curriculum alignment by adopting Heggerty, Foundations, and McGraw Hill's World of Wonders Anthology K-5 for the 5 pillars of reading and writing instruction. CCPS also employs the Authentic Voices Library, which incorporates a range of student identities, languages, backgrounds, and abilities for grades 2 and 3. There is a need for enhanced support and materials for multilingual learners (MLs) and students struggling with writing. **Professional Learning** opportunities are robust and include providing Lexia LETRS to early childhood and elementary educators and administrators, with mandated training for primary teachers. Annual mandatory training updates on structured literacy implementation are provided to K-5 teachers, supported by continuous professional development planning and targeted support for historically underserved groups through interventionists and mentors. Training is not uniformly mandated, leading to variability in teacher knowledge across grade levels; therefore, recommendations include ensuring ongoing and job-embedded professional development focusing on equity and structured literacy. The **Multi-Tiered Support Systems** are comprehensive and employ a variety of screenings and diagnostics, such as KRA and DIBELS, to inform instructional planning and intervention strategies through regular data analysis and collaborative meetings. This system could benefit from earlier provision of Tier II resources and teacher support. **Instructional Leadership** shows dedication to data-driven improvement and involves collaboration on goal-setting during Principal Professional Learning Community Meetings, which requires each school to develop a data-driven school improvement plan aligned with system-wide assessments and year-over-year targets to support instructional decisions. This system may benefit from ensuring principals are exploring strategies for addressing gaps based on disaggregated data for more strategic decision-making and creating enhanced monitoring protocols of instructional fidelity. **Community Culture and Engagement** efforts involve partners with organizations like the Carroll County Public

Introductory Statement

Library, Boys and Girls Club of Carroll County, ThorpeWood, and Judy Centers to enhance literacy through various community-based programs and support. Efforts could improve through deeper collaboration with community partners to support literacy initiatives effectively.

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 **(full) Implementation-Sustainment** around the key drivers of Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Learning, Multi-tiered systems of support, Instructional Leadership, and Community Engagement. Many of the pieces of the comprehensive plan are well in place, and additional support is continuing to be put into action to ensure that evidence-based practices can be implemented and sustained to the fullest extent.

Secondary

CCPS schools actively engage families and local bookstores to host Family Literacy Nights, promoting community involvement in literacy initiatives. Collaborations with special educators aim to enhance community awareness of assistive technology and communication devices, while regular progress reports keep parents informed and empowered to support their children's literacy development. The secondary academic calendar includes provisions for the Science of Reading (SoR) for grades 6-8 and outlines the schedule for local assessments. Additionally, a range of benchmark performance assessments is employed for grades 6-10, with ongoing data meetings facilitating collaborative analysis of reading and writing data to inform targeted instructional strategies, supported by Tier I and II interventions and various secondary literacy programs.

Key Findings: Strengths & Opportunities

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction: *Implementation-Sustainment*

Grades K-5

CCPS curriculum is aligned with the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS). CCPS uses Heggerty, Foundations, and McGraw Hill's World of Wonders Anthology K-5 for the 5 pillars of reading and writing instruction. The curriculum generally follows [evidence-aligned](#) principles of structured literacy. The system uses the Authentic Voices Library, which incorporates a range of student identities, languages, backgrounds, and abilities for grades 2 and 3. The curriculum has strong core knowledge development, explicit, systematic comprehension, and vocabulary instruction for grades 2 and 3.

System-wide expectations are clearly articulated regarding using resources for phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and writing K-5, and teachers were observed implementing accordingly. The MILE team observed explicit and systematic instruction in many K-2 classrooms as teachers implemented Foundations lessons. For

example, knowledge-building and skill-based activities were observed as teachers explicitly provided phonics instruction that included a gradual release of responsibility to students. Additionally, teachers utilized the curriculum effectively to build vocabulary and to support comprehension development.

Even though the Wonders curriculum provides resources for multilingual learners (MLs), limited scaffolding and instructional materials for MLs were observed, and focus groups overwhelmingly reported that MLs require more support. Administrators and teachers also report a lack of curriculum support for students who struggle with writing.

Grades 6-12

CCPS's secondary English Language Arts (ELA) curricula prioritize fiction and nonfiction texts, emphasizing close analytical reading through explicit instructional strategies. These strategies include a focus on text structures and features and the use of dialectical journals, Socratic Seminars, literature circles, Jr. Great Books, and Text Dependent Constructed Response (TDCR) writing prompts. The district's Embedded Skills instruction modules further reinforce explicit practice in critical skills such as summarizing, paraphrasing, determining central ideas, and drawing inferences. Additionally, CCPS integrates writing instruction within its curricula, focusing on effective writing across various audiences and purposes, including argumentation, exposition, and narrative forms, particularly enhancing writing fluency for grades 6-8.

2.0 Professional Learning: *Implementation-Sustainment*

Grades K-5

CCPS provides professional learning opportunities by assessing multiple stakeholder groups' input about student learning needs. The district provided the Lexia LETRS suite to early childhood and elementary educators and administrators. This training was mandated for all primary teachers; however, it may not have been extended to intermediate-grade teachers in elementary schools. Mandatory training on curriculum updates related to structured literacy implementation is provided to K-5 teachers annually.

To ensure the continuity of their professional development efforts, CCPS creates opportunities for annual plan updates and has identified primary interventionists, tutors, mentors, and compensatory education interventionists to target support for historically underserved groups as part of the infrastructure for continuous organizational growth. Reading supervisors meet monthly with reading specialists from each school to discuss reading updates and provide guidance on training for their teachers. All principals were given access to "Shifting the Balance" training.

Each K-5 teacher is assigned an ELA specialist responsible for providing ongoing job-embedded professional learning to address each school's specific student/teacher needs. Teachers' collaboration with the ELA specialists is linked to the school improvement plan to ensure accountability. Central Staff reported that LETRS is time-consuming and expensive. They are seeking grant funding to support the expense of LETRS training and permission to conduct an in-house abridged version of this training.

Grades 6-12

CCPS's professional development initiatives are aligned with the Maryland College and Career

Ready Standards (MCCRS) and the foundational principles of the Science of Reading and Writing. The Secondary ELA Supervisor convenes quarterly meetings with building principals, stakeholders, and teachers to disseminate county data, discuss curriculum initiatives, and share resources that support county-wide goals. Starting in September 2024, Professional Learning Community (PLC) groups will meet monthly to analyze The Writing Rope text, focusing on strategy implementation, feedback, and curricular enhancements, including developing a systematic Scope and Sequence for instruction. Data from the FaRM assessment was utilized to allocate resources effectively, determining which schools would receive additional support staff to assist high-needs populations, with specific support provided for the Freckle Reading Program and the Star Reading Assessment for grades 6-8.

3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems: *Implementation-Sustainment*

Grades K-5

CCPS Tier 1 instruction provides opportunities for differentiation through Universal Design for Learning (UDL). CCPS reviews trend data to monitor alignment and correlate between local and 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, and goal setting, and guide conferences with students and parents. School teams receive guidance on how implementation of UDL can increase learning opportunities.

CCPS assessments consist of screening, diagnostic, formative, and summative measures. Over a given year, CCPS uses the Primary Literacy Assessment, CCPS Phonics Assessment, Comprehensive Benchmark Assessment, Reading Inventory, and Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program as diagnostic assessments. All assessments are aligned to the Science of Reading, Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS), and Reading Pillars. CCPS uses KRA and DIBELS as its universal screener, administered three times yearly: September, December, and April. DIBELS assesses letter naming fluency, phonemic segmentation, and nonsense word fluency.

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 a) monthly data meetings to discuss test scores, county processes, and needs, b) "kid talk meetings" where educators discuss struggling students, and c) Wildly Important Goals (WIG) are required to be discussed at planning meetings for reading, math, and writing. These goals come from the 4DX model and aid in implementing county-wide initiatives.

Grades 6-12

CCPS utilizes a variety of benchmark performance assessments for grades 6-10, including DRA, SRA, DWA, SWA, SIRA, SIWA, SLRA, and SIWA, with results from the Star Reading Assessment reported quarterly. For grades 9-12, the Reading Inventory (RI) provides assessment results biannually for targeted populations within schools. Local benchmark assessments have been developed to monitor student progress against the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS), with monthly data meetings held at each grade level in all CCPS schools. During these meetings, administrators, ELA specialists, classroom teachers, interventionists, and special educators collaboratively analyze reading and writing data derived from screening, benchmark assessments, and progress monitoring to inform targeted instructional goals, utilizing Tier I and Tier II phonics instruction/interventions alongside various secondary supports such as the Freckle Reading Program, Wilson Reading System (WRS), Just Words, Rewards (Voyager Sopris Learning), and Framing Your Thoughts (Project Read by Language Circle). Tier III interventions include the same programs, underscoring a comprehensive approach to literacy support.

4.0 Instructional Leadership: *Implementation-Sustainment*

Grades K-5

CCPS administrators develop goals during Principal Professional Learning Community Meetings with the instructional leadership team at each school. Each school is required to complete a data-driven school improvement plan. Directors and principals monitor school-wide data patterns and trends, and school administrators must identify "Wildly

Important Goals” (WIGs). Principals reported that the central office collates data in XL and correlates these data to describe growth using MCAP scores, which annually requires a data-driven school improvement plan from every school.

All teachers and support staff utilize the *CCPS Assessment Timeline* and the *Information to Support Instruction* document. These documents describe the times each system-wide assessment is administered and provide year-over-year targets to guide grouping and instructional decisions.

Grades 6-12

The secondary academic calendar incorporates considerations for the Science of Reading (SoR) for grades 6-8. Additionally, it includes a schedule for local assessments, outlining the timing and administration of various evaluation tools.

5.0 Community Culture and Engagement: *Implementation-Sustainment*

Grades K-5

CCPS meets regularly with stakeholders to ensure representative groups understand MSDE and CCPS initiatives, including Blueprint- and SoR-related topics.

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

- The Carroll County Public Library
- The Boys and Girls Club of Carroll County
- The ThorpeWood
- The Early Childhood Supervisor/Judy Centers

Grades 6-12

Individual CCPS schools collaborate with families and local bookstores to organize Family Literacy Nights, fostering community engagement in literacy initiatives. Furthermore, schools partner with special educators to raise community awareness about assistive technology and complex communication devices. CCPS also ensures that parents receive regular progress reports, equipping them with the information necessary to engage in their children's literacy development actively.

Recommendations

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction

Grades K-5

While curriculum materials are aligned with SoR principles, attending to the cultural frameworks for students presents an opportunity for CCPS to create conditions to ensure greater equitability of access to literacy instruction.

Grades 6-12

The plan must ensure that the five components of effective literacy instruction are incorporated into the regular curriculum rather than restricted to intervention supports. It is

crucial to include a culturally responsive and sustaining education (CRSE) framework, as Muhammad (2023) outlined, which emphasizes building identity, teaching skills, fostering intellectualism, and promoting critical thinking. Additionally, the local education agency (LEA) should clearly define "explicit strategies" and "explicit practice" while detailing a systematic approach to scaffold instruction grounded in evidence-based principles. Furthermore, the LEA should provide a comprehensive strategy for supporting English learners and dialectal speakers, including a well-articulated approach to vocabulary and writing instruction across secondary grades.

2.0 Professional Learning

Grades K-5

While CCPS has a robust professional learning program for its staff, training is encouraged but not mandated, creating variability in professional knowledge, particularly across grade levels. Consideration of alternate models, including varying means of delivery or methods for demonstrating mastery, will ensure greater consistency of knowledge and differentiation of professional learning across veteran and novice teachers.

Additionally, we recommend that additional professional development opportunities explore recursive learning opportunities that support the application of an equity lens in daily instruction to ensure Tier I instruction is broadly accessible with scaffolds for linguistically and culturally diverse students.

CCPS should consider aligning professional learning opportunities to support teachers and better engage learners experiencing the greatest challenges. These opportunities should be ongoing and job-embedded to support teachers' continued capacity building, focusing on strategies supporting students with the greatest challenges.

Grades 6-12

The plan should outline the mechanisms for teachers above grade 8 to engage in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), ensuring equitable access to resources and training. It is essential to consider the distribution of resources and the adjustment of instructional time and intensity at the secondary level. Additionally, the plan must emphasize scaffolding techniques and training tailored for secondary educators. Finally, it is important to specify how feedback will be systematically delivered to teachers at this level to promote ongoing improvement and support.

3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems

Grades K-5

Tier II resources for comprehension should be provided before grade 3. CCPS employs a robust assessment framework for grades 2-5 students, utilizing various evaluations aligned with the Science of Reading components, including comprehension, to inform targeted Tier II interventions. In grades PreK-2, informal assessments guide instruction, while interventions like Lexia Core 5 and the Advancing Early Literacy program support students struggling with foundational literacy skills.

Grades 6-12

The LEA should provide comprehensive information regarding the progress monitoring tools utilized at the secondary level that are distinct from the current assessments. Integrating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles within general and intervention settings at this educational stage is essential. The plan must outline data collection protocols specific to secondary education and clarify the implementation of Tier 1 instruction, including group sizes and adjustments in intervention times for non-electronic programs requiring teacher support. Additionally, further elaboration on Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, including the duration and size of student groups, is necessary, alongside clarification of secondary teachers' roles in the intervention process beyond simply suggesting options and details on how progress is monitored and reported.

4.0 Instructional Leadership

Grades K-5

To enhance principals' ability to lead school reading instruction strategically, we recommend they need access to disaggregated data relevant to trends and patterns of student identification and participation in interventions. By including information on patterns such as time spent in intervention patterns in core programs upon exiting intervention participation, school leaders will have access to necessary tools to enhance intervention outcomes. Further, we recommend implementing structures to support continuous data-informed consultative processes between school leaders and various literacy specialists.

In addition, we recommend that the district strengthen professional learning opportunities to build instructional leaders' knowledge of structured literacy and capacity. Part of this work may be to guide monitoring effective practices to cross-reference classroom data with assessment data (to include determinations of teacher efficacy) to ensure organizational alignment meets students' expressed values and goals. CCPS can continue strengthening its literacy leadership ability by supporting principals in these analyses.

Grades 6-12

The LEA should present a comprehensive calendar for grades 8-12 that outlines the timing and administration of assessments. Additionally, it is advisable to develop a communications plan that identifies the target audience for each assessment and explains how these assessments will inform instructional practices at the secondary level. This plan should ensure that all stakeholders, including teachers, students, and parents, understand the purpose and implications of the assessments.

5.0 Community Culture and Engagement

Grades K-5

To build greater community engagement, we recommend that CCPS put systems into place at the individual, grade, building, and district levels to monitor the instruction fidelity to ensure the key initiatives' sustainability. Additionally, we recommend that CCPS continue to build engagement with community partners, staff, caregivers, and students to facilitate collaboration and build trust and knowledge of literacy practices to focus on the assets and needs of families at a frequency of at least 1x/ month.

We recommend that the district capture data on climate and culture at the system level—both within and outside the school community—to be reviewed collectively to support key initiatives. CCPS mandates four annual parent-teacher conference nights at each school to update parents and guardians on student progress, specifically focusing on students below grade level. The district also hosts reading nights to engage families with the reading curriculum and provide strategies for at-home literacy support.

Grades 6-12

The plan should detail the methods employed for collecting culture and climate data at the secondary level. Additionally, clarifying whether all listed interventions apply to secondary students and their families is essential.

