



LEA Final Report

Local Education Agency

Cecil 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 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.

Cecil County Public Schools was evaluated between February 2024 and May 2024. 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 Cecil County 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. 13 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. Fourteen classroom observations were conducted in April and 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 20 minutes. LEA staff members were present during classroom observations.

LEA Background and Context

The Cecil County Public School District (CCPS) embraces the literacy vision “that students have a right to instruction grounded in systematic, explicit foundational skills and complex texts with rich and relevant central ideas and messages. Literacy is about learning to read and write; learning to read and write is about learning to think.” Cecil County has made strides in adopting and implementing tier I HQIM in the elementary grades and is working to improve secondary curriculum approaches. MCAP 3rd grade scores have increased from 2018 to about 38% in 2023.

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 & Instruction**, the school district implements evidence-based literacy instruction through programs like Foundations and Bookworms. For **Professional Development**, the system provides systematic training for K-5 teachers and administrators, targeting exposure to the curriculum. Professional development efforts are well-organized, with teachers receiving individual coaching and Professional Learning Communities (PLC) support. **Multi-tiered support systems** are being prepared for implementation, focusing on interventions tailored to individual student needs using programs like Wilson and Corrective Reading. **Instructional Leadership** is in the preparation stages, involving regular data-driven discussions among teachers, tutors, coaches, and literacy specialists to effectively tailor lesson plans and support student progress. While **Community Engagement** efforts are also in preparation, there is consistent communication and monitoring of instructional fidelity to ensure sustainability and effectiveness across the district.

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 moving from **preparation to early implementation** in the key drivers of Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Learning, Multi-tiered systems of support, Instructional Leadership, and Community Engagement. The leadership at CCPS 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

In 2017, the district established a Materials Adoption Committee for Secondary English Language Arts (ELA) to enhance the diversity and complexity of curricular reading materials, conducting ongoing reviews to ensure broad representation across gender, culture, and race. Currently, the district is exploring Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) models for middle schools, aiming for system-wide implementation by the 2026-27 school year while providing Tier 1 instruction during a 55-minute ELA block. To address the needs of students who do not meet College and Career Readiness (CCR) benchmarks, the district plans to develop an extended curriculum and implement valid screening and progress monitoring tools for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Additionally, the district promotes professional development for teachers, including training on scaffolding for multilingual learners, while employing strategies to enhance stakeholder communication, particularly regarding parental awareness of CCR and equitable access to assessment results for multilingual families.

Key Findings: Current Status of Implementation

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction

Implementation Status: *Early Implementation*

Grades K-5

CCPS provides systematic training around evidence-based literacy instruction. K-5 teachers and school administrators receive training on the use and individual implementation of Foundations and Bookworms programs. Additional voluntary training includes Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS).

Grades 6-12

In 2017, the district established a Materials Adoption Committee for Secondary English Language Arts (ELA) to enhance the diversity and complexity of curricular reading materials. This committee reviews grade-level curricula to ensure a broad representation of gender, culture, and race, recommending texts to address identified gaps. The district is actively exploring Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) models for middle school, with a goal for system-wide implementation by the 2026-27 school year. Currently, Tier 1 instruction occurs during a 55-minute ELA. Additionally, the district plans to develop an extended curriculum for students who do not meet College and Career Readiness (CCR) benchmarks by the end of 10th grade. It also employs scaffolded assessments for English Learners (ELs) to support their learning in content areas. In the spring and summer of 2024, a cohort of teachers, including those in special education and English Language Development, will receive professional development focused on scaffolding and support for multilingual learners.

2.0 Professional Learning

Implementation Status: *Early Implementation*

Grades K-5

The MILE team observed organized and practical efforts to provide Professional Development opportunities to literacy teachers and coaches, helping them implement the curriculum in their classrooms. Teachers highlighted the support of individual coaching from Professional Learning Communities (PLC) that provided one-on-one feedback meetings.

Grades 6-12

From 2018 to 2023, CCPS partnered with the Maryland Writing Project to voluntarily deliver professional learning opportunities for secondary English Language Arts (ELA) teachers. The district allocates two to three full school days annually for professional development that aligns with the grade-level curriculum, specifically two days in August and one in October. For the 2024-2027 school years, a professional learning model aligned with the teacher career ladder is being implemented in one secondary school, with plans to expand this model to additional schools and departments. Coordinators will utilize Schoology to create a library of professional learning resources that can be accessed asynchronously by teacher leaders, ensuring that all teachers receive annual professional development that includes insights into their students' English learner plans, thereby fostering instruction that is informed by students' English language proficiency levels, accommodations, and necessary supports.

<p>3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems</p>	<p>Implementation Status: <i>Early Implementation</i></p>
<p>Grades K-5 MILE team observed Tier II and Tier III interventions based on individual needs using Bookworms Intensive, Wilson, Read Mastery & Corrective Reading, and PCI Reading Programs.</p> <p>Grades 6-12 CCPS is currently examining Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) models for middle schools to enhance literacy interventions. To facilitate appropriate student placement in Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, the district aims to identify and implement a valid and reliable screening tool for grades 6-8. Additionally, the district plans to establish a progress monitoring tool to assess the effectiveness of interventions and track students' progress toward college and career readiness. Tier 1 instruction is provided within a 55-minute English Language Arts (ELA) block, while Tier 3 interventions for Students with Disabilities occur during a 20-25 minute "revisit" period; however, an established MTSS framework and resources for Tier 2 interventions are currently lacking in middle schools.</p>	
<p>4.0 Instructional Leadership</p>	<p>Implementation Status: <i>Early Implementation</i></p>
<p>Grades K-5 Classroom teachers, tutors, coaches, and literacy specialists communicate about students' progress weekly to bi-weekly. Teachers used data analyzed by Foundations to create specific lesson plans for students. Special Education teachers meet regularly with administrators to review IEPs and consider up to two years' worth of data to craft and support student lesson plans.</p> <p>Grades 6-12 Implementation goals have been established for the period from 2024 to 2027.</p>	
<p>5.0 Community Culture and Engagement</p>	<p>Implementation Status: <i>Early Implementation</i></p>
<p>Grades K-5 During site visits and administrative meetings, consistent and informed communication between school-level and system-level administrators was observed. District-level literacy specialists spoke about monitoring fidelity to ensure sustainability through instructional observations, teacher meetings, and data monitoring.</p> <p>Grades 6-12 Teachers are surveyed to gather insights on professional learning and curriculum development. The district has identified multiple strategies to enhance stakeholder</p>	

communication, including increasing parental awareness of college and career readiness (CCR) and ensuring equitable access to assessment results for multilingual families.

Recommendations: Next Steps

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction

Grades K-12

Create a framework for understanding how you see the role of student culture in teaching and learning in CCPS. Ensure that teachers are fully integrated into this model and trained to understand how to enact these beliefs within evidence-based learning practices.

2.0 Professional Learning

Grades 6-12

Opportunities exist to strengthen training beyond the curriculum for K-5 teachers, including SoR training so that teachers have deeper knowledge.

3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems

Grades K-5

Teachers (K-5) reported noticeable student growth in literacy skill levels since implementing the new Foundations curriculum. The highest achievers are supported and challenged by the variety of instructional opportunities in the Bookworms Curriculum. In contrast, the lowest achievers are supported by the Tier II and Tier III interventions based on individual needs using Bookworms Intensive, Wilson, Read Mastery & Corrective Reading, and PCI Reading Program. A resource/service gap exists across the district; some schools have intense DRI blocks, and others have none. District-wide equity gaps left some classrooms needing tutor support. Closing those gaps to provide equitable intervention programs is advised.

4.0 Instructional Leadership

Grades K-5

The district is implementing its Literacy Plans with fidelity and integrity to the underlying research from the University of Delaware Bookworms, which is its primary source of SoR evidence. Monitoring and data discussion were observed, but inequities across the district left some schools without minimal intervention implementation. Some primary data sources will be lost next year after the Foundations trial ends, as the basic model provides automatic data analyses for teachers to write intervention plans. Supplemental resources or plans must be provided for data access if the program is not renewed.



5.0 Community Culture and Engagement

Grades K-12

Continue to integrate systems that help to ensure fidelity. Also, continue to create systems that help ensure community and engagement are valued at all schools and enacted consistently throughout the entire school system.

