



LEA Final Report

Local Education Agency	Charles 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.

The Charles 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 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 Charles 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. 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. 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. In April 2024, 28 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 20 minutes. LEA staff members were present during classroom observations.



LEA Background and Context

Charles County Public Schools District's (CCPS) literacy vision is “to empower all students to reach their full potential as literate, productive citizens prepared for the demands of the 21st century.” The school system emphasizes diversity, equity, and inclusion principles, as the student body is quite diverse.

CCPS has provided training in LETRS for elementary special educators and ESOL and PreK-3 teachers. The district began transitioning to evidence-based practices during SY 21-22 and fully transitioned in SY 22-23. The literacy plan states that 100% of these teachers will be trained by SY 23/24. In August 2023, the district began piloting a Houghton-Mifflin-Harcourt (HMH) foundational reading program in 4 schools. A reported 25% growth in student performance in those schools resulted in a decision to implement this program in all Charles County elementary schools. Over 360 teachers were part of the LETRS cohorts this year. According to the Charles County Public Schools Literacy Plan, one of the long-term goals is to train a cohort of reading resource teachers to be facilitators to provide instruction in LETRS for 4th and 5th-grade teachers.

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**, CCPS actively implements structured literacy through HMH Into Reading for grades K-5, integrating foundational skills, vocabulary, reading, and writing across all levels with culturally diverse texts. Pre-kindergarten uses Connect 4 Learning supplemented by Heggerty Phonemic Awareness. Despite positive feedback on diversity and engagement from teachers, challenges include integrating reading and writing effectively due to time constraints and curriculum coherence issues, exacerbated by varying reading levels among students. Concerns also extend to insufficient writing instruction time and support for multilingual learners. **Professional Learning** opportunities, including LETRS training, are available but not consistently accessible to all teachers, impacting literacy instruction continuity. **Multi-tiered Support Systems** are in place, utilizing MTSS and assessments like iReady, though data utilization for instructional adjustments needs to be more consistent. For **Leadership**, teachers' literacy instruction is evaluated through observations, SLOs, and iReady screeners, supported by the Danielson framework, while reading resource teachers oversee programs, coordinate interventions, and facilitate professional learning, yet time constraints hinder the comprehensive implementation of recommended literacy strategies. Despite efforts to **engage the community** through literacy nights and partnerships with libraries, challenges persist in aligning community support with school literacy goals.

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 in the phase of **Early Implementation** for the areas of Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Learning, MTSS, and Instructional Leadership. Community Culture and Engagement is in a phase of **Preparation**.

Secondary

The district's plan underscores its commitment to the five core components of literacy at the secondary level, emphasizing reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, and speaking/listening within the middle and high school curriculum. It prioritizes diverse texts and culturally responsive teaching practices while integrating fluency and phonics instruction into Tiers 2 and 3 of intervention support. The plan includes comprehensive professional development for Tier 1 ELA and intervention teachers, focusing



on data analysis to inform instructional decisions and establishing a cohort of teacher leaders trained in the Science of Reading. Additionally, it outlines diagnostic screening procedures and the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). It aims to create a monitoring tool to ensure fidelity in literacy instruction while emphasizing the importance of developing school climate strategies as part of improvement plans.

Key Findings: Current Status of Implementation

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction: *Early Implementation*

Grades K-5

Charles County utilizes HMH Into Reading to implement structured literacy in grades K-5. Into Reading incorporates foundational skills, vocabulary, reading, and writing at all grade levels. This HMH text also includes culturally diverse text. Teachers praised the HMH curriculum for its diversity and inclusion of culturally relevant materials, which enhance student engagement and learning experiences.

Connect 4 Learning is the core program used in Pre-kindergarten, while Heggerty Phonemic Awareness is a daily supplement to the core program. Classroom environments support literacy instruction (including, but not limited to, word walls, alphabet strips, and anchor charts).

The teaching of foundational skills was evident in targeted phonemic awareness activities in K-3 and the use of decodable texts in teacher-led small group instruction. Practices in comprehension, such as activating background knowledge in collaborative discussion and explicit instruction in drawing inferences, were observed in some classrooms. However, such practices needed to be more evident in intermediate classrooms with long-term substitutes.

During classroom visits, it was observed that routines in vocabulary instruction and writing opportunities were needed. Teachers stated that they need help with integrating reading and writing: Teachers highlight challenges such as using different texts for reading and writing, which complicates the alignment and coherence of literacy instruction. This issue is exacerbated by time constraints and the need to cover multiple standards within a limited timeframe. Teachers are concerned that writing instruction is not receiving adequate time or priority within the daily schedule. This is attributed to packed schedules, such as limited time slots before lunch or conflicting subject demands at the end of the day, making it difficult to integrate writing instruction effectively alongside other subjects like social studies and science.

Teachers stated the pervasive impact of reading difficulties on overall academic performance and the challenge of meeting diverse educational needs in a single classroom. The classroom comprises students at a broad spectrum of reading levels, from kindergarten to third-grade proficiency. This diversity complicates teaching strategies, particularly during shared reading sessions, where it's challenging to effectively balance comprehensive literacy instruction covering multiple literacy standards with a broader curriculum while meeting the individual needs of all students in a limited time frame.

Teachers, particularly at the intermediate level, expressed concerns that many students are reading below their grade level (e.g., fourth graders reading at a first-grade level), which impacts assessments in all subjects, including math and social studies.

Supports and scaffolds for multilingual learners (MLs) were not observed.

The plan highlights the district's commitment to the five core components of literacy at the secondary level. It specifies that the middle and high school curriculum emphasizes reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, and speaking/listening skills. While comprehension and vocabulary are explicitly prioritized, fluency and phonics instruction are incorporated into Tiers 2 and 3 of intervention support. A sample pacing guide for secondary instruction is included to facilitate curriculum implementation.

Grades 6-12

The plan underscores the district's commitment to the five core components of literacy at the secondary level, detailing that the middle and high school curriculum emphasizes reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, and speaking/listening. It explicitly addresses comprehension and vocabulary, while fluency and phonics instruction are integrated into Tiers 2 and 3 of intervention support. Furthermore, the district prioritizes using diverse and representative texts in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) and assigns content specialists responsible for implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. The plan incorporates evidence-based strategies that include explicit instruction aligned with grade-level Maryland College and Career Ready (MCCR) standards, instructional practices centered on the gradual release of responsibility, scaffolded comprehension questions, and writing instruction. Specific strategies for vocabulary development include explicit instruction of high-impact words, context clues, and synonyms. In contrast, comprehension strategies encompass "close reading" and a deliberate progression in text complexity to enhance textual analysis skills. Additionally, the plan emphasizes fundamental writing strategies and conventions, providing modeling and guided practice opportunities, and includes resources such as sentence frames and writing models specifically for English language learners.

2.0 Professional Learning: *Early Implementation*

Grades K-5

Charles County Public Schools has provided systemic opportunities for training in research/evidence-based literacy instruction for elementary special educators, ESOL teachers, and teachers of PreK-3 students. The teachers mentioned above received training in LETRS. In the summer of 2022, new or transfer teachers in early childhood, kindergarten, special education, Title I (K-5), reading specialists, and new instructional assistants received LETRS training. For the 2023-24 school year, sixty-three percent of teachers in the district were either new or had provisional certification/licensure. A summer professional learning catalog was made available to teachers to support continued learning. These courses include but are not limited to foundational skills for K-2 teachers, Heggerty training, Bridge the Gap (Heggerty) training, and small group instruction.

Teachers can choose PD sessions based on personal needs and interests, allowing for tailored professional growth. However, principals reported needing PD tailored to the needs of their specific students in the schools. CCPS reported that principals are receiving LETRS training starting July 2024.

LETRS training for some teachers up to 3rd grade was interrupted, and training for 4th and 5th grade teachers was unavailable.

Grades 6-12

The district plan delineates the responsibilities of content specialists and school administrators in facilitating collaborative planning time for secondary English Language Arts (ELA) teachers. It also establishes a cohort of secondary ELA teacher leaders and interventionists receiving training in the Science of Reading (SoR). The professional development (PD) plan for Tier I ELA and intervention teachers are comprehensive, catering to varying proficiency levels and training on analyzing progress monitoring data to inform instructional decisions. Furthermore, the plan outlines specific PD activities and success measures for secondary ELA and intervention teachers, emphasizes differentiation strategies to meet the diverse needs of adolescent learners, and includes provisions for post-PD classroom observations and proficiency goals for school leaders to enhance SoR-based reading instruction.

3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems: *Early Implementation*

Grades K-5

The district utilizes MTSS to ensure students can access additional support. Schools have student support teams (SST) that manage this process. SSTs meet with teachers and administrators to decide the next steps for students who demonstrate needs beyond Tier 1 instruction. There are criteria to follow when making an SST referral and determining the next steps for literacy support.

The CLP and teacher focus groups report that iReady and phonics screeners are administered three times a year. Teachers in K-2 reported conducting Acadience (DIBELS) assessments monthly but indicated that the data gathered needs to be more consistently utilized for instructional adjustments.

Grades 6-12

The plan outlines specific diagnostic screening and placement procedures for middle and high school students, including referral processes and benchmarking practices, while also indicating a need for phonics screeners suitable for secondary students. It describes the county-wide implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), professional development opportunities, and various support mechanisms. Although the plan mentions the development of a calendar for school-based data collection, whether this calendar will encompass the secondary level remains to be seen. Additionally, while the plan details secondary-level Tier 1 interventions across Core, Honors, and AP courses, it lacks specific scheduling information. Clarity is needed regarding the program utilized in the middle school Literacy Lab 3 (Tier 2 course) and the applicability of instructional grouping and dosage information for middle and high school Tier 2 programming. The plan provides comprehensive details on Tier 3 programming, highlighting the use of evidence-aligned programs such as Wilson Reading, Language Live!, and Wilson Just Words, along with disaggregated data from historically disadvantaged groups at the secondary level.

4.0 Instructional Leadership: *Early Implementation*

Grades K-5

Teachers' implementation of literacy instruction is evaluated through multiple methods, including observations, Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), and iReady screeners. The Danielson framework provides a structured evaluation approach, although it may only partially capture some teaching aspects.

The office of ELA monitors school performance 3x/year, as evidenced by iReady and Acadience assessment data.

Reading resource teachers (RRTs) oversee the literacy programs in elementary schools. They manage the reading database, coordinate intervention programs, coach all literacy teachers, and facilitate family literacy events. The RRTs meet with content specialists monthly to receive professional learning about the science of reading and updates on the literacy plan.

Teachers feel pressured by time constraints, which prevent them from adequately addressing the varied learning gaps within their classes. This need for time inhibits their ability to implement comprehensive literacy strategies recommended in training sessions like LETRS, which emphasize building foundational skills and background knowledge.

Grades 6-12

The plan outlines general guidelines but lacks specific narrative evidence regarding the secondary focus. The professional development (PD) calendar includes key activities to enhance proficiency in Understanding by Design at the secondary level. While an assessment calendar and data dive schedule are provided, these are limited to Title I schools. Additionally, the narrative indicates a calendar for school-based data meetings will be established by summer 2024 to monitor school and district performance. However, schools previously scheduled their own data meetings. Data dives are incorporated as part of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for Title I. Furthermore, the plan mentions developing a curriculum-agnostic walk-through tool to set expectations for whole and small-group instruction, which will be shared with principals in August 2024. A narrative description highlights the formation of professional learning teams and cohorts involving principals, the Office of Teaching and Learning, and the Office of Administration and Leadership to provide a structured approach for identifying and addressing barriers following guided visits.

5.0 Community Culture and Engagement: *Early Implementation*

Grades K-5

Each school is required to have one literacy night per year. The literacy plan states that content specialists in the Teaching and Learning office meet with community stakeholders to collaborate on how community members can support literacy efforts. It is also stated in the literacy plan that individual school sites reach out to community members to help with tutoring and volunteering in literacy initiatives. The district has partnered with Charles



County Public Library to have a story time at 5 locations and a Ready Set School bilingual learning group that occurs twice monthly at Waldorf West Library.

Grades 6-12

The plan articulates a long-term objective to create a monitoring tool to ensure the fidelity of core literacy instruction implementation at the elementary level. In response to the Maryland School Survey results, the district's strategy incorporates in-school mentorship programs, restorative practices, and trauma-informed approaches. Additionally, the strategic plan emphasizes the importance of school culture and climate, stipulating that each school will formulate a climate strategy as an integral component of its improvement plan.

Recommendations: Next Steps

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction

Grades K-5

Charles County uses HMH Into Reading, which utilizes culturally relevant text in its curriculum. Students can see characters or people who look like them; however, that is only the beginning. Classroom observations revealed that some school-based staff needed more support to make the complete transition to evidence-based instruction. Guidance from the central office to resource teachers and administrators is needed to complete the transition for those teachers.

Classroom environments evidenced dedication to literacy by including alphabet strips, sound-keyword strips, anchor charts, HFW word walls, etc. It is recommended that the sound-keyword strips/posters be aligned with the curriculum that is being used. In many lower-grade classrooms, some posters needed alignment with the learning levels. Vowel sound keywords should only include vowel diagraphs (e-eagle) or long vowel keywords if closed/short sounds have been taught.

It is also recommended that long-term subs in kindergarten or first-grade classrooms be trained in evidence-based foundational skills instruction.

Grades 6-12

The plan needs more clarity regarding the vertical alignment of the literacy instructional curriculum despite evidence indicating a need for such alignment to facilitate students' transition to the secondary level. A strategy should be developed to explicitly address this need and professional development for content specialists to enhance their integration of culturally relevant and sustainable education (CRSE) practices and an equity framework. The district should also incorporate ongoing teacher training on content-embedded literacy strategies that extend beyond the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom and scaffolds for dialectal speakers. Additionally, the plan should focus on systematic instruction in text structure and comprehension across various text types while embedding vocabulary instruction in non-ELA content areas.

2.0 Professional Learning

Grades K-5

The district has invested in evidence-based practices by providing LETRS training to PreK–3 personnel; however, 4th and 5th-grade teachers need training to continue to address more complex literacy needs at those grade levels. The school system has the difficult task of providing LETRS training to “new and conditional teachers.” The literacy plan states that training is provided to new and conditional teachers from an “extensive summer professional learning catalog.” It is unknown if the summer training is mandated or optional.

The district has provided LETRS training to several instructional personnel. According to the comprehensive literacy plan, a cohort of reading resource teachers should be trained to provide that training to 4th and 5th-grade teachers so that consistent literacy instruction can continue. It is recommended that administrators be included in LETRS training so that a fair evaluative process of literacy instruction can occur.

African Americans make up the largest student demographic in the district but have persistently low performance scores compared to other student demographics ([See Percent Proficient](#)). In addition, a growing population of Latinx students is entering the school system. Intensive professional training in Culturally Responsive and Sustainable Educational (CRSE) practices would help to close achievement gaps between students with higher and lower performing scores, dialectical differences, and ELLs. Creating platforms for teachers to share resources and best practices related to CRSE can foster a more collaborative and inclusive professional learning environment.

Grades 6-12

It is essential to determine whether instructional coaching is available at the secondary level and, if it still needs to be provided, how it can be effectively integrated into the existing plan for ongoing, job-embedded professional development. Professional development should include explicit training for secondary interventionists focused on data-driven decision-making to adjust instruction duration and intensity appropriately. Additionally, addressing the equitable distribution of resources should be a priority. The district should continue with the current implementation while considering an expansion of the plan to detail how the Science of Reading (SoR) cohort will promote collaboration and ongoing professional development to disseminate and sustain SoR principles across both English Language Arts (ELA) and non-ELA content-area classrooms.

3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems

Grades K-5

Continuous professional development opportunities are essential to building staff capacity and effectively implementing MTSS. Training sessions and workshops on data analysis, intervention strategies, and progress monitoring can empower teachers to meet their students' diverse needs.

Develop and implement a structured plan (MTSS guide) for utilizing the data gathered from assessments (as mentioned above, teachers were not necessarily as involved based on their comments). This plan should include specific data analysis strategies, identifying student needs, preparing lessons for small groups, and making targeted instructional adjustments to enhance learning outcomes. Then, use the guide for school-based professional development.

Grades 6-12

The district's plan for assessment within the secondary Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is well-structured; however, it would benefit from further elaboration on the utilization of Acadience for progress monitoring and the criteria for determining student readiness to transition to less intensive interventions. Identifying an appropriate secondary screener and clarifying how the plan addresses data meetings at the secondary level is essential. Additionally, an explicit description of how data informs changes at the classroom and school levels and the criteria for students exiting more intensive interventions should be included. The district should provide information regarding the Tier 1 schedule, including daily minutes and frequency per week, and clarify the specific Tier 2 program utilized in Literacy Lab 3, ensuring that the dosage and grouping referenced on page 30 are applicable at the secondary level. Furthermore, the plan should describe how the intensity and focus of interventions are regularly adjusted based on progress monitoring data, along with clearly defined exit criteria. Additional details regarding group size, whether individualized and instructional interventions for Tier 3 should also be included, along with information about specific strategic instruction embedded in classroom practices.

4.0 Instructional Leadership

Grades K-5

Implementing systems to regularly assess the impact of professional learning on teaching practices and student outcomes can provide valuable insights. This includes tracking changes in instructional methods, student engagement, and academic performance.

Creating feedback loops where teachers can share their experiences and suggest improvements to professional learning programs can ensure these initiatives remain relevant and practical.

Consider revising or supplementing the Danielson framework to reflect better the diverse and integrated curriculum and the realities of classroom teaching. Also, consider extending the evaluation period for SLOs and other assessments to capture a more comprehensive picture of student growth and teacher impact over the entire school year.

Grades 6-12

It is advisable to include explicit documentation outlining the goals for secondary leadership. Additionally, the assessment calendar and data meeting schedule should be made available before the commencement of the school year, with a clear articulation of how these elements are addressed at the secondary level. Furthermore, aligning the new protocol with the guidelines for curriculum-agnostic walk-through tools would be beneficial. Finally, the

