

# LEA Final Report

Local Education Agency

Frederick County Public Schools

## 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 Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS) evaluation was conducted between March and May 2023. 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 initially provided to MILE in January 2024 and updated in June 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 FCPS leadership 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. A total of 18 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. Fifteen classroom observations were conducted in 3 schools 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 about 20 minutes. LEA staff members were present during classroom observations.

## Introductory Statement

Frederick County Public School (FCPS) has developed a comprehensive literacy plan with a central goal: to ensure that all students have access to instructional engagement using the Science of Reading (SoR) approach to position students for long-term academic success. Through implementing a high-quality, evidence-based curriculum and a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), teachers provide students access to a responsive instructional program called Structured Literacy, designed to ensure equitable access to learning. FCPS has intentionally focused on support for evidence-based literacy practices for over five years. The school system is in varying phases of the implementation process to expand and sustain its structured literacy transformation.

The district was evaluated according to the [EPIS Framework](#), which system-wide implementation of evidence-based practices is evaluated according to stages of Exploration, Adoption/Preparation, Implementation, and Sustainment. For **Curriculum and Instruction**, FCPS utilized programs like Heggerty, Foundations, and McGraw Hill's World of Wonders Anthology K-5 to deliver evidence-based literacy instruction effectively. Teachers demonstrate skillful implementation of phonics and comprehension strategies, particularly in early grades, supported by resources like the Authentic Voices Library. However, challenges persist in providing adequate scaffolding and instructional materials for multilingual learners, and there is a reported deficiency in curriculum support for students struggling with writing. **Professional Learning** opportunities are robust in providing evidence-based reading practices and continuously refining training to meet specific needs, including LETRS, Orton Gillingham, and other structured literacy approaches for literacy specialists, secondary intervention teachers, and classroom educators. There are discrepancies in training coverage between primary and intermediate-grade teachers. In addition, initiatives should be strengthened with mandated and differentiated training models to ensure consistent knowledge across grade levels and expertise in supporting linguistically and culturally diverse learners. **Multi-tiered Support Systems** are well-structured with a focus on data-driven instruction and UDL principles and a universal screening approach that integrates various assessments and diagnostics to identify student needs. This is supported by a core team at each school comprising administrators, literacy specialists, special educators, multilingual education teachers, interventionists, and classroom teachers, who adjust student support using MTSS based on ongoing assessment data, including DIBELS, Oral Reading Fluency, Quick Phonics Survey, and Really Great Reading Decoding Surveys administered three times per year. There is an ongoing effort to refine the use of assessments and enhance collaborative analysis of student progress. **Instructional Leadership** is proactive in setting data-driven goals and implementing school improvement plans with administrators collaborating amongst themselves, literacy specialists, and reading interventionists to achieve student achievement goals, with principals actively engaged in assessing and supporting instructional effectiveness at both school and classroom levels. School-based leadership would benefit from improved access to disaggregated student data to enhance intervention strategies, continuous consultation with literacy specialists, and efforts to monitor instruction

fidelity. **Community Engagement** initiatives are diverse and include the collaboration with community partners, staff, caregivers, and students to foster trust and enhance literacy knowledge, focusing particularly on the birth to Pre-K continuum to ensure school readiness, with partnerships including Judy Centers and the Local Early Childhood Advisory Committee supporting equitable access and readiness initiatives. Ensure broad stakeholder understanding and participation in literacy initiatives. Efforts might involve fostering additional collaborative partnerships to build stakeholder trust and knowledge, ensuring sustained support for literacy initiatives.

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 FCPS as being in the mode of *Implementation* around the key drivers of Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Learning, Multi-tiered systems of support, Instructional Leadership, and Community Engagement.

### **Grades 6-12**

The plan details the adoption of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) for elementary education, with intentions to implement similar strategies in secondary schools using local funding. However, more specific information regarding Tier 1 literacy curricula at the secondary level is needed. It emphasizes support for Multilingual Learners (MLs) and culturally diverse students by integrating HQIM with supplemental resources, including a resource repository developed by the Multilingual Education Program to enhance literacy instruction. The plan highlights an "accelerated learning process" for K-12 professional development, encompassing regular literacy meetings, co-teaching, and classroom walkthroughs for feedback while utilizing funds from the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Grant to pilot intensive intervention specialists at the secondary level. It outlines a structured approach to diagnostic screening and literacy support for middle and high school students. It features Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and various intervention programs while incorporating key performance indicators and a data dashboard to monitor progress and inform instructional strategies.

## **Key Findings**

### **1.0 Curriculum and Instruction: *Implementation***

#### **Grades K-5**

FCPS curriculum is aligned with the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS). FCPS uses Open Court for grades K-2 and Into Reading for grades 3-5. The curriculum generally follows [evidence-aligned](#) principles of structured literacy.

The MILE team observed explicit engagement in phonics-based instructional practice that reflects student and teacher comfort with SL structures and protocols and teacher use of the student's primary home language as needed to reinforce student engagement in the learning environment. However, teachers reported a need for instructional materials and strategies

for MLs (particularly materials in languages other than Spanish) and culturally relevant reading materials that engage comprehension and enhance vocabulary development.

Teachers also reported a need for opportunities to expand access by using culturally responsive instruction and culturally relevant materials.

### **Grades 6-12**

The plan outlines the adoption of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) for elementary education. It indicates future implementation for secondary schools using local funds, though specific details about the Tier 1 literacy curriculum for secondary levels still need to be provided. The core curriculum in FCPS aims to support Multilingual Learners (MLs) and culturally diverse students by integrating HQIM and supplemental resources, evaluating ML support in selecting secondary materials, alongside a repository of resources created by the Multilingual Education Program for effective literacy instruction.

## **2.0 Professional Learning: *Implementation***

### **Grades K-5**

FCPS implemented a robust, multi-tiered professional development system in 2019 that builds the capacity of teachers and leaders to grow in their evidence-based Reading praxis and expand learning opportunities for students. The district continues to refine this training according to targeted need areas.

Additionally, FCPS provides teachers with rigorous learning opportunities to enhance their capacity to engage in evidence-based reading instructional practices. The district has provided LETRS, Orton Gillingham, and explicit learning in the principles of SoR to literacy specialists, secondary reading intervention teachers, and classroom teachers.

### **Grades 6-12**

The district plan emphasizes an "accelerated learning process" for ongoing professional development in K-12, including regular literacy meetings, co-teaching, and classroom walkthroughs for feedback. It allocates resources to support these initiatives, utilizes funds from the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Grant to pilot intensive intervention specialists at the secondary level, and outlines targeted training for teachers in the multilingual education program, including Science of Reading (SoR) training for secondary ELA teachers from August 2023 to June 2025.

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

### **Grades K-5**

FCPS uses a universal screener, triangulating multiple measures and diagnostics to determine learners' needs. A core team at each school monitors student progress and adjusts student support using MTSS. The core team includes administrators, literacy specialists, special educators, multilingual education teachers, interventionists, and classroom teachers.

FCPS assessments consist of screening, diagnostic, formative, and summative measures. The district uses DIBELS in K-3 and Oral Reading Fluency as a grades 4-5 diagnostic. FCPS uses Quick Phonics Survey (QPS) and Really Great Reading Decoding Surveys as formative and diagnostic tools supporting MTSS, which are used 3x/year.

**Grades 6-12**

The plan outlines a framework for diagnostic screening and literacy support for middle and high school students. It details the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and various intervention programs across tiers, although the application of UDL at the secondary level still needs to be clarified. It provides comprehensive information on the frequency and duration of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions alongside disaggregated data on historically disadvantaged groups, demonstrating a commitment to enhancing literacy outcomes through targeted instructional strategies.

**4.0 Instructional Leadership: *Implementation*****Grades K-5**

FCPS invests in building the capacity of its school leaders to ensure a robust reading program based on SoR. The district expects collaboration between school leaders, literacy specialists, and reading interventionists to meet student achievement goals. FCPS leaders establish goals to ensure its structured literacy efforts are supported continuously throughout the school year.

FCPS principals are highly engaged in supporting the learning environment. They are knowledgeable and involved at the school and classroom levels as assessments of the instructional program's effectiveness are negotiated.

**Grades 6-12**

The district plan articulates several key performance indicators and literacy goals, encompassing annual and multi-year objectives. It includes a link to a data dashboard featuring an early warning system and a narrative detailing professional development aligned with the Science of Reading (SoR) framework. While the assessment and progress monitoring plans specify the frequency of evaluations, a calendar outlining testing windows and data analysis sessions is absent. The plan details a progress monitoring strategy for grades K-10, involving reviews conducted three to five times yearly, and provides disaggregated student data via the dashboards. Furthermore, it notes the utilization of classroom walkthroughs to offer feedback to teachers. It indicates that "look-for" tools, currently applied at the elementary level, are under evaluation for potential implementation in secondary education. The narrative also outlines the structure of quarterly Academic Leadership Planning (ALP) meetings, where instructional leaders analyze data, track progress, and coordinate support for individual schools while specifying the next steps for enhancing monitoring processes across the district.

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

FCPS frequently engages community partners, staff, caregivers, and students to facilitate collaboration, build trust, and provide relevant literacy knowledge about families' strengths and needs. FCPS prioritizes work in the birth to Pre-K continuum to promote school success.

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

- Judy Center will provide services that support equitable access to kindergarten readiness. Over the past 4 years, it has expanded its partnerships to include 6 Judy Centers

- The Local Early Childhood Advisory Committee

**Grades 6-12**

The plan outlines the formation of a Systemic English Language Arts (ELA) Team comprised of district leaders responsible for monitoring district data, advising on implementation fidelity, and identifying professional development and resource needs. It notes that elementary principals participate in "Curriculum Connections" meetings to oversee the fidelity of implementing high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). Additionally, the district plan emphasizes community-based strategies aimed at early intervention and provides a link to a data dashboard that includes results from culture and climate surveys.

**Recommendations: Next Steps**

**1.0 Curriculum and Instruction**

**Grades K-5**

While FCPS curriculum materials are aligned with SoR principles, we recommend that the district consider a cultural framework for students to create conditions for more equitable access to literacy.

**Grades 6-12**

As part of Action B2, it is recommended that a comprehensive plan be developed to adopt and implement a Science of Reading (SoR)-aligned literacy curriculum at the secondary level, including specific goal dates and addressing both vertical and horizontal alignment. Integrating a Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education (CRSE) framework, as Muhammad (2023) outlined, would be beneficial, ensuring that components such as identity building, skills instruction, intellectualism, and criticality are incorporated. Have you considered plans for guiding secondary Tier 1 instruction emphasizing explicit, systematic, and scaffolded approaches, particularly for Multilingual Learners (MLs)? Finally, developing strategies for vocabulary development, language comprehension, and writing instruction that include direct teaching, text structure analysis, and appropriate scaffolding for diverse learners is essential.

**2.0 Professional Learning**

**Grades K-5**

While FCPS has a robust professional learning program for its staff, training is not mandated, creating variability in knowledge, particularly across grade levels. To ensure consistency of knowledge and differentiation between veteran and novice teachers, we recommend that the district explore a process or means of demonstrating mastery.

Additionally, we recommend that the district provide recursive learning opportunities that support the application of an equity lens in daily instruction to ensure Tier I instruction is accessible for students with disabilities and linguistically and culturally diverse students.

**Grades 6-12**

Developing a comprehensive plan outlining professional learning content, including objectives, key activities, and target participants, is advisable to demonstrate vertical



alignment in professional development (PD). This plan should ensure that secondary interventionists receive explicit training on data-driven decision-making to adjust the time and intensity of instruction. Furthermore, specific descriptors of the professional learning content targeting Multilingual Learners (MLs) and speakers of language variations should be included, along with instructional approaches and scaffolds that support these populations, particularly for non-Multilingual Education (ME) teachers who also engage with these student groups in Tier 1 classrooms. Additionally, it is important to establish expectations for school leaders and instructional support specialists regarding the frequency and type of feedback provided during classroom observations and to implement PD focused on strategy instruction for secondary content-area teachers in English Language Arts and other subjects.

### **3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems**

#### **Grades K-5**

We recommend that FCPS infuse authentic writing opportunities across the MTSS protocol and deepen the writing curriculum authentically across all grades to support the development of the reading process. We recommend that the district provide Tier II resources for grade 2 students who would benefit from comprehension support before grade 3.

#### **Grades 6-12**

Integrating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles at the secondary level is advisable by providing professional development for Tier 1 teachers and resources to support UDL implementation across middle and high schools. If the district is still in the exploratory phase, drafting a plan with specific steps for preparation, potentially targeting a select group for initial rollout, would be beneficial. Additionally, please clarify the expected frequency of Core Team meetings for data analysis and placement decisions, aiming for at least once per month, and describe how data informs instructional adjustments. The plan should also detail Tier 1 scheduling, how intervention intensity is adapted based on progress monitoring, and the alignment of Tier 2 interventions with Tier 1 instruction, including group sizes and individualization based on student needs.

### **4.0 Instructional Leadership**

#### **Grades K-5**

We recommend that FCPS train and support principals to strategically lead school reading instruction efforts by providing disaggregated data relevant to trends and patterns of student identification and participation in interventions.

Additionally, we recommend that the district continue strengthening instructional leaders' knowledge of structured literacy and monitoring effective practices. The district should also cross-reference walk-through data with assessment data to include how determinations of teacher efficacy ensure organizational alignment with students' expressed values and goals.

#### **Grades 6-12**

It is essential to ensure that the assessment calendar and data meeting schedule are disseminated before the commencement of the school year. Additionally, consider piloting "look-for" tools at the secondary level during the upcoming school year to expand this practice district-wide in the subsequent year.

## **5.0 Community Culture and Engagement**

### **Grades K-5**

We recommend that FCPS infuse culture and climate data into its comprehensive literacy plan.

Additionally, we recommend that the district describe its expectations for schools and the central office regarding parent and community engagement, supporting its structured literacy efforts.

### **Grades 6-12**

It is advisable to include a detailed description of the plan to ensure the fidelity and sustainability of key initiatives at the secondary level. Additionally, identify opportunities to promote community engagement, emphasizing stakeholder collaboration and trust-building. Furthermore, please explicitly outline how climate survey results are integrated into decision-making processes and support for key initiatives.



