



LEA Final Report

Local Education Agency	Kent 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 practical 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 Kent 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 literacy experts provided written and oral feedback to Kent 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. A total of 11 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. Five classroom observations were conducted in April 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 and lasted for 15 or 20 minutes. LEA staff members were present during classroom observations.

LEA Background and Context

Kent County Public School (KCPS) is working to enact its literacy mission to “implement a research-based, comprehensive literacy plan that focuses on high-quality foundational skills instruction, fosters a culture of continuous improvement, and ensures equitable access to literacy resources.” MCAP proficiency levels are improving, as about 37% of students in grade 3 scored proficiency in 2023, an improvement from 2022. Of the 609 elementary school students enrolled as of 2023, 48% of the elementary school-aged students are racially diverse, 59% are economically disadvantaged, and all observed schools were classified as Title 1.

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 Kent County Literacy Plan integrates Science of Reading-aligned curricula like OG+ (IMSE), Heggerty, Foundations, and Wonders to deliver comprehensive literacy instruction, emphasizing explicit, systematic, and cumulative learning approaches. For **Professional Development**, teachers and administrators express satisfaction with the current curriculum implementation and support from the administration in training teachers to understand the curriculum. **Professional Development** opportunities are perceived positively, enabling teachers to effectively implement Structured Literacy approaches in their classrooms. **Multi-Tiered Support Systems** include regular screenings and assessments through Wonders and NWEA MAP, with Tier II and Tier III interventions monitored periodically through ISME. **Instructional Leadership** is supported by explicit goals and regular progress monitoring across the district, although implementation details for interventions could be clearer. **Community Engagement** efforts include annual back-to-school nights and collaborations with a Judy Center to involve families of early readers in the educational process.

The LEA literacy framework emphasizes the integration of structured literacy across all content areas, highlighting the essential roles of speaking, writing, reading, and listening and the necessity for differentiated and scaffolded instruction for diverse learners. It advocates for consistently applying evidence-based strategies at the Tier 1 level, supported by theoretical models such as Scarborough’s Reading Rope and the Simple View of Reading, while outlining a comprehensive approach to vocabulary instruction and language comprehension. District leaders will promote Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for literacy data analysis, facilitate targeted professional development sessions, and implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to ensure all students receive appropriate literacy instruction tailored to their needs.

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

Secondary

The Local Education Agency (LEA) literacy framework emphasizes the integration of structured literacy across all content areas, highlighting the essential roles of speaking, writing, reading, and listening. It advocates for differentiated, explicit, and scaffolded instruction tailored to diverse learners while drawing on theoretical models such as Scarborough’s Reading Rope and the Simple View of Reading to inform effective teaching practices. The framework stresses the importance of language comprehension at the Tier 1 level, recommending consistent, evidence-based strategies alongside explicit writing instruction that addresses various genres and audiences. Additionally, the framework outlines a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to provide targeted interventions for students needing additional assistance while promoting the use of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for collaborative data analysis and professional development focused on equity and culturally responsive teaching.

Key Findings: Current Status of Implementation

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction

Implementation Status: Implementation

Grades K-5

The Kent County Literacy Plan works with specific Science of Reading-aligned curricula through programs such as OG+ (IMSE), Heggerty, Foundations, and Wonders to provide explicit, systematic, and cumulative literacy instructions. Teachers and administrators seemed content with using current systems and support from the administration in implementing the curriculum.

Grades 6-12

The LEA literacy framework emphasizes the integration of structured literacy across all content areas, underscoring the critical roles of speaking, writing, reading, and listening and the necessity for differentiated, explicit, and scaffolded instruction for diverse learners. It outlines unique vocabulary instruction and knowledge development opportunities within each discipline, supported by theoretical models such as Scarborough’s Reading Rope and the Simple View of Reading, which provide a research basis for effective teaching practices. Furthermore, the framework details the importance of language comprehension at the Tier 1 level, recommending the consistent application of evidence-based strategies—including summarizing, questioning, and analyzing the author’s purpose—while also stressing explicit writing instruction that encompasses sentence structure, paragraph organization, and the writing process for various genres and audiences.

2.0 Professional Learning

Implementation Status: Implementation

Grades K-5

Teachers reported satisfaction with the current level of Professional Development, citing experiences receiving the necessary training and support to implement the Structured Literacy curriculum adequately in the classroom.

Grades 6-12

District leaders will promote the use of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for analyzing literacy data among educators, supported by a structured literacy coaching plan. Schools are provided with designated time for monthly PLC meetings and professional development (PD) sessions, which focus on equity, English Language Learners (ELLs), and culturally responsive teaching practices. While PD opportunities are outlined to assist teachers and interventionists in planning and adapting interventions based on data, the feedback mechanisms for intervention teachers require further clarification.

3.0 Multi-tiered Support Systems

Implementation Status: Implementation

Grades K-5

Necessary screenings are happening through The Wonders curriculum-embedded assessments (3x/year) and testing of Reading Skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension) to assess BOY, MOY, and EOY. Although not directly observed, administrators reported that Tier II and Tier III monitoring happens in small groups through the ISME curriculum every few weeks. Tier I monitoring happens every week using NWEA map reading fluency.

Grades 6-12

The literacy plan identifies progress monitoring tools, such as NWEA 6+ MAP, and emphasizes the importance of monthly data meetings involving various stakeholders. All students receive Tier 1 Core instruction, which is differentiated to meet diverse learning needs. In contrast, Tier 2 instruction is provided for those requiring additional support beyond the core curriculum, and Tier 3 intervention is designated for students needing intensive literacy assistance. The plan includes a detailed discussion of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), highlighting the necessity for specialized instruction from special education teachers or reading specialists tailored to individual student needs based on diagnostic assessments and data analysis.

4.0 Instructional Leadership

Implementation Status: Implementation

Grades K-5

The district's literacy plan had very explicit goals that the staff understood, and the administration provided the necessary support to achieve them. Teachers and administrators reported that regular testing occurs to monitor progress and analyze data across the district. Data about what is done to implement interventions is much more sparse.

Grades 6-12

Long-term goals are articulated within the literacy plan for secondary grades, emphasizing the necessity of training all administrators and elementary teachers in the Science of Reading (SoR). The assessment calendar outlines testing windows for Beginning-of-Year (BOY), Middle-of-Year (MOY), and End-of-Year (EOY) data analysis, particularly focusing on specific student groups. Furthermore, participation in school learning walks will be employed to offer feedback on effective literacy instruction and evidence-based practices; evidence of

research-based methodologies will be gathered during these visits using the KCPS learning walk rubric to facilitate targeted professional development for schools.

5.0 Community Culture and Engagement

Implementation Status: Implementation

Grades K-5

Expectations of back-to-school nights annually and collaboration with a Judy Center to engage families of early readers

Grades 6-12

School leaders will systematically observe classroom instruction to ensure adherence to the curriculum, state standards, and College and Career Readiness (CCR) benchmarks. Teachers are expected to implement the literacy plan with fidelity. The engagement of community partners is integral to the plan, providing essential supplementary reading support and enhancing overall literacy efforts.

Recommendations: Next Steps

1.0 Curriculum and Instruction

Grades K-5

While teachers expressed satisfaction with the levels of training connected with the implementation of OG this year, they unanimously agreed that resources around staffing and tangible teaching materials need to be improved. Building upon foundational skills proved difficult since teachers didn't have applicable literature to use. While teachers got innovative in creating a Google Drive, adding what appropriate readings they found throughout the year, ongoing testing results indicated that students struggled to connect the lesson teachings during tests that required the application of this learning with long text passages. One educator hired as a literacy coach ended up teaching in the classroom because of staffing shortages.

Grades 6-12

The plan needs more specific opportunities and questions for improvement. It is recommended to incorporate a Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Education (CRSE) framework, as Muhammad (2023) proposed, which includes four essential components: building identity, teaching skills, developing intellectualism, and fostering criticality. Additionally, the plan should provide detailed descriptions of explicit, systematic literacy instruction, including tailored guidance for supporting English learners and dialectical speakers, strategies for integrating word and morphological awareness into content-area literacy practices, and comprehensive instruction on text structure and the reading-writing connection, emphasizing how enhancing writing skills can concurrently improve reading comprehension.

2.0 Professional Learning

Grades K-5

The Kent County Literacy Plan adequately outlines the necessary goals and initiatives to support successful literacy instruction. Administrators reported that data monitoring is in place through regular testing by certified support. Still, teachers detailed confusion about how to help students who don't understand concepts taught through group instruction. Furthermore, support coaches have no curriculum-specific training or certifications to support students.

Grades 6-12

A comprehensive plan for lesson studies should be implemented to ensure sustainability in instructional practices. This plan must include explicit training for teachers and support staff on how to modify the time and intensity of instruction according to data and student needs, as well as detailed strategies for the equitable allocation of resources based on available funding sources. Additionally, it is recommended that professional development (PD) offerings be enhanced specifically for teachers working with English Language Learners (ELLs) and other historically underserved groups while also providing PD opportunities in literacy strategy instruction tailored for secondary content area educators. Furthermore, a structured approach for observing and providing feedback to those delivering academic interventions should be developed, integrating this process into the existing literacy coaching framework.

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

Teachers expressed the need for specific literacy instructors for ELLs and speakers of language variations, as some intermediate students are 100% Spanish-speaking. Teachers reported needing more than one intervention specialist trained in Tier 3 support.

Grades 6-12

The plan should clearly identify and label the assessments to diagnose specific reading difficulties alongside additional progress monitoring tools for students receiving reading interventions. A more comprehensive explanation of how Universal Design for Learning (UDL) aligns with the instructional focus at the secondary level is necessary, detailing its role in supporting and enhancing student learning. Data meetings must include explicit plans addressing each tier of student achievement, and the time frame for instruction (90-120 minutes per day) should be explicitly noted. Additionally, detailed descriptions of Tier 2 instruction should be provided using specified indicators, and the plan for Tier 3 interventions must be elaborated based on ideal implementation indicators. Finally, further clarification is required on how diagnostic assessments and reading interventions will assist struggling readers in improving both word recognition and language comprehension.

4.0 Instructional Leadership**Grades K-12**

Consistency in the training of coaches and tutors in the curriculum used in the classroom is needed.

Grades 6-12

Enhance and diversify the data collection methods from stakeholders to obtain comprehensive insights. Furthermore, the KCPS learning walk rubric should be aligned with the IDA's Knowledge & Practice Standards to ensure consistency in instructional practices. A strong emphasis should be placed on training in the Science of Reading (SoR) for all administrators and secondary teachers, particularly focusing on reading strategy instruction for Tier 1 content educators and intensive strategies for reading interventionists and specialists. Additionally, clear short-term and mid-term goals should be established for literacy instruction in secondary grades, with a systematic process for monthly review of these goals.

5.0 Community Culture and Engagement

Grades K-5

No identifiable systems to monitor commitment to engage with the community were observed. KCPS elementary and middle schools are designated Title I institutions, enabling them to implement comprehensive Parent Family Engagement events. Attendance at these events is monitored, and surveys are utilized to assess parental commitment and satisfaction. Additionally, each school employs newsletters and weekly phone calls as strategies to engage and inform families about school activities and initiatives.

Grades 6-12

Establishing robust systems at all levels is essential to promoting fidelity and sustainability within the literacy framework, with a particular emphasis on enhancing systems at the building level through more detailed descriptions. Additionally, it is recommended that collaboration between community stakeholders and school leaders be facilitated at least once a month to strengthen partnerships and support literacy initiatives.