



Department of  
**Education**

# CLP Implementation Review

## An Analysis of CLP Implementation in Maryville City Schools

Tennessee Department of Education | July 2021



# Executive Overview

The COVID-19 health pandemic has been unlike any other time and has significantly shifted education in Tennessee and the nation. As noted in the department's [Reopening Schools: Overview Guide for LEAs](#), the pandemic elevated known gaps, and created a sense of urgency for a child-centered strategy. This has been especially true for our youngest learners, those with existing achievement gaps, those in rural communities, and those who need additional school-based services.

On June 22, 2020, the Tennessee State Board of Education promulgated the Continuous Learning Plan (CLP) Emergency Rule 0520-01-17 and Policy 3.210. Based on that rule and policy, the Tennessee Department of Education produced a template and rubric on June 26, 2020. Districts submitted CLP plans and implemented those plans throughout the 2020-21 school year.

As a part of the emergency rule, the department is required to submit a mid-year report and an annual report on CLP implementation. To collect data for the mid-year report, the department administered a survey to districts, and did so again in May for the end-of-year report. In addition, the department conducted implementation reviews with selected districts from April-June to inform the end-of-year report to better tell the story of CLP implementation in districts during the 2020-21 school year.

The department saw this as an opportunity to tell the unique stories of districts and how they stepped up to face unprecedented challenges and overcome those challenges, as well as to highlight the challenges that still exist. The department contracted with external researchers to conduct these reviews. As part of the review process, the researchers collected and reviewed artifacts, conducted focus groups with district staff, leaders, teachers, and parents, and produced the following report that highlights all of the hard work Maryville City Schools did this year, and captures some of the successes and challenges experienced.

## ***CLP Implementation Review Process***

The department contracted with Planting Seeds, LLC to create this case study applying a mixed methods case study approach that included analyzing CLPs, artifacts, and interviews with district leaders, teachers, and parents. Researchers first reviewed the district's original CLP. They then reviewed additional artifacts submitted by Maryville City Schools to better understand what occurred in practice as the district worked to implement the CLP and respond to challenges. Then, researchers conducted interviews with district leaders, teachers, and parents. Finally, researchers analyzed all information gathered to draft the following case study that tells the story of implementation for Maryville City Schools, highlights their successes, and articulates their unique challenges.

## ***District Selection***

The department used a purposive sampling technique to generate a diverse sample of districts for review that could provide the best potential information on successes as well as challenges. In order to get a cross section of districts statewide with varying CLP experiences, the department identified districts who appeared most often in the bottom 10% (11 districts) and the top 10% (19 districts) of the following data points:

- Percent of students in full-time remote learning
- Percent of students with disabilities in full-time remote learning
- Percent of economically disadvantaged students in full-time remote learning
- Percent of K-2 students in full-time remote learning
- Percent of teachers who have missed more than 10 percent of instructional days
- Size of ESSER 1.0 allocation
- Percent of ESSER 1.0 funds remaining

Maryville City Schools was selected using these criteria.

## ***CLP Implementation***

### **Model of Remote Learning**

Maryville City Schools (MCS) offered a digital online learning option as well as a traditional in-person school option for all students during the 2020-21 school year, beginning on July 30, 2020. All MCS students (Pre-K-12) could choose to either attend traditional in-person school or attend digital school full time. Junior high and high school students began on a staggered schedule and then had the additional option to participate in hybrid learning where they attended school online for most of their classes, but had in-person classes for art, music, or career and technical education (CTE).

Families were encouraged to continue using their selected learning format for 9-week intervals, or to limit transitions to coincide with formal school breaks. However, if traditional, on-campus students were sick, absent, or under mandatory quarantine, they were able to briefly transition to digital learning until they were allowed to return to campus. A student's ability to participate in digital and hybrid learning was contingent on their academic progression. If students failed to have adequate academic progress, they were withdrawn from the digital learning program and required to attend traditional school on-campus. Additionally, all digital students were required to complete assessments and testing on-site at their school's respective digital learning lab.

Reopening and CLP implementation information was consistently delivered to stakeholders and the community through social media, the official district and school websites, printed documents, newspapers, radio, and other forms of media. The district anticipated that only 10-15% of students would participate in

digital learning. According to a district leader, at the onset of the 2020-21 school year, about 18% of students were enrolled in the digital learning format. By the end of spring, this number had decreased to around 8%.

MCS requested ESSER funds to hire additional staff and personnel or to provide additional compensation to existing staff and personnel to meet the needs of virtual instruction. This included contracting teachers to support digital learning both during and outside the formal school day. Schools in MCS were able to either 1) have designated virtual teachers report on-campus but work exclusively with digital students, or 2) have designated virtual class periods where teachers only worked with virtual students. In grades K-3, there was a designated digital teacher in every grade level at each elementary school.

## **Teacher Preparation and Instruction**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, MCS had a 1:1 student to technology ratio. This was an important initiative in the district that began to transition to blended learning in order to support college and career readiness. All students, grades K-12, had access to a digital learning device. The district also had a supply of hot spots for students to use that they increased for the 2020-21 school year. While the district was technology rich, there was still great variability in teachers' technological competence and ability to effectively deliver high quality instruction online.

Pre-service professional learning was offered to teachers during the summer to develop their skills and increase their comfort levels with digital learning. Although previous years' professional development incorporated effective digital instruction practices, in preparation for the 2020-21 school year, schools offered more professional development on topics such as providing academic rigor and using standards-based instruction in the digital learning space and engaging students and maintaining a positive culture and climate. Teachers at MCS also completed 13 hours of self-selected professional development based on their individualized learning needs assessments.

Teachers were instructed to follow the MCS Standards Pacing Guide in order to provide confident and standardized instruction to students across the district. In-service professional learning and development on digital learning was also offered at MCS. Teachers were able to work alongside each other and develop stronger skillsets through collaboration.

## **Student Engagement and Academic Support**

There was an initial concern for ensuring the engagement of students who had selected the digital learning option. Therefore, an intervention process to address disengagement was instated. Upon recognition of an engagement issue, the district initiated a caregiver conference. Following further transgressions, students were required to meet weekly, in person, with their teacher; if disengagement continued then students were

withdrawn from virtual learning and re-enrolled in the traditional, on-campus classroom. An administrator recalls:

“A vast majority of the kids that struggled in the spring, chose digital in the fall. So, we immediately had concerns and targeted groups of kids. And Dr. --- mentioned, the support that we had to require engagement of those kids academically, and that when you weren't engaged, we immediately put you on an improvement plan.”

Quarantine mandates caused disruption to teaching and learning and were a constant threat to student engagement for students temporarily enrolled in virtual learning. This may be due to the fact that these students had not elected or opted into the digital learning method but were participating out of necessity. To help increase engagement during virtual learning, teachers used interactive tools during virtual lessons (like polls, screen sharing, education-based games, etc.) and allowed students the opportunity to work in small groups or lead the lesson themselves.

Student progress was monitored using Mastery Connect and benchmark assessments that took place in each school's respective Digital Learning Lab. This helped to ensure that student data was being collected across the school year and that academic integrity was maintained. If students were not progressing as expected, they would be offered remediation, tutoring, or reteaching sessions directly on-campus.

Providing services and support to special populations was a priority for MCS. The district requested ESSER 1.0 funds to provide additional support for special populations of students such as students receiving Special Education services, English Learners, students identified by RTI, and those students who were not experiencing adequate progression during digital instruction. Furthermore, MCS conducted a needs analysis in July, prior to the onset of the 2020-21 school year. The district worked to supplement students' learning experiences and curb further learning loss after the Spring 2020 emergency response closures. They hired staff for remedial instruction and resources to support in-house instruction and services for students with special needs. Students still received RTI via breakout rooms and Special Education and English Learner (EL) Services were provided in accordance with students' Individualized Education or Learning Plan. MCS also purchased tools, software, platforms, and materials to provide special services remotely. These services included: medical services, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy. For example, Edmark Online was a software purchased by the district for reading intervention and speech therapy. Finally, MCS took special consideration for EL students and families who may need additional language services such as translation and interpretation.

## **Technology**

As previously mentioned, MCS already had enough hardware and technological devices for all students in the district. There were only two major adjustments made to increase student access to technology for the

2020-21 school year. First, students in grades K-3 were now able to take their devices off campus to use at home. Second, additional hotspots were obtained in order to support students who did not have access to fast and reliable internet at home.

In preparation for the 2020-21 school year, MSC invested in adaptive and interactive platforms and software for instruction and communication like Zoom, Canvas, Dyo, SeeSaw, Powerschool, and Mastery Connect and purchased additional features like single sign on services. Technological devices such as iPads, Lenovo Laptops, and Windows Notebooks were also distributed to stakeholders. Teachers were also equipped with laptop stands and cameras to assist with delivering digital instruction.

Students were expected to follow the guidelines and expectations outlined in the “iReach Responsible Use Policy” and the “iReach Resource Guide”. MCS monitored student use and tracked and flagged questionable or concerning student online activity.

Stakeholders at MCS were supported by a technology team that included a Technology Coordinator at each individual school and a District Technology Director. Stakeholders had access to an online help desk called “TechTech Help Link” that directed them to resources, allowed them to troubleshoot common issues, and provided a place to submit help tickets for more demanding issues that needed to be addressed by a professional.

## **Attendance**

Tracking attendance did prove difficult due to student quarantines that temporarily led to on-campus students transitioning to virtual learning. Students were marked present for attendance if they logged in and participated in class by a certain time in the morning. Student activity and timestamps (e.g., length of time spent on an assignment or time of assignment submission) were also used by teachers as an indication of attendance. Teachers emphasized the importance of routines, structures, and setting procedures to ensure students were actively present and participating in instruction.

## **Monitoring**

MCS engaged stakeholders before, during, and after the CLP implementation. Transparent communication was crucial and ensured that the community was fully engaged in the development and implementation of the CLP. Formal and informal stakeholder feedback proved useful to administrators with decision-making, planning, and monitoring of the CLP.

Teachers provided information on student attendance, class participation and engagement, assignment quality and submission to district leaders. Formal benchmark assessments were also used to track student growth across the 2020-21 school year and monitor for differences in digital students and those on-campus.

Data revealed that MCS students, excluding first-graders, demonstrated comparable academic progression as previous years. Additionally, the MCS Digital Learning Monitoring Plan outlined a teacher evaluation process for digital instructors that mirrored the traditional evaluation system.

## ***Biggest Successes***

### **Enhanced Communication Between Stakeholders.**

The district implemented tools and strategies to encourage and sustain high quality and effective communication between students, parents, families, teachers, school leaders, and the county. This communication was varied, effortful, and persistent during the course of virtual or remote learning.

At MCS, communication between the schools, communities and families helped to maintain morale and support across the district. The active communication built trust and a shared sense of responsibility. MCS provided clear and specific expectations for both students and caregivers. Students were to attend and participate in class daily, as well as check communications (Canvas, SeeSaw, etc.) daily. They also were to follow the MCS Responsible Use Policy and the iReach User's Guide which has traditionally been used in the district. Caregivers were set up and enabled a productive learning environment at home for their child (schedule and office like space or setting), to communicate with teachers, and to help uphold academic integrity. These clear and specific expectations decreased parent cognitive load and brought them relief. Teachers further clarified student expectations. A teacher explains:

“The most important thing I learned this year that would be beneficial for others is the importance of clear communication. Whichever platform you utilize to present your daily agenda, classroom expectations, parent teacher contact, student- teacher contact, create and maintain a schedule for upholding those expectations surrounding your communication to your digital learners and their families. We presented the daily agenda by 4:00 each day for the following day to ensure all students could prepare materials, or their workspace for the day's activities- sites were all picture clues or icons to help navigate the digital world with ease to ensure they knew what was expected of them daily. Find a system that works for you and your learners, and implement with consistency.”

Teachers also communicated and collaborated often. All teachers, regardless of instructional delivery format, were on-campus daily. This allowed for teachers to work with one another, share lesson plans, and share successful strategies.

### **Tracking, monitoring, & responding to student data**

The district tracked and monitored student outcomes during the CLP implementation. They, in turn, used this information to respond to students quickly and effectively, intervening when students showed declining participation or academic progress.

Digital instruction required that teachers were deliberate in delivering the essential content in a meaningful and rigorous way. An administrator discussed how digital instruction made teachers “really think through their curriculum, and what would be the minimum viable curriculum and the most essential standards that I need to teach, to make sure that these students have mastered the essential content to be successful.” Teachers focused on how to use digital tools and educational technology to deliver high quality instruction.

### **Providing Structures to Support Virtual Learning.**

MCS had the ability to provide the necessary structures and resources to transition learners to a hybrid or virtual model with minimal disruption to instruction. Students learning at home had access to learning materials (technology-based and non-technology based) that were useful in instruction.

At MCS school leaders, teachers, and the technical support team worked to ensure all students and families were equipped with the necessities to be successful in a virtual or hybrid learning environment. MCS was advantaged due to their previously 1:1 student technology initiative. However, there were also several written resources for families to refer to, online technical support, a hotline, and on campus tech staff.

### ***Biggest Challenges***

#### **Insufficient human capital to support the functioning of virtual and hybrid models.**

MCS faced insufficient human capital or staff capacity to support various forms of virtual and hybrid learning and instruction. The hybrid model of instruction presented challenges for educators in delivering equitable, high-quality instruction, and drastically increased their demands. Teachers sacrificed planning time to address challenges that stemmed from remote instruction. They also expressed difficulties with limited materials in adjusting to remote instruction, in which they had to develop those materials on their own. Additionally, they were providing technical support to students and families.

Intermediate and high school teachers at MCS who taught digital classes often instructed separate, traditional in-person classes as well. These teachers experienced some difficulty creating consistency across these classrooms and providing an equitable learning experience for their digital students. As such, teachers would have to prepare the same content in two different ways during lesson planning. This produced stress and strain on teachers. Ultimately, the functioning of the learning environment suffered and teacher strain and burnout ensued.

#### **Maintaining and Sustaining Student Engagement.**

The district was faced with low levels of student engagement during virtual and/or hybrid instruction. There were difficulties with students actively participating in class during virtual learning. Students' attendance and tardiness caused disruptions in other students' learning and may have had unfavorable impacts on grades. Evidence of low student engagement includes students not turning cameras on during class, not interacting



with classmates or teachers, inconsistency in submitting assignments, and decrease in motivation and morale.

Teachers noted that some students did not have a quiet, office-like workspace at home and that this began to become distracting for their learning. Additionally, teachers discussed that the devices themselves became distractions for students. This was an issue especially with older students who may have chosen to attend class via their cell phone and then later be enticed by social media. While devices in a traditional classroom trigger environmental cues related to academics, using devices at home may trigger environmental cues related to relaxation and entertainment. This led teachers to feel as though they were competing for students' attention at times.

### **Student Academic Integrity.**

Teachers and district leaders expressed an inability to secure accurate student data due to cheating and plagiarism among students and the over-involvement of caregivers in the completion of student classwork and homework assignments.

Students were informed and expected to maintain academic integrity and avoid plagiarism, cheating, or student academic brokering and parents were informed to "maintain academic integrity by not assisting or allowing assistance for assignments or projects." Still, many teachers suspected that academic integrity was at risk when students were working at home and instructors were unable to see what support they may have been utilizing. For example, a teacher explained that students had to have video and additional monitoring during class time in order to ensure they were not using artificial intelligence like Alexa and Siri to solve problems or complete exercises. Another issue was the presence of intervening parents. Teachers were concerned that parental involvement was too high in the virtual learning environment and that students were not doing enough independent work at home. A teacher explained having to consider, "how much of this work is a reflection of student ability or parent effort." While parental involvement is necessary, there is a limit, and it can become a barrier to student academic progression.