



Education Preparation Provider Signed Assurance Companion Document

What is the purpose of this guidance document?

This guidance document serves as a companion to the *EPP Signed Assurances: Literacy Standards Guidance for EPPs* to provide clarity and additional information to support understanding and alignment to the requirements of the Tennessee Literacy Success Act. Additional resources can be found on the [Literacy in Educator Preparation](#) webpage.

What does the Tennessee Literacy Success Act require for Education Preparation Providers (EPPs)?

The [Tennessee Literacy Success Act of 2021](#) requires the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) to develop and submit to the State Board of Education for approval, foundational literacy skills standards, for use by Educator Preparation Providers (EPPs) for the instruction of candidates seeking a license to teach students in kindergarten through grade three (K-3) and for those seeking an instructional leader license.

At a minimum, these standards must include:

- How to effectively teach foundational literacy skills of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension without using “MSV” (meaning, syntax, visual) cueing or pictorial cueing as a differentiated learning approach;
- How to use instructional supports and learning access points for students with significant reading deficiencies and students with advanced reading skills without the use of guided reading or leveled readers for direct and small group instruction;
- Dyslexia identification and how to provide effective instruction for students with characteristics of dyslexia using appropriate scientific research and brain-based multisensory intervention methods and strategies;
- How to implement reading instruction using high-quality instructional materials;
- Behavior management, trauma-informed principles and practices for the classroom, and other developmentally appropriate supports to ensure that students can effectively access reading instruction; and
- How to administer universal reading screeners to students and use the resulting data to improve reading instruction for students.



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In July 2021, the SBE adopted foundational skills standards that outline these requirements (see [Literacy and Specialty Area Standards For Educator Preparation Policy 5.505](#)). The Tennessee Literacy Success Act requires all EPPs to provide training on reading instruction focused primarily on the foundational literacy skills standards beginning August 1, 2022. Effective August 1, 2023, candidates must then provide a certificate documenting the passage of a Tennessee reading instruction test that tests the candidate's knowledge of foundational skills instruction as defined in the Tennessee Literacy Success Act or provide evidence documenting the candidate's completion of a foundational literacy skills instruction course approved by the department.

Why is the state emphasizing foundational literacy skills now?

Overall, Tennessee literacy rates have not changed in seven years as measured by the third grade Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) and fourth grade National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).

Governor Bill Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly placed a heightened focus on foundational skills instruction because of the recognition of the lack of improvements in literacy rates as well as the predicted decline in literacy scores after COVID-19 pandemic disruptions during the 2020 spring and 2020-21 school year. The General Assembly recognizes the importance of focusing on literacy and how it will set our students and state up for success, and our assessment results clearly indicate the need for drastic measures to improve literacy opportunities for all Tennessee children.

Evidence-based research indicates the most reliable way to teach children to read is by systematically covering a set of foundational skills which includes phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, and phonics. The research on learning to read goes back many decades and includes the work of psychologists from the 1960s to more recent discoveries by neuroscientists using brain imaging technology. Balanced Literacy, a concept that arose in the 1990s, relies heavily on cueing, independent reading time, and leveled reading. The balanced literacy approach for early literacy instruction is not supported in the Tennessee Literacy Success Act because systematic phonics is required in the Tennessee State Academics Standards and required in the updated standards for educator preparation programs. Instead, evidence-based literacy instruction must include phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension as part of its comprehensive literacy instruction.

How have the Educational Preparation Provider standards changed?

The Tennessee Literacy Success Act enacted on February 3, 2021, requires all EPPs to provide applicable candidates with training on foundational literacy skills. The law required updates to the existing literacy



standards including (1) how to effectively teach the foundational literacy skills of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension, (2) how to scaffold instruction for teaching students with advanced reading skills, students at risk for significant reading deficiencies, and students with significant reading deficiencies, (3) dyslexia identification and how to provide effective instruction for students with characteristics of dyslexia using appropriate scientific research and brain-based multisensory intervention methods and strategies, (4) how to implement reading instruction using high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), (5) behavior management through trauma-informed principles, and (6) how to administer a universal reading screener to students and use the resulting data to improve reading instruction for all students. Beginning August 1, 2022, EPPs must provide training on reading instruction focused primarily on these foundational literacy skills standards to applicable candidates seeking licensure to teach grades kindergarten through three (K-3) as well as candidates seeking instructional leader licensure.

Below is an overview of the updates made in each Literacy Standard for teacher candidates. A crosswalk outlining the changes between the 2017 and 2021 EPP literacy standards can be found [here](#).

- *Standard 1: Content Knowledge* - several standards were updated to include clearer language and terminology associated with foundational literacy skills
- *Standard 2: Language and Literacy Rich Environment* - updates include the elimination of practices that are not evidence-based including leveling and cueing
- *Standard 3: High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) and Lesson Preparation* and *Standard 4: Instruction using High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM)* - new standards were developed to address the requirements of the law
- *Standard 5: Foundational Literacy Skills Assessment and Evaluation* was updated to include assessments specific to assessing progress in foundational skills instruction
- *Standard 7: Trauma-Informed Concepts* and *Standard 8: Trauma-Informed Discipline Practices* – new standards were developed to address the requirements of the law

Below is an overview of the updates made in the *Literacy Standards for Instructional Leader Preparation*. A crosswalk outlining the changes between the 2017 and 2021 EPP literacy standards for instructional leader programs can be found [here](#).

- Addition of new standards and updated language in existing standards focused on foundational skills instruction (*a.1*)
- Supporting students with advanced reading skills and significant reading deficiencies (*a.2*)
- Dyslexia identification and how to provide effective instruction for students with characteristics of dyslexia using appropriate scientific research and brain-based multisensory intervention methods and strategies (*a.3*)



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- Use of universal reading screeners (*g, h*)
- Implementation of instruction using high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) (*k, l, m*)
- Behavior management through trauma-informed principles (*n, o.1-8, p.1-5*)

*What key terminology and concepts **should be** included in the literacy instruction courses for teacher candidates?*

The following key terminology and concepts should be included in the literacy instruction courses for teacher candidates:

- Alphabetic principle: understanding that letters and letter combinations are symbols that represent speech sounds in words, or that the sounds of language are represented by letters and letter combination
- Decodable text: carefully sequenced texts to progressively incorporate words that are consistent with the letter–sound relationships that have been taught to the new reader
- Decoding: the ability to apply knowledge of letter-sound relationships as well as letter patterns to correctly pronounce written words
- Foundational Literacy Skills: the continuum of skills that research has demonstrated are required to systematically teach reading, including phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, decoding, vocabulary development and comprehension
- Encoding: the cognitive process of transferring speech to print, or linking a speech sound to a visual symbol
- Evidence-based research: practices, materials and educational strategies that have been proven to be effective via studies
- Fluency: reading with sufficient automaticity, pacing, prosody (e.g., intonation, tone, stress, rhythm), and accuracy to support comprehension
- Grapheme: letter or combination of letters that represent a phoneme
- High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM): a complex set of resources that build conceptually through the yearlong scope and sequence as well as through grade levels that includes comprehensive tools that allow teachers to prepare instructional experiences for all learners
- Intervention: a multi-tiered system of academic supports for reading gaps defined by assessments; in Tennessee, interventions are frequently a component of the Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²) system
- Knowledge-building/Comprehension building: the term “building knowledge” refers to the comprehension strand of Scarborough’s rope and refers to read-aloud and reading outcomes that focus on developing conceptual understandings on topics (e.g., amphibians, the American Revolution) after reading a series of texts on the same concept
- Language comprehension: student’s ability to derive meaning from written and oral language



- Learning access points: HQIM have explicit access points designed to help learners with additional needs engage in materials, e.g., additional vocabulary definitions and context for students who are English Language Learners
- Lesson Preparation/Unit Preparation: supporting teachers' unit and lesson planning process grounded within HQIM and understanding the daily lesson components of the materials and how to use those components to deliver lessons and sequence lessons into a unit with a culminating assessment
- Letter knowledge: the ability to identify the letters of the alphabet with speed and automaticity and understanding of alphabetic and print concepts, as well as ability to identify and discriminate between letters (visual discrimination)
- Morphemes: meaning-carrying units of written language including base words, prefixes, suffixes, combining forms, and roots
- Morphology: the study of meaningful units within words
- Oral language: spoken language, including spoken words and articulated sounds
- Orthographic Mapping: the process that occurs when unfamiliar words become automatic sight words through accurate and automatic word retrieval
- Phoneme: the smallest distinct units of sound we can perceive in words
- Phonemic awareness: the specific ability to focus and manipulate the individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words
- Phonics: readers learn the predictable relationships between sounds and the letters and spellings that represent those sounds in written language
- Phonological awareness: the ability to identify and manipulate oral language including words, syllables, onsets, and rimes and is inclusive of the advanced skills within phonemic awareness
- Scarborough's Rope: Scarborough (2010) described skilled reading using the comparison to strands of a rope to demonstrate the interdependence of each element
 - The Reading Rope contains upper and lower strands
 - The word-recognition strands (phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition of familiar words) come together as the reader becomes more fluent, accurate, and automatic
 - The language-comprehension strands (background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge) come together into its own strand which then intertwines with word-recognition
 - The interweaving of word-recognition and language-comprehension illustrate how a skilled reader uses all the skills in an integrated manner with automaticity
- Simple View of Reading: Gough & Tunmer (1986) offer the simple view of reading as a formula used to explain how the two most basic components of reading—word recognition (decoding) and language comprehension—result in reading comprehension. The formula is $D \times LC = RC$
- Sounds-first: an approach to instruction that acknowledges the fact that children's ability to notice and manipulate sounds is the first step in foundational skills development



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- Word composition: encoding when writing; grade-level phonics and word analysis skills when encoding words

*What key terminology and concepts **should not be** included in the instruction of teacher candidates?*

The following key terminology and concepts should not be included in the instruction of teacher candidates:

- **Balanced literacy:** Balanced literacy is deeply rooted in whole language and infrequently adds components of phonics instruction. Most often, though, if phonics instruction is included, it is rarely explicit or systematically developed throughout the course of a child’s reading instruction
- **Cueing:** an approach that guides children to guess and use clues to identify a new, unknown word (standard 2.11)
- **Guided reading small groups:** instruction provided in a small group setting that pairs children with leveled texts to match their “instructional reading level”, often preventing them from accessing and engaging in grade-level concepts and skills. This methodology often prevents students from accessing grade-level texts thus widening the gap of students performing on grade level (standard 2.4)
- ***Independent reading level:** the text level a student is able to read independently, or without teacher support
 - Independent reading level is assessed using an instrument with a determined level of accuracy, rate, and comprehension (standard 2.4)
 - *It is appropriate, however, to discuss independent reading levels for the purposes of independent reading, small group instruction and intervention
- ***Instructional reading level:** the text level a student is able to read with teacher instruction
 - Instructional reading level is assessed using an instrument with determined level of accuracy, rate, and comprehension, but should not be used to determine reading materials for classroom instruction (standard 2.4)
 - *It is appropriate, however, to discuss instructional reading levels for the purposes of independent reading, small group instruction and/or intervention
- **Leveled reading:** differentiating students by their reading level, often preventing them from accessing and engaging in grade-level texts (standard 2.4)
- **Whole language:** the philosophy that assumes learning to read is a natural phenomenon and that if children are exposed to enough texts, they will develop a love of reading and the skills needed to be fully literate without the need for explicit and systematic phonics instruction. Whole language is often characterized by lessons that encourage children to use context clues rather than decoding skills as the primary method of word recognition (standard 2.11)



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