



Early Literacy Supports FAQ and Update February 2020

Tennessee is gaining national attention for the Governor’s Literacy Initiative and accompanying literacy bill (see *EdWeek*, Curriculum Matters, etc.) due to the comprehensive nature of support it will provide for future teachers, current teachers, and school leaders – as well as highlighting the excellent work already being done by many districts across the state. Most importantly, the initiative will prepare all students in Tennessee with the instruction they deserve in order to learn to read proficiently. This commitment will push over \$50 million towards improving literacy access, skills, and training for our students, educators and families. This initiative also addresses the ongoing concerns related to the needs of new teachers and the costs of ongoing professional development.

What are the components of the Early Literacy Supports Framework?

1. PK–2 Foundational Skills Curriculum Supplement (complements districts’ Knowledge Building Curricula)
2. K–2 Foundational Reading Skills Training (5 Days) and K–2 Foundational Reading Skills Implementation Training (5 Days)
3. K–2 Uniform Reading Diagnostic
4. K–2 Implementation Support
5. Family Support Resources

What is the “science of reading” and how does it apply to the Early Literacy Supports Framework?

The term “science of reading” refers to evidence-based literacy practices that are grounded in cognitive science. These practices include: sounds-first instruction, a systematic approach to building sounds, intentional coding of letter patterns to sounds, and the absence of “cues” (MSV) during foundational skills. Instruction grounded in the science of reading includes phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary. The resources and supports provided by the department through this initiative will be grounded in these practices in order to become the highest achieving state in the country.

What do I need to purchase? How much does this cost my district?

The state will provide a free, open-source PK-2 foundational skills supplemental curriculum. The full curriculum resource will be available no later than July 1, 2020 and is not contingent on legislative funding.

This initiative provides two weeks of no-cost professional development for all educators who provide reading or reading intervention instruction for students. Non-administrators will also receive a competitive stipend for successfully completing the professional development sequence.

This initiative provides a free, K-2 reading diagnostic for all districts.

This initiative provides no-cost locally-selected and/or locally-driven implementation supports from external providers that will be required to meet the specific needs of local districts and work directly with districts on implementation.

Additionally, all districts will complete the local adoption process as outlined in statute, and notify the Tennessee Department of Education of their K-2 knowledge-building curriculum decisions by May 15, 2020. K-2 ELA knowledge-building materials are eligible for partial reimbursement grants contingent on the approval of the Governor’s budget. Please see the handout on High Quality Materials for more information.

What is the foundational skills curriculum?

The foundational skills curriculum is a supplemental curriculum that will be provided open-source and free to all districts in Tennessee. It is a set of instructional materials focused on the science of reading (systematic phonics instruction). Classroom teachers participating in the training will also receive a set of aligned classroom materials at no cost to districts.



Can districts who are already implementing a foundational skills curriculum receive a waiver?

Yes. Districts who are “early adopters” (implementing similar and approved materials for at least two years) may apply for a waiver so that they may continue to use their existing materials.

What is the foundational skills training?

The training will launch in multiple locations in each of the eight CORE regions tentatively beginning in July, 2020. Teachers will complete a five-day course (week one) focused on developing a deep understanding of phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, decoding, and vocabulary development. At the end of the week one course, participants will demonstrate proficiency and be eligible for a literacy certificate. A second, five-day course (week two) will focus on implementing foundational skills. After completion of the second course, K-2 teachers will receive classroom kits with decodables, manipulatives, and sounds-first resources.

When will teachers be trained?

The accompanying bill being considered by the Tennessee State Legislature requires that all educators are trained by July 2022. The department is in the process of putting out a Request for Proposals (RFP) for external providers to conduct this training, and expects all trainings to be done in Summer 2020 and Summer 2021. The department will be putting out a survey by the end of February to conduct a landscape analysis of district needs and preferences related to the timing of the training, to provide to the selected vendor(s).

The department will work with districts and the vendor to ensure as many trainings as possible are conducted on-site at local elementary schools, to ensure smaller group sizes, reduced travel time, and classroom-based supports and practice.

Recurring funding that is listed in the Governor’s proposed budget would allow for regional trainings to be done annually for any new-to-literacy teachers, new-to-Tennessee teachers, or teachers who may have missed the primary trainings in 2020 and 2021.

Which teachers are impacted? Who is expected to go through the training?

Any educator who is responsible for reading instruction or remediation, and associated administrators, must participate in the training. This includes classroom teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, etc.

Will any teachers who participate in the training, but are unable to demonstrate mastery in teaching reading, risk losing their licenses?

Absolutely not. This is a shift that is focused on support and development. Teachers within districts who master the content will have the opportunity to serve as a mentor for those who do not.

For those who do not successfully demonstrate mastery, districts should assign a mentor teacher (outlined above) and the department will encourage those teachers to participate in the training again, to ensure that their students have the full benefit of effective literacy instruction and support.

Will teachers be compensated for participating in training?

Yes. Educators (non-administrators) will receive stipends commensurate with their roles and as closely aligned to district practices as possible. Stipend funding will be paid for by districts through state funding.

How will my administrators be able to support teachers?

All administrators who support teachers engaged in reading instruction will also be required to participate in the training, to better support their educators in daily classroom instruction. Leader preparation programs will be required to provide this training moving forward, so that all future administrators serving elementary school will be well-versed in supporting effective literacy instruction.



Are there other pathways to demonstrating mastery besides the training? What are options for districts who are already implementing this work?

Yes. Educators who have already successfully participated in similar trainings and/or those who elect to take and pass the literacy certification assessment in lieu of participating in the training may do so through their districts. Processes for this exemption will be provided in the future, and in consultation with local districts. Early adopter districts are also able to submit for waivers from components of the training. Stipends will only be available for those who participate in the training.

What does ongoing training look like for new teachers, or teachers who are new to Tennessee?

Similar to the first 18-months of implementation, the recurring funds outlined in the Governor's proposed budget provides for the same two weeks of training in each CORE region annually. Separately, all educator preparation providers (EPPs) will be required to exclusively provide science of reading content for teacher candidates by 2021.

Will the state be able to provide training to all districts?

The state will facilitate the implementation of the trainings through a statewide contract with an external provider(s) who is proven to produce outcomes in this area. Unlike previous initiatives, where state employees were responsible for all aspects of a particular initiative, this work will require bringing in high-quality providers with a track record of success, who will meet the needs of local districts. By managing the performance of external providers, the department can focus on quality implementation, get to scale faster, and ensure greater local flexibility and personalization.

What will the K-2 uniform reading diagnostic measure?

The uniform reading diagnostic will measure phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, decoding, and vocabulary. The diagnostic will be administered three times each year, and the data will be hosted on a state database to ensure that districts can use the information flexibly to support children's individual needs. The diagnostic will be available to support PreK students as well as third-grade students who have not reached reading proficiency yet. It will exclusively be used for providing aligned support and resources and will not be used for accountability purposes.

What if the district is already uses a reading diagnostic?

Districts may submit a waiver to use an aligned reading diagnostic. More information will be provided as the department completes a review of materials and receives district surveys (to be sent by the end of February).

Will there be supports for implementation after the training is over?

The Governor's proposed budget has a four-year, staggered support model that will allow all Tennessee elementary schools to have access to implementation support through a state-contracted vendor. Schools will receive gradually reduced supports over a four-year period (years 1 – 4), and then re-start with full support at the start of the next cycle (years 5 – 8). This is to ensure that schools with changing staff continue to receive the supports they need for continued growth and excellence.

Is there a cost to districts for ongoing implementation supports?

There is no cost to districts for ongoing implementation supports, pending passage of the Governor's proposed budget.

How will TDOE provide districts supports for families?

TDOE will partner with non-profit organizations across the state to develop family literacy guides and help create local strategies to increase access to literacy resources for our youngest learners. Finally, innovative community literacy models will be shared through the Early Literacy Supports website.