



OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY

REVIEW OF LITERACY SUCCESS ACT: FIRST YEAR IMPLEMENTATION



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Contents

3	Introduction
3	Tennessee students have struggled to meet basic literacy standards
5	Universal reading screeners identify students' needs
5	TDOE provides a free universal reading screener to districts
7	Schools administer screeners and report results to TDOE
11	Districts and charter schools notify parents and provide interventions when students have reading deficiencies
13	Teacher training focuses on foundational literacy
13	TDOE provides professional development for current teachers in literacy instruction
15	Literacy skills instruction training required for teachers to renew or advance their licenses
16	Literacy skills instruction training developed for high school students pursuing teacher-pathway courses
16	Districts update Foundational Literacy Skills Plans
18	Educator preparation programs revise instruction
18	Revised EPP standards for teaching reading instruction are adopted
19	EPP reading instruction to focus primarily on foundational literacy skills outlined in standards
20	New Tennessee reading instruction test is required to be developed by TDOE and provided at no cost
20	TDOE reports analyze the state's literacy practices, instructional training, and affordability of teacher education programs
21	Key points from preK through grade 5 foundational literacy skills study
23	Key points from EPP literacy instruction programs and practices in literacy instruction study
23	Key points from EPP affordability study
24	TDOE solicited contracts through a competitive process for several requirements of the LSA
26	Existing statutory requirements incorporated into the LSA
27	Conclusions and Policy Options
31	Appendix A: History of Literacy Initiatives in Tennessee
33	Appendix B: Tennessee Universal Reading Screener overview
35	Appendix C: Early Literacy Network School Districts
36	Endnotes

Introduction

During its 2021 Special Session on Education, the Tennessee General Assembly passed the Tennessee Literacy Success Act (LSA), which seeks to ensure that students in early grades are on track to become proficient readers by the end of grade 3.¹

The LSA requires school districts and public charter schools to use foundational literacy skills instruction with a phonics-based approach for early reading instruction. To ensure that districts provide effective foundational literacy instruction, the law requires the use of a reading screener to identify when a student needs help with reading before completing grade 3, requires specific literacy instruction training for teachers, and sets a deadline for English language arts textbooks and instructional materials in use to be aligned with Tennessee standards. The LSA requires districts and charter schools to develop foundational literacy skills plans – describing the time devoted to aspects of core literacy instruction, additional student interventions and supports, and their use of screeners, instructional materials, and training for teachers – and submit their plans for state approval every three years.^A

The LSA legislation also requires educator preparation programs to emphasize a phonics-based approach, aligned with state foundational literacy standards. Finally, the law requires several new reports on the current status of Tennessee’s early grades literacy instruction and achievement, teacher training on methods to teach reading, and affordability of teacher training providers.

In 2022, the General Assembly passed a law requiring that the Comptroller’s Office annually review the implementation of the LSA and report its findings to the chairs of the Senate and House education committees and the State Board of Education (SBE) by November 1st of each year.² The Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) has been designated by the Comptroller to complete this annual review. This report is the first such review. A separate annual Comptroller review of district and charter school foundational literacy skills plans is required by the LSA. [The first literacy plan review](#) was completed in 2021, and this report includes the review of plans that districts and schools updated in 2022.

OREA’s overall review of the first year’s implementation of the Literacy Success Act included multiple interviews with Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) staff, a review of state documents, reports, plans, and guides, and a review of relevant state laws and SBE rules. OREA also contacted educators at a small sample of school districts and charter schools across the state to gather their feedback on implementation.

Tennessee students have struggled to meet basic literacy standards

Low reading scores for Tennessee’s public school students in early grades has been a long-time concern for the General Assembly. Over at least the past two decades, legislators have passed laws, often working with governors and TDOE, in an effort to improve English language arts (ELA) proficiency rates for young readers. Grade 3

Multiple reviews of the LSA

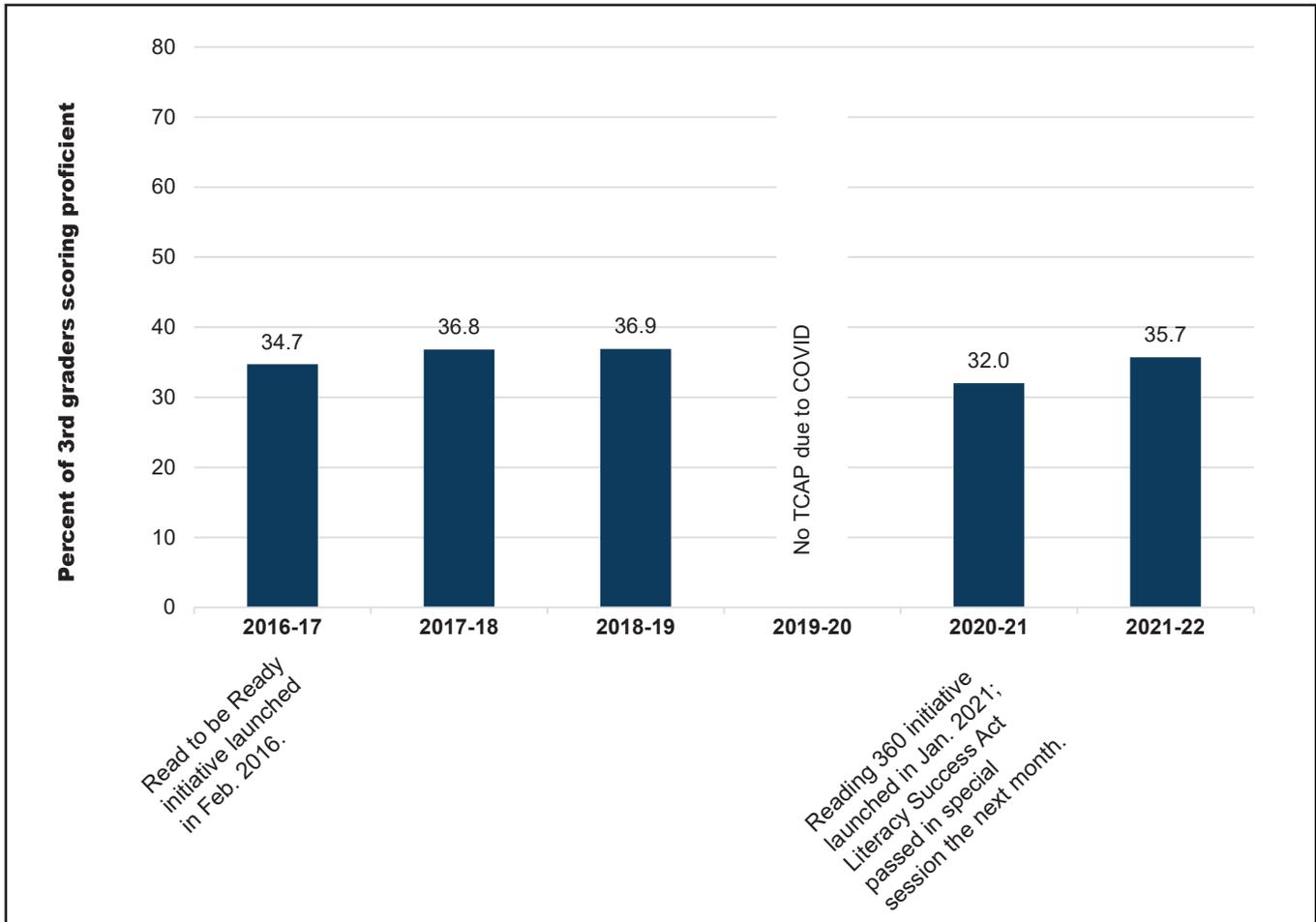
- The Tennessee Literacy Success Act requires TDOE, SBE, and Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), to study the implementation of the act and report to the General Assembly by July 1, 2024.
- A separate public chapter (Public Chapter 717, 2022) requires OREA to study and report on the implementation of the Literacy Success Act yearly, beginning with this report, due in November 2022.
- The newly created Tennessee Reading Research Center, housed in the UT College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences, is tasked with evaluating the impact of the state’s Reading 360 initiative and analyzing the implementation of the Literacy Success Act, as reported in the press release announcing its launch.

Sources: Public Chapter 3, 2021, 1st Extraordinary Session; Public Chapter 717, 2022; TDOE March 7, 2022 news release.

^A Although many charter schools are part of traditional districts, they can make independent instructional choices (such as the selection of a universal reading screener) based on their charter status.

is considered a pivotal year for students – who need a strong foundational background in reading to progress in all subjects – but for several years, only about one-third of the state’s 3rd graders have tested proficient in reading. (See Appendix A for a history of Tennessee’s reading initiatives.)

Exhibit 1: The majority of 3rd graders have not shown proficient TCAP reading scores (meets or exceeds expectations) over the last six years



Note: TCAP is Tennessee’s annual standardized student test, the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program. Scores on English language arts are grouped into four categories: below, approaching, meets, and exceeds grade-level expectations. See more about Tennessee’s literacy initiatives at Appendix A. Sources: University of Tennessee, Knoxville, *A Landscape Analysis of Foundational Literacy Skills in Tennessee, PreK to Grade 5*, April 14, 2022; Tennessee Department of Education, *2022 TCAP Release*, June 2022.

Passage of the LSA marks the most targeted attempt by the General Assembly to improve the teaching of reading in early grades. This review considers the state’s first year efforts in implementing the LSA’s requirements, which are designed to ensure that:

- current teachers and teacher candidates are trained to develop students’ foundational literacy skills and provide appropriate interventions when students need help; and
- educators know how each student in the early grades is progressing toward learning to read.

Foundational literacy skills are the basic building blocks needed to learn to read, including phonemic awareness (identifying and working with individual sounds in spoken words), phonics (linking sounds of spoken words with letters), fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Because research on how students learn to read has found that a phonics-based approach is most effective, reading instruction based on foundational literacy skills has been referred to as the “science of reading.”

A **Universal reading screeners identify** **B** **C** **students' needs**

The LSA requires the use of universal reading screeners to ensure that K-3 students are learning the foundational literacy skills needed for reading and to identify struggling students who need help. All districts and charter schools are to administer a state-approved universal reading screener to their K-3 students three times per year beginning in school year 2021-22 and report results to TDOE. Schools are required to notify parents if the results from the reading screeners indicate a student has a significant reading deficiency. **TDOE made a free universal reading screener available to districts and schools beginning in the 2021-22 school year. All districts and schools have reported their screener results to TDOE in the first year of LSA implementation.**

TDOE provides a free universal reading screener to districts

The LSA requires TDOE to provide a free Tennessee universal reading screener to districts and schools as an option among other reading screener options approved by the State Board of Education (SBE).

Districts and schools were first required to administer universal screeners in reading, writing, and math to students in grades K-8 grade in 2014-15 as part of the state's adoption of the Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²) framework.³ Universal screeners are short assessments of foundational skills to help teachers identify earlier where students may be struggling and provide extra support or interventions for students quickly.^B

Under RTI², districts and schools had some latitude in their choice of screeners, the dates of their administration, and screener scores that would trigger reading interventions, although TDOE provided guidance on screeners that met state criteria. The 2021 Literacy Success Act standardized reading screener implementation for all students in grades K-3 by requiring districts and schools to use one of the state-approved screeners, requiring screener administration during time periods set by TDOE, and having TDOE set the screener scores for reading proficiency levels, among other changes. Within the choice of approved screeners, TDOE has specified which subtests (also called "probes") must be included in each screener administration and has specified that students' primary ELA or reading teachers cannot administer the screeners in order to ensure more objective results.

Screener options

TDOE contracted with NCS Pearson, Inc. to use its aimswebPlus reading screener as the Tennessee universal reading screener. The Tennessee universal reading screener (TURS) can also be used by districts and schools to meet RTI² and dyslexia screening requirements.

What is a universal reading screener?

A universal reading screener is a short, standardized assessment to check that students are on track in developing their early reading skills. "Universal" refers to their administration to all students in a grade level. Screeners are nationally normed, with results based on comparisons to other students in the same grade and school year season. A single screener is a combination of very short subtests, each focused on a key skill. Different combinations of subtests are given to students based on their grade and season. (See Appendix B for more details on screeners.)

Tennessee contracted with NCS Pearson, Inc. to make the aimswebPlus reading screener available at no charge to local districts and charter schools. Each year of the contract was budgeted at \$2.5 million, using federal funds, and includes several other K-3 screeners, as well as an online reporting platform, training for district educators, and technical support.

Sources: TDOE interviews, presentations, and guidelines; July 2021 contract with NCS Pearson, Inc.

^B In Tennessee, school districts are required to use RTI² to identify students with a "specific learning disability." Specific learning disability is one of 13 federally-defined disabilities set under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and covers conditions like dyslexia, dyscalculia, and written expression disorder that affect a child's ability to read, write, listen, speak, reason, or do math.

In 2021-22, almost half of districts (48 percent) used the TURS (aimswebPlus); the other districts used one or more of the other State Board-approved screeners.^c (See Exhibit 2.) Some districts used two screeners, for example, one for grades K-1 and another for grades 2-3. Charter schools were most likely to use the MAP screener (36 percent), followed by Easy CBM (21 percent) and Dibels (18 percent). (See Exhibit 3.)

Districts and schools that decide to change their screeners must update their state-required foundational literacy skills plans. Focusing just on the K-3 universal reading screeners required under the LSA, 24 districts and six charter schools have indicated they are changing their screeners for the 2022-23 school year. More districts are planning to use the TURS or iReady screeners in 2022-23 than the previous year, and a few charters are shifting to the TURS as well. (See Exhibits 2 and 3.) (See p. 16 for more on district and charter school updates to their foundational literacy skills plans.)

State Board approved reading screeners

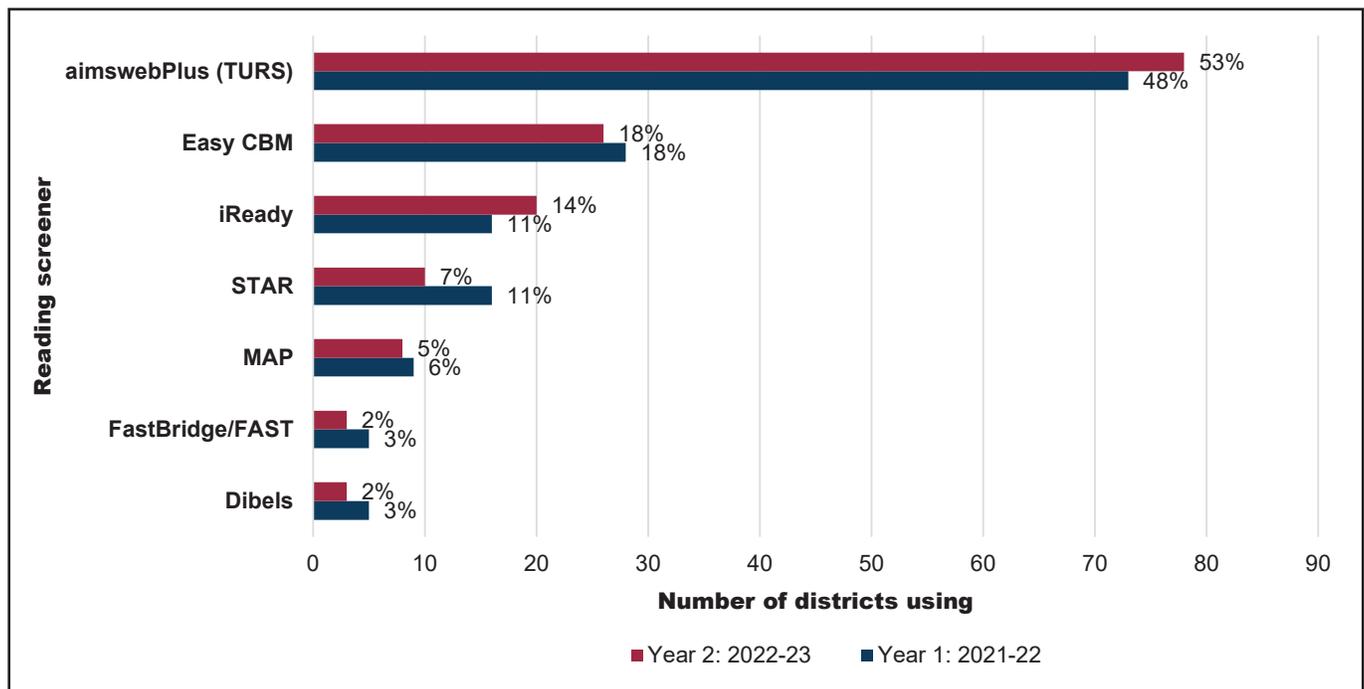
SBE has approved eight universal reading screeners, one of which has been designated as the Tennessee Universal Reading Screener, available to districts and schools at no charge.

- aimswebPlus (designated as the Tennessee Universal Reading Screener provided by TDOE)
- Dibels 8th edition
- Easy CBM
- Formative Assessment for Teachers (FAST)*
- STAR Early Literacy
- Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)
- Fastbridge Suite*
- iReady Diagnostic for Reading and iReady Early Reading Tasks

*Since the SBE approval, FAST has been incorporated into Fastbridge Suite.

Source: State Board of Education Policy 3.302.

Exhibit 2: Number and percent of districts using approved LSA reading screeners for K-3 students | 2021-22 and 2022-23

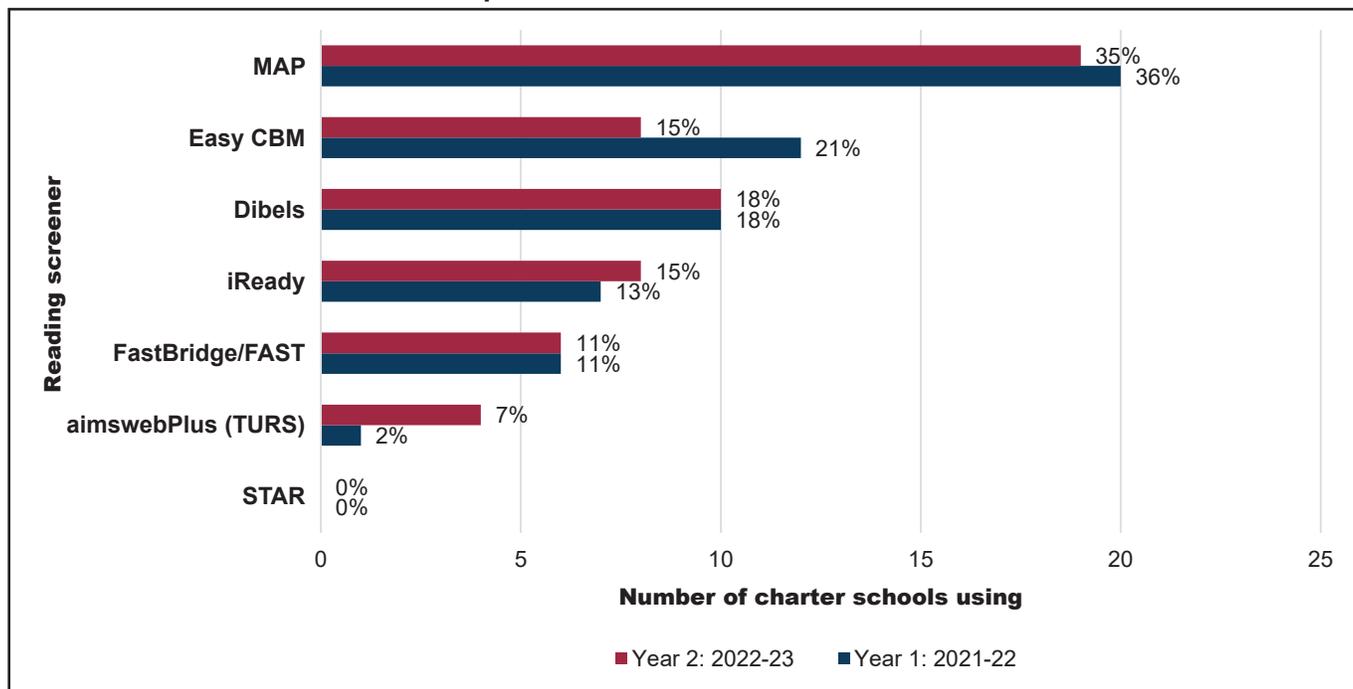


Note: Eleven districts reported using two screeners each in Year 1, and seven districts reported using two screeners each in Year 2 (typically split between grade levels) for meeting the Literacy Success Act requirements. The difference from Year 1 to Year 2 in total screeners used explains the results for the Easy CBM screener, in which fewer districts using it in Year 2 still comprised 18 percent of all screeners used. Districts may use additional screeners for progress monitoring, diagnosing characteristics of dyslexia, or other purposes.

Source: OREA review of districts' foundational literacy skills plans.

^c The state special schools were not included in this analysis but those with students in K-3 did administer universal reading screeners.

Exhibit 3: Number and percent of charter schools using approved LSA reading screeners for K-3 students | 2021-22 and 2022-23



Note: Four charter schools reported using two screeners each in Year 1, and three charter schools reported using two screeners each in Year 2 (typically split between grade levels) for meeting the Literacy Success Act requirements, Districts may use additional screeners for progress monitoring, diagnosing characteristics of dyslexia, or other purposes.

Source: OREA review of schools’ foundational literacy skills plans.

Schools administer screeners and report results to TDOE

The LSA requires all districts and charter schools to report their screener results to TDOE. Typically, the districts and schools rely on the vendors supplying the approved screeners for their reporting. The vendors provide access to digital platforms for schools to record screener results, and the vendors then submit the screener results to TDOE.

TDOE reported that all districts and charter schools have administered the screeners and submitted required data in compliance with state statute. Screeners are required to be administered to students during three state-determined windows. In 2021-22, those windows were:

Fall	Aug. 2 – Oct. 1, 2021
Winter	Jan. 1 – Feb. 4, 2022
Spring	Apr. 11 – May 20, 2022

Why all districts do not use the free reading screener

Because TDOE provides the state’s universal reading screener for K-3 students to districts at no charge, some may wonder why all districts do not use the state’s screener. In interviews with a sample of districts, OREA heard a variety of reasons. Some have used other screeners for several years and teachers are more familiar with them, some districts want all their grades to use the same screener and they are already using another screener for grades outside K-3. Some have multi-year contracts with other screener vendors or find other screeners are better aligned with their curriculum or produce more useful results. One district tried the state screener but is switching to another one because their teachers found the state’s screener too time consuming and overwhelming.

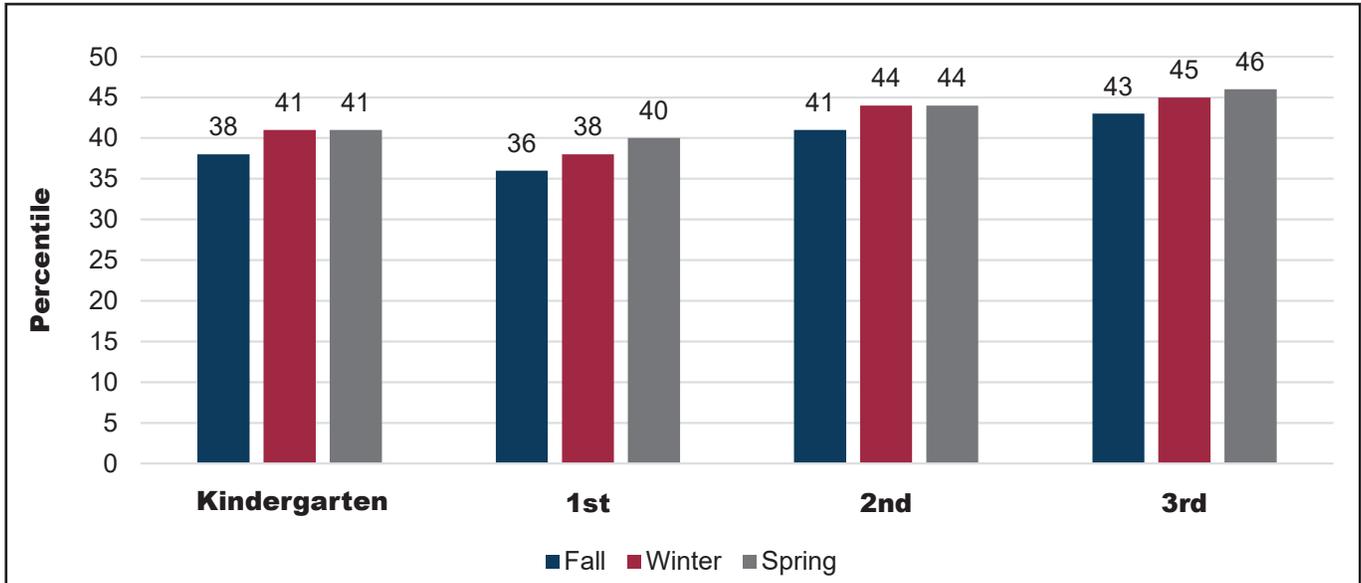
Source: Interviews with selected school districts and charter schools.

For 2022-23, some districts noted that earlier communication from TDOE about the scheduled windows for screener administration and earlier final confirmation that the windows meet all requirements would be helpful. Trying to schedule the administration of reading screeners in conjunction with the vendors’ windows, school vacation breaks, and other assessments is time consuming.

Screener results

Initial results from the 2021-22 screeners are reported by percentile ranking, based on national norms for each grade and screener administration period (fall, winter, spring). Thus, Tennessee’s 1st graders’ scores on the spring screener, for example, are ranked with other 1st graders’ scores across the country who also took the same screener test in spring. TDOE staff note that the national norms for the state-approved reading screeners were all set before COVID; it would therefore be somewhat expected for students who had lost instruction time during COVID to score lower than students in pre-COVID years.

Exhibit 4: Tennessee students’ rise in average percentile rank from 2021-22 universal reading screener composite scores indicate skill gains based on national norms



Source: Tennessee Department of Education.

The screener results in Exhibit 4 show that, overall, Tennessee K-3 students gained the same, or more, foundational reading skills during the 2021-22 school year as students nationwide. The national norms for the approved screeners have an average range from the 40th to 59th percentile (think of the largest portion of a bell curve, like the shaded area in Exhibit 5), with the national average at the 50th percentile. Tennessee’s average percentile on the spring foundational literacy skills composite for all grades, K-3, was 43 on the nationally normed scale, roughly indicated by the red line in Exhibit 5.⁴

As required by the LSA, TDOE determined the “reading proficiency level scores” for all the state-approved universal reading screeners. The SBE adopted rules that K-3 students who score in the 15th percentile ranking or below on any of the approved, nationally-normed screeners is determined to have a “significant reading deficiency.”⁵ Students with a score between the 16th and 40th percentiles are at risk for a significant reading deficiency.⁶ As of September 2022, TDOE did not have final data yet available from the seven screener platforms to report how many Tennessee students fell into the significant and at risk reading deficiency categories.

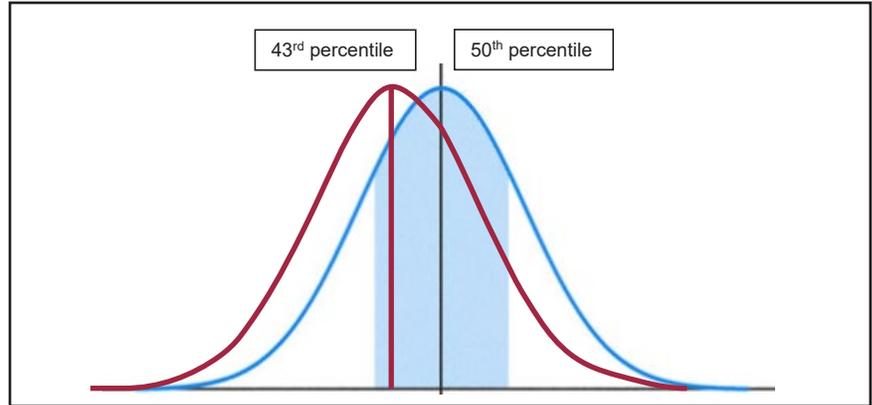
Percentile rankings

Percentile rankings for screener results are based on comparisons to national results from other students who completed the same screener. A change in percentile ranking means that a student’s score increased or decreased more than other students’ scores. A percentile ranking that stays the same does not mean a student hasn’t progressed; it means the student progressed at the same rate as others. In other words, their place in the ranking line remains unchanged.

Source: various definitions of percentile rankings.

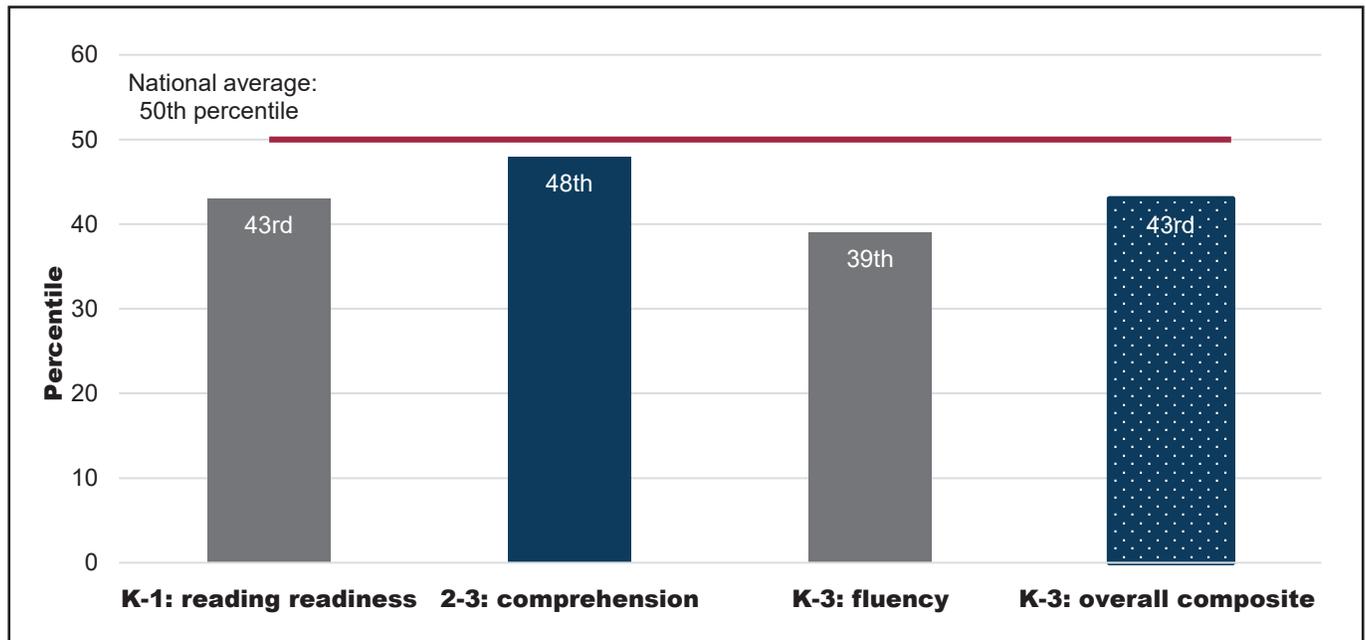
Specific sets of skills measures show Tennessee students below the national average percentile rankings on the year-end spring results, despite some improvements in each grade levels' ranking during the year. Exhibit 6 shows specific literacy skills and grade combinations for Tennessee students by percentile rankings against national norms.

Exhibit 5: National average percentile compared to Tennessee average percentile for K-3 spring composite screener results | 2021-22



Source: OREA graph of TDOE data.

Exhibit 6: Selected foundational literacy skills and Tennessee students' percentile rankings based on national norms for year-end composite screener results | 2021-22



Source: OREA graph of Tennessee Department of Education data.

TDOE is using the screener data submitted by districts and schools to analyze how Tennessee students' reading skills are developing over time and how Tennessee students compare with other students nationally. In partnership with the newly established Reading Research Center, TDOE plans to analyze how districts' performance on reading screeners connects to districts' participation in Reading 360 initiatives as well as how it connects to 3rd grade TCAP (Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program) scores.^D

PreK screeners

One condition of the TURS that the department provides free to districts and schools is that it be appropriate for students in pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade, even though the law only requires districts and schools to administer a screener for K-3 – the preK screener is optional. A problem with the screener designated as the TURS (aimswebPlus) arose because the preK screener did not have national norms against which to measure

^D Reading 360 is a comprehensive statewide literacy initiative, funded through \$100 million in federal grants and COVID-19 relief funding to provide optional reading resources to help more students develop strong phonics-based reading skills.

student progress. State Board of Education rules require that state-approved universal reading screeners have national norms, which the TURS does for grades K-3.⁷ State Board rules do not require the universal reading screeners it approves to have preK versions; that is only required for the TURS in the LSA.

TDOE's early guidance to districts and schools in July 2021 stated that it was working with Pearson (the contracted vendor for aimswebPlus) to "apply existing kindergarten screeners for preK use."⁸ The department has indicated that nationally normed preK reading screeners were limited in availability from vendors generally.

In 2021-22, only one district reported using the preK screener, and it had to use the national kindergarten norms to measure the progress of its preK students.^E For the 2022-23 school year, two state-approved reading screeners will have national norms for preK: STAR Early Literacy and Fastbridge, according to TDOE.

National norms on screeners are used to identify students with "significant reading deficiencies," a designation that, by law, triggers parent notifications and potential reading interventions for K-3 students, but not for preK students. (See more about steps taken for students with reading deficiencies in the next section on parent notification.) Because the LSA only requires districts and charter schools to administer a universal reading screener to K-3 students, those are the only student scores required to be reported to TDOE. It is unclear if the lack of preK national norms, or the use of adapted kindergarten norms, for preK screener results has an impact on the usage of TURS as a tool for preK teachers to monitor their students' progress in gaining literacy skill or to identify where students need additional instruction.

The lack of national preK norms becomes a thornier issue if the district or school chooses to use students' TURS screener results for preK teachers' alternative growth measures in their teacher evaluations, an option allowed, but not required, under provisions of the LSA legislation. Although other, better-aligned options for preK teacher alternative growth measures exist, using the TURS preK screener for teacher evaluation purposes may limit its equity as a growth measure, according to TDOE. (Alternative growth measures are non-TCAP options for teachers to generate a growth measure based only on their classrooms, rather than using one of the TVAAS composite measures based on a larger group of students.^F) Since the one district that used the preK TURS also opted to use the screener results to generate an alternative growth measure for its preK teachers, TDOE applied a conversion table to translate kindergarten national norms into appropriate student growth calculations.^G TDOE guidance on using screener results to generate alternative growth measures for teachers stated that because 2021-22 would be the first year for the process, teachers' level of overall effectiveness (LOE) scores would also be calculated with a TVAAS composite growth score. Then, only the higher of the LOE scores (using screener results or using a TVAAS composite) would be used for a final evaluation score.

^E According to TDOE staff, the district was made aware of the limits of the Tennessee Universal Reading Screener (aimswebPlus) and its lack of national preK norms prior to the district's final decision to use it.

^F All teacher evaluations must include some type of growth score, indicating how much a teacher helped students increase learning. For teachers whose students take TCAP tests, the TVAAS growth score calculated for a classroom serves as that teacher's growth score. For teachers whose students are not tested under TCAP, either due to grade level or subject taught, a variety of TVAAS composite group scores are used as proxy growth measures for the teachers. Alternative growth measures are options such as the portfolio model or, recently, universal screener results, that provide teachers with growth scores individual to their classrooms that are not based on TCAP.

^G Each state-approved universal reading screener provides one of three types of growth calculations, typically based on the students' initial composite score, that can be used to generate an individualized growth score for a teacher.

Reading Research Center

Partnering with TDOE in some of its analysis of universal reading screener results is the new Reading Research Center, opened at the University of Tennessee Knoxville campus in 2022. The center is to evaluate and analyze the state's Reading 360 initiative and its \$100 million investment in literacy supports and grants. The Reading Research Center was created by TDOE via an interagency agreement with the University of Tennessee and funded by federal COVID-19 relief funding for education. Although not the direct impetus for TDOE's creation of the center, a 2000 state law, which included a number of literacy education provisions, directed the State Board of Education and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, with others to "consider development" of a university-based reading research center.

Sources: TDOE interviews and March 7, 2022, news release; Public Chapter 911, 2000.

Districts and charter schools notify parents and provide interventions when students have reading deficiencies

Parent notification

Parent notification through district and school home literacy reports began with RTI², similar to the use of universal reading screeners. The Literacy Success Act required that some standardized components be included in communications to parents about students' reading skills development.

The LSA requires home literacy reports to be sent to parents of each student “immediately upon determining that a student in kindergarten through grade 3 has a significant reading deficiency, based on the results of the [most recent] universal reading screener.”⁹ TDOE guidance also recommends that home literacy reports be sent to parents of students identified as “at risk” of a significant reading deficiency. The original LSA legislation required that these literacy reports to parents include not only that their student had a significant reading deficiency but also must include:

- information about the importance of a student being able to read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade,
- reading activities the parents may use at home to help improve their students' reading proficiency, and
- information about the reading interventions and supports that the district/charter school recommend for their students.

A sample of districts and charter schools contacted by OREA reported that they have continued to send parents the home literacy reports as they had been under RTI², although typically some adjustments to the wording of the reports had been made to comply with the law.

Inclusion of 3rd grade retention information

A 2021 amendment to the LSA requires districts to begin adding information to the home literacy reports in school year 2022-23 about the state's revised 3rd grade retention law.¹⁰ TDOE has provided districts and charter schools with guidance, including sample letters, on including retention information in the home literacy report to parents of those 3rd graders whose reading screener scores trigger report requirements.

The amendment to the LSA, however, is located in a section of law describing the required elements of home literacy reports for parents of all students identified with significant reading deficiencies, including K-2 students as well as third grade students. It is not clear if the original intent of the law was to require information about retention for more than 3rd graders' parents.

3rd grade retention law

Another bill, passed in the same 2021 special session as the LSA, was the Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act, which established mini camps, summer camps, learning loss bridge camps, and a state tutor network. Within that bill were also revisions to state criteria for retaining 3rd grade students based on their TCAP scores of the ELA portion of the test, including options to avoid retention, such as summer camps and intensive tutoring.

Source: Public Chapter 1, 2021, 1st Extraordinary Session.

Parent notification plans through home literacy reports are a required part of the foundational literacy skills plans that districts and charter schools submit to TDOE every three years. Districts and schools must submit plan updates if they make changes to key pieces of their literacy programs, but were not required to revise their plans for the state's change to home literacy report requirements.^H

^H See more about foundational literacy skills plans and updates by districts and charter schools on page 16.

Interviews with a sample of local districts and schools found that some were still deciding how to provide information about 3rd grade retention to parents (so they may or may not include the information in all their home literacy reports); others were planning to provide that information to parents through such avenues as:

- parent nights or parent meetings,
- district-created pamphlets or other materials explaining the law,
- notices that parents must sign and return,
- a strategy of “early and often” communication with parents of 3rd graders, focusing on how parents can support their students’ progress,
- ensuring that parents know about all available school interventions such as before and after school tutoring and ALL Corps tutoring,
- family portals where parents can check on their student’s progress, and
- training for principals, who in turn train 2nd and 3rd grade teachers to help prevent the need for retention.

Student interventions and supports

The LSA requires districts and charter schools to provide additional help to students identified as having a significant reading deficiency. Additional methods of helping with reading – often called interventions and supports – are detailed in districts’ and schools’ foundational literacy skills plans (FLSPs) and are intended to get students struggling with literacy skills to get back on track quickly and not fall too far behind. The LSA states that districts and schools can meet this requirement using the interventions and supports already outlined in the state’s RTI² framework manual.¹¹

While interventions and supports vary by student needs and by school schedules, policies, and personnel, the RTI² manual outlines the basic steps for intervention:

- universal screeners can identify individual students’ strengths and needs, which in turn can point to specific skills that may need additional work;
- results from universal screeners can be combined with teachers’ observation of students in class, results from classroom assignments and tests, and more specialized screenings if needed, to help pinpoint students’ learning issues;
- depending on the level of intervention, students receive extra instructional time – either in small groups or individually – that is focused on specific skills, in addition to the core instruction provided to all students; and
- student performance is regularly monitored to ensure that the intervention is helping the student progress, with adjustments made if students are not progressing.

TDOE’s Tennessee Foundational Skills Curriculum Supplement – a collection of open-sourced, evidence-based resources (teacher guides, student workbooks, training, etc.) to help teachers provide foundational literacy instruction for early grades students – includes specific sample lesson plans, exercises, worksheets, and other materials for teachers needing to provide supplemental instruction for struggling early readers.

Other interventions that may help students improve literacy skills include after-school programs, summer camps, and tutoring established as part of the state’s learning loss remediation and student acceleration program.

Information about specific reading interventions and supports that a school recommends for a student and intervention activities that parents can use at home are required to be provided in the home literacy reports given to parents of students whose screener results indicate a reading deficiency.

Teacher training focuses on foundational literacy

Another way the Literacy Success Act helps ensure that schools focus on foundational literacy skills is through the requirements for teacher training. The law requires TDOE to develop training courses on literacy skills instruction for both K-5 teachers and high school students in a teaching-as-a-profession career pathway. The act also requires all K-5 teachers to complete one literacy skills instruction course approved by TDOE by August 2023. Finally, although not technically part of the Literacy Success Act, but included in the same public chapter as the act, is a requirement for K-3 teachers and instructional leaders to complete a literacy skills instruction course prior to advancing or renewing their existing licenses.¹

TDOE has developed both the training course for teachers and the course for high school students interested in the teaching profession as required by the act, and indications are that K-5 teachers are making good progress in meeting the requirement to complete one literacy skills instruction course by the 2023 deadline.

TDOE provides professional development for current teachers in literacy instruction

The LSA requires TDOE to develop at least one professional development course that provides training on how to teach foundational literacy skills to elementary students and to make that course available to K-5 teachers at no cost. Prior to the passage of the act in February 2021, TDOE had already taken steps as part of its Reading 360 initiative to develop and promote teacher training on foundational literacy skills: issuing a request for proposal for a vendor to develop two early reading training courses and announcing plans for classroom materials kits and stipends for teachers who successfully complete the free training. The initiative used federal funds to offer a wide range of optional resources to school districts, teachers, and families to support student literacy skills. TDOE has characterized the LSA as the policy framework around which districts can build their early literacy efforts and the Reading 360 initiative as a comprehensive set of strategies and supports that districts can use in their efforts.

TDOE awarded TNTP (a nonprofit formerly known as The New Teacher Project) an initial \$8.06 million, one-year contract in March 2021, to develop and provide two early grades reading courses with accompanying instructional materials.¹² The contract, funded through federal pandemic relief dollars, was later expanded from one year to three, with an additional \$8 million added to the maximum approved amount.¹³ After a separate request for proposal was issued in 2022, a contract for secondary literacy skills training was awarded to TNTP for \$9.7 million over two and a half years.¹⁴

The LSA requires all K-5 teachers to complete at least one state-approved course in foundational literacy skills instruction by August 1, 2023. As of summer 2022, TDOE had approved both the Early Reading Training Course I and the Secondary Literacy Training Course I to meet the law's requirement. (See box on foundational literacy skills instruction training.)

TDOE reported that a total of 25,749 licensed educators completed the Early Reading Training Course I as of August 22, 2022. Based on the passage rates of the educators who completed the course during the 2021 testing period, almost all educators (99.6 percent) passed the end-of-course assessment.

¹The license renewal requirement applies to all teachers seeking renewal or advancement of licenses with endorsements that authorize them to teach students in grades K-3, regardless of whether they are actively teaching in those grades. The requirement applies to both practitioner (initial) teacher licenses and professional teacher licenses. Practitioner licenses must be renewed every four years and professional licenses every seven years.

Because the training is open to teachers, reading interventionists, instructional leaders, and other licensed personnel across standard, special education, and English learner classrooms, it is difficult to determine the percentage of active K-5 teachers who have met the law's training requirement.^J Teachers with elementary endorsements but who are not currently teaching in a K-5 classroom may also have completed the training. There are an estimated 28,000 teachers in standard K-5 classrooms. Administrators from a sample of school districts and charter schools contacted by OREA during July and August 2022 reported that their teachers were largely on track to meet the LSA training requirement by the deadline of August 2023. Some were also working to have paraprofessionals and certain administrators trained.

TDOE has indicated that the newly created Reading Research Center at the University of Tennessee will compile all the teacher training data and match it to active K-5 classroom teachers in order to confirm that the statutory requirement is met by the deadline. Although its evaluation priorities had not been finalized as of August 1, 2022, the center is anticipating a project in which it will examine the relationship between teacher participation in professional development and student performance. While the proposed evaluation projects for the center are focused on how Reading 360 components impact student literacy, the overlap between the LSA requirements and the Reading 360 initiative could provide the necessary information for the center to draw conclusions about whether all active K-5 teachers had completed at least one required foundational literacy skills training.

Although the second Early Reading course is not required by the LSA, TDOE has provided incentives to encourage early grades teachers to complete it in addition to the first course that is required by the act. As part of the Reading 360 initiative, K-5 teachers earned a \$1,000 stipend for completing both Early Reading courses (I and II) and K-2 teachers received the stipend and classroom kits of curriculum materials. The training stipends were funded with federal pandemic relief funds for education. During the 2021 training period, 8,935 educators completed both trainings, and the passing rate for Course II was 99.7 percent, indicating that approximately 8,908 educators earned the stipends for their approximately 60 hours of training. As of August 2022, another 4,404 educators had completed Course II, for a total of 13,339 who have completed both courses.^K

TDOE's training satisfaction surveys found more than 97 percent of participants in both training years agreed or strongly agreed that the training prepared them to better support students in phonics-based instruction. Several districts contacted by OREA reported that staff have been positive about the training overall, that the training had resulted in improved instruction, and/or that stipends have been an effective incentive. Some districts noted that state monitoring of which teachers had completed Course I and allowing districts to pull a report of completers from the state's school personnel system (COMPASS) would make compliance easier.

Foundational literacy skills instruction training

Early Reading Training Course I – Online, asynchronous (participants learn on their own time) training for K-5 educators focused on research on foundational literacy skills, how those skills are built into Tennessee standards, the systematic development of those skills, and the research behind high-quality instructional materials. Teachers must pass a multiple choice assessment. (Approximately 25 hours.)

Early Reading Training Course II – Week-long, in-person training for K-5 educators typically offered during summer and focused on how to implement a foundational literacy curriculum and instructional materials in planning, preparing, and providing instruction. Participants must pass the assessment for Course I before taking Course II. (Approximately 30 hours.)

Secondary Literacy Training Course I and II – Similar to the Early Reading Training courses, the secondary literacy training for teachers in grades 5-12 consists of a one-week online course and a one-week in-person course. These courses focus on how reading skills develop and how reading comprehension is supported by vocabulary growth with the use of high-quality instructional materials and alignment with state standards.

Sources: TDOE, Reading 360: Tennessee Early Reading Training, weeks 1 and 2 overview; TDOE, Request for Proposals for Secondary Literacy Training, April 15, 2021.

^JTDOE also approved Secondary Literacy Training Course I to meet the law's training requirements. However, since this training is geared to teachers in grades 5-12 and teacher completion data by grade was not available, and since the law only requires a training course for K-5 teachers, data on completion of the Secondary Literacy Training Course I was not requested for this report.

^K Educators completing Secondary Literacy Course I and II can also earn the \$1,000 stipend.

Another incentive created by the Reading 360 initiative to encourage teacher training beyond the LSA requirements is aimed at school districts through the Reading 360 Early Literacy Network. The network is a TDOE-coordinated effort to provide literacy support grants for districts that achieve certain training goals. The 95 school districts participating in the network had to ensure that 25 percent of their K-2 teachers completed both Early Reading Course I and Course II during the 2021-22 training period, and that 60 percent of their K-2 teachers will have completed Course I by June 2023. In return, the participating districts receive two-year, federally funded grants between \$80,000 and \$100,000, depending on enrollment, to hire state-approved vendors that provide direct support, such as coaching or professional development, to preK–2 teachers as they implement the new early literacy instruction. The network also offers additional teacher professional development, both virtually and in-person, which is also open to non-network districts. (See Appendix C for a list of Early Literacy Network districts.)

A sample of districts contacted by OREA included several that were members of the Early Literacy Network. They reported their participation in the network had been worthwhile, particularly for:

- the classroom walk-throughs, high-quality feedback for teachers, and other work with the grant-funded vendors, and
- the foundational skills resources, including training and lesson plans.

Those districts contacted that had opted not to participate in the network indicated they found too many conditions attached to the grant funds or that they believed their teachers had sufficient training with existing resources; they thought more might be overwhelming.

Literacy skills instruction training required for teachers to renew or advance their licenses

In addition to the professional development requirements of the LSA, the 2021 law also included some new license renewal requirements for teachers and instructional leaders.^L Beginning in August 2023, some teachers and instructional leaders must document that they have completed a state-approved course in foundational literacy skills instruction.^M The types of licensing actions subject to this requirement include:

- seeking or renewing an initial license authorizing teaching of K-3 students,
- renewing a professional license authorizing teaching of K-3 students,
- renewing or advancing an instructional leader license,
- holding an active professional teaching license in a reciprocal-agreement state and seeking renewal or advancement of an initial Tennessee license, and
- holding an active professional instructional leader license in a reciprocal-agreement state and seeking renewal or advancement of a Tennessee initial instructional leader license.

Similar requirements for those enrolled in educator preparation programs and seeking a new license are outlined in the next section on literacy instruction changes for educator preparation programs. Teachers subject to these license requirements are those who have endorsements relating to preK-3 education.

^L Although generally all of Public Chapter 3 of the 1st Extraordinary Session of 2021 is referred to as the Tennessee Literacy Success Act, that name technically refers only to the provisions in the first three sections of the public chapter that are codified in Part 9 (TCA 49-1-901 through 49-1-909). Additional provisions impacting educator preparation providers and educator licenses and alternative growth models for teacher evaluations were included in other sections of the public chapter.

^M The law provides the option for teachers to pass a Tennessee reading instruction test or to complete the literacy skills instruction course. Since the law also requires all K-5 teachers to complete the course by Aug. 1, 2023, it is assumed that most licensed educators will use documentation of the required course to meet this license requirement. State Board of Education Policy 5.502 indicates initial practitioner teacher licenses must be renewed within four years and professional teacher licenses must be renewed within seven years.

The law requires that local school districts and charter schools approve professional development points for at least one literacy skills instruction training completed by teachers. (Professional development points are required to renew or advance educator licenses.) Early Reading Course I and Secondary Literacy Course I are approved to meet license renewal requirements.

Literacy skills instruction training developed for high school students pursuing teacher-pathway courses

High school students who are interested in teaching as a profession may have access to career and technical education (CTE) courses in either the Teaching as a Profession (TAP) or the Early Childhood Education pathways. The standards for the CTE courses in these pathways are set by the State Board of Education, as are standards for any other CTE courses. To meet LSA’s requirement for a new foundational literacy skills instruction course, TDOE presented its proposal for a new level 4 course – Foundational Literacy Practicum – for SBE’s first consideration at its May 20, 2022, meeting. In its work to develop the new course, TDOE also sought to increase the literacy emphasis of existing TAP courses. SBE voted final approval of the new course and the related revisions to existing courses at its July 22, 2022, meeting.



Districts update Foundational Literacy Skills Plans

Part of the Literacy Success Act includes a requirement that all districts and public charter schools submit foundational literacy skills plans (FLSPs) and regular updates to TDOE for approval.¹⁵ **Although 2022 was not a required submission year, 65 districts and public charters have submitted a revised FLSP since their initial submissions in 2021.**^N

An FLSP details how a district or charter school plans to provide foundational literacy skills instruction, reading intervention, and supports to students identified as having a significant reading deficiency. The plans are intended to “demonstrate the effective implementation of foundational literacy skills instruction” which is to be provided as the primary form of English language arts (ELA) instruction. The plans are also required to be posted on TDOE’s website as well as the district or charter school website.

LSA requires Comptroller review

The LSA requires districts and charter schools to submit FLSPs every three years but requires the Comptroller’s Office to review the plans and TDOE’s approval of the plans every year. This section of the report constitutes the Comptroller’s second annual review of FLSPs.

Source: TCA 49-1-905 (g)(1) and (6).

Each district and charter school plan must cover grades K-5 and include the following six sections:

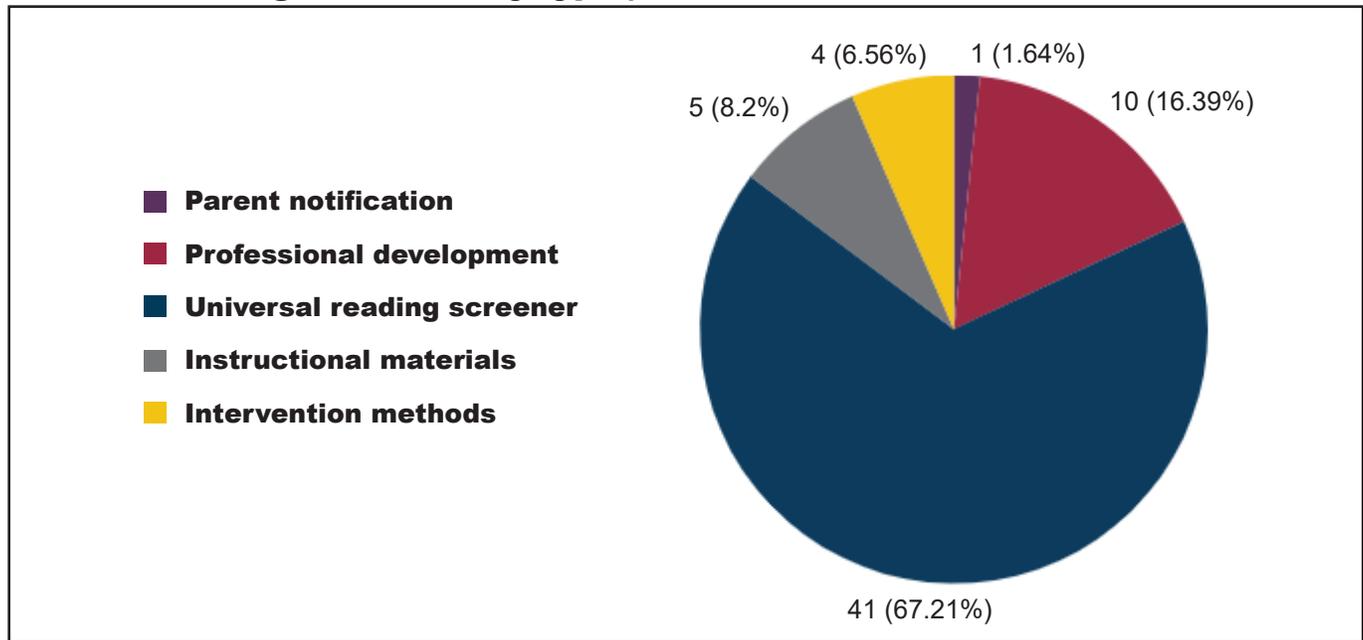
- the amount of daily time devoted to foundational literacy skills instruction and how that time is utilized,
- ELA textbooks and instructional materials adopted,
- the universal reading screener selected by the district or charter school,
- a description of reading interventions and supports available to students with a significant reading deficiency,
- how the district or charter school intends to notify and engage parents in the student literacy process, and
- how the district or charter school will provide professional development in foundational literacy skills to K-5 teachers.

^N Counts of FLSP changes here may differ from the earlier report section on universal reading screeners because some districts and schools report their screener changes for grades K-5 in their FLSPs, but the earlier section focused only on screener changes reported for grades K-3, which are grades for which the LSA requires districts and schools to administer screeners and report results to TDOE.

Districts were required to submit their first foundational literacy skills plans to TDOE by June 1, 2021. OREA analyzed how these plans aligned with the guidelines created by the SBE and TDOE in a report that can be found at [Review of Foundational Literacy Skills Plans](#). Districts are required to submit a revised FLSP every three years unless the district is making a policy change regarding one of the six required topics on an FLSP, in which case a revision must be submitted to TDOE when the policy change occurs. Districts may be exempt from a triennial submission if certain student academic growth criteria are met through the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS), a statistical method that measures the influence of a district, school, or teacher on the year-to-year growth of students or groups of students.

Forty-four districts and charter schools submitted updated plans to reflect policy changes for the 2022-23 school year to TDOE for approval. Twenty-one districts and charters had submitted revisions to their FLSP in 2021, after their initial submissions and before the start of the 2021-22 school year. The most common reason for a revision was a change in universal screener, accounting for 68 percent of changes in updated FLSPs. Changes in professional development accounted for the second largest share of changes, with 10 districts, or 16 percent, updating this portion of the plan. Districts made these changes to update timelines of teachers’ participation in the Early Literacy Training courses provided by TDOE or to specify what other training programs teachers will attend. Five districts made changes regarding instructional materials, either adding or removing instructional programs. Four districts made changes regarding interventions. TDOE approved all FLSP updates submitted by districts and schools since their initial plan approvals in 2021.

Exhibit 7: Changes to FLSP by type | 2021 and 2022



Note: Districts and schools that submitted updated plans without notable changes in one of the required elements are not included in the graph.
 Source: OREA analysis of FLSP updates provided by TDOE.

Educator preparation programs revise instruction

The 2021 law that created the Tennessee Literacy Success Act also included some new requirements for educator preparation programs (EPPs). EPPs are primarily college programs to prepare students to become teachers, but also include several alternative programs outside of institutions of higher education, such as Teach for America and the Memphis Teacher Residency. The law includes three EPP-related requirements:

- TDOE to have developed new foundational literacy skills standards for EPP instruction of candidates seeking licenses to teach K-3 students and to become instructional leaders by July 31, 2021,
- EPPs to provide reading instruction training primarily focused on foundational literacy skills standards developed by TDOE beginning August 1, 2022, and
- candidates enrolled in EPPs to pass a state-approved Tennessee reading instruction test or document the completion of a foundational literacy skills instruction course beginning August 1, 2023.

TDOE has developed, and the State Board of Education has approved, new EPP standards for instruction of K-3 teacher candidates and instructional leader candidates. EPPs are to begin implementing the new state literacy instruction standards this school year (2022-23). EPPs must submit plans to TDOE stating that, beginning with the fall 2022 semester, their reading instruction will have a primary focus on foundational literacy skills and that courses and clinical experiences will be aligned with foundational literacy standards. Implementation of the third EPP-related requirement is still in progress. As of July 2022, TDOE was in the development process for a new Tennessee reading instruction test that certain EPP candidates must pass as part of their program.

Revised EPP standards for teaching reading instruction are adopted

The law required that by July 31, 2021, TDOE was to develop and submit to the State Board of Education new foundational literacy skills standards that EPPs would be expected to use in their instruction of candidates seeking licenses to teach grades K-3 and in specialty program instruction of candidates seeking instructional leader licenses. The law outlined specific elements to be included in the new literacy skills standards, including:

- effective teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension;
- differentiated instruction for students with a range of reading skills;
- identification of and effective teaching for students with dyslexia;
- reading instruction using high-quality instructional materials;
- behavior management, trauma-informed principles and practices, and other supports to ensure students can access reading instruction; and
- administration of universal reading screeners and use of screener data to improve instruction.

In July 2021, the State Board revised Policy 5.505 addressing literacy and specialty area standards for educator preparation. The revised policy added new standards for instructional leader preparation programs and specified that early education foundational literacy skills standards are required in educator preparation programs that lead to endorsements in:

- early development and learning preK–K,
- early childhood education preK–3,
- integrated early childhood education, birth through K,
- integrated early childhood education preK–3,

- elementary education K–5,
- special education early childhood preK–3,
- special education comprehensive K–12,
- special education interventionists K–8, and
- special education interventionists 6–12.

Under the law, the standards require training on the components of foundational literacy skills, identification of students progressing successfully and those who are not, how to respond with appropriate instructional differentiation (including instruction for students with dyslexia), identification and use of high-quality instructional materials, use of universal reading screeners to identify students with reading deficiencies, and trauma-informed instruction and discipline. The revised policy also addresses the new literacy standards for instructional leader preparation programs, including training on foundational literacy skills, differentiating instruction for students at different reading levels and those with characteristics of dyslexia, and trauma-informed practices.

EPP reading instruction to focus primarily on foundational literacy skills outlined in standards

Beginning in the fall semester of 2022, educator preparation programs approved by SBE are required to base their reading instruction on the new foundational literacy skills standards adopted by SBE.^o State Board Policy 5.504 states that EPPs shall implement all applicable literacy and specialty area standards as set in Policy 5.505.

In addition, after a rulemaking hearing on July 6, 2022, the State Board approved a revision to its rule 0520-02-04-.07, which outlines requirements for EPPs. The revision adds a new procedure for TDOE to review EPP alignment to foundational literacy skills standards (per SBE Policy 5.505) and to potentially require corrective action and, ultimately, denial of approval for any specialty area program that fails to align to and incorporate the foundational literacy standards. The rule change does not take effect until after review by the Attorney General and filing with the Secretary of State, and is subject to Government Operations Committee action.

EPP faculty had options to attend Early Reading Training Courses I and II in both 2021 and 2022 when they were offered to K-5 teachers. A report that reviewed faculty participation in 2021 showed that a majority of EPP early grades programs had faculty who attended both courses in that year.¹⁶

Finally, EPPs must submit signed assurances to TDOE on how they plan to meet the state requirements to focus primarily on phonics-based literacy instruction for endorsement areas related to early grades literacy. Each EPP must explain its plans for how foundational literacy skills standards will be integrated into applicable programs and demonstrate alignment between literacy standards and the courses and clinical experiences provided by the EPP. TDOE reviews these assurances in a similar way to its review of districts' foundational literacy skills plans that outline how they will meet the Literacy Success Act requirements. In its guidance to EPPs, TDOE has provided several resources and states that

. . . over the course of the next few years, the department will engage substantively with EPPs in efforts to ensure all EPP faculty and staff who engage in preparing educators in these areas are adequately prepared and supported.¹⁷

Supports may include program audits with feedback, EPP networking opportunities, and K-12 teacher training opportunities that will also be open to EPP faculty.

^o EPPs approved by the State Board of Education include both public and private institutions.

New Tennessee reading instruction test is required to be developed by TDOE and provided at no cost

The LSA requires TDOE to develop a new test or identify an existing test that assesses foundational skills instructional knowledge of candidates for designated teacher or educational leader licenses. The department is to provide such a test at no cost to the candidate or to the EPP.

TDOE was, as of July 2022, involved in the development process, which may include procurement of components, for a new Tennessee reading instruction test. Once TDOE develops or identifies an appropriate test, it is to be approved by the State Board. TDOE must also recommend for State Board approval the passing score that candidates must achieve.

As an alternative to passing the new state-approved foundational literacy instruction test, designated candidates may document their knowledge of reading instruction by completing the foundational literacy skills instruction course already developed by TDOE. (See more about the literacy skills instruction course at p. 14.) The LSA requires that beginning August 1, 2023, candidates who

- seek an initial teaching license or endorsement to teach K-3 students,
- who seek an initial instructional leader license, or
- who have an initial teaching license and are enrolled in a graduate EPP program,

must either pass a state-approved reading instruction test or pass the foundational literacy instruction course (which includes an end-of-course test). (The law requires this not only of candidates enrolled in EPP programs, but also of teachers and instructional leaders who already hold a license and are seeking to renew or advance their existing licenses. See more about training for active teachers at p. 13.)

Typically, candidates enrolled in an EPP and seeking either an Elementary Education K-5 or an Early Childhood Education preK-3 endorsement would take a Praxis assessment on their content knowledge of reading instruction (among other content areas), such as “Teaching Reading: Elementary,” as prescribed in State Board Policy 5.105. The new Tennessee reading instruction test would replace the Praxis reading instruction test. TDOE states that the Tennessee test will be aligned with Tennessee literacy standards, unlike the Praxis. The new Tennessee test is expected to be available by the end of the 2022-23 school year. Alternatively, EPP candidates may document their reading instruction knowledge by completing the free foundational literacy skills instruction course, which has been available since spring of 2021.



TDOE reports analyze the state’s literacy practices, instructional training, and affordability of teacher education programs

The Literacy Success Act of 2021 required TDOE to provide to the State Board of Education and the House and Senate education committee chairs by March 1, 2022, results of:

- a landscape analysis of literacy in Tennessee, including current practices, student achievement, instructional programming for students, and remediation services;
- a landscape analysis of literacy instruction, including instructional programming and pedagogical practices used by educator preparation providers (EPPs); and
- a joint analysis with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) about the affordability of EPPs, including tuition affordability for future educators and costs relative to those in other states;

student loan and debt burdens of EPP graduates; financial barriers that may inhibit people from pursuing teaching as a profession; and the ability to reduce the costs of obtaining educator preparation and credentials.

On behalf of TDOE, the University of Tennessee-Knoxville College of Education, Health, and Human Services published two reports on April 14, 2022: [*A Landscape Analysis of Foundational Literacy Skills in Tennessee PreK to Grade 5*](#) and [*A Landscape Analysis of Tennessee Educator Preparation Providers' Instructional Programming & Pedagogical Practices in Foundational Literacy Skills*](#).

In March 2022, TDOE published [*Educator Preparation Provider Affordability Report: Initial Analysis of Financial Motivators and Barriers to Becoming a Teacher in Tennessee*](#).

All three required reports have been published. Summaries of the results reported from the three studies follow.

Key points from preK through grade 5 foundational literacy skills study

The study reviewed English Language Arts (ELA) student achievement data from grades 3 through 5 on the state assessment (Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program or TCAP) from 2017 through 2021. The achievement data is the baseline for assessing improvements in early literacy proficiency that result from Reading 360, the state reading initiative launched in January 2021.

Generally, grade 3-5 students' ELA performance increased from 2017 to 2018 and increased or remained stable from 2018 to 2019 (with a decrease for 4th grade), followed by a decrease between 2019 and 2021, due to the education disruptions from COVID. Similar trends were found for two subgroups of students: those that are economically disadvantaged and those who are Black, Hispanic, or Native American.

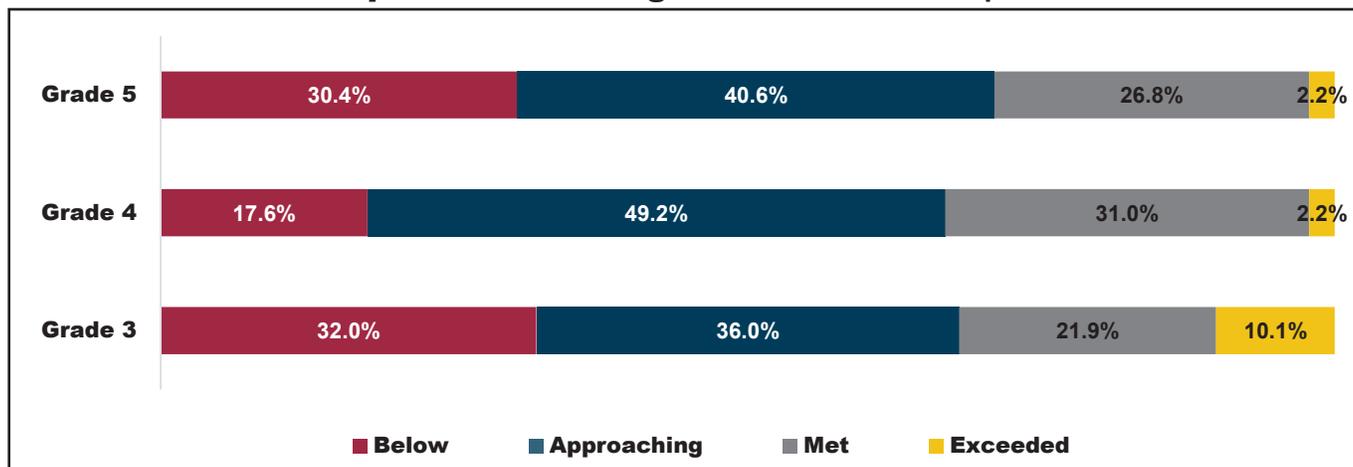
Exhibit 8: Grades 3-5 students scoring proficient in English language arts dropped in 2021 after COVID disruptions

Percentage of students whose performance meets or exceeds grade-level expectations					
Grade	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Grade 3	34.7%	36.8%	36.9%	n/a	32.0%
Grade 4	36.5%	37.9%	34.3%	n/a	33.2%
Grade 5	30.8%	32.4%	35.2%	n/a	29.0%
Grades 3-5	34.0%	35.7%	35.5%	n/a	31.4%

Note: Data not available for 2020 due to COVID-19-related school closures and state and federal action that authorized a waiver of statewide assessments.
Source: University of Tennessee, Knoxville, *A Landscape Analysis of Foundational Literacy Skills in Tennessee, PreK to Grade 5*, April 14, 2022, pp. 8-9

The chart below shows ELA performance in 2021 disaggregated by performance level, showing relatively few students at the top performance level.

Exhibit 9: TCAP ELA performance of grade 3-5 students | 2021



Note: This study was performed before 2022 TCAP results were available.

Source: Based on University of Tennessee, Knoxville, *A Landscape Analysis of Foundational Literacy Skills in Tennessee, PreK to Grade 5*, April 14, 2022, p. 9.

The analysis found that students' ELA academic performance in districts and charter schools across the state in all years reviewed varied considerably. The percentage performing at proficient levels ranged from 10.6 percent to 76.2 percent in 2017 and from 4.5 percent to 72.5 percent in 2021.

The study also analyzed instructional practices in districts and charter schools, based on the foundational literacy skills plan that each district and charter school is required to submit to TDOE for approval. The analysis focused on:

- the allocation of time devoted to teaching foundational literacy skills in grades K-2 and grades 3-5;
- types of remediation practices; and
- types of programs and materials used.

The review of district and charter school plans found that:

- All districts and charter schools meet the minimum standards for instructional time – at least 45 minutes in foundational skills instruction in grades K-2 and at least 30 minutes in grades 3-5. The majority reported spending more than the minimum time in grades K-2, from 45 minutes to 120 or more minutes, and many reported spending more than the minimum time in grades 3-5, from 30 to 120 minutes.
- Districts and charter schools use a variety of primary instructional materials. Two are used by nearly half of the districts and charter schools across grades K-5: *Amplify – K-5 Core Knowledge Language Arts* and *Benchmark – K-5 Advance*. The most common supplementary material used is the *Tennessee Foundational Skills Curriculum Supplement*.
- All districts and charter schools have a documented process of increasing academic interventions to students whose academic performance falls below a certain level. The state requires districts to use RTI², a process of increasingly intensive academic interventions for students whose academic performance falls under a certain level. Overall, more than 70 different RTI² interventions were listed in the foundational literacy skills plans submitted by districts and charter schools for grades K-5.

Key points from EPP literacy instruction programs and practices in literacy instruction study

The study is based on a survey of state-approved educator preparation providers (EPPs) that collected information on each program's practices, pedagogy (teaching methods), and programming related to foundational literacy skills instruction.

EPPs provided survey responses about training programs in one or more of three areas:

- early childhood (preK-K and/or preK-3),
- elementary education (grades K-5), and
- special education.

Survey questions focused on:

- the number of courses and credit hours that EPP programs devoted to foundational skills and the number that incorporate clinical experiences prior to student teaching or teaching internship; and
- how much time EPPs devote to classroom instruction and practical/clinical experience on individual components of literacy development, as well as broader questions on reading instruction theory and methods.

The survey found that the science of reading is a strong instructional principle within EPPs' elementary education instruction, although some faculty continued to support practices of whole language and balanced literacy instruction.

The survey also included questions on whether and which faculty (by position) in each EPP program participated in the TN Early Reading Training Courses 1 and 2 (spring and summer 2021). The survey found that most EPPs required the training, but some did not. Most EPPs that participated rated the content as highly effective or very effective. EPPs said the training either strengthened or validated their approaches to preparing teachers to teach foundational skills.

Key points from EPP affordability study

The context for the study stems from the facts that:

- Tennessee is seeing an overall decline in enrollment in its EPPs, which may relate to affordability.
- Tennessee is in the bottom 10 states in terms of the ratio of public-school teacher wages to wages of other college graduates.

Two surveys were conducted for the study: one of current, former, and prospective teachers and one of leaders of Tennessee EPP programs. The study also conducted focus groups and interviews with current and former teachers.

Results from surveys, interviews, and focus groups with current, former, and prospective teachers

More than two-thirds of the teacher survey respondents have student debt related to their EPP, according to the teacher survey results. The average debt across all respondents is \$36,728, with the second lowest household income group (\$40,000-60,000) incurring the second highest average debt (\$40,266).

EPP program costs vary substantially. Some alternative teacher preparation programs offer no-cost options.

The most expensive institution charges more than \$50,000 per year to attend its program. The average tuition for a traditional bachelor's program is \$20,890, and the average cost for a master's degree program is \$12,830. Based on both the teacher survey results and the EPP survey results, "the majority of teacher candidates struggle to afford the cost of tuition, in addition to living expenses."¹⁸

The study found that the cost of attending an institution of higher education in Tennessee that offers an education program is higher than in surrounding states. The average cost of tuition and fees in Tennessee is \$17,714 with other states' costs ranging from \$8,564 (Mississippi) to \$17,253 (Virginia).

According to surveys, interviews, and focus groups conducted for the analysis, both current and prospective teachers in Tennessee identify average annual teacher salary and benefits as the primary disincentive to becoming a teacher, followed by a program's net tuition cost, lack of access to student loans and financial aid, and lack of student scholarships.

The study identified some financial motivators that teachers said can help address some of the barriers, including loan forgiveness programs, access to scholarships and grants, alternative licensure pathways with free or minimal tuition, or job-embedded programs. The Grow Your Own model, where aspiring teachers receive free job-embedded training, is one such example. Currently, there are 65 Grow Your Own programs in Tennessee.

Results from EPP survey about program operating costs

EPPs reported that total costs to run their teacher preparation programs averaged \$1,426,901 across the state, serving a total of 8,890 students, with the greatest cost related to staffing. Public programs are larger in staff size and have bigger budgets than private or alternative programs. The average cost per teacher candidate across the state is \$5,278, with costs ranging by regions from \$1,519 (the South Central region) to \$11,182 (the First Tennessee region). However, some major public and private programs were not included in the cost analysis due to insufficient data reported.

The cost for Tennessee's Grow Your Own programs, where aspiring teachers receive job-embedded training, is significantly lower, but further study is needed, the report indicates, to understand the true costs of such programs.



TDOE solicited contracts through a competitive process for several requirements of the LSA

The Literacy Success Act required TDOE to procure any goods or services needed to implement the act through a competitive process, in compliance with state laws and rules, and to submit all contracts to the General Assembly's Fiscal Review Committee. TDOE used various procurement processes to implement the portions of the act related to universal screeners, professional development for teachers, and three studies. Although not technically part of the LSA, a provision in the same public chapter for a new reading instruction exam was in the development process as of July 2022, and may involve some procurement. All contracts listed reported solely federal funds to meet the contracted amounts.

Exhibit 10: TDOE contracts to implement the Literacy Success Act

LSA requirements	Contract details (contracted party, begin and end dates of contract, total contracted amount)	Contract process
49-1-905(c)(3) – TDOE shall provide the Tennessee universal reading screener at no cost to districts or charter schools.	<p style="text-align: center;">NCS Pearson, Inc.</p> 7.21.21 – 6.30.24 \$7,500,000 (@ \$2,500,000 per year)	Sole source contract after request for information to four vendors (based on their use by local districts) resulted in only one vendor confirming ability to meet all state criteria.
49-1-906 – TDOE shall develop at least one professional development course on foundational literacy skills instruction that is available at no cost to teachers in grades K-5.*	<p style="text-align: center;">TNTP, Inc.</p> 3.12.21 – 3.11.24 \$16,064,000 (original contract for two years @ \$4,032,000 per year; amendment added two more years @ \$4 million per year.)	Competitive contract through a request for proposal.
49-1-908(b)(1)(A) and (B) – TDOE must conduct a landscape analysis of literacy (K-12 students) and literacy instruction by EPPs.	<p style="text-align: center;">University of Tennessee, Knoxville</p> 1.20.22 – 8.31.22 \$100,000 (separate contracts for K-12 and EPP analyses @\$50,000 each)	Interagency agreement through a request for application.
49-1-908(b)(1)(C) – TDOE, with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, must conduct a joint analysis on the affordability of EPPs .	<p style="text-align: center;">Education First Consulting</p> 11.17.21 – 3.31.22 \$100,000 (separate contracts for quantitative and qualitative portions @ \$50,000 each)	Competitive contract through a request for application.

* Note that TDOE developed through a second contract with TNTP another professional development course in literacy skills instruction targeted to teachers in grades 5 -12.

Source: Comptroller of the Treasury.

The contracts with NCS Pearson and TNTP, Inc. were procured with the appropriate review and approvals by the Department of General Services’ Central Procurement Office (CPO) and by the Comptroller of the Treasury. The interagency agreements with the University of Tennessee are agreements between state agencies and not subject to CPO or Comptroller review. The contracts with Education First Consulting are considered informal purchases, permitted by state law and rules. As such they are not reviewed by CPO prior to purchase and do not meet statutory requirements that trigger a Comptroller review, but CPO does review the resulting contracts. The General Assembly’s joint Fiscal Review Committee confirmed that all the completed contracts listed in Exhibit 10 had been submitted to the committee as required by law.



Existing statutory requirements incorporated into the LSA

When Public Chapter 3 was signed into law after the 2021 1st Extraordinary Session, it designated Title 49, Chapter 1, Part 9 of the Tennessee Code as the Tennessee Literacy Success Act. While most of Part 9 was new or revised with the 2021 public chapter, two existing provisions in law remained unchanged and were incorporated into the LSA.

Low reading scores to be addressed in school improvement plans

The first, *TCA 49-1-904*, requires TDOE to identify schools with consistently low reading scores in kindergarten through grade 12 and assure that steps to improve these scores are addressed in the schools' improvement plans. TDOE continues to identify schools and districts with low reading scores through the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) data published on its website. The requirement for districts and charter schools to submit their universal reading screener data to TDOE provides the department with an additional measure of K-3 students' literacy before students take a TCAP assessment.^p

Districts are required to submit district improvement plans for TDOE approval each year. Individual school improvement plans are approved by district teams, although TDOE approves school plans for priority schools. The annual district and school improvement plans are meant to drive instructional priorities and funding decisions for all students. State guidelines for district and school plans state that, in addition to several priority needs, all plans should address student learning improvements for all student groups as well as discipline, safe and healthy school environments, technology in the classroom, family engagement, professional development for teachers, and more.

School and district improvement plans are broad, covering academic achievement and growth, educator placement and training, school environment, and other issues, to meet both federal and state requirements. It is likely that the LSA provision requiring districts and schools to submit specific plans focused on K-5 literacy instruction will be a more effective method for TDOE to monitor reading improvement methods undertaken by schools with low reading scores than the comprehensive improvement plans.

The law's requirement for districts and schools to submit literacy plans provides flexibility based on improvements in students' reading scores. When districts and schools meet certain criteria reflecting strong improvement, they are exempt from submitting a literacy plan. Conversely, those with below expected student improvement on certain criteria may be required by TDOE to submit literacy plans more often.

Early grades literacy reports

A requirement for annual reports to one or more of the General Assembly's education committees was first added to the Tennessee Literacy Initiative Act in 2000.¹⁹ The information to be included in such reports was amended in 2001 and again in 2019, when it was revised to become the "early grades reading report."²⁰ The statutory requirement for the early grades reading reports remained part of the law when the 2021 Literacy Success Act revamped much of the Tennessee law that deals with early grades literacy (*TCA 49-1-901 et seq.*).

Since 2019, the law has required the annual reports to include:

- statewide 3rd grade reading scores,
- testing procedures used to evaluate reading proficiency,
- number of students retained in grades K-3,

^pTCAP is required for students beginning in 3rd grade. A majority of districts administer an optional 2nd grade TCAP.

- number of reading specialists in each LEA,
- types of reading intervention or enrichment programs offered in each LEA, and
- information on statewide reading initiatives.

It does not appear that TDOE has produced these annual early grades literacy reports. Some of the required information is provided by TDOE in other locations and formats, such as 3rd grade reading TCAP scores, but other information has not been reported annually, such as the number of students retained in K-3 or the types of reading intervention or enrichment programs offered in each district. Some other state requirements have been adopted that impact literacy and the types of information required in the early grades literacy reports including:

- the 2021 passage of the Literacy Success Act and its requirements for districts to submit literacy skills plans detailing their literacy curriculum and intervention efforts and its requirement for the state to produce landscape analyses on the status of several elements of literacy instruction across the state,
- the 2014 implementation of the RTI² framework for students who are struggling in reading or math, and
- the revisions to the 3rd grade retention law requiring consideration of TCAP reading scores becoming effective in 2022-23.

Conclusions and Policy Options

- 1. In summary, TDOE and local districts and charter schools are implementing the major directives of the Literacy Success Act. A few items remain in progress. A small sample of districts and charter schools contacted by OREA suggested some improvements, but they were generally positive about implementation of the LSA's requirements.**

Implementation through August 2022

- TDOE has provided a free universal reading screener to districts and schools, and student results on those screeners have been reported to TDOE.
- TDOE has developed training courses for teachers, and indications are that K-5 teachers are making good progress in meeting the requirement to complete one literacy skills instruction course by the 2023 deadline.
- Although this was not a required submission year, 65 districts and public charters have submitted a revised FLSP since their initial submissions in 2021.
- TDOE has developed, and the State Board of Education has approved, new EPP standards for instruction of K-3 teacher candidates and instructional leader candidates.
- All three required reports have been published: analysis of preK-5 foundational literacy skills achievement and instruction, analysis of EPP literacy instructional practices with teacher candidates, and analysis of EPP affordability.
- All contracts and interagency agreements used to procure goods and services under the LSA were submitted as required to the General Assembly's Fiscal Review Committee. The contract for a state universal reading screener was a sole source contract after a request for information from four vendors resulted in only one that could meet state criteria. The contract for a foundational literacy instructional training course was completed through a competitive process. Both contracts were procured with appropriate CPO and Comptroller approvals.

Implementation steps continuing or remaining

- All active K-5 teachers must complete at least one foundational literacy skills course by August 2023. TDOE does not currently have the data in a format to report the number or percent of active K-5 classroom teachers who have completed at least one course. They expect the new Reading Research Center will be able to provide this data after data cleaning, matching, and analysis.
- As of July 2022, TDOE was in the development process for a Tennessee reading instruction test that will be provided at no cost to teacher and administrator candidates and EPPs.
- As of the fall 2022 semester, reading instruction at EPPs is required to have a primary focus on foundational literacy skills, and courses and clinical experiences should be aligned with the state's foundational literacy standards.
- The LSA requirement for all districts and charter schools to use state-approved textbooks and instructional materials will be assessed in a separate Comptroller review to be completed by May 2023.

Districts' and charter schools' reactions

OREA contacted a small sample of school districts and charter schools to collect local feedback on the first year of LSA implementation. Because it was not a representative sample of all districts and charters schools in the state, the feedback collected should not be considered a comprehensive measure of local responses to LSA, but does provide some local perspective on the law's implementation.

- Districts reported that staff have been positive about the foundational literacy training, that training had resulted in improved instruction, and/or that stipends have been an effective incentive for teachers to complete the training. A majority of districts are members of the Reading 360 Early Literacy Network, which, although not an element of the LSA, is closely related in its focus on teacher training for early literacy instruction. Participating districts had positive feedback about the training supports and resources provided by the network.
- When asked about improvements they would like to see, a few districts suggested earlier determinations of required screener administration windows and earlier communication of those windows to districts. Others suggested that it would be helpful if they could pull lists of teachers that had completed the required foundational literacy training from the state's COMPASS system so that they could more easily ensure compliance with the law's training requirement.

The remaining conclusions and related policy options address clarity about the use of universal reading screeners for preK students, appropriate communications with parents about Tennessee's new mandatory 3rd grade retention law, and the lack of early grades reading reports compiled by TDOE.

- 2. Although the LSA primarily focuses district and charter school efforts on grades K-3, it does require the Tennessee Universal Reading Screener (TURS) provided by TDOE to be appropriate for students in preK as well as K-3. While the TDOE-provided screener (aimswebPlus) did have a preK screener, it did not have national norms for the preK level, as required by State Board rules for all state-approved screeners.**

State Board rules do not require universal reading screeners to have preK versions; that is only required by the LSA for the TURS. Only one district opted to use the TURS preK screener in 2021-22 and did so with the knowledge of its limitations. PreK screener results are not required to be reported to the department for purposes of student progress monitoring. It is not clear if the lack of preK national norms, or the use of adapted kindergarten norms, for preK screener results impacts preK teachers' usage of the TURS. The lack of national norms does seem to raise more obstacles if a district or school chooses

to use the screener results to generate alternative growth measures for preK teacher evaluations. TDOE has stated that two state-approved reading screeners – although not the TURS – do have national preK norms for the preK level screeners for 2022-23.

The department should continue to work with its TURS vendor to advocate for development of national norms for the preK version of its screener. The department, and others charged with review of the implementation of the LSA (such as the Comptroller's Office), should monitor districts' and charter schools' optional adoption of universal reading screeners at the preK level to determine levels of use for student progress monitoring and for teacher evaluation alternative growth measures.

3. It does not appear that information about the revised 3rd grade retention law will be provided automatically to parents of all K-3 students who are identified as having significant reading deficiencies, as a 2021 state law requires. However, TDOE has issued guidance to districts and charter schools on providing retention information to parents of 3rd grade students with reading deficiencies through home literacy reports, and additional parent information about retention is being planned or is already underway at both state and local levels through multiple other avenues.

A 2021 amendment to the LSA added a requirement for the mandated home literacy reports to include information about the revised 3rd grade retention law. Home literacy reports are required to be sent to parents of K-3 students who are identified through universal reading screenings as having a significant reading deficiency.

A sampling of districts contacted by OREA reported that they are planning to provide parents with information about the revised 3rd grade retention law through multiple avenues, but not necessarily as a standard component of the home literacy reports.

Sending information about the revised 3rd grade retention law as part of parent notification for every low score on reading screeners (for example to parents of kindergarten and 1st grade students) may not be the desired intent. A general reference to the retention law could be included in the information about the importance of a student being able to read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade, which is already required as a part of home literacy reports.

The General Assembly may wish to clarify the statutory requirements for information on 3rd grade retention to be included in home literacy reports for all K-3 students. As the law stands now, TDOE will need to update its guidance on required home literacy report components before the next literacy skills plans are due in 2024.

4. It does not appear that early grades reading reports have been prepared annually by TDOE and submitted to House and Senate education committees as required since 2019.

The statutory requirement for the early grades reading reports remained part of the law when the 2021 Literacy Success Act revamped much of the Tennessee law that deals with early grades literacy (*TCA 49-1-901 et seq.*). Since 2019, the law has required the annual reports to include:

- statewide 3rd grade reading scores,
- testing procedures used to evaluate reading proficiency,
- number of students retained in grades K-3,
- number of reading specialists in each LEA,

- types of reading intervention or enrichment programs offered in each LEA, and
- information on statewide reading initiatives.

Some of this information is provided by TDOE in other locations and formats, such as 3rd grade reading TCAP scores, but other information has not been reported, such as the number of students retained in kindergarten through 3rd grade or the types of reading intervention or enrichment programs offered in each district. Given the newer requirements under the LSA, and the passage of other requirements impacting literacy, the General Assembly may have sufficient information on early grades literacy efforts across the state and may no longer need the type of report envisioned in the 2019 amendment. Additional literacy-related actions include:

- the 2021 passage of the Literacy Success Act and its requirements for districts to submit literacy skills plans detailing their literacy curriculum and intervention efforts and its requirement for the state to produce landscape analyses on the status of several elements of literacy instruction across the state,
- the 2014 implementation of the RTI² framework for students who are struggling in reading or math, and
- the 3rd grade retention policy based on TCAP reading scores becoming effective in 2022-23.

The General Assembly may wish to either eliminate the early grades literacy report required in *TCA* 49-1-907 or clarify when it would like its education committees to receive such a report.

Appendix A: History of Literacy Initiatives in Tennessee

1999 – The General Assembly enacted the Tennessee Literacy Initiative Act, stating that it was the policy of the state, the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), and the local school districts to “move toward the goal of every public school student being able to read at an appropriate level before being promoted beyond the third grade.”²¹ The act required the Comptroller’s Office, with the assistance of the Tennessee Department of Education and the State Board of Education, to report on several aspects of the state’s literacy efforts.

2000 – The Comptroller’s Office of Education Accountability (now known as OREA) published the literacy study required by the 1999 law.

2000 – The General Assembly passed Public Chapter 911, which recognized a number of OREA’s study findings, including:

- “most Tennessee students were not successful in reading,”
- prominent sources had rated Tennessee’s language arts standards as “very low,” and
- “many Tennessee teachers may lack the expertise needed to assess or assist children with reading difficulties” and lack “sufficient professional development opportunities to bring them ‘up to speed’ regarding the latest reading methodology research.”

Public Chapter 911 also initiated requirements for:

- TDOE to identify schools with consistently low reading scores and to ensure that improving reading scores was addressed in schools’ improvement plans,
- State Board of Education (SBE) and Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) to review teacher training requirements and revise them as necessary,
- Annual reports by TDOE, SBE, and THEC on implementing the act to be made to a legislative education committee, and
- OREA to conduct a follow-up study on the status of literacy initiatives.

The law also suggested that SBE, THEC, the University of Tennessee System, and the State Board of Regents (later reorganized as the Tennessee Board of Regents) consider developing a university research center on reading for preschool through 12th grade teachers.

2001 – Further legislation in 2001 added requirements for specific data on early grades (K-3) reading programs and assessments to be included in annual reports to designated legislative committees.²²

2011 – The General Assembly passed legislation requiring that 3rd graders not be promoted to the next grade unless their reading skills and comprehension were demonstrated through grades or test results. Students could be promoted if they participated in district interventions.

July 2014 – Tennessee required districts to begin using the Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²) as the framework to deliver instruction and interventions to address individual student needs.²³ RTI² is the method used to determine whether students have specific learning disabilities.^Q

^Q Specific learning disability is one of 13 federally-defined disabilities set under the IDEA and covers conditions like dyslexia, dyscalculia, and written expression disorder that affect a child’s ability to read, write, listen, speak, reason, or do math.

Required elements of RTI² include the administration of universal screeners in reading, writing, and math for K-8 students three times per year, a tiered system of interventions, progress monitoring and parent communication. In 2018-19, Tennessee added funding for an RTI² component to the Basic Education Program (BEP), the state's school funding formula.

February 2016 – TDOE launched the Read to be Ready Initiative, which focused on reading development in early grades through funding for literacy coaches, summer reading camps, new state guidance and literacy instructional materials, and new standards and training for educator preparation programs. In 2016, the goal was set to have 75 percent of 3rd graders meeting grade level reading by 2025.²⁴ This was an ambitious goal: in 2016-17, 34.7 percent of students in grade 3 were meeting grade-level reading expectations.

2016 – The Tennessee Early Literacy Network (TELN), another component of the Read to be Ready initiative, was initiated, eventually comprising 22 districts. A joint effort between TDOE and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and led by TDOE's regional offices, the focus of TELN was to improve early reading outcomes as well as build districts' capacity to solve problems and continuously improve.

2016 – The LIFT Network (Leading Innovation for Tennessee Education), a group of 12 to 14 district superintendents committed to exploring innovative approaches to issues such as early literacy, began working with TNTP (previously called The New Teacher Project) and SCORE, to help their districts select high-quality instructional materials and provide teachers sustained support to strengthen early grade literacy instruction.

January 2021 – The state launched Reading 360, its \$100 million initiative that emphasizes a comprehensive, phonics-based approach to help students read on grade level by 3rd grade. Reading 360 provides free and optional district supports such as teacher literacy training (including stipends and classroom materials for teachers) and instructional resources and free reading resources for families to use at home.

2021 – The Reading 360 Early Literacy Network (distinct from the earlier TELN) was launched with about 75 districts. Participating districts received grants of \$80,000 to \$100,000 to reimburse costs of working one-on-one with implementation support providers. Participating districts as of September 2022 totaled 95 and include the state's two largest districts (Memphis-Shelby County Schools and Metro Nashville Public Schools) as well as some of the smaller (Athens City, Bradford Special, and Sweetwater City schools).

February 2021 – The Tennessee Literacy Success Act was passed by the General Assembly, along with several other education bills, during the 1st Extraordinary Session of 2021. Key provisions in the act require districts and charter schools to provide foundational, phonics-based literacy instruction in grades K-3, use state-approved instructional materials, screen students regularly to identify needed interventions, and to submit literacy instruction plans to TDOE. Teachers are required to complete training in foundational literacy skills instruction and education preparation providers are required to align classroom and clinical training for teacher candidates with foundational literacy standards.

2022 – The new Tennessee Reading Research Center was established jointly by TDOE and the University of Tennessee and hired its first director. The center, part of the Reading 360 initiative, will analyze data from classrooms, colleges, and communities to determine how the state's Reading 360 supports and grants are improving student literacy rates. The center will also analyze the implementation of the Literacy Success Act.

Appendix B: Tennessee Universal Reading Screener overview

Typically, universal reading screeners are combinations of various small subtests that focus on a particular skill or set of skills. The combinations change with students' grade levels and the school year season (fall, winter, or spring).

The table below shows the different subtests used in the Tennessee Universal Reading Screener (aimswebPlus). TDOE has set both a minimum set of subtests required (shown in red) and a comprehensive set of subtests that include both the red and gray shaded elements. TDOE has prescribed similar combinations of subtests, both minimum and comprehensive, for the other State Board-approved screeners. While both the minimum and comprehensive screeners meet Tennessee requirements for basic dyslexia screening, only the comprehensive screener meets requirements for additional dyslexia screening for at-risk students. Districts using the minimum universal reading screener may use other tools for assessing additional dyslexia characteristics in at-risk students.

Exhibit B-1: Tennessee Universal Reading Screener schedule of minimum and comprehensive subtests, by grade level

Subtest	Kindergarten			First			Second			Third		
	Fall	Winter	Spring	Fall	Winter	Spring	Fall	Winter	Spring	Fall	Winter	Spring
Initial sounds (2-3 min)	Red											
Letter naming fluency (1 min)	Red	Red	Red									
Letter word sound fluency (1 min.)	Red	Red	Red	Gray								
Phoneme segmentation (2-3 min.)		Red	Red	Red								
Nonsense word fluency (1 min.)				Red	Red	Red						
Oral reading fluency (2 min.)				Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Reading comprehension (15-25 min.)							Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Vocabulary (4-7 min)							Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Comp. - spelling	Gray	Gray	Gray	Gray	Gray	Gray	Gray	Gray	Gray			
Comp. - listening comprehension	Gray	Gray	Gray	Gray	Gray	Gray						

Minimum screener subtests

Comprehensive screener additional subtests

Source: Tennessee Department of Education.

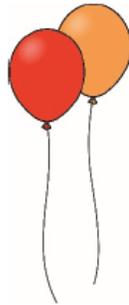
The minimum screener requirements include no more than three subtests per screener. The longest subtest (reading comprehension) is not administered until students reach 2nd grade. The minimum screening time for kindergarten students is about five minutes, for 1st grade students is about six minutes, and for 2nd and 3rd grade students ranges from about 21-34 minutes. Some subtests, especially those for younger students, are given to children one at a time. Others can be administered to small groups of four to five students.

Some examples of screener items from the TURS are shown below.^R

Kindergarten: letter word sounds fluency

d	c
og	ap
dog	cap

Kindergarten: auditory vocabulary



1st: word reading fluency

are	at	like
you	were	way
his	an	because

2nd grade: oral reading fluency

Dad and Rob went fishing.

"We will catch fish to eat for lunch," said Dad.

They loaded their fishing things into the boat: poles, bait, life jackets, and a net.

"Let's catch a fish!" said Rob.

^R All examples are copyrighted by NCS Pearson, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission of TDOE.

Appendix C: Early Literacy Network School Districts

As of September 15, 2022

Achievement School District	Hamilton County	Murfreesboro City
Athens City	Hancock County	Overton County
Bedford County	Hardeman County Schools	Paris Special
Benton County	Hawkins County	Pickett County
Bledsoe County	Haywood County	Polk County
Bradford Special	Henry County	Putnam County
Bradley County	Hickman County	Roane County
Bristol City	Houston County	Robertson County
Campbell County	Humboldt City	Rogersville City
Cannon County	Humphreys County	Scott County
Cheatham County	Jackson County	Sevier County
Chester County	Jefferson County	Shelby County (MSCS)
Clay County	Johnson County	Smith County
Cocke County	Lake County	Stewart County
Coffee County	Lauderdale County	Sullivan County
Collierville City	Lawrence County	Sumner County
Cumberland County	Lebanon Special	Sweetwater City
Davidson County (MNPS)	Lenoir City	Tennessee School for the Blind
Decatur County	Lincoln County	Tipton County
DeKalb County	Loudon County	Trenton Special
Dickson County	Macon County	Trousdale County
Dyer County	Madison County (JMCS)	Tullahoma City
Dyersburg City	Manchester City	Unicoi County
Elizabethton City	Marion County	Union City
Etowah City	Marshall County	Union County
Fayette County	Maury County	Van Buren County
Fayetteville City	McMinn County	Warren County
Franklin County	McNairy County	Washington County
Gibson County Special	Milan Special	Wayne County
Grainger County	Millington Municipal	White County
Grundy County	Monroe County	Wilson County
Hamblen County	Montgomery County (CMCSS)	

Source: Tennessee Department of Education.

Endnotes

¹ Public Chapter 3, 2021 1st Extraordinary Session. The law has been incorporated into *Tennessee Code Annotated* at 49-1-901 through 49-1-909, and at 49-5-5619 and 49-1-302(d)(2)(B).

² Public Chapter 717, 2022.

³ Tennessee Department of Education, *Response to Instruction and Intervention Framework*, revised November 2020, [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/documents/rti2_manual_revisedNov2020%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/documents/rti2_manual_revisedNov2020%20(1).pdf).

⁴ Tennessee Department of Education, *Universal Reading Screener, 2021-2022 EOY Data Report*, July 6, 2022.

⁵ State Board of Education Rule 0520-01-03-.15.

⁶ Tennessee Department of Education, *TN Universal Reading Screener Administration Guidelines*, Sept. 2021, p. 3, <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/2020-21-leg-session/TURS%20Admin%20Considerations%20Final.pdf>.

⁷ State Board of Education Rule 0520-01-03-.15(5).

⁸ Tennessee Department of Education, “TN Universal Reading Screener: Frequently Asked Questions,” July 21, 2021, https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/2020-21-leg-session/TURS_FAQ.pdf.

⁹ *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-1-905(d).

¹⁰ Public Chapter 367, 2021.

¹¹ Tennessee Department of Education, *Response to Instruction and Intervention Framework*, revised November 2020, [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/documents/rti2_manual_revisedNov2020%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/documents/rti2_manual_revisedNov2020%20(1).pdf).

¹² Tennessee Department of Education contract with TNTP, Inc., March 12, 2021.

¹³ Tennessee Department of Education contract amendment with TNTP, Inc., Jan. 10, 2022.

¹⁴ Tennessee Department of Education contract with TNTP, Inc., April 1, 2022.

¹⁵ *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-1-905(f).

¹⁶ University of Tennessee, Knoxville, *A Landscape Analysis of Tennessee Educator Preparation Providers’ Instructional Programming and Pedagogical Practices in Foundational Literacy Skills*, April 14, 2022.

¹⁷ Tennessee Department of Education, “EPP Signed Assurance - Literacy Standards: Guidance for EPPs,” [no date].

¹⁸ Tennessee Department of Education, *Education Preparation Provider Affordability Report*, March 2022, p. 11.

¹⁹ Public Chapter 911, 2000.

²⁰ Public Chapter 248, 2019.

²¹ Public Chapter 130, 1999.

²² Public Chapter 250, 2001.

²³ State Board of Education Rule 0520-01-03-.03(7).

²⁴ Tennessee Department of Education, *First Steps: A Report on Elementary Grades Reading in Tennessee*, April 2018, https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/reports/rpt_first_steps_reading_report.pdf.

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