

To: The School Board of Alexandria City Public School

From: Special Education Advisory Committee

CC: Literacy Department

Date: May 13, 2021

Subject: K-2 Literacy Recommendations

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to outline the key recommendations from the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) to provide an inclusive and equitable environment regarding K-2 Literacy in the general education setting that will guide students to be successful in reading with the resources and necessary materials.

Summary

The Special Education Advisory Committee has compiled key recommendations including a Multi-Tiered System of Support approach, educator training and support, implementation with fidelity and accountability systems and communication and support for families regarding progress and services. This memo outlines in detail the elements that will create a rigorous and results driven K-2 literacy program that will benefit all students throughout the early elementary years. Benefits can include proper interventions put into place to assist with properly identifying students with disabilities by providing the proper interventions and systems of supports prior to receiving referrals for special education.

Additionally, all recommendations support and target the following Alexandria City Public School Board's goals:

- **Academic Excellence and Educational Equity:** Every student will be academically successful and prepared for life, work, and college.
- **Family and Community Engagement:** ACPS will partner with families and the community in the education of Alexandria's youth.
- **Facilities and the Learning Environment:** ACPS will provide optimal and equitable learning environments.

Background

The Special Education Advisory Committee had a chance to meet with Dr. Carolyn Wooster, Elementary Literacy Coordinator for ACPS, and Kimberly Schell, ACPS Literacy Coordinator and Secondary Literacy. The meeting included a discussion about the K-2 Literacy plan and opportunity to ask questions. Following the meeting SEAC members completed a survey regarding literacy priorities that was provided by Dr. Wooster. The Special Education Advisory Committee respectfully requests that the Alexandria City Public School Board support the following key elements for the K-2 Literacy initiative to be successful, inclusive, and equitable to all students in the early years of learning.

I. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

First and foremost, SEAC believes it is essential to have a curriculum that encompasses a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) approach. MTSS is defined by the IRIS Center (2019) as: "A model approach to instruction that provides increasingly intensive and individualized levels of support for academics (e.g., response to intervention or RTI) and for behavior (e.g., Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports or PBIS)." MTSS includes three tiers of support where students have the opportunity to flow in and out of tiers as content is presented and learning challenges arise.

“Tier 1 – All students’ receive effective, differentiated instruction provided by a classroom teacher using evidence-based core curriculum. Tier 1 is expected to bring approximately 80% of students to acceptable levels of proficiency.

Tier 2 – For students who don’t respond effectively to Tier 1 instruction, Tier 2 supplements core instruction using targeted, evidence-based small-group interventions to help them catch up. This supplemental instruction is expected to bring up to 15% of students to proficient levels.

Tier 3 – Involves the application of intensive, evidence-based interventions which are designed to increase the rate of student progress for the approximately 5% of students who need very intensive 1:1 intervention.”



There is much research and benefits of MTSS, one key benefit being students receive interventions earlier and are less likely to fall behind if implemented with fidelity. Also, as students learn and grow, different concepts can be challenging for students, but they still have the ability to succeed given the resources, intervention, and support. Some of the resources to support these efforts include, but are not limited to:

A. Universal Design for Learning & Multisensory Approach

With MTSS, some resources that benefit students use Universal Design for Learning. “Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn.” One way to optimize learning with K-2 Literacy is ensuring that the content presented involves a multi-sensory, focusing on all senses (taste, smell, touch, sight, hearing, and movement) to allow students to have opportunities to learn beyond reading and writing. At a young age, children are still developing and growing, while truly learning how they learn themselves as students, therefore, it is imperative to give students multiple means of representation to learn content to be successful reading.

B. Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

“Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize and manipulate the spoken parts of words. The levels of phonological awareness are syllables, onset–rime, and phonemes. Phonemic awareness is the ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. We know that a student's skill in phonological awareness is a good predictor of later reading success or difficulty.” Both phonological and phonemic awareness are imperative indicators that allow students to be successful with reading and SEAC believes this is vital piece when considering an appropriate district wide curriculum.

II. Education Preparation and Training

As educators are given multiple tasks and responsibilities, SEAC believes it is imperative that they are given the support and training needed for the implementation to be highly effective for all students. Some key recommendations to support educators throughout this new training are the following:

A. Coaching and Specialist Support

Educators should have the support and resources needed to be successful in implementing a new curriculum or content. If a teacher is struggling in any area, there should be an opportunity to reach out for resources and have direct coaching, opportunity to shadow other educators, and/or have a mentor to assist with the more challenging content. Again, as educators are tasked with many different responsibilities, in order for the program to truly be successful, they need to be offered a clear system of support in order for all parties to be successful.

B. Teacher Training “Toolkits”

Many educators have a classroom of 17+ students, meaning 17+ different needs. As the individualized instruction is given, educators should have the resources to provide supplemental material needed. Regarding MTSS, students in each Tier should be receiving the instruction needed to be successful. The more accessible the “toolkit” of resources, interventions, manipulatives, books, and other content is for educators, the more accessible it will be to students.

C. Consider the use of Highly Trained Tutors to Provide Intervention (The Literacy Lab, City Year, and other outside partners if appropriate)

Highly qualified tutors or paraprofessionals can support educators and students in the classroom during the literacy period. Educators can lean on others to support students while they are receiving rigorous instruction and interventions. Through this system, students have an opportunity to learn from a variety of adults to support their reading needs. [insert research based on The Literacy Lab]

III. Implementation with Fidelity

Another important element is the data collection and implementation of any K-2 Literacy program with fidelity. In order for the program as a whole to be implemented, fidelity checks and

data collection are imperative to ensure the success of the program. Areas to consider when looking at assessments are the following:

A. Progress monitoring process

“The purpose of monitoring progress is to determine the effectiveness of an intervention plan on student learning. When data show students are progressing, interventions are maintained until students meet identified goals. When data show students are not progressing, a change in intervention is necessary (Fuchs, Compton, Fuchs & Davis, 2008). When changes are made to intervention plans based on data, intervention or phase lines should be placed on student graphs to indicate the change. Students receiving Tier 2 support should be assessed weekly or every other week, while students receiving Tier 3 support should be assessed weekly.” Alexandria Public City Schools should consider creating a schedule for progress monitoring academic skills accessible to families and community members (See Table below for example)

Academics	Suggested Timeline	Instrument / Assessment Used	Person Responsible
Tier 1	Universal Screening: 3 times per year (beginning, middle, end) for all students K-8	NWEA - MAP	Classroom Teacher
	Individual Screening: As high school students are referred for tier 2 or 3 support	EasyCBM	Interventionist
Tier 2	Monitor Progress: Twice monthly (more often as concern increases, may need multiple assessments for reliability)	EasyCBM (K-8) Common content areas assessments (9-12)	Classroom Teacher
Tier 3	Monitor Progress: Weekly	EasyCBM	Interventionist

B. Data Committee Review

Implementing systems in places such as data meetings and professional learning committees will allow district-wide collaboration to assess student’s progress and area of need. The following is a suggested outline that can be beneficial when considered implementing an MTSS with fidelity:

- School-Wide Improvement Meetings: Quarterly;
- Universal Data Screen Review Meetings: Fall, Winter, and Spring;
- Grade Content/Content collaborative teacher meetings: Monthly;
- Building Leadership Team Coordination Meetings: Quarterly;
- Intervention Planning Meetings: every 4-6 weeks.

C. Implementation Strategies

“Fidelity refers to how closely prescribed procedures are followed and, in the context of schools, the degree to which educators implement programs, assessments, and implementation plans the way they were intended. When we implement interventions and assessments with fidelity, intervention teams can make more accurate decisions about an individual student’s progress and future intervention needs. In addition, fidelity of implementation to the data-based individualization (DBI) process as a whole, across

multiple students in a school, helps to ensure that staff have the necessary resources and processes in place to support strong implementation for individual students.”

When considering an implementation approach to ensure fidelity, one area that could be helpful is considering adapting a rubric approach to ensure that support and the infrastructure that is necessary for successful implementation.

D. Interventions

Lastly, it is crucial to identify the appropriate interventions and supports needed for a

successful K-2 Literacy plan. As students move in and out of each tier through whole group instruction, small group, and at times one-on-one support, it is key to ensure that the interventions are appropriate within each setting. Educators may need support implementing accommodations and/or interventions. Having a division-wide approach to system(s), tools, and teaching strategies can assist with support for teachers and students.

IV. Communication and Support for Families

A. Communication and Understanding of Interventions

Throughout the K-2 Literacy process, SEAC feels that family members should be kept up-to-date with the learning process that is occurring in the classroom. When the new K-2 literacy program starts, including families it is a key element to ensure success and support of the system. When students receive interventions, families should be aware of the interventions used, the deficits targeted, updates regarding effectiveness, and appropriate next steps. One idea to consider is a “simple check the box” of challenges being addressed, interventions used, and progress achieved. This communication takes away from additional paperwork for educators, opens communications for families, and data and progress tracking.

B. At home support for Families

Additionally, SEAC would like to see guidance and tools provided for families to assist with their child’s literacy development at home. As their opportunity to support their child’s learning may vary, we believe there should be an opportunity for independent learning. The ability to have multiple means of representation throughout homework (UDL) provides an opportunity to engage learners outside of the school setting. Some key components that would be helpful to consider are the following areas:

- a. Specific guided activities;
- b. Sight Word Practice;
- c. Accessibility through digital or physical resources;
- d. Tutoring options;
- e. Accessibility to books.

Conclusion