

Tennessee School for the Deaf

Foundational Literacy Skills Plan

Approved: June 8, 2021

Updated: April 16, 2024

This Foundational Literacy Skills Plan has been approved by the Tennessee Department of Education and meets the requirements of the *Tennessee Literacy Success Act*. All portions of the Foundational Literacy Skills plan were submitted to the department and approved. To view the supplemental artifacts, please contact the district directly.

Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades K-2

Tennessee School for the Deaf has designated 135 minutes to foundational skills and ASL/English literacy to bridge the language gaps in both ASL and English. K – 2nd grade teachers use the Tennessee ELA standards and K-12 ASL Content Standards in alignment with Fingerspelling Our Way to Reading for our foundational skills curriculum and as one of the primary forms of instruction. Our approved instructional materials are indicated below.

Teachers in grades K-2 use researched-based K-12 ASL Content Standards, focusing on Viewing for Foundational Skills and Language standards. Viewing for Foundational Skills standards address the visual phonology components and are directed towards the five parameters (handshape, movement, non-manual markers, location, orientation), fingerspelling, and basic structure of American Sign Language. They are building blocks that result in stronger decoding skills of the visual phonological forms of signs, leading to stronger lexical processing skills and serving as a bridge to English literacy skills. Language standards foster students' comprehension and working knowledge of the structures of ASL, command of language, and vocabulary acquisition and use. ASL Language standards aid in the acquisition of a foundational language to serve as a bridge to a second language, English.

Fingerspelling Our Way to Reading is an evidence-based, supplementary literacy program for deaf and hard of hearing students in K-2nd grade. The program has two components, a 3-day per week fingerspelling program and a 2-day per week reading comprehension program. The fingerspelling program enhances phonological awareness of fingerspelled words, increasing expressive and receptive fingerspelling skills and identifying printed words. The reading comprehension program provides additional reading opportunities using fingerspelling words in sentences and stories that are used in each unit—this form of visual phonology aids in the development of decoding skills.

Teachers will monitor biweekly students' foundational reading skills using the IRLA: Independent Reading Level Assessment. Determining progress level, teachers will assign students to appropriate leveled books to further foster foundational reading skills. All students in grades K-2 will receive reading intervention through the 100 Book Challenge.

Daily Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction in Grades 3-5

Tennessee School for the Deaf has designated 135 minutes to address Tennessee ELA standards and K-12 ASL Content Standards to bridge literacy in both languages, ASL and English. An hour is allocated to the ASL/ELA block using an evident-based approach to applying foundational skills by comparing languages, ASL and English, focusing on fluency, grammar, morphology, spelling, expressive/writing, and receptive/reading skills in Spelling and Viewing standards. Our approved instructional materials are indicated below.

Bilingual Grammar Curriculum (BGC) will be used to address foundational skills for 3-5 grade students. BGC took into consideration that designing grammar instruction requires comprehensive knowledge about the linguistic structure of both ASL and English, a thorough understanding of how deaf and hard of hearing children with unique, visual orientation learn. During these learning sessions, students will build bridges between a visual language (ASL) and one that is exclusively linear (English). This happens by developing metalinguistic knowledge of students first language (ASL) and applying that understanding to their second language (written English). Students progress through a series of grammar lessons that create a strong foundation in their first language and systematically apply a comparison approach to learning their second language.

Teachers will monitor biweekly students' foundational reading skills using the IRLA: Independent Reading Level Assessment. Determining progress level, teachers will assign students to appropriate leveled books to further foster foundational reading skills. All students in grades 3-5 will receive reading intervention through the 100 Book Challenge. Through the 100 Book Challenge Reading Skills Card and Framework, our teachers will teach the appropriate reading strategies for that level to assist students in moving on to the next level.

By September 2025, each student will arrive home every afternoon with 1, 2, 3, or more books that are part of a system designed for their achievement.

To address the continued need to develop foundational skills in ASL, for 45 minutes, ASL teachers will address the Language and Discourse and Presentation standards.

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades K-2

Benchmark - K-5 Advance

Approved Instructional Materials for Grades 3-5

Benchmark - K-5 Advance

Additional Information about Instructional Materials

Supplemental Materials aiding in foundational skills for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students:

- Fingerspelling Our Way to Reading
- Bilingual Grammar Curriculum
- ASL Content Standards: K-12 <https://www2.gallaudet.edu/k-12-asl-content-standards>
- ARC 100 Book Challenge (American Reading Company)

Universal Reading Screener for Grades K-5. This screener complies with RTI2 and Say Dyslexia requirements.

We administer the TN Universal Reading Screener, aimswebPlus, to our students in grades K-3 and NWEA MAP for our students in grades 4-5.

Currently all Universal Screeners are not designed to assess the reading/comprehension skills in Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students in grades K-2. Phonology-based screeners are inappropriate for this demographic group. Therefore, IRLA is also being used to assess reading foundational skills and the benchmarks posted in ASL K-12 Content Standards.

Intervention Structure and Supports

Our intervention schedules and structures are aligned with the expectations outlined in the RTI² manual. The interventions are evidence-based, are differentiated by tiers, and address student specific skill gaps. We progress monitor the gaps while our data teams use this progress monitoring data to inform decisions about duration, material, and intensity changes when a student is not showing progress.

The unique demographic make-up of students with language delays automatically places all elementary students with reading intervention supports using the 100 Book Challenge supplemental reading curriculum. Biweekly, K-5 teachers will monitor students' progress to explicitly identify the skills each students must practice.

To support the acquisition of a solid foundational language, ASL K-12 Content Standards will be addressed throughout the ELA block. ASL teachers will address the Language and Discourse and Presentation component during ASL classes to close language gaps.

Parent Notification Plan/Home Literacy Reports

Tennessee School for the Deaf will provide a Home Literacy Report and engage parents and families in the student's literacy progress.

For students in grades K-5 identified as having a significant reading deficiency, a Home Literacy Report will be sent to families three times a year.

Student scores will be communicated in parent-friendly language that provides a clear explanation of student skill gaps, the depth, and extent of student needs, and emphasizes the importance of reading proficiently by the end of 3rd grade. In addition, parent conferences will be held during each nine-week grading period for students considered "at risk" and who are showing a significant reading deficit.

K – 5 grade ELA supplemental curriculum through the 100 Book Challenge features family letters that outline the foundational skills and strategies to inform and equip parents to work with their child. These letters support parents to ask questions about the knowledge they are building and practice their newly acquired foundational skills at home.

Professional Development Plan

With the unique demographic needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing students attending Tennessee School for the Deaf, specialized professional development for teachers will be provided to maximize students' acquisition of foundational literacy skills. Teachers will participate in free training sessions focusing on gaining knowledge and instructional strategies using visually based phonology. Research indicates that young visual learners utilize visually-based phonological knowledge — such as ASL sign phonology, fingerspelling, and graphemic knowledge — which serves as an important intermediate level of processing, or a "wedge," between print and meaning."

The fingerspelling program enhances phonological awareness of fingerspelled words, increasing expressive and receptive fingerspelling skills and identifying printed words. The reading comprehension program provides additional reading opportunities using fingerspelling words in sentences and stories used in each unit—this form of visual phonology aids in the development of decoding skills.

August, October, and December

ASL Graphemes, three series, in-person cohort training session focusing on applying ASL Graphemes (visual phonology) to build foundational skills in ASL that aid in the development of literacy in English print. Teachers will learn strategies to use ASL graphemes to teach students to decode specific sign locations that later bridge signs to English print. Training will be provided by Jessica McMahon, current principal of Tennessee School for the Deaf, Knoxville campus.

100 Book Challenge, three series, in-person cohort training provided by American Reading Company to gain knowledge in implementing the supplemental reading intervention curriculum in foundational literacy skills with a specialization in reading fluency and vocabulary. And a series of collaborative teacher meetings with schools from Florida Schools for the Deaf and Blind, Delaware School for the Deaf, and Louisiana School for the Deaf to develop visual phonology lessons.

July

Reading 360 Early Literacy, teachers will participate in the free and optional Reading 360 Early Literacy Training series developed by the Tennessee Department of Education.

June/July - All teachers of grades in kindergarten through fifth grade will engage in Week 1 of the Early Literacy Training series, asynchronously.

July/August - All teachers of grades in kindergarten through fifth grade will participate in cohort-based, in-person training offered as Week 2 of the Early Literacy Training series.

To ensure teachers' competency, pre-and post-tests will be administered for each training. An acceptable score will be required for teachers to receive their certificates. Progress will be monitored on these approaches via learning walks and PLCs throughout the year, addressing any needs that arise along the way.

Additional Information about this Foundational Literacy Skills Plan

We are using scientific studies to justify why phonemic awareness is NOT a critical skill for deaf students to acquire literacy comprehension and writing skills. Please refer below to research-based summaries explaining the need for ASL Foundational Skills and visual phonology.

Scientific studies indicate that ASL phonological processing aids in language acquisition resulting in stronger decoding skills of the phonological forms of signs which lead to stronger lexical processing skills, leading to stronger literacy skills. Brain scans show sign language is processed in the same brain tissue scientists had thought processed only speech. Importantly, sign phonology is processed in the identical tissue as sound phonology, showing that the tissue thought to be dedicated to sounds is dedicated to finding patterns in language.

Our plan for providing PD for all K-5 grade teachers is as follows:

August

Fingerspelling Our Way to Reading, in-person cohort two-day training provided by professional learning vendor focusing on visual phonology (phonological awareness) related to fingerreading and fingerspelling.

Proficiency in ASL has been shown to positively influence spoken language development and the development of English literacy in deaf students. Various research indicates that "the problem that deaf students have in learning to read and write stems partly from their lack of understanding of how either ASL or English works." ASL needs to be understood and appreciated before the students can fully translate from ASL to English.

Phonemic awareness is not a critical skill for deaf students to acquire literacy comprehension and writing skills. Fingerspelling is an effective strategy to support deaf students in accessing English.

Language development and fingerspelling are essential for literacy development. They each support different cognitive processes essential to literacy.

References:

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- Psycholinguistic Turn in Deaf Education. *Education Sciences*, 9(2), 133-. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci9020133>
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