

Eastern North Carolina Literacy Project

Identifying Effective Early Literacy
Instructional Practices



Phase I Reports & Phase II Pilot Plan
June 2026



Eastern North Carolina Literacy Project

Identifying Effective Early Literacy Instructional Practices

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This work was made possible through the generous support of Barnhill Contracting Company and the Barnhill Family Foundation. Their investment in early literacy reflects a deep commitment to the children and communities of Eastern North Carolina — and a belief that every student deserves the foundation to become a confident, capable reader. We are grateful for their partnership and their vision.

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Part A | Executive Summary

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Author(s): BEST NC



The Opportunity

North Carolina has made significant investments in early literacy: mandatory training in the science of reading, state-funded literacy coaches in every district, and district-led adoption of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). Yet in many rural Eastern NC districts, results remain uneven. The pieces are in place: strong materials have been purchased, teachers have been trained, and coaches or Multi-Classroom Leaders® are on staff. What's missing is the coordinating infrastructure that links curriculum, coaching, and instructional leadership, along with the district-level capacity to implement HQIM with fidelity and sustain it long after outside support ends. For students in high-need districts, the cost is real. The investments have been made; the opportunity now is to make them work together.

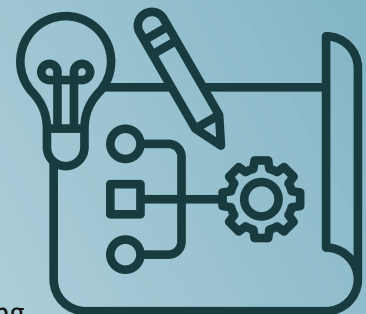
The ENC Literacy Pilot

Beginning in Summer 2026, BEST NC will launch a two-year pilot with 3–5 Eastern North Carolina school districts, building on a year of targeted research across the region and within Edgecombe County Public Schools. The pilot is an implementation support model designed to build the sustainable internal systems, routines, and expertise districts need to deliver strong literacy instruction year after year. It has three aims: to drive measurable gains in student literacy in participating districts, to produce a replicable HQIM implementation model that can be scaled across North Carolina, and to generate the evidence base needed to secure state resources for this work.

The model rests on a clear, evidence-based premise: students learn to read when teachers deliver HQIM in foundational skills and comprehension with fidelity, supported by curriculum-based professional learning (CBPL) and job-embedded coaching from Multi-Classroom Leaders® (MCLs™). Translating that premise into daily practice requires coordinated capacity-building at every layer of the system.

Building a Model for North Carolina

- A two-year, \$1.9M investment to build four layers of district capacity, designed to scale statewide.
- Teacher capacity through CBPL for all educators, grounded in the district's adopted HQIM, with deep focus on comprehension instruction.
- Coach and MCL™ capacity through professional learning on coaching teachers to implement HQIM and aligned assessments with fidelity.
- Leadership capacity through guidance for school and district leaders on deploying the Advanced Teaching Roles (ATR)™ framework so MCLs™ can coach with fidelity, and on aligning funding streams to sustain HQIM and MCL™ roles as permanent features of the district.
- System capacity through tools and routines for collecting, analyzing, and acting on implementation data, driving continuous improvement in pilot districts, and generating the evidence needed to inform statewide policy and investment



What the Research Shows

In Fall 2025, BEST NC, Public Impact, The Friday Institute, and Watershed Advisors launched a planning phase, supported by a \$100,000 grant from the Barnhill Family Foundation, to investigate what high-quality literacy implementation looks like in practice in Eastern NC.

Working with Edgecombe County Public Schools, one of North Carolina's most mature ATR™ districts, the team conducted classroom observations, educator focus groups, leadership interviews, and a district-wide survey of teacher beliefs and practices. A parallel survey of North Carolina "bright spot" schools captured additional insights about the conditions behind above-average literacy outcomes.

Findings demonstrate what's possible when HQIM, coaching, and educator readiness come together:

- **Student outcomes follow strong implementation.** At three ECPS schools implementing a high-quality foundational skills curriculum, Kindergarten students posted within-year DIBELS gains of 48 to 59 percentage points. At one of those schools, reading proficiency on the state End-of-Grade assessment improved across every tested grade.
- **The professional foundation is in place.** 93% of observed classrooms used district-adopted materials, and 97% of teachers reported engaging in science-of-reading-aligned practices daily or weekly. Teachers rated their confidence in developing student literacy at 3.52 out of 4.00 and their ability to use and adapt HQIM at 3.55 out of 4.00.
- **Sustained ATR™ implementation produces the strongest results.** A Friday Institute statewide evaluation found that Advanced Teaching Roles™ schools with five or more years of implementation show the largest achievement gains. ECPS, now in its ninth year, is positioned to model what the MCL™ coaching structure can achieve at maturity.
- **The remaining gaps are addressable.** Educators named the conditions that hold results back: a need for more coherent materials across foundational skills, comprehension, and intervention; capacity constraints that limit coaching and Tier 2/3 supports; and a pull toward state assessment formats that fragments implementation. These are the conditions the pilot is designed to address.

Building Together

District selection begins Spring 2026, with the pilot launching in Summer 2026.

The Barnhill Family Foundation has committed a \$950,000 matching gift to anchor the two-year, \$1.9M investment. We are raising the remaining \$950,000 from philanthropic and public funding partners to unlock the match and fully launch the pilot.

Every gift builds the teacher, coach, leadership, and system capacity that makes the model work, and the evidence base needed to carry it statewide.

To learn more or explore a partnership, contact Brenda Berg, President & CEO, BEST NC, at brenda.berg@bestnc.org.

Part B | A Qualitative Assessment of Instructional Practices in Edgecombe County Public Schools



Originally published in March 2026

Author(s): BEST NC, Watershed Advisors, Friday Institute for Educational Innovation

Overview

The following report evaluates how Edgecombe County Public Schools (ECPS) translates its student-centered literacy vision into daily practice across four Essentials for Excellent Instruction: Core Instruction, Assessment, Responsive Student Supports, and Continuing Development for Educators. Data was gathered through ~30 classroom observations, educator focus groups, 32 surveys, and student achievement data. Findings will anchor the ENC Literacy Pilot Model — a scalable framework for improving literacy outcomes across Eastern North Carolina.

Key Strengths

- Materials fidelity is high. District materials were in active use in 93% of observed classrooms; 97% of educators report daily/weekly science of reading-aligned practice.
- 95 Percent Group is producing results. Schools using the intervention showed Kindergarten DIBELS gains of 48–59 percentage points within one year; Bulluck Elementary saw a 15-point Grade 5 EOG proficiency gain year-over-year.
- Embedded coaching drives improvement. MCLs™ through Opportunity Culture® are the strongest instructional lever — 93.75% of educators report MCLs™ leading literacy data meetings. G.W. Carver Elementary exemplifies this model at full activation.
- Educator beliefs and confidence are strong. Educators scored 3.61/4.00 on belief in explicit/systematic instruction and 3.52/4.00 on confidence using high-quality instructional materials.

Consistent Challenges

- Standards-first orientation undermines curriculum fidelity. Teachers supplement or depart from adopted materials when they perceive misalignment with EOG formats.
- Comprehension assessment is a gap. Curriculum-embedded assessments rate 2.66/4.00 for effectiveness vs. 3.31/4.00 for progress monitoring tools; educators don't trust them to reflect state test expectations.
- Tier 2/3 staffing is uneven. 21.88% of schools lack a reading interventionist; fewer than 28% of interventionists participate in co-planning or data meetings.
- Coaching reach varies. 31.25% of respondents report no literacy coach at their school; ATR™ leaders are frequently pulled into coverage roles, limiting instructional support.

Implications for the ENC Literacy Pilot Model

1. Coherent HQIM across all tiers — foundational skills, comprehension, and intervention aligned to NC ELA standards taking effect in 2027–28.
2. Protected coaching capacity — ATR™ roles treated as a structural investment, with targeted professional learning for MCLs™ in adult leadership and coaching practice.
3. Aligned assessment systems — frequent, actionable comprehension assessments that bridge formative classroom use and end-of-grade accountability.

Continue to the next page to access a shortened version of this report.

Identifying Effective Early Literacy Instructional Practices

Phase I – Part A: Qualitative Evaluation in Edgecombe County Public Schools

BEST NC, Watershed Advisors, the Friday Institute, Public Impact

December, 2025 – March, 2026

A Qualitative Evaluation of Instructional Practices in Edgecombe County Public Schools

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Executive Summary

Improving early literacy outcomes requires more than strong instructional materials or isolated initiatives. It requires a coherent system in which educator actions at every level align around a shared vision for students. This report examines how Edgecombe County Public Schools (ECPS) operationalizes its student-centered vision for literacy and the instructional practices and systems that support that work. Watershed Advisors and BEST NC evaluated the extent to which this vision is reflected in daily practice across four Essentials for Excellent Instruction: Core Instruction, Assessment, Responsive Student Supports, and Continuing Development for Educators.

Across all four essentials, the study found meaningful strengths:

- Educators across the district demonstrated **strong alignment with the student-centered literacy vision**, and 93% of observed classrooms featured district-provided instructional materials in active use.
- **High-quality foundational skills curriculum** is producing measurable early results: schools implementing strong curricula as a core and intervention programs showed Kindergarten DIBELS gains of up to 59 percentage points within a single school year.
- **Embedded coaching through Advanced Teaching Roles (ATR)[™] and literacy coaches**, including Multi-Classroom Leaders[®] (MCLs[™]), emerged as a high-leverage strategy for instructional improvement, particularly when paired with high-quality instructional materials that give coaches and teachers a shared, structured foundation to work from.
- G.W. Carver Elementary demonstrated a **replicable, systematic model for data-driven responsive student supports**.

The study also surfaced consistent challenges across the essentials:

- Misconceptions about comprehension instruction, shaped by North Carolina's accountability system, sometimes led teachers to depart from adopted materials or deprioritize curriculum-embedded assessments in favor of tools more closely aligned to EOG formats.
- Staffing and capacity constraints limited the reach of Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports and the consistency of coaching across schools.
- Educators expressed a clear desire for a more coherent suite of materials spanning core instruction, comprehension, and intervention, as well as aligned, job-embedded professional learning.

These findings directly inform the next phase of this work: the development of the ENC Literacy Pilot Model, a scalable framework for improving literacy outcomes across Eastern North Carolina. That model will build on the vision, priorities, and implementation chain established through this study, and will identify the strategic levers, including guidance on high-quality instructional materials, targeted funding, aligned assessment systems, and curriculum-based professional learning, that districts and project partners must activate to translate this vision into practice for every student.

Introduction

Edgecombe County Public Schools was selected for this study because district leaders and philanthropic partners have made significant investments in improving student performance in early literacy, specifically by implementing a combination of high-quality instructional materials and job-embedded literacy coaching provided by teacher leaders in three elementary schools. Early indicators suggest that when implemented together, these two levers are positively correlated with student growth. The goal of this research is not only to better understand how these elements are interacting to impact student learning and teacher practice, but also to identify the additional conditions contributing to or detracting from ECPS's ability to realize its vision. Ultimately, this research will inform the ENC Literacy Pilot Model, a framework designed to translate effective practices from ECPS into a scalable model for improving literacy outcomes across Eastern North Carolina.

Watershed Advisors and BEST NC conducted this analysis using a systems-based framework for educational leadership that centers the student experience and emphasizes the critical role of adult actions in driving student outcomes. The framework highlights four key components necessary for systemwide improvement: **establishing a clear vision and priorities** for students, **aligning educator actions** through a coherent implementation chain, activating **key policy and resource levers** to support that work, and **continuously measuring progress** to guide improvement.

This study focuses primarily on the first component, Vision and Priorities, and examines how ECPS's student-centered literacy vision is reflected in daily instructional practice through the lens of four Essentials for Excellent Instruction: Core Instruction, Assessment, Responsive Student Supports, and Continuing Development for Educators. Evidence was gathered over two months through classroom observations, educator focus groups, surveys developed in partnership with the Friday Institute, and analysis of student achievement data.

Our Approach to Systems Change

Undergirding this analysis of ECPS and their instructional practices is a systems-based framework for state and district leadership that centers the student experience and emphasizes the critical role that adult actions play in driving student outcomes.

Vision + Priorities: Anchor the system in a clear vision for students and a small set of priorities that matter most.

Implementation Chain: Ensure every educator in the system understands their role in advancing those priorities.

State Actions: Align state levers (e.g., policy, funding, guidance, and support) so the system moves in the same direction.

Measure Progress and Adjust: Continuously track progress and make adjustments to stay on course.



Data collection in ECPS focused on the first level of this framework: **Vision & Priorities**. Using ECPS’s student-centered vision for literacy as a North Star, we organized subsequent research questions to evaluate how closely this vision aligned with the daily practices of teachers and other educators in the system.

Student-Centered Vision for Literacy

Every K–5 student should experience excellent, daily, explicit instruction in foundational skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency), systematic building of background knowledge and vocabulary, engagement with complex, grade-level text through reading, writing, and discussion, and responsive support informed by ongoing assessment. Students should learn in environments that foster a strong culture of literacy, where reading is valued, visible, and celebrated, and where students are encouraged to see themselves as confident, curious readers.

In particular, we were interested in how this vision drove toward a small set of actionable priorities: the Essentials for Excellent Instruction, that are required to bring this vision to life.

Essential	Description	Overarching Research Question
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Core Instruction	Access to high-quality instructional materials that support authentic student engagement in grade-level content	<i>How do high-performing schools define, understand, and implement strong core literacy instruction, and how does the design and implementation of core materials support or constrain that work?</i>
Assessment	Access to assessments that paint an accurate picture of student performance and outcomes	<i>How do teachers and leaders use early literacy assessment data to inform instruction, and what distinguishes data use practices in high-performing schools?</i>
Responsive Student Supports	Students receiving regular, timely supports that are data-driven and coherent with the instructional core	<i>How are responsive literacy supports designed and delivered across schools, and what distinguishes coherent systems that enable students—both below and above grade level—to make strong progress?</i>
Continuing Development for Educators	Educators equipped with job-embedded professional development opportunities and other structural supports	<i>How are professional learning, coaching, and instructional leadership structured to support literacy instruction, and how do educators perceive the effectiveness of these supports?</i>

Purpose of Study

Through this qualitative analysis, we sought to understand the extent to which this student-centered vision and these four priorities were in place, and which aspects of each priority educators in ECPS identified as most critical to student outcomes. Findings from this analysis will inform the three components of the Phase II ENC Literacy Pilot Model:

1. Recommendations for a model pilot framework that, if implemented with fidelity, offer a set of best practices that can drive outcomes for students, regardless of district and location.
2. The development of an ideal implementation chain, where these priorities become concrete actions attached to each educator in the system, and all drive toward a shared vision for student outcomes.
3. An implementation plan for Phase II of the ENC Literacy Pilot that identifies the key levers districts and pilot partners will pull over the course of the next three years to support educators to take these actions.

Explanation of Study

Over the course of two months, BEST NC and Watershed Advisors partnered to conduct classroom observations, focus groups, and interviews, and analyzed a small sample of student achievement data. The Friday Institute led the work of collecting and analyzing survey data. Together these methods aimed to illuminate current literacy implementation practices in ECPS and uncover which literacy practices,

structures, and systems are non-negotiable for excellent literacy instruction and improved student outcomes.

Prior to conducting classroom observations and focus groups, Watershed Advisors facilitated a two-hour visioning session with ECPS district, school, and instructional leaders on December 11, 2025. The session was designed to establish a shared foundation for the study by engaging participants in three areas: **defining what excellent literacy instruction should look like** for every K–5 student in ECPS classrooms; **identifying the adult actions** required at each level of the system to make that vision a reality; and beginning to **surface the current state** of literacy teaching and learning across the district. Drawing on a draft student-centered vision statement and the four essentials for excellent instruction as starting points for discussion, participants reflected on, refined, and ultimately affirmed the shared vision that guides this report and will anchor the ENC Literacy Pilot Model.

The central premise of this work is that the practices and conditions contributing to success in ECPS are not unique to a single context. Instead, the study aims to surface a set of scalable practices, structures, and enabling conditions that can inform strong literacy implementation across districts, regardless of geography, size, or demographics.

Edgecombe County Context

ECPS was identified as a "bright spot" district in North Carolina, demonstrating strong literacy outcomes and continued student growth driven by improvements in instructional practices. Building on the district's recent investments in foundational skills materials and literacy coaching, this study seeks to better understand the broader instructional systems, structures, and educator actions that support strong literacy outcomes. Central among these is the district's use of Advanced Teaching Roles (ATR)[™], through the Opportunity Culture[®] staffing model, in which teacher leaders known as Multi-Classroom Leaders[®] (MCLs[™]) continue teaching students while also supporting a small team of peers. Research shows this model outperforms traditional instructional coaching in improving both teacher practice and student outcomes. [A 2024 statewide evaluation of ATR[™] programs by the Friday Institute](#) found statistically significant gains in student math achievement and positive ELA effects that strengthen with years of implementation, with the largest gains concentrated in schools with five or more years of experience. As a 2016 recipient of an ATR[™] grant provided by the NC Department of Public Instruction, ECPS has been implementing ATR[™] for nine years, positioning the district to realize the full benefits the research associates with sustained implementation.

A note on language: *In North Carolina, the Advanced Teaching Roles[™] framework is commonly referred to by the abbreviation "ATR[™]." Edgecombe County Public Schools has been a long-standing ATR[™] district, implementing Public Impact's Opportunity Culture[®] model, which uses its own nomenclature for ATR[™] positions. Throughout this report, Edgecombe's ATR[™] staff in teacher-leadership roles are referred to by their Opportunity Culture[®]-branded title: Multi-Classroom Leaders[®] (MCLs[™]).*

Over the course of this study, Watershed Advisors and BEST NC visited five schools across Edgecombe County. District-wide, Edgecombe County selected Benchmark Advance as their comprehensive core curriculum, and survey data supports that this curriculum is used daily in 96.9% of classrooms. Benchmark Advance has been the primary, district-provided core curriculum for five years, with district leaders identifying vocabulary and background knowledge-building as the two primary focus areas for literacy instruction this year.

The **Benchmark Advance foundational skills section** of the curriculum serves as the primary foundational skills instructional resource in five of the eight ECPS elementary schools. The other three schools—G.W. Carver Elementary, G.W. Bulluck Elementary, and Coker-Wimberly Elementary—have, with financial support from the Barnhill Family Foundation, purchased and implemented **95 Percent Group's foundational skills curriculum**. Those same schools are also using 95 Percent Group's Tier II intervention materials. Additionally, all elementary schools in ECPS have at least one staff member dedicated to implementing 95 Percent Group's Tier III intensive intervention program, 95 RAP. The district also provides access to Heggerty and i-Ready as supplemental intervention materials. Of the five schools visited for this project, two use the Benchmark Advance foundational skills program, and three use 95 Percent Group's foundational skills curriculum.

Of the five schools visited, all five have Advanced Teaching Roles™ in place through Opportunity Culture®, with their MCLs™ operating at varying levels of capacity. Two of the schools visited, G.W. Carver and G.W. Bulluck, also have literacy coaches that focus solely on supporting teachers to implement the 95 Percent Group's foundational skills curriculum. These coaches are funded through a grant from the Barnhill Family Foundation.

Survey Response Demographics

There were 32 total survey respondents from Edgecombe County Public Schools, with at least one response from all eight schools with grades K–3. Because some schools are below the threshold to disaggregate data without being identifiable, data will be presented in aggregate.

Of the total respondents, 75% identified their roles as a “Classroom Teacher.” Also represented in the survey were “Adult Leadership Teachers (e.g., Multi-Classroom Teachers),” “Instructional Coaches,” and “Special Education Teachers.” Additionally, most respondents identified themselves as teaching or supporting Kindergarten (35%), however some respondents also noted teaching or supporting multiple grades. Survey respondents also shared the number of years of experience in education with approximately 41% of respondents having 9–18 years of education experiences, followed by approximately 22% of respondents having more than 22 years of experience. Survey respondents also noted the type of educator's license they currently possess, with approximately 66% of the respondents noting that they possess a “professional educator's license.”

Data Collection tools and Details

Data Collection Tool	Data Collection Details
Classroom observations	Watershed Advisors and BEST NC observed ~30 classrooms across elementary schools in ECPS. Our observations were focused on observable behaviors in three categories: • Materials in use: <i>Were the district or school-provided materials visible and utilized in instructional practices?</i> • Teacher actions: <i>Which teacher actions were most present during this lesson? Were they supported by the materials?</i> • Student engagement: <i>What student actions were most present during this lesson? How did the lesson materials and delivery impact their engagement?</i>
Focus Groups and Interviews	Watershed Advisors and BEST NC hosted four official focus groups, and had additional conversations with teachers and teacher leaders during our site-visits. These focus groups were divided into two groups: teachers (11 participants) and ATR™ leaders, instructional coaches, and administrators (10 participants). Focus groups facilitated conversation oriented toward the Essentials for Excellent Instruction. Core Instruction • Teacher question: <i>In your own classroom, what instructional practices are most essential for strong literacy learning, and why?</i> • Leader question: <i>When you think about strong literacy classrooms across your school(s), what instructional elements feel non-negotiable? How are teachers using (or not using) district-provided curriculum materials like 95PG and Benchmark Advancetosupport these instructional elements?</i> Assessments Teacher question: <i>In your own classroom, what literacy assessments do you use with your students? Which ones most influence how you plan or adjust instruction? Which ones are most useful?</i> Leader question: <i>What literacy assessments are used across your school or district? How useful are they for understanding student needs and guiding instructional decisions?</i>

Responsive Student Supports

Teacher question: *How do you use what you know about students to decide who needs extra support or additional challenges?*

Leader question: *How are assessment and instructional information used to identify students for additional literacy support or acceleration? How consistent are these practices across classrooms or schools?*

Continuing Development for Educators

Teacher question: *What kinds of professional support help you most with literacy instruction? Where do you still need more guidance or learning?*

Leader question: *What professional supports are in place to help teachers implement strong literacy instruction? Where do instructional leaders need additional capacity or clarity to support that work?*

Survey Data

The Friday Institute, Watershed and BEST NC developed a survey to gain an understanding of early literacy practices in the classroom, beliefs on early literacy, and personnel support for early literacy. Specifically, this survey asked educators to identify specific curriculum being used in the classroom, the frequency and perceived effectiveness of early literacy practices (i.e. phonological awareness, planning time, small groups, etc.), their confidence with teaching early literacy topics, which support staff is available to help them with early literacy (i.e. literacy coach, grade-level PLCs, Multi-Classroom Leaders®, etc.), and what professional development they have received related to early literacy.

This survey was sent to K-3 literacy educators in Edgecombe County Public Schools. After receiving approval from NC State University's IRB office, the Friday Institute partnered with Edgecombe County Public Schools to deploy the surveys to all participant schools in the district. Surveys were sent via email that contained a link to the survey.

The survey was open to collect responses for one month (March 2026) for data collection. The survey yielded 32 responses from educators in Edgecombe.

ECPS Data Review

Using DIBELS and State Assessment data disaggregated by school, project partners evaluated the correlation between the two sets of data and between the data and investments made in early literacy instruction in specific schools, namely High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) and additional literacy coaching capacity.

Discussion of Findings

The findings that follow examine how this vision plays out in practice across four Essentials for Excellent Instruction: **Core Instruction**, **Assessment**, **Responsive Student Supports**, and **Continuing Development for Educators**. A fifth section examines Culture of Literacy, not as an additional essential, but as a cross-cutting dimension of the district's vision that shapes, and is shaped by, the instructional work documented across all four essentials. Within each essential, **Instructional Strengths** highlight strong alignment with the district's vision, and **Additional Findings** surface opportunities to strengthen coherence and implementation.

Implications for the ENC Literacy Pilot Model take these findings a step further, and begin translating them into actionable considerations for the development of the ENC Literacy Pilot Program.

Vision

A clear, student-centered vision for literacy, when paired with dedicated leadership, guides school leader and teacher actions and, ultimately, student outcomes.

ECPS's student-centered vision for literacy acts as a North Star for district leaders, school leaders, instructional support personnel, and teachers, pointing all educators in the same direction and serving as a centering force for daily practice. Notably, this vision was not developed in isolation: it emerged from a collaborative process in which ECPS district, school, and instructional leaders gathered in December 2025 to define, discuss, and refine what excellent literacy instruction should look like for every student, grounding the vision in the expertise of the educators responsible for bringing it to life. Across classrooms and focus groups, educators at every level demonstrated clear alignment with this vision and a shared commitment to realizing it for students.

Student-Centered Vision for Literacy

Every K–5 student should experience excellent, daily, explicit instruction in foundational skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency), systematic building of background knowledge and vocabulary, engagement with complex, grade-level text through reading, writing, and discussion, and responsive support informed by ongoing assessment. Students should learn in environments that foster a strong culture of literacy, where reading is valued, visible, and celebrated, and where students are encouraged to see themselves as confident, curious readers and communicators.

The findings that follow examine how this vision plays out in practice across four Essentials for Excellent Instruction: Core Instruction, Assessment, Responsive Student Supports, and Continuing Development for Educators.

Priorities: Essentials for Excellent Instruction

We define priorities as the small, core set of strategies that point toward a unified vision for the student experience. ECPS teachers and leaders agree that the four essential components of literacy instruction are Core Instruction, Assessment, Responsive Student Supports, and Continuing Development for Educators. Through classroom observations and focus groups, we evaluated the extent to which these essentials were emphasized in daily instructional practices and overall school culture. These findings highlight strengths in ECPS’s current instructional systems and practices and provide additional insights that help inform our ideal ENC Literacy Pilot Model.

Core Instruction

Instructional Strengths	Consistent use of high quality materials supports strong implementation of evidence-based literacy practices. Classroom observations and educator feedback indicate strong implementation of district-provided foundational skills and comprehension materials. In 93.1% of observed classrooms, district-adopted instructional materials were in active use, and an equal proportion of teachers demonstrated explicit, systematic instruction in foundational skills. Survey data reinforces these observations: approximately 97% of educators reported engaging in science of reading-aligned practices (e.g., explicit phonics instruction, phonological awareness, small-group literacy instruction, and vocabulary instruction) on a daily or weekly basis, and rated all of these practices as effective in supporting student growth. The 95 Percent Group Phonics Core Program, in particular, appears to provide meaningful instructional support: teachers were observed delivering explicit, direct instruction aligned to a logical learning sequence, with embedded opportunities for practice and attention to student development. Educators spoke positively about the coherence and structure the curriculum provides, suggesting that when materials meet a high bar for quality and are internally aligned, they enable consistent, faithful implementation. The data suggest that high-quality, well-sequenced materials can serve as a stabilizing force for instructional practice across classrooms.
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DIBELS benchmark data from the 2024–25 school year offers additional evidence of this trend. Among the three schools implementing the 95 Percent Group’s Core and Intervention programs (Tier 2 Phonics Lesson Library), G.W. Carver, Bulluck, and Coker-Wimberly, Kindergarten students showed gains of 49, 48, and 59 percentage points, respectively, in the proportion of students meeting DIBELS benchmarks from the beginning to the end of the year. This pattern is consistent with strong foundational skills instruction taking hold in the earliest grades and suggests that high-quality, well-sequenced materials are producing meaningful early literacy growth when faithfully implemented.

Additional Findings

Educators expressed a desire for a comprehensive, coherent suite of materials across tiers.

While educators expressed appreciation for the foundational skills curriculum, many articulated a desire for a more comprehensive, district-wide suite of materials that is coherent across core instruction, comprehension, and intervention. Survey data reflects this pattern in practice: while a large portion of respondents use district provided materials (97% reported Benchmark Advance, 50% reported i-Ready, 41% reported Heggerty), a number of respondents reported drawing from a wider range of instructional materials. This suggests that teachers are seeking resources beyond the district-provided curriculum to meet the full range of student needs.

Additionally, educators noted the benefits of curriculum use consistency across schools, which enables collaboration and professional development opportunities with faculty in other buildings. Teachers frequently referenced wanting “one curriculum that does it all,” reflecting a broader priority around instructional coherence and alignment across tiers of support.

Standards-driven planning shapes the use, or lack thereof, of instructional materials.

Common teaching practices in ECPS, and across North Carolina more broadly, prioritize the state standards and assessments, which play a critical role in the state's accountability system. This standards-first orientation shapes how educators perceive and use instructional materials: teachers often prioritize aligning lessons to discrete standards over following the designed sequence of the adopted curriculum, which can limit the perceived utility of high-quality materials and affect the depth and consistency of implementation.

Importantly, this dynamic does not mean science-of-reading-aligned practices are absent. As mentioned in the first finding, 97% of educators engage in explicit phonics, phonological awareness, small-group instruction, and vocabulary instruction on a daily or weekly basis. However, when teachers perceive gaps between district-provided materials and state assessment expectations, they actively seek alternatives, a pattern borne out in the range of supplemental materials educators reported using alongside district resources.

Educator perception of instructional materials is an indicator of implementation fidelity.

Educator perceptions of instructional materials emerged as an important indicator of implementation strength. Where teachers viewed materials as coherent, supportive, and visibly aligned to the state test, implementation appeared stronger and more faithful. Conversely, when materials were perceived as incomplete or insufficiently comprehensive, teachers were more likely to supplement or adapt, potentially affecting coherence across classrooms. The range of supplemental materials in active use across the district reflects this dynamic directly: the materials teachers reach for beyond the district curriculum offer a window into where they perceive gaps in their current suite.

Implications for the ENC Literacy Pilot Model

Districts and schools need high-quality instructional materials for foundational skills and knowledge-building that align with the new NC ELA standards that will be implemented 2027–2028.

If the materials used during the 2026–2027 school year do not adequately align with current ELA standards, educators need consistent guidance on modifying or supplementing the curriculum to maintain coherence and align with best practices in knowledge-building and comprehension.

Assessment

Instructional Strengths

Consistent use of data drives instructional decisions.

Across grade bands, teachers consistently described DIBELS (mCLASS) data as highly actionable and central to instructional decision-making. Educators demonstrated confidence in using DIBELS results to form instructional groups,

identify specific skill gaps, and adjust day-to-day teaching in response to student performance. Observations and teacher feedback suggest that foundational skills data reduces the cognitive load of differentiation by providing clear, skill-specific information that can be acted on immediately. Survey data is consistent with this pattern: progress monitoring tools, most commonly mCLASS and, where applicable, 95 Percent Group assessments, were both the most frequently used assessment practice (84% of respondents daily or weekly) and the highest rated for effectiveness (average of 3.31 out of 4.00).

95 Percent Group assessments were described as useful complements to DIBELS, particularly for monitoring student progress within foundational skills. Overall, foundational skills assessment systems appear coherent, actionable, and closely connected to classroom instruction, enabling responsive adjustments in teaching.

Educators and leaders expressed a desire for comprehension assessments that similarly assess student progress and growth in comprehension skills specifically, but do not feel that the current suite of instructional materials is sufficient.

Early EOG data offer an encouraging signal that foundational skills gains may be beginning to translate into state assessment outcomes over time. At Bulluck Elementary, one of three schools implementing the 95 Percent Group intervention curriculum, reading proficiency on the EOG improved at every tested grade level from 2023–24 to 2024–25, including a 15-point increase in Grade 5 (19.4% to 34.5%). While one school's trajectory is not conclusive, this pattern is consistent with the expectation that sustained investment in foundational skills instruction produces measurable gains on state assessments, even when those assessments are not specifically designed to capture foundational literacy progress.

Additional Findings

Standards-driven instruction drives assessment selection and use, and lowers the perceived value of the core curriculum-embedded assessments.

The core comprehension program in use in ECPS (Benchmark Advance) provides curriculum-embedded formative assessments aligned to the overall curriculum scope and sequence. There are perceived misalignments between these curriculum-embedded assessments and the state assessments, driving

teachers to use other, supplemental formative assessments that are more closely aligned with the state standards. Teachers reported that perceived alignment to state assessments strongly influences whether formative tools are viewed as valuable. Assessments that mirror EOG formats or emphasize standards mastery tend to be prioritized in planning and instructional time. Survey data corroborates this directly: unit assessments, the category most likely to capture curriculum-embedded tools like those in Benchmark Advance, had an average effectiveness rating of 2.66 out of 4.00, below the threshold respondents associated with effectiveness, despite being used by nearly 60% of educators regularly.

In contrast to DIBELS and mCLASS, Benchmark Advance assessments were widely described as providing limited actionable insight for classroom instruction. Teachers noted that these assessments:

- Do not consistently yield data that informs small-group or differentiated instruction
- Lack scaffolding
- Do not sufficiently expose students to multiple-choice question formats tied to extended passages
- Are perceived as misaligned to the NC EOG
- Are inappropriate for K-2 students when administered on the computer

As a result, some schools and teachers rely more heavily on Read to Achieve (RTA) and SchoolNet assessments, which were described as both more challenging and more aligned with state standards and assessments.

Implications for the ENC Literacy Pilot Model

Districts and schools need frequent, efficient comprehension assessments that align with end-of-grade assessments and support instructional decision-making.

Responsive Student Supports

Instructional Strengths

G.W. Carver Elementary demonstrates a systematized, data-driven model for responsive literacy supports.

Worth highlighting in these findings are the systems and structures in place at G.W. Carver Elementary to identify and respond to student needs in a purposeful, data-driven way. School leadership has clearly identified literacy as a top priority and has aligned time, staffing, and instructional resources in

service of that goal. Systems for reviewing and acting on student data are embedded into the school's routines, empowering educators to make timely and targeted instructional decisions.

At Carver, MCLs™ and literacy coaches have clearly defined roles and responsibilities tied directly to literacy instruction across grade levels. Protected intervention blocks and common planning time create the conditions for teachers and support staff to coordinate efforts and respond intentionally to student needs. Instruction across tiers is coherent: students receive support from adults who share common instructional practices, use familiar materials, and ground decisions in individual student data. Survey data from Carver respondents corroborates this portrait of fully activated instructional roles: 100% of respondents reported that both MCLs™ and Literacy Coaches conduct observation and feedback and lead data meetings focused on literacy, with MCLs™ also pulling small groups (90%) and supporting co-planning and co-teaching (80%). Notably, no respondent indicated that either role does not support literacy instruction or does not exist at their school.

MCLs™ were also observed co-teaching, modeling instructional practices, and pulling small groups alongside classroom teachers, demonstrating a level of embedded, side-by-side support that goes beyond traditional coaching and directly strengthens instructional delivery in real time. Principal and assistant principal engagement similarly reflects active instructional leadership: 90% of Carver respondents reported that school leaders conduct observation and feedback, and 70% reported their involvement in data meetings focused on literacy. This is consistent with what we observed about leadership prioritization at the school. Grade-level PLCs also play a meaningful role in Carver's data infrastructure, with 90% of respondents reporting that PLCs are focused on data meetings tied to literacy. This is consistent with the structured, purposeful collaboration routines we observed, where teachers regularly convene around student data to plan and adjust instruction.

This level of systematization, where leadership prioritization, staffing structures, data routines, and instructional materials operate in alignment, positions Carver as a model for ECPS and other districts seeking to strengthen responsive literacy supports.

Additional Findings

Coherence between core and intervention materials strengthens implementation.

Across schools, educators reported that intervention materials are most effective when they are tightly aligned with core instruction. When instructional approaches, routines, and materials are coherent across tiers, teachers are better able to reinforce learning, reduce fragmentation, and build student confidence. Conversely, when intervention resources diverge significantly from core materials, implementation becomes more complex and less streamlined. Specifically, educators noted the benefits of having 95 Percent Group curriculum for foundational skills paired with 95 Percent Group's intervention suite and Tier 3 program, 95 RAP. This level of coherence not only fosters communication among instructors at Tiers 1, 2, and 3, but also facilitates a high level of teacher expertise and familiarity with curriculum materials and instructional moves.

Capacity and staffing constraints impact Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction.

Despite strong data use practices, schools reported that staffing and capacity constraints can impede the consistent implementation of Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports. Limitations related to personnel, scheduling, and time make it difficult in some schools to fully operationalize best practices, even when data clearly identifies student needs. District-wide, 62.5% of respondents reported that reading interventionists are deployed to pull small groups of students. Their integration into planning and data practices is lower: only 28.13% participate in co-planning, and only 25% participate in data meetings focused on literacy. 21.88% of respondents indicated that a reading interventionist does not exist at their school at all, meaning access to dedicated intervention support is itself uneven across the district. This pattern, where intervention roles are primarily activated for direct student support but remain somewhat disconnected from collaborative planning and data review, suggests that coherence across tiers depends not just on having interventionists in place, but on building the structures and time that allow them to function as integrated members of the instructional team. When capacity is stretched, the connections between Tier 1, 2, and 3 supports can weaken.

**Implications for the ENC
Literacy Pilot Model**

Districts and schools need instructional materials that are coherent across Tiers 1, 2, and 3. They may also need support in directing staff capacity and other resources toward responding to student needs, and/or in designing and implementing intervention systems that maximize existing staff capacity,

including support with scheduling at both the school and ATR™ level. All instructional staff should be involved in planning interventions to promote coherence across instructional departments (e.g., Special Education, English Language Learners, Multi-Lingual Learners, Intervention).

Continuing Development for Educators

Instructional Strengths

Formal teacher leadership and embedded coaching staffing structures are a critical lever for instructional improvement.

Across both teacher focus groups, teachers consistently identified MCLs™ and literacy coaches as one of the strongest levers for improving literacy instruction. When coaching is non-evaluative, embedded, practical, and grounded in daily instructional work, teachers report greater clarity in planning, stronger curriculum implementation, and increased confidence in meeting student needs. Survey data corroborates this broadly across the district: 87.5% of respondents reported that MCLs™ conduct observation and feedback, 93.75% reported MCLs™ leading data meetings focused on literacy, and 75% reported MCLs™ pulling small groups. No respondents indicated that MCLs™ do not exist at their school. It is worth noting, however, that 31.25% of respondents indicated a Literacy Coach does not exist at their school, meaning the coaching landscape varies considerably across ECPS. Educators rated participation in coaching cycles at 2.94 out of 4.00 on the effectiveness scale, suggesting that while coaching is widely valued and demonstrably impactful where it is fully activated, district-wide conditions do not yet consistently allow it to reach its full potential. The capacity constraints and role clarity challenges that shape this picture are explored further in Additional Findings below.

Educators described the positive impact of MCLs™ and literacy coaches on lesson internalization, instructional delivery, and responsiveness to data. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) led by MCLs™ were characterized as focused and purposeful: grounded in student data, aligned to upcoming standards and instructional planning, and structured in ways that allow teacher concerns to surface and be addressed. MCLs™ were also observed co-teaching, modeling instructional practices, and pulling small groups alongside classroom teachers, demonstrating a level of embedded, side-by-side support that goes beyond traditional coaching and directly strengthens instructional delivery in real time. An educator noted: “Training

combined with coaching, data analysis, and peer observation has been most beneficial to my growth as a literacy teacher.”

When coaching is protected, clearly defined, and instructionally centered, it strengthens both individual teacher practice and collective efficacy within grade-level teams.

Strong systems and protected time enable job-embedded professional learning.

In schools where systems are well established, protected time and clear structures support educators in growing within their own communities of learning. Dedicated PLC time, data meetings, and structured collaboration routines create the conditions for teachers to deepen their understanding of curriculum and instructional practices. Grade-level PLCs reflect this pattern in survey data: 81.25% of respondents reported that PLCs are focused on data meetings tied to literacy, and 68.75% reported PLCs supporting co-planning. This data suggests that where these structures exist, they are being used for substantive instructional work rather than administrative tasks. It also suggests room for growth in PLC support of co-planning practices, including unit and lesson internalization.

Leaders and teachers alike emphasized the value of professional learning that builds knowledge of instructional materials and strengthens their implementation. LETRS training stood out as both the most widely attended professional learning activity (90.63% of respondents) and the most appreciated. Educators valued its research grounding and practical classroom applicability. As one educator noted: “The LETRS training was so all-encompassing. I learned many things about our English language and now see literacy in a whole new way. I was able to work with peers to utilize strategies learned in our classrooms, and I was able to share with my students ‘what I learned in teacher school.’ It continues to be so impactful.” This pattern is consistent with broader feedback that professional learning is most valued when it is deeply grounded in the science of reading and directly connected to daily instructional practice.

Additional Findings

Educational leaders benefit from robust, targeted development opportunities that focus on instructional practices and adult learning.

Coaches and instructional leaders reported benefiting from training that shifts the focus from student-centered strategies to adult-centered learning. MCLs™, in particular, expressed a desire for more preparation in leading adults, facilitating coaching conversations, and navigating day-to-day role expectations. Greater clarity and consistency in the MCL™ role across schools emerged as a need, especially as responsibilities vary depending on school context.

Capacity constraints limit the impact of coaches and ATR™ leaders.

While coaching and MCL™ support is widely valued, its effectiveness is closely tied to staffing and resource capacity. Scheduling structures and formal district accountability for these roles can also be significant levers: when principals and ATR™ leaders are held accountable for student and teacher data at the district level, implementation fidelity tends to improve. Budget constraints and staffing shortages often require ATR™ leaders and coaches to fill classroom coverage gaps, limiting their ability to engage in modeling, co-teaching, and classroom observation – practices that educators identify as most impactful.

MCLs™ described feeling stretched thin, particularly when responsible for simultaneous teaching blocks (e.g., when foundational skills instruction occurs across multiple grade levels at once), which constrains coaching availability. Teachers also noted that the strength and consistency of coaching support varies across grade bands and content areas depending on how MCL™ time is allocated within a school. The district-wide instructional roles data reflects this variation: while MCL™ engagement across key coaching activities is strong overall, analysis from Carver Elementary suggests higher activation is achievable: reporting 100% on both observation and feedback and data meeting facilitation, compared to 87.5% and 93.75% district-wide. This gap between what is possible when MCL™ roles are fully activated and what is consistent across the system is itself an argument for the structures and protections the ENC Literacy Pilot Model aims to put in place.

Implications for the ENC Literacy Pilot Model

Literacy-specific coaches or ATR™ leaders who support a small group of educators to skillfully implement curriculum are widely perceived as high-leverage. Schools and districts may need support in directing new and existing funding, staff capacity, and time to develop and/or maximize a school-based coaching strategy. Districts also need a professional learning

strategy that supports and complements this school-based coaching approach.

The research base on ATR™ underscores that impact is not automatic: it is a function of how the model is implemented. Statewide evaluation findings indicate that effects on student achievement grow meaningfully with years of implementation and are strongest in schools where the model operates at school-wide scale with role fidelity intact. For the ENC Literacy Pilot, this means that ATR™ capacity should be treated as a structural investment to protect over time, not a variable to adjust in response to budget pressures. Districts and state partners will need to advocate for sustainable funding structures, including salary supplements that make these roles viable, to ensure the conditions under which ATR™ produces its strongest results are consistently in place.

Culture of Literacy

Fostering a culture of literacy is not one of the four Essentials for Excellent Instruction, but it is explicitly named in ECPS's student-centered vision: students should learn in environments where reading is valued, visible, and celebrated, and where they are encouraged to see themselves as confident, curious readers and communicators. In that sense, a culture of literacy is both a precondition for excellent instruction and its ultimate expression: the environment in which all four essentials take root and become meaningful to students. Because it is woven into the vision that anchors this entire analysis, it warrants its own examination: not as a fifth essential, but as a lens for understanding whether the instructional work underway in ECPS is adding up to something students can feel.

Instructional Strengths

Educators hold strong, science-aligned beliefs about literacy and high confidence in their ability to teach it.

ECPS educators' beliefs about literacy instruction are not only aligned with the science of reading, they reflect a genuinely internalized professional commitment to what students need. Educators had a high level of agreement to the statement "students learn best when instruction is explicit and systematic" with an average rating of 3.61 out of 4.00 (4.00 = Strongly agree; 1 = Strongly disagree), followed by "literacy practices should be consistent across classrooms" (3.48), "phonological awareness should take precedence in early literacy instruction" (3.39), and "decoding skills are the most important factor for developing independent reading comprehension" (3.26). These are the

beliefs that underpin the instructional practices documented throughout this report.

Equally notable is the confidence educators bring to this work. Survey findings indicate high confidence in their ability to develop foundational literacy skills (3.52 out of 4.00, 1 = Not confident; 4 = Very confident) and to help students become proficient readers (3.45). When asked specifically about HQIM, educators reported high confidence in both using (3.52) and adapting (3.55) high-quality instructional materials to meet student needs, which proves a meaningful signal given the implementation demands of curricula like the 95 Percent Group and Benchmark Advance.

This combination of belief and confidence creates a strong foundation for the culture of literacy the district's vision describes, in which teachers are not simply delivering content but actively working to cultivate students who see themselves as capable, curious readers.

The physical and instructional environment reflects a shared commitment to making literacy visible.

Reading materials were present and accessible in 96.6% of observed classrooms, a pattern consistent with educators' expressed aspiration to create spaces where students encounter reading as meaningful and valued. Across focus groups, teachers spoke repeatedly about wanting students to see themselves as readers, not merely as students completing literacy tasks, reflecting an understanding that culture of literacy is something deliberately cultivated, not passively assumed.

When professional learning reinforces this orientation, the effect is multiplicative. LETRS training, in particular, appeared to shift not just instructional technique but how educators understand language and literacy itself. As one educator described: "I now see literacy in a whole new way... I was able to work with peers to utilize strategies learned in our classrooms, and I was able to share with my students what I learned in teacher school." This kind of reorientation, where teachers become invested learners and advocates for literacy, is a prerequisite for the culture the district's vision articulates.

Additional Findings

Educator skepticism about standardized assessments signals a tension between accountability measures and the culture of literacy educators are

working to build.

The only belief item to fall below the agreement threshold in the survey was "standardized assessments are a reliable indicator of a student's literacy performance," which registered at 2.39 out of 4.00. This finding is consistent with broader patterns documented throughout this report: educators widely perceive a misalignment between the state accountability system and the day-to-day literacy work happening in classrooms. When the measures used to evaluate student progress are not trusted to capture what is being taught and learned, it creates a structural tension that can inadvertently work against the culture educators are actively trying to build.

The belief that "it is realistic to expect students to reach grade-level reading proficiency by 3rd grade" registered at 3.03 out of 4.00: technically above the agreement threshold, but meaningfully lower than every other science-of-reading-aligned belief item in the survey. This modest score likely reflects not a lack of commitment to the vision, but honest uncertainty about whether current conditions (e.g., instructional materials, intervention capacity, staffing supports) are reliably sufficient to deliver it.

The conditions for a culture of literacy are unevenly activated across schools.

Across schools, the aspiration for a culture of literacy was genuine and widespread, but the structural conditions that make that culture consistent varied considerably across sites. These conditions may include: access to diverse and engaging texts beyond the core curriculum, school-wide routines that make reading visible and celebrated, shared language about what a culture of literacy looks like in practice. Where school leadership has made culture of literacy an explicit, named priority, the effects are visible in classroom environments, in how teachers talk about students as readers, and in the coherence between what students experience in core instruction and in intervention. Where those commitments are less explicitly held or articulated, the aspiration remains individual rather than collective.

It is also worth naming the relationship between materials coherence and culture of literacy. When students engage consistently with rich, complex texts, particularly in knowledge-building and comprehension instruction, the conditions for a genuine reading culture are more fully in place. The current

	gap in comprehension materials documented in the Core Instruction findings above is therefore not only an instructional issue; it is also a culture-of-literacy issue. A coherent suite of materials is one of the conditions that makes the vision of "confident, curious readers and communicators" something every classroom can work toward, rather than something that depends on individual teacher initiative.
Implications for the ENC Literacy Pilot Model	The ENC Literacy Pilot Model has an opportunity to build directly on ECPS educators' strong beliefs and confidence while addressing the structural and material conditions needed to translate those beliefs into a consistent, visible culture of literacy at every school. Priority areas include ensuring access to a coherent suite of HQIM for knowledge-building and comprehension that supports authentic engagement with complex texts; establishing school-wide routines and shared expectations that make reading visible, valued, and celebrated beyond the core curriculum; and supporting educators in developing common language about what a culture of literacy looks like at every level.

Vision in Practice: Summary of Findings

Across all four essentials, ECPS demonstrates meaningful alignment with its student-centered literacy vision, with particularly strong evidence in the areas of instructional materials use and shared commitment to students. The findings also surface consistent opportunities to deepen that alignment, particularly in the coherence of implementation systems across schools.

What we saw and heard that suggests educators are on track:

- **93.1% of observed classrooms had district-provided instructional materials in active use**, and the same proportion of teachers demonstrated explicit, systematic instruction in foundational skills. Survey data reinforces this pattern: approximately 97% of educators reported engaging in science of reading-aligned practices on a daily or weekly basis, and rated all of these practices as effective in supporting student growth.
- Reflecting the district's current emphasis on vocabulary, **96% of observed classrooms demonstrated explicit vocabulary support for students**, with numerous educators citing this district priority as a driver in their instructional choices.
- **Reading materials were visible in 96.6% of observed classrooms**, and educators expressed a shared desire to foster a culture of reading in their schools and classrooms.
- **Educators hold strong, science-aligned beliefs about literacy and high confidence in their ability to teach it.** Survey data indicates high agreement across core science of reading principles. Educators rated these principles as highly effective, and reported that their confidence levels in implementing these skills were equally high: educators rated their ability to develop foundational

literacy skills and to help students become proficient readers as between effective and very effective. This signals that the district's investment in professional learning is producing not just competence, but genuine professional conviction.

What we saw and heard that suggests there is more work to do:

- *Core Instruction*: A standards-first mindset, shaped in part by the weight of state assessments in NC's accountability system, sometimes led teachers to supplement or depart from the designed sequence of adopted materials, reducing coherence across classrooms. In some cases, limited ATR™ leader availability for collaborative planning may compound this dynamic.
- *Assessment*: Perceived misalignment between curriculum-embedded assessments and the EOG led many teachers to deprioritize the formative tools provided by core programs in favor of supplemental assessments seen as more closely aligned to state test formats.
- *Responsive Student Supports*: Staffing and capacity constraints limited consistent delivery of Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports, even in schools with strong data practices and a clear commitment to responding to student needs.
- *Continuing Development for Educators*: While coaching is widely valued, variation in ATR™ leaders role clarity and the frequency with which ATR™ leaders and coaches are pulled into administrative or classroom coverage roles limited the depth and consistency of instructional support available across schools.
- *Culture of Literacy*: While educator beliefs and classroom environments reflect a genuine commitment to fostering a culture of literacy, the structural conditions that make that culture consistent varied considerably across schools. These conditions include: access to diverse texts, school-wide routines that celebrate reading, and shared language about what a culture of literacy looks like in practice.

Taken together, these findings paint a picture of a district with a strong foundation (e.g., a clear vision, strong adoption and implementation of high-quality materials, and a genuine centering of the student experience), alongside a set of specific, addressable implementation challenges that the ENC Literacy Pilot Model is designed to help solve for. Educators themselves reflect this readiness: survey data indicates high confidence in their ability to develop student literacy (3.52 out of 4.00; 1 = Not confident, 4 = Very confident) and to implement and adapt high-quality instructional materials (3.55), suggesting ECPS enters the next phase of this work not only with the right vision, but with the professional foundation to carry it forward.

Map the Implementation Chain

Findings from this audit enable us to begin developing an implementation chain: the actions that educators from the district to the classroom must prioritize to realize their vision for excellent literacy instruction at scale across the district. This draft implementation chain draws on best practices and enabling conditions we observed at work in ECPS, as well as practices that educators expressed a desire to see developed

further at the district and school levels. A more detailed implementation chain will be included in the ENC Literacy Pilot Model framework.

These actions all point toward the clear, student-centered vision for literacy described in the “Vision” section above. As a result of our ideal implementation chain, students are engaging with grade-level content supported by the materials in use, receiving data-driven responsive student supports, and experiencing a positive classroom literacy culture.

	Key Actions
Teachers/ Instructional Staff	• Deliver evidence-based, standards-aligned instruction, supported by classroom materials • Use formative assessments to adjust Tier 1 instruction and plan for interventions • Directly and regularly engage in collaborative planning, coaching, and job-embedded professional learning to improve instructional practices, supported by ATR™ leaders/literacy coaches • Cultivate a culture of literacy by ensuring consistent access to diverse reading materials and opportunities for students to engage with texts beyond the core curriculum
Coaches/ Multi-Classroom Leaders®	• Support teachers’ instructional practices through cycles of observation/feedback, modeling instructional practices, and facilitating collaborative planning • Lead formative data analysis and planning for responsive student supports • Deliver curriculum-based professional development aligned with teacher and student needs
School Leadership	• Allocate ATR™ capacity to literacy and protect their time to ensure sustained support, keeping each MCL’s™ focus to a team of no more than 8 teachers in alignment with Opportunity Culture® design principles. • Develop collaborative planning and coaching structures for ATR™ leaders to support teachers, and for coaches to support Tier 3 student supports • Enable data use through protected, structured data review time Develop schedules that reflect protected planning and professional learning time for educators, instructional leaders,

	and coaches • Establish systems and expectations that promote a culture of literacy, including access to diverse texts and consistent opportunities for reading beyond the core curriculum
District Leadership	• Procure a coherent suite HQIM for foundational skills and comprehension that includes resources for intervention • Adopt an Advanced Teaching Roles™ strategy and support school leadership teams to allocate adequate ATR™ capacity to literacy Provide high-quality, job-embedded, sustained professional learning for school leaders, coaches/ATR™ leaders, and teachers

Measure Progress and Adjust Strategy

Conducting this qualitative research study required project partners to design, pilot, and refine a set of core data collection tools, including a classroom observation instrument, an interview protocol, and an educator survey. These tools have since been strengthened and will anchor measurement efforts in the ENC Literacy Pilot, enabling partners to assess the implementation of key actions across the implementation chain. Participating districts will collect baseline data on current practices prior to launch and gather follow-up implementation data at regular intervals throughout the pilot. These data will support decision-making and continuous improvement at multiple levels of the system, as outlined in the table below.

Who	What the data is used for	Routines that support this
Project Partners	• Monitor the progress of pilot districts • Identify implementation patterns (strengths, gaps, variations) • Refine strategy, allocate resources, adjust supports	• Regular data reviews (e.g., bi-monthly or quarterly) using a structured protocol
District and School Leaders	• Identify implementation strengths and gaps across schools and classrooms • Adjust approach to staffing and time allocation • Target professional learning for school-based personnel	• Calibration/norming on evidence collection • Monthly huddle to review data and plan for support

Coaches / ATR™ leaders	• Identify implementation strengths and gaps across classrooms • Target coaching and professional learning	• Calibration/norming on evidence collection • Monthly huddle to review data and plan for support
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Looking Ahead: Developing the ENC Literacy Pilot Model

The qualitative data collected and analyzed through this study have directly informed the development of a shared vision for high-quality literacy instruction, a set of priorities for the student experience, and a draft implementation chain outlining the key actions educators at every level must take to bring that vision to life. The next phase of work will translate these findings into a fully realized ENC Literacy Pilot Model: a scalable framework for improving literacy outcomes across Eastern North Carolina.

The primary work in April 2026 is to identify and operationalize the strategic levers that project partners and district leaders must activate to support implementation across the system. Possible levers of influence include guidance on high-quality instructional materials, targeted use of existing funding, formative assessment systems that accurately capture student progress, alignment to the new NC ELA standards taking effect in 2027–28, curriculum-based professional learning at every level of the system, and a communications strategy for families, educators, and policymakers. A complete lever map, tied to an implementation timeline, will be included in the ENC Literacy Pilot Model framework. Ultimately, this work is in service of a single goal: ensuring that every student across Eastern North Carolina experiences the kind of excellent literacy instruction that opens doors and expands what is possible for them.

About This Report

This report was produced as part of Phase I of the ENC Literacy Project, a multi-year effort to improve early literacy outcomes across rural Eastern North Carolina. It documents findings from a qualitative evaluation of instructional practices in Edgecombe County Public Schools conducted between December 2025 and March 2026, and informs the design of the ENC Literacy Pilot Model.

BEST NC is a nonprofit organization committed to ensuring every student in North Carolina has access to excellent educators. BEST NC advances this mission through research, policy advocacy, and strategic partnerships that strengthen educator quality and pipeline across the state.

Watershed Advisors partners with school systems, nonprofits, and funders to design and implement strategies for improving student outcomes at scale. Watershed's work spans instructional systems, professional learning, and organizational strategy.

The Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at NC State University is a research and development center that advances education through applied research, professional learning, and leadership development. The Friday Institute partners with districts and policymakers to strengthen teaching and learning across North Carolina.

Public Impact is a national education organization dedicated to extending the reach of excellent teaching through the Opportunity Culture® model. Public Impact works with districts to design and implement Advanced Teaching Role structures that give more students access to great teachers and give those teachers the support and compensation they deserve.

Part C | Early Literacy Bright Spots in North Carolina: Practices, Conditions, and Beliefs



Originally published in April 2026

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Overview

A cross-sectional survey of 11 North Carolina Bright Spot elementary schools (89 respondents) examined the practices, leadership, assessment, professional learning, and beliefs that distinguish schools outperforming peers in early literacy. Schools were identified via k-means clustering across three peer groups — Low EDS/Low Needs, Rural/Small, and High EDS/High Needs — ensuring fair comparisons. Strong outcomes reflect a school-wide system of shared beliefs, aligned instruction, and intentional structures, not any single program.

Key Findings

- Science of Reading practices dominate. 90%+ report daily phonological awareness, explicit phonics, and small-group instruction. Heggerty (64%), UFLI (48%), and Foundations (42%) are the top curricula.
- Leadership drives literacy as a schoolwide priority. 83% have principals engaged in literacy data meetings; 87% have literacy-focused grade-level PLCs.
- Progress monitoring is the assessment backbone. Used weekly by most educators and rated highest for effectiveness (3.54/4.00) across all assessment types.
- LETRS anchors professional learning. 89% have participated in LETRS; 76% in phonological awareness training. Educators most value PL that explains the "why" and delivers practical, classroom-ready strategies.
- Beliefs and confidence are high — with one gap. 95–98% agree literacy should be explicit, systematic, and consistent. 97%+ are confident in foundational skills and HQIM use, but only 29% feel very confident in writing connected to reading.

Areas for Growth & Implications

Priority	Finding	Implication
Scale embedded coaching	84% lack MCL™ structures; 44% lack a literacy coach	Expand embedded instructional leadership as an under-utilized lever
Strengthen writing PL	Lowest confidence area across all schools	Target professional development even in high-performing schools
Address assessment skepticism	60% don't trust standardized assessments to capture literacy growth	Pair progress monitoring with comprehension tools educators find credible

Continue to the next page to access the full report as it was originally published.



Early Literacy Bright Spots in North Carolina

Practices, Conditions, and Beliefs

April 2026

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Executive Summary

Using survey methodology, this study examined the instructional practices, materials, leadership structures, assessment approaches, professional learning experiences, and beliefs present in North Carolina schools identified as “Bright Spots” in early literacy outcomes. Findings indicate that these schools share an approach to literacy instruction grounded in evidence-based practices and supported by strong organizational structures.

Key Findings

Instructional Practices & Materials: Across bright spot schools, educators consistently reported using structured literacy curricula alongside supplemental and teacher-created materials to meet diverse student needs. Instructional practices were closely aligned with the Science of Reading, with phonological awareness, explicit phonics, and small-group instruction implemented daily by the vast majority of teachers. These practices were also perceived as the most effective, indicating strong alignment between beliefs and classroom implementation.

Leadership Structures: Leadership and collaboration emerged as enabling conditions. Schools demonstrated a shared responsibility for literacy through active principal involvement in data-driven decision-making and widespread use of grade-level professional learning communities (PLCs). However, despite these strong structures, educators identified capacity constraints. In particular, teachers noted the need for additional instructional coaches, interventionists, and instructional assistants.

Assessment Approaches: Assessment practices further reinforced this coherent system. Educators reported frequent (primarily weekly) use of multiple assessment types, with progress monitoring identified as the most valuable tool for informing real-time instructional decisions.

Professional Learning Experiences: Professional learning experiences, particularly LETRS and phonological awareness training, were experienced widely and highly valued, especially when they combined research-based explanations with practical classroom applications.

Beliefs about Early Literacy: Educators across Bright Spot schools demonstrated strong alignment in their beliefs about early literacy instruction, emphasizing the importance of explicit, systematic instruction and early intervention. High levels of

teacher self-efficacy were reported, particularly in foundational literacy skills, though slightly lower confidence in writing instruction suggests an area for future support.

Introduction

North Carolina has invested heavily in strengthening early literacy through initiatives such as DPI-supported literacy coaches and mandatory Science of Reading training for all elementary teachers. However, even with these supports in place, there is uneven implementation and outcomes in early literacy across the state. While many schools are still working to implement these initiatives, there are schools that have shown to have positively impacted student early literacy. It is important to better understand the practices, conditions, and beliefs of these schools. The Friday Institute, in partnership with Watershed Advisors and Best NC, conducted a cross-sectional survey of these “Bright Spot” schools in early literacy outcomes to better understand the instructional practices, materials, leadership structures, assessment approaches, professional learning experiences, and beliefs within these schools.

This study is being done in conjunction with Watershed Advisors and BEST NC who concurrently examined how Edgecombe County Public Schools (ECPS) operationalizes its student-centered vision for literacy and the instructional practices and systems that support that work. Together these efforts will help inform the ENC Literacy Pilot Model, a framework designed to translate effective practices into a scalable model for improving literacy outcomes. This report focuses only on the “Bright Spot” schools.

Study Design

The objectives of this study are to identify schools that outperform their peers in literacy outcomes and understand the practices, conditions, and beliefs about early literacy within these schools that support these outcomes. This study utilized a cross-sectional survey with criterion-based purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2012; Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling is appropriate for this study because the goal is to identify schools that demonstrated success in early literacy proficiency (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). After identification, schools meeting the selection criteria were invited to complete a survey regarding their literacy practices, instructional conditions, leadership structures, and beliefs about early literacy.

A cross-sectional survey design was appropriate because it allowed the research team to collect information from a large number of schools at a single point in time and

identify patterns across schools with strong literacy outcomes. This design is well-suited for describing current practices, beliefs, and conditions (Creswell, 2012).

Research Questions

This study was guided by a set of research questions. Within NC schools with a proven record of student growth in early literacy:

1. **Practices, Materials, and Structures:** What are the key instructional practices, materials (including HQIM), leadership structures, and enabling conditions that lead to effective early literacy instruction and improved student outcomes as perceived by teachers and administrators in these schools?
2. **Assessments:** Which early literacy assessments are being used across schools, and how do teachers and leaders perceive their usefulness for identifying student needs and driving instruction?
3. **Professional Learning:** What are the key professional learning experiences of these teachers and administrators to support early literacy, and how do they perceive its usefulness?
4. **Beliefs and Instructional Orientation:** What beliefs do teachers hold about early literacy development, effective literacy instruction, and student learning, and what is their self-efficacy toward early literacy practices?

Criterion-Based Sampling

We followed a criterion-based sampling strategy to identify North Carolina elementary schools with a recent history of positive outlier performance on End-of-Grade (EOG) reading exams. To ensure fair comparisons, schools were grouped with peers via a k-means clustering algorithm prior to evaluating performance on EOGs.

School sampling utilized publicly available data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI), specifically focusing on the 2023-24 and 2024-25 disaggregated school performance datasets. Because the full suite of 2024-25 school report card data is not slated for release until June 2026, the 2023-24 report card metrics served as a proxy for school characteristics. This substitution is supported by historical trends indicating that school-level demographic and operational metrics remain relatively stable year-over-year.

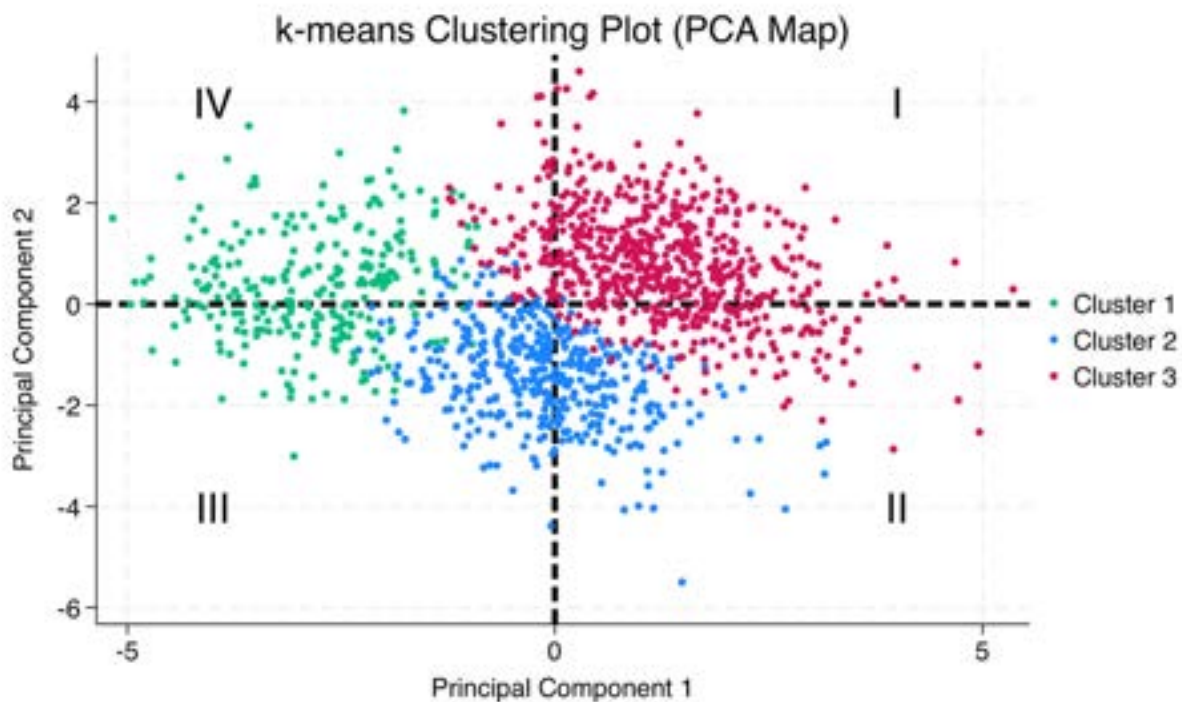
To define the characteristics of each school, eleven distinct variables were standardized and incorporated into the model. These spanned four primary domains: financial investment (total per-pupil spending), operational metrics (student-teacher

ratios, total enrollment, and short-term suspension rates), staffing profiles (the percentage of beginning teachers and National Board-certified staff), and demographic compositions (minority enrollment, ESL enrollment, economic disadvantage, and urbanicity).

The k-means clustering algorithm was employed to partition schools into distinct groups based on the similarity of these eleven standardized variables. This unsupervised machine learning approach functions by iteratively assigning schools to a cluster whose center point is mathematically nearest, then recalculating that center point based on the new membership until the groups reach a stable state.

Determining the optimal number of clusters, k , involved a two-step validation process to ensure the groupings were mathematically sound. An Elbow Method analysis was first used to visually identify the point of diminishing returns in variance reduction. This was subsequently verified by the Calinski-Harabasz pseudo-F statistic, which confirmed that $k=3$ provided the most robust separation. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was further utilized to visualize these multi-dimensional relationships within a two-dimensional space, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Principal Component Analysis map, NC elementary schools



Descriptive profiles were assigned to each cluster by observing their location on the PCA map relative to the variables driving each axis. For example, the top-left cluster was designated “Low EDS/Low Needs” (Cluster 1, green) because its placement anchors the far left of the x-axis, positioning it directly opposite the high-poverty variables like EDS and Title I. The remaining two clusters, “High EDS/High Needs” (Cluster 3, red) and “Small/Rural” (Cluster 2, blue), were defined using the same process.

Once the clusters were established, school performance was evaluated strictly within the context of each peer group. Reading proficiency rates were standardized by cluster, year, and grade level to identify schools performing significantly above their group mean. A binary scoring system was implemented to flag schools that reached the top 5th or 10th percentiles of their respective clusters.

The final selection criteria were tailored to the specific characteristics of each cluster. For the “Low EDS/Low Needs” group, schools were required to achieve an aggregate outlier score of 3 or higher, signifying 90th percentile performance in at least three of the four measured EOG categories across both academic years. Conversely, for the “Small/Rural” and “High EDS/High Needs” clusters, the threshold for identification required a higher intensity of performance: schools had to place in the 95th percentile of their cluster for at least two EOG categories while maintaining a 90th percentile ranking in at least three categories. This tiered methodology ensures that identified schools are not merely high-performing, but are true statistical anomalies relative to their specific operational environments.

Survey Data Collection, Participants and Analysis

In partnership with Watershed Advisors and BEST NC, the Friday Institute developed a survey to gain an understanding of early literacy practices in the classroom, beliefs on early literacy, and educator professional learning. Specifically, this survey asked educators to identify specific curriculum being used in the classroom, the frequency and perceived effectiveness of early literacy practices (i.e., phonological awareness, planning time, small groups, etc.), their confidence in teaching early literacy topics, which support staff is available to help them with early literacy (i.e., literacy coach, grade-level PLCs, Multi-Classroom Leaders®, etc.), and what professional development they have received related to early literacy. The survey contained both open- and closed-ended items and can be found in Appendix A.

This survey was sent to Bright Spot schools that agreed to participate (n=11). Principals were asked to send the survey link to all K–3 ELA teachers, literacy coaches, coaches

who support K–3 literacy, and interventionists. The survey was open for one month (March 2026) to collect responses. Respondents received a \$20 Amazon gift card for participating in the survey. Upon closing the survey, the Friday Institute computed frequencies, percentages, and descriptive statistics for closed-ended items. For Likert items, responses were coded numerically to enable descriptive analysis. For open-ended questions, analysis looked across responses for themes.

Participants

The survey yielded 89 responses from educators across the Bright Spot schools. Eight-three percent of respondents were classroom teachers (see Figure 2 for a breakdown of all roles reported), and there was approximately equal representation of teachers working with Kindergarten through 3rd grade. Respondents represented a more veteran population, with 74% having 9 or more years of experience in education (Figure 3) and 71% reporting 9 or more years of experience with early literacy.

Figure 2. Respondents' Educational Role

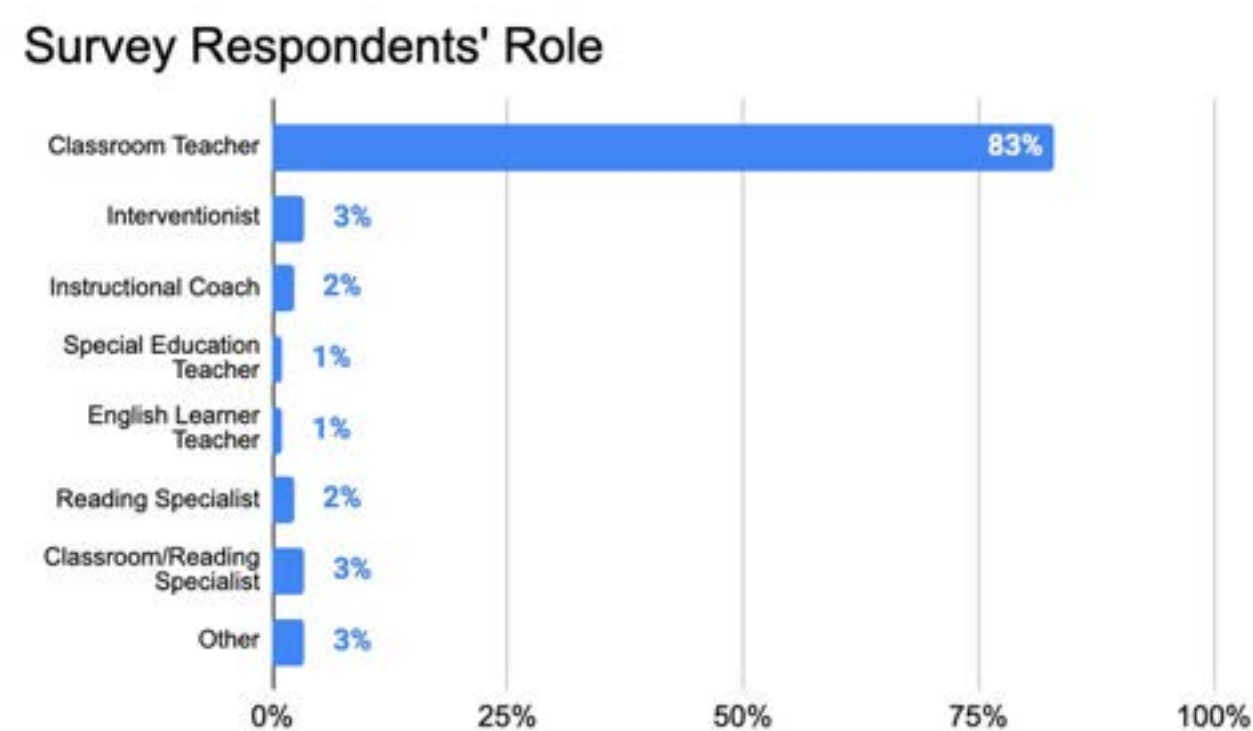
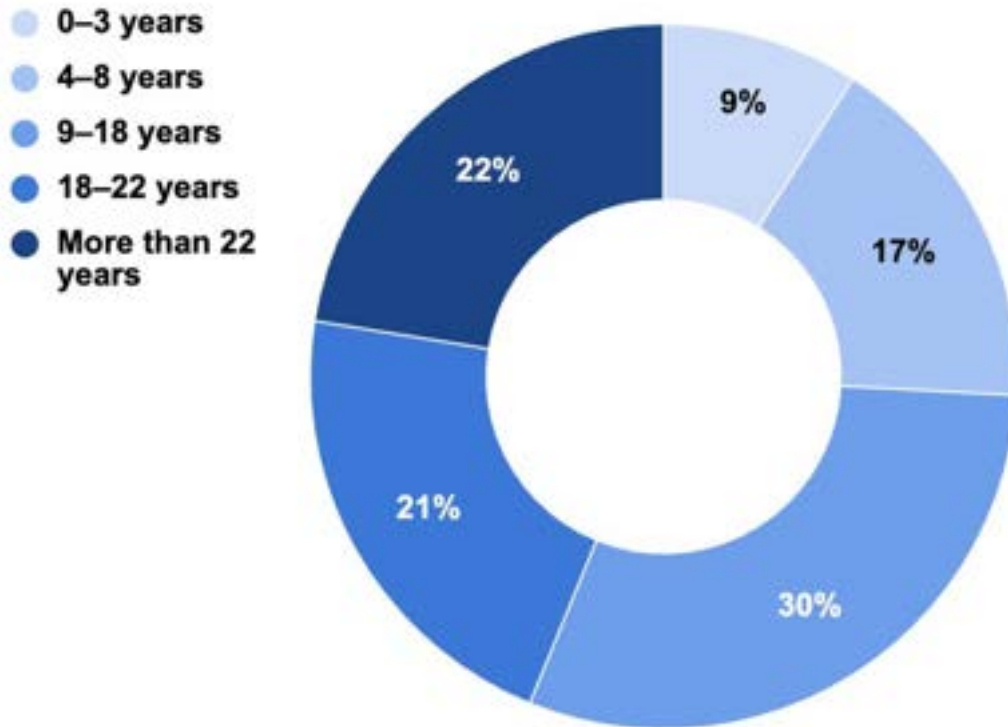


Figure 3. Respondents' Experience

Years of Experience in Education of Survey Respondents



Limitations

This study has several important limitations. First, findings are based on self-reported survey data from teachers and administrators, which may be influenced by recall bias or differences in how respondents interpret and report their practices. Additionally, the cross-sectional design captures data at a single point in time, limiting the ability to draw causal conclusions or understand how instructional practices and supports evolve over time.

School Level Sample Identification and Findings

A primary goal of this research is to identify Bright Spot schools for early literacy and to understand the practices, beliefs, and supports within those schools. The following section begins with an overview of the schools identified as Bright Spots and then presents the findings from the survey administered to these schools.

Bright Spot Schools Overview

The criterion-based sampling process yielded 41 candidate Bright Spot schools throughout the state. Only public, non-charter schools were included. Table 1 below lists the number of schools by cluster.

Table 1. Number of Candidate Bright Spot Schools, by cluster

Cluster	Number of Schools
Cluster 1 - Low EDS/Low Needs	11
Cluster 2 - Rural/Small	7
Cluster 3 - High EDS/High Needs	23

Five schools from cluster 2 and six schools from cluster 3 participated in the survey.

Survey Results

The survey results will be divided into 4 sections, each corresponding to a research question.

Practices, Materials, and Structures

Teachers and administrators in the Bright Spot schools identified a consistent set of instructional practices, curricular materials, and enabling conditions that they believed contributed to strong early literacy instruction and improved student outcomes. Across schools, respondents described a combination of structured literacy curricula, supplemental resources, evidence-based instructional practices, and school supports that together paint a picture of the conditions for their literacy instruction.

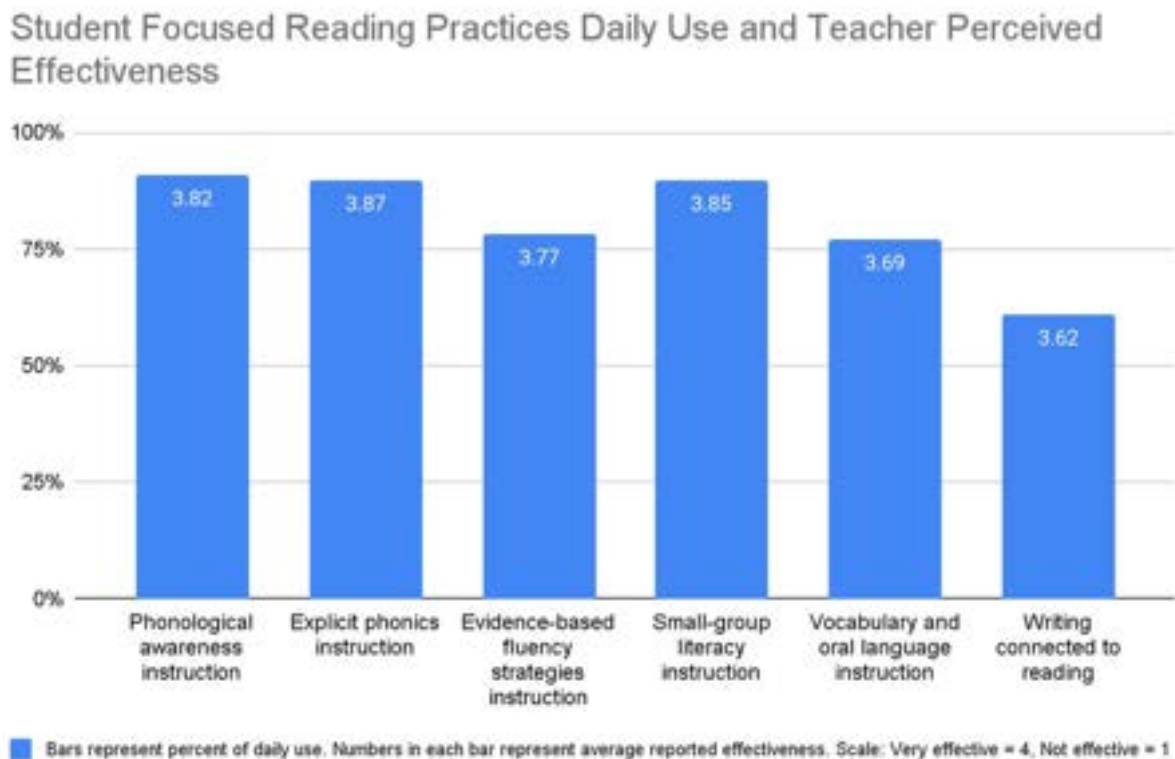
Across schools, the most commonly used literacy materials included Heggerty, which 64% of respondents reported using daily or weekly, followed by UFLI at 48% and Foundations at 42%. About one-third of respondents also reported frequent use of Reading Horizons, while other high-quality instructional materials used regularly included Benchmark, Geodes, Amplify, i-Ready, and Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts. See Appendix B for a complete list of all curricula and their reported usage.

In addition to formal curricula, educators frequently described using supplemental and teacher-created materials to address student needs. In response to an open-ended question, ReadWorks and teacher-created materials were among the most frequently mentioned resources. **These findings suggest that effective schools often paired**

core, high-quality instructional materials with targeted supplemental resources and teacher-developed materials to address student needs.

The instructional practices perceived as most important were highly aligned with evidence-based early literacy instruction/the science of reading. More than 90% of respondents reported using phonological awareness instruction, explicit phonics instruction, and small-group literacy instruction daily, and these same practices were also rated as the most effective for supporting students (see Figure 4). Additional literacy practices, including fluency instruction, vocabulary and oral language development, and writing connected to reading, were reported as occurring daily by at least 60% of respondents. Notably, teachers’ perceptions of effectiveness closely mirrored the frequency with which these practices were used, suggesting a strong alignment between what educators viewed as beneficial and what they implemented consistently.

Figure 4. Educators reported practices and perceived effectiveness



With regard to structure, a key enabling condition in Bright Spot schools is the presence of leadership and collaborative structures that signal that early literacy is

treated as a schoolwide priority rather than an individual one (see Table 2). At the leadership level, 83% of Bright Spot educators reported having a principal or assistant principal engaged in literacy-focused data meetings. This structural commitment at the leadership level suggests that early literacy is institutionalized and may be a contributing factor to why these schools were identified as Bright Spots. Open-ended responses corroborated this, with some educators specifically naming school principals as engaged individuals who have supported effective literacy practices.

Our principal (current interim) is a literacy focused data driven instructional leader. Her leadership is valued and helps us to align to student needs as she provides needed planning, time, support and PD.

At the collaborative level, the majority of Bright Spot educators (87%) reported having grade-level PLCs that serve as a core structure for literacy-focused data meetings. Approximately 65% indicated that this structure extends to include co-planning and co-teaching, reflecting a culture of shared instructional responsibility. Complementing PLCs, Bright Spot educators reported having an instructional coach (73%) and reading interventionist (63%) who support literacy-focused data meetings, with 69% of Bright Spot educators also reporting that their reading interventionist also supports in pulling small groups.

Table 2: Literacy-Focused Roles, Structures, and the Support They Provide

	Observation and feedback	Co-planning or co-teaching	Data meetings focused on literacy	Pulls small groups	Other supports	Does not support literacy instruction or does not exist at my school
Instructional Coach that supports literacy	47.62%	38.10%	72.62%	30.95%	23.81%	0%
Literacy Coach	33.33%	23.81%	44.05%	26.19%	16.67%	44.05%
Multi-Classroom Leader® (MCL™)	2.38%	5.95%	9.52%	5.95%	5.95%	84.52%
Reading Interventionist	28.57%	34.52%	63.10%	69.05%	29.76%	21.43%
Grade-level PLCs	40.48%	65.48%	86.90%	33.33%	30.95%	4.76%

focused on literacy						
Principal/ Assistant Principal	88.10%	21.43%	83.33%	10.71%	33.33%	3.57%

However, even among Bright Spot educators, capacity constraints emerge as a limiting factor. Across open-ended responses, Bright Spot educators consistently requested more instructional coaches, interventionists, teacher assistants, tutors, and volunteers to sustain and expand small-group instruction, co-planning, and teacher feedback. This signals that while the right structures exist, they are not yet resourced at the scale needed to fully meet demand. **Notably, 84% of Bright Spot educators reported that a multi-classroom leader structure either does not exist or does not support literacy in their school, and 44% reported the same of a literacy coach structure.** These point to potential opportunities for extending instructional leadership across classrooms that have yet to be fully realized.

I think having a more full-time literacy coach to provide feedback and co-planning in the classroom would help teachers and students grow in their knowledge of literacy instruction.

Assessments

Findings indicate **educators rely on a comprehensive and responsive assessment system, most frequently using assessment data on a weekly basis to inform instruction.**

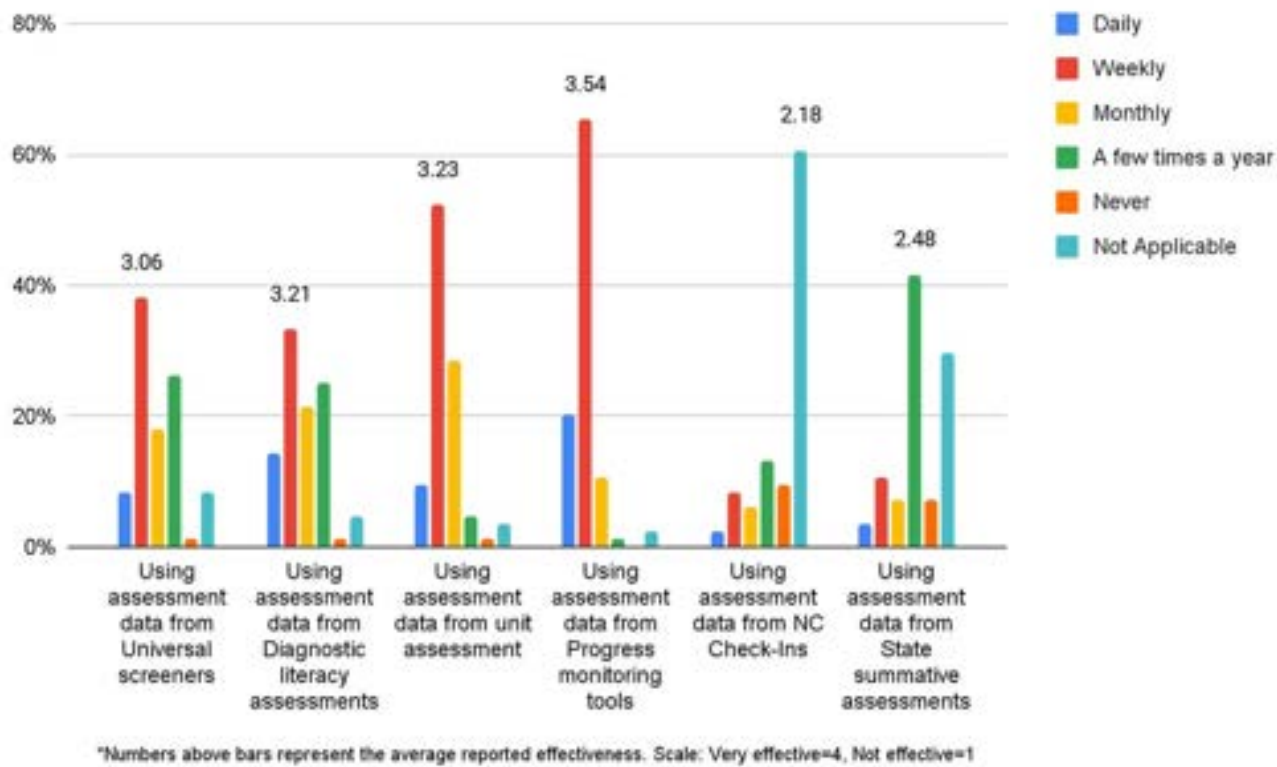
Schools are using multiple types of early literacy assessments with varying frequency to inform instruction. As shown in Figure 5, educators most commonly reported using assessment data on a daily or weekly basis, suggesting that assessment is embedded into ongoing instructional decision-making rather than used only intermittently. In fact, educators most often report using assessment data on a weekly basis. Use declines for monthly or infrequent timeframes, indicating that more responsive, continuous data sources are prioritized over periodic measures.

Consistent with these patterns, educators identified progress monitoring tools as the most useful for supporting student growth, with average ratings ranging from “effective” to “very effective.” The frequent use of progress monitoring data aligns with the perceived value of progress monitoring. Thus, **progress monitoring, in particular,**

stands out as both the most frequently used and most highly valued tool, reflecting a strong emphasis on ongoing, real-time data to guide instructional decisions.

In addition, educators reported regular use of data (daily or weekly) from diagnostic literacy assessments (avg. 3.21 out of 4 effectiveness), unit or curriculum-embedded assessments (avg. 3.23), and universal screeners (avg. 3.06), and that these assessments were effective for impacting student growth. Overall, the findings suggest that schools rely on a comprehensive assessment system with various assessment types. It should be noted that most respondents (61%) do not report using NC Check-ins at their schools.

Figure 5: Use of Various Assessments



Professional Learning

Generally, Bright Spot schools have engaged in various early literacy professional learning, with educators participating in an average of 8 training types (see Figure 6

for the top 5 professional learning trainings). In particular, the majority of Bright Spot schools have engaged in LETRS Training (89.29%) and Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Professional Learning (76.19%). Moreover, this high participation across Bright Spot schools suggests that early literacy professional learning is most likely prioritized at the school level rather than driven solely by individual educators.

Figure 6. Professional learning experiences



In open-ended responses, educators frequently made positive comments about LETRS training. They specifically mentioned that LETRS training explained the why behind reading and not only gave them theoretical knowledge, but also provided practical strategies to implement in the classroom. Educators also mentioned that LETRS training overall helped them build confidence and encouraged growth.

What made LETRS especially great was that it was both research-based and practical. The training helped me understand why certain instructional practices are effective, not just what to do. It also gave me strategies I could immediately apply with my first-grade students, especially when teaching phonics and supporting struggling readers... Overall, completing LETRS strengthened my confidence as a literacy teacher and improved the way I support my students as they develop foundational reading skills.

These findings from the open-ended responses indicate that effective professional development entails explaining to educators the "why" behind effective instructional practices while also providing them with concrete strategies to implement. Additionally, educators appreciate the learning that occurs alongside their colleagues, and when it is hands-on. As one survey respondent noted in their response to what was the best early literacy professional learning they have experienced and what made it great: *"Any professional development that is practical and has takeaways that can be implemented relatively easily."*

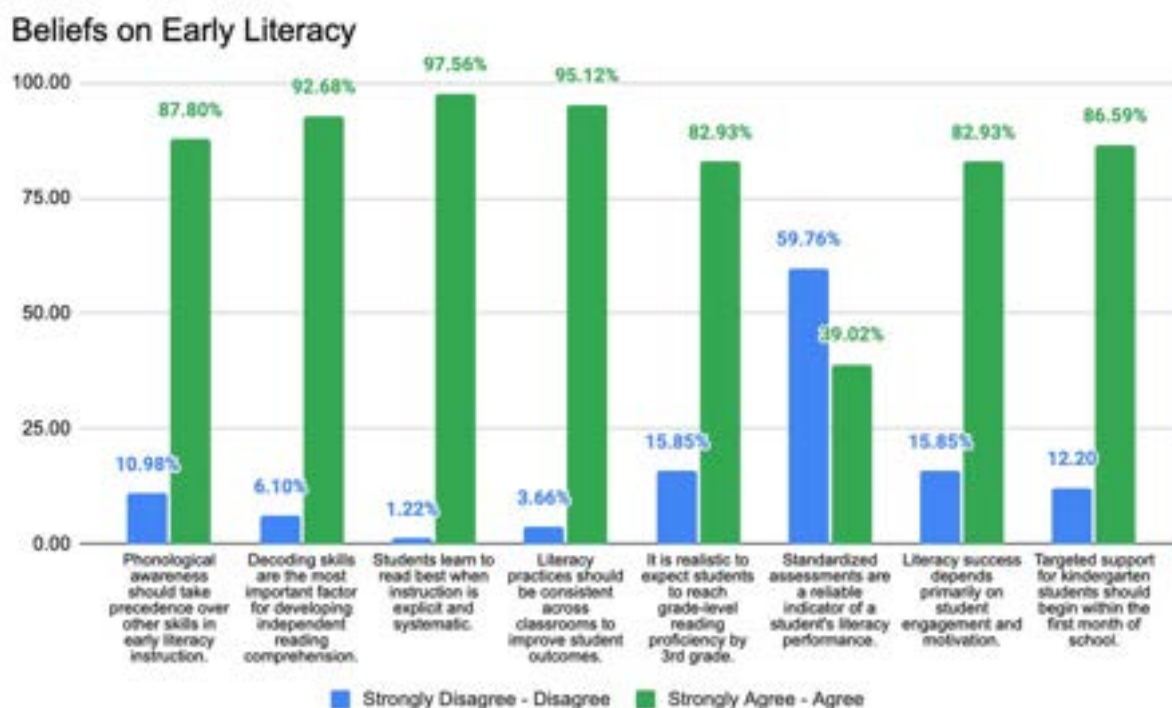
Beliefs and Instructional Orientation

Beliefs on Early Literacy Development, Effective Instruction, & Student Learning

Survey responses reveal that Bright Spot educators hold similar strong beliefs across key dimensions of early literacy (see Figure 7). Regarding effective literacy instruction, the majority of Bright Spot schools (95%-98% of survey respondents) agreed or strongly agreed that early literacy should be consistent across classrooms and delivered through explicit, systematic instruction. Bright Spot educators also believe that phonological awareness and decoding skills are foundational components of early literacy development, suggesting two main areas to prioritize in early literacy instruction. These findings suggest that Bright Spot educators' beliefs are broadly aligned with the Science of Reading, which identifies explicit and systematic instruction, phonological awareness, and decoding as essential principles of effective early literacy instruction. Notably, however, the majority of Bright Spot educators (60%) do not believe standardized assessments are a reliable indicator of a student's literacy performance, suggesting potential skepticism about whether current assessment tools accurately capture student progress.

When it comes to student learning, Bright Spot educators generally agreed that students can achieve grade-level reading proficiency by 3rd grade. Aligned with this finding is the fact that 87% of Bright Spot schools believe that targeted support for kindergarten students should begin within the first month of school. **These findings suggest that Bright Spot educators hold a proactive, early-intervention mindset, recognizing that identifying and supporting students early is important for achieving grade-level reading proficiency by 3rd grade.** However, 83% of Bright Spot educators also agreed or strongly agreed that literacy success primarily depends on student engagement and motivation. Given the way this survey item was framed, it is difficult to determine the degree to which this represents a firmly held belief. However, it is an important area to further explore as connecting literacy success to student motivation and engagement may underestimate the role of effective instruction and support.

Figure 7. Respondents' early literacy beliefs

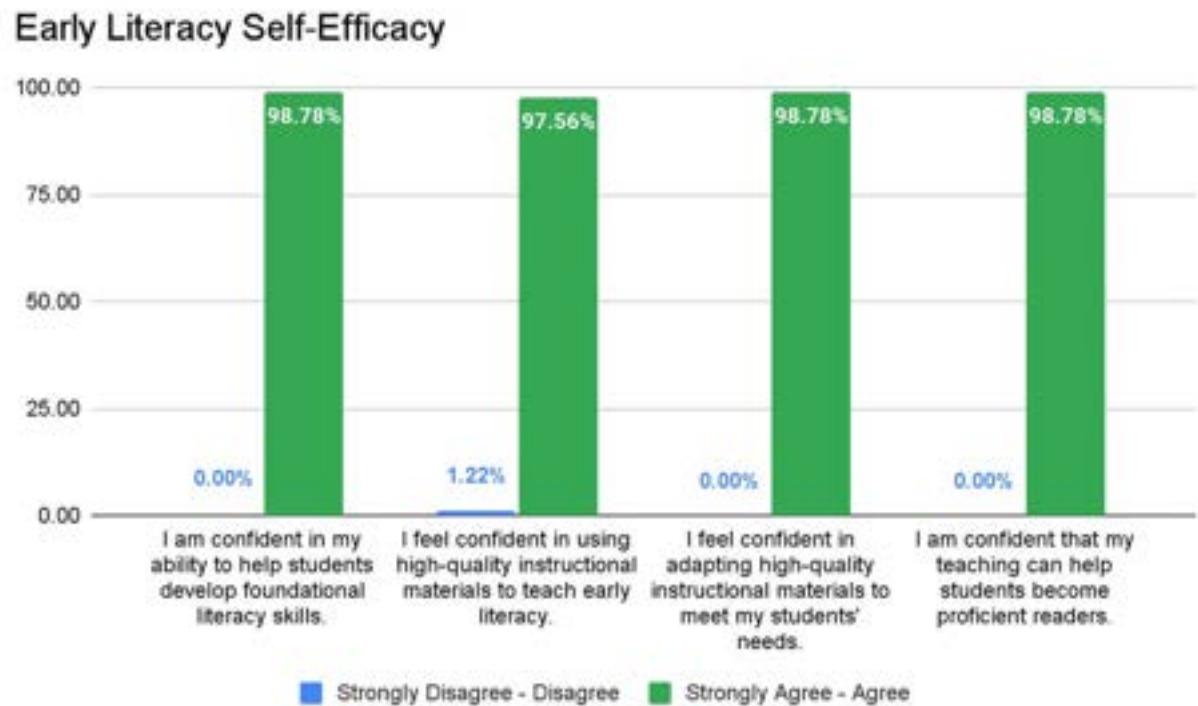


Educators' Self-Efficacy Towards Early Literacy Practices

Bright Spot educators demonstrate self-efficacy across a range of early literacy practices. The majority of educators at Bright Spot schools (97% and above) feel confident in their ability to develop foundational literacy skills, guide their students

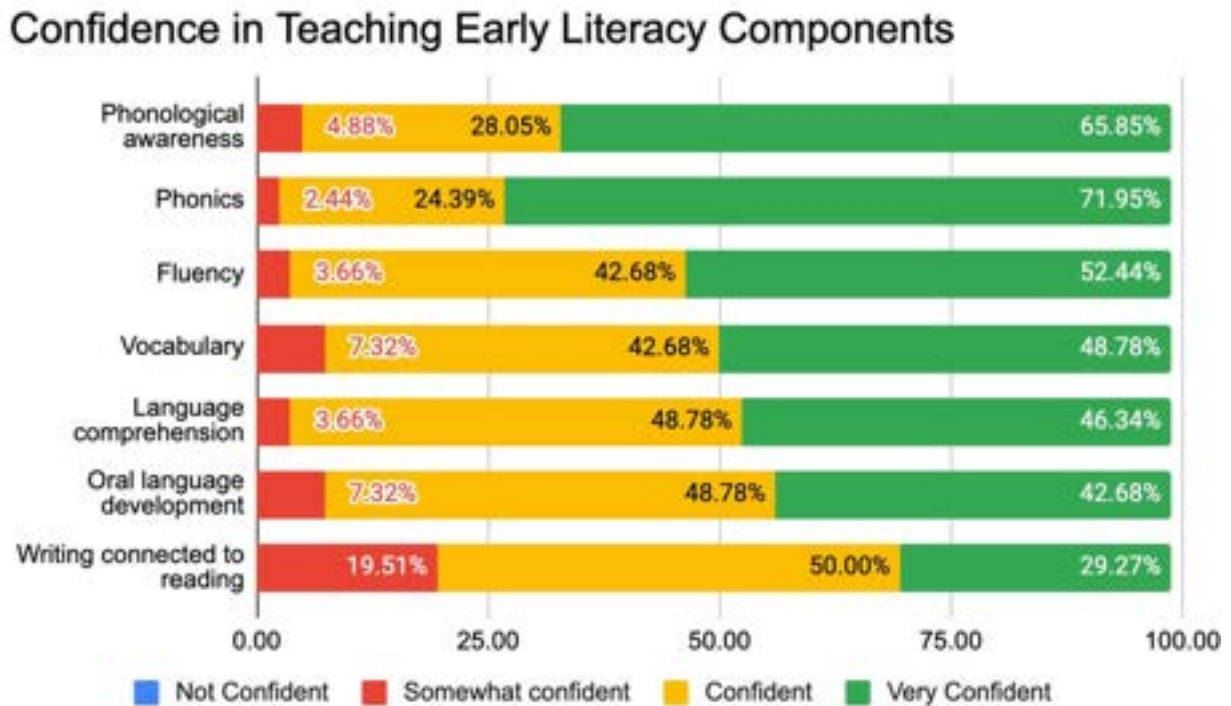
towards reading proficiency, and effectively use and adapt high-quality instructional materials to meet their students' needs (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Respondents' early literacy practices self efficacy



When rating their confidence in specific instructional areas, the majority of Bright Spot educators (between 52% and 65%) reported feeling very confident in teaching phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency. This suggests that **Bright Spot educators feel well prepared to teach the foundational skills of the Science of Reading**. However, confidence is slightly lower in the area of writing connected to reading, with 50% of educators reporting just confident and 20% reporting somewhat confident. **This confidence gap suggests that writing connected to reading may be an area where Bright Spot educators feel less instructionally prepared, indicating a targeted professional development opportunity to strengthen educators' capacity in this area.** See Figure 9 for the levels of confidence reported across each instructional area.

Figure 9. Confidence for teaching early literacy



Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from this report on Bright Spot schools suggest that strong early literacy outcomes are not a result of a single practice or program, but rather a school-wide system built on shared beliefs, aligned instruction, and supportive structures. Bright Spot schools treat early literacy as an institutional priority, suggesting alignment across K-3 classrooms and collaborative efforts toward strong early literacy outcomes. There seems to be strong alignment between what educators in these Bright Spot schools believe about early literacy and what they actually do in classrooms. Their beliefs and practices are strengthened by their ongoing engagement with professional learning opportunities, which itself suggests that early literacy is a high priority for these schools. However, findings also point to areas for growth, particularly around capacity constraints, recognizing the common challenges that all schools face, even when they are identified as Bright Spots. The lower confidence in teaching writing connected to reading also points to an opportunity for growth, suggesting that building teachers'

instructional expertise is an ongoing process, even in schools that are already outperforming their peers.

Overall, these findings illustrate the conditions important for having strong early literacy outcomes. The findings indicate that these conditions are not accidental but intentional, and that they require collaboration, support, and alignment across the entire school to sustain them. The findings provide valuable insights into ways to strengthen early literacy outcomes across all North Carolina schools.

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<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>

Appendix A

You are being asked to complete a survey for research purposes. The survey is about your early literacy practices and beliefs. You can expect that the survey will take roughly 20 minutes.

You must be 18 years of age or older, reside in the United States, and be currently employed in a NC school district teaching or tutoring a literary subject to participate in this study.

For this study, you will answer questions about your early literacy classroom practices, curricula, beliefs, and profession learning. Completing this survey is voluntary and you can stop at any time by stopping your participation during the survey or emailing the Principal Investigator that you no longer wish to participate.

We suggest that you take this survey using a private device, in a private location, using a web browser set to private/incognito mode. This helps reduce the likelihood that your responses could be viewed by others who may use the same device or network. The data collected about you from this survey will be stored in accordance with NC State data protection standards.

You will receive a \$20 gift card for completing this survey. In order to receive full compensation for completing the survey, you must finish the survey.

If you consent to complete this survey, please click “Yes I consent” button to begin the survey.

If you have any questions about the survey, how it is implemented, or the research study, please contact the Primary Investigator, Emily Thrasher, at epthrash@ncsu.edu. Please reference study number 28915 when contacting anyone about this project.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or are concerned with your treatment throughout the research process, please contact the NC State University IRB Director at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8754, or fill out a confidential form online at <https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/compliance/research-compliance/irb/irb-forms-and-templates/participant-concern-and-complaint-form/>

- ☐ Yes, I consent
- ☐ No, I do not consent

Thank you for consenting to participate in this survey! The purpose of this survey is to better understand early literacy instruction across schools from the perspectives of teachers and administrators. Specifically, the survey asks about instructional practices, materials and curricula, assessments, professional learning experiences, and beliefs related to early literacy teaching and learning. Your responses will help provide insight into what supports effective early literacy instruction and how current practices are experienced in schools.

There are no right or wrong answers. The survey should take roughly 20 minutes to complete. Please respond to each question as thoughtfully as possible.

1. What is your current role? (Select all that apply)

- a. Classroom Teacher
- b. Interventionist
- c. Instructional Coach
- d. Special Education Teacher
- e. English Learner Teacher
- f. Reading Specialist
- g. Adult Leadership Teacher (e.g., Multi-Classroom Leader)
- h. Classroom Excellence Teacher (e.g., Team Reach Teacher)
- i. Other (please specify) _____

2. Which grade(s) do you currently teach or support?

- a. Kindergarten
- b. Grade 1
- c. Grade 2
- d. Grade 3

3. Years of experience in education

- a. 0–3 years
 - b. 4–8 years
 - c. 9–18 years
 - d. 18–22 years
-

e. More than 22 years

4. Years of experience teaching early literacy

a. 0–3 years

b. 4–8 years

c. 9–18 years

d. 18–22 years

e. More than 22 years

5. What is the name of the school where you currently teach?

6. What type of license do you have?

a. Permit to Teach License

b. Emergency Licenses

c. Residency License

d. Professional Educator's License

e. Other (please specify) _____

7. How often do you use the following early literacy curricula in your classroom/practice?

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Few times a year	Never
American Reading Company	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Heggerty	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Letterland	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
UFLI	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Foundations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

95% Group	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Wit & Wisdom	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I-Ready	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Orton-Gillingham	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Imagine Learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Open Court	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
EL Education	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
HMH Into Reading	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lexia Core5	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reading Mastery	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Corrective Reading	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
McGraw Hill Wonders	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reading Horizons	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

S.P.I.R.E.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Amplify Intervention	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Amplify Boost	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Flyleaf	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SIPPS	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Morpheme Magic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Benchmark	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Geodes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. Outside of the curricula listed above, what other instructional materials do you use in your classroom/practice? (Skip if not applicable)

9. How often do you engage in the following practices?

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	A few times a year	Never	Not Applicable
Phonological awareness instruction	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Explicit phonics instruction	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Evidence-based fluency strategies instruction	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Planning time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Small-group literacy instruction	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vocabulary and oral language instruction	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing connected to reading	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Participate in coaching cycles	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10.How effective are each of the practices in impacting student growth?

	Very effective	Effective	Somewhat effective	Not effective
Phonological awareness instruction	☐	☐	☐	☐
Explicit phonics instruction	☐	☐	☐	☐
Evidence-based fluency strategies instruction	☐	☐	☐	☐
Planning time	☐	☐	☐	☐
Small-group literacy instruction	☐	☐	☐	☐

Vocabulary and oral language instruction	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing connected to reading	☐	☐	☐	☐
Participate in coaching cycles	☐	☐	☐	☐

11.How often do you engage in the following assessment practices?

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	A few times a year	Never	Not Applicable
Using assessment data from Universal screeners	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using assessment data from Diagnostic literacy assessments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using assessment data from unit assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using assessment data from Progress monitoring tools	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using assessment data from NC Check-Ins	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Using assessment data from State summative assessments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
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12.How effective are each of the assessment practices in impacting student growth?

Not effective	Very Effective	Effective	Somewhat effective	
Using assessment data from Universal screeners	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using assessment data from Diagnostic literacy assessments	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using assessment data from unit assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using assessment data from Progress monitoring tools	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using assessment data from NC Check-Ins	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using assessment data from State summative assessments	☐	☐	☐	☐

13.Which literacy-focused instructional roles or leadership structures exist in your school, and which of these supports do they provide? (Select all that apply)

	Observation and feedback	Co-planning or co-teaching	Data meetings focused on literacy	Pulls small groups	Other supports	Does not support literacy instruction	Does not exist at my school
Instructional Coach that supports literacy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Literacy Coach	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Multi-Classroom Leader® (MCL™)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reading Interventionist	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Grade-level PLCs focused on literacy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Principal/ Assistant Principal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

14.What additional changes or supports would help improve early literacy outcomes for all students? (Skip if not applicable)

15.Which literacy-focused professional learning have you participated in? (Select all that apply)

a. Curriculum-based professional learning (specify curriculum) _____

b. Letrs training

- c. Hands on professional learning focused on engaging literacy strategies (ie - practice, make-it/take-it)
- d. Effective instructional literacy strategies to implement in the classroom professional learning
- e. Professional learning focused on understanding how curricula, standards and assessments work in tandem
- f. Phonological and phonemic awareness professional learning
- g. Phonics/Decoding professional learning
- h. Professional learning focused on understanding fluency: accuracy, rate and prosody
- i. Vocabulary development professional learning
- j. Professional learning on language comprehension and knowledge building
- k. Professional learning to help the shift from decodables to grade level text.
- l. Writing to strengthen reading professional learning
- m. Professional learning on MTSS - Intervention Systems - understanding core, differentiated core, remediation, supplemental and intensive interventions.
- n. Professional learning on preparing for and responding to different learner needs (e.g. english language learners, gifted students)
- o. Professional learning on using assessment data in literacy
- p. None of the above

16. What is the best early literacy professional learning you have experienced? What made it great?

17. What is your agreement with the following statements about early literacy education?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Phonological awareness should take precedence over other skills in early literacy instruction.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Decoding skills are the most important factor for developing independent reading comprehension.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students learn to read best when instruction is explicit and systematic.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Literacy practices should be consistent across classrooms to improve student outcomes.	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is realistic to expect students to reach grade-level reading proficiency by 3rd grade.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Standardized assessments are a reliable indicator of a student's literacy performance.	☐	☐	☐	☐

18. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am confident in my ability to help students develop foundational literacy skills.	☐	☐	☐	☐

I feel confident in using high-quality instructional materials to teach early literacy.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I feel confident in adapting high-quality instructional materials to meet my students' needs.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I am confident that my teaching can help students become proficient readers.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Literacy success depends primarily on student engagement and motivation.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Targeted support for kindergarten students should begin within the first month of school.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

19. Please rate your level of confidence in effectively teaching the following early literacy components

	Very confident	Confident	Somewhat confident	Not confident
Phonological awareness	☐	☐	☐	☐

Phonics	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fluency	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vocabulary	☐	☐	☐	☐
Language comprehension	☐	☐	☐	☐
Oral language development	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing connected to reading	☐	☐	☐	☐

20. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience teaching early literacy? (Skip if not applicable)

Appendix B

Responses to: How often do you use the following early literacy curricula in your classroom/practice?

Curriculum	Daily	Weekly	Monthly		Never
American Reading Company	0%	0%	1%	3%	96%
Heggerty	58%	6%	2%	10%	24%
Letterland	8%	0%	0%	3%	89%
UFLI	33%	16%	3%	11%	37%
Foundations	39%	2%	0%	6%	53%
95% Group	10%	3%	2%	6%	79%
Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts	9%	15%	2%	8%	66%
Wit & Wisdom	17%	0%	0%	2%	81%

I-Ready	20%	3%	2%	4%	70%
Orton-Gillingham	1%	7%	2%	1%	89%
Imagine Learning	0%	0%	1%	1%	98%
Open Court	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
EL Education	2%	2%	1%	4%	90%
HMH Into Reading	6%	1%	1%	2%	90%
Lexia Core5	20%	2%	1%	0%	76%
Reading Mastery	1%	2%	0%	2%	94%
Corrective Reading	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
McGraw Hill Wonders	9%	2%	2%	4%	82%
Reading Horizons	30%	1%	0%	0%	69%
S.P.I.R.E.	2%	2%	2%	1%	92%
Amplify Intervention	8%	18%	7%	11%	56%
Amplify Boost	10%	13%	2%	2%	72%
Flyleaf	2%	0%	4%	3%	90%
SIPPS	0%	0%	0%	1%	99%
Morpheme Magic	0%	0%	1%	1%	98%
Benchmark	12%	12%	2%	9%	64%
Geodes	20%	9%	4%	3%	63%

Part D | Phase II Proposed Pilot Plan in Eastern North Carolina



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Overview

The ENC Literacy Pilot Model translates research from Edgecombe County Public Schools into a scalable framework for improving early literacy across Eastern North Carolina. The core premise: students learn to read when teachers deliver high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) with fidelity, supported by curriculum-based professional learning and job-embedded coaching from Multi-Classroom Leaders® (MCLs™). The pilot aims to drive measurable student gains, produce a replicable HQIM implementation model, and build the evidence base for sustained state funding.

The Implementation Chain

The model defines aligned actions at every level. Teachers deliver explicit, evidence-based instruction using HQIM, use formative data to adjust Tier 1 instruction, and engage with MCLs™ through coaching cycles and collaborative planning. MCLs™ and coaches support teachers through observation, co-teaching, and data-driven planning, while delivering curriculum-based professional development. School leaders protect MCL™ time (max 8 teachers per MCL™), build collaborative structures, and establish a visible culture of literacy. District leaders procure coherent HQIM across Tiers 1–3, sustain an Advanced Teaching Roles™ strategy, and provide job-embedded professional learning at every level.

Key Levers & Data

Project partners activate four primary levers: consulting support for HQIM selection and alignment to NC standards (Watershed Advisors); training for MCLs™ and coaches on observation, co-teaching, and adult leadership (Public Impact); curriculum- and comprehension-based professional learning for teachers (External PL Vendor); and guidance on data review and implementation measurement (Watershed Advisors/Friday Institute).

Tracking Progress

Progress is tracked at the beginning, middle, and end of year using six tools — student achievement data, classroom observations, teacher collaboration observations, educator surveys, focus group protocols, and site visit checklists — with annual analysis from the Friday Institute informing continuous improvement and state-level recommendations.

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Overview of Research Findings

The ENC Literacy Pilot Model is grounded in qualitative research conducted by Watershed Advisors and BEST NC in Edgecombe County Public Schools (ECPS) during the 2025–26 school year. ECPS was selected as a study site because district leaders and philanthropic partners have made sustained, deliberate investments in early literacy, making it a strong source of evidence for what effective literacy implementation can look like in a rural, high-need district. Some of these deliberate investments include: piloting high-quality instructional materials and embedded literacy coaching across a set of elementary schools. The central premise of the research is that the practices and conditions contributing to success in ECPS are not unique to a single context, and can be translated into a scalable framework for improving literacy outcomes across Eastern North Carolina.

Using multiple data sources, the study evaluated the extent to which ECPS's student-centered vision for literacy was reflected in daily instructional practice. Data collection activities included:

- Classroom observations in approximately 30 elementary classrooms
- Educator focus groups with teachers, instructional coaches, and school leaders
- Surveys developed in partnership with the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation
- Analysis of DIBELS and End-of-Grade student achievement data

These data were organized around the “Four Essentials for Excellent Instruction.” These priorities anchor ECPS's student-centered vision: Core Instruction, Assessment, Responsive Student Supports, and Continuing Development for Educators.

The research surfaced meaningful strengths:

- Strong implementation of foundational skills materials, with DIBELS data showing Kindergarten gains of up to 59 percentage points within a single school year at schools implementing the 95 Percent Group curriculum.
- Highly actionable use of DIBELS data to drive instructional decision-making across grade bands.
- Embedded coaching through Multi-Classroom Leaders[®] (MCL[™]) and literacy coaches was identified as a high-leverage strategy for teacher growth and curriculum implementation.
- G.W. Carver Elementary has developed a replicable model for systematized, data-driven responsive student supports designed to enable all learners to access grade-level instruction.

The research also surfaced consistent challenges:

- Misconceptions about comprehension instruction, shaped by North Carolina's accountability system, sometimes led teachers to depart from adopted materials or deprioritize curriculum-embedded assessments in favor of tools more closely aligned to End-of-Grade (EOG) formats.

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- Staffing and capacity constraints limited the consistent reach of Tier 2 and Tier 3 student supports and job-embedded instructional coaching.
- Educators expressed a clear desire for a more coherent suite of materials spanning core instruction, comprehension, and intervention, as well as aligned, job-embedded professional learning.

These findings directly shape the structure of the ENC Literacy Pilot Model that follows. The pilot is designed to support participating districts in building the conditions, practices, and systems the research identified as most essential, and to help them dismantle the barriers that, even in a strong district like ECPS, can stand between educators' best efforts and the ultimate goal: every student becoming a proficient reader.

The pilot has three aims: to drive measurable gains in student literacy across participating districts; to produce a replicable HQIM implementation model that can be scaled across North Carolina; and to generate the evidence base needed to secure sustained state funding for this work.

The model rests on a clear, evidence-based premise: students learn to read when teachers deliver HQIM in foundational skills and comprehension with fidelity, supported by curriculum-based professional learning (CBPL) and job-embedded coaching from Multi-Classroom Leaders® (MCLs™). Translating that premise into daily practice requires coordinated capacity-building at every layer of the system.

The ENC Literacy Pilot Model is organized around a four-step process for improving literacy outcomes at scale: establishing a student-centered vision, identifying priorities, mapping the implementation chain, and measuring progress and adjusting strategy. Each section of this pilot model corresponds to these steps, building from the research-grounded vision established in ECPS toward a practical framework that pilot districts can implement, adapt, sustain, and measure.

An Ideal Implementation Chain

Establishing a student-centered vision and identifying priorities are reflected in the research findings above. The next step is making that vision and those priorities concrete: translating them into aligned action at every level of the system, from the district office to the classroom, which ultimately impacts students meaningfully. An implementation chain makes that alignment concrete by defining the specific actions that teachers, coaches, school leaders, and district leaders must each take to drive toward shared instructional priorities, with the student experience as the measure of success at every level. The chain below reflects both the promising practices observed in ECPS and the conditions that research and educator experience suggest are necessary for excellent literacy instruction at scale. It represents the ideal state the ENC Literacy Pilot is working toward and clearly articulates what full, coherent implementation looks like when every educator in the system is rowing in the same direction in service of students.

	Key Actions
Students	• Engage daily with grade-level content through explicit, systematic instruction supported by high-quality materials • Receive timely, data-driven responsive supports that maintain access to grade-level learning • Experience a culture of literacy where reading is visible, valued, and celebrated
Teachers/ Instructional Staff	• Deliver evidence-based, explicit instruction supported by high-quality classroom materials • Use formative assessments to adjust Tier 1 instruction and plan for interventions • Engage regularly with MCLs™ and literacy coaches through collaborative planning, coaching cycles, and job-embedded professional learning • Cultivate a culture of literacy by ensuring consistent access to diverse reading materials and opportunities for students to engage with texts beyond the core curriculum
Coaches/Multi-Classroom Leaders®	• Support teachers' instructional practices through cycles of observation and feedback, co-teaching, modeling, and facilitating collaborative planning • Pull small groups alongside classroom teachers to directly strengthen instructional delivery • Lead formative data analysis and planning for responsive student supports • Deliver curriculum-based professional development aligned with teacher and student needs
School Leadership	• Allocate MCL™ capacity to literacy and protect their time to ensure sustained support, keeping each MCL's™ focus to a team of no more than 8 teachers in alignment with Opportunity Culture® design principles • Develop collaborative planning and coaching structures for MCLs™ to support teachers, and for coaches to support Tier 3 student

	<i>supports</i> • <i>Enable data use through protected, structured data review time</i> • <i>Ensure schedules reflect protected planning and professional learning time for educators, instructional leaders, and coaches</i> • <i>Establish systems and expectations that promote a culture of literacy, including access to diverse texts and consistent opportunities for reading beyond the core curriculum</i>
District Leadership	• <i>Procure a coherent suite of HQIM for foundational skills and comprehension that includes resources for intervention</i> • <i>Adopt an Advanced Teaching Roles™ strategy and support school leadership teams to allocate adequate Multi-Classroom Leader™ capacity to literacy</i> • <i>Provide high-quality, job-embedded, sustained professional learning for school leaders, coaches/MCLs™, and teachers</i>

Key Levers for Activating the Implementation Chain

The implementation chain defines what educators at each level of the system must do to realize their shared vision for literacy instruction. Shifting educator practice, however, requires intentional support, resources, and enabling conditions. This section describes the specific actions project partners will take to make those shifts possible, drawing a direct line from each educator’s actions to the supports that enable them, and mapping those actions to the strategic tools project partners can activate in their role as state-level support for pilot districts.

Enabling the Implementation Chain
Teachers and Instructional Staff

For teachers to deliver evidence-based, explicit literacy instruction supported by high-quality materials, use formative assessments effectively, and collaborate with their MCLs™ and coaches, project partners will:

Pilot Action	Project Partner Lead
Support district selection and procurement of HQIM that is coherent across Tiers 1–3 and aligned to NC standards and assessments	Watershed Advisors/BEST NC
Provide curriculum- and content-based professional learning, including comprehension-specific training	External PL Vendor/Literacy Expert

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Support school scheduling to ensure protected planning time and consistent MCL™/coach access	Public Impact
Offer pilot participation incentives including supplemental literacy materials to support classroom culture-building	BEST NC

MCLs™ and Literacy Coaches

For MCLs™ and coaches to support teachers through observation and feedback, co-teaching, modeling, and data-driven planning, project partners will:

Pilot Action	Project Partner Lead
Provide curriculum- and content-based professional learning and support MCLs™ and Coaches in delivering curriculum-based PL to their teacher teams	Public Impact / External PL Vendor / Literacy Expert
Provide training on conducting classroom observations and using data to coach teachers and adjust team-level strategy.	External PL Vendor, Public Impact
Provide training on co-teaching, modeling strategies, adult leadership.	Public Impact
Support scheduling structures that protect MCL™ time for instructional support, aligning with Opportunity Culture® design principles	Public Impact
Provide guidance on data collection, interpretation, and how to lead effective school-level data review processes	Watershed Advisors

School Leaders

For school leaders to allocate and protect MCL™ and coach capacity, develop coaching and planning structures, enable robust data use, and foster a culture of literacy, project partners will:

Pilot Action	Project Partner Lead
Provide scheduling guidance to support protected PLC blocks, planning time, intervention blocks, and culture-building activities. Create role clarity documents and frameworks for staff.	Public Impact
Provide support designing intervention systems that maximize existing staff capacity, including scheduling models at the school and MCL™ level	Public Impact / Watershed Advisors

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Provide curriculum training and training on observation and data tools	External PL Vendor, Public Impact
Support leaders in developing school-level data review processes	Watershed Advisors, Public Impact
Support identification of funding streams to enable additional staffing capacity, including full-release MCLs™, coaches, and interventionists	Watershed Advisors
Support development of accountability structures for MCL™ and coach impact on teacher practice and student outcomes	Public Impact

District Leaders

For district leaders to procure coherent HQIM, adopt and sustain an Advanced Teaching Roles™ strategy, and provide high-quality professional learning across all levels, project partners will:

Pilot Action	Project Partner Lead
Provide one-on-one consulting support to identify existing funding streams that can be redirected toward HQIM, implementation supports, professional learning, and staffing	Watershed Advisors / School Finance Expert
Provide consulting support for HQIM selection, ensuring coherence across Tiers 1–3 and alignment to NC standards and assessments	Watershed Advisors
Provide support to align HQIM across tiers and with NC standards, including development of crosswalk tools, if needed	Literacy Consultant
Provide guidance on HQIM adoption and implementation, including a recommended timeline for PL rollout at the district, school, and team levels	Watershed Advisors
Provide ATR™ implementation support, including guidance on MCL™ role design, funding sources, team composition, and district-level accountability structures	Public Impact
Support development of a communications strategy and key messages for educators, families, and other stakeholders	BEST NC / External Communications Vendor
Offer pilot participation incentives, including resources for staffing coverage and supplemental materials	BEST NC

Data Collection Framework

Data Collection Framework Overview

Measuring progress is essential to ensuring that pilot activities are having the intended impact on educator practice and student outcomes. To support this, project partners have developed a data collection framework that helps pilot districts build a clear picture of current literacy implementation, track progress throughout the pilot, and measure outcomes at its conclusion. The tools included in the framework are designed to be practical and targeted, not exhaustive, so that districts are collecting the right information to support continuous improvement without adding unnecessary burden.

The data collection framework is grounded in the same four-step process that anchors the ENC Literacy Pilot Model: establishing a student-centered vision, identifying priorities, mapping the implementation chain, and measuring progress and adjusting strategy. Data collection efforts focus primarily on Step 4, helping districts answer a core question at each stage of the pilot: to what extent are the adult actions in the implementation chain actually happening, and how are they influencing student learning?

To answer that question, the framework includes six complementary tools:

- **Student Achievement Data Collection:** Tracks formative and summative student outcomes, including DIBELS and EOG data, to monitor growth over time.
- **Classroom Observation Tool:** Surfaces strengths and opportunities in literacy instruction by examining materials in use, teacher actions, and student engagement.
- **Teacher Collaboration Observation Tool:** Evaluates the effectiveness of PLC and co-planning time across four domains: unit internalization, lesson preparation, student work analysis, and data-driven planning.
- **Survey:** Gathers educator perspectives on implementation, professional learning, assessment practices, and instructional supports across schools, developed in partnership with the Friday Institute. Data will be collected on pilot practices, perceived effectiveness, and overall pilot outcomes.
- **Interview and Focus Group Protocols:** Provides deeper qualitative insight into educator experiences with literacy instruction, organized around the four Essentials for Excellent Instruction, developed in partnership with the Friday Institute. Data will be collected on pilot practices, perceived effectiveness, and overall pilot outcomes.
- **Site Visit Checklists:** Evaluates school-level enabling conditions across six domains, including access to HQIM, assessment expectations, collaboration structures, and scheduling.

Together, these tools allow project partners and district leaders to identify bright spots, surface barriers, and make informed adjustments throughout the pilot. Data will be collected by pilot partners and shared with the Friday institute who will provide an annual report of insights that can be used to adjust course and

monitor progress. These insights will inform recommendations to state leadership on scalable elements of this model.

Research Questions Guiding the Pilot

Beyond documenting whether and to what extent the adult actions in the implementation chain are occurring, the pilot is designed to answer a broader set of research questions. Because the ultimate aim is to inform how the state can replicate this model at scale, the data collection framework is structured to generate evidence about which materials, conditions, and supports are most strongly associated with stronger instruction and improved student learning. These questions include:

- Which high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) are associated with the greatest student gains?
- Which materials are perceived as most effective by educators?
- What supports are associated with improving teachers' ability to skillfully implement high-quality instructional materials?

Plan for Collecting and Using Implementation Data

Collecting data is only valuable when paired with a clear plan for when and how it will be gathered, and by whom. The table below outlines the recommended data collection cadence for pilot districts across three key moments: a baseline audit at the start of the pilot, a mid-year check-in, and an end-of-year review. Together, these touchpoints allow project partners and district leaders to establish a starting point, monitor progress, and measure outcomes.

Tool	Who collects?	Beginning of Year	Middle of Year	End of Year
Student Achievement Data	District/school leaders and Data teams	✓	✓	✓
Classroom Observation	District/School leaders, coaches, project partners	✓	✓	✓
Teacher Collaboration Observation	School leaders, coaches, or district leaders	✓		✓
Interviews/ Focus groups	District leaders, project partners	✓		✓
Site Visit Checklists	District leaders, project partners	✓	✓	✓

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Tool	Who collects?	Beginning of Year	Middle of Year	End of Year
Optional: Survey	District leaders, project partners	√		√



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