

## Literacy Framework (LF)

Completed June 2021

### Background

The Literacy Framework is a district-developed framework designed to provide a roadmap for instruction in the five pillars of reading and writing to ensure that all students read at or above grade level. There are two parts to the framework, one for elementary (K-5) and another for secondary (6-12). District literacy leaders created the Literacy Framework along with RMC Research in the spring of 2015. The initial implementation of the framework began in the fall of 2015, followed by more professional learning in 2016-17. The focus of the professional learning was to ensure systems, structures, and processes were in place for the LF, including a schedule breakdown of time dedicated to literacy and an emphasis on the five pillars of reading. A train-the-trainer model was utilized with principals, Curriculum Support Teachers (CSTs), and coaches to disseminate professional learning to teachers.

In January 2021, FCS contracted with Metis Associates and NORC at the University of Chicago to conduct a mixed-methods implementation evaluation of the Literacy Framework.

### Evaluation Questions

1. How was the rollout, utilization, and quality of the framework's content?
2. What is the relationship between LF utilization and literacy outcomes?
3. What factors influence decision-making about literacy choices in Fulton County Schools?
4. How do principals and literacy coaches describe their experiences implementing literacy curriculum in schools?

### Methodology and Data

The Metis study team used the following qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data for this study:

- Individual interviews with district-level literacy program owners to inform survey design
- An online teacher survey sent to all teachers districtwide (1,464 total respondents)
- An online School Implementation Survey (SIS) of school leaders most knowledgeable of Framework implementation at their schools (98 total respondents)
- Multiple regression models to predict student achievement associated with the level of implementation at their school

For the regression analysis, student demographic and achievement data were acquired from the Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA). A 2019-2020 roster of FCS schools, including demographics and geography, provided by FCS.

NORC complemented Metis's analysis with a qualitative approach using interviews of school leaders. To select the schools for interviews, NORC used a stratified random sampling technique that organized schools into areas (i.e., north/south) within grade-level bands (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school). NORC sampled half of the schools in each grade band to speak to a wide variety of different institutions. Table 1 below shows the distribution of the schools interviewed by grade band and zone.

**Table 1. Literacy Framework Interview Sample by School Level and Zone**

Zone	Elementary Schools	Middle Schools	High Schools
1	4	1	1
2	5	1	2
3	4	2	1
4	5	1	2
5	6	2	1
6	4	2	1
7	4	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>

Once data collection was complete, NORC developed codes for the LF interviews. These codes aligned with the overarching research questions and interview questions. They compared responses across several key dimensions including school type (elementary/middle/high), respondent type (teacher/administrator), and geography (north/south). NORC also compared across codes, surfacing common themes, tensions, and questions in the data. Reported findings reflect these comparisons. Notably, while some schools in the north and south spoke differently about their context and level of engagement with the district, these differences were not as widespread as expected.

## Findings

### Familiarity with the Framework

Most teachers (94%) were familiar with the LF, and almost all school leaders said their schools were currently following the expectations in the LF. These findings align with perceptions of district leadership that the year-long professional learning effectively increased awareness of the LF.

### Implementation Fidelity and Academic Outcomes

Regression models showed a significant positive relationship between teacher implementation of the LF, measured by the Teacher Survey, and the change in the proportion of students performing at grade level on ELA exams between 2017 and 2019.

For the outcome analyses, multiple regression models were developed to predict student achievement in 2017, 2018, and 2019 and the difference in achievement between these years (e.g., the difference between 2017 and 2019). The achievement was quantified for each school as the proportion of students scoring at grade level in ELA as measured by the Georgia Milestones EOG and EOC exams.

The School Implementation Survey completed by school leadership did not figure prominently as a significant predictor of student achievement in any analyses. This indicates that teachers likely have a

more accurate perception of implementation fidelity than do school leaders.

### Professional Learning Well Utilized

Teachers were most likely to have received professional learning related to the LF through grade- or content-based team meetings and Professional Learning Communities (PLC)s. Teachers reported that training on the LF, balanced literacy, data-supported literacy instruction, and assessment interpretation had the most impact on teacher knowledge and skill development.

Professional learning experiences were very different for ES and secondary teachers. Middle and high school teachers, for example, were twice as likely to have received no literacy-related training within the past three years than their ES counterparts.

### Variation by Zone

There was variation by zone in the resources, teacher experiences, and instructional buy-in. South Fulton schools were more likely to consider struggling readers and evidence-based practices when selecting new literacy materials. North Fulton schools were more likely to consider gifted and English language learners when choosing new materials.

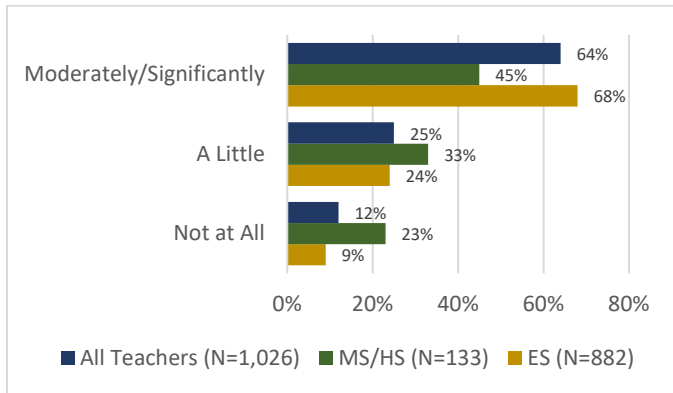
### Lack of Deep Change in Practice

In Metis's analysis of Teacher Survey data, they found that 64% of teachers self-report that the LF did prompt a moderate or significant change in their practice. Figure 1 shows how teachers self-reported the impact the LF had on their instruction and how this varies by school level.

NORC found that teachers had a clear understanding of the LF—they could name it, describe it, and identify its component parts without much prompting or probing. In addition to this understanding, interview respondents were “bought-in” to the LF. They saw its purpose, knew its use, and found ways to apply it in their schools and classrooms. However, this application was uneven. A few teachers could speak in detail about ways they incorporated the LF into their daily practice. However, it was more common to hear teachers talk about using the LF as a

scheduling tool or as a place to access resources to support their existing instruction.

**Figure 1. Teachers Reporting the Impact of the Literacy Framework on ELA/Literacy Instruction**



## Family and Community Involvement

Family and community involvement emerged as the most challenging element for implementation. Schools are generally in the early stages of planning and developing external partnerships to support student literacy goals. The LF has had little impact on classroom literacy volunteers- neither parents/families nor community residents.

## Limitations

It is crucial to consider some limitations as they do influence the results of our evaluation. The study design focused on teachers' and leaders' self-reported implementation and did not incorporate observations or document reviews to quantify how it impacted practice.

## Surveys

There were far more teacher respondents from Elementary (1,077) than Middle and High Schools (164) taking the Teacher Survey. Fewer schools are represented in the School Implementation Survey (68) than the Teacher Survey (80). Moreover, the number of respondents by school varied considerably for the teacher survey (from 1 to 50).

## Regression Analysis

While the teacher survey significantly predicted change in ELA achievement from 2017 to 2019, the proportion of overall variance explained by the model was approximately 31%. In other words, the prediction of academic achievement by the model was not very strong.

## Implementation During COVID-19 Pandemic

Lastly, this study occurred during the coronavirus pandemic, when FCS schools were involved in different teaching environments and a continual unknown state. The impact of this additional external factor cannot be understated. Not all schools opted to participate in the surveys and interviews; therefore, the sample may be biased towards schools with the capacity to respond to an interview request or survey. According to respondents, the pandemic altered how some of them engaged with the frameworks and how deeply they chose to implement them. It may also have shifted teachers' instructional priorities.

## Considerations

In summary, we would like to make the following recommendations to improve the implementation of the Literacy Framework:

Offer additional training on the LF and its practices and approaches, especially at the MS/HS levels. When planning for this professional learning, engage experts rather than past train-the-trainer models. At all levels, an emphasis on phonics going forward will further strengthen teacher practice.

Also, consider establishing and communicating clear expectations regarding the implementation and use of the LF. The district might also provide schools with a list of vetted curricula that align well with the LF and the literacy standards and meet the needs of students with disabilities and English learners.

Finally, the district might consider supporting schools in increasing family and community involvement.