

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SOLUTION: FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY

Education First—a national, mission-driven strategy, policy and implementation organization with deep expertise in education improvement—is the right partner to support Arkansas school districts in their efforts to strengthen foundational literacy instruction. We bring a proven track record of providing district leaders and educators with coaching and professional learning that cultivates the conditions for student improvement and system-wide change. Since 2022, we have partnered with more than 400 districts and charter management organizations (CMOs) directly and in communities of practice to support a wide range of initiatives, including the strategic adoption and implementation of evidence-based literacy and mathematics instruction. Education First serves as a trusted partner for more than a dozen districts and states that are working to advance foundational literacy instruction aligned with the Science of Reading (SoR), adopt high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) and design systems of professional learning that support both.

We provide professional learning services to districts and CMOs to support:

- Functional skills instruction and support
- Access to foundational skills for all learners, including students with disabilities and English language learners
- High-quality intervention practices aligned to core instruction
- Using assessment data to drive instruction
- Building leadership capacity to support implementation of HQIM

We have supported districts with these ELA HQIM on Arkansas' approved list: *CKLA*, *CKLA Skills*, *Into Reading*, *myView*, *Odell*, *Wit & Wisdom*, *Wonders*. We are an approved provider in the Arkansas Professional Learning Partner Guide.

We understand what it takes to help educators shift from current practice toward evidence-based instructional practices in reading. This is complex work that begins with building the knowledge of district and school leaders, educators and families about the Science of Reading—the rich body of scientifically-based research that articulates how children learn to read—and why it matters. It also requires selecting, adopting and implementing high-quality instructional materials that provide students with systematic, sequenced instruction and practice in the six essential components of literacy—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and oral language—and teaching educators to use these materials skillfully in the classroom. And it requires deep work to align the district's academic infrastructure—strategic plans, assessments, interventions, professional learning and coaching, staffing, and resources—to ensure evidence-based literacy practices take root across the district so every student, in every classroom, learns to read.

We help districts do this hard work well. When we partner with school districts and CMOs to strengthen foundational literacy, we pair each district with a specialized team of subject matter experts who work with key decisionmakers and staff to deepen their Science of Reading (SoR) expertise, build their skills for managing shifts in curriculum and instruction across the district, and extend their capacity to execute the district's literacy strategy. Although we tailor each engagement based on the needs and context of each district, our collaborative, data-driven and evidence-based approach can include:

- Facilitating initial meetings with district leaders to establish strong working relationships and understand the district's literacy strategy to date, what has been planned or discarded, and what the most pressing needs are
- Establishing goals and a detailed project plan with district leaders—in collaboration with others affected by or implicated in the work, such as school leaders and classroom teachers—detailing the roles and responsibilities of all parties essential to the success of our engagement
- Collecting and analyzing data on student literacy performance to understand the current state
- Providing coaching and support for the school and district leaders responsible for the district's literacy strategy to facilitate the development of sustainable infrastructures that support ongoing structured literacy and HQIM implementation by:
 - Building buy-in for the shifts required to deliver effective foundational literacy instruction
 - Aligning the use of HQIM with principles of SoR to ensure that materials and embedded assessments support the systematic and explicit teaching of foundational reading skills
 - Providing equitable access to foundational literacy skills for all learners, including students with disabilities, English learners and other diverse populations, to ensure every student gets individualized support so they can successfully access grade level instruction every day
 - Designing systems of professional learning aligned with the district's literacy strategy
 - Building "implementation chains" that articulate the observable behaviors that will shift in the building and classroom as a result of actions taken by the district to ensure that SoR-aligned practices become ingrained in daily instruction
 - Establishing clear goals, timelines, and accountability structures to ensure the fidelity of SoR implementation across all schools
- Training literacy coaches and instructional leaders to build educators' capacity to deliver effective literacy instruction through ongoing, embedded, curriculum-based professional learning

- Supporting progress monitoring by collecting and analyzing data on student achievement and growth in literacy, including leading indicators (e.g., performance on HQIM unit assessments, observation data from classroom walkthroughs) and lagging indicators (e.g., performance on state tests and end of year assessments)
- At the conclusion of our engagement, delivering final recommendations and facilitating a final debrief conversation to guide district and school leaders in continuing to advance students' literacy learning

Throughout this process, we hold routine touchpoints with the district team to advise on implementation, observe or support facilitation of key internal and stakeholder meetings, monitor and reflect on progress, troubleshoot challenges, and ensure the work continues to move forward. We also routinely request feedback and review the results of our support so we can continuously improve our work and ensure we are achieving impact.

Our support makes a difference. We have helped districts in multiple states to deliver on their state's vision for foundational literacy instruction by making coherent, sustainable shifts in literacy instruction aligned with the Science of Reading. For example:

- In **Maryland**, we designed and facilitated Literacy Learning Labs for district staff to see SoR implementation in action on site visits, paired with SoR knowledge-building sessions. We facilitated a community of practice for districts to adopt and use early literacy HQIM and improve support for educators to use SoR-aligned instructional practices. We developed a statewide coaching model, webinar series and in-person training to build capacity of 600+ local instructional coaches to support implementation of the state's literacy strategy. Additionally, we developed a Social, Emotional and Academic Development (SEAD) strategy for **Cherry Hill Strong** in southern **Baltimore**, to boost student achievement and address pandemic-related unfinished learning.
- In **Massachusetts**, we supported five school systems to transition to new HQIM by analyzing the current state of curriculum in each district, developing detailed plans with the materials-specific activities needed to achieve the district's instructional vision, and providing ongoing support during implementation.
- In **Texas**, we supported seven school systems with 1:1 coaching, classroom observations, learning walks, data analysis and planning to improve their instructional strategies and HQIM implementation.

Education First Results

We coached Cedar Hill, TX, on implementation of HQIM in their K-1 literacy classrooms. Before we began, the district's baseline data indicated a very limited presence of HQIM in classrooms. We coached system leaders to focus on consistent progress monitoring, providing professional learning experiences targeted to curriculum, and strengthening teacher and leader support structures. After one year of our coaching, more than 50 percent of K-1 teachers demonstrated proficiency with curriculum internalization.

With our support, districts ensure that improvements in literacy are scalable, sustained, and deeply embedded into the culture of teaching and learning. Systems that work with us make progress toward the following goals:

Our Services	Our District Partners' Goals
Building leadership capacity to support HQIM implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More classroom teachers demonstrate ability to internalize lessons and skillfully implement HQIM • More teachers and leaders believe they have the support needed to implement HQIM effectively and understand their role in this work
Using assessment data to drive instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School systems align and streamline their assessments to focus on gathering the most relevant data that supports literacy development and leverage HQIM embedded assessments effectively • Districts select tools that effectively monitor student progress in key areas such as phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency and comprehension, allowing for more targeted and informed instructional decisions
Ensuring access to foundational skills to all learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School systems effectively monitor progress for all students, including students with disabilities and English learners • School systems identify effective and evidence-based interventions to support students in accessing grade level instruction to improve reading outcomes and close achievement gaps across diverse learner populations.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SOLUTION: CAREER PATHWAYS

Education First—a national, mission-driven strategy, policy and implementation organization with deep expertise in education improvement—is the right partner to support Arkansas districts in building strong, sustainable career pathways for students. We bring a proven track record of providing district leaders and educators with coaching and professional learning that cultivates the conditions for student improvement and system-wide change. Since 2022, we have partnered with more than 400 districts and charter management organizations (CMOs) directly and in communities of practice to support a wide range of initiatives, including researching, designing, building and launching pathways into high-wage, high-growth careers.

We provide professional learning services to districts and CMOs to support:

- Analyzing and improving the rigor of district pathways
- Establishing high-wage, high-growth pathways in a district
- Facilitating the building of coalitions between employers, higher education and workforce in local communities

We know the K12-to-postsecondary transition space. Our team is well-versed in high school redesign, college and career readiness, career and technical education (CTE) systems, and career pathways bridging high school, work and college experiences that help young people earn credentials with labor market value. We know that for students to thrive after high school, they need support long before they walk the stage at graduation—including early exposure to critical information about the value of career pathways, the schooling and training required for any given profession and what high-wage, high-growth jobs are available where they aspire to live. They also need affordable opportunities in high school to earn college credit that is transferable and applicable to a degree, as well as meaningful work-based learning experiences that allow them to explore their career options and that build over time to lay a foundation for future employment. And they need high-touch, tailored advising so they can navigate the transition from high school to what lies beyond and achieve their postsecondary goals. In short: They need clear, affordable, supported pathways that carry them from middle and high school through postsecondary education and training to completion of a credential with labor market value and entry into the workforce.

We help districts create these pathways for students. Because the postsecondary space is so fragmented and is constantly changing, designing and sustaining college and career pathways requires smart use of data, robust communication and collaboration across multiple organizations and sectors, and a sustained investment of time, effort and resources. When we partner with districts and CMOs to develop and launch pathways, we pair each district with a specialized team of subject matter experts who can deliver research and analysis, coach and advise, facilitate collaboration across organizations, and more to ensure each pathway is grounded in data, supportive of students' aspirations and responsive to their needs, and built for the long haul. Although we tailor each engagement based on the needs and context of each district, our approach can include:

- Facilitating initial meetings to establish strong working relationships and understand the district's college and career strategy to date, what has been planned or discarded, and what the most pressing needs are
- Establishing goals and aligning on a detailed project plan with district leaders—in collaboration with others affected by or implicated in the work, such as school leaders and counselors and other sector partners from employers and institutions of higher education—detailing the roles and responsibilities of all parties essential to the success of our engagement
- Collecting and analyzing data to assess high school student interest, access and barriers to access in critical career readiness programming, as well as alignment of current programming with high-demand jobs, including data related to:
 - Career exploration, navigation and counseling
 - Dual credit enrollment opportunities
 - CTE enrollment in single courses and in programs of study leading to credentials
 - Participation in work-based or experiential learning and apprenticeships
 - Industry credentials earned
- Collecting and analyzing data to assess college matriculation and success in coordination with the district as well as state agencies such as ADE and ADHE, including:
 - Advanced course taking and dual credit enrollment opportunities such as AP and IB
 - Four-year high school graduation rates
 - FAFSA completion
 - Postsecondary matriculation within one year of graduation, ideally by high school if not by district
 - Postsecondary remediation rates for recent graduates
 - Postsecondary enrollment in year two
 - Postsecondary completion rates within two, three, four and six years
- Providing coaching and support for the leaders responsible for the district's college and career strategy to facilitate development and maintenance of partnerships with industry and higher education

- Supporting district leaders to build new college and career pathways, including conducting interviews and focus groups, researching best practices and model programs from across the nation, facilitating design sessions and planning meetings, drafting memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and other foundational documents, etc.
- At the conclusion of our engagement, delivering final recommendations and facilitating a final debrief conversation to guide district leaders in sustaining career pathways in the long term

Throughout this process, we hold routine touchpoints with the district team to advise on implementation, observe or support facilitation of key internal and stakeholder meetings, monitor and reflect on progress, troubleshoot challenges, and ensure the work continues to move forward. We also routinely request feedback and review the results of our support so we can continuously improve our work and ensure we are achieving impact.

Our support makes a difference. We have supported many partnerships between districts, employers, colleges and intermediaries that have resulted in college and career pathways that collectively enroll thousands of students every year. For example:

- We collaborated with **Chicago Public Schools** and **City Colleges of Chicago (CCC)** to develop a five-year Chicago Roadmap to jointly prepare more Chicago students for postsecondary credentials, including non-AA credentials with labor market value; support them to succeed at CCC or transfer to a four-year university; and ensure they graduate equipped with the knowledge, skills and experiences to thrive in Chicago's labor market.
- For **New York City Public Schools**, we planned a more robust, coherent career pathways infrastructure that facilitates the student connections and employer engagement required for strong work-based learning opportunities and career-connected learning for all 1M+ students in New York City.
- We supported the Alumni Pathway to Students program in **Gary, Indiana**, by conducting landscape analyses of the local labor market and education programs and making recommendations on how to build, scale, support, and sustain career pathways.
- We are partnering with the Rodel Foundation and the Delaware Department of Education to produce career readiness standards for middle school that ensure **Delaware** students exit grade eight ready for high school, having found success in career and technical education, as well as academic and social and emotional programming that inspires student identity and a path to postsecondary success.
- In **Colorado** and **Tennessee**, we developed successful multi-million-dollar proposals for the Perkins Innovation and Modernization Grant Program, laying the foundation for cross-sector partnerships to prepare students and educators to meet regional labor market demands.
- On behalf of the Gates Foundation, we designed and supported the launch of two career pathways-focused grant opportunities, Horizons and Limitless Learning Network, that engage nearly 30 regional partnerships of K12, employer and postsecondary leaders in **Washington** state to improve college and career advising, FAFSA/WAFSA completion, dual enrollment and other evidence-based practices that lead to industry-recognized credentials and postsecondary degree completion. We also incubated the Network to successfully launch and support the 25 regional partnerships of K12, employers and higher education in year one.

With our support, districts build better pathways for their students. Systems that work with us make progress toward the following goals:

Our Services	Our District Partners' Goals
Establishing high-wage high-growth pathways in a district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the rigor of career pathways so more students earn credentials of value • Identify and assess work-based learning and career preparation programs • Develop a comprehensive career navigation and coaching system
Analysis of district pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify labor market opportunities for jobs that will be available for 10 years or more • Collaborate with postsecondary, workforce and other entities to select viable pathways to organize around • Analyze available data systems and develop recommendations regarding how partners will collect, maintain, share and publish data related to student college and career outcomes • Facilitate data-sharing agreements
Facilitating building coalitions between employers, higher education and workforce in local communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate specialized work groups to deliver the required project initiatives • Work collaboratively with key agency decisionmakers and leaders in each work group, providing them substantial expertise and capacity • Design and launch communications campaigns to elevate the value of career pathways and work-based learning programs

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SOLUTION: INSTRUCTIONAL QUALITY

Education First—a national, mission-driven strategy, policy and implementation organization with deep expertise in education improvement—is the right partner to support Arkansas school districts in their efforts to improve instructional quality. We bring a proven track record of providing district leaders and educators with coaching and professional learning that cultivates the conditions for student improvement and system-wide change. Since 2022, we have partnered with more than 400 districts and charter management organizations (CMOs) directly and in communities of practice (CoPs) to support a wide range of initiatives, including the adoption and implementation of evidence-based literacy and mathematics instruction. Education First serves as a trusted partner for more than a dozen districts and multiple states—including the Arkansas Department of Education—that are working to advance foundational literacy instruction aligned with the Science of Reading (SoR), adopt high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) and design systems of professional learning that support both. We also support a CoP for 50+ educator preparation programs that are incorporating HQIM into coursework and requirements.

We help school system leaders reimagine academic strategies, including selection and use of HQIM, evidence-based teaching practices, and systems for continuous improvement. We provide professional learning services to support:

- PLCs focused on collaborative planning (unit and lesson preparation practices and student work analysis)
- High-quality intervention practices aligned to core instruction
- Using assessment data to drive instruction
- Building leadership capacity to support implementation of HQIM
- Increasing acceleration opportunities and student outcomes
- Ensuring access to core HQIM for all learners.

We have supported districts with HQIM on Arkansas' approved list: *Carnegie Math, CKLA, CKLA Skills, Eureka Math, Into Reading, myView, Odell, Reveal Math, Wit & Wisdom, Wonders*. We are an approved provider in the Arkansas Professional Learning Partner Guide.

Our team is deeply knowledgeable about the skillful use of HQIM in literacy, mathematics, science and social studies and high-quality, curriculum-based professional learning (CBPL) principles. Our consultants have significant pedagogical content knowledge in foundational literacy and in English language arts (ELA), mathematics and science college and career readiness standards. We are experts in designing systems and structures for districts that result in school-level, job-embedded, collaborative, inquiry- and reflection-based professional learning. We develop, design and deliver support to districts and CMOs to improve instructional coaching for classroom educators.

Education First partners with local school systems and state education agencies to advance coherence of teaching and learning across systems of support. In HQIM-focused system and leadership support, Education First guides school systems toward instructional coherence grounded in the HQIM across core instruction, intervention blocks, high-dosage tutoring and out-of-school learning to bring all students to grade-level standards.

To support instructional quality, we collaborate closely with school and district leaders to support the skillful use of HQIM. Our approach begins with helping systems align their instructional practices with HQIM, ensuring that curricula not only meet academic standards but also provide equitable access to rigorous content for all students. For literacy, we ensure that Science of Reading (SoR) principles are embedded in instruction, while for mathematics, we focus on the full spectrum of state standards, including conceptual, procedural and applied learning. For example:

- We supported five **Massachusetts** districts to transition to new ELA and mathematics HQIM. We analyzed the current state of curriculum in each district, developed detailed implementation plans that articulate the activities needed to achieve the instructional vision for each district's chosen instructional materials, and provided support and thought partnership for implementing the new plans, including classroom learning walks and data collection.

We use data from classroom observations and embedded assessments to monitor progress and refine instruction in real time. Through job-embedded on-site and virtual coaching, we help develop the structures that support educators to internalize HQIM and make data-informed adjustments to their instruction, ensuring that they are equipped to deliver lessons that meet the demands of grade-level standards. Our support extends beyond one-time professional learning; we embed continuous cycles of feedback, coaching and improvement that help systems build leadership capacity and foster a culture of instructional rigor and excellence. For example:

- We supported seven districts in **Texas** from 2020-2024. We provided 1:1 coaching, classroom observations, learning walks, data analysis and planning to build capacity, support academic recovery from COVID and improve their instructional strategies and HQIM implementation. For example:
 - We coached **Cedar Hill ISD** on implementation of HQIM in their K-1 literacy classrooms. Before we began, the district's baseline data indicated a very limited presence of HQIM in classrooms. We coached system leaders to focus on consistent progress monitoring, providing professional learning experiences targeted to curriculum, and strengthening teacher and leader support structures. After one year of our coaching, more than 50 percent of K-1 teachers demonstrated proficiency with curriculum internalization.

- We helped **Longview ISD's** central office administrators, principals and academic deans to improve the implementation of their ELA curriculum. Teacher use of ELA HQIM went from almost zero use in observed classrooms at the beginning of SY22-23 to over 50 percent of observed classrooms teaching a high-quality lesson using HQIM by the end of SY22-23.

Our outcome-driven approach ensures that educators implement HQIM skillfully and use assessment data to inform instruction and interventions. We guide school systems to focus on the most relevant data, enabling educators to track progress effectively and make timely instructional adjustments. This ensures that all students, regardless of background or ability, receive high-quality, grade-level instruction that meets their needs. We support school systems to work towards measurable improvement in HQIM implementation across content areas and use data for monitoring:

- When launching a curriculum implementation project, we set student outcome goals on leading and lagging indicators. For example, for lagging indicators, we set goals around state tests and end of year assessments; for leading indicators, we set goals around HQIM unit assessments and observation data from walkthroughs. Progress is tracked in data dashboards and used for decision making in implementation cycles.
- In addition to student data, we routinely analyze results from professional learning sessions and the support we provide. We discuss these data with clients to determine how to improve, and we regularly conduct step-backs with clients to ensure we are achieving impact. We embed regular feedback and continuous improvement cycles within implementation plans to ensure we are responsive to the client's needs. We work collaboratively with state agencies to administer surveys to measure the effectiveness of our coaching and support and receive direct feedback from state leaders and their conversations with the district leaders who receive our services.

Our approach is grounded in the principles of High-Quality Professional Learning (HQPL), which emphasizes job-embedded, sustained, curriculum based and data-driven support for educators. We enable a comprehensive system of coaching, professional development and capacity-building that includes classroom observations, data collection using state-approved observation tools, and personalized feedback. Education First partners with **Maryland** on HQPL:

- We facilitated a community of practice (CoP) on the Science of Reading for 23 of 24 Maryland school districts to help them adopt and implement early literacy HQIM and improve their HQPL support for educators to use structured literacy instructional practices. This CoP provided implementation support to district leaders, created a learning space to share problems of practice and design HQPL systems in the districts.
- We designed and facilitated Literacy Learning Labs for 23 of 24 districts' literacy specialists in Spring 2023 (K-3) and Spring 2024 (grades 5-8). These two-day sessions included district site visits to see SoR implementation in action, paired with knowledge-building sessions focused on key concepts in SoR instruction.
- We developed a statewide coaching model, webinar series and in-person trainings to build the capacity of 600+ local instructional coaches to support implementation of the state's literacy strategy.

With our support, districts deliver high-quality instruction to all students. Systems that work with us make progress toward the following goals:

Our Services	Our District Partners' Goals
Building leadership capacity to support HQIM implementation	School systems increase the number of classrooms implementing HQIM skillfully. Teachers and leaders believe they have the support needed to implement HQIM effectively and understand their role and responsibility to support its implementation.
Using assessment data to drive instruction	School systems align and streamline their assessments to focus on gathering the most relevant data that supports literacy development and leverage HQIM embedded assessments effectively. Districts select tools that effectively monitor student progress in key areas such as phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency and comprehension, allowing for more targeted and informed instructional decisions.
Ensuring access to foundational skills to all learners	School systems effectively monitor progress for all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners. School systems identify effective and evidence-based differentiation and intervention to improve reading outcomes and close achievement gaps across diverse learner populations.
PLCs focused on collaborative planning	School systems improve the quality of PL and data-driven culture. Teachers have sustained opportunities to analyze upcoming units and student work to identify trends in understanding and areas of need, and plan for continuous improvement in instructional quality.