



## **Executive Summary**

*Cultivate Education’s proposal to supplement Literacy Leadership Teams across Iowa with our network of highly-qualified and experienced Implementation Specialists*

Successful initiatives are only accomplished by successful teams. For the Iowa Comprehensive Literacy State Development project to be successful at the local school level, some assistance in creating and sustaining successful teams will be needed. Cultivate Education is a leader in the field of improving implementation outcomes through the use of best practices in teaming and system development. We seek inclusion onto the list of Iowa’s Literacy Grant Support Providers to enable our team of Implementation Specialists to provide schools across the state with our extensive knowledge and experience in comprehensive literacy programs, evidence based practice implementation, and Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework development. Our end goal is to build up local capacity to implement Literacy MTSS based upon the needs of each community we serve, and build the local independence to sustain and innovate upon that effort into the future.

To accomplish this goal, our partner schools will contract for only the supplementary roles and responsibilities that they need to round out their improvement team, and accomplish their end goals as well. Research on effective school improvement emphasizes the critical role of coaching in fostering teacher professional development and aligning practices with evidence-based interventions (Knight, 2007). Even a fractional FTE allocation, such as 0.1 per building, ensures a consistent point of contact for coaching, facilitating regular professional learning, and maintaining momentum for improvement initiatives (Kraft et al., 2018). Our team will use the team membership table below to identify which Member Roles they currently have accounted for, and which they may need supplemented by Cultivate Education’s Implementation Specialist. This versatile approach will enable schools to only contract for support in the specific area that they need (Content Expert, Data Analyst, and/or Implementation Coach), and rely upon the existing strengths of their staff and teaming structures to advance their Literacy MTSS efforts.

<b>Implementation Team Member Roles</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>
District Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Championing literacy improvement</li> <li>● Actively removes barriers to local teams’ success</li> <li>● Serves as a thought partner around continued development of the work</li> </ul>
Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Championing school-site literacy improvement</li> <li>● Actively removing barriers to success</li> <li>● Schedules protected time for collaboration and mitigates competing commitments to team members’ time</li> </ul>
Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provides regular leadership and coordination to the</li> </ul>



Lead/Facilitator	<p>Implementation Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Schedule and create the agenda for team meetings</li> <li>● Communication with project sponsors</li> <li>● Guiding the completion of the learning cycle</li> <li>● Communication with district and building administration</li> </ul>
Team Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Typically between 3-7 staff members who are representative of the grade levels and content being taught within the building</li> <li>● Engage in learning cycles and pilot early implementation efforts</li> <li>● Serve as a communication conduit for other staff in the building</li> </ul>
Content Expert ( <i>can be external to the building site</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Actively connecting the Improvement Team with knowledge, research, and resources to aid in implementation</li> <li>● Review change ideas for viability and provide targeted feedback for enhancement</li> </ul>
Data Analyst ( <i>can be external to the building site</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support Literacy Leadership Teams to develop practical measures and data collection strategies</li> <li>● Assist in data collection, entry, and analysis for the team</li> <li>● Create data displays that inform ongoing work</li> <li>● May provide support to more than one Implementation Team</li> </ul>
Implementation Coach ( <i>can be external to the building site</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Deep expertise in improvement methodologies</li> <li>● Able to provide professional learning and coaching to site and district-level staff in area of improvement</li> <li>● May coach more than one Implementation Team</li> </ul>
<p><i>In some cases, one individual may serve in more than one role for their building and/or district</i></p>	

With each school site having selected/identified their Implementation Team with assigned roles and responsibilities, Cultivate Education staff will then undertake involving each member of the team with dedicated professional learning and coaching on how to maximize their impact in their team role. Through the use of well organized and data-informed monthly meetings, this Implementation Team will work collectively to improve student outcomes and build independence and sustainability of the project as a whole.

**Experience**

Cultivate Education was founded in 2016 to assist schools in better implementing best practices to improve outcomes for students, staff, schools, and communities. We are a unique company that specializes in the process and science of implementation, and draws upon the decades of experience of our team to pair with the specific content/topic/goals of our partner organization(s). This primarily takes the form of high-quality professional development that is paired with ample implementation coaching (typically monthly).

Cultivate Education scaled up operations in 2021, in large part due to the disruptions that the Covid-19 outbreak had upon schools and communities and the lack of organizations available to support schools in that ever changing environment. Starting with support to school districts and special education cooperatives in Kansas, Cultivate quickly expanded to supporting districts nationwide with implementing best practices such as MTSS, data-informed instruction, absenteeism, and behavior programs such as PBIS. Recently, we have added staff to the team, primarily in the much needed area of literacy. Collectively, the three staff members who will be assigned to work with Iowa schools have nearly 90 years of experience in education, with 45 of those years working at the state and national level on the topic of MTSS and Literacy.

To support the successful execution of this project, Cultivate Education will deploy a team of experienced consultants who possess deep expertise in coaching, project management, literacy initiatives, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), leadership, and professional learning. The individuals listed below will serve as the primary personnel responsible for delivering services aligned with Iowa school and district goals.

For this project, Cultivate Education will allocate the services of Stephanie Stindt, James Baker, and Chris Perry as the primary staffing. Their extensive experience with Literacy MTSS implementation primarily came from working for Keystone Learning Service under direct contract from the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) to operate the Kansas MTSS and Alignment project on their behalf. In this capacity, these three educational leaders provided assistance to hundreds of schools across Kansas and have gained a sterling reputation for quality and approachability. Since departing Kansas MTSS, each has furthered their careers at the national and state level, and are teaming up again for this RFP in Iowa. A further description of the staff's experience is detailed below, as well as in their attached resumes.

- **Stephanie Stindt** is an experienced Literacy and Instructional Specialist with 20+ years in the field of education across diverse roles. Her experience includes her time as a classroom teacher, instructional coach, and for ten years, a Reading Trainer and District Alignment Specialist for the Kansas MTSS state team. She was most recently the Regional Manager of LETRS State Success, where she provided strategic guidance to departments of education in the effective implementation of large scale LETRS initiatives. She brings expertise in reading science and research, structured literacy practices, implementation of large scale initiatives, and multi-tiered system of supports. In addition, she has extensive experience providing technical assistance, managing initiatives, coaching educators, and facilitating impactful workshops and presentations. For this project, Stephanie will serve as an Implementation Specialist, Coach, and Professional Learning Presenter.
- **James Baker** has spent more than 35 years in Kansas Education, including teaching multiple grade levels and as a principal of an elementary school. James was a founding member of the Kansas Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Team aiding in the creation and implementation of the nationally recognized Kansas MTSS model. From 2006-2021, James served as a MTSS trainer. This has allowed James great insight and understanding in the needs of Preschool through High School in the development and

support of students, educational leaders, teachers, and Boards of Education, in the implementation and sustainability of the MTSS model and other educational initiatives. In addition to his work with Cultivate Education, James is an Assistant Professor of Education at Bethany College where is busy readying a new generation of teachers for the classroom. For this project, James will serve as an Implementation Specialist, Coach, and Professional Learning Presenter.

- **Chris Perry** draws upon his experience as a teacher and working on state and federally funded school improvement projects that provide technical assistance to districts and educators to address the academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and mental health needs of the students they serve. Additionally, Chris has served on his local School Board since 2017, and guided several private and public school systems through the several rounds of the school accreditation and improvement process. In the last few years, Chris has been honored to serve as the keynote speaker for school district, state-level associations, and even as the 2024 Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) Annual Conference Keynote Speaker. With Cultivate, Chris serves as the Founder and Executive Director, where he supports partner schools/districts in achieving their improvement goals by using the principles of implementation science to address areas of need, and to cultivate, replicate and highlight successes in enhancing student learning. For this project, Chris will serve as an Implementation Specialist, Coach, and Professional Learning Presenter.

### **Relevant Experience with Children and Youth (Birth to Grade 12)**

The three Implementation Specialists assigned to the Iowa project bring nearly 90 years of combined experience as teachers, specialists, administrators, college professors, state level technical assistance providers, consultants, and project managers. For instance, Stephanie is a former classroom teacher and interventionist, James is a former classroom teacher and building administrator (one of the first in Kansas to implement MTSS), and Chris is a former special education teacher and current school board member. While our primary experience lies in elementary education, we also have direct experience supporting middle and high school teachers. We've worked in a wide range of classrooms, schools, regions, and states - experiences they draw from regularly to better connect with the educators and leaders they support. During our work with Kansas MTSS (2005-2021), we provided coaching and systems support to districts across the PreK-12 continuum-including rural, urban, and suburban contexts - serving schools with diverse populations and needs.

As an organization, Cultivate Education partners primarily with K-12 school districts, and in recent years, we have seen increased engagement with secondary schools, particularly in areas such as:

- Data literacy for instructional teams
- Building-wide vocabulary integration
- Effective teaming practices within MTSS
- Standards alignment and instructional coherence

While our direct coaching in early childhood literacy MTSS is more limited, we do support many early childhood programs in Kansas with coaching focused on classroom management, behavior strategies, and instructional planning. When needed, we can expand our capacity through a network of affiliate specialists with expertise in Early Childhood MTSS and literacy development to ensure schools receive support that matches their context.

Cultivate Education operates all projects with the understanding that streamlining and increasing clarity around improvement efforts is critical to the success of an initiative regardless of location, size, or diversity. Many of our current partner schools are in rural settings, in large part because of an intentional organizational effort on our part to better support districts with 1,500 or fewer students. We have found that districts below that size rarely have instructional coaches to support implementation, and administrators often serve multiple roles such as 504 Coordinator, Transportation Director, or curriculum adoption lead. When applied to larger districts, our partnerships tend to take the form of more targeted implementation support, such as specific buildings that are struggling with providing inclusive instruction for English language learners, as well as specialized classrooms that support the behavioral and social emotional needs of students with disabilities. In all the examples above, we structure our partnerships to be supplementary in nature, to help fill the necessary roles that the district needs to move their initiative forward, all while costing the district far less than hiring full-time staff. In the last five years, Cultivate Education has partnered with districts as large as Wichita Public Schools (~46,000 students), as well as districts as small as Jefferson County North (~450 students) - based upon what their specific needs and capabilities were at the time. As applied to the scope of this project in Iowa, we intend to make thorough use of rubrics, observations, and risk assessments to determine specific literacy and implementation supports needed for each partner school and district, and then work with that local team to develop customized improvement plans and fill the roles that they do not currently have with our staff while capacity is built up to sustain that effort in the absence of our team in the future.

Across all grade levels and service areas, our team is deeply experienced in supporting instructional improvement and systems change grounded in the science of reading, structured literacy practices, and effective implementation.

### **Knowledge Areas**

Few teachers enter their first classrooms equipped with the knowledge they need to be effective teachers of reading. However, we know more about how to improve literacy outcomes than at any other time in the history of education due to the Science of Reading. So that there is a common understanding of that term, the Reading League (2021) has defined the science of reading as:

a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. This research has been conducted over the last five decades across the world, and it is derived from thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages. The science of reading has culminated in a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop; why some have difficulty; and how we can most effectively assess and teach and, therefore, improve student outcomes through prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties (p. 6).

As noted above, the science of reading is not a program a school can purchase, a particular set of skills, a pendulum swing, or a “philosophy”. It is a preponderance of evidence from the fields of neuroscience, linguistics, education, and cognitive psychology. This science has led to theoretical models, instructional guidance, professional learning for teachers, statewide initiatives and legislation, and additional research to better apply the research to practice and effectively serve every student in acquiring proficient reading skills. The science of reading consists of thousands of peer-reviewed studies on how the brain learns to read, what skills contribute to skilled and proficient reading, and what instructional practices are most effective.

Our understanding of the science of reading is grounded in the decades of interdisciplinary research that explores how the brain learns to read, knowing that reading is not natural, and how instruction can most effectively teach all students to read.

Research based frameworks used to describe what is necessary to become a skilled reader are the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) and Scarborough’s Rope (Scarborough, 2001). The Simple View of Reading posits that reading comprehension, which is the goal of reading, is a product of two domains: Word Recognition (the ability to read words accurately and automatically) and Language Comprehension (the ability to understand language). It is always about strength in the skills that comprise both of the domains; strength in one cannot compensate for weakness in another. If a student cannot comprehend what they read, educators should look at whether there are difficulties in Word Recognition or Language Comprehension or both domains.

Scarborough’s Rope takes the Simple View of Reading a step further and identifies the subskills that are needed to be a skilled, proficient reading in each domain. The Word Recognition domain includes the foundational skills of phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition. The Language Comprehension domain includes verbal reasoning, vocabulary, background knowledge and the like. This model shows each of these skills as strands of a rope, which must be intertwined between domains over time in order for a person to be a skilled and proficient reader.

Across the birth-grade 12 continuum, evidence-based literacy practices evolve to reflect stages of reading development, but always remain anchored in what research shows to be effective and are reflected in Scarborough’s Rope. While all of the skills in Scarborough’s Rope are crucial for proficiency in reading, certain skills are emphasized at different grade levels so that there is a logical scope and sequence of skill development. An outline of how these skills progress across the continuum of a child’s development in reading are outlined below:

- **Birth - PreK:** The focus is on building oral language, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and print awareness through sophisticated language modeling, read-alouds, songs, play-based interactions, and activities to build phonological awareness.
- **Grades K-2:** Instruction shifts to emphasize instruction in the foundational skills identified by the National Reading Panel- phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Instruction at this stage requires explicit and systematic

instruction in phonics and phonemic awareness in order to support automatic decoding and orthographic mapping.

- **Grades 3-5:** At this stage, we would expect students to have mastered basic foundational skills and instruction should continue to reinforce upper level phonics skills, decoding multi-syllabic words, morphological awareness, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies. At these grade levels, literacy instruction should be intentionally embedded into content areas so that students learn to apply skills to texts with various levels of complexity and purposes.
- **Grades 6-12:** At the secondary level, reading instruction is almost exclusively included across the disciplines. The instruction should focus on accessing academic texts, increasing vocabulary, using academic language, and text comprehension strategies. It is important to note that there are many older students who are still missing foundational skills, causing them to struggle with reading, which contributes to a lack in academic success. Interventions should still address foundational skills gaps, using practices aligned with Structured Literacy.

Throughout all grade levels, high-quality instruction includes ongoing assessment, data-informed decision making, and differentiation to meet diverse student needs, including those with dyslexia, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities. Our understanding of the Science of Reading is not only research and evidence-based, but also grounded in how we implement it equitably across classrooms to ensure all students receive the type of instruction research shows they need to become proficient readers and writers. This is supported by the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000), which identified the critical role of explicit, systematic instruction—particularly in phonemic awareness and phonics—as essential for developing word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension skills.

Research also indicates that a comprehensive approach to literacy goes beyond the mastery of foundational skills. The National Assessment of Educational Progress' (2017) definition supports the idea that literacy includes deep comprehension skills such as analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and using information that weaves together reading, writing, listening, and speaking in meaningful ways across disciplines. These practices not only support comprehension and critical thinking, but also build background knowledge and vocabulary which are key to long-term reading success. For example, over the last few years Cultivate Education has partnered with area schools to enhance vocabulary instruction at the secondary level and cultivating data literacy skills at the elementary level through grade level teams - all with the intention of deepening staff understanding of the connection points of various content areas and grades back into overall literacy.

The Cultivate Education Staff bring nearly 90 years of experience delivering high-quality technical assistance, training, and coaching in the science of reading, structured literacy practices, and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). The organization has supported hundreds of schools and districts and empowered thousands of educators to strengthen instructional practices, use data for instructional decision making, and improve student outcomes. Three members of our team previously served on the Kansas State Department's MTSS training team, with two of those individuals playing a lead role in the research, design,

and development of the state's MTSS reading implementation processes for over a decade. One of the leaders on our team led statewide LETRS implementation efforts in the Western United States and worked closely with Dr. Carol Tolman as a LETRS Local Certified Facilitator in the state of Kansas.

In addition, our team maintains a deep understanding of current research in literacy and MTSS frameworks, with strong connections to national literacy and systems leaders, including Stephanie Stollar, Carol Tolman, Louisa Moats, David Kilpatrick, Linda Farrell, Anita Archer, and Tim Shanahan. We maintain active engagement in professional networks, ensuring our work reflects the most up-to-date, evidence-based practices.

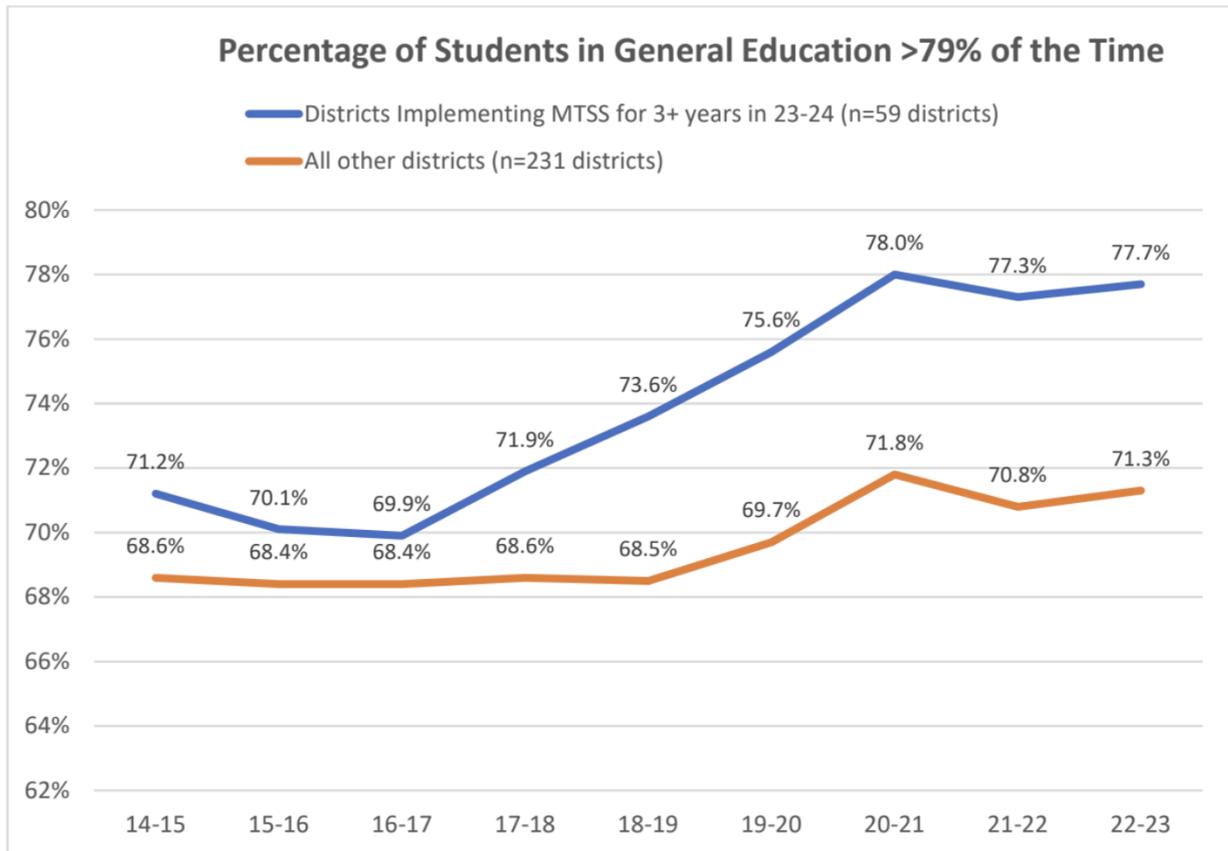
## **Action and Outcome Section**

### Previous Experience

The three primary staff members from Cultivate Education who will be supporting Iowa schools that are participating in the CSLD are James Baker, Stephanie Stindt, and Chris Perry. All three of these individuals have extensive experience with implementing MTSS at both the school level as teachers and administrators, and at the state level while working on the Kansas MTSS project, which is the state funded MTSS technical assistance program through the Kansas State Department of Education. Districts apply to receive training, coaching, and technical assistance from the project to improve the performance of their MTSS framework to support the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of their students. This model works directly with a district leadership team, building leadership teams, and collaborative (PLC, grade, or content level) teams and guides them through the Structuring, Implementation, and Sustainability phases - typically over the course of three school years. While this work was not conducted under the Cultivate Education banner, valuable lessons were learned by our team in how to support Kansas' largest urban district (Wichita at over 46,000 students) as well as how to support some of our smallest rural districts (such as Elk Valley at just under 100 students). Replication of implementation efforts regarding the Science of Reading, MTSS, effective coaching practices, and successful team meetings became a cornerstone of the work for these three individuals, and lessons that they have later carried on in their careers and would be bringing to the process of supporting schools in Iowa too.

All three of these individuals began working for Kansas MTSS prior to the 2014-15 school year, and all departed the project by 2022. Since their departures from the project, these leaders have pursued careers in education reform and advancement at the district, state, and national levels. They have also taken on roles at universities and educational entrepreneurship promoting effective implementation. Their individual career arcs are further elaborated on in the Personnel Exhibit, but it is worth pointing out that during the time period in which all three of these individuals were working on the Kansas MTSS project is the exact time period in which the schools that were receiving support from the project experienced the most success. While there are many variables at play in this situation, one telling graph is represented below that illustrates the amount of time that students with disabilities spent in general education settings, a priority area for the state of Kansas to improve all students' access to grade level instruction.

The time period in which the most growth was seen (circa 2016-2020) is the exact time period in which these three individuals were supporting Kansas schools with implementing MTSS as they hit their third year of implementation.

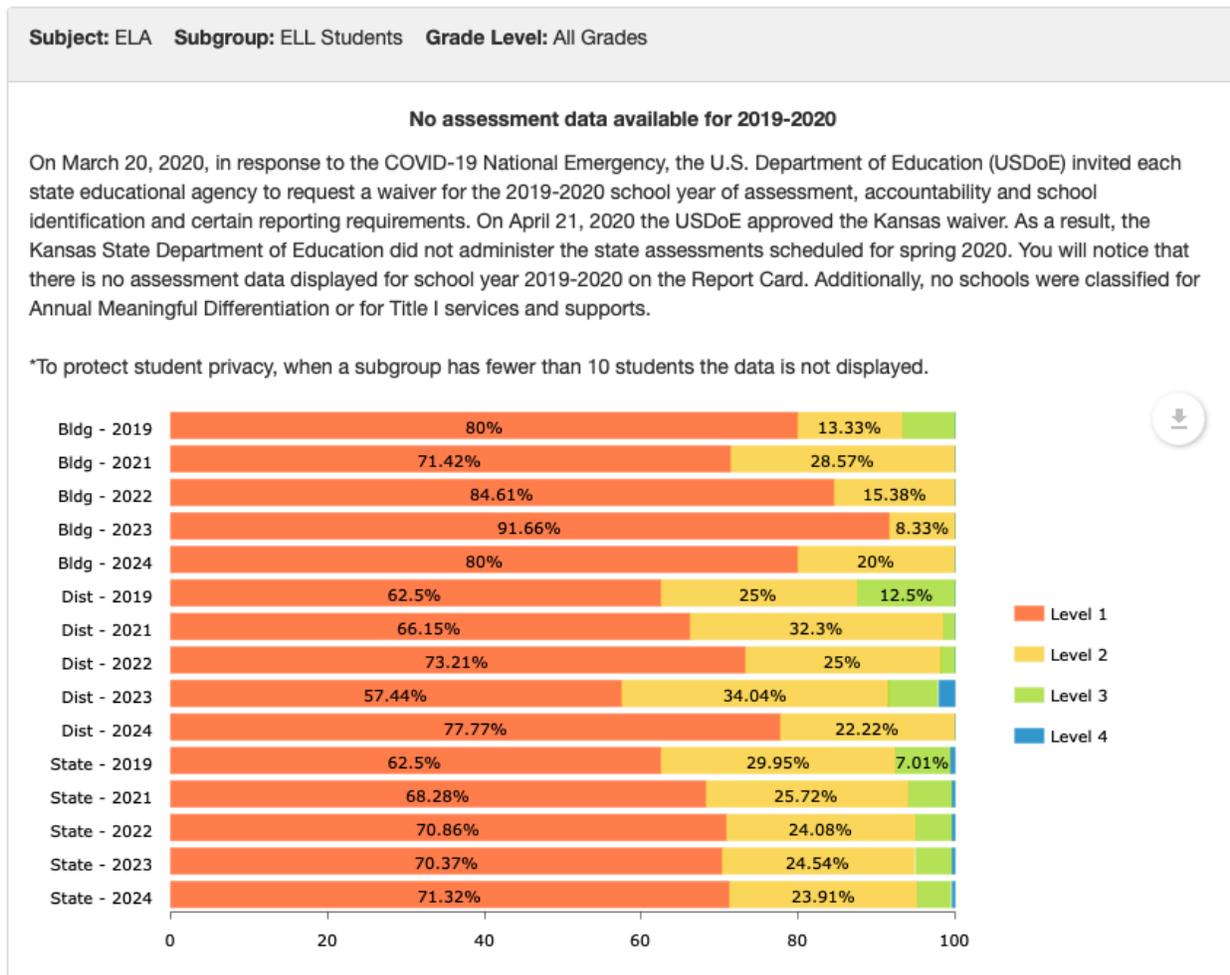


Several of the school districts detailed below had received support from Kansas MTSS during this 2014-2022 time period, and later determined that it was in their best interest to contract for enhanced services from Cultivate Education after 2021. Since the Kansas MTSS project is not applying for this RFP, nor is their exact support model used by Cultivate Education, a detailed breakdown of their model is not included in this proposal. Keystone Learning Service had been the fiscal agent for the Kansas MTSS project during the time period under discussion, and an accompanying letter of support from their Executive Director Doug Anderson is included in this proposal submission. Suffice to say that the many years that these three spent supporting Kansas schools with the Kansas MTSS project have left profound impacts on not just these individuals, but the schools, staff, students, and communities that they supported as well.

USD 373 Newton Public Schools, Newton, Kansas

Shortly after the conclusion of the 2021-22 school year, Santa Fe 5th/6th Center (enrollment ~450 students), was identified by the state of Kansas as having a disproportionate percentage of ELL students scoring at Level 1 on the state assessment, which is the lowest score category within the Kansas State Assessment scoring system. In response to this data, the building was placed on the state’s Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) list and made eligible for

guidance from the state level team. As a result of that guidance, in the Spring of 2023, the leadership team at Santa Fe determined that additional support was needed to support their teachers in developing the data analysis and inclusive instructional skills necessary to properly implement an MTSS framework and close this achievement gap. They contracted with Cultivate Education (Implementation Coaches James Baker and Chris Perry) to develop a support plan for the 2023-24 school year, which entailed the Implementation Coaches attending monthly meetings with the grade level PLCs, conducting walkthroughs/observations of instruction, and providing technical assistance with data analysis and inclusionary practices. As a result of this implementation support, the percentage of ELL students who scored at a Level 1 dropped by nearly 12%, and the building became eligible for removal from the CSI list and state oversight and guidance. The chart below illustrates five years of state assessment results for ELL students at the building (Bldg), District (Dist), and State comparative levels. Active Cultivate Education support concluded at the end of the 2023-24 school year (total duration of the support was about 15 months), upon the team reviewing implementation data and concluding that the building staff had gained the necessary skills to sustain the effort. At the time of this writing, 2025 state assessment results have not been made publicly available to evaluate the sustainability of this improvement. A corresponding letter of support from Newton Superintendent Fred VanRanken is provided along with these materials.





USD 383 Manhattan-Ogden Unified School District, Manhattan, Kansas

In the Winter of 2022, Cultivate Education was contacted by the leadership team in Manhattan-Ogden School District (~7,000 students) to help in auditing their current levels of implementation of their district adopted 5-year Strategic Framework. This strategic plan governed all district efforts, from operations and staff onboarding, to instruction and personalized learning. This Strategic Framework was formally adopted by their school board during the summer of 2020, and due to the complexities of navigating the Covid pandemic, it was unclear how deep into implementation the district was and how much variance there was between the fourteen school buildings. Over the course of that Spring, the implementation audit was conducted using a variety of focus groups, Fastbridge data analysis, curriculum aligned fidelity tools, and staff/family survey data. The audit report was provided to the district leadership team and the school board, which provided detailed information regarding the level of Paper, Process, and Perception Fidelity for each of the Objectives and Strategies within the Strategic Framework. The district leadership team determined that USD 383 could use additional support at the district level in improving the consistency of MTSS implementation, and contracted for such support from Cultivate Education over the course of the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years. The Cultivate Education Implementation Coaches (James Baker and Chris Perry) primarily provided Content Expertise, Data Analysis and Implementation Coaching, along with topical professional development to address some lingering challenges such as absenteeism and evidence-based practice implementation. Through this partnership, the district refined many of their MTSS guidance documents, trained staff on how to use them at the building level, and monitored the student screening and outcomes data. In the Spring of 2023 school year, a follow-up implementation audit was conducted to evaluate change over time. Several of the MTSS-affiliated indicators are listed in the table below:

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Implementation Change from 21-22 to 22-23</b>
<b>1A:</b> Align curriculum with content standards and assessment framework.	+16%
<b>1B:</b> Identify and implement evidence-based instructional practices.	+14%
<b>1C:</b> Institutionalize a multi-tiered system of reading, mathematics and social-emotional supports.	+5.7%

A change in the Kansas Education System Accreditation (KESA) model during the 2023-24 school year prompted the district to adjust their core components of their strategic planning, and resulted in a discontinuation of these implementation audits. The district does continue to contract for professional development services from Cultivate Education, primarily on the topics of literacy, classroom management, and data analysis. A corresponding letter of support from Manhattan-Ogden Assistant Superintendent Andrea Tiede is provided along with these proposal materials.



**USD 368 Paola School District, Paola, Kansas**

USD 368 (~1,800 students) has long partnered with Cultivate Education for professional development and coaching services, primarily at the secondary level to improve standards alignment and student engagement. During the 2024-25 their K-2 elementary school (~350 students) noticed some concerning literacy patterns during their Fall benchmark screening period. The majority of their students were in the “At-Risk” range across all three grade levels. The building leadership team determined that outside support was needed in the form of content expertise, data analysis, and improvement coaching - and invited Chris Perry in for an initial meeting. The team eventually decided to have Chris join the grade level PLC meetings once a month (~75 minutes for each PLC) to provide micro-professional learning and coaching around topics such as using Fastbridge data to inform instruction, engaging in short cycle improvement planning, and targeted Tier 1 interventions/accommodation implementation. This plan began in January 2025, and also included a half day of professional learning from Cultivate Education staff as well. The results of the staff’s efforts are listed in the table below. Grades 1 and 2 saw excellent reductions in the percentage of students identified as “At-Risk”, which Kindergarten’s percentage increased.

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Fall Risk %</b>	<b>Spring Risk %</b>	<b>% Change</b>
K	52%	55%	+3%
1st	65%	53%	-12%
2nd	59%	51%	-8%

This grade level PLC coaching plan will be refined but continue into the 2025-26 school year, and some changes to the Kindergarten instructional materials and scope and sequence will begin in July 2025 to establish a refined plan to address learning needs going forward. A corresponding letter of support from Assistant Superintendent Tammy Thomasson is provided along with these proposal materials.

**Coaching Services**

Utilizing best-practices in implementation science and coaching, our experienced Implementation Specialists will deliver professional learning and coaching aligned to the Science of Reading across PreK-12. From the board room to the classroom, Cultivate Education brings deep expertise and extensive experience coaching educators across K-12 in implementing Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and literacy practices grounded in the Science of Reading. Cultivate Education’s work has included technical assistance and instructional coaching for general and special education teachers, building and district leaders, and state-level teams.

From the big picture perspective, our team will typically begin the work with partner schools by quickly analyzing their current status (through the state’s risk and needs assessment as well as utilization of Cultivate Education’s tools that are included in this proposal submission). This

process helps identify each school’s areas of need of concern as well as their current capacity to address those needs. This leads to goal setting and adaptation/selection of solutions to the areas of concern that take the form of an overall “intervention” package. This intervention package might be schedule changes, target science of reading professional learning for paraprofessionals, data literacy skill development for the grade level teachers, and/or all the previous at once. The chart below further elaborates on how, as the Implementation Sequence develops, as does the Problem Solving Stage and the Coaching Stages, so that the orientation of these tasks subtly shifts over time to be directly supportive to what the team needs at that time.

<b>Problem Solving Stage</b>	<b>Typical Implementation Sequence</b>	<b>Coaching Stage</b>
Problem Identification	1. Identify a concern 2. Collect baseline data 3. Confirm the concern and set a goal	Identify
Problem Analysis	4. Select the area/resource for intervention 5. Planfully adapt the intervention to the context/resources	Learn
Plan Implementation	6. Provide training 7. Implement the intervention	
Plan Evaluation	8. Assess learning outcomes 9. Assess intervention fidelity 10. Evaluate the intervention 11. Support implementation	Improve

Improving implementation fidelity in schools requires a multifaceted approach that emphasizes clarity, support, and continuous feedback. First, schools should provide comprehensive professional development to ensure educators understand the program's goals and procedures, as research shows that training enhances fidelity (Fixsen et al., 2005). Additionally, the establishment of clear guidelines and step-by-step protocols is critical, as ambiguity can lead to inconsistent application (Durlak & Dupre, 2008). Ongoing coaching and support systems, including peer observations and administrative feedback, can further reinforce adherence to program standards (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Lastly, utilizing data-driven decision-making to monitor fidelity and address barriers in real-time ensures that adjustments align with evidence-based practices (Century & Cassata, 2016). These strategies collectively enhance the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes by maintaining the integrity of implementation efforts.

At the time of this writing, it is difficult to fully anticipate the implementation stage of each school that we may be supporting. In general though, in the first year of our partnership with a school, a basic version of the phases will look like this:



<b>Installation and Planning Stage</b>	<b>Approximate Timeline</b>
1. Clarify Vision and Goals	August-September
2. Evaluate Capacity, Resources, and Process	August-September
3. Engage Stakeholders	August-September
4. Create a Leadership Team	August-September
5. Choose Data Sources	August-September
<b>Implementation Stage</b>	
6. Implement Tier 1 instruction as designed	August-September
7. Determine which students need additional interventions/ supports	August-September
8. Implement interventions/ supports	September-October
9. Begin to Progress Monitor Tiers 2 and 3	September-October
10. Provide Coaching to Teachers	September-May
11. Evaluate for Consistent Implementation at Tiers 1, 2, and 3	October-May
12. Reflect on overall implementation and refine areas of need	May-June

Our team has partnered with thousands of school leaders and teachers to analyze student data, identify instructional priorities, and co-develop action plans tailored to each context. Our work has included planning and facilitating professional learning communities, delivering professional learning sessions, conducting coaching cycles, and providing feedback based on classroom walkthroughs.

We understand the IA-CLSD’s goals require more than training sessions - they demand sustainable change, cross-team coordination, and responsive coaching. Our expertise in system level project planning at the school, district, and state level equips us to guide educators from theory to practice. We take a structured, goal-driven approach to coaching and professional learning that includes evaluation of district and school needs and aligning implementation with district goals, using data to monitor and adjust course as needed. Our approach supports long-term improvement through establishing a system of collaborative goal-setting, problem-solving, short and long cycle implementation, and reflective practice focused on continual and sustainable improvement in literacy for all students. Our current and past partners include districts with varying demographics and readiness levels, and we have helped educators build capacity to implement structured literacy in core and intervention settings, leading to increased implementation fidelity in schools and improved reading achievement for students.

As literacy consultants, professional development facilitators, MTSS specialists, and instructional coaches we are confident in our ability to deliver tailored support that aligns with the goals of this grant. Our deep content knowledge rooted in the Science of Reading, coupled with a strong understanding of adult learning and experience providing technical assistance to schools and districts in literacy enables us to coach effectively in diverse contexts—from early childhood to high school.

### **Coaching Strategy**

Research on effective school improvement emphasizes the critical role of coaching in fostering teacher professional development and aligning practices with evidence-based interventions (Knight, 2007). These coaches ensure a consistent point of contact for coaching, facilitating regular professional learning, and maintaining momentum for improvement initiatives (Kraft et al., 2018). All of Cultivate Education’s projects have long term sustainability in mind through a phased release of responsibility and increase in local capacity. This foundational principle of our organization will be evident in the intentionality on how coaching is provided to each educator who is part of a district that participates in the partnership with Cultivate Education.

#### Key Coaching Components

- **Observation and Reflection:**  
Coaches observe improvement team functioning, providing targeted feedback that emphasizes “teachable moments” and the power of reflective practice. This aligns with Knight’s emphasis on understanding teaching as both an art and a science.
- **Structured and Sustained Dialogue:**  
Regular, scheduled conversations—whether through formal meetings or less formalized emails and calls —ensure that coaching is ongoing. This sustained dialogue helps team members internalize best practices, build confidence, and develop a growth mindset.
- **Actionable Feedback and Goal-Setting:**  
Feedback is designed to be immediate and actionable. Teams set goals based on data and collaborative decision making, leading to iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and re-evaluation—a cycle that encapsulates the “implementation coaching” model.
- **Building a Community of Practice:**  
Teaming and Coaching extends beyond the one-to-one relationship. It fosters a wider community of practice where peers share insights, celebrate successes, and work together to solve common challenges. This collaborative culture is essential for cultivating a resilient and innovative teaching force and school improvement.

Our coaching strategy is anchored in the belief of taking Science of Reading and research into structured and supported practice. Joyce & Summers (1982) and Rock (2019) found that between 10-15 coaching sessions are needed to improve outcomes, and are most effective when a



consistent coaching schedule and collective participation procedures are established and followed. This includes the operationalizing of the principles of gradual release, job-embedded learning, and collaborative implementation planning. We recommend a flexible coaching model that includes a combination of:

- Consistent (at least monthly) and focused implementation team meetings
- On-site visits for classroom observations, modeling, and feedback
- Virtual coaching sessions for follow-up support and reflection
- Data-driven planning meetings with school leaders to establish structures that allow for inclusive practices and align literacy goals with student outcomes
- Professional learning sessions on structured literacy, foundational skills instruction, diagnostic assessment, and progress monitoring, aligned with the Science of Reading
- Consulting with school and district Literacy Leadership Teams to align literacy practices with MTSS frameworks, improve Tier 1 core instruction, and embed support for multilingual learners and students with disabilities.

When this all comes together, it may look something like the following coaching and professional development timeline over the course of a school year:

<b>Month</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Format</b>
August	A. Three Hour Professional Development Session (Full Staff) related to best practices in literacy instruction B. Initial Implementation Team Meeting	A. In-person B. Virtual
September	Implementation Team Meeting	Virtual
October	Implementation Team Meeting	Virtual
November	C. Classroom Observations and Teacher Coaching Sessions D. Implementation Team Meeting	C. In-person D. In-person
December	Implementation Team Meeting	Virtual
January	Implementation Team Meeting	Virtual
February	Implementation Team Meeting	Virtual
March	Implementation Team Meeting	Virtual
April	Implementation Team Meeting	Virtual
May	E. Classroom Observations and Teacher Coaching Sessions	E. In-person F. In-person



	F. Implementation Team Meeting G. An end of the year data analysis and goal re-setting meeting.	G. Virtual
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We anticipate that the majority of our time allocation for Iowa schools will be devoted to implementation coaching services, though one of the advantages of Cultivate Education is that we have a knowledgeable staff and extensive network to tap into should our partner schools need professional learning. We offer professional learning workshops focused on topics such as structured literacy practices, each of the Big 5 components of reading, orthographic mapping, literacy screening and diagnostics, using progress monitoring for decision making, and instructional adaptations for multilingual learners and students with disabilities. So while coaching services for a school might be provided by Chris Perry, if the school needs deeper professional learning on vocabulary practices, we have James Baker on our team who can provide that. If the school needed a professional learning series on the Science of Reading, Stephanie Stindt would likely provide that service. Our team brings decades of collaborative experience working with one another, which allows us to seamlessly integrate key themes of professional learning into our team-based coaching. This by no means shackles the school to only receiving professional learning from our team, as we have a long history of collaborating with organizations like Lexia, the Reading League, Corwin, state level accreditation groups, and many others to braid efforts together as much as possible.

Following an initial needs assessment, each participating school site will establish an Implementation Team to lead and sustain improvement efforts. Research by Fixsen, Blase, Timbers, & Wolf (2001) underscores the critical role of these teams in achieving fidelity of implementation. With the support of well-functioning Implementation Teams, over 80% of sites successfully adopted practices with fidelity, compared to only 30% without such teams. Moreover, these teams significantly accelerate the timeline for implementation, reducing the average time to fidelity from 17 years to just 3.6 years (National Implementation Research Network, 2015).

The roles of the Implementation Team will be critical to further differentiate coaching and support. While schools often have staff that serve a variety of purposes, for clarity of roles and responsibilities, schools will identify the following roles to make up their implementation team:

<b>Implementation Team Member Roles</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>	<b>Estimated Time Commitment</b>
District Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Championing literacy improvement</li> <li>● Actively removes barriers to local teams' success</li> <li>● Serves as a thought partner around continued development of the work</li> </ul>	~1-2 hours per month in Team meetings
Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Championing school-site literacy</li> </ul>	~1-2 hours per



	<p>improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Actively removing barriers to success</li> <li>● Schedules protected time for collaboration and mitigates competing commitments to team members' time</li> </ul>	month in Team meetings
Team Lead/Facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provides regular leadership and coordination to the Implementation Team</li> <li>● Schedule and create the agenda for team meetings</li> <li>● Communication with project sponsors</li> <li>● Guiding the completion of the learning cycle</li> <li>● Communication with district and building administration</li> </ul>	~2 hours per week in Team meetings and in preparation
Team Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Typically between 3-7 staff members who are representative of the grade levels and content being taught within the building</li> <li>● Engage in learning cycles and pilot early implementation efforts</li> <li>● Serve as a communication conduit for other staff in the building</li> </ul>	~1-2 hours per week in Team meetings and in preparation
Content Expert ( <i>can be external to the building site</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Actively connecting the Improvement Team with knowledge, research, and resources to aid in implementation</li> <li>● Review change ideas for viability and provide targeted feedback for enhancement</li> </ul>	~1-2 hours per week in Team meetings and in preparation
Data Analyst ( <i>can be external to the building site</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support Literacy Leadership Teams to develop practical measures and data collection strategies</li> <li>● Assist in data collection, entry, and analysis for the team</li> <li>● Create data displays that inform ongoing work</li> <li>● May provide support to more than one Implementation Team</li> </ul>	~2 hours per month in Team meetings and in preparation
Implementation Coach ( <i>can be external to the building site</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Deep expertise in improvement methodologies</li> <li>● Able to provide professional learning and coaching to site and district-level staff in area of improvement</li> <li>● May coach more than one Implementation Team</li> </ul>	~2 hours per week in Team meetings and in preparation

*In some cases, one individual may serve in more than one role for their building and/or district*

With each school site having selected/identified their Implementation Team with assigned roles and responsibilities, this project will then undertake involving each member of the team with dedicated professional learning and coaching on how to maximize their impact in their team role. Schools will be contracting with Cultivate Education to fill in 1-3 of these roles and be a part of their team. Those potential roles are: Content Expert, Data Analyst, and/or Implementation Coach. The amount of time the school contracts with Cultivate Education will largely depend on how many roles Cultivate Education will be serving for this building. This method will be especially helpful for schools that do not currently have staff with the skill sets and/or time to fulfill the responsibilities of that role. For instance, a school could have staff members who can fill all the roles except for Data Analyst, and contract with Cultivate Education to serve in that role for their improvement team.

To support this work, we anticipate the following time commitments from local personnel:

- Pre-implementation planning meeting to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment (either virtual or on site) to review details such as:
  - Implementation Team Membership
  - Initiative purpose, goals and priorities
  - Student literacy data and data management platform
  - Current evidence-based literacy practices
  - Status of professional development
  - Knowledge of the Science of Reading
  - Existing implementation structures, protocols, schedules, and resources
  - Curriculum and assessments
- Monthly 30–60 minute virtual planning meetings
- Utilize coaching to support short and long improvement cycles
- Participation in data analysis during screening periods and collaborative time
- Attendance at professional learning sessions

Our team of Implementation Specialists have experience in serving each of these roles, as teachers, interventionists, administrators, state trainers, and implementation specialists. Additionally our team members also have experience in improvement teams for topics such as school accreditation, behavior supports, community-based mental health partnerships, and state-level initiatives - all of which allows us to have a deep and wide pool of experience to draw from in fulfilling our roles within this project. Critical to the sustainable success of this team in each school, a gradual fading of responsibilities from Cultivate Education staff to school staff will need to occur. Our intent is not to work with each school in perpetuity, but rather build up their capacity through modeling and coaching in order for the effort to self-sustain.

We do not rely on third-party contractors; all services are provided directly by the Cultivate Education team, ensuring consistency, strong relationships, and deep knowledge of the district context. However, if demand for our services exceeds the capacity of our three identified

Implementation Specialists, we can coordinate with other specialists in our network to support additional requests in consultation with the regulations within this contract. Some time/guidance may be needed from the Iowa Department of Education staff on this topic.

Cultivate Education's approach is highly collaborative and designed to build local capacity. We work to ensure district and school staff feel ownership of the implementation and are supported through planning, reflection, and continuous improvement. All services are perfectly aligned to the goals of the CLSD grant and are designed to improve both instructional practice and student outcomes.

### **Approach**

Research on effective school improvement emphasizes the critical role of coaching in fostering teacher professional development and aligning practices with evidence-based interventions (Knight, 2007). Even a fractional Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) allocation, such as 0.1 per building, ensures a consistent point of contact for coaching, facilitating regular professional learning, and maintaining momentum for improvement initiatives (Kraft et al., 2018). Having clarity in the roles and responsibilities of all the team members is critical to the success of the implementation team, and in many cases targeted coaching will need to be provided to individuals on the team who will need to build up their knowledge and skills of their roles, such as methods for effectively facilitating meetings or creating master schedules that allow for more frequent staff collaboration. While somewhat challenging to identify at the outset, as a part of the initial meetings with schools, analyses will be conducted to better understand the existing team members strengths and areas for growth. This information, along with notes and observations from the monthly team meetings will help to identify which staff and skills are needed for additional coaching. Specific examples of this can be found in the descriptions of Newton Public Schools and Paola School District.

One of the advantages for schools that partner with Cultivate Education is that our organization is not directly affiliated with any single publishing company, assessment platform, or intervention model - this allows us to provide authentic, research-informed recommendations tailored to each school's unique needs. Our team brings deep experience with the Orton-Gillingham approach, Adaptive Schools for communication and team functioning, a variety of core and intervention programs, and Panorama for data management. This breadth of knowledge allows us to support schools in building systems that not only promote instructional coherence, but also ensure that professional knowledge- about students, curriculum, and practice-is consistently used to make informed and data based decisions. This systems-level approach strengthens implementation and builds lasting internal capacity. We are as comfortable supporting schools that use Acadience as we are with Fastbridge, and as familiar with UFLI as we are with the 95 Percent Group's Core Program. Should schools need help navigating their resources and tools to achieve their literacy goals, there is a strong likelihood that we have worked with those systems before and can offer objective, experience-based support.

A successful implementation of a literacy initiative carries many of the same ingredients as achieving most other goals: clarity in purpose, clarity in process, and clarity in



measurement/outcomes/evaluation data. In regards to literacy, the team needs to consistently know:

1. Where are you trying to go? (Purpose)
2. What documents guide our work and how do you track their usage? (Process)
3. How are you going to know if you are making progress towards your goal? (Measurement)

In the field of education, we often have difficulty delineating these details for our initiatives, especially when it comes to literacy and MTSS. Take the first question about “Purpose” for example. Staff within a single school building may respond to “Why are we doing MTSS?” in a variety of ways, such as:

- *We are trying to get all our students to be proficient readers*
- *We are building a system to provide interventions to students who are below grade level*
- *We are building a better system for Tier 1 instruction*
- *We are trying to provide better interventions for students with disabilities*
- *Etc.*

All of these answers are/could be technically correct, as they all could be outcomes of MTSS - but this variance in response often creates difficulties when it comes to resource allocation (i.e. do we buy a new Tier 1 curriculum or invest in more Tier 2 intervention programs) as well as stakeholder/staff/student engagement (i.e. if a parent is given three different reasons why their child is receiving phonics instruction, it is likely to create confusion). From small-scale, individual goals - to large, complex system goals involving hundreds of people and moving parts, there is a rhyme to implementation best practices that bridge a variety of contexts. For these reasons, when Cultivate Education is partnering with schools and districts to address any improvement initiative we often start with, and structure the sequence of our coaching and supports around, what we call the 6 P’s of Implementation Fidelity. This is used to sequentially set up fidelity categories that need to be addressed in order for an initiative to be sustainably successful.

<b>Fidelity Category</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Primary Questions</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	The reason for your school system engaging in this work. This addresses your “ <b>Why</b> ” behind the initiative.	Why is your system engaging in this initiative? What area of concern does this initiative address? How does this initiative connect with other existing initiatives?

<p><b>Paper</b></p>	<p>The documents, protocols, resources, etc. that your system has agreed to use as guidance and structure the implementation of this initiative. This addresses your “<b>What</b>” and the “<b>How To</b>” behind the initiative.</p>	<p>What are the agreed upon standards, practices, and strategies for this initiative?</p>
<p><b>Process</b></p>	<p>The degree to which your system is consistently implementing the specifics within your documents, protocols, resources, etc. This addresses your “<b>How Much</b>” and “<b>How Well</b>” behind the initiative.</p>	<p>How are you measuring the implementation of the specific steps within your “Paper” initiative?</p>
<p><b>Perception</b></p>	<p>Gathering feedback from stakeholder groups regarding their impression of the implementation of this initiative. This addresses your “<b>Who</b>” and the “<b>So What</b>” behind the initiative.</p>	<p>How do various stakeholder groups view the Purpose, Paper, and Process implementation?</p>
<p><b>Product</b></p>	<p>Identify the types of outcomes we intend to get by engaging in this initiative. This addresses your “<b>Where</b>” and “<b>Which</b>” behind the initiative.</p>	<p>What are the results/outcomes you intend to influence with this initiative?</p>
<p><b>Persistence</b></p>	<p>If fidelity is established and products (outcomes) are equitable, this initiative will be weaved into the operations through intentional planning for long-term sustainability and innovation. This addresses your “<b>When</b>” behind the initiative.</p>	<p>How do you intend to utilize data for decision making, build capacity, and sustain this initiative in the coming years?</p>

Our organization’s experience in working with leadership teams to implement literacy MTSS, the most common missing element is clarity in the “Paper” and “Process” forms of implementation fidelity. While there is no perfect template or form that guides MTSS implementation, schools need to have some form of an MTSS protocol or guidance document to

ensure continuity in implementation. For instance, what we often find is that there are either no written guidelines that help inform school staff about progress monitoring decision rules, or there are several versions of the decision rules that various schools, grade levels, and PLC teams are using simultaneously. Both of these situations result in a high degree of variance in student outcomes. Even in systems that have this form of Paper Fidelity on solid footing, there still needs to be a consideration towards the “Process” Fidelity of the effort long term as well. For example, if students are intended to receive 30 minutes of intervention five days a week, but there is no record or log of students’ attendance for those intervention sessions, the team is unable to determine if a student’s lack of skill development is due to dosage or intervention misalignment. Additionally, this 6 P’s Framework allows schools to start with the end in mind, and have as many of the data pieces in place prior to initial implementation as possible. As Alley et al. have found, monitoring the fidelity of the pre-implementation process nearly doubles the probability of success, from 35% likelihood, up to 65% implementation (2023). In other words, having a plan for monitoring the plan is an effective way of ensuring that we are going to follow the plan!

We have developed a simplified version of this framework for Literacy MTSS, and intend on using this tool at the early stages of partnership with a school, in addition to needs and risk assessments that are also being conducted with participation in this project from the state’s perspective. Within this tool, the “Literacy MTSS Pre-Implementation Meeting Inventory” is provided to the teams, and one of our staff members walks the team through each of the features of MTSS and this 6 P’s Framework. For instance, the initial topic is in regards to the stated goals of Literacy MTSS and asks the implementation team to consider the following:

“Our school makes sure that students have the necessary literacy skills to be successful. There should be agreement by all certified and non-certified staff on what these skills are, and collective effort towards ensuring that all students gain these skills.

1. What are these \_\_\_\_\_ skills?
2. How will we teach them?
3. How will we know if they have them?
4. What will we do if they don’t?
5. How can we make sure all students gain these \_\_\_\_\_ skills?”

For some schools, having continuity in the responses will be a challenge, but that also provides the team with a starting point. From that point forward, consultation and coaching will be delivered to gain the consensus of the team regarding what skills all students need in their school, how are we going to respond if they don’t have these skills, etc. With those fundamentals established, the team is ready to dive deeper into progress monitoring features, fidelity of Tier 2, and staff development questions as well - but this team would be spinning their wheels if they don’t have consistency in the skills that they think students need.

Our last main reason for using this 6 P’s Framework to serve as the backbone to Literacy MTSS initiatives is that it requires the leadership team to think deeply about the fundamental features of MTSS (i.e. Data-Informed Decision Making, Universal Tier 1 Instruction, Leadership, etc.) and how those features fit into and enhance the context of their school/district/community. To quote Holding and Koestner, “two competing, but complementary characteristics of a successful goal setter are:

1. They select self-relevant and intrinsic goals
2. They strategically abandon or adapt goals when they become unattainable”(2023)

Each school building is slightly different than the next one down the highway, and even smaller variables, such as different intervention materials, end up having implementation ramifications that are unique to each school. There is great value in engaging leadership teams in discussion and decision making around topics like “what type of schedule do we need to adopt next year to enable our kids to get the full benefit of the core literacy program, as well as have adequate time and staffing to provide interventions as needed”. This gets to Holding and Koestner’s research point as well, in that strategically adapting the components of MTSS to the local context and evaluating the data stream as it comes in will put the entire initiative onto a firmer foundation from the outset.

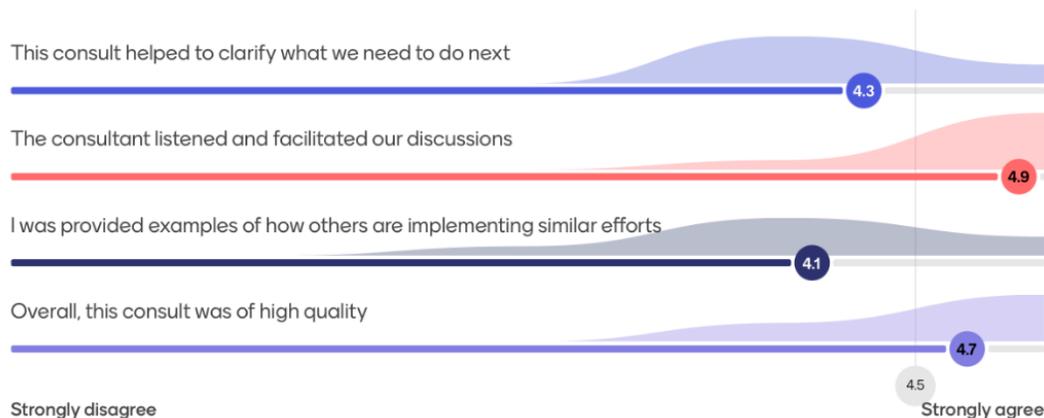
Fidelity monitoring tools help schools assess adherence, dosage, quality of delivery, and participant responsiveness, all of which are critical factors in achieving positive student outcomes (Fixsen et al., 2005). Studies show that when schools systematically monitor fidelity, they can identify gaps in implementation early and make necessary adjustments to improve effectiveness (Century & Cassata, 2016). For example, research on multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) has demonstrated that fidelity monitoring leads to more consistent application of interventions, resulting in better student behavioral and academic outcomes (McIntosh et al., 2016). Additionally, using structured fidelity tools—such as checklists, self-report surveys, and observational rubrics—has been linked to improved teacher adherence to evidence-based practices and stronger program sustainability (Carroll et al., 2007).

Furthermore, fidelity monitoring enhances data-driven decision-making by providing educators with real-time feedback to refine their instructional strategies and interventions (O’Donnell, 2008). Without fidelity assessment, schools risk “drift” from intended practices, reducing program impact and wasting resources (Dane & Schneider, 1998). Given this evidence, schools implementing structured fidelity monitoring tools can significantly improve the reliability and effectiveness of their school improvement initiatives. One of the challenges that schools face is that in many cases they do not have adequate tools and time to conduct fidelity checks. It is worth noting that even when schools have the best curricular resources available, they often have to make some modifications and adaptations to them in order to embed them into the existing structures of the school, thus modifying/stretching the resources to the point where full fidelity to the program is no longer possible. This is most commonly seen when a school only has 60 minutes daily of core instructional time, but their curriculum calls for 90 minutes - something has to give. In the Paola School District example, the opposite was the case in which the district has adapted a common phonics component to their instruction (~30-45 minutes daily) that was evidence based, but the remainder of their instructional time (~45-60 minutes daily) was teacher developed and open source. Though the staff did collaboratively plan for this instructional time, variance was happening. To help address this, the Cultivate Education team helped to develop some fidelity monitoring tools that could be used as self-reflections, team discussions, and non-evaluative observations - in an effort to increase the instructional continuity while the district began the steps at looking at which resources to adopt for the following school year. This example is provided as an illustration of how fidelity tools can be

created and launched by a building team, and they can be highly effective ways to encourage data literacy and prioritization with the implementation team as well.

Because the style of coaching that we use is dynamic and determined by the needs of the building, it tends to be a bit more time intensive on the part of our staff as well as has more variation between schools/districts/projects. We use those initial meetings, group reflections, and needs assessments to narrow down the scope of the coaching support and the priorities to increase the likelihood of success by being as clear as possible about the team’s objectives and scope of work. This does create slightly non-linear progress with teams, as large gains will often be made in a short period, but also periods where things slow down a bit. In spite of that variance, our partner schools are very appreciative of our Implementation Specialists, as can be seen in the screenshot below which followed a monthly Implementation Team meeting at a middle school. On this five point scale, the numbers shown illustrate the average rating, and the distribution of scores in the slightly faded color is also shown. While we don’t always collect this type of perception data with each of our literacy projects, it does serve as an example of how the coaching approach we utilize is well received by schools and is of high-quality.

## Feedback



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