



LIFT EDUCATION
LEADING INNOVATION FOR TENNESSEE

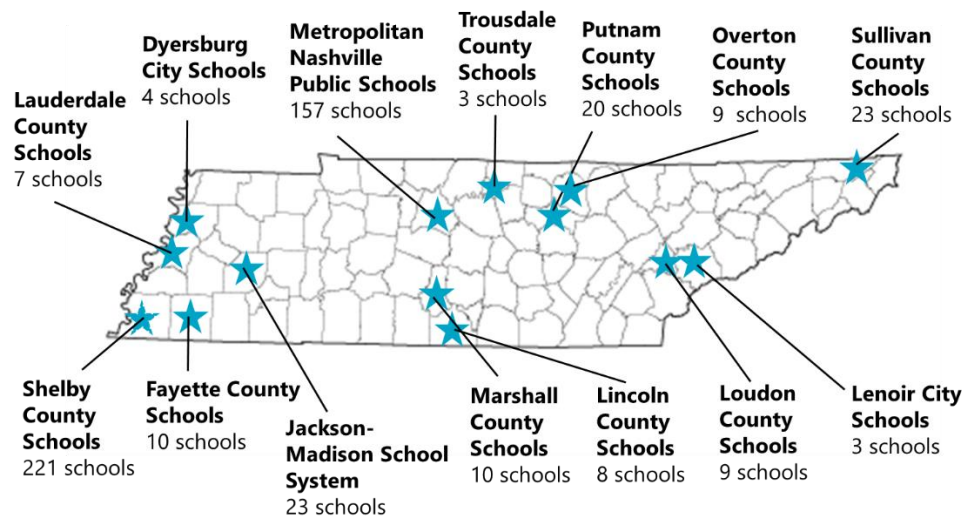
Sustaining Our Progress In Early Literacy Annual Report

October 2019

Introduction

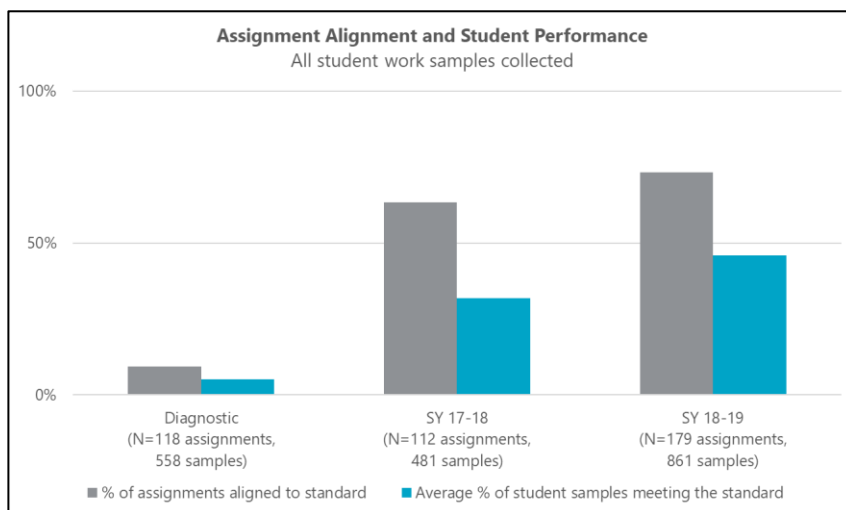
[Leading Innovation for Tennessee Education \(LIFT\)](#) is a small group of Tennessee districts working together to explore innovative approaches and share best practices that benefit students and other school districts. The network was first convened in 2012 to support rigorous academic standards in Tennessee and in 2014 broadened to focus on directly improving student outcomes.

The [State Collaborative on Reforming Education \(SCORE\)](#), a nonprofit and nonpartisan research and advocacy organization based in Nashville, formally convenes the network. [TNTP](#), a national nonprofit focused on supporting states and districts to end educational inequities, serves as a content partner for rigorous academics. This partnership—combining knowledge of Tennessee’s context with a nationally recognized partner for academic success—has been key for our network.



In spring 2016, the districts in the LIFT network examined their existing literacy programs and classroom practices and identified a shared problem of practice: **K–5 students were not yet accessing a high-quality literacy program that supported them to meet the demands of Tennessee’s rigorous standards. Teachers and leaders had not yet made the instructional shifts that would support students to become proficient readers, writers, and thinkers.**

Since then, the districts in the LIFT network have worked to address this problem of practice by **expanding and supporting the use of standards-aligned instructional materials** and **building the capacity of teachers and leaders to deliver standards-aligned literacy instruction**. Over the past three years, the network has made significant progress:



- About half of lessons observed in 2018-19 showed some or full alignment to the Tennessee ELA standards, compared with only 4 percent during initial reviews.
- About three-quarters of student assignments collected in 2018-19 showed strong or excellent alignment to the Tennessee ELA standards, and almost half of students are meeting the demands of those assignments.

Teachers and leaders continue to be invested in the work. Nine in 10 teachers reported “consistently using the instructional materials throughout the year,” and nearly 7 in 10 teachers agree that “students’ reading/listening comprehension is growing noticeably as a result of using these materials.”

As noted in our [previous reports](#), the LIFT network initially focused on the untested early elementary grades (K-2) and slowly scaled up the use of standards-aligned instructional materials to the tested upper elementary grades. Additionally, LIFT districts began the work with small-scale pilots of standards-aligned materials in a few classrooms or schools and slowly scaled up to district-wide use.¹ Given this phased approach, we did not anticipate an immediate impact on student achievement on the TNReady English Language Arts assessment. However, this year, as the first graders involved in early 2016-17 pilot work completed third grade, some LIFT districts began to see significant gains in achievement.

On the 2018-19 TNReady English Language Arts assessment:

- Eight out of 12 LIFT districts saw increases in the number of third-grade students scoring on track or mastered in English Language Arts.
- Every single LIFT district had at least one elementary/intermediate school that exceeded growth expectations.
- In five LIFT districts, every single school engaged in the LIFT literacy improvement work exceeded growth expectations.
- Twenty elementary/intermediate schools from across the LIFT Network were named by the state as reward schools. Four of those schools jumped from a TVAAS score of 1 in 2017-18 to a TVAAS score of 5 in 2018-19.

This report outlines lessons learned from the 2018-19 school year that will be valuable to policymakers and practitioners. Those interested in learning from our work may also be interested in our previous reports and published resources.²



“Change is hard, and the results are not always immediate. Our TNReady test scores from this spring have proven to us that what we have been working so hard to accomplish and implement over the past three years is working. We had been seeing great improvements in our RTI data, but we still needed the validation of our TNReady data. We have the best test scores this year that we have ever had.”

- Evelyn Rafalowski, Director of Schools,
Sullivan County

¹ See LIFT Materials Implementation Timeline in the appendix of this report.

² Please read the 2017 and 2018 LIFT annual reports to learn more about the network and the lessons learned in our first two years of implementation and the Instructional Materials Implementation Guidebook to see a comprehensive description of the innovative approaches and best practices from the network: <https://lifteducationtn.com/resources/>

Update on 2018-19 Strategy

In 2018-19 the LIFT districts focused on **accelerating progress in identified areas of instructional practice** and on **expanding access to high-quality instructional materials to more students**. Based on data from spring 2018 progress monitoring efforts, the network articulated three key learning priorities for the year:

- 1) **Shifting the Lift:** How do we continue to build capacity of leaders and teachers to ensure *students* are owning the cognitive work of making meaning and demonstrating understanding of the complex ideas, information and arguments in high-quality text?
- 2) **Reaching All Learners:** How can we leverage standards-aligned instructional materials to meet the needs of diverse learners and support *all students* in reaching the standards?
- 3) **Change Management:** What conditions are needed to successfully sustain the changes we have made across the network? What will our long-term change management strategy look like?

The districts in the LIFT network explored a variety of innovative approaches to answer these questions and studied the impact on classroom practice and student learning. This report outlines our most recent learnings:

- **Key Learning 1:** To sustain progress, leaders must maintain relentless focus on the vision for excellence and investment in the strategy to achieve it.
- **Key Learning 2:** Teachers need structures and support to reorient their daily work with rigorous materials.
- **Key Learning 3:** Teachers' expectations rise when they see firsthand that their students can succeed with more rigorous materials.
- **Key Learning 4:** We cannot underestimate the magnitude of the transformation that shifting to explicit and systematic foundational skills instruction requires.
- **Key Learning 5:** The best practices we have learned from the LIFT network's efforts to improve early literacy can be replicated to expand impact.

We would be remiss to ignore recently released research from Harvard's Center for Educational Policy Research (CEPR) that is relevant to the network's implementation of standards-aligned instructional materials. In the recently released study, [Learning By the Book](#), CEPR researchers compared the average student growth in elementary schools using different curricula in six states. The researchers found that the adoption of more-rigorous curricula has not yet produced the improvements in student outcomes that prior research predicted.³

However, the authors of the study caution against the interpretation that curriculum choice does not matter. Instead they point to the complexity of curriculum implementation and the fact that teachers in the study used the materials inconsistently and received very little training and support. Instead, they urge states and districts to consider the magnitude of this transformation and identify the supports teachers and leaders need to reorient their daily work with rigorous curricula.⁴

As a network, LIFT districts have been engaged in this action research, to identify the supports teachers and leaders need, for the past three years and have codified our best practices for other states and districts in our [Instructional Materials Implementation Guidebook](#).

We are excited to highlight our most recent lessons learned in this report.

³ See Kane, T. et al. *Learning By the Book*. March 2019. Available at: <https://cepr.harvard.edu/curriculum>

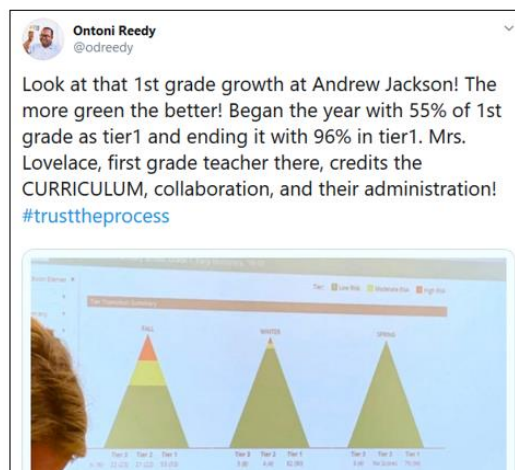
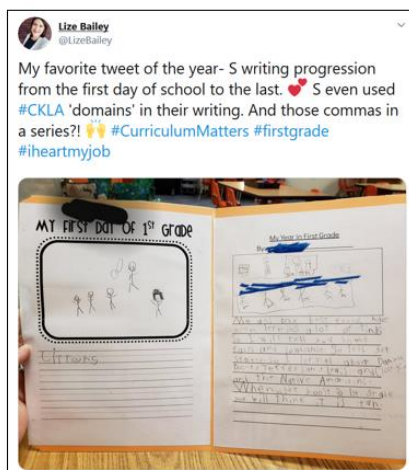
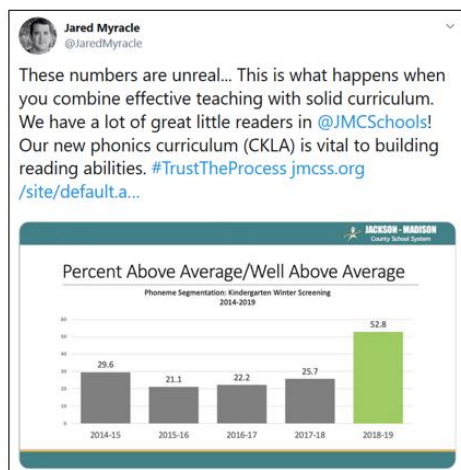
⁴ See Kane, T. & Steiner, D. *Don't Give Up on Curriculum Reform Just Yet*. April 2019. Available at: <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/04/02/dont-give-up-on-curriculum-reform-just.html>

Key Learning 1: To sustain progress, leaders must maintain relentless focus on the vision for excellence and investment in the strategy to achieve it.

In our 2018 Annual Report, we emphasized that to reach the intended depth of instructional change we are seeking and to sustain that change, leaders at all levels of the organization need to stay focused and to act strategically.⁵ In the initial phases of this work, LIFT leaders consciously planned activities to engage stakeholders in decision-making, communicate rationale and direction, and continuously gather feedback throughout the change process. The result was strong investment in the vision for excellent instruction and standards-aligned instructional materials as a strategy to achieve it.

Three years into our journey, in the face of competing priorities, changing demands and resources, and teacher and administrator turnover, LIFT leaders were keenly aware of the risk that the work would be watered down or that high-quality instructional materials would fall into disuse. In fact, in *Learning By the Book*, CEPR researchers reported that, although the vast majority of teachers surveyed reported using their instructional materials for some purpose, only 25 percent used them "nearly all the time" for essential activities, and just 7 percent exclusively used the instructional materials. Many teachers reported supplementing their instructional materials with resources that they found on the internet or developed themselves.⁶ In the early phases of the work this was not the case in LIFT districts, and leaders wanted to make sure it stayed that way.

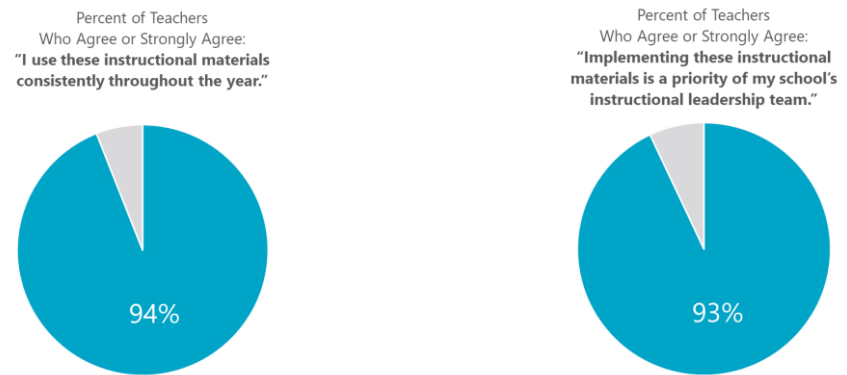
To avoid this pitfall, leaders in LIFT districts prioritized **strategies to maintain the investment of all stakeholders**, including board members, families and the community, school leaders, and teachers. These strategies included celebration of early wins and regular communications about successes, lessons learned, and areas of focus moving forward. Many leaders leveraged social media to celebrate the dramatic changes in students' daily experiences, the hard work of teachers and leaders to realize this change, and early improvements in student outcomes. Others shared before-and-after student work samples with school board members and school leaders to highlight the growth in student learning and encourage persistence in the work.



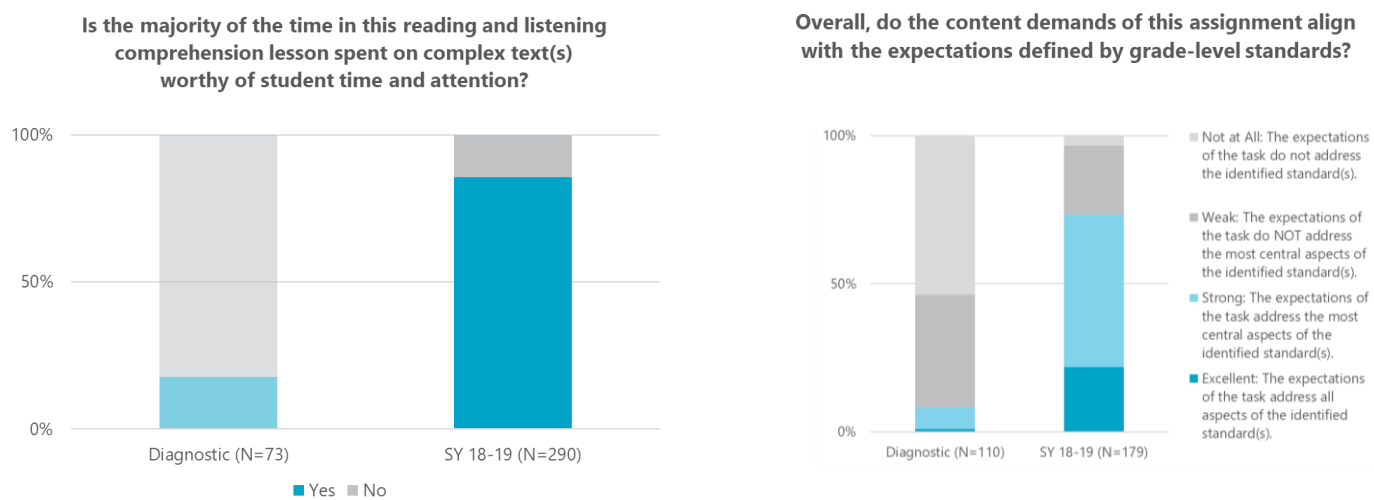
⁵ https://lifteducationtn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/180911-Annual-Report-Draft_FINAL.pdf

⁶ See Kane, T. et al. *Learning By the Book*. March 2019. Available at: <https://cepr.harvard.edu/curriculum>

As a result of intentional investment strategies like this, teachers in LIFT districts still overwhelmingly agree that implementation of high-quality instructional materials is a priority for them and their district and school leaders.



Maintaining the investment of all stakeholders in the vision for excellent instruction and instructional materials as a strategy to achieve that vision has allowed students to consistently engage with the rigorous texts and tasks in the selected materials. The consistent use of standards-aligned materials in LIFT districts means that students continue to have opportunities to cultivate comfort with the complex syntax, vocabulary, ideas, information, and arguments in texts about meaningful topics. **In 2018-19, 86 percent of observed lessons focused on a complex text that was worthy of student time and attention, compared with just 21 percent in our initial instructional reviews.**⁷



Additionally, the consistent use of standards-aligned materials in LIFT districts means that students continue to have opportunities to engage in the rigorous assignments present in the instructional materials. **In 2018-19, 73 percent of sampled assignments reflected the demands of Tennessee’s rigorous ELA standards, compared with just 9 percent in initial instructional reviews.**

THEN: Grade 2 Task, Instructional Review

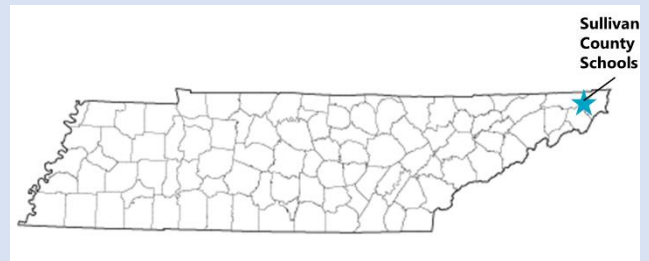
In *The Pigeon Wants a Puppy* the pigeon ends up getting a puppy but he changes his mind and doesn’t want it anymore. At the end he wants a walrus. Would you get him a walrus? Why or why not?

NOW: Grade 1 Task, 2018-19

Choose the person or event that you think was most important to the birth of our country. Explain why you chose this person or event using details from the stories we have read.

⁷ Initial reviews took place in 2016.

Vignette: Maintaining Stakeholder Investment In Sullivan County



In the early phases of this work, Sullivan County district leaders effectively engaged the school board, school leaders, teachers, and families in the decision to pilot the Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) curriculum as one component of a comprehensive literacy strategy. To maintain strong investment in this strategy over the 5-6 years they anticipate it will take to change standardized assessment results, Sullivan County leaders have relentlessly focused educators on the day-to-day changes in the student experience. They have executed a variety of intentional investment strategies aimed at maintaining this focus, including:

- Transparently reporting on progress to the Board of Education at regular intervals, including sharing data on changes in classroom practice, changes in task alignment, and changes in student learning as measured by student work analysis and RTI data, and teacher, leader, and family perceptions of the work reported in surveys.
- Inviting teachers and leaders to share their perceptions and the impact of the work directly with the Board of Education.
- Sharing [newsletters](#) with families highlighting the exciting knowledge-building in the curriculum and highlighting how parents can help their children at home.
- Using Google Classroom to share stories of impact across the district and using Twitter to share these stories more broadly, including highlights from observed [student discussion](#), [student work](#), [parent perceptions](#), and evidence of [student learning](#) from curriculum-embedded and RTI assessments.
- Focusing on early evidence of impact on student learning, including RTI data. In February 2019, Sullivan County issued a [press release](#) announcing historic gains in elementary reading on their RTI screening assessments, and the Bristol Herald Courier [featured the news](#). In August 2019, Sullivan issued another press release announcing substantial gains in elementary reading on the TNReady English Language Arts assessment, and the Kingsport Times News [featured the news](#).
- Contributing to the national conversation on curriculum reform, including co-authoring an Education Week [editorial](#) and [blogging](#) about the impact on student learning with the hashtag #theywillrise.

As a result of these efforts, Sullivan County teachers still, overwhelmingly, agree that implementation of CKLA is a priority for them and their district and school leaders with 99 percent of teachers agreeing with the statement “I use these instructional materials consistently throughout the year.” Following the lead of their district team, Sullivan County teachers are also [tweeting](#) about the impact of the work on their students and inspiring other teachers to leverage high-quality instructional materials.



Key Learning 2: Teachers need structures and support to reorient their daily work with rigorous materials.

A clear vision for excellent instruction and standards-aligned instructional materials alone are not enough to produce dramatically different results for students. To realize their potential, teachers must deeply understand the design and intent of the materials, build trust and confidence in the materials, and deliver them with integrity, creativity, and professional judgement. This requires teachers to make a significant shift from *planning* for lessons (i.e. sourcing materials and designing activities) to deep intellectual *preparation* from high-quality materials.

In the early phases of this work, LIFT leaders provided strategically sequenced professional learning to help teachers understand the design of the instructional materials and the potential benefits for students. This included orienting teachers to consistent protocols that would support the significant shift from *planning* for lessons to deep intellectual *preparation* (see example Unit Preparation Protocol to the right).

This year, LIFT leaders worked to establish consistent **structures** and provide **ongoing support** for teacher collaboration and reflection to deepen and refine unit and lesson preparation. This meant carving out and protecting time for **unit preparation** and supporting teacher teams to understand the desired results for learners in a unit, think about how students will demonstrate the desired results at the end of the unit, and map how the lesson experiences in the unit will build to those desired results.

LIFT leaders also prioritized structures and support for **lesson preparation** to help teachers make strategic decisions about lesson delivery that would improve the impact on students (e.g. anticipating student misconceptions or struggles, identifying pieces of text that might need to be revisited, strategically grouping students, making decisions about where to speed up, slow down, skip or supplement based on the needs of students).

EL Module Preparation Protocol

TEACHER: _____
GRADE: _____
MODULE: _____

Step 1: What will my students learn during this Module?

Guiding Questions	Notes
Review the Module Overview. Focus on the introductory information about the Module at the beginning of the document. <ul style="list-style-type: none">What will my students come to know and understand through this Module?	
Review the Module Overview. Focus on the Guiding Questions and Big Ideas. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Why are these Guiding Questions and Big Ideas worthwhile for students to explore?	

Step 2: How will my students demonstrate their learning in this Module?

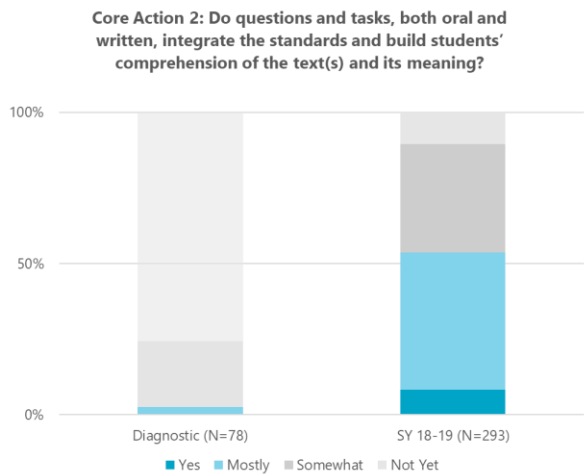
Guiding Questions	Notes
Review the Assessment Overview. Focus on the description of the Mid- and End-of-Unit Assessments. <ul style="list-style-type: none">How are students asked to demonstrate their understanding of the "Big Ideas" for the Module in the Mid- and End-of-Unit assessments?	
Review the Performance Task Overview. Focus on the Summary of Task and the Key Criteria for Success. <ul style="list-style-type: none">What does the Performance Task require students to know? What does the Performance Task require students to do?Building on the Criteria for Success in the Modules, create a rubric for the Performance Task that is aligned to the standards.	

Step 3: How will the daily learning experiences in this Module build student understanding and skill?

Guiding Questions	Notes
Read each Unit Overview. Focus on the introductory information about the Unit and the Guiding Questions and Big Ideas. <ul style="list-style-type: none">What is the focus of each Unit in this Module? What is the arc of learning?	Unit 1: Unit 2: Unit 3:

Example: Unit Preparation Template

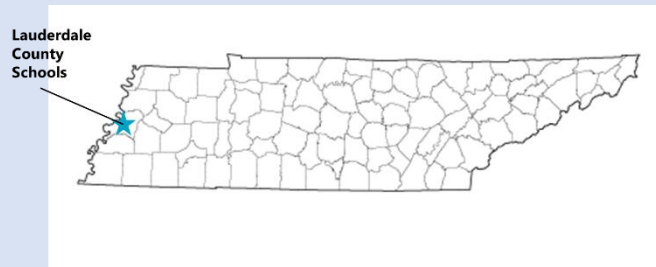
As a result, more and more teachers in LIFT districts are engaging in the deep intellectual preparation needed to effectively deliver the lessons in high-quality instructional materials. In 2018-19, 53 percent of observed lessons featured strong question sequences that support student access to complex texts and rigorous tasks, compared with just 3 percent in initial instructional reviews.



"We start with the end in mind by looking at the assessment and then go backwards from there. Of course, you have got to figure out things like what copies do you need, what charts do you need to make, but you also **have to go much deeper than that.**"

- Kristin Johnston, Teacher, Lenoir City Schools

Vignette: Supporting Teachers To Refine Their Preparation And Practice In Lauderdale County



This year, Lauderdale County schools launched a Reflective Coaching Collaborative (RCC) – embedded, ongoing professional development for K-3 teachers implementing Wit and Wisdom instructional materials. The goal of the RCC was to support teachers in a differentiated manner as they refine their lesson preparation and instructional practices using strong curricular materials. The ultimate goal for this ongoing support was to help teachers transition to the role of facilitator as they “shift the lift” and plan for lessons that actively engage students.

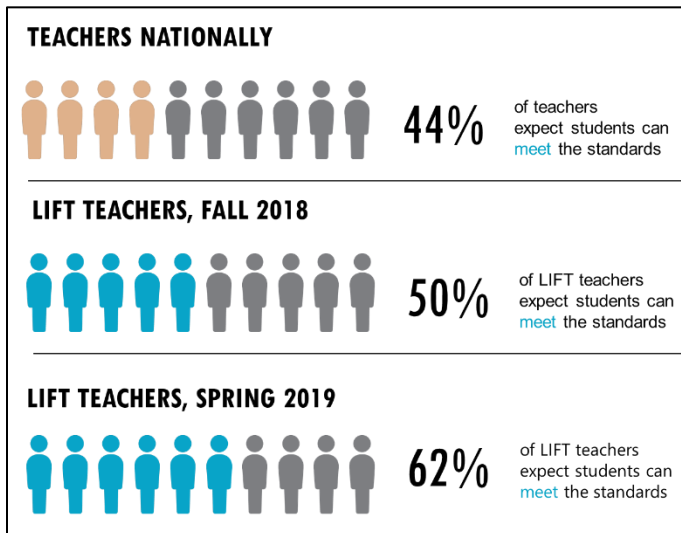
During late spring 2019, two instructional coaches and one curriculum coordinator in the K-3 setting worked with a total of 12 teachers in three different schools. Instructional coaches facilitated an initial Professional Learning Community (PLC) with teacher teams to review chapters related to the *Ratio* instructional practice outlined in *Teach Like A Champion 2.0* (Lemov, 2015) and to explain the RCC cycle. During the RCC cycle, which lasted approximately eight weeks, the teachers were provided an opportunity to synthesize information from the book study, analyze and adapt an upcoming Wit and Wisdom lesson, practice “teaching moves” selected to increase engagement, film the delivery of a practiced lesson, reflect on the lesson delivered in collaboration with an instructional coach using a reflection protocol, analyze student work samples, and identify areas for continued growth.

The teachers who participated in the RCC were initially apprehensive. Teachers noted that they were intimidated by the use of video but, after the cycle understood better the value of purposefully reflecting on their teaching. All teachers involved in the RCC voiced that opportunities to collaborate with others in a supportive environment as they “did this hard but important work” was the most significant outcome of their participation. One teacher noted that while watching herself on video, she saw many “missed opportunities to build on student knowledge.” Another teacher commented that the reflection protocol allowed her to set aside her perceptions of how the lesson was supposed to go (based on the preparation of lesson) and identify areas that she could support students to become more independent learners. Most of the teachers agreed that the RCC was a powerful way to improve their teaching practices and that they would participate in another cycle in the future.

Leaders in Lauderdale County hope that continued use of the RCC will empower teachers as they engage collaboratively to refine their instructional practices and support each other as professional learners. They also hope that this new learning will ultimately lead to greater adaptability and improved ability to meet the individual needs of current and future students. This growth mindset is especially important as some teachers continue to be apprehensive of the curricular changes and have not fully bought into the use of strong materials. In addition, new learning will be shared with other teachers throughout the district as Lauderdale County expands the implementation of Wit and Wisdom ELA through Grade 8 during the 2019-20 school year.

Key Learning 3: Teachers' expectations rise when they see firsthand that their students can succeed with more rigorous materials.

In a recent national study of the student experience, *The Opportunity Myth*, TNTP found that teachers with high expectations for students' success have a meaningful positive impact on academic achievement. The report also showed that most surveyed teachers across the county do not report having high expectations for their students' success. Based on these findings, LIFT leaders committed to measuring and raising expectations for students across the network.



In fall 2018 and spring 2019, the network surveyed teachers to benchmark their expectations for students. Initially the network was interested in establishing a baseline to measure progress in future years. However, there was a significant and interesting increase in the number of teachers reporting that their students can meet the demands of Tennessee's rigorous standards from fall to spring. In spring 2019, 62 percent of teachers reported that they believed their students can meet the demands of Tennessee's ELA standards, compared with only 50 percent in fall 2018.

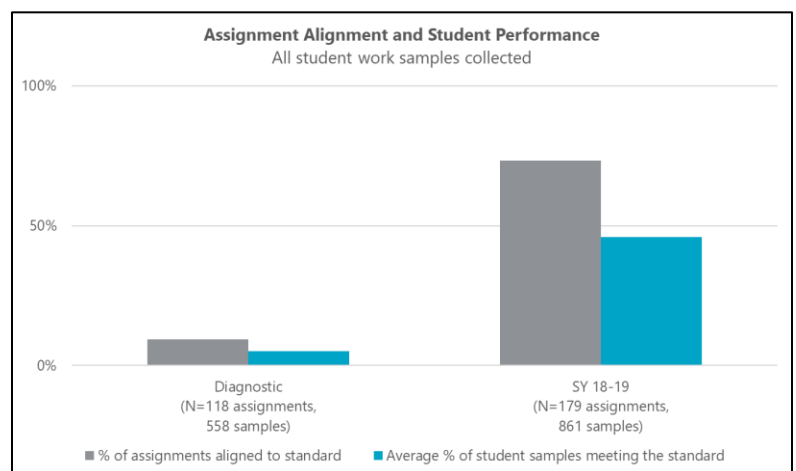
While there is still a lot of room for growth, this is markedly different than the 44 percent of teachers who expect students to meet their state's academic standards in TNTP's national study of the student experience, [The Opportunity Myth](#).

Based on interviews of teachers, LIFT leaders hypothesize that the commitment to the rigorous tasks in the curriculum (see Key Learning 1) has allowed teachers to see firsthand that their students can succeed with more rigorous materials which is slowly challenging and changing low expectations.

In 2018-19, students had significantly more opportunities to engage with grade-level assignments than in past years. And they rose to the challenge—46 percent of students in LIFT districts met the demands of the standards on rigorous assignments, compared with just 5 percent in initial instructional reviews. Students are showing us what they are capable of when they are given grade-level work and, as a result, teachers' expectations are rising.

Here is what some of the LIFT teachers had to say about their changing expectations for students:

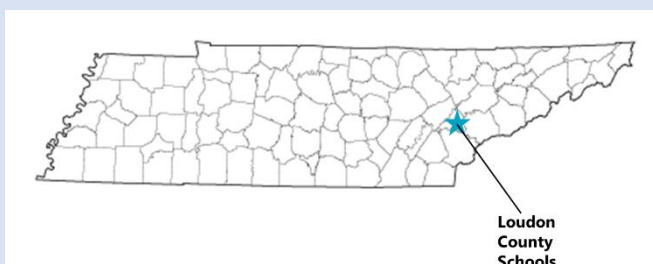
- "When we started this, it was a lot of 'I don't think we'll be able to do this; I don't know how we'll get there; I'm not sure they will meet this expectation.' Time and time again they have proved me wrong."
- "Before, I probably said the words 'these writing standards are not age appropriate.' I can't use that excuse anymore. I have a classroom full of kids who can do it and have shown me."
- "I knew children were capable, but now looking at how rigorous this curriculum is, and the fact that our students have risen to meet that bar; it has been astounding to me! I see that my students rise to do much more than I thought they could before."



- "I felt that I was a pretty decent reading teacher before! I'm not saying that to toot my horn, but I had worked hard for years to make sure my students were getting the skills they needed. But after a year of CKLA, I was like, 'Wow, this is what's possible!'"

LIFT leaders will capitalize on this finding by prioritizing structures and supports for teachers to analyze and reflect on student work in the year ahead. They will also continue to leverage social media to celebrate student success on grade-level assignments to broaden impact.

Vignette: Supporting Teachers To Reflect On Student Learning In Loudon County



After two years of implementing the Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) curriculum, Loudon County Schools sought to deepen and refine implementation to improve the impact on students. Through classroom observations, they noticed that “Curriculum Team” members (the initial group of teachers who piloted CKLA) demonstrated stronger implementation. They observed evidence that Curriculum Team members had deeply internalized the content and routines in CKLA, seemed to better understand the desired results for students, and generally held higher expectations for student performance. They decided to leverage the experience and expertise of these Curriculum Team leaders to build the capacity of other teachers and accelerate progress toward their vision. To that end, they charged Curriculum Team members with leading their grade-level teams through two structured Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for each CKLA Domain:

- PLC A: Engage your grade-level team in deep analysis of the End-of-Domain Task.
- PLC B: Engage your grade-level team in deep analysis of the students’ work.

Loudon County leaders supported Curriculum Team members to establish regular routines for these PLCs and trained them to use consistent protocols to guide reflection (see below). They also communicated clear expectations for PLC cycles to elementary principals, ensuring that this time was protected and supported.

Teachers are now consistently reflecting on the impact of instruction on student learning and identify next steps for themselves and their students in these PLCs. And while there is still significant room for growth, 61 percent of Loudon County teachers expect their students to meet the demands of Tennessee’s rigorous standards.

PLC A: End-Of-Domain Task Analysis Protocol	
Step 1: Analyze and Refine the Task Goal: Understand the task from the perspective of the student and determine its purpose.	
Protocol Steps and Guiding Question Guiding Question: How does the task allow students to demonstrate comprehension of the central ideas in the Domain? Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the Essential Question for the Domain and the prompt for the End-of-Domain Writing Task. Consider how the End-of-Domain Writing Task allows students to demonstrate their understanding of the Essential Question in writing. If necessary, refine the task and draft student-facing directions. 	Notes
Step 2: Determine Alignment to Grade Level Standards Goal: Determine if the task is aligned to the Tennessee Academic Standards for the grade level.	
Protocol Steps and Guiding Question Guiding Question: Does the task align closely to expectations articulated by grade-level standards? Does the task contain reach the depth of grade-level standards? Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the task to identify the targeted grade-level standards. Write down each of the grade-level standards. Review the Tennessee Academic Standards to determine alignment. If necessary, refine the task to align more closely to expectations articulated by grade-level standards. 	Notes
Step 3: Set Expectations for Student Performance Goal: Norm expectations for student performance to ensure we are holding a consistently high bar across classrooms.	
Protocol Steps and Guiding Question Guiding Question: What will it look like for students to meet expectations on this task? Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider what it will look like for students to meet expectations on this task. Review grade-level guidance document to ensure expectations reflect the depth of grade-level standards. Collaboratively draft an exemplar response. 	Notes

PLC B: Student Work Analysis Protocol	
Step 1: Analyze Individual Student Work Goal: Determine how well instruction supported individual students to demonstrate comprehension of the central ideas in the Domain and meet the demands of the standards.	
Protocol Steps and Guiding Question Guiding Question: What does the student's work demonstrate about his or her understanding of the central ideas in the Domain (i.e. knowledge/competence)? What does the student's work demonstrate about what he or she can do (i.e. the standards)? Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evenly distribute work samples among the team so that each member has a handful of student samples from the same task. Each person individually analyzes their samples using the guiding questions above. 	Notes
Step 2: Identify Trends Across the Collection of Student Work Goal: Analyze and identify trends across the collection of student work samples to determine the strengths and areas of improvement.	
Protocol Steps and Guiding Question Guiding Question: What are students doing well? (What do they know and are able to do)? What are common errors and challenges students appear to be having with the task? Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each person gets one minute to share their analysis of the individual pieces of student work they examined. The group synthesizes and identifies patterns and trends across student work samples. 	Notes
Step 3: Determine Next Steps to Support Student Learning Goal: Determine what instructional next steps the teacher and students should take to support student learning.	
Protocol Steps and Guiding Question Guiding Question: What would you name as the next big thing for this group of students to work on? What can the teacher do to move the students forward? Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What would you name as the next big thing for this group of students to work on? What can the teacher do to move the students forward? 	Notes

Key Learning 4: We cannot underestimate the magnitude of the transformation that shifting to explicit and systematic foundational skills instruction requires.

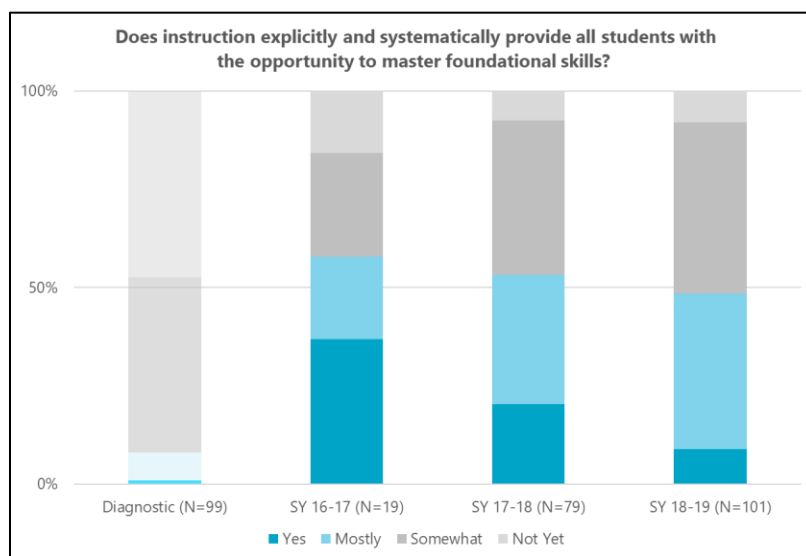
As outlined in our 2017 and 2018 Annual Reports⁸, much of the professional learning and support teachers in LIFT districts have received has been focused on reading and listening comprehension instruction. This was an intentional decision because of the significant instructional shifts required to deliver this type of instruction effectively.

- Shift 1: Regular practice with complex text and its academic language
- Shift 2: Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text
- Shift 3: Building knowledge through content-rich non-fiction

This year, LIFT leaders reflected on progress monitoring outcomes and determined that they may have underestimated the magnitude of the transformation in foundational reading skills instruction.

Despite decades of reading research pointing to the effectiveness of systematic and explicit instruction in phonological awareness and phonics⁹, many districts and schools across the country—including many districts in the LIFT network prior to this work—have not embraced this approach.¹⁰ In SY 2016-17, most districts in the LIFT network committed to shifting practice and piloted instructional materials that support systematic and explicit daily instruction in phonological awareness and phonics in a small number of classrooms.

Initially the network saw a huge increase in the quality of foundational skills instruction after the introduction these instructional materials to a small number of pilot teachers. In 2017-18, 58 percent of observed lessons reflected the vision for systematic and explicit foundational skills instruction, compared with just 7 percent in our initial instructional review. However, with expansion to many more teachers in 2018-19, without sufficient training and support, teachers have reverted back to old practices and are not consistently implementing the skills materials with integrity. In 2018-19, only 49 percent of observed lessons reflected the vision.



Looking forward, LIFT leaders plan to prioritize training and support for foundational skills instruction, similar to the support provided for reading and listening comprehension instruction, to ensure all teachers use the instructional materials and aligned practices consistently and students have the opportunity to systematically and explicitly master foundational skills instruction. This will include launching a new foundational skills vision-building tool and introducing protocols for Unit and Lesson Preparation with high-quality foundational skills materials.

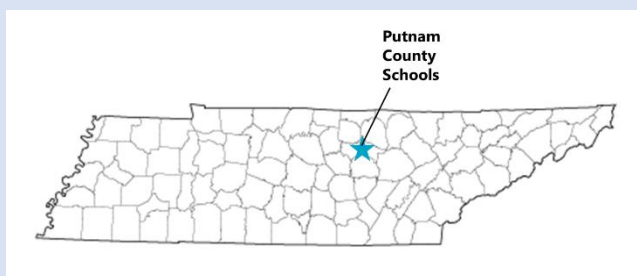
For policymakers and practitioners interested in learning from our work, we cannot emphasize enough the importance of ongoing support for teachers and leaders to reorient their daily work with rigorous materials—including foundational skills materials.

⁸ See the 2017 and 2018 LIFT annual reports to learn more about the network and the lessons learned in our first two years of implementation: <https://lifteducationtn.com/resources/>

⁹ See Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read: an Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction : Reports of the Subgroups. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health, 2000. Available at <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pubs/nrp/Documents/report.pdf>

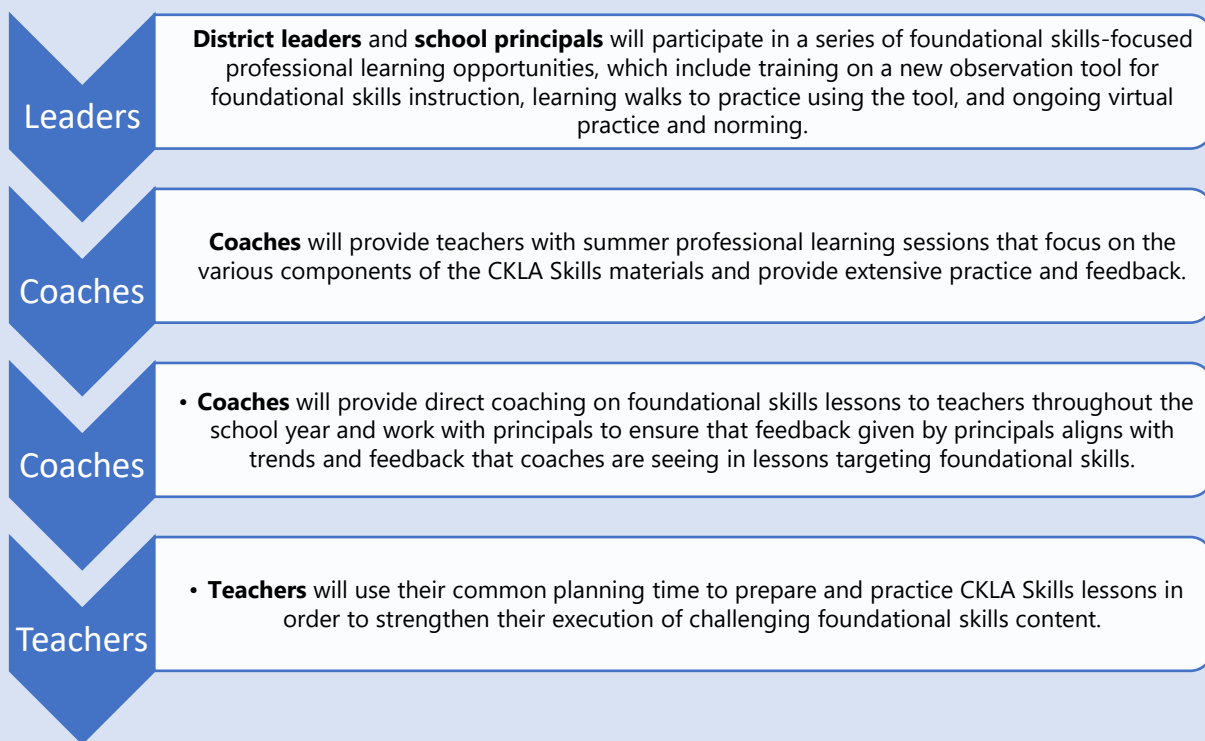
¹⁰ See Hanford, E. "Hard Words" Transcript from APM Reports. Available at <https://www.apmreports.org/files/hard-words-transcript.pdf>

Vignette: Looking Forward— Improving The Quality Of Foundational Skills Instruction In Putnam County



During the 2018-19 school year, Putnam County Schools saw positive growth in the quality of their foundational skills instruction: just over 50 percent of observed classrooms provided students with explicit and systematic instruction that led to mastery of foundational skills, up from about 25 percent in the 2017-18 school year. However, district leaders are mindful of the trends observed in the LIFT network as a whole, and of the opportunity to continue improving foundational skills instruction for the other 50 percent of students in the district.

With these trends and opportunities in mind, Putnam County has set forth an ambitious strategy for improving implementation of the CKLA Skills instructional strand in the 2019-20 school year that includes several specific action steps geared at further developing the vision and execution of instruction:



Through this strategy, Putnam County hopes to provide teachers and leaders with the targeted professional learning necessary to keep teachers on track with implementing their CKLA Foundational Skills materials and ensuring that students in Putnam County are receiving strong, research-driven foundational skills instruction.

Key Learning 5: The best practices we have learned from the LIFT network's efforts to improve early literacy can be replicated to expand impact.

This year LIFT leaders welcomed three new districts to the network: Lincoln County, Marshall County, and Overton County. Each of these districts were independently working to improve early literacy instruction and expressed an interest in learning from the work of LIFT. These three districts formed their own mini network, within LIFT, called the LIFT Learning Network (LLN), and explored whether it was possible to replicate these best practices to achieve similar or even better results with less technical support from SCORE and TNTP.

The LLN districts leveraged the best practices learned from the LIFT network that had been codified in our [Instructional Materials Implementation Guidebook](#) to evaluate, select, and launch high-quality instructional materials. Specifically, they:

- Piloted standards-aligned instructional materials as a strategy to improve early literacy instruction in a small number of classrooms; using the pilots to create a space for risk-taking, mistakes, and quick learning.
- Engaged teachers and leaders in strategically sequenced, materials-specific professional learning.
- Established structures and regular routines for teacher collaboration and reflection with instructional materials.
- Provided consistent protocols and supports for reorienting teachers' unit and daily lesson preparation.



"When I first got the materials, I was overwhelmed. We all were. It's a really different way to teach. And I was thinking, 'Oh goodness how are my kids going to do this? It's so different.' But Putnam County teachers, who have been using the curriculum since 2016, encouraged us. They told us, 'trust the process,' and I am so thankful that we did because the results have been amazing."

- Andrea Chiaudano, LIFT Learning Network Teacher

Additionally, these districts were matched with a mentor district from the original LIFT network to provide resources and ongoing thought partnership. Mentor districts provided teacher training resources, hosted leaders and teachers from LLN districts to visit classrooms and speak with educators, and joined monthly virtual PLCs to share wisdom, anecdotes, and best practices with LLN districts.

After only one year, the results suggest that the best practices we have learned from the LIFT network's efforts to improve early literacy can be replicated to expand impact—and even accelerated. In 2018-19:

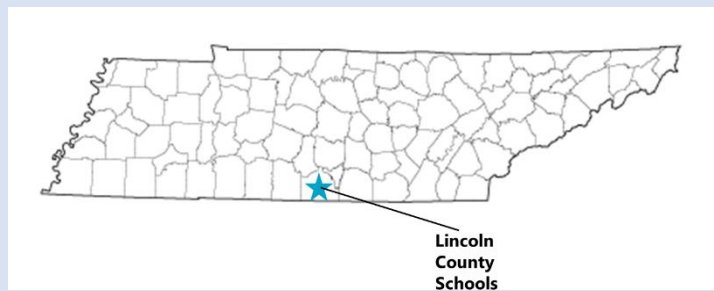
- 73 percent of observed lessons in LIFT Learning Network districts were centered on a **high-quality text**, compared with just 56 percent in initial instructional reviews in these districts.
- 58 percent of sampled **tasks** in LIFT Learning Network districts **reflect the demands of the standards**, compared with just 30 percent in initial instructional reviews in these districts.
- 43 percent of observed lessons in LIFT Learning Network districts featured **questions and tasks that support student access to complex text**, compared with just 19 percent in initial instructional reviews.
- 11 percent of observed lessons in LIFT Learning Network districts **allow students to own the rigorous thinking**, compared with 0 percent in initial instructional reviews in these districts.
- 48 percent of students in LIFT Learning Network districts are **meeting the demands of Tennessee's rigorous standards**, compared with 25 percent in initial instructional reviews in these districts.
- 83 percent of observed foundational skills lessons in LIFT Learning Network districts provide the opportunity for students to **master foundational skills**, compared with 67 percent in initial instructional reviews in these districts.

By leveraging the best practices learned from the LIFT network and their relationships with mentor districts, the LIFT Learning Network districts have made faster progress than other LIFT districts did in their pilot year and have almost accelerated progress to the point of "catching up" with other LIFT districts, many of whom are three years in to this journey.

Given this, we believe our [Instructional Materials Implementation Guidebook](#) will be a valuable resource for districts adopting high-quality instructional materials as they think through the many supports that teachers and leaders need to effectively leverage high-quality materials to dramatically improve outcomes for students. It may be particularly beneficial for districts in Tennessee who will be adopting new ELA materials in 2020.

We also suggest that as Tennessee districts begin the ELA textbook adoption process over the next year, they should reach out to their LIFT colleagues to see what lessons can be learned and what pitfalls they should avoid. We attribute the successes of LIFT and the LLN districts to the ongoing opportunities for collaboration and thought partnership provided through the network. **We encourage those embarking on the textbook adoption process to partner with other districts in their region to explore innovative approaches, share best practices, identify the best supports for their teachers, and problem-solve challenges as they arise.**

Vignette: Supporting Teachers With New Instructional Materials In Lincoln County



When Lincoln County teachers first found out that they would be piloting the Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) curriculum in the fall of 2018, there were a lot of nerves about the amount of content they had to internalize. However, teachers at South Lincoln Elementary School received a lot of advice from teachers in Putnam County based on learnings from the [Instructional Materials Implementation Guidebook](#)—namely to use the materials with fidelity at the beginning and to trust the structures and content of CKLA.

Teachers at South Lincoln worked in grade-level teams to understand the domain and lesson structures of CKLA by using their shared planning time to analyze the goals of each lesson and to ensure that students would have the opportunity to read and write about content and practice foundational skills each day. By working together, teachers were able to help each other lighten the load of understanding each domain and the logistical aspects of lessons, such as preparing anchor charts and materials.

As a result of their shared planning based in best practices from Putnam County teachers, teachers in Lincoln County more than doubled the number of grade level-appropriate assignments that students received (70 percent of assignments, up from 33 percent the year before), and ensured that 70 percent of observed lessons focused on high-quality texts. South Lincoln Elementary was named by the state as a reward school. In the coming year, these best practices will be replicated by teachers across Lincoln County, as Lincoln scales their program from two to six elementary schools.



Conclusion And Next Steps For LIFT

As we begin our fourth year of the early literacy implementation work, SCORE and TNTP will continue to provide strategic support to LIFT districts in their efforts to produce dramatically different early literacy outcomes. Based on data from spring 2019 progress monitoring efforts, we will continue to focus on the following learning priorities:

1. **Shifting the Lift:** How do we continue to build capacity of leaders and teachers to ensure *students* are owning the cognitive work of making meaning and demonstrating understanding of the complex ideas, information and arguments in high-quality text?
2. **Reaching all Learners:** How can we leverage standards-aligned instructional materials to meet the needs of diverse learners and support *all students* in reaching the standards?

The network has also identified some new learning priorities for SY 2019-20:

3. **Coherence:** How do we achieve coherence across all strategic initiatives and priorities designed to support improvements in teacher practice and student learning and avoid distractions over the long-term?
4. **Change Management:** How do we continue to build investment and celebrate progress, while simultaneously inspiring a sense of urgency to drive needed improvements in practice and student learning over the long-term?

These questions are designed to tackle the most pressing common challenges across the network, grounded in the evidence we've collected, and the lessons shared in this annual report. We will continue to share our learnings, outcomes, and resources as we test new ideas and study their impact on students.

Questions? Comments? Suggestions? Please contact us!

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APPENDIX A: LIFT MATERIALS IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

	SY 2016-2017	SY 2017-2018	SY 2018-2019	SY 2019-2020
Dyersburg City	Read-Aloud Project, K-2*	Read-Aloud Project, K-2 EL Language Arts, 3-5*	Unit Starters, K-1 EL Language Arts, 2* EL Language Arts, 3-5	EL Language Arts, K-1* EL Language Arts, 2-5
Fayette County	Wit & Wisdom, K-2* CKLA L&L, K-2*	CKLA L&L, K-3 CKLA Skills, K-3	CKLA L&L, K-4 CKLA Skills, K-4	CKLA L&L, K-5 CKLA Skills, K-5
Jackson-Madison County	CKLA L&L, K-2*	CKLA L&L, K-2 CKLA Skills, K-2* EL Language Arts, 3-5*	CKLA L&L, K-2 CKLA Skills, K-2 EL Language Arts, 3-5	CKLA L&L, K-2 CKLA Skills, K-2 EL Language Arts, 3-5
Lauderdale County	Wit & Wisdom, K-1*	Wit & Wisdom, K-3	Wit & Wisdom, K-5	Wit & Wisdom, K-5
Lenoir City	N/A – Not yet part of LIFT network	EL Language Arts, 2-5*	EL Language Arts, K-5	EL Language Arts, K-5
Loudon County	Wit & Wisdom, K-2* CKLA L&L, K-2* Wilson FUNdations, K-2*	CKLA L&L, K-2 Wilson FUNdations, K-2	CKLA L&L, K-2 Wilson FUNdations, K-2 CKLA L&L, 3*	CKLA L&L, K-3 Wilson FUNdations, K-2
Putnam County	CKLA L&L, K-2*	CKLA L&L, K-2 CKLA Skills, K-2*	CKLA L&L, K-3 CKLA L&L, 4* CKLA Skills, K-3	CKLA L&L, K-4 CKLA Skills, K-3
Sullivan County	CKLA L&L, K-2* CKLA Skills, K-2*	CKLA L&L, K-2 CKLA L&L, 3* CKLA Skills, K-2 CKLA Skills, 3*	CKLA L&L, K-3 CKLA L&L, 4* CKLA Skills, K-3	CKLA L&L, K-5 CKLA Skills, K-3
Trousdale County	CKLA L&L, K-2* CKLA Skills, K-2*	CKLA L&L, K-2 CKLA Skills, K-2	CKLA L&L, K-2 CKLA Skills, K-2 EL Language Arts, 3-5*	CKLA L&L, K-2 CKLA Skills, K-2 EL Language Arts, 3-5
Lincoln County	N/A – Not yet part of LIFT network	N/A – Not yet part of LIFT network	CKLA L&L, K-1* CKLA Skills, K-1*	CKLA L&L, K-2 CKLA Skills, K-2
Marshall County	N/A – Not yet part of LIFT network	N/A – Not yet part of LIFT network	CKLA L&L, K-1*	CKLA L&L, K-1 CKLA Skills, K-1*
Overton County	N/A – Not yet part of LIFT network	N/A – Not yet part of LIFT network	CKLA L&L, K-3* CKLA Skills, K-3*	CKLA L&L, K-3 CKLA Skills, K-3

* Small-scale pilot in select classrooms or schools.