

Spotlight Illinois: Building a foundation for reading success

Overview

As Illinois' eleventh-largest district, [Springfield Public School District](#) serves a diverse population of 13,000 students across 31 schools. When district leaders recognized their literacy instruction needed strengthening, they knew the path forward required both systematic change and substantial support for their teachers.

"We were in a position where we had more kids needing tiered support than were being satisfied in the core," explains Meri Havenar, Inclusive Practices and Curriculum Specialist for the district's Student Support Services Department. After years of using Units of Study, the district faced mounting challenges meeting students' foundational reading needs, particularly for their special education population.

DISTRICT SNAPSHOT

Springfield Public School

- 13,000 total students
- 31 schools (20 elementary including 1 Gifted & Talented)
- Demographics: 45% African American, 35% white
- 60% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch
- 21% of students have an IEP



"From the special education side, we have an obligation to have materials that are at least research-based," Havenar notes. "We weren't satisfying the needs of our students, and we weren't satisfying what we are obligated to do professionally."

“Students are more engaged when they’re coming into their intervention groups and participating in targeted instruction, because now we’re matching their needs and boosting their confidence.”

MERI HAVENAR

Inclusive Practices and Curriculum Specialist
Student Support Services Department

WHAT YOU’LL LEARN

- How one district took a strategic, differentiated approach to implementation—leveraging flexible resources to both address existing skill gaps and accelerate learning
- Why implementing research-based materials **plus** professional development helps to address foundational reading needs across a diverse student population
- Why early results show increased teacher confidence and student engagement

A strategic approach to change

The district formed a collaborative task force to evaluate curriculum options, gathering teacher input and analyzing various approaches. Their search led them to 95 Percent Group’s comprehensive suite of products, including [95 Phonemic Awareness Intervention Resource™](#) (95 PAIR™), [95 Phonics Lesson Library™](#), [95 Phonics Chip Kit™](#), and [95 RAP \(Reading Achievement Program\)™](#).

Implementation began in fall 2024, with two of Springfield’s Balanced Calendar schools beginning the programs in July—before the other schools in the district were to begin in the fall. The district took a strategic approach, primarily using 95 PAIR in kindergarten and first grade while leveraging the Phonics Lesson Library’s flexibility to address skill gaps in upper elementary.

“We know that because of the situation we’re in and making up ground from the insufficient instruction that’s taken place over the last several years, we’re in a different spot,” Havenar explains. “We’ve got no time on our side when it comes to making this up, so how are we going to close gaps, while also pushing forward to accelerate where we need students to go?”

Professional learning that transforms teaching

A key component of Springfield’s success has been the integration of 95 Percent Group’s professional learning with the ongoing LETRS training they were engaged in. “Having such a large number of our educators going through LETRS training in connection with the professional development from 95 Percent Group—which is just lockstep with the LETRS training— has changed the game for them,” Havenar shares.

The district's approach to coaching has been particularly impactful. Despite initial reluctance about classroom visits with 95 Percent Group coaches, teachers have embraced the support.

"I was so amazed and pleasantly surprised by their feedback," Havenar says. "So many of them were requesting more time with coaches, talking about how much they appreciated it, how valuable it was, and how much they looked forward to next steps."

A partnership that prioritizes individual needs

What sets this implementation experience apart, according to Havenar, is differentiation of support rather than a "one-size-fits-most" professional learning model.

Havenar also touched on the flexibility and availability of the consultants. The district maintains weekly check-ins with their implementation manager, who makes herself available to all buildings, principals, and teachers. This level of support has helped break down barriers and encouraged staff to reach out when they need assistance.

This is a testament to the fact that when it comes down to it, it's the people that make the experience great.

"Your product could be great," Havenar reflects, "but without that ability to individualize it for whatever your particular needs are and to feel supported and confident in moving forward with it, the results would be significantly different."

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95 Percent Group is committed to meeting Springfield's specific needs. I think it's so important for people to understand how well they individualize their support to the particular needs of your school or district. I haven't really experienced that kind of support over 27 years in education.

MERI HAVENAR

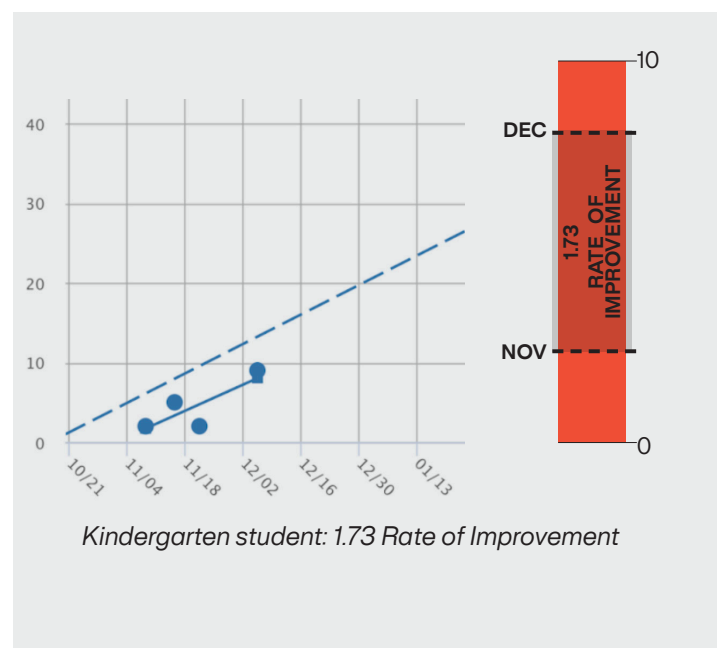
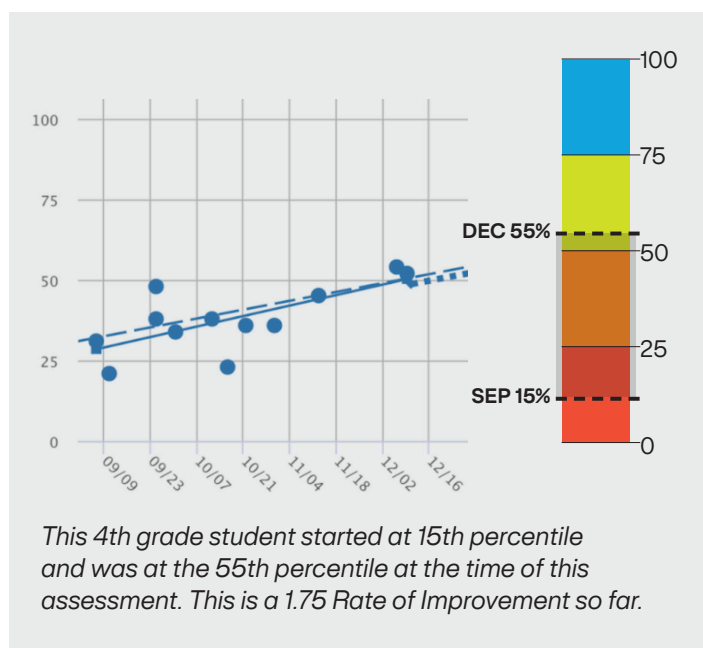
Inclusive Practices and Curriculum Specialist
Student Support Services Department



Early signs of success

While still in the early stages of implementation, the district is already seeing positive changes. Teachers report increased confidence in their instruction, and students are more engaged in their learning. “It’s so fantastic to see,” Havenar laughs. “They’re more engaged when they’re coming into their intervention groups and participating in targeted instruction because now we’re matching their needs and boosting their confidence.”

Additionally, the progress monitoring they’ve done so far shows significant growth is happening. “Overall, we see some significant growth in students’ performance when components are delivered with fidelity and integrity. We see students making greater than expected growth in these situations, and attribute that to the strength in materials as well as the solid support and coaching that have been provided.”



Looking ahead, Havenar is excited about the continued partnership with 95 Percent Group and its potential impact on student achievement.

“The end goal is that all of our students are making ground and reaching those high standards that we know they’re capable of. Working with science of reading–based materials and 95 Percent Group coaching puts the structures and supports in place so that as adults, we can make that happen for them.”

Ready to learn more? Contact a literacy specialist!

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