

Spotlight Pennsylvania:

One aligned, Tier 1 literacy solution

Overview

Educators across [Reading School District](#) faced a stubborn reality: despite years of effort, too many students were still below grade level in reading by the end of third grade. Earlier intervention programs weren't concrete enough in foundational skills. There were no clear starting or ending data points, and the phonics component simply wasn't strong enough.

Fast forward to the first few days of the 2025–26 school year and there is a completely different energy surrounding literacy. Early elementary students are writing multiple sentences on day 1 without asking for any teacher assistance. 1st graders are using academic language to explain spelling patterns.

“

The Reading School District has the strongest sense of community I've ever been privileged to work with.”

JUDIE CAROLEO

Director of Professional Learning
95 Percent Group

PRODUCTS USED

95 Tier 1 Solution

95 Phonics Core Program and Sortegories by 95 Percent Group

SNAPSHOT

The Reading School District

- 85% Latino
- 11% Black
- 5% White
- 28 %SpEd
- 31% EL
- 10% dual ID as both EL and SpEd
- Primarily Spanish speaking families
- 94% eligible for free or reduced lunch

Addressing gaps in foundational skills

Reading School District has been a 95 Percent Group school partner since 2017. They were devoted users of Tier 2 intervention resources like 95 Phonics Lesson Library™ and phonemic awareness resources as well as both screeners—95 Phonics Screener for Intervention™ and 95 Phonemic Awareness Screener for Intervention™.

In 2020—before the chaos of COVID—the district invested in a new Tier 1 resource. Over time, however, and even after the instructional dust began to settle, it became clear that what they were working with wasn't going deep enough in the specific foundational skills students needed to become proficient readers by third grade. They needed data that told them specifically where to start and stop instruction—where a student was missing a critical literacy skill.

So leaders went looking for a stronger, more aligned and evidence-based approach to foundational reading instruction. Given their depth of knowledge and strong existing relationship with 95 Percent Group, adding the [95 Tier 1 Phonics Solution](#) including 95 Phonics Core Program® and Sortegories to their model, felt like an intentional next step.



“

If we are teaching syllable types and decodable words, they can read anything.”

SHERRY BRINKER

Reading specialist

Getting started: Concerns, routines, and the turn

During the 2024–2025 school year, four elementary schools—including 10th & Green, who saw the most success—piloted 95 Phonics Core Program across K–5 and were supported by ongoing, in-person coaching from the 95 Percent Group professional learning team. Their stellar results prompted swift and collective action: this year, the program has been deployed districtwide in K–2 with the pilot schools extending 95 Phonics Core Program through grades 3 and 4, and with intervention resources expanded across K–6.

“The coaching and implementation support were strong at 10th and Green—both from our own reading specialists and from the coaches that came in from 95 Percent Group—and it showed up in our classrooms.”

JULIANNE KLINE

District superintendent for teaching and learning

Although the success has been thrilling for all involved, the transition wasn't effortless. 10th and Green 2nd grade teacher, Kelly Wendler, spoke about her experience.

“When we first started last year, not everyone was completely bought in. Teachers worried about how our Multilingual Learners and Special Education students would fare—and whether our higher students might get bored. The first few weeks were challenging as we all learned the routines and the instructional dialogue.”

She continued.

“But once we got through that first month or two, everything started to click. The kids began to love the consistency and structure, and we saw so much growth in our data. Their confidence skyrocketed—to the point where if a student asked how to spell a word, we'd say, 'We don't ask that question—get your hand ready for fingerstretching!' They just knew what to do.”

After just a few months, teachers reported strong growth in the data and steady increases in student confidence. Students were shifting “How do I spell this?” to independent application of the strategies they were learning.

Student growth you can see—and hear

Teachers now hear first- and second-graders using accurate academic language to talk about phonics—even explaining the why behind letter-sound correspondences.

Sherri Brinker, reading specialist at 10th and Green described witnessing this. “In all my years, I've never heard 6- and 7-year-olds use terms like 'closed syllable' or explain why a vowel has a specific sound. And explaining it to the friend next to them or to an adult.”

From silent to soaring: Multilingual students and more

Confidence has surged for Multilingual Learners in particular.

Wendler describes how explicit and systematic literacy instruction has helped a specific student who is a Multilingual Learner.

“Last year we enrolled a 1st-grade student who only spoke Haitian-Creole. She had a challenging start and was very quiet at first. By March, she was reading to anyone who would listen—often tracking teachers down to read. She went from mostly silent to a student who volunteered to read and speak constantly. The pride and confidence were remarkable. On day three of 2nd grade, she wrote about her drawing completely on her own. She didn’t ask for help once.”

She continued.

“On day three. After one year of aligned instruction. Imagine day 180! I can’t even imagine where they’re going to be. And this is a new feeling to be honest. I’m here 19 years, and you just expect to get them in 2nd grade already really behind. I’m almost in tears about the growth. It’s just incredible.”

Professional learning: The power of precision

It’s not just students that have experienced growth. Many teachers are feeling the enormous difference and relief that comes with a teaching environment where everyone is using the same tools and has the clarity of a shared instructional language.

Erin Brown, principal at 10th and Greene Elementary spoke about some of the surprising ways teachers and students have grown so far, and about the different ways educators have responded to working with 95 Percent Group resources.

“Our teachers have grown so much through implementation. At first, some of our upper-grade teachers were hesitant—they weren’t used to this level of structure.”

But by the end of the year, Brown said, one upper elementary teacher admitted she’d misjudged it. She saw growth in her students that have typically needed more support. The type of growth that she’d never seen before last year.

Brown smiled. “Now, she’s a believer.”

Results that matter

Given our conversation was at the beginning of the 2025-26 school year, educators at 10th and Greene Elementary hadn't begun their Beginning of Year testing window yet. So the sustained results they shared from the students starting out the year after 1 year of targeted phonics instruction was mostly narrative. But there was some compelling evidence of growth from the previous school year.

FOR EXAMPLE

EVIDENCE ONE

Many more students ended the school year in June, 2025 at/above benchmark in the "pilot" buildings than in other "non-pilot" buildings

EVIDENCE TWO

The four pilot schools ranked in the top five for growth at each grade, with 10th & Green leading the district

EVIDENCE THREE

Kindergarten students posted the largest EOY benchmark growth in the district

Student growth was verified through constant monitoring and responsive regrouping. Classroom excitement and teacher embrace of the program were key differentiators: *students got excited because teachers were excited.*

Looking ahead: Starting fast, aiming high

An exciting addition in the 2025-26 school year? Reading has added the second part of 95 Tier 1 Solution, Sortegories™ by 95 Percent Group—K-5 district wide—to round out their Tier 1 instruction. They are using this web-based, flexible platform during the dedicated 60 to 90 minutes of small group instruction for differentiated and skill-focused independent literacy practice.

With year one under their belt, most students and teachers entered year two already fluent in the routines, materials, and language of instruction—meaning they could largely hit the ground running with instruction.

In fact, when asked what she's most excited about for this year, Wendler responded, "On day 3 of school, honestly, it feels like the sky's the limit! I am so excited to see what's next. And when they go to 3rd grade, what is the 3rd grade team going to see about the 2nd graders that come up? Because they're all getting the same instruction, the same consistent language. We're all finally speaking the same language."

A culture shift: From silos → a trusted system

One of the most important messages here?

The initiative didn't just raise scores—it built collaboration and coherence across schools. Shared routines and language replaced isolated efforts, and a districtwide literacy culture began to take root.

"We're not a district of schools anymore—we're a school district," Wendler said happily.

"It's a team effort," Brinker explained when talking about the impressive growth they saw from beginning to end of last year. "It's the classroom teachers who embraced the instruction and brought excitement surrounding the program into their classrooms everyday."

"It's also the reading specialists," Wendler chimed in, "who supported teachers by working with groups and monitoring data and making all the moving parts work. It's the administrators who are so committed to learning about the science of reading."

"It's a collective effort," finished Kimberly Clarke, assistant principal at 10th and Green.

"A trusted system."

“

At the district level, I'm excited that all of our 13 schools are on board now. This unity and consistency really matters because we have a high transiency rate between schools in our district. But now? Every K-2 elementary student will encounter the same high-quality instruction—no matter the school.”

JULIANNE KLINE

District superintendent for teaching and learning

Want to learn about Reading School District's Journey first hand?

Check out our on demand webinar [here!](#)



Trusted, proven literacy solutions

95percentgroup.com | sales@95percentgroup.com | 847.499.8200
© 2025 95 Percent Group LLC. All rights reserved.

