

Spotlight Ohio: Tier 3 intervention in action

Overview

In 2016, educators at Fairless Local School District in Ohio started a professional learning deep dive into structured literacy and the science of reading, beginning with LETRS training, completed in 2021 after some unanticipated time on hold to get through the pandemic. With their new understanding, they began a focused search for structured literacy-based core instruction and intervention to support student and educator success, and to tackle their ongoing challenges with attendance and test scores.

By fall of 2023, they had implemented structured literacy in Tier 1 and Tier 2 across K-3. With the success of 95 Tier 1 Phonics Solution across K-3, and 95 Tier 2 Phonics Solution in small groups for Tier 2, the data at the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year showed a significant increase to 72% of 3rd graders reading at or above grade level from ~60-65% where they started.

A logical next step was implementing an aligned Tier 3 program for students still struggling.



DISTRICT SNAPSHOT

Demographics

- **92%** White
- **~4%** Two or more races
- **~2%** Hispanic/Latino
- **<1%** Black
- **<1%** Asian
- **<1%** American Indian/Alaskan Native
- **~42%** Economically disadvantaged (FRL)
- **~17%** Students with disabilities (IEP)

Schools

- Fairless Elementary School (PK-5)
- Fairless Middle School (6-8)
- Fairless High School (9-12)

Total enrollment:

Approximately 1600 students across K-12

Discovering an aligned approach to Tier 3 intervention

Students who persistently struggle need a high level of support.

5-10%

of students will need intervention

20+

number of weeks

45-120

minutes of additional instruction per day

40-200

repetitions for students with LD and Dyslexia diagnosis

Adam Amato has a background in intervention and literacy, with 13 years in various roles in the district. Today, he is a district MTSS and instructional coach, supporting teachers and students with resources and instruction in all three tiers.

Amato explains what led them to rethink Tier 3: "When a consistent group of students was showing significant gaps in their literacy skills in assessments and screeners, we understood that we needed a new approach to Tier 3 intervention." They had been supplementing their Tier 2 instruction with a range of solutions—individual teachers were spending a lot of time and money of their own to find resources—and students were suffering from the inconsistencies. Realizing they needed instruction consistent and aligned with their Tier 1 and Tier 2 solutions, Amato learned about 95 Tier 3 Literacy Solution featuring 95 RAP™ and set to work bringing that into the district for students who still need more reading support.

With their knowledge of the science of reading and structured literacy, the team recognized their non-negotiables—intensive work in phonology, orthography practice, repetition to build automaticity, and more instructional time and intensity than Tier 2 offers.

95 RAP fulfilled them all.



From overwhelm to slow and steady adoption

They started a committed investigation of 95 Tier 3 Literacy Solution with webinars, one-on-one site visits, and demos by the 95 Percent Group team.

Amato reports, “We loved everything that we heard. One thing that became clear, though, is we were very overwhelmed. That can happen in an adoption process.”

He expanded, “In our K-5 elementary school at the time, we had myself and two other instructional coaches/reading specialists, and one intervention specialist per grade level. We wanted to move right into it and train all of us, all at the same time. And that led to a lot of questions—How do we go about this? Who do we train? How do we train them? How quickly do we roll this out? And a lot of wires kept getting crossed.”

At that point, in a conversation with his curriculum director, Amato asked to just be trained himself. Once he did the full training, he identified a group of fourth grade students that would really benefit from 95 RAP, based on their Acadience data, and started a pilot. He was clear that the team needed to be able to see “what this could look like with our students.”

A key turning point

Amato continues, “I wanted our people to see our students using it in our classroom, in our walls, in our schedule. Then we could have broader conversations about which teachers should be using this, when they should be using it, who they should be using it with. And those are the same topics that we continue to have conversations about for next year.”

He emphasizes, “Enabling educators in our district to see what it looked like was a key turning point in getting 95 RAP into classrooms across the district.”

What Tier 3 intervention looks like today

Today they have three staff members fully trained and implementing 95 RAP—one provider at the elementary school, one at the middle school, and Amato is at both buildings where he does four 95 RAP groups.

Amato emphasizes, “We use 95 RAP in the RTI block and not during core ELA. This protects Tier 1 instructional time, ensuring students do not lose access to grade-level content. The Tier 3 students meet in small groups with 95 RAP-trained providers while all other students receive targeted skill work in teacher-led Tier 2 groups.”

Changing middle school student lives

Amato shared that in the middle school, they have one 95 RAP-trained teacher who works with students in a resource room setting with 6th and 7th graders. The two of them are using 95 RAP during the RTI block in the afternoons with students who she is not seeing during her resource room time. Amato is using it with an 8th grader and reports, "It is going well."

He continues, "And I'm thinking of a particular 7th grader. When he came into 6th grade, in his fall Acadience benchmark, I think he was reading under 5 words a minute correctly. In the second grade level passages he's doing with 95 RAP right now, he's reading upwards of 50 to 70 and he's never been able to do that before. The student has told us, 'I'm starting to get it. I'm really starting to understand how to read.'"

He just has so much more confidence with what he's doing. And regardless of it being 2nd grade material, he's never been able to do it before. 95 RAP is really making a difference. "

“

95 RAP lets me actually teach instead of constantly prepping.”

95 RAP TEACHER

Fairless Schools



“

I used to skip the hard words, but now I can figure them out.”

95 RAP STUDENT

Fairless Schools

Student and teacher outcomes

The positive outcomes for students and teachers are clear. The consistency, familiarity, and repetition is increasing student engagement and confidence, and they're making observable academic gains.

Amato explains, "One thing that's really helped our students is when they see and hear that common language from Tier 1 to Tier 2 to Tier 3—there's not as much anxiety and stress trying to figure out how this works. They've heard it. And in a lot of cases, they just need that extra practice with it. When it's familiar to them the effort isn't as strenuous."

Amato reports that the engaging instructional dialogue is freeing teachers to focus on the art and science of teaching. Teachers are benefitting from the reduced prep load and they've gained greater confidence supporting Tier 3 readers. **There is high buy-in.**

Next steps

As of the 2025–2026 school year, Amato and team have implemented structured literacy in Tier 1 and Tier 2 across K–3, and Tier 3 in grades K–8].

In talking about what's next, Amato explained, "We're having conversations for next year about what it's going to look like with more teachers." He continued, "We plan to expand 95 RAP implementation in the elementary school to all instructional coaches and intervention specialists to use as SDI (Specially Designed Instruction) for students on IEPs requiring intensive foundational intervention and individualized instruction."

In addition, they are also looking at using it in a different resource room setting—at the elementary level—similar to what they're doing at the middle school.

A game changer for teachers and students

Amato sums up, "95 RAP has been a game changer for the teachers and specialists."

How?

"It's the consistency. It's the ability for teachers to expand on their knowledge of the science of reading with the convenience and prep time saved by just being able to get into the program, and not be bound to such a tight script that they sound like a robot."

Amato emphasizes how 95 RAP doesn't rob teachers of their creativity—it provides the support they need so they can just concentrate on teaching, and really tune into what the student needs in the lesson and provide that. He shares, "Teachers can become absorbed in finding and gathering enough material, and then when their students are in front of them, they are still preoccupied, when they just need to be tuning in to where the students are."

And it's not just a game changer for the teachers. It is transforming the intervention experience for the students.

Amato explains how: "Students have the time, the repetition, the focus that they need to have. It's custom-tailored to each student—so they may be all working on phonology at the same time, or they may all be working on phonics and word attack at the same time, but every kid is in their own skill set within each of those areas. And it's hardly noticeable from a teaching and a management standpoint. It actually flows better having it that way."

4 key insights to guide your Tier 3 implementation

1

Start with the why, based on your professional learning in structured literacy.

2

Focus on the right students at the right time so you don't overwhelm your system.

3

Move through one tier at a time, and follow the data to make the best decisions.

4

Trust your teachers and literacy team—lean in to what they're telling you.

Additional resources

- ▶ Watch the on-demand webinar, [Transforming Tier 3 Instruction and Outcomes](#), with 95 Percent Group's Laura Stewart and Justin Carlson, and special guest Adam Amato.
- ▶ Read the blog post, [Spotlight Ohio: Structured literacy is a non-negotiable](#), about Fairless Elementary School's Tier 1 and Tier 2 implementation.



“

I think it was really important that you started with professional learning—so that you understood what you needed to look for in a resource and that led you to your non-negotiables.”

LAURA STEWART

Chief Academic Officer
95 Percent Group
From the webinar, *Transforming Tier 3 Instruction and Outcomes*

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