SIPPS Educator Spotlight: Arcadia Longoria, Weslaco ISD, Texas

Categories: Educator Spotlight

We’re honored to feature Arcadia Longoria, Elementary Reading Language Arts Strategist at Weslaco Independent School District (WISD) in Weslaco, Texas. In this interview, Arcadia talks about Weslaco ISD's implementation of SIPPS as the district's early literacy foundational skills program for kindergarten through third grade and describes how SIPPS has become “an integral part of the early educational literacy focus” at WISD.

Tell us a little about yourself, your district, and the students that you serve.

Located in the heart of the Rio Grande Valley, Weslaco ISD serves approximately 16,000 students across 21 campuses. As the Elementary Reading Language Arts Strategist, I feel extremely blessed to serve our students and staff in Weslaco where I have the privilege of providing curriculum support.

Our district motto states, “WISD is the Right Choice.” Clearly, this holds true for me as I am a graduate of Weslaco High School and was honored to teach multiple grade levels for 25 years at WISD prior to entering my role as a curriculum leader for the district.

Those experiences have allowed me to inspire and empower our students and staff while helping students grow their critical thinking and problem-solving skills to ultimately become successful lifelong readers and writers. WISD values a learner focus; a collaborative and supportive learning culture; the implementation of best practices, pedagogy, and continuous improvement; and a results-driven approach.

What is the most rewarding part of being an educator for you?

I hope to empower and inspire the students and staff who I meet along my path. Being an educator allows me to keep learning and growing while collaborating with teachers and administrators to analyze what works for our kids and what does not. To see a child progress and show academic growth is something that brings great joy to teachers, and that progress can potentially have a long-lasting positive impact on the child’s life.

As an educator, I know that I can guide staff and students to new experiences. It is my responsibility to keep growing and discovering,
and to continue to challenge them to reach their full potential—which will ultimately lead to great successes.

How long has your district been implementing SIPPS? Tell us a little about the implementation.

Years ago, SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words) was introduced to a small group of students in one of our middle schools. Shortly after a small pilot, a campus administrator took the initiative to bring it to her newly assigned elementary school. Along with the purchase of SIPPS resources, teachers received multiple rounds of professional learning which included coaching and modeling of SIPPS lessons.

Within a few years this same administrator brought SIPPS to yet another elementary school. Following the same implementation process, our English Language Arts & Reading Coordinator soon noticed how well the students at these two campuses were performing on their phonics assessments.

Eleven years later, SIPPS is now our district's early literacy foundational skills program for kindergarten through third grade. Across all tiers of instruction, this multi-level program provides word recognition strategies and skills that have helped develop confident students in their journey to become successful readers and writers.

What do you appreciate about SIPPS? What do teachers appreciate about it?

I appreciate how the SIPPS program provides a structured literacy approach to foundational skills instruction through explicit and systematic instructional routines focused on phonological awareness, spelling-sounds, and sight words, with immediate application to connected texts in reading and spelling.

Teachers appreciate how daily SIPPS lesson components allow them to scaffold instruction while also helping readers achieve automaticity and accuracy, which in turn allows them to focus on comprehension.

“Teachers know that SIPPS is very systematic; it's even in the name (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics and Sight Words). The instructions are very clear and direct. Students learn to follow routines to a T and become successful in their learning. The program is scaffolded so that students receive that explicit instruction, starting with the foundational level through to the higher levels. Teachers have noticed students applying what they learn in SIPPS to all other areas.”

—Kindergarten Teachers, Gonzalez Elementary, Weslaco ISD

What have you noticed about students' learning and engagement? What have teachers noticed?

Students in kindergarten and first grade, many of whom missed the most important early literacy foundational skills (because of COVID), continue to thrive and are becoming readers and writers in spite of the chaos the pandemic has caused.

Kids feel successful and excited to participate in their lessons, which have allowed them to feel a sense of accomplishment as they progress from one lesson to the next.

I've also noticed that teachers understand the importance of the consistency of the explicit and systematic lesson components. This consistency enables students to master phonological awareness, spelling-sound relationships, decoding, and sight-word knowledge to grow their accuracy and fluency.

How has SIPPS shifted teaching practices and/or professional learning in your district?

SIPPS has become an integral part of our early educational literacy focus here at WISD. SIPPS provides an explicit and systematic
phonics continuum for our K–3 students, which is part of the Texas Education Agency's HB3 requirement.

Both teachers and administrators participate in ongoing professional development to review the components of SIPPS instruction and its alignment with Science of Reading and to navigate the print and digital resources. Campus instructional coaches have begun the important work of navigating the Collaborative Classroom Learning Portal. Especially helpful is the SIPPS Professional Learning Support with its guidance on elements of effective implementation, learning walks, and internal coaching for improvement.

SIPPS is a key component to the continued success of the Raising Blended Learners (RBL) grant that was awarded to four WISD elementary schools that are in the process of piloting blended learning to offer additional support for K–2 students in mastering foundational literacy skills. RBL teachers receive ongoing, personalized SIPPS professional learning along with on-site SIPPS coaching and modeling to extend their knowledge and instructional practices related to the science of reading.

“SIPPS contains all the resources teachers need to deliver an explicit and systematic lesson that benefits and saves time for busy teachers. Teachers have access to story charts, small books, sound wall cards, teacher handheld cards, a teacher’s manual, and online resources through Collaborative Classroom’s Learning Portal. Students benefit from explicitly sequenced lessons that help them close reading gaps by motivating them to read using the sight words and the sound and spelling patterns they are learning.”

—Eva Guerra, Kindergarten Teacher, Cleckler-Heald Elementary, WISD

What thoughts or insights would you share with a district that is considering SIPPS?

Stop thinking about it! Get your staff on board and students on the road to lifelong literacy development. The SIPPS program links the reading developmental stages—simple alphabetic, spelling pattern, and polysyllabic/morphemic—and will provide your students with empowered, sustainable foundational skills instruction.