

Aligning Tiers of Instruction with Being a Reader and SIPPS: An Interview with Reading Specialist Kendra Reiley

By Maria Arnett | Categories: Educator Spotlight, Reading, Reading Intervention and Acceleration



How does aligning tiers of instruction improve outcomes for all readers?

We are delighted to feature Kendra Reiley, Title I Reading Specialist at Middlesex Elementary School in Virginia. Kendra supports the implementation of Collaborative Literacy across grades K-3, including Being a Reader, and uses SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words) as an intervention.

In this spotlight, Kendra shares how the alignment of instruction between Being a Reader (Tier 1) and SIPPS (intervention) has accelerated the reading development of students at Middlesex Elementary. She describes the success that she and her colleagues saw during the 21-22 school year.

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

Hello! My name is Kendra Reiley and this is my ninth year as an educator. I spent the first five years of my career as a fifth grade reading teacher before pursuing a master's degree in reading.

For the past four years, I have served as the Title I Reading Specialist at Middlesex Elementary School in Middlesex County, Virginia. Our division is small and rural, consisting of only one elementary school in the county.

After taking on my new role as a reading interventionist, I became fascinated about everything that encompasses the science of reading. In fact, our entire elementary school recently took a deep dive into the science of reading as well!

This year, we implemented several new changes to our reading curriculum, including the Being a Reader and SIPPS programs. Our teachers and students are thriving with the changes despite the setbacks caused by COVID-19.

How did your school become interested in Being a Reader and SIPPS?

Our school was looking for a Tier 1 small-group reading program that was rooted in the science of reading.

Being a Reader included all of the components of a structured literacy program that we were looking for, including phonemic awareness, phonics, high-frequency sight word instruction, decodable texts, and spelling. The whole-group components' focus on early literacy experiences and comprehension was also helpful.

In addition, the biggest selling point for us was that Collaborative Classroom also offered SIPPS, an aligned intervention program for Tier 2. It is rare to find a core program like Being a Reader that aligns to an intervention program!

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We also admired Collaborative Classroom for offering instructional materials that were affordable for our small division. As a non-profit organization, Collaborative Classroom is truly in it for the students and teachers, not the money.

How long has your school been implementing Being a Reader and SIPPS? Tell us a little about the implementation.

A few of our teachers piloted Being a Reader in the 2020–2021 school year and really enjoyed the program.

Due to a successful pilot, all K–3 teachers started using Being a Reader for Tier 1 in the 2021–2022 school year. At the same time, I started implementing SIPPS for our Tier 2 pull-out service offered through the Title I reading program.

It worked out perfectly that we had some of our teachers pilot the program before implementing it with all teachers. This allowed for a smoother transition as the pilot teachers were able to provide support to the teachers who were implementing Being a Reader for the first time.

Being a Reader quickly gained a good reputation in our school during the pilot. News was quickly spreading about how great the program was working. Many teachers were jealous that they were not chosen to pilot the program!

What do you appreciate about Being a Reader? What do teachers appreciate about it?

As the Title I Reading Specialist, I have not actually used Being a Reader myself. However, I know that our teachers are very happy with Being a Reader and that our students are really taking off as readers like never before.

The small group instruction has been especially beneficial. The early small-group reading sets in Being a Reader are meant to develop foundational reading skills. The sets follow a structured literacy format and include engaging decodable readers. After students have mastered the foundational skills, trade books are introduced that allow the lessons to become even more focused on comprehension and fluency.

The teachers at my school have been enthusiastic about Being a Reader all year long. Our K-1 teachers have told me that they are introducing phonics concepts to students sooner than they ever have in previous years.

Teachers have also stated that they cannot believe how advanced some of their students are becoming in reading. Being a Reader has set the bar much higher for the expectations of the students in our school, especially in kindergarten. We are proud to say that the majority of our K students are reading at or above grade level!

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Although many of our students were hit hard by the effects of COVID-19, they are steadily making gains towards reaching grade-level expectations as well. We know the process of catching these students up will take some time, but we feel confident in the future of our students because of Being a Reader.

Prior to this program, teachers were designing their own small-group instruction and it looked different in each classroom. Not to mention, teachers had to spend hours finding their own materials and writing lesson plans for their groups.

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I am so proud of our teachers for taking on a whole new reading program during a global pandemic. They did an amazing job learning and implementing the program and it is really paying off for our students!

As a Title 1 Reading Specialist, what do you appreciate about SIPPS? What do teachers appreciate about it?

The best part about SIPPS is the alignment to Being a Reader! In my classroom, I know that I am using the same scope and sequence and teaching routines as the general education teacher. This is a feature that our teachers appreciate, too.

My students are never confused about being in two different programs because Being a Reader and SIPPS are so seamlessly connected. In previous years, it was difficult to know if my intervention lessons aligned with the small-group instruction my students were getting in the general education classroom.

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I also appreciate that students are taught to respond chorally throughout the majority of a SIPPS lesson. Although this is a difficult task at first, they eventually become automatic in their responses. This format ensures that students are getting the maximum amount of response time possible while also ensuring that the lesson moves quickly. Choral responses also keep all students engaged throughout the entire lesson.

Another great feature of SIPPS is that the pace moves quickly! This program was designed to accelerate students' learning. Too many intervention programs cause students to be stuck at a level for far too long. Intervention students are already significantly behind in reading. The last thing we want is for the gap to grow even wider for them.

SIPPS is designed to fill the gaps as quickly as possible in order to catch students up to grade-level expectations. The pace is determined by the mastery tests that are included after each set of lessons. The mastery tests are quick and easy to administer.

Because of these quick assessments, I know exactly if students are ready to move on or if more practice is needed. "B" lessons are provided in order to slow down the pace of instruction, or teachers can repeat the previously taught lessons. Spiral review is always built in as well.

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

I have noticed that with the choral responses in SIPPS, students are now engaged throughout the entire intervention session. My students have plenty of opportunities to practice the concepts we are learning.

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We often revisit the stories that we were reading at the beginning of the year and notice how easy they are for us to read now. We then celebrate how much our brains have grown.

The mastery tests are also very motivating for the students. This is an assessment tool that is designed for the teacher to use as a way to determine the pace of the lessons. However, I share my mastery tests with my students, parents, and general education teachers. This is a time for students to check in on their own reading progress. Students receive feedback to let them know if they are getting it or if they need more practice.

I feel that my students are able to see so much growth in themselves as readers this year. They understand that their hard work each day is truly making a difference in their brains because they have proof of their progress!

How have Being a Reader and SIPPS shifted teaching practices and/or professional learning in your school?

Many of our teachers are engaging in LETRS training together this year, including myself. We have all been able to make connections about the components of Being a Reader and SIPPS and how these directly relate to what we have been learning in the LETRS program.

It is great to have instructional materials that align to our professional development. Because of Being a Reader and SIPPS, our teachers are big believers in using a structured literacy format. It really feels like everything is clicking into place for our students and teachers in so many ways!

What thoughts or insights would you share with a school or district that is considering Being a Reader and SIPPS?

If your school or district is considering Being a Reader and SIPPS, be sure that your teachers understand why a structured literacy format is essential in foundational literacy. The Being a Reader and SIPPS programs are great instructional resources, and teachers will be better equipped to make instructional decisions if they understand the “why” behind the lesson plan components.

I would also recommend including lots of support for teachers, including modeling and coaching. The Learning Portal contains great resources as well!

Learn more about Being a Reader and SIPPS.

For more about the importance of aligned tiers of instruction, download our white paper [Aligning a System of Support to Reach All Readers](#).

To learn more about how SIPPS may complement LETRS training, read the blog post [Systematic, Explicit Literacy Instruction Aligned with LETRS: The Case for SIPPS](#).