

SIPPS Educator Spotlight: Jessica Zimmerman, Phoenix, Arizona

Categories: Educator Spotlight, Reading Intervention and Acceleration (Grades K–5)



In this spotlight, we are delighted to feature Jessica Zimmerman, coach at Valley View Leadership Academy in Roosevelt School District, South Phoenix. Jessica shares her school's work towards closing the achievement gap using the SIPPS program and how a three-part implementation plan developed a sustained intervention model in her building.

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

My name is Jessica Zimmerman. I am a mom, educator, and creator. I graduated from ASU with my master's degree in Education and began my teaching in Roosevelt School District, where I taught in kindergarten–3rd grade. I eventually transitioned into teaching gifted and talented students in a resource teacher format.

In 2016, I was lucky enough to begin my adventure as an instructional coach at Valley View Leadership Academy, where I coach 35 phenomenal educators.

Roosevelt School District is a Title 1 community district in the heart of South Phoenix. Roosevelt has always had a history of resiliency. Our parents, teachers, students, and staff come to work ... and work they do! I have never seen commitment to education like I have seen here. Our teachers live, eat, and breathe a love of learning into everything they do.

Our K–8 students are incredibly special. They are innovative, curious, and persistent. They have been through so much and yet they come to school excited to learn, despite it all. They are truly the inspiration and the “why” behind everything we do.

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

The most rewarding part of being an educator for me is seeing the lasting impact that teaching, coaching, and mentoring has on a student's or teacher's life.

When I work with someone, guide them through their thinking, set goals for improvement, provide support in finding strategies to be better, and then see them in action, using those strategies to be a better version of themselves—that is honestly why I love my job.

I get to see the lasting impact that educational resources have on development and success when they are aligned perfectly to learner needs. I also see the lasting impact that research-based strategies have on students who need something different, who need to learn in a way that makes sense to them.

I see the lasting impact that support, advocacy, mentoring, and relationships have on the whole human, building confidence with each conversation, lesson, and planning session. And finally, I get to hear, even years later, that someone felt “supported” or “understood” or “heard” or “special” because of the work we did together, and that is why I love my job and keep coming to do this work, every day.

How did your school become interested in *SIPPS*?

Our school initially became interested in *SIPPS* when I used the program during a summer school session a few years ago. The growth I saw in the students receiving the *SIPPS* material was just outstanding! I was blown away by the confidence the students had when leaving their *SIPPS* groups.

I spoke to the teacher who was giving the *SIPPS* material and she just boasted how easy, fun, and effective it was for the students. I had to learn more.

That is when I reached out to Nancy Chalex and was invited to a workshop held at a host school. My resource teachers and I went to the workshop and as soon as we left, we came to the consensus that *SIPPS* was something we HAD to do for our students in the Special Education program at Valley View. We finally had hope for closing the achievement gap; we could finally get some materials to our ESS special education teachers. They had been planning alone for years to help fill those reading foundational gaps, and here was a solution for us to try. We were ready to begin our *SIPPS* adventure.

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

We have been implementing *SIPPS* now since 2017–2018. We began with our three resource teachers using *SIPPS* as their Tier 2 curriculum with their identified special education students. They paired *SIPPS* with the students’ IEP goals, and the curriculum matched up perfectly with what the students were lacking!

We saw so much growth from the students during this first year of implementation that we knew we needed to expand the impact it was having to others who had foundational reading needs.

We phased its use in with our paraprofessionals for Tier 2 support during small-group reading time. Our paraprofessionals provided *SIPPS* instruction to over 35 students in grades K–4 each trimester for the first two years of implementation (one being virtual instruction last year during the pandemic). The program is virtual-friendly, so we were able to continue the momentum of implementation, and it was exciting to see.

This year, 2021, is the year we took the leap! With over 100 students participating in the *SIPPS* program and seeing growth, we chose *SIPPS* as our Tier 2 curriculum resource for our school-wide Walk to Read program: Four days per week students are leveled by their placement test in *SIPPS* and receive *SIPPS* instruction at their readiness level around 45 minutes per day.

We are in our first month of implementation and could not be happier with how it is going! We have grades 1–4 participating in *SIPPS* and even have some Challenge Level groups going for our grade 4–8 students who have severe instructional gaps.

We are so excited to see the growth the students will make and the impact this program will have on our school’s reading

achievement. We could not be more thrilled to continue our *SIPPS* adventure. We will keep you updated and cannot wait to share the results *SIPPS* yields for our students and teachers.

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

My teachers have explained that they love how straightforward the *SIPPS* program is. The scripting, the embedded teacher support (instructional videos on the Learning Portal along with the QR codes in the teacher's manuals), and the instructional aides for students, like the story posters and the cards, are so well organized and support teachers with implementation in such a meaningful way. Nothing is done without purpose in *SIPPS*!

The routines are golden, and my teachers have even stated that they have "learned how to teach reading" because of *SIPPS*. The Learning Portal keeps expanding its offering of instructional resources. *SIPPS* is a comprehensive reading-foundations program, far better than anything else I have seen at targeting foundational reading skills in a way students can understand.

As a coordinator, I appreciate the ease of leveling students with the Placement Assessment and Mastery Test data. The streamlined program moves sequentially from a primary entry point to adapting for the needs of older students who need developmentally appropriate foundational skills. This is just key to a successful Tier 2 program.

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

I have noticed that students are excited to go into their *SIPPS* classes. They are excited to participate and show confidence in their reading skills as they continue to build reading fluency and automaticity.

I see teachers being able to support students in real time and encourage students through academic feedback. The teachers have noticed that the students do so well with the routines and structure, they know what to expect next! It's really a brilliant program.

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

SIPPS has shifted teaching practices in our school in so many ways. I have seen teachers get really good at seeing what students know based on using the instant academic feedback and correction structure embedded within *SIPPS*. I have seen teachers utilizing placement data to inform instruction and set goals for students. Teachers have become fluent in foundational reading skills.

Our school has shifted in practice, as it is now achievable to use a program at a school-wide level to address foundational skills needs. That's huge for us! It was a missing piece to our structures in closing the achievement gap and we cannot wait to see the kids flourish due to this added layer of support.

The state of Arizona is purposefully investing in accelerating early literacy in its 2022 budget and in recently passed legislation, such as SB1572. How do you see *SIPPS* aligning with Arizona's push to implement effective, evidence-based literacy instruction?

We were thrilled to be provided with additional funding from the AZ Early Literacy Grant. We are seeing an influx of grade K-3 students with foundational reading gaps, much more than in years past. We have been able to use these funds to purchase additional *SIPPS* levels, schedule professional training, provide additional consumables for student use, as well as expand our reading libraries.

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Finally, what thoughts or insights would you share with a school or district that is considering *SIPPS*?

I would say: do it in phases! By implementing *SIPPS* in three phases, we were able to work out the kinks of adopting a new program. We were able to afford it with budgeting! We were able to build teacher capacity, buy-in, and sustainability of practices.

The “go slow to go fast” motto worked here! I wouldn’t have done it any differently.

