

DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT



When Fluency Isn't Enough: How ADM Community School District Closed the Comprehension Gap

A Closer Look at DeSoto Intermediate School

ADM Community School District in Adel, Iowa appeared to be doing everything right.

District leaders had undertaken what they described as a “radical reset” around literacy, a multi-year effort to align instruction to the science of reading, strengthen MTSS systems, and ensure that all students received targeted, need-based support. The work was paying off: ADM was outperforming neighboring districts, strengthening its reputation across the state, and improving reading proficiency.

Yet a troubling challenge remained—and it became especially visible at DeSoto Intermediate School.

Some students could decode accurately and read fluently but still struggled to comprehend text. Leaders at DeSoto Intermediate School recognized that accurate, fluent reading alone was not enough for reading proficiency and that reaching these students would require something more.

Results at a Glance

+6.15

point average scale–score gain among 5th- and 6th-grade intervention students at DeSoto Intermediate School (FastBridge aReading, Fall–Winter)

Outpaced schoolwide peers' average by
+4.65
points

Exceeded national expected growth benchmark by
+4.00
points



Teachers reported reduced planning burden and greater instructional confidence

72%

of students on track for reading proficiency



District expanded SPIRE Next districtwide within its MTSS framework






Instructional Challenges and Priorities

At DeSoto Intermediate School, teachers were working diligently to address students' comprehension gaps, often creating their own materials or adapting available resources. This work was time-intensive for teachers, and it didn't consistently result in the level of growth teachers and leaders knew students were capable of achieving.

Additionally, as the district introduced more rigorous, grade-level texts through a new core ELA curriculum, students' comprehension challenges became even more apparent. Students who had previously appeared successful struggled when asked to engage deeply with rigorous, grade-level texts. The same students kept appearing on intervention lists for vocabulary and comprehension difficulties, and progress remained slower than expected.

Leaders recognized that this challenge was not a matter of effort or commitment on the part of educators. Instead, it pointed to a need for instructional tools that could support comprehension and language development in a more systematic, structured, and scalable way.

To address this need, leaders prioritized a solution that would:

-  Strengthen comprehension and language development through explicit, structured instruction
-  Build knowledge, vocabulary, and comprehension skills through engagement with challenging complex text, with appropriate scaffolds
-  Enable oral reading fluency development in prosody and expression
-  Fit within existing MTSS structures, including a dedicated Tier 2 intervention block and Tier 3 supports
-  Align with the science of reading and the district's broader literacy vision

Why SPIRE Next and EPS Learning

Unlike interventions that treat comprehension as a collection of isolated skills and strategies, SPIRE Next offers a structured, systematic approach—one that integrates knowledge-building texts, vocabulary, close reading, and written response. Leaders noted other clear benefits to students and teachers:

- **For students:** Consistent lesson structures to reduce cognitive load and build confidence with complex text.
- **For teachers:** Clear, ready-to-use lessons to eliminate the need to create materials and give peace of mind that instruction was evidence-based.

“For quite some time, we struggled to find an intervention that truly addressed language development and reading comprehension. SPIRE Next filled that gap.”

– Amy Hemphill, Principal,
DeSoto Intermediate School

Effective Implementation Practices

Beginning in fall 2025, SPIRE Next was implemented during a daily, protected 30-minute intervention block. This dedicated time ensured that every student received targeted Tier 2 support or enrichment in reading or math based on their individual needs.



Implementation of SPIRE Next was further strengthened by implementation science-based practices, including:

- ✓ **Professional Learning:** Prior to implementation, teachers engaged in extensive professional learning in the science of reading and Structured Literacy principles. This context helped teachers to recognize the value of SPIRE Next and approach implementation with enthusiasm.
- ✓ **Intentional Scheduling:** SPIRE Next was embedded within existing Tier 2 and Tier 3 MTSS structures, ensuring consistent instructional time that was protected in the master schedule.
- ✓ **Thoughtful Planning and Pacing:** Leaders collaborated with literacy consultants to develop a manageable weekly scope and sequence to maintain a brisk instructional pace.
- ✓ **Coaching and Collaboration:** Supportive classroom observations, peer collaboration, and ongoing feedback and reflection fueled a culture of continuous improvement.
- ✓ **Data-Based Decision-Making:** PLCs and leadership team meetings provided time and space for teachers to analyze data, share insights, and problem-solve challenges.

The combination of strong instructional materials and thoughtful implementation practices created the conditions for meaningful and measurable growth.

“SPIRE Next takes the guesswork out of reading instruction. The lessons are purposeful, easy to implement, and grounded in the science of reading.”

– Jarrett Bertog, 5th-grade Teacher,
DeSoto Intermediate School

“With repeated readings, it’s exciting to see students’ understanding of the text increase...and their confidence grows as they work with challenging passages.”

– Katie Vetter, 6th-grade ELA Teacher and
Coach, DeSoto Intermediate School

Outcomes

Within the first semester of implementation, fifth- and sixth-grade students receiving SPIRE Next at DeSoto Intermediate School demonstrated accelerated growth, according to school leaders:

Reading Growth (FastBridge aReading, Fall-Winter)

- ✓ SPIRE Next students averaged a **6.15-point scale-score gain**
- ✓ Outpaced the schoolwide average for all fifth- and sixth-grade students (**4.65 points**)
- ✓ Exceeded the national expected growth benchmark (**4 points**)

On Track for Proficiency

- ✓ **72%** of SPIRE Next students were on track to make expected growth and reach reading proficiency by the end of the school year

Building on these results, ADM Community School District:

- ✓ Expanded SPIRE Next across grade levels
- ✓ Established vertical alignment from elementary through secondary schools
- ✓ Positioned SPIRE Next as the district's primary resource for comprehension and language intervention within its MTSS framework.

Teachers and Leaders Reported:

- ✓ Greater student persistence with complex texts
- ✓ Stronger student writing and independent strategy use carrying into core ELA
- ✓ Reduced planning burden for teachers
- ✓ Increased confidence and peace of mind for teachers, knowing intervention was research-based and aligned to student needs

Looking Ahead

For ADM Community School District, success with SPIRE Next represents another important milestone in the district's literacy transformation. By clarifying what literacy success looks like along a developmental trajectory and aligning supports accordingly, the district has created a multipronged pathway for student success.

Through their work, ADM Community School District is enabling striving readers to become confident, proficient readers who can not only read fluently but also comprehend challenging text and clearly express themselves in discussion and writing.

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