

## CASE STUDY

# EPS Learning Puts District on Track for Reading Success

Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), California



A large urban school district was struggling with an ineffective “hodgepodge” of reading intervention products for its striving students. Learn how EPS Learning helped them streamline and find success for both teachers and students.

## Meet Oakland Unified School District

Like many school districts nationwide, Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) in California faces significant staffing challenges—turnover, recruitment, retention, and credentialing—especially in special education and targeted services in other critical areas. And just like other districts, OUSD’s challenges are compounded by the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic’s instructional disruptions. Additionally, OUSD has seen declining overall enrollment, while the number of students requiring special education services has grown.

The district is currently navigating budget cuts and decreased funding, which are the result of declining enrollment and the end of temporary COVID-19 relief funding. Despite these challenges, OUSD remains committed to its social justice-oriented mission—striving to build full-service community schools that address the diverse

needs of its students and their families. This includes providing free breakfast and lunch, on-site health clinics, after-school programs, and various other services that support students’ well-being and academic success.

Against this backdrop of fiscal challenges and evolving community needs, OUSD remains strong in its commitment to teaching and learning, with a particular emphasis on literacy. One key initiative in the [OUSD Strategic Plan](#) aims to ensure that all students are strong readers by third grade. In 2022–2023, less than 33% of Oakland students met or exceeded standards on the statewide English Language Arts (ELA) assessment, compared to the statewide average of 46% and the national average of 47%. Improving literacy rates is essential for empowering students to take charge of their learning and prepare for future success in college, careers, and their communities. OUSD is dedicated to reducing academic disparities and enhancing literacy skills for all its students.

## Making Good on Commitments

Until 2019, OUSD relied on a variety of literacy interventions and programs that lacked coherence. “We even had a reading clinic, where students would be bused to one central location for intensive reading intervention,” said Micaela Reinstein, OUSD Director of Special Education–Elementary Schools. “But that meant they missed other parts of their school day, and the clinic didn’t reach all the students who needed it.”

“Teachers were using whatever products and curricula they had and were familiar with—there was no consistency. It just wasn’t working. Our kids weren’t learning how to read,” she continued.

Alli Guilfoil, a former OUSD elementary special education director and current consultant for the district, said, “We needed a solution to expand student access to high quality reading intervention to our students with IEPs across all schools. California’s dyslexia legislation, AB 1369, had also recently passed and would require just that in the coming years.”

Guilfoil continued, “As the OUSD team evaluated options, we decided against partners with more clinical models. We wanted a program that integrated smoothly into the school day, so we explored SPIRE®, the intensive intervention solution from EPS Learning, and received positive feedback from nearby districts like San Francisco Unified. SPIRE stood out as the most multisensory and teacher-friendly option, fitting well into the schedule without disrupting core content, specials, or recess.”

“We needed a research-based structure that would be easy for teachers to implement. We see a lot of teacher turnover, especially in special education,” Reinstein said. “So, a scripted program that allows teachers to hit the ground running was necessary. We found that with SPIRE.”

OUSD met with members of the EPS Learning team, who provided guidance, recommendations, product demonstrations, and efficacy research to validate SPIRE’s effectiveness. The EPS team also helped develop an implementation plan specific for the district,

including needed materials and teacher training. EPS Learning provided comprehensive training over the summer and throughout the school year. The implementation started with a small group of teachers in June 2019, who began using SPIRE in Fall 2019. All K-8 SPIRE materials for the district arrived that fall, and training for all K-12 teachers was scheduled. EPS Learning trainers worked with OUSD staff in November 2019 and January 2020, but the SPIRE rollout was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“That threw a wrench into everything,” said Guilfoil.

## Powering Through the Pandemic

“We were fully remote for a year and a half once COVID-19 hit,” Guilfoil said, adding that the district’s primary concern was, “How do we make this work while our kiddos are at home? We scrambled to get printed materials into the hands of our students. We also added iSPIRE®, the online version of SPIRE.”

“EPS was instrumental in helping us navigate that change. They guided us through the implementation and in helping get teachers up to speed,” Guilfoil said.

Like many districts, OUSD is still feeling effects of the pandemic. Teacher retention is down, and the influx of more students with special needs has strained the district’s resources. Reinstein said, “We looked at 2023 as a real reset for us—we have new teachers, a new leadership team in special education, and we’ve fully implemented SPIRE and iSPIRE in our schools.”

## Positive Results

Patty Sheehan, a recently retired special education teacher at OUSD’s Acorn Woodland Elementary School said, “Prior to using SPIRE I had to invent my material. I had to look up the goals and see what the students were working on, and I had to find materials to address the needs of those goals and develop a curriculum. And I never felt confident that it was very thorough. But SPIRE was incredibly thorough.”

## Next Steps

In the spring of 2024, OUSD piloted EPS Learning's digital literacy solution, Reading Assistant®, in several classrooms with promising results. Reading Assistant is an AI-powered tutor that provides students with personalized reading practice and targeted interventions for rapid improvement. Using voice-recognition technology, the program analyzes students' reading skills as they read aloud. An interactive avatar provides immediate, customized feedback and micro-interventions. Reading Assistant provides intentional practice of skills that are explicitly taught through SPIRE. Students encounter the fiction and informational passages from SPIRE, and receive real-time feedback as they read the passages. The program also includes other stories so students can quickly move beyond the decodable texts included in the SPIRE content. According to Reinstein, teachers in the pilot program found it to be "a light lift for teachers, with a high payoff for students."

"It's a great intervention tool and fits into how our special education program is structured," Reinstein added. "One teacher loved it so much that the principal requested it for the whole school."

Teachers using SPIRE in their instruction are seeing impressive growth on assessments. In addition to rising assessment scores, OUSD is seeing improvements in other ways. "Teachers say that many students seem more confident about their abilities and enjoy reading tasks much more," said Reinstein. "Our students are also doing better when they're accessing other, higher-level interventions." This enthusiasm set the stage for a district-wide SPIRE implementation, and OUSD rolled out Reading Assistant to all K-8 schools in the fall of 2024.

One teacher who has seen significant success with SPIRE and EPS Reading Assistant is Anna Treidler, a teacher at OUSD's Joaquin Miller Elementary School. Treidler teaches a mild-to-moderate self-contained special education class, typically for grades 3–5, but for the fall 2024 semester, her class is made up of just 4th

and 5th graders. Treidler has been using SPIRE since its implementation before the COVID pandemic and now uses Reading Assistant as well. She shared, "I'm really glad to have a structured, evidence-based reading intervention program. It's been easy to figure out how to use and incorporate into my daily routine."

Treidler explained how she organizes her class for literacy centers: "I group students by reading level and have them rotate through different stations. One of the centers is the computer station, where students use Reading Assistant. I have them complete one story, and if they finish, they can move on to Epic or Sora to read eBooks or listen to audiobooks. Another center is where we do a SPIRE lesson together."



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**Micaela Reinstein,**  
OUSD Director of Special Education-  
Elementary Schools

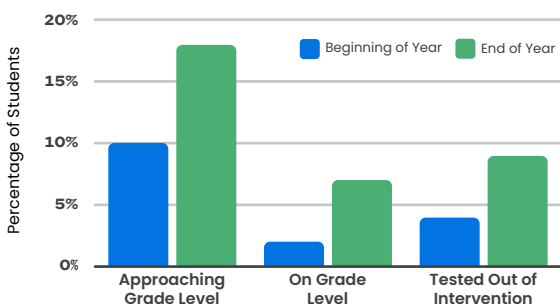
Treidler credits much of her success with SPIRE and Reading Assistant to the support and resources provided by the EPS Learning team. "What's been most helpful for me is diving into the teacher's guide and following the steps and instructions. Once you get into the guide, it's clear and easy to use compared to some other curriculums I've worked with."

Treidler's positive experience with SPIRE and Reading Assistant extends far beyond student progress—it's also about how these tools support her as an educator. "I really appreciate the Quick Checks in SPIRE. The built-in assessments are extremely helpful for gauging student progress," Treidler said. "They give me solid data, not just observational notes, which helps me confirm whether students are truly grasping the material."

Ultimately, it's the students' success that matters

most to Treidler. “I’ve definitely seen a lot of growth, especially in students who came from general education classes where the reading intervention wasn’t effective. SPIRE and Reading Assistant have really made a difference for them.”

### K-5 Reading Diagnostic Outcomes 2023–2024 School Year



OUSD striving readers receiving SPIRE instruction demonstrated meaningful improvement over the course of the 2023–2024 school year, with 40% of students measured moving up at least one performance level. Across all of the 88% of OUSD elementary schools included in this analysis, there were more students performing on or above grade level, and fewer students significantly below grade level, at the end of the school year.

### On Track and on Their Way

Guilfoil reports that at eight OUSD schools, the majority of students receiving SPIRE instruction moved up at least one performance band level on reading assessments. “At these sites, we have evidence of students receiving SPIRE instruction consistently throughout the school year, and, in most cases, special education teachers delivering SPIRE instruction have been doing so with their students consistently for multiple years,” Guilfoil said. “We did have one teacher, brand new to SPIRE, along with some students

who were being taught by special education tutors also make significant gains. What this tells us is that SPIRE makes it possible for new teachers, paraeducators, or other classroom assistants to successfully support students to make significant progress in their reading. And that the progress is stronger with consistent instruction over time,” explained Guilfoil.

“We believe that the trend of SPIRE ‘super user’ teachers leading students to more accelerated growth is related to the teachers believing in SPIRE. They’ve used it for years now. They’ve seen their students grow. As a result, they make sure to prioritize consistent SPIRE instruction for their students in need of reading intervention.”

### Working together

“We’ve gone through a lot of changes in the last five years, and EPS Learning has been really responsive and helpful,” Guilfoil said. “They’ve ensured we’ve gotten the products we need and helped us reach out to families during the pandemic. We’ve got the products, the people, and the training—now it’s really about monitoring student progress.”

Jennifer Duffy, a customer success specialist with EPS Learning, reflected on the partnership with OUSD, saying, “It’s so heartening to see teachers and admins who really care. They have a lot of challenges in front of them regarding the needs of their students, but I have no doubt they’ll rise to them.”

Together with EPS Learning, OUSD teachers will continue to make a profound difference in their students’ lives, futures, and community.

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