

DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT

Driving Literacy Gains Through Partnership and Innovation in Intensive Intervention

Martin County School District, Martin County, FL



How Educator Insights and Classroom Realities Helped Shape a Research-Based Program for Striving Readers

In Martin County, Florida, district leaders faced an urgent and familiar challenge: many students who qualified for intensive literacy intervention were years behind grade level, with limited time to close foundational skill gaps.

"Many of our middle and high school students are reading at a first- or second-grade level," said Karis Sullivan, Exceptional Student Education (special education) Instructional Coach for Martin County School District. "If students don't have foundational skills, it affects everything—across subject areas and throughout their lives."

The district was deeply committed to structured, evidence-based literacy intervention for students with the greatest needs, while also recognizing that a program's success depends on how well it works in real classrooms and how it supports teachers in practice.

A Partnership Built on Innovation

When Martin County began exploring SPIRE Up, an intensive literacy intervention developed by EPS Learning, district leaders recognized a strong Structured Literacy foundation along with a valuable opportunity. By piloting the program in their classroom settings, they could contribute educator insights that would help refine and strengthen the intervention program prior to broader implementation.

“Martin County had that strong, foundational relationship with EPS Learning. Transparency and communication have been the best thing about our partnership.”

Program Adoption and Co-Creation

SPIRE Up, a blended learning program that integrates both print and digital components, builds on EPS Learning’s long-standing, Orton-Gillingham-based, Structured Literacy program, SPIRE 4th edition. SPIRE Up offers a more efficient—yet equally rigorous—research-backed pathway for students in grades 2–8 who require intensive literacy intervention. For Martin County, that efficiency was critical.

“If a student starts an intervention in third grade and it takes many years to complete, that’s a lot of time,” Sullivan noted. “We want our students to build a strong reading foundation so they can move into higher-level skills and strategies. That’s why the SPIRE Up progression was so appealing.”

As the district prepared for implementation, leaders invited one school to participate in a focused pilot period. Insights gathered during that pilot informed targeted refinements before SPIRE Up expanded to two additional elementary schools and two middle schools.

“Everything was heard, and this led to significant changes before the launch. There was so much communication.”

Feedback Loops to Drive Change

As implementation expanded, collaboration deepened further. Teachers, leaders, and specialists tested the usability of materials, the blended print + digital instructional flow, and the ease of implementation in classrooms. Weekly feedback loops ensured that educator input translated quickly into program refinements, including updates to print materials, fidelity-of-use supports, and digital tools.

"I could go back to teachers each week and say, 'They hear you and they see you—and here's what they're working on.'"

A Strong District Supports Strong Implementation

Martin County's leadership team worked alongside EPS Learning to cultivate the conditions for successful implementation:

- **Blended learning with purpose**
Teacher-led, explicit instruction remained central, with digital practice reinforcing skills and informing next steps—not replacing teachers.
- **Dedicated time in the master schedule**
Protected time within the master schedule ensured that students could receive consistent small-group instruction, allowing teachers to deliver intensive intervention with fidelity.
- **Clear structures and shared understanding**
Expectations and progress were communicated consistently through positive communication across multiple channels, including face-to-face interaction.
- **Teacher-centered coaching**
District coaches developed program expertise, enabling them to conduct fidelity checks, model instruction, and provide supportive, non-evaluative coaching cycles.

Early Signs of Impact

Midway through implementation, early results are fueling confidence and enthusiasm. Students who had struggled with reading for years are making measurable gains in decoding and oral reading fluency—progress that may have once felt difficult to achieve.

District leaders report encouraging examples: some students receiving special education services have advanced one or two reading proficiency levels on mid-year district assessments, while English learners are showing significant growth in mastering phonics skills. Early wins are signaling a promising trajectory for long-term success.

“Our kids love it. They’re the toughest critics, and they are enamored with the digital aspect and the comprehension pieces.”

Looking Ahead

As implementation of SPIRE Up continues, Martin County’s experience highlights the power of pairing evidence programs with practices that elevate educator expertise and respond to real classroom realities.

By grounding innovation in both research and educator voice, Martin County School District and EPS Learning illustrate what’s possible when research and practice work in concert, creating stronger, attainable pathways to literacy success for striving readers with the greatest needs.

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