

Stockton Unified School District

Advancing Reading Proficiency Through Strategic, Equity-Driven *SIPPS* Implementation



INTRODUCTION

Stockton Unified School District (SUSD), which serves a large and diverse student population, has embarked on a significant and strategic initiative to enhance reading outcomes across its schools. Recognizing the foundational role of reading proficiency in student success, the district committed to the systematic implementation of the evidence-based *SIPPS*[®] program. This brief provides an overview of the initial successes and positive impacts observed since the program's launch, highlighting its effect on student reading proficiency, the growing confidence of educators in delivering effective reading instruction, and the evolving, more robust culture of reading within the district.



35,144

Total Students



80%

Students Receiving Free/
Reduced-Price Meals



15%

Students Receiving Special
Education Services



2024-2025

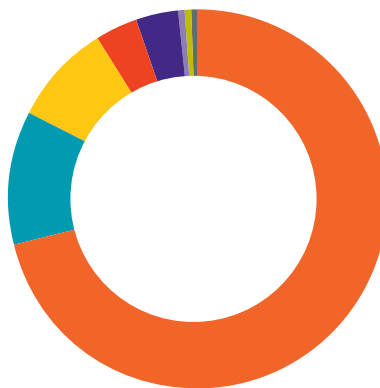
Implementation Years

71.3% - Hispanic/Latino

11.4% - Asian

8.6% - Black/African American

3.6% - White



3.7% - Two or more races

0.4% - American Indian/Alaska Native

0.5% - Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

0.5% - None reported

Student Demographics

NARRATIVE

ABOUT STOCKTON UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Located in Stockton, California, Stockton Unified School District (SUSD) is a large urban district serving 35,144 students across 55 schools, including elementary, junior high, and high schools, as well as specialized campuses. The district's mission—to graduate every student “college, career, and community ready”—is closely tied to its commitment to lifting youth out of poverty through equitable education.

The district serves a highly diverse student body, which is a key consideration for educational programming. SUSD's student population is predominantly Hispanic/Latino (71%), with significant percentages of Asian American (11%), African American/Black (9%), and other racial/ethnic groups. Notably, a substantial portion of its students, around 24% (over 9,100 students), are identified as English learners (ELs), with Spanish being the most prevalent home language, alongside other languages like Arabic, Filipino, Hmong, and Khmer. The district also serves a high percentage (77%) of socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

ADDRESSING LITERACY NEEDS

SUSD's commitment to providing a world-class education aligns with state goals to ensure students are reading by third grade and are fully literate by high school graduation. Prior to widespread *SIPPS* implementation, SUSD faced significant challenges, with only 6% of special education students and 15% of English learners reading at grade level. The implementation of programs like *SIPPS* is a direct reflection of SUSD's dedication to providing evidence-based instruction to meet the varied needs of its diverse learners and ensure a strong foundation for future academic success.

The *SIPPS* implementation is part of a larger district-wide push that also includes a major focus on writing, emphasizing the link between decoding and encoding. Equity walks, conducted by trained Educational Services team members, are designed to calibrate instruction

across schools and assess how teaching practices align with district-wide equity goals. These walks extend beyond *SIPPS* to review overall curriculum adherence and ensure active student engagement.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EDUCATOR SUPPORT

In July 2023, veteran leader Dr. Michelle Rodriguez, known for her 30+ years of service to high-poverty California districts, arrived in Stockton to become the 14th superintendent in 20 years. When Superintendent Dr. Rodriguez arrived at SUSD, *SIPPS* was already being used voluntarily in Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools, and showing good growth. However, it was not being implemented district-wide. Dr. Rodriguez, along with Assistant Superintendent Kasey Klappenback, spent the first year preparing the team to mandate *SIPPS* for every K–2 educator to replace Benchmark's phonics component. This mandate was supported by the Board of Trustees and involved over 5,000 staff members, including intervention educators and instructional assistants.

As of the 2024–25 school year, *SIPPS* is used to supplement core foundational skills instruction for every K–2 child, and also for intervention. This practice is referred to as “distributed practices” (rather than “double dose”) to clarify that intervention is not simply repeating the same instruction but is providing additional, targeted support. Every K–2 child in the district receives core *SIPPS* instruction, and Mastery Test data determine whether they receive distributed practices.

The district also began hiring intervention educators, with 19 intervention educators employed in 2023–24. Plans for the next school year (2024–25) included an intervention educator in each of the 43 K–8 elementary schools, and for the first time, intervention educators at high schools. The high school interventionists would be using *SIPPS* Plus, which is designed for use with older students (grades 4 and above) who are reading at first- and second-grade levels.

The systematic approach to implementation is based on Kotter's change management strategy, starting with the "why" (urgency), building a group of believers (principals and educators who already saw success), establishing a clear vision and requirement, and consistently celebrating wins.

Crucial to the implementation's success was job-embedded professional learning. This meant coaches from Collaborative Classroom (and previously CORE, the Consortium on Reaching Excellence in Education, an organization focused on improving literacy instruction) visiting classrooms to model, provide side-by-side teaching, or observe and suggest modifications. This support was multi-level, training district coaches, principals, and instructional assistants, to ensure everyone could provide constructive feedback. Principals conducted daily walk-throughs using "look for" guidance, and the Educational Services team conducted "equity walks" to calibrate support based on each school's specific needs and data. This approach differentiated support for schools, just as educators differentiated for students. Evidenced Success and Results According to Superintendent Dr. Michelle Rodriguez*, the implementation of *SIPPS* at SUSD has yielded "pretty dramatic" and "significant growth."

RESULTS

Data-Driven Progress

SUSD utilizes in-program Mastery Tests to track student progress methodically. Educators collaborate in monthly Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to analyze data and make informed decisions about moving students from one level to the next. The percentage of Mastery Tests entered into the system, indicating program engagement, more than doubled—from 26% to 65% for K-2 grades from 2023-24 to 2024-25 (see Figure 1).

Student groupings are flexible, shifting every ten lessons (roughly twice a month) based on Mastery Test data to ensure students are getting the instruction they need. The focus is on delivering complete lessons to ensure students master skills. If students are not learning, intentional reteaching occurs, including educators' examination of how they are teaching the routines.

*All quotes from Dr. Rodriguez were taken from the Collaborative Classroom blog post "[How Stockton's Superintendent Is Leading Change for Reading Achievement](https://collaborativeclassroom.org/blog/stockton-reading-sipps/)." collaborativeclassroom.org/blog/stockton-reading-sipps/

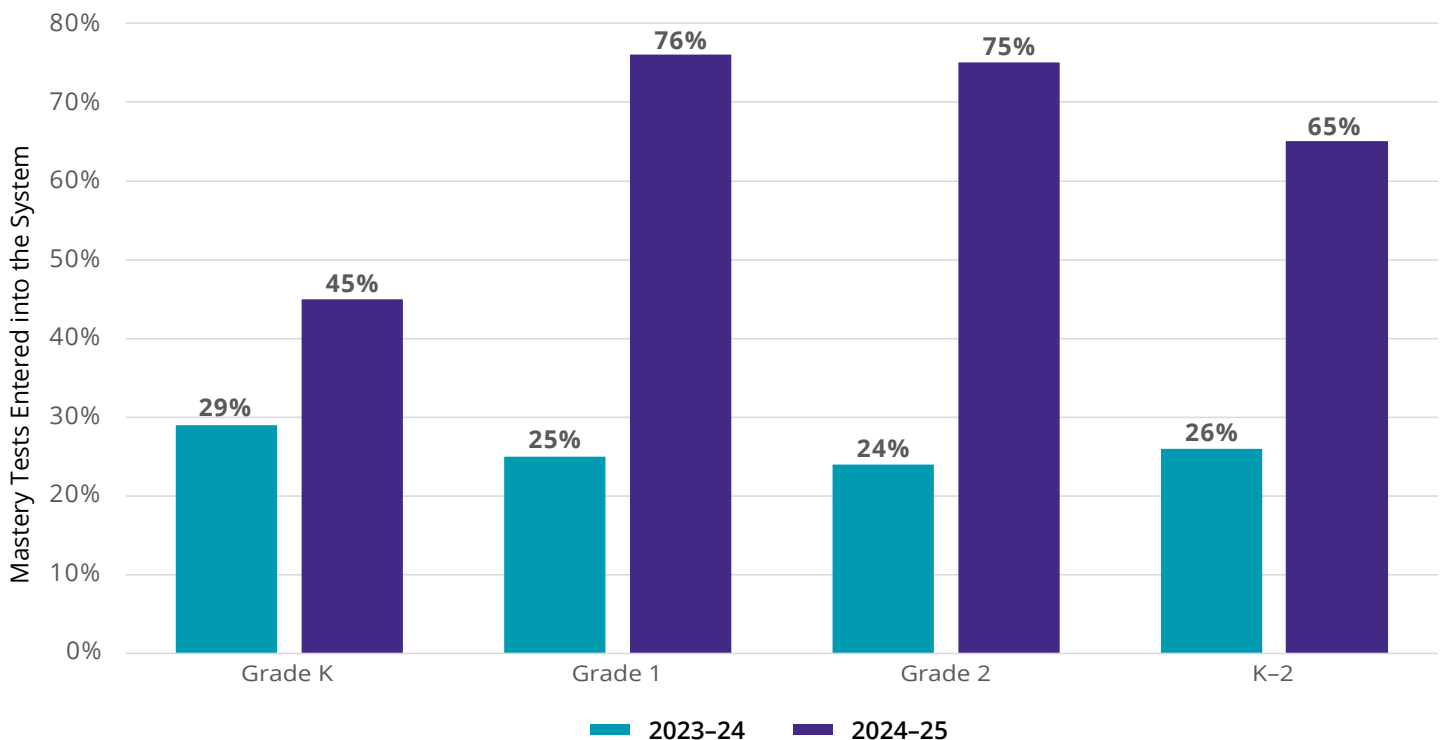


Figure 1: SIPPS Mastery Test Data Entry by Grade Level

Student Achievement

Based on Mastery Test data gathered between Fall and Spring of the 2023–24 school year, the number of K–2 students reading at grade level increased from 409 to 494, representing a 20.8% gain in proficiency across kindergarten, first, and second grades. Mastery Test data for the 2024–25 school year showed continued and remarkable growth, with the number of students meeting grade-level benchmarks rising from 791 in the Fall to 2,028 in the Spring, representing a 156.4% gain in proficiency (see Figure 2).

English learners demonstrated substantial progress in reading achievement, with proficiency rates indicating significant improvement. In the previous year, 15.8% of English learner students were reading at grade level. This year, that proportion has risen to 33.9%, indicating that more than twice as many English learners are now reading at or above grade level. Superintendent Rodriguez noted that the science of reading is highly

aligned with English learners, seeing the “complete opposite” of common misconceptions: “Sometimes people talk about the science of reading and think that it’s not aligned with their English learners. I actually have seen the complete opposite.”

SUSD also experienced a 4% increase in SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium) scores for students in grades 3 through 12, demonstrating positive effects beyond the K–2 range. This growth is attributed to the implementation of *SIPPS*, combined with a district-wide focus on writing, highlighting the explicit connection between decoding and encoding skills.

Individual sites report impressive growth. As an example, one site reported a 17% growth in reading proficiency based on i-Ready® data within the first two to three years of *SIPPS* implementation. Also, a educator from Primary Years Academy reported that 80% of their second graders were reading at or above grade level.

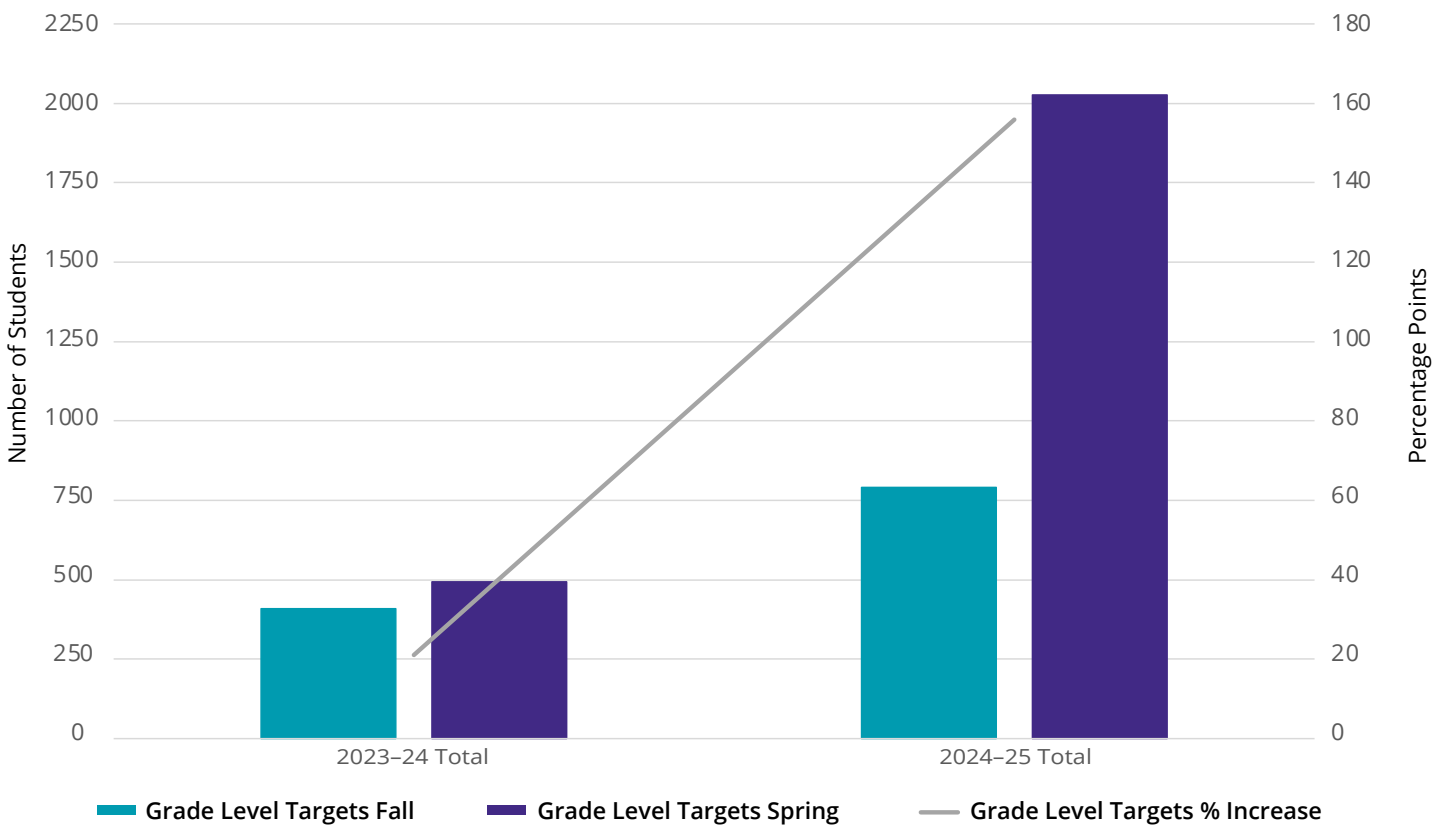


Figure 2: Students Meeting On-Grade Level Targets

Educator Confidence

Educators' beliefs have shifted, moving from uncertainty to enthusiasm as they witnessed student progress. Superintendent Rodriguez stated, "Change experiences to change beliefs to change expectations . . . we had some who didn't believe that their first graders could read at the level that they are. And now, educators are seeing a lot of efficacy."

As a result, educators have gained growing confidence in their ability to teach reading effectively. Initial uncertainty from some educators quickly turned into enthusiasm as they witnessed student progress. The program's systematic, explicit, and comprehensive nature has aligned reading instruction across the district, fostering collaboration and consistency. Educators appreciate that *SIPPS* is scripted yet allows for differentiation based on student needs. A remarkable 88% of educators who responded to district surveys reported seeing a positive impact from *SIPPS*. For example, a grade 2 educator from Pittman shared that *SIPPS* is a ". . . well-designed program that addresses the needs of our students . . . [I've] been waiting 27 years for this."



"Change experiences to change beliefs to change expectations... we had some who didn't believe that their first graders could read at the level that they are. And now, educators are seeing a lot of efficacy."

Student Engagement and Enthusiasm

Educators report that students are now "excited about reading and eager to engage with lessons." Many students eagerly ask, "Is it time for *SIPPS*?" For example, a second-grade student, after consistent *SIPPS* work, proudly reported reading a book three times.

The implementation has led to a significant improvement in the overall culture of reading, particularly in grades K–3. One site reported a dramatic increase in library circulation, from 60 to 6,376, demonstrating a greater desire for reading among students.

CONCLUSION

Stockton Unified School District's comprehensive implementation of the *SIPPS* program has established a unified, evidence-based approach to reading instruction. With strong leadership, a strategic implementation model, embedded professional development, and a culture of equity and accountability, SUSD is witnessing rapid improvement in student reading proficiency. Educators are re-energized, students are engaged, and the district is laying a firm reading foundation that will reverberate far beyond the early

grades. The positive impact on both educators and students underscores *SIPPS* as an invaluable tool in SUSD's mission to ensure all students become confident and capable readers, contributing to sustained growth in reading outcomes. *SIPPS* stands as a powerful example of how aligned systems, evidence-based practices, and shared commitment can drive meaningful, measurable change.



LEARN MORE

Learn more about the *SIPPS* program: collaborativeclassroom.org/programs/sipps



EXPLORE

Explore the evidence base for the *SIPPS* program: collaborativeclassroom.org/evidence-base/research-sipps