REALLY GREAT READING

CASE STUDY

Building a Culture of Literacy Through Consistent Instruction

Seneca Area School District, located in rural southwest Wisconsin, serves approximately 300 students in grades PK–12. The district prides itself on strong relationships, small class sizes, and personalized learning. But when baseline decoding and fluency data revealed persistent foundational gaps, leaders knew change was necessary. Intervention alone couldn't close the gaps; instruction needed to shift at the classroom level.

The district launched a multi-year effort to integrate Really Great Reading into its core approach to foundational skills. Today, students across K–5 receive daily RGR instruction, and the district is seeing measurable gains in both data and culture.

The Challenge

Despite dedicated teachers and small class sizes, decoding and fluency were areas of concern. District surveys and data showed that many students in grades 2–5 were still struggling with spelling and fluency, while younger students lacked a systematic phonics foundation.

Kelsey explained: "The terminology and routines have become part of our everyday classroom language. Phonics is just part of how we talk now—it's woven into the environment." But at the start, that wasn't the case. Intervention time was inconsistent, and without a clear structure for Tier 1 phonics, students weren't getting what they needed.

The Turning Point

In 2021, the district pulled together baseline data and proposed adopting Really Great Reading districtwide, modeling the rollout after a neighboring district's success. With ESSER funds, Seneca invested in programs across all grades, including Launchpad in 4K, Countdown in kindergarten, Blast in first grade, and HD Word for grades two through five, with HD Word Plus available for advanced students.

Seneca Area School District

District Overview



Seneca, Wisconsin

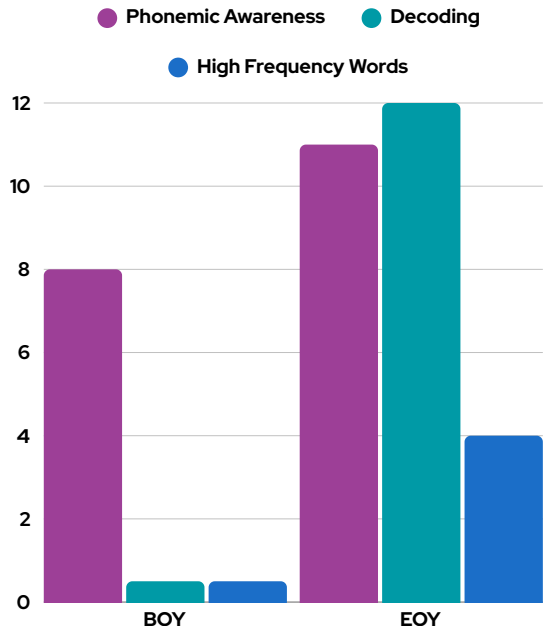
3 Schools		
1 Elementary School	1 Middle School	1 High School

Approximately **255** students

21 teachers, **3** administrators

45% Socioeconomically Disadvantaged

Kindergarten Growth by Skill



**Calculations were achieved by using the mean score from the diagnostic decoding survey.*

Teachers quickly recognized the benefits. “The program is easy to open up and teach,” Kelsey shared. “You can pull up the Teacher Presentation Tool and know exactly where you’re going without spending hours figuring it out.” The structured scope and sequence provided clarity. Strong buy-in followed, with staff expanding into RGR handwriting and eagerly anticipating future offerings. Just as importantly, a cultural shift took root, phonics language became embedded in daily instruction, and students began approaching reading like detectives, excited to uncover and explain patterns in words.

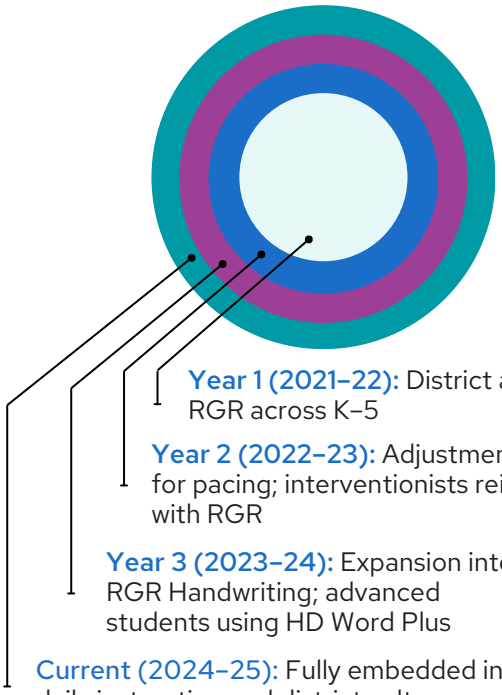
What Worked

Seneca’s success with Really Great Reading was rooted in a clear, structured scope and sequence that supported both classroom and intervention use, giving teachers consistency without sacrificing flexibility. The program adapted easily to the district’s small class sizes, whether teachers were working with nine students or twenty-five, and allowed for pacing that matched the needs of each group. The lessons were easy to follow, leading to strong teacher buy-in across the district. Staff embraced the routines so thoroughly that they expanded into RGR handwriting and expressed excitement for future program offerings. Perhaps the most notable outcome, however, has been the cultural shift in classrooms. Phonics terms like “schwa” and “bossy R” became part of everyday language, and students began approaching reading like detectives, eager to uncover rules and explain word patterns.

Outcomes

The first-grade cohort showed a clear line in the data, outperforming previous groups with stronger fluency, higher spelling scores, and fewer Act 20 flags. Kindergarten students demonstrated notable gains in phonemic awareness, decoding, and high-frequency word recognition, while grades 1 through 5 showed steady growth from fall to spring on diagnostic decoding surveys.
Teachers report that students now decode with accuracy and purpose, explaining patterns and rules with confidence. Parents and administrators have taken notice, reinforcing that this shift is both meaningful and lasting. What began as a response to decoding and fluency gaps has become a districtwide transformation, one rooted in consistent, evidence-based instruction that continues to strengthen literacy outcomes for every student.

Implementation for Foundational Skills



Year 1 (2021–22): District adopts RGR across K–5

Year 2 (2022–23): Adjustments made for pacing; interventionists reinforce with RGR

Year 3 (2023–24): Expansion into RGR Handwriting; advanced students using HD Word Plus

Current (2024–25): Fully embedded into daily instruction and district culture

Tier Movement

- Students who once needed intervention are now meeting grade-level expectations, reflecting steady growth across all tiers.

Program Reach

- Implemented districtwide in K–5, reaching about 150 students daily.
- Includes Launchpad, Countdown, Blast, and HD Word for aligned instruction PK–5.
- Strengthened by strong teacher buy-in and consistent professional development.

Fifth Grade Growth

