

## Rieck Avenue Elementary School, Millville, NJ

# HEADSPROUT BUILDS READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS IN MEASURABLE WAYS

Millville, New Jersey is a diversely rich community, and so is Rieck Avenue Elementary School, with its large percentage of multilingual and ESL students. Just as varied as the student population is each student's educational ability. One quarter of the school's population is enrolled in some level of special or differentiated education, and for most teachers, finding a cohesive starting point for classroom learning can be a challenge. But Rieck Avenue Elementary has discovered a powerful resource.

To close achievement gaps among the school's multilingual and ESL students, administrators at Rieck Avenue Elementary have adopted Headsprout Reading Comprehension – effective, one-of-a-kind supplemental reading programs for individual, group, and full classroom instruction. Headsprout Reading Comprehension individualized instruction, an adaptive, computer-centric program that provides broad-based reading comprehension lessons to students of varying abilities and developmental levels. The key to the program's success is its capacity to allow self-paced learning while offering a differentiated learning experience. The individualized nature of the program is ideal for a school like Rieck Avenue Elementary, where few students start their learning from the same point.

### Differentiated instruction and built-in engagement

Rieck Avenue Elementary teachers use the Headsprout Reading Comprehension individualized instruction

program to help students learn information at their own pace, without the students worrying about being left behind. The program is made up of interactive “episodes” that focus on key comprehension skills and vocabulary, and differentiates instruction by allowing each student to control the speed and content of the lesson progression. Those students who have already mastered a specific set of skills are able to focus on areas perceived as difficult, while those who are just beginning are given a thorough foundation before advancing.

The flexibility of Headsprout Reading Comprehension brings a welcome relief to teachers like Special Education teacher Cindy Hignett. “I have 16 students,” Hignett notes, “so I can't give an individual reading program to each one. The beauty of Headsprout Reading Comprehension is that we can have everyone at a computer and they are all able to work at their own level and their own pace. I need to be able to provide opportunities for differentiated and individualized instruction – and that is what Headsprout Reading Comprehension delivers.”

*“At the end of the level, I feel like I accomplished something. It feels really, really, good.”*

Elementary Student

In 2014, Learning A-Z merged Headsprout's two elementary reading products — Headsprout Early Reading and Headsprout Reading Comprehension — into one adaptive, effective, and fun K-5 online reading program. From introducing early readers to key reading fundamentals to growing reading comprehension skills for more established readers, Headsprout is the perfect resource to help children become capable and confident readers.

Teachers are always being challenged to find ways to maintain engagement, especially when students are struggling. Headsprout Reading Comprehension is specifically designed to keep students engaged during instruction, and to help them avoid frustration if they are grappling with a particular skill. Literacy Coach Jessica Grabowy explains, “If a student is having some challenges, [the program] will repeat a question, but in a different style. So the student is exposed to repetition in the program, but doesn’t feel like he or she is continuously failing.”

Headsprout Reading Comprehension uses a progress-reward system as the students read and play. When students provide correct responses on the first attempt, they receive points in the form of “coins.” Once accumulated, these “coins” can be used to “purchase” short animations or games that entertain the students while reinforcing the skills they’ve just learned. In this way, students are able to view reading instruction as a rewarding and fun activity. Debra Sukinik, who is District Supervisor of Special Education for Rieck Avenue Elementary, points out that some students would sit at the computer doing Headsprout Reading Comprehension for hours if they weren’t told it was time to move on.

### Real-time performance data

The students aren’t the only ones who are reaping the benefits of the Headsprout Reading Comprehension program. Teachers at Rieck Avenue Elementary report that the program provides them with instant access to performance data for each student. The program breaks down individual user progress on an episode-by-episode basis. It specifically identifies each student’s present level of reading performance, and makes it easy for teachers to analyze and share the data with their students. As Jessica Grabowy notes, “On a report card, [students] might get an A or a B. But really, what does that mean?”

With instant access to performance data, the Headsprout Reading Comprehension program guides both teachers and students to a better understanding of areas of comprehension in need of development, such as inferential, literal, main idea, context-derived word meaning, and vocabulary. By using this feedback, teachers are able to identify which students need greater emphasis on certain skills.

“[Teachers] can see all of their students at one shot,” Sukinik says. “They can click on individual students and see the episode they’re working on, how many they’ve completed, how long it took them, and what date they completed it. Then they’re able to assign or print out resources based on [how the student] performed. Teachers love using Headsprout because it really gives them instant feedback.”

### The school-to-home connection

Teachers and administrators alike appreciate the number of ways that the Headsprout Reading Comprehension program supports a strong school-to-home connection, which helps to facilitate student learning outside the classroom. The program comes with supplemental material that can be completed in class or at home. These activities extend the learning day and reinforce the skills introduced in the episodes. Also, at certain points in the program, students can print out a book to take home and read to their parents. As Sukinik observes, “Giving children a physical book to take home means that households that don’t have an Internet connection, a computer, or a printer can still have a strong and meaningful connection [with their child’s school].” And for those households who can get on the Internet, Headsprout Reading Comprehension promotes a number of blended learning options, including online access and a convenient iPad version of the program.

### Ease of use tops the list

Headsprout Reading Comprehension’s intuitive interface is popular with students and teachers alike. Debra Sukinik explains, “Whenever you spend money on a new technology, you want to be sure it will work. The ease of use is top on our list of why we love it. Teachers can put students on the computer, or the students can sign themselves on . . . and bring up their own programming while the teacher is one-on-one with the student or in a small group doing guided reading.”

Karen Culp, a Response to Intervention teacher at the school, agrees. “Students pick it up immediately and enjoy it,” she says. One student sums it up, “At the end of the level, I feel like I accomplished something. It feels really, really, good.”