

CASE STUDY:

California Elementary School Makes Lexiles the Foundation for Student Assessment



Lexile: Matching readers to text

As schools grapple with stretched budgets and increasing performance scrutiny, creative solutions are the order of the day. One site-managed elementary school in southern California has taken the bold step of making The Lexile Framework® for Reading the cornerstone of assessments and evaluation for the entire student body.

Green Tree East Elementary School serves K-6 students in the San Bernardino County city of Victorville. More than 70 percent of the students are low-income, and 26 percent are English Language Learners. Creating a paradigm to help these children meet the federal No Child Left Behind Act and California's rigorous state standards—while still making sure they have had breakfast, lunch and help with homework—was a challenge that brought together a committee of dedicated teachers. The title of their project is “No Teacher Left Behind (NTLB) Curriculum Realignment: Charting a New Course for Academic Success.”

The Need to Make Assessments Consistent

Until January 2005, Green Tree East relied on the Flesch-Kincaid system for aptitude leveling but felt its algorithm-based system was too inconsistent. The Lexile Framework for Reading's more linear approach appealed to the committee. Using Lexiles®, the committee reviewed instructional materials, including library and textbooks, to determine if they met state testing requirements.

Second-grade teacher Hugh McNeese was one of the committee's driving forces. He noted, “The way the school is set up, Lexiles are the foundation, and everything is feeding off the data we're getting from them, even the textbooks.”

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“We're in the development stage,” said Robert Guynn, a fifth-grade teacher. “We're not only integrating Lexiles but reinventing our school with the measures as part of the program. We've laid the groundwork this year for using them next year. The thing we like about Lexiles is there is a continuum all the way from kindergarten to sixth grade. That way we can chart kids from the time they enter the school until they leave.”

Lexiles proved to be a catalyst for change at Green Tree East. With Lexiles' consistent leveling across the school, Green Tree East was able to say goodbye to multiple, unrelated inventories in use, with scores that didn't transfer or translate from one grade to the next. Now Scholastic Reading Inventories (SRI) are used at each grade level so all teachers will see at a glance how every student is performing.

To that end, the teachers plan to create an NTLB data wall, with a color-coded magnet for each student, to track where they are by Lexile measures. Teachers also plan classroom charts, organized by Lexiles, as well as the reporting on SRI progress reports. Green Tree East is working with the office of the San Bernardino County superintendent of schools to add Lexile measures to district-generated report cards.

The implementation of Lexiles at Green Tree East won't just change how students and materials are matched, said the teachers. It will change the very nature of how reading is taught and managed at each grade level.

“When you look at education as a whole, reading instruction basically stops at third grade,” noted Guynn. “At fourth grade, rather than teaching students how to read, they're expected to read for information. Lexiles will change that at our school because we'll identify kids who still need reading instruction, so we'll continue to teach those who need it past third grade.”

The Key to Test Preparation

Lexiles also will get students on track for standardized tests long before they need to sharpen their number two pencils.

California children take their baseline test in second grade, said Sheryl McNeese, a second-grade teacher. “With Lexiles, we've leveled out the workload among kindergarten, first- and second-grade teachers. We've readjusted our benchmarks using Lexiles so we can get the children ready for reading the test at second grade. They're tested at second grade/eight months, but by that time they're expected to achieve a fourth-grade/eight-months level.”

The expectation that students will read two grade levels above their own to score proficiently on the California Standards Test continues into sixth grade.

“From the kindergarten point of view, Lexiles help us have a more definite target for our kids to reach,” said kindergarten teacher Linda Washington. “It’s more helpful than ‘they just need to read.’”

Hugh McNeese added, “It’s a common teacher language. If we get a Lexile measure from another school for a transfer student, we’ll know what it means. I think it would be nice to have a standard for educators across the nation that all teachers understand.”

The Next Step: Measuring Student Reading and Writing on the Same Scale

Using the Lexile Analyzer®, a tool that allows users to analyze text and generate a Lexile measure, a pilot project at Green Tree East measured fifth-grade student writing on the same scale as their reading level. In almost every case, students’ Lexile reading measures were significantly higher than the score their writing received.

This allowed students to look at text at their Lexile level and compare and contrast it with their own writing. This analysis provokes students to metacognate—monitor and evaluate their writing and develop problem-solving strategies to improve it.

Encouraging Parental Awareness and Involvement

Basing the entire school’s reading assessments on Lexiles will also help students in a very basic way—by providing parents with user-friendly academic reports. The majority of students are bussed in from a very low-income area, divided from the school’s neighborhood by a major highway. Many parents can’t be involved with the school because of a lack of transportation, time and limited English skills.

“One thing that the parents might find useful is that the SRI uses Lexiles to generate book lists and graphics-based reports that show student progress,” said Paul Hokama, a second-grade teacher at Green Tree East. “It generates Spanish letters for the Spanish-speaking parents and gives them a wide range of opportunities to get involved.”

The reading lists that are sent home with students will contain Lexile measures as well as Dewey Decimal and library cataloging information. To complete the circle of support, the Green Tree East committee will work with the local public library, as part of a broad-based plan to strengthen community buy-in.

Hugh McNeese noted that the school district is encouraging Green Tree East’s adoption of Lexiles, hoping its success will provide an example for other schools in the district.

“Currently, we don’t get test results until the following school year,” he said. “We are going to use the Lexile information and real-time data to drive our curriculum, so we’ll know exactly where the children are from week to week. If a need comes up, we’ll be able to create an intervention immediately for a child or sub-group. We’ve taken on a task that completely reorganizes how a California school is run.”

Green Tree East Elementary School is a site-managed school with approximately 700 students in Victorville, Calif. The student population is largely low-income, and many students are English Language Learners.

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The Lexile Framework® for Reading provides a common scale for matching reader ability and text difficulty, enabling teachers and parents to choose materials that can help to improve student reading skills and monitor literacy across the curriculum and at home. Recognized as the most widely adopted reading measure in use today, Lexiles® are part of reading and testing programs at district, state and federal levels. More than 100,000 books and 80 million articles have Lexile measures, and all major standardized tests can report student reading scores in Lexiles.

Benefits of Using Lexiles

- Consistent tracking of student progress across the grades
- Accurate classification and management of classroom and library materials and textbooks
- Well-informed and data-driven instructional decisions in response to changes or challenges in student performance
- Accurate and user-friendly communication with parents about student progress

For more information on Lexiles, contact us at **1.888.LEXILES** or visit **www.Lexile.com**.

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