

CASE STUDY:

North Carolina Students Use Lexiles To Build Reading Skills



Lexile: Matching readers to text

K-5 educators face unique challenges. In addition to teaching and preparing students for high-stakes tests, successful teachers of young children also create lifelong readers. This responsibility weighs heavily on the shoulders of Susan Sidden, K-5 supervisor of reading and writing for the Wilkes County School District in North Carolina.

Wilkes County is a quiet, largely rural county located in the northwest part of the state, at the foot of the Appalachian Mountains. With a spread-out population of about 66,000 and a 45-minute drive to the nearest major metropolitan area (Winston-Salem), Wilkes County—and, by extension, its school district—is self-sufficient, self-reliant and determined to excel. It was that determination that led the district to turn to Lexiles® to help its students build literacy skills.

Advantages of Incorporating Independent Reading

Sidden is a firm believer in a balanced approach to literacy, which incorporates shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading and writing. In 2001, she was looking for a way to boost the sluggish level of improvement in her district.

“Independent reading is the most important thing in my mind, and it’s the one I could do something about quickly,” she says. “We had used the same reading program for many years, and matching readers to their levels with that program seemed to be more difficult than with Lexiles. Plus, our North Carolina End-of-Grade tests report Lexile scores, so why run a train on a track that will be switched to another track at the end of the school year?”

After switching the district’s reading program to Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), which reports in Lexiles, Sidden saw immediate improvement in student scores. When a student is reading and comprehending materials that have Lexile measures 100 points higher than his/her Lexile score, it is recommended that he/she move on to the next reading level. Sidden says, “In one class, 71 percent of the students have increased their Lexile scores by 100 points or higher, and more than half of that 71 percent improved by more than 200 points. In some cases, we have 250- to 350-point gains. Beginning readers are making 450-point gains.”

Helping Teachers Increase Reader Comprehension

Just as exciting is the increase in comprehension and interpretation. “We’re big into asking higher-level questions,” notes Sidden. “We’ve trained our teachers in higher-level questioning teaching strategies so higher level-questions were posted on the walls in our classrooms. However, before we started using Lexiles, the kids weren’t really responding to them. The program we’d used before had just asked the literal comprehension questions, such as, ‘The shirt was red, what color was the shirt?’ Questions on the End-of-Grade tests are interpretive, and Lexiles are a better fit for that.”

She continues, “At one point, a boy in the third grade was working on a Scholastic Reading Inventory. He looked up at the higher-level question on the wall and remarked that it was connected to the question on the computer.”

With increased comprehension and quickly improving scores, Wilkes County students are benefiting from Lexiles as they pursue independent reading, too, which is exactly the result Sidden wants. “The greatest challenge overall is what’s good for kids,” she says. “I wanted something that would support independent reading. Using SRI and Lexiles, we were able to place children

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"Educators need to understand how important independent reading is in the overall picture of reading," Sidden continues. "They need to understand that children must practice that skill, and they have to practice on their own particular level. Lexiles help us reach that goal."

The Wilkes County School District has 13 elementary schools serving a population of just over 66,000 residents. Wilkes County, N.C., is a rural county in the northwest part of the state.

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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

- Better prepares students for interpretive test questions
- Easier monitoring of classroom and student progress
- Better understanding by parents of student assessments
- Enthusiastic and engaged students

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