



CASE STUDY: The Lexile® Framework for Reading

Michigan School District Uses Lexile Measures to Improve the Literacy Skills of Its Diverse Student Body, Differentiate Instruction and Continue Its Long Tradition of Excellence

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The L’Anse Creuse Public School district, located 20 miles northeast of Detroit and covering thirty-seven square miles of northeast Macomb County, was formed in 1954 when population increases necessitated the establishment of a new high school. Today, almost a decade into the new millennium, the district—which has since grown to include two high schools, four middle schools, ten elementary schools, a vocational and technical center, and a performing arts center—continues its long tradition of meeting the needs of its community.

For many years a homogenous, middle-class suburban school system, L’Anse Creuse’s demographic has changed over the past five years, according to Diane Vigneron, learning consultant for the middle schools. Population growth within the district’s attendance area has resulted in increased numbers of minority and disadvantaged students. This diversity in the student body poses new challenges to teachers, who must adjust to a wider variety of needs and abilities.

Though L’Anse Creuse’s demographic is changing, the district’s commitment to high standards of academic excellence is stronger than ever. Learning Consultant Diane Mason attributes L’Anse Creuse’s stellar reputation and consistently high test scores to the school board’s insistence that “failure is not an option.” The district’s vision statement says it all: “L’Anse Creuse...a community where all people work together so that everyone succeeds.”

L’anse Creuse Discovers The Lexile Framework for Reading

In the year 2000, concerned about a decline in reading skills, former District Superintendent Dr. John Armstrong called for a renewed emphasis on literacy across the curriculum. Spurred by this initiative, Mason and Vigneron attended a Literacy Leaders Institute conference hosted by Scholastic. “We brought about fifteen teachers and administrators,” Mason recalls, “because we were searching for ways to assess our middle school students on our own, quickly and easily.” At the conference, they discovered The Lexile Framework for Reading, an educational tool that would support and enhance the district’s literacy efforts for years to come and become a crucial component of middle school assessments and curriculum design.

Soon after the Scholastic conference, L’Anse Creuse implemented the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), one of many testing programs that report students’ reading scores as Lexile measures. The SRI is administered twice during each school year: once in early fall and again in May. This customized test—comprised of reading passages and multiple choice questions—takes about thirty minutes to complete and provides a score instantaneously. Based on their Lexile measures (which can range from below 0L to above 1700L), students are categorized as: at risk; basic; proficient; or advanced readers.

Once Lexile measures were provided to instructors and more fully integrated into school culture, teachers began to recognize the power of the measures to drive and differentiate daily instruction. Now that the Lexile Framework is used to its full potential in the middle schools, according to Mason, teachers, administrators and librarians alike acknowledge that “Lexile measures are critical: you need to match kids to texts to see measurable reading improvement.”

English Language Arts Teachers Use Lexile Measures to Facilitate Group Work and Differentiate Instruction

Sheryl Furnas, an English language arts teacher at Middle School North for the past eighteen years, agrees with Mason that the Lexile Framework is a “useful and effective tool.” She and other Lexile advocates in the district emphasize the importance of the Lexile Framework’s unique approach of measuring both reader ability and the difficulty of text on the same scale. Prior to the district’s adoption of Lexile measures, she says, teachers had no reliable way of determining students’ reading levels and no strategies that guaranteed improvement. Because of the accuracy of Lexile measures in determining both reader ability and text difficulty, Furnas now feels empowered to help students progress. “I encourage my students to read on a daily basis within their target range: 100L below and 50L above their Lexile measures. I can tell them with confidence that if they practice reading within these guidelines, they’ll see results.”

Sustained silent reading has long been emphasized in the middle schools, and English teachers routinely devote up to twenty minutes of every sixty-minute class period to silent reading. In the past, those minutes were poorly utilized if students chose materials that were below their target range. Now teachers use Lexile measures to insure that students select challenging texts that both interest them and will help to strengthen their reading skills. “We want that in-class reading time to be productive,” says Furnas.

Lexile measures also help facilitate cooperative learning among students within “literature circles” and small discussion groups. “For different purposes and lessons,” Furnas says, “I can group students with similar Lexile measures or varied Lexile measures. In the past, I formed groups based on intuition; Lexile measures make grouping strategies much easier.”

Content Teachers Rely on Lexile Measures to Help Struggling, Gifted and Special Education Students

Lexile measures may be a perfect fit for English teachers, but they are equally indispensable for the district’s “content” teachers. Judy Merrifield, a science teacher at Middle School Central for the past decade, was initially dubious about Lexile measures’ relevance to science instruction. However, once she was provided lists of her students’ Lexile measures by class period, she quickly came around, realizing that “Lexile measures were going to make my job much easier.”

“We read quite a lot in science,” she says, “and science reading is particularly challenging and notorious for specialized vocabulary.” Because a typical science class is comprised of over thirty students, Merrifield considers Lexile measures a quick and useful way to “see where everyone is at the beginning of the year,” so that she can “better accommodate each student and make efficient use of class time.” Lexile measures help Merrifield differentiate lesson plans and assign appropriate reading. “If we are studying cells, for example, I determine the content I need my students to know and then I seek out several articles on that topic at differing Lexile levels,” she says. “The content is the same, but the length, vocabulary and complexity of the articles are varied to suit the spectrum of reading levels. This way, all students can access the material and participate meaningfully in class discussions.”

Lexile measures offer incentives for teachers to move beyond the “textbook approach” while remaining confident that supplementary materials they seek are level-appropriate. This enables Merrifield and others to broaden students’ horizons and introduce real-world applications and relevance to the knowledge they acquire in class.

With differentiated materials made possible by Lexile measures, struggling students now can access content more assuredly, increase their self-confidence and, in the process, improve their reading skills. But Merrifield is quick to add that gifted students benefit as well. “Differentiating for gifted students shouldn’t just mean ‘giving them more work.’ I have some students in my seventh grade classes with twelfth grade reading skills. With Lexile measures, I can offer them meaningful challenges in the form of more advanced texts.”

If Lexile measures are useful for struggling and gifted students alike, they are absolutely essential for special needs students, according to Jennifer Kowal, special education learning consultant for the district’s middle and high schools. Kowal says that frequent and nuanced assessments are crucial for the district’s special needs students so that necessary adjustments can be made to their Individualized Education Plans. The Lexile measures of special education students are measured three times during each school year. Other assessments, including state tests, are “accurate, but not sufficient,” according to Kowal. “They don’t help teachers drive instruction as effectively as Lexile measures.”

Kowal recalls a student who read the book “Milkweed” by Jerry Spinelli over a weekend and confessed to her that it was the first book he’d read for pleasure in three years. In guiding students toward books of appropriate difficulty, Lexile measures “decrease reader frustration and increase the likelihood of positive reading experiences,” according to Kowal.

Lexile Measures Empower Students, Guide the Textbook Review Process and Influence Library Acquisitions

“The students themselves embrace Lexile measures,” according to Merrifield. “I often overhear them talking about their Lexile measures in the hallways. And because we assess them at the beginning and end of each year, students can really see their growth and experience a sense of accomplishment.”

The key, according to Vigneron, is explaining to students why Lexile measures are so important. Prior to the administration of the SRI, she sets the groundwork by talking to students about the need for sophisticated reading skills. “I

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make the stakes explicit by showing them charts and graphs of the reading levels required to succeed in a variety of professions. I even tell them what Lexile [measure] they'll need to read a driver's education manual and pass the written licensing exam." As Kowal puts it, "our students understand that Lexile measures are more than 'just another number.'"

Determining the Lexile measures of educational materials before purchasing decisions are made has revolutionized the process of textbook review and adoption. According to Mason, determining the Lexile measures of textbooks under consideration "reveals how unfriendly some texts can be for our kids." And Vigneron has found that the offerings within certain anthologies have widely divergent Lexile measures, which could pose problems or cause confusion.

Library acquisitions are another area in which Lexile measures have proved invaluable. Librarians can add to their collections based on "filling gaps" in the Lexile spectrum, thereby insuring every student access to appropriate materials. Many of the books in L'Anse Creuse's middle school libraries and media centers have Lexile measures. Students can easily search for reading materials in their target ranges, and librarians have enhanced power to make informed suggestions.

Lexile Advocates Promote Productive Summer Reading and Extend Lexile Measures to the High Schools

One area of particular promise cited by district representatives is Lexile measures' potential to enhance summer reading programs and prevent "summer setback." The diminishment or loss of student skills during the summer recess is one of the most vexing problems in education. But L'Anse Creuse students who follow through with summer reading in their target Lexile ranges show growth when they return to school in the Fall and are better prepared to tackle the state tests administered in October. Vigneron holds Lexile information sessions for parents and has spearheaded efforts to send level-appropriate suggested reading lists home with students at the end of each school year.

A Lexile advocate from the beginning, Vigneron attended the Lexile National Conference in Atlanta in 2006 and learned even more about the science, research and data behind the Lexile Framework. She has since become an aggressive promoter of its use throughout the district. Efforts are underway, for example, to integrate Lexile measures more thoroughly into the district's high schools. Lexile measures are currently used primarily for placement purposes in the high schools. But Vigneron expects that new-teacher training sessions will soon result in increased use of Lexile measures to drive daily high school instruction throughout the year.

Meanwhile, central district administration has continued its focus on literacy. Dr. Keith Wunderlich, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, says that Lexile measures "lend a consistency and focus to what we do." Unlike subject-specific state assessments, he says, Lexile measures are "generalized measures that are understandable, easy to implement and provide a common frame of reference for all secondary teachers." Wunderlich is confident that Lexile measures will be an integral part of the district's next five-year strategic plan, which will take effect in 2009. "Considering how far we've come in literacy instruction over the past five years, Lexile measures will remain a priority."

"The growth made by students whose teachers hold them accountable for reading within their targeted Lexile reading range is phenomenal," according to Mason. "We have seen kids within one year grow by three or four hundred Lexile measures." Such growth will surely result in increased recognition for the district's middle schools, three of which have already attained "Blue Ribbon School" status. Test scores continue to rank among the state's best.

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For more information on Lexile measures, visit www.Lexile.com.

MetaMetrics, an educational measurement and research organization, develops scientific measures of academic achievement that link assessment with targeted instruction to improve learning. The organization's renowned psychometric team created The Lexile Framework for Reading; El Sistema Lexile para Leer, the Spanish-language version of the reading framework; The Quantile Framework for Mathematics; and The Lexile Framework for Writing. In addition to licensing Lexile and Quantile measures to state departments of education, testing and instructional companies, and publishers, MetaMetrics offers professional development, resource measurement and customized consulting services.

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