

CASE STUDY:

South Florida Middle School Uses Lexile Measures to Map Path for Meeting State Learning Standards



Lexile: Matching readers to text

As every educator knows, reading must be taught on an ongoing basis and throughout the curriculum — not just in Reading and Language Arts classes, but in all classes, particularly in elementary and middle school. As students progress up the educational ladder, they must use their reading skills to interpret and analyze materials in every subject area. At Boca Raton Community Middle School in Florida, a new program is putting The Lexile Framework® for Reading to work throughout the school's curriculum, helping teachers to ensure that students meet state learning goals.

The Lexile Framework 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 the 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.

Lexiles Connecting Students With Text

Kim Knutson, testing and evaluation specialist for the School District of Palm Beach County, said it was a commitment to helping Boca Raton Community Middle School's students achieve at the highest levels on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) that made Lexiles a vital part of the school's instructional program. While the school's overall reading test scores are high, the administration faced the challenges of a socio-economically diverse student population. More than one-third of the student body qualifies for free/reduced lunch; 10 percent have limited English proficiency; 17 percent are in the Exceptional Student Education (special needs) program; and 13 percent are gifted. With such a wide range of backgrounds and abilities, the teachers had difficulty finding materials that more than 50 percent of the students could comprehend at a given time. Knutson knew that connecting students with reading materials from across the curriculum that matched their reading abilities was key to helping them build literacy skills.

“A lot of the content-area teachers aren't reading teachers, but they're teaching students how to comprehend their instructional materials. That's our vision.”

Using students' Lexile measures from the previous school year's Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) tests, Knutson introduced The Lexile Framework to all teachers at Boca Raton Community Middle School. “It's all about comprehension,” said Knutson. “The students practice reading differentiated text every day, modified for their individual reading level. Then, when the teacher presents grade-level textbooks, the students will have prior knowledge of the content, and therefore be able to better comprehend their textbook material.”

Making a Good Curriculum Better

The introduction of The Lexile Framework has assisted science teacher Amy Berean in broadening the selection of materials for her sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade classes. Together with fellow teacher Christina Imbriale, Berean has created a program called “Teaching Science Through Novels.” Berean introduces new topics through a low-Lexile article that all students can comprehend; then the topic is explored through additional materials at varying Lexile levels, including a novel with a Lexile measure that most students can comprehend. Therefore, sixth graders studying earth science and volcanoes will read “The Volcano Disaster,” by Peg Kehret, an action adventure tale set on Mount St. Helens during its eruption. Advanced eighth-grade students may be assigned Jules Verne's “Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,” or Michael Crichton's “Jurassic Park,” depending on the study unit.

“Lexiles are used in all disciplines and electives,” said Knutson. Students are assigned articles for each class every night, targeted to their reading ability. Additionally, the school is implementing Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) time for 20 minutes each day, during which students read “Scholastic Reading Counts!” books, matched to their Lexile level. They then complete comprehension quizzes.

The addition of Lexiles to the teachers' instructional strategies has also added to their resources for targeted materials. In particular, the content-area teachers have benefited from using Lexile Reader/Writer, a software program being pilot tested at Boca Raton Community Middle School that allows them to assign material to students for reading and then audit their comprehension.

Another Boca Raton Community Middle School Language Arts teacher, Susan Derr, uses Lexiles to “jigsaw” reading materials for her students. She selects four articles with varying Lexile measures and assigns them to students in small groups. The students read the article that matches their Lexile level and then, as a group, summarize the main ideas in the article and answer a worksheet of questions about the article. Derr selects high interest articles for this assignment and says that students “might groan at first, but they love doing it.” She said she has used this instructional strategy for more than 20 years, but now Lexiles and the “Lexiled” articles in the school’s EBSCO database provide her with a key tool for designing her “jigsaws.”

The ongoing “Lexiling” of the school library provides access to other targeted materials across an array of levels and subjects. Margaret Carlson, media specialist, and Knutson compared the distribution of the Lexile measures of the media center’s book collection to the distribution of student reading ability. After learning that the media center’s collection did not contain many books for students with high or very low reading abilities, the school tailored its purchases to complement students’ Lexile measures.

If a student’s aptitude and comprehension vary across content areas — higher in Language Arts than in Science, for instance — the Lexile measure is adjusted for each particular discipline, ensuring that a student can concentrate on learning comprehension and critical-thinking skills instead of struggling through text. “A lot of the content-area teachers aren’t reading teachers, but they’re teaching students how to comprehend their instructional materials. That’s our vision,” Knutson added.

Independent reading keeps students challenged, pushing them to comprehend at a level of 75 to 80 percent. Knutson noted that the students are able to build their receptive vocabulary, preparing them for the deliberate instruction presented by the teacher.

Supporting Teacher Development

Knutson has made professional development a priority for the teaching staff, creating a regular schedule of workshops, training sessions and team meetings. Topics range from Lexile tools and support materials to SRI test administration, data analysis and goal-setting. It’s all job-embedded, so teachers receive regular refreshers and information during teacher development days and monthly early-morning sessions. “An idea is introduced in a workshop, and teachers take it back to the classroom,” Knutson said. “I attend their team meetings to see how it’s going, then follow up in an early-morning half-hour session.”

Staying on Track to Meet and Exceed State Standards

Using the power of Lexile measures to match students and text, Knutson’s aim is to keep Boca Raton students on track to meet and exceed Florida’s state standards. In fact, because Lexiles are available for the norm-referenced (NRT) component of the FCAT, the data from SRI tests provide teachers with a powerful tool for predicting how students will likely perform on the state assessment.

“It’s my goal to move students ahead one and a half years in a single year’s time,” Knutson said. “That’s in keeping with the Sunshine State Standards.”

Boca Raton Community Middle School, part of the School District of Palm Beach County, Fla., serves a racially and ethnically diverse student population of approximately 1,120 students.

Contact

Kim Knutson
knutson@palmbeach.k12.fl.us

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

- Makes it easier to provide targeted reading materials to students
- Provides an assessment link to the state standardized tests
- Can be implemented by all teachers, across all content areas
- Provides additional content resources for teachers

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

For more information, press only:

Lisa Wolfe, L. Wolfe Communications, 773-325-9935, lwolfe@lwolfe.com

MetaMetrics, Lexile, Lexile Framework, Lexile Analyzer, Lexile Vocabulary Analyzer, Lexile Power Vocabulary, Lexile Lingos, and the Lexile symbol are trademarks or U.S. registered trademarks of MetaMetrics, Inc. The names of other companies and products mentioned herein may be the trademarks of their respective owners. © 2005 MetaMetrics, Inc.



Lexile: Matching readers to text