



CASE STUDY: The Lexile® Framework for Reading

North Carolina Community Collaborates to Connect Kids With Books, Build Reading Ability Through Summer Reading

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As educators and administrators across the country focus their efforts on improving students’ reading skills, many students show measurable success by the end of the school year. However, once the last bell of the year rings, a whole new challenge begins—ensuring that students retain the gains they have achieved in reading ability over the summer break.

Dubbed summer reading “loss” or “slide,” this dilemma has caused consternation in educators everywhere, with hard-won improvements being lost during summers filled with sun, fun and often very little reading among school-aged children. With no regular assignments and challenges to keep them engaged, students look elsewhere for entertainment and lose the skills they—and their teachers—worked so hard to build over the school year. However, a study by Dr. James Sangil Kim, assistant professor of education at Harvard University, demonstrated that students’ reading skills could grow over the summer if they were able to select books based on their personal interests and at their Lexile reading levels.

Last summer, a community coalition in Durham, N.C., worked together to roll out a summer reading program fueled by Kim’s research. The program provided local students with resources that enabled them to select reading materials based on their unique interests and reading abilities and, as a result, continue to build their reading skills after the school doors closed for the summer.

Using Lexile Measures to Help Students Build Reading Skills Over Summer Break

The nonprofit organization, Communities in Schools, brought together the Durham County Library, Durham Public Schools and MetaMetrics®, an educational measurement company and developer of The Lexile Framework for Reading. The goal of this collaboration, named the Durham Community Partnership for Reading, was to reduce summer reading slide for Durham children. The partnership developed a program that used the public library’s annual summer reading program as a springboard to involve students and parents in choosing summer reading materials based on Lexile measures.

The Lexile Framework for Reading provides a common, developmental scale for matching reader ability and text difficulty. Lexile measures enable educators, parents and students to select targeted materials that can improve reading skills and to monitor reading growth across the curriculum, in the library and at home. Recognized as the most widely adopted reading measure, Lexile measures are part of reading and testing programs in the classroom and at the district and state levels. More than 100,000 books, 80 million articles and 60,000 Web sites have Lexile measures, and all major standardized tests can report student reading scores as Lexile measures.

“The goal of our Summer Reading Program is simple—to encourage students to read throughout the summer so they’ll increase or maintain their reading levels,” said Karlene Fyffe, youth services manager, Durham County Library. “This year, MetaMetrics invited us to include other components in the program. We were excited about the opportunity, particularly since it also gave us a chance to work more closely with the public schools.”

A closer alliance between the Durham County Library and Durham Public Schools was also important to Mary Gray Leonard, the school district’s director of media services. The proposed partnership came at a time when the district was beginning to incorporate Lexile measures into its school library media programs.

“At the end of 2006, Durham Public Schools converted all of its media centers to an online union catalog system that allows patrons to search for books by Lexile measure,” she recalled. “Two months later, we met with MetaMetrics and Durham County Library to discuss the summer reading program. Out of that meeting came the creation of a custom Lexile map that was tailored for the Durham community.”

Mapping Summer Reading Selections for Durham Students

Under Leonard's direction, school library media specialists from Durham Public Schools selected six titles for each Lexile range from 200L to 1700L to be included as book suggestions on the map.

"We felt it was important to have school librarians involved in the selection of the titles because they are trained in materials selection and aware of the need for diversity," said Leonard. "It was challenging to find books that not only appealed to a wide range of people, but that were also widely available. We tried to make sure that the majority of our school libraries had a minimum of one copy of each title on the list, and we also checked to see that the public library had copies of most of the books. It was so wonderful to be able to search our catalog by Lexile measure."

Availability of recommended titles was only part of the challenge. "We wanted to have representative samples for both boys and girls of all backgrounds and interests," she said. "The list represented not only award-winning books but also books that were popular with students. We tried to take into consideration gender and interests. The recommended books at the lower Lexile levels are primarily fiction with some biography. More nonfiction is included at the higher levels."

Students in Durham Public Schools receive their Lexile measures on their end-of-grade reports, a summary of performance on the state assessment. This year, they also received a copy of the custom Lexile map, accompanied by an explanation of the Lexile Framework and a letter from Durham Public Schools Superintendent Carl Harris, Ph.D., encouraging parents to ensure that their children read regularly over the summer. The summer reading program was even featured in a segment of "Bright Ideas," a program on Channel 4, the community's public access cable channel.

"Our goal was for our students to have a better understanding of what their Lexile measures were and how to use them when they visited the public library during the summer," said Leonard.

To help the public librarians understand how to help summer readers and their parents use Lexile measures, MetaMetrics provided training sessions on the Lexile Framework and the "Find a Book" Web site. MetaMetrics also developed posters promoting Lexile measures as a tool for finding reading material, and they were displayed in all branches of the public library system. When the summer readers came to the library, the youth librarians were ready to help them select books based on their reading abilities and interests.

Matching Students With Books Year-Round at School, Library and Home

"Many students came into the library with their Lexile measures in hand," said Youth Services Manager Fyffe. "This project was exciting because many parents didn't know about Lexile measures and how they could use the scores to help their children find books."

The map and information distributed by the schools changed the way many students approached summer reading. "Not only did the students come into our libraries with their Lexile measures, but their parents came with them as well to inquire about books within their Lexile range. Our librarians were able to help them find the books they needed," she added.

The collaboration came at a time when Lexile measures were not included in the public library's catalog so technology staff had to work on importing the measures. While the transition period had some challenges over the summer, Fyffe's staff was still able to help students find books based on their Lexile measures.

"Several librarians and students relied on the Lexile Web site, because we were in the middle of importing the scores," recalled Fyffe. "The 'Find a Book' Web site was extremely helpful, and a large number of students and librarians used it."

MetaMetrics launched its "Find a Book" Web site to help young readers and parents quickly and easily use Lexile measures to select books that match their interests—or school assignments—and reading abilities. By simply visiting www.lexile.com/findabook on a computer at home or at the library, entering a Lexile measure and picking a favorite subject, Durham summer readers were able to view and print a custom "bookbag" of titles. Then, through a link to WorldCat, an online network of library holdings, readers could find out if the Durham County Library—or another library near them—had the books on their list.

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Both the school district and the public library call this collaboration over the summer a success and look forward to doing it again next year.

“Prior to the collaboration, children did not ask for books by Lexile measures. Not at all,” said Fyffe. “Our librarians were accustomed to helping children find books based on authors, titles, subjects or classification numbers. Even as a parent of a child in the public school system, I’d see the Lexile measure on the end-of-grade report and I wouldn’t do anything with it. This partnership was an education for many of us—as librarians and as parents. It was a wonderful experience. And next summer, when Lexile [measures] are available from our online catalog, this new tool will be awesome.”

Mary Gray Leonard concurred. “This is something that we will continue to build upon.”

“Although the Lexile Framework was introduced to the media services department just last March, it certainly has carried over from the summer, thanks to this program. There’s an increased awareness among the school librarians,” she said. “More and more, we will work in conjunction with reading and language arts teachers to educate other teachers about Lexile measures. Additionally, as understanding of Lexile measures increases, we will be able to do an even better job of helping students find books at the right reading level for them.”

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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