



LEXIA LEARNING PLAYS KEY ROLE IN IMPROVING READING SKILLS: A WINNING COMBINATION OF INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING, CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT AND TARGETED INSTRUCTION

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- Aaron Turpin, Executive Director of Information and Technology
Hall County Public School System, Georgia

Profile

The Hall County Public School System located in Gainesville, Georgia, about an hour north of Atlanta, serves nearly 26,000 students in 33 schools, including 21 elementary schools. Over 50% of the student population qualifies for the free or reduced-price lunch program, and 19% of the learners speak a second language at home.

Challenges

Over the past several years, Hall County school officials have been working diligently to design and build an educational learning environment where students can learn at any time and any place, with constant feedback and assessment for both teachers and parent, alike.

As part of this explicit plan for success, a robust five-year plan of Teaching and Learning Goals was established in 2007. Using a balanced scorecard, various goals and objectives were outlined for elementary, middle and high school students. For elementary learners, the goal was to have 90% of Hall County students reading at, or above, grade level by the end of grade three.

Solution

To meet their academic goal, and to address a growing English language learner (ELL) population, Hall County administrators decided they needed to implement a district-wide supplemental educational tool to support their core curriculum. Hall County’s Aaron Turpin, Executive Director of Information and Technology recalled a program he previously used when he served as principal of a local elementary school. There, Turpin served 700 students, 98.8% of which were ELL.

The program Turpin’s school used was Lexia Learning, designed to effectively support essential reading skills development in students at all levels of ability, pre-K through adults.

“Lexia Learning was instrumental for our success,” said Turpin. “It’s as if the reading program was designed with us in mind. It is a web-enabled, technology-based and research-proven software program that supports the reading instruction in a child’s native language; and it has helped all of our students succeed.”

This decision to implement Lexia came not only based on Turpin’s own successful experience with the supplemental reading program, but was also supported by decades of scientifically-based research that served as the very foundation of the Lexia Learning program.

Implementation

With a keen focus on improving reading skills student-by-student and class-by-class, Turpin and his colleagues began implementing the Lexia Learning reading program across the entire school system.

Using a blended approach of teacher- and technology-based instruction, Lexia Learning is extremely effective at improving reading skills when the program delivering in tandem with high quality classroom instruction. This methodology helps students get the regular practice on essential reading skills such as phonological awareness, sight word recognition, sound-symbol correspondence and word-attack skills.

Collaborative Planning

In Hall County, Turpin and David Moody, Director of Elementary Education, collaborated with district staff and Lexia Learning personnel to devise a program that provided school administrators and teachers with an introduction to the program as well as a series of training workshops. Following the program orientation, teachers conducted basic reading skill assessments of each student.

Based on the reading assessments, a program was constructed that had all elementary students, whether reading on, above or below grade level, using the Lexia Learning supplemental reading program a minimum of three times per week.

“We viewed this program as really teaching *with* technology,” said Turpin. “It focused on specific instructional strategies for our learners with specific challenges—such as non-reader ELL students—while at the same time offering accelerated learning opportunities for our proficient readers.”

Classroom Implementation

Lexia Learning’s unique and cost-effective technology offers more than 950 activities for reading skills development. Each of the age-appropriate, skill-specific activities conforms to federal guidelines. Students using the program work independently as the software automatically detects when additional practice is needed. This “branching” technology ensures that students demonstrate mastery of each reading skill before proceeding to the next skill. Students receive additional practice through the engaging and fun Lexia activities, unaware of the remediation occurring, and without feeling frustrated or bored.

Students using Lexia wear headphones and work independently, privately, and at their own pace. This allows the teacher to have part of his or her class using Lexia while the rest of the students receive small-group instruction—based on data and prescriptive lesson material from Lexia—without disruption. In addition, the privacy provided by the Lexia system allows students who are experiencing difficulty to hone their skills without the embarrassment of having their classmates see or hear their struggles. Instead, they slowly and steadily build their skills and their confidence as they progress through the Lexia system.

Classroom Reporting Becomes Integral

Moody found his teachers somewhat skeptical in the early implementation stages, but they soon began relying on the comprehensive reports for in-class intervention. The teachers, armed with detailed usage and skill progress reports generated from the software, began reorganizing their classrooms to focus on specific skill building needs across all classroom students, while other teachers created small group learning opportunities as needed.

“The key to the program’s effectiveness rests in establishing time to examine the reports,” said Moody. “I regularly pull student reports to monitor progress and, should I notice that a particular student has been on the same activity without progressing, I can work with the teacher to find ways to provide the appropriate instruction they need to succeed.”

Turpin added, “These reports provide the clear transparency needed for timely, supportive classroom or individual instruction strategies with highly scripted lessons for struggling students. The results have produced unparalleled improvements in reading test scores that have swiftly reduced student achievement gaps.”

Extended Learning Opportunities

Hall County has been able to incorporate Lexia into its extended learning programs by implementing the program at local YMCA sites. Using 21st Century grants to purchase the program, and leveraging Lexia’s flexible, concurrent licensing agreement, the district was able to provide an additional 50-100 students with the ability to access Lexia at each facility after school hours.

Results

Soon after students began using the Lexia Learning program, the teaching staff noted immediate changes. Struggling students began making academic progress with significant gains in reading scores going up. Turpin noted that real gains have been achieved in all subgroups, with 38% gains on the state’s Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT).

Hall County administrators have shown tremendous reading improvement and validated the Lexia Learning success internally against the Developmental Reading Assessment® (DRA) second edition, a set of individually administered criterion-referenced reading assessments for students in kindergarten through Grade 8.

Reporting Capabilities

“The Lexia Learning reports have proved to be both accurate and efficient; giving our teachers the necessary intervention and enrichment strategies that have resulted in improved reading scores for our young students,” said Moody.

The reporting capabilities, as well as the 24/7 access to performance data were especially popular with the parents who are not proficient in speaking English. With the ability to access the program at any time, parents now find themselves empowered to help their children and become more involved in the education process.

An Integral Part of “Response to Intervention” (RTI) Instruction

“For us, the use of the Lexia Learning program has led to timely and appropriate intervention since students are assessed on each individual activity,” said Turpin. “With this constant assessment, Lexia provides reliable data to guide RTI instruction, without false highs or lows in terms of skill assessments.”

Lexia’s scientifically-based and published research affirms the efficacy of this basic reading acquisition process for most Tier I, II, and III beginning and remedial reading learners. Most students typically use require a total of two to four hours per week of program usage to acquire all of their basic-English reading skills in a timely and orderly way.

Some estimates suggest that the procurement, implementation and annual hosting costs of a technology-based RTI solution are roughly 10% of the cost of implementing a traditional teacher-centric RTI solution. Because of the product efficiency and flexible license structure of Lexia’s program, Turpin reported that his decision to implement Lexia saved “millions of dollars in purchases of reading textbooks for kindergartners through eighth-graders.”

Benefits for ELL Students

At the World Language Academy, where Moody serves as principal, he reports additional benefits especially with their unique offering of a dual Spanish/English language immersion program. Lexia offers reading instruction in Spanish and supports English language acquisition, yielding some significant benefits for ELL students facing steep challenges.

“Our kindergarten and first grade students only receive one hour of Language Arts instruction in English throughout the day, the rest of day, our program is taught in Spanish,” said Moody. “Lexia Learning provides the extra, critical time for our students to learn English language skills.”

Said Moody, “We ended up with a double bonus: our students improved their reading skills—in their native language—*and* they became more proficient with their English language speaking skills.”

Conclusion

Lexia has become an integral part of Hall County’s efforts to help every child develop reading and language proficiency in an environment inclusive of teachers and parents. With collaborative effort and dedication to high standards, the district is on pace to achieve its goals.

“Education must be focused, defined, and measurable rather than random and accidental. We have an enormous responsibility to equip our students with the skills to grow and excel,” said Turpin. “In Hall County, we have applied these principles using the Lexia Learning System, and our students are achieving amazing results through an environment of differentiated instruction.”

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