

CASE STUDY

# Teacher Autonomy in Implementation Improves Literacy Across Ohio Middle School





Before she arrived at Niles Middle School in Niles City Schools, Assistant Principal Leah Marsh was a high school teacher who was asked to start using Lexia® PowerUp Literacy® with her students.

“As with any new program, we teachers were kind of conditioned to want to stick with what we know and what we’re comfortable with. So, initially, I did have reservations,” she admitted.

After the first year, she started seeing growth among her students. By the following year, it was clear the students enjoyed making progress in PowerUp, receiving certificates and awards every time they moved up a level or completed a unit.

“So, when I became assistant principal here at Niles, I wanted our students here to go through that journey of growth,” Marsh said. “It was in our best interest to go ahead and partner with Lexia®.”

Lexia  
**POWERUP**  
LITERACY

“

PowerUp is backed by the science of reading and really supports the foundational skills that students need.”

– Leah Marsh, Assistant Principal, Niles Middle School

## Where Students at Niles Middle School Started

Niles Middle School is a traditional public school for grades 6–8, with approximately 500 students. Many of them, Marsh pointed out, still have gaps due to the pandemic, even years later.

When Marsh arrived at Niles, there was already a literacy program in place for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Starting with the pre-assessment, every sixth grade student had to read a passage aloud to their teacher, and the teacher had to go through and assess them. It was too time consuming, and Marsh felt the program wasn't meeting the educators' needs. The level of time and effort required meant teachers weren't using it the way it should have been, and Niles Middle School needed a solution that freed up teachers' time.

Educators in the Language Arts department agreed. The previous program was no longer serving student needs as well as it had in the past. They wanted a program that would provide real-time reporting data and resources, while being engaging and age-appropriate for the students. With her past experience, Marsh knew PowerUp was the solution. In addition to offering embedded assessment and auto placement, "PowerUp is backed by the science of reading and really supports the foundational skills that students need," she explained.

As a team, educators at Niles Middle School decided to go forth and try it.

## Autonomy in Implementation Earned Not Only Buy-In But Appreciation

Across the school, PowerUp was implemented for Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 students, with tiers 2 and 3 getting more instruction in a small-group or one-on-one setting.

What makes the implementation at Niles unique, however, is the autonomy teachers were given. Marsh allowed each teacher to integrate PowerUp as they saw fit. "We started slowly," she said. "The teachers figured out how it would work in their classrooms and the way they've implemented it has worked."

Marsh's personal experience with PowerUp and demonstrated trust in her teachers gained buy-in for the program. "My best advice would be to allow your teachers to have a say in how they think it's going to work in their classroom," she said. "If they feel supported on their leadership and decision-making, then they'll have ownership of the program and the curriculum and they'll be invested in it, which again will transfer on to the students and have them engaged and invested in their learning as well."

"I could empathize with them because I was them at my previous school," Marsh added. "I understood where they were coming from. They rolled with it and started liking it. Eventually, they were thanking us because it was so much better than what they had before."

Some teachers are using PowerUp every day as bell ringer time. When students arrive, they know what to do. Other teachers dedicate specific days, such as every Monday or every Friday. For their first year with PowerUp, the goal at Niles was 12 units per week.

Marsh shared how many teachers and students went above and beyond. “We started that goal at the beginning of the year with the idea that we would progress as the year goes on, getting students involved. We currently have multiple teachers with students who are completing 20 units or more per week,” she said.

## Teachers and Students Love PowerUp

Marsh is excited to see how her teachers’ buy-in translates to student engagement. “Students have just gone off and started running with it,” she said. “The students like PowerUp because it’s more interactive for them.” She noted that some students might take a little longer with Grammar, however, they particularly enjoyed the Word Study and Comprehension strands.

Beyond the initial buy-in for implementation, Marsh is also seeing enthusiasm from her teachers, sharing how they were excited PowerUp was renewed for another year.



“Teachers love the ease of PowerUp,” Marsh said. “From the very beginning, it places students where they need to be. It comes with videos to help. When students are stuck or not understanding, it goes back and re-teaches them a different way, and it also gives teachers already-put-together resources. They don’t have to go out and try to find everything on their own to help their students.”

With the individualized learning paths provided by PowerUp, educators at Niles Middle School are able to keep special education and gifted students learning in the same class. “Lexia helps all levels of students,” Marsh explained. “With the auto placement at the beginning, all students are on their personalized path. That helps the teachers, and it helps the students feel that ‘We’re all in the same game’ here.”

“I love that Lexia has the skill builders and shows areas where students need improvement,” Marsh added. “Our teachers can grab those and work with those individual students or at a small-group level.”

As a school leader, Marsh personally appreciates the data and support from Lexia. “We can just enjoy PowerUp, and know we’re supported,” she said. Her Lexia representative keeps her current with new resources, program improvements, and additional data she can share with her team.

## The Early Results Are Outstanding

“We are starting to see students who are really honing in and moving from the foundational skills on up to intermediate and advanced levels,” Marsh said. In the second year of using PowerUp, educators at Niles are already seeing impressive gains. For all students using the program, the data shows:

**84%**

of students ended last year in the intermediate or advanced zones in the Comprehension strand

**69%**

reached the intermediate or advanced skills in Grammar

**74%**

reached intermediate or advanced skills in Word study

“Those are huge accomplishments within our building,” Marsh said. “We see that when we’re using the program with fidelity, the students working on advanced skills more than doubled in the Comprehension strand and increased over five times in the Word Study and Grammar.”



## Looking Ahead

Going forward, Marsh wants to see her team using more of the resources provided, especially now that the latest batch of sixth grade students have adapted to PowerUp.

Educators at Niles can monitor student progress in real time through myLexia®, Lexia’s online educator dashboard. This tool provides a summary view of their classrooms’ Action Plan, highlighting the students needing more usage, those who are struggling with a skill, and those ready to celebrate success with a printable achievement certificate. Their plan for this year, Marsh said, is for teachers to check the student needs tabs and the progress report weekly.

The goal is to better support students in their critical time of need—versus waiting until the end of the quarter, or whenever the teacher has free time. This weekly, ongoing check-in is used to meet the needs of students quickly and provide the best possible support for students.

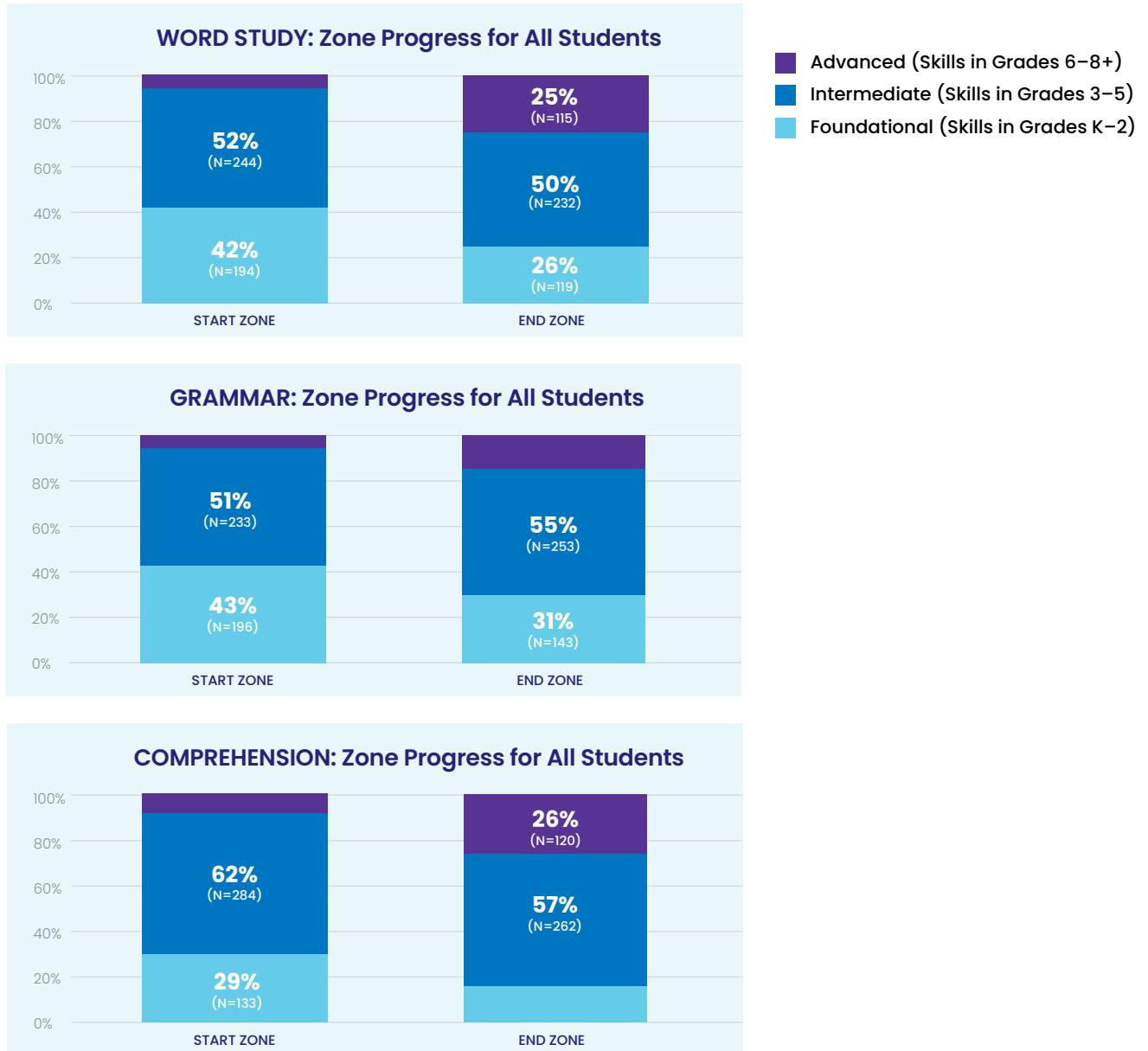
“For secondary students, teaching reading has its challenges,” Marsh said. “But I’ve come to appreciate how research-backed strategies and literacy can transform instruction. It’s fascinating to see how the science of reading helps educators support our diverse learners more effectively.”

She added, “It’s all about fostering the love for reading while equipping students with the tools they need. With Lexia, we are able to support our students better and close some of those literacy gaps.”

## Success by the Numbers

**Goal met:** Students completed an average of **12 Units per week** across PowerUp strands.

**Strand during the 2023–2024 school year for all 475 students with any usage.**






**85%** of students meeting usage moved up at least two zones since the beginning of the year.





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