



**LEXIA PROVIDES EARLY LITERACY INSTRUCTION TO HELP
NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING STUDENTS THRIVE
English and Spanish Instructional Model Helps All
Students Develop English-language Reading Skills**

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- Dr. Michael Bachicha
Director of Categorical Programs
Cabrillo Unified Schools
Half Moon Bay, California

Profile

Located 25 miles south of San Francisco in Half Moon Bay, California, the Cabrillo School District serves approximately 3,400 students in grades K–12. The District serves a dichotomous population, with native English speakers and English Language Learners (ELL)—most of whom are first-generation, and some second-generation students from Mexico. Dr. Michael Bachicha served as both a site principal and as Director of Categorical Programs for two years, where he helped address some of the District’s most pressing challenges.

Challenges

Given the varied needs in the District, one of the key challenges facing Cabrillo Unified is the achievement gap between the native English speakers and ELL students. Bachicha and his team sought a technology-based program that would give equal access and support to all students.

Solution

Cabrillo Unified chose *Lexia Reading* to address its needs. Bachicha had twice implemented Lexia while serving as principal at two other District schools—one of them a Title I school. He noted that he was drawn to Lexia’s ability to provide focused English instruction that wasn’t just literacy, but was also vocabulary and English language development for students who spoke little or no English.

Key Foundational Skills

“Unlike Lexia, most other programs don’t provide the combination of phonemic instruction, which is key for decoding skills, and comprehension skills.” said Bachicha. “Many programs support good

comprehension, but students must be able to read first in order to get there; and other programs support phonemic instruction without a comprehension component in the system”

While Lexia *Primary Reading* and *Strategies for Older Students* support the development of skills for students who can't read, Lexia's *Early Reading* is one of a very few programs to support students most basic reading skills.

“If you have students who cannot decode American phonemes, the Lexia system is perfect for you,” said Bachicha. “For most kids at that age, phoneme instruction progresses quickly, and they can do a lot of decoding after their first year. However, to get to that point, I’m not sure that’s possible without a phoneme instruction model like Lexia. It’s perfect for ELL students, in particular.”

Appropriate for All Learners

Lexia provides age-appropriate support for all learners. For older students who struggle with foundational reading skills, the intervention tools they use can be a source of embarrassment—particularly if the content is not age appropriate or if other students notice they are using an intervention program. However, on the Lexia program, the struggling and advanced students use the same interface, and their skill level is kept private.

“Because it’s on the computer, the real advantage for struggling students is that no one is looking over their shoulder,” he continues. “If the student were using a textbook, the materials in most cases are not age-appropriate in terms of theme and content, and can be a source of embarrassment. Lexia’s age-appropriate content preserves students’ self esteem while providing the instruction that they need. “

Spanish Language Instructions

With many other programs, ELL students can be “shut-out” of the program if they do not speak English. Lexia provides the program instructions in both English and Spanish, to help those students who may be illiterate in both languages.

“Lexia was the first program I ran across where the instruction was in English but the instructions for how to navigate the program were in Spanish as well,” said Bachicha. “It provides instant access for K-2 students who are brand new to the country, who speak only Spanish, but can now access the instructional technology by hearing directions in Spanish.”

State-aligned Data Reports

Another key aspect of the Lexia program that factored into Cabrillo Unified’s decision was the way in which the assessment data reports matched the standards of the California Reading Professional Development Institute (CRPDI)—a state-driven literacy and reading pedagogy developed by the University of California to help teachers focus on the core essential aspects of reading instruction.

“When I examined the printout with the student results, what surprised me about it—and sold me on it—was that the sheet looked almost exactly like the CRPDI sheet that used by teachers,” said Bachicha. “Lexia not only listed the same core reading skills that we were assessing, but also listed them in the same order and identical formats. This proved to me that people who created *Lexia Reading* are people who understood literacy, understood reading programs and how to come up with something that that really would benefit kids.”

“In terms of using CRPDI as a formative assessment tool, Lexia prevents teachers from having to conduct 30 minutes of assessment to gather formative data,” he continued. “This program documents formative data that can be used with the ongoing informal assessment teachers carry out as part of their regular instruction. They simply go to the data sheet print-out of their students’ current status—this enables them to use the data in a more formative manner.”

Implementation

Teachers and students both quickly took to the new program, which was implemented in two elementary schools and in the District middle school. The computer-savvy teachers as well as those new to technology embraced the program, noting that it was extremely friendly to non-computer savvy teachers.

“Once kids were using Lexia, teachers loved it,” said Bachicha. “No prodding or pushing was necessary. Instead, I would hear teachers say, ‘How can we get more time on the Lexia program? It’s great!’”

According to Bachicha, Lexia provides instruction—particularly at the secondary level—that a lot of teachers aren’t trained to provide. This was a specific criterion during the District’s search for their reading technology program.

Students also embraced the program, as Lexia became a very popular classroom activity.

“Students absolutely love it,” explained Bachicha. “They love the way the program is broken down into levels, and they love filling in their ‘ladder’” (a meter that shows student progress towards each goal). “The intrinsic reward of filling in that box is gratifying for them.”

Lexia was also used during intervention time in the afterschool homework club, which is a two-hour block. Bachicha set the goal of having students use Lexia for 20 minutes per day as an essential part of their instruction. However, students enjoyed the program so much that it was perceived as a reward.

“They all clamored for more time on Lexia,” he said. “‘You get to do Lexia,’ was a reward. So, we made sure we rotated everyone through, but it was perceived as reward.”

Results

Cabrillo Unified reported, anecdotally, that every year that Lexia was used, their scores on the California Standards Test (CST) improved.

“My K–2 teachers absolutely swear by Lexia,” said Bachicha. “Without Lexia, we wouldn’t be seeing this kind of improvement. We’re convinced that Lexia is a key component in our continuous growth.”

“One of the biggest benefits is that Lexia really gives the teacher a tangible, concrete measure of student progress,” he continued. “They all keep their running records, but the tangible measure that Lexia provides adds power to the ongoing assessment.”

“It’s one thing to have students read to you in a small group—typically they can do it with teacher support. But when they’re on Lexia, they must work independently on it and you get to see student skills in a non-high stakes manner.”

Although Lexia enables students to practice key skills independently, it does not leave them to flounder without support. The program offers the right amount of scaffolding to help students progress through each skill level, removing support as students begin to demonstrate success.

“Lexia helps them progress to mastery,” said Bachicha, “and I can see them apply what they’re learning to group work, and can see an abstract of showing that they’re learning.”

Conclusion

“From the reading software I’ve been exposed to, Lexia is the best: bar none,” Bachicha said. “It offers access for English learners, helping them accelerate their literacy development and adapt to English phonemes in a way that I haven’t seen any other program do as well as Lexia. This program was clearly created not just by software guys, but by people who truly understand what it takes to read. The assessment data page shows you that right away, and we were sold in one day.”

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