

**El Paso, Texas
Lexia Learning**



LEXIA LEARNING HELPS PUT A FOCUS ON READING READINESS WITH EARLY GRADE INTERVENTION IN EL PASO

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-Pamela C. Howard, Principal, Burleson Elementary School

Profile

Burleson Elementary School is part of the El Paso Independent School District (EPISD), the largest district in the Texas Education Agency's Educational Service Center – Region 19. With more than 63,000 students in 92 campuses, EPISD is the seventh largest district in Texas and the 57th largest district in the United States.

Challenges – An At-Risk Population

Burleson Elementary has 435 students in grades pre-K–5. Ninety-eight percent are Hispanic, with 97 percent qualifying for the free and reduced lunch program. In addition, 10 percent of the children attending the school are homeless and reside at the local Salvation Army.

Because most of the students are English Language Learners, Burleson Elementary School principal Pamela Howard knew from her years of experience as both a teacher and administrator that serving such a diverse student population would demand a special approach. And that was especially evident after the school registered an “academically unacceptable” rating from the Texas Education Agency in 2007.

This rating comes from the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), which pulls together a wide range of information on the performance of students in each school and district in Texas every year. With the information from the AEIS, the Agency develops and implements the state Accountability Rating system used to rate Texas public schools and school districts.

With her sights set on improving academic achievement for all of her students, Howard and her staff wanted to put a renewed focus on improving reading skills, especially among their young English language learners.

“We wanted to give these students every opportunity to succeed and reach their optimum performance levels in reading, especially in the upper grades where there is a noticeable shift in the textbook,” said Howard. “There are fewer visuals and smaller type, so students need to be ready for that change. If they aren’t ready, there will be big problems.”

To accomplish this, Howard and her staff would need to put forth a concerted effort to establish a systematic pyramid of instruction that would include the traditional, textbook-driven, whole-group learning experience. It would also require the addition of a significant amount of individualized instruction using computer technology. Howard’s program of choice: Lexia Learning Systems’ *Lexia Reading*® program.

“This approach of combining textbooks, big books, guided reading books, and other forms of literature and the Lexia technology initially took some convincing,” said Howard. “My teaching staff needed to see it to believe it, but I had used Lexia at other schools and districts where I had worked, and I knew we would get great results here.”

Solution

Throughout her career, Howard had worked in other school districts in the state and had put in place school-wide and district-wide implementations of daily reading instruction including the Lexia Learning system for more than 15 years.

“Over the years I have learned that to be able to teach students how to read, especially those who have special needs or who are ELLs, you have to be able to connect to them,” said Howard. “And to connect to them, you have to get and keep their attention for more than a few minutes at a time. But admittedly, that’s not always easy—that is—until I started using Lexia.”

The research-based *Lexia Reading* program was designed to provide ongoing, dynamic assessment of reading skills and progress, enabling teachers to foster students’ reading success by informing and differentiating reading instruction.

At Burluson, the powerful combination of this methodology and motivation propelled the students using Lexia *Early Reading* and *Primary Reading* into independent practice with engaging, age-appropriate activities.

“We started by introducing our students, many of whom are in Tier II of our Response to Intervention (RtI) program, to phonological principles and the alphabet—both proven predictors of reading success,” said Howard.

The students spent 25-30 minutes per day, four or five days each week in the reading lab where teachers were required to be on-hand in order to support, guide and intervene when necessary. Kindergarten students were able to work independently on targeted skills following brief instructions, and complete interactive activities that branch automatically; providing practice where needed and automatically advancing students as they master skills.

In order to support ELL students whose first language is Spanish, Lexia provides program instructions in both English and Spanish; ensuring that they are able to use the program properly and maximize the benefit of the English-language skills practice.

Based on students' English language proficiency, "our teachers, using the classroom data and the data provided by Lexia, are the best persons to decide whether instructions for the reading activities were given in English or Spanish," said Howard. "The nuances of speech including certain pronunciations were important differentiators and critical to their success," said Howard.

Teachers quickly came to embrace the easy-to-read reports which immediately indicated whether a young learners' progress and skill development were at, below or above pace. The interactive activities automatically provided practice where needed, while at the same time, automatically advancing students as they mastered each skill. And because of the systematic and multi-sensory practice activities, students were excited about learning.

Results

Burleson has seen its students excel on the Lexia program. Howard and the staff could instantly discern when their young students were struggling, or if they had become stymied or were ready to advance, just by reviewing the robust Lexia progress reports.

With this important data in hand, teachers were affecting significant changes, student-by-student, and class-by-class. The Lexia tiered model of instruction gave students specific paths to follow for understanding and mastery, while the teachers were well-prepared with skill-specific lessons and homework activities provided with the software.

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The test scores have been equally impressive. Previously, Burleson students' reading scores previously ranked among the lowest in the district. However, in 2008-09, third-graders posted a 100 percent pass rate for reading. Fourth-graders logged a 94.5 percent pass rate in reading and 100 percent in writing, and fifth grade posted a 95 percent pass rate in reading.

"By initiating Lexia *Early Reading* in pre-kindergarten and pre-first classes, followed by Lexia *Primary Reading* in the later grades, we have implemented a successful, customized intervention strategy, which is delivering stronger readers, increasing the love of reading, and helping improve test scores," said Howard.

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