

CASE STUDY

Why Not Both? Fort Worth Jump-Starts New Literacy Framework with Powerful Core5 and PowerUp Combination

Fort Worth Independent School District, Fort Worth, Texas



Fort Worth ISD Implements Lexia Core5 and PowerUp to Support Its New Literacy Framework

When Marcey Sorensen, Ed.D., joined the Fort Worth Independent School District as the district's new chief academic officer in 2019, she immediately noticed some gaps in instructional quality.

Coming from a district that was successfully using Lexia® Core5® Reading, Sorensen felt the computer-based program would be a good fit for Fort Worth ISD. "We needed to create a literacy framework and implement new curriculum and products," she explained.

As part of that effort, the district welcomed Darnisha Carreathers, Ed.D., as its new executive director of literacy for grades K–12. This multipronged approach to closing gaps that existed in the district's instructional quality has worked well.

"Literacy in Fort Worth ISD has changed dramatically since we implemented our literacy framework, curriculum, and resources," Sorensen said, "and thanks to all of the literacy-related work that our team has completed over the last 2 ½ years."

Reading to Learn

Fort Worth ISD's literacy reset kicked off with an intensive few months of framework development focused on the pillars of robust literacy instruction. As Carreathers explained, that literacy framework dictates how literacy is taught at Fort Worth ISD and is grounded in the science of teaching reading across these four fundamental areas: comprehension, knowledge of words and word parts, writing, and oral reading fluency.

Working with Tim Shanahan, a premier literacy educator in reading instruction and comprehension, the district wanted students to learn academic vocabulary and get "academic-rich" content that would lay the foundation for reading comprehension at a young age.

"As they then navigated decoding and fundamentals and the move into grades 3–5," Sorensen explained, "the focus would shift away from 'learning to read' over to 'reading to learn.'" The district provides the resources, tools, and professional development its teachers need to help students along that journey.

"You can have a framework that lives 30,000 feet in the air, but if you're not providing the resources, tools, professional development, coaching, and 'boots on the ground for teachers,'" Sorensen said, "that framework will just stay up in the sky."

Helping Teachers Help Students

Sorenson said one of Lexia's best features is its data-rich reporting function. She and her team use the platform to monitor key metrics like student growth and usage fidelity and identify students who require a teacher's intervention. "Lexia's data is robust and easy to navigate," she said. "Teachers can use it to help kids, and principals use it to help teachers help their students."

Carreathers said Core5 is user-friendly for both students and teachers, the latter of which have a wide variety of professional opportunities right at their fingertips, and without having to go through "a hundred different clicks" to get to the meat of the program. Additionally, Lexia's support team is always responsive via phone call or email.

"Whether it's an interface that's not working or a broken link, we always get an immediate response from them," Carreathers said. "That's important for a district of this size; we don't have the time to fill out multiple Google forms or talk to an AI chatbot when our teachers can't get into Zoom."

Fort Worth ISD's literacy team also likes how Lexia provides professional development for principals who aren't always privileged to those levels of support when a new piece of technology is introduced. "Leadership professional development is important for principals, who don't always know what they 'don't know,'" Carreathers said. "With Lexia, principals know what they should be looking for and can monitor that activity and inform instruction on their campuses."

Expanding to PowerUp

When Fort Worth ISD reviewed the performance of its middle school students, district leaders realized some of them needed additional literacy instruction, too. They turned to Lexia® PowerUp Literacy® for help. Designed for grades 6 and above, the platform helps accelerate literacy gains for those at risk of not meeting College- and Career-Ready standards.

"Lexia Core5 was getting pretty strong positive praise from our elementary principals," Sorensen said. "So, we decided to add PowerUp to the district." The district, which was already offering a Structured Literacy course in 90-minute blocks, added a mandatory, purposeful use of PowerUp within that instructional block.

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—Marcey Sorensen, Ed.D., chief academic officer, Fort Worth Independent School District

Along with that structured usage of PowerUp, the platform is available to students in grades 6–8, with a focus on sixth- and seventh-grade students who are below the 65th percentile. Carreathers likes the platform’s user-friendly nature and its extensive library of teaching resources.

“When I sit with teachers to help them better understand phonemes and why we’re blending, all of the lessons and related resources are in PowerUp; it’s all there for them,” said Carreathers, who is expecting to see improvements in student reading performance this year as a result of the district’s use of PowerUp. “We’re just getting started with it.”

Lexia Superstar Campuses

Octavia Gray-Essex, the district’s K–12 literacy coordinator, said Fort Worth ISD has seen a significant uptick in “quality usage” of Core5 during the last year for students in kindergarten through fifth grade. “It’s less about minutes spent on the platform and more about the skills and units gained,” Gray-Essex explained. “We’ve also seen a tight correlation between our Lexia data and our NWEA MAP data, which is pretty exciting.”

“I think the specificity of the data and that there’s a standards alignment report was surprising to me,” Gray-Essex added. “Even if you look at the NWEA MAP data, it tells you the area, and when we looked over at Lexia, it said the same thing, but then it gave you the lesson that actually helps support that standard. When a program hits the nail on the head exactly like that, you feel connected and confident.”

With Core5, Carreathers said some of the successes the district has seen involved some of its low-performing campuses. “Some schools whose students really struggled initially with the online program have since become Lexia superstar campuses,” she said.

Students and parents also love the interactive, engaging platform. “We’ve had a lot of parents sing the praises about how much they love Lexia,” Gray-Essex said, “and how their kids used it over summer break, liked the certificates, and enjoyed the learning experience.”

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—Darnisha Carreathers, Ed.D., executive director of literacy, Fort Worth Independent School District

Nearly Half of Students Reading at Grade Level

Kalyn SanJacinto, principal at Carroll Peak Elementary School, began using Core5 last year and already is seeing positive results. Every student in grades pre-K-5 uses Core5 at the school, which is 98% economically disadvantaged. Before the literacy platform was rolled out, teachers were shown how to review the system data and set clear expectations about how much time students should be spending with the program.

In a weekly newsletter, SanJacinto highlights different aspects of the Lexia program and focuses on how just less than one-third of all students are on the “at-risk” list now at any given time. “That’s actually pretty good for us,” she said. “I’m also constantly pulling the data because it fluctuates and giving ‘shout outs’ to teachers who don’t have any students on the at-risk list.”

These shoutouts are a big deal for students, teachers, and parents alike, and especially since Carroll Peak Elementary School started the school year with 66% of its students reading below grade level. “We’re now down to 31% below grade level,” SanJacinto said. “And we’re up to 46% students on grade level, versus 27% at the beginning of the year.”

In addition, 23% of students are reading above grade level, compared to just 7% at the start of the year. Some fifth-grade students have already completed Core5 because of how much work they’ve completed at home. These are all positive points for a school that just one year ago was struggling to get its students reading at grade level.

“It’s about being thoughtful and really knowing where your kids are and knowing what they’re doing,” said SanJacinto, who adds teachers really like the program and its turnkey approach to literacy education. “With Lexia, they don’t have to create the content themselves, they’re also not just letting the computer handle the instruction. In fact, Lexia has helped some instructors expand their own proficiency levels and how they teach certain skills in new ways.”


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