

CASE STUDY

'Lexia Lets Them Fly:' How Core5 and PowerUp Are Accelerating Student Literacy in Mason City Schools





Mason City Schools is a nationally recognized district in Ohio, consistently ranked among the state's top 10 districts, and a recipient of the Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence.

The district is also well known for its culturally diverse community, with more than 70 countries and languages represented across the schools. Mastering English literacy presents unique challenges for multilingual learners, particularly in a high-achieving district where Tier 1 instruction assumes strong, foundational reading skills by the time students reach upper elementary or middle school.

Educators throughout the district are committed to ensuring every student has access to high-quality literacy instruction. Kasi Hockensmith, an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher for grades 5–6, and Emily Pate, ESL teacher for grades 7–8, participated in the district's efforts to find a way to address these challenges.

"We had so many kids come to us needing reading skills that are typically mastered in the early grades," Hockensmith said. "It's really hard when you have a student come to this country eager to learn—but they need phonemic awareness, or phonics, or more vocabulary, and it's hard to remediate without embarrassing the student. But they still need those skills."

Piloting New Solutions With Core5 and PowerUp

After hearing good things about Lexia® through the grapevine, leaders at Mason City Schools decided to pilot Lexia® Core5® Reading with third grade students. Hockensmith jumped on board to test the program for her English Learners in grades 5–6.

“At the time, I was seeing huge gaps in intentional phonemic awareness and word parts,” Hockensmith said. “When I saw how Lexia tackled phonics, I was a huge fan because I felt like it hit many of the gaps for my EL students and native English speakers who had missed out on instruction during the pandemic. It’s not just an EL issue.”

District leaders also piloted Lexia® PowerUp Literacy® for multilingual learners in middle school, judging its content to not only be engaging and age-appropriate, but foundationally solid. They quickly saw the value of the program for adolescent students.

“PowerUp is age-appropriate for middle schoolers,” Pate said. “So many other things we tried in the past did not feel developmentally appropriate.”

Pate also appreciated that PowerUp meets every student where they are. “We have all the levels in one room,” she said. “It’s so important to have a program that can be individualized to each student.”

After a successful pilot of both programs, Core5 and PowerUp were rolled out for multilingual literacy support during the 2023–2024 school year.

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To have a program like PowerUp, that has a pretest component and is really personalized and individualized for each student is so powerful. In my classroom, even though every student is labeled as an English Learner, that means a wide variety of things. We have all the levels in one room essentially. As the classroom teacher, to have something that is personalized to each student every day is very powerful. And I think that’s where we’re experiencing a lot of growth because we’re meeting each kid where they’re at.”

—Emily Pate, ESL Teacher

Learning Foundational Skills Without Embarrassment

Many English Learners arrive at Mason City Schools eager to learn, and their varied situations require unique intervention tools. It can be challenging to remediate when the teacher is forced to single out the student or give them content that looks like it's for a lower age level, sometimes resulting in a student who's resistant to working with a teacher.

Hockensmith and Pate believe working on literacy skills in an online program like Lexia is an ideal solution because it shields the student from facing embarrassment or judgment about their skill level. The program identifies the skills that need work and helps the student work on them. When teachers use the data, the personalized interventions are seamless. "It gives me a chance to intervene intentionally, knowing that they're struggling, without them having to raise their hand and admit that they don't know what they're doing," Hockensmith said.

A student working on lower grade-level skills can do so without drawing attention—Pate joked that PowerUp looks like YouTube, which also helps protect them from feeling like they're behind.

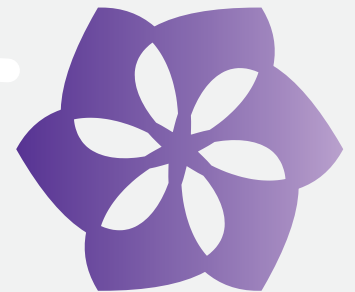
"I've never had a kid say, 'This is babyish,' with Lexia," Pate said. "The readings and the comprehension stories are so good. When we were reading a book about the Titanic, I had a student say, 'Oh, I learned about this on Lexia!' So, they're making the connections. And it's amazing."

Hockensmith added, "Lexia is helping students catch up with those skills, independently. When Tier 1 isn't accessible due to gaps in their learning, Lexia can help them get there."

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What I love about PowerUp is the personalized literacy instruction for students. It's multifaceted. It hits the word study component, the grammar component, the reading comprehension all in one nice location. You don't need three different programs. It's all right there, it's completely age appropriate and engaging for our students, and it's helpful for the teacher because it provides everything you need in one place.”

—Emily Pate, ESL Teacher



Accelerated Literacy Growth for Multilingual Students

Educators at Mason City Schools are seeing the impact of investing in Lexia. “Our students are growing tremendously,” Pate said. “I just had a student in the 99th percentile for growth* from fall to winter. Ninety-ninth percentile for growth is amazing. With Lexia, we’re seeing that literacy is growing at a tremendous rate for so many of our students.”

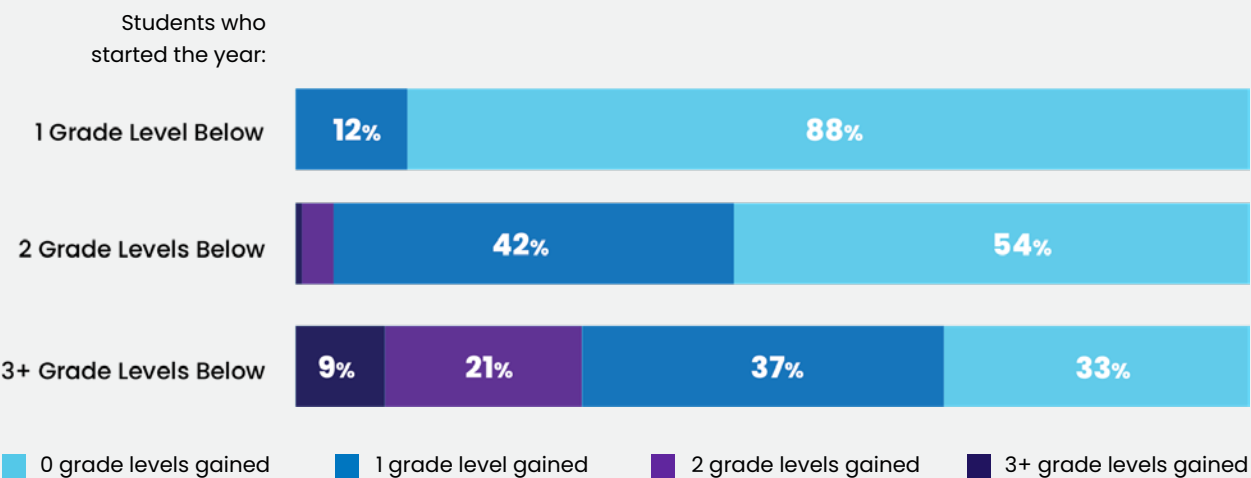
Hockensmith uses the Skills Status Report with students to help them see that their teachers are tuning in and want to see them succeed. It also provides a visual about their progress, so they can be motivated by their own growth. She’s found that both individual attention and encouraging that intrinsic motivation has benefited her students. She’s had students jump from several grade levels in a short period of time—phenomenal growth they hadn’t seen before.

“It makes them unstoppable,” Hockensmith said. “They are excited to get to a new level in Lexia because I print out their certificates, and we make a big deal, and I show them how they’ve grown on the chart. They are motivated, too, because they realize they’re growing. I mean, I have kids that have grown three or four grade levels in skills.”

This impressive progress can be seen in the program data, as students using Core5 or PowerUp advanced their literacy skills, with several catching up to their general education peers.

Core5†

- When using Core5, 45% of students working below grade level advanced **at least one grade level** of material in a single year.
- When students started 3 or more grade levels below, 30% accelerated **at least 2 grade levels** in reading skills.



*Data provided by Emily Pate, ESL Teacher, Mason City Schools
†During the 2023–2024 school year. Program progress data from Lexia Analytics Hub, Detailed Usage and Progress Report.

PowerUp*

- The number of students working in intermediate or advanced skills in the Word Study and Grammar strands **more than doubled** by the end of the year.
- 100% of middle school students meeting usage in PowerUp moved up **at least two zones** since the beginning of the school year.



*During the 2023–2024 school year.

Program progress data from Lexia Analytics Hub, Detailed Usage and Progress Report.

Expanding To Use Lexia Across the Board

The first two years of using Lexia with multilingual students had such positive results that the decision was made to expand the use of Core5 to include all general education students for the 2024–2025 school year. So now the broader teacher and student populations are learning the ropes.

As they began working with Lexia, many upper-elementary general education teachers deepened their understanding of phonics skills alongside their students, which had recently been developed through Ohio's Science of Reading Training. They saw their learning put into practice through their students' Lexia engagement.

"I got a whole new comfort level by engaging with the teaching process," Hockensmith said. By teaching with Lexia, she was able to make connections where students were missing important pieces of the puzzle. General education teachers are finding the same thing.

With Lexia, that learning curve is softened with "right time" resources and real-time progress data to fully support educators in teaching reading skills. "Seeing exactly where that child is, having pre-made materials, it really takes a lot of the stress away," Hockensmith said.

The outlook for the districtwide adoption is positive based on the experience of ESL educators in their third year of using Lexia. "By this time of the year, we're usually struggling," Hockensmith said. "But this year is really great, and we've been able to share things that are going really well. And it's just a completely different vibe, by expanding our Lexia use like we have."

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They're learning the language for the first time being English Language Learners. That's what makes their trajectory super impressive. With Lexia, they are able to make connections by hearing it and seeing it. They're able to make connections back to their home language. These are kids that are able to learn on such an accelerated level, and Lexia lets them do that. It lets them fly.”

—Kasi Hockensmith, ESL Teacher



How Instruction of Multilingual Students Has Evolved Since the Expansion

Hockensmith has evolved the way she runs her classroom using Lexia since it was adopted across general education classes. At first, she used it to teach synchronously in her ELD classes.

“We’re using Lexia as a Tier 1 resource with all our teachers—so every gen ed student in the building should be in Lexia,” Hockensmith said. With students getting more consistent Lexia time in their general education classes, Hockensmith and her paraprofessional have more flexibility in how they structure the ELD classes.

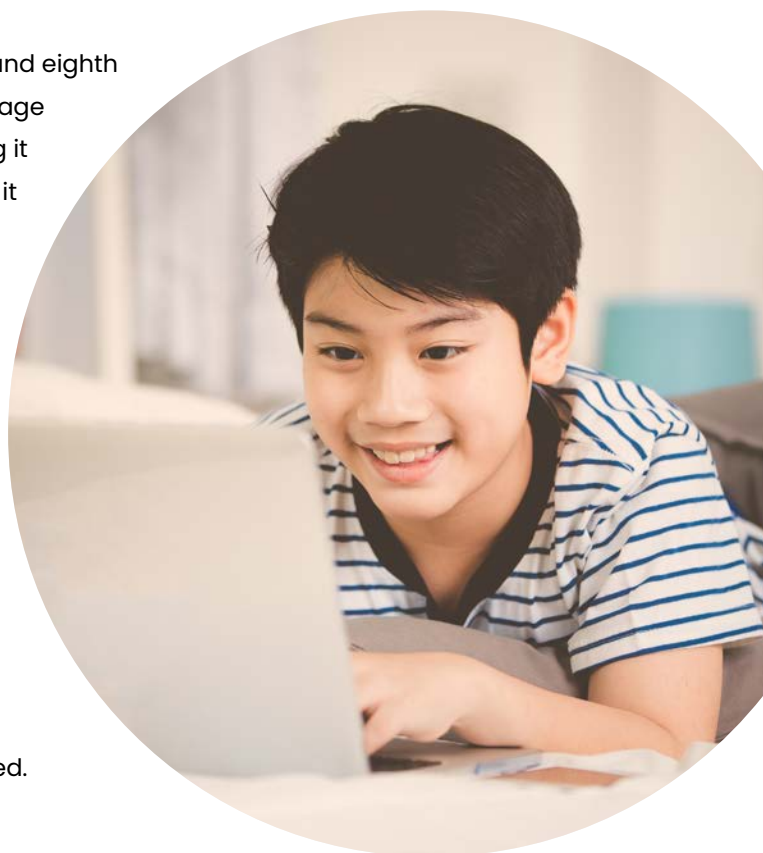
Now, a full-time paraprofessional does the synchronous teaching, covering emergent reading skills using hands-on learning with the pencil and paper work before proceeding to the online program. This frees Hockensmith to work with the students at low and high-intermediate language levels, using PowerUp word work lessons. “So, I’m still teaching synchronously, at a higher level than usual,” she said. “I can’t believe the impact the word work has had. The word study has been amazing in having conversations in our classroom.”

She also uses the first five minutes of class as a transition period, where she can check in with any student she sees is stagnating or who needs extra support. “All of my students, in fifth or sixth grade, use either PowerUp or Core5 daily,” Hockensmith said.

At the middle school level, Pate works with 80+ seventh and eighth grade students, using PowerUp as a tool in English language development classes. In part because she’s been ‘talking it up so much,’ district leaders made the decision to make it available as a districtwide intervention resource

“Usually, I’ll do a whole class lesson, something I know people need practice on,” Pate said. “Then, they get 20 minutes a day for individual time on the program.” She pulls students individually to work with those who need help. “As a teacher, you’re always checking: Are they meeting their minutes? Do we need instruction? Are we doing so well we need enrichment materials? And I want students to be checking in with me.

“In my classroom, they don’t feel like they’re just sitting on a computer, and no one’s paying attention,” she added. “It’s a constant conversation of ‘How are you doing? Oh, you have a streak!’”



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For me as a teacher, I love myLexia® where I can just go in and see exactly what's happening with the student. I can tell if they're moving at an appropriate pace. I can tell if they've been guessing, or if they've been sitting there a long time. It just gives you a lot of information. Then, it gives you a prescribed instructional resource, what the student needs help on. That is probably the best part, because I know exactly what they need, and I have material to use immediately.”

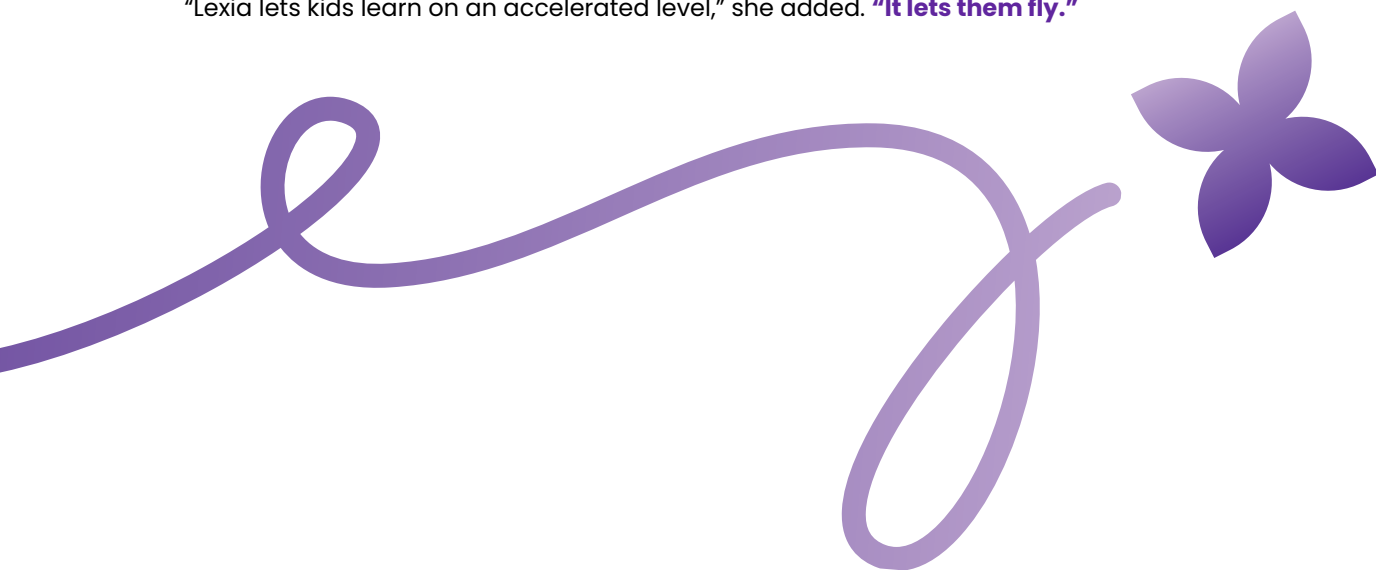
—Emily Pate, ESL Teacher

Looking Ahead to Encouraging Results

This year, educators at Mason City Schools have intentionally incorporated Core5 and PowerUp into their Learner Centered Systems of Support Model (MTSS) to ensure all students receive personalized literacy supports. Educators like Pate and Hockensmith believe this move will see districtwide growth matching what they are seeing among the English Learner student population.

“It is daunting and intimidating to try to reach every kid where they are,” Hockensmith said. “But we know that’s the only way to grow a child. And Lexia does it for you and it just keeps you so informed. There are kids who need so many different levels—and Lexia lets you do that.

“Lexia lets kids learn on an accelerated level,” she added. **“It lets them fly.”**





Lexia®, a Cambium Learning® Group brand, is transforming literacy education, driving change in 1 of every 3 school districts across the United States. For more than 40 years, Lexia has been a thought leader in literacy education, delivering award-winning, research-based solutions grounded in the science of reading. With a full spectrum of offerings, including professional learning, curriculum, and embedded assessment tools, Lexia provides educators with Structured Literacy solutions that are proven effective and designed to drive meaningful literacy outcomes. By empowering educators with unparalleled ease of use and the knowledge and tools they need, Lexia helps more students unlock their potential to read, write, and speak with confidence. For more information, visit lexialearning.com.



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