

Irving Independent School District Irving, Texas

Case Study: Irving Independent School District Boosts Student Achievement, State Assessment Scores With PASeries Reading From Pearson

Every year, U.S. school districts face the Herculean task of preparing students for state assessments. District administrators look for ways that don't intrude on already jam-packed class time to monitor student progress. At Irving Independent School District (ISD) in Texas, administrators were seeking a way to measure student performance on the district's curriculum, which is aligned with state standards.

Irving ISD chose PASeries® (Progress Assessment Series®) Reading from Pearson as a way to measure students' performance on their path to becoming competent readers. Part of Pearson's award-winning PASeries, PASeries Reading is designed to measure reading progress throughout the school year and to forecast growth for students in grades 3-8.

PASeries Reading uses the industry-standard scientific Lexile Framework® for Reading. Lexile® measures provide a common scale for matching reader ability and text difficulty, allowing easy monitoring of student progress. PASeries Reading assessments include screener, progress and diagnostic tests, focusing on overall ability as well as specific skills in reading.

A large, urban district in suburban Dallas, Irving ISD serves more than 33,000 students in 20 elementary schools, seven middle schools and four high schools; 63 percent are Hispanic, and many speak limited or no English. Susan Ramos, elementary language arts coordinator for the district, said the district was looking for a way to identify students who need extra help and flag problem areas that might be missed in the daily bustle of the classroom. PASeries Reading is helping the district achieve that goal and more.

"When we're working with first and second graders, it's very easy to test them and see what level they're reading," Ramos said. "As students reach third, fourth and fifth grade, it's harder to assess them, although we can see that they're progressing. With PASeries, we can really assess the student. Lexile measures help us identify a student's comprehension and vocabulary development more quickly. Before, teachers were assessing comprehension one student at a time. If a Lexile measure is not where it should be, we can intervene immediately. We don't wait for the state test."

Irving ISD began to use PASeries during the 2006-2007 school year, starting with fourth and fifth grades. Today, PASeries Reading is used in grades 3-5 in all 20 of the district's elementary schools, as well as four of its seven middle schools.

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**- Lisa Molinar, Assistant Principal
Farine Elementary School**

Lisa Molinar, assistant principal at Farine Elementary School, has found PASeries Reading a valuable tool for her school's teachers. "PASeries gives teachers a way to look at data for predictors, a measure we never had before."

Students work on comprehension skills in small groups based on reading level. With the information from PASeries Reading assessments, teachers can tweak their classroom plans to individualize instruction.

"PASeries identifies which students need more help so if a child is not meeting state standards, teachers can target instruction," said Ramos. "Using PASeries feedback graphs and the Lexile measures, they match children with books that will help them develop reading comprehension skills."

In Molinar's school, PASeries has lightened the burden for teachers worried about tracking performance against objectives. "It's another indicator to help teachers understand where students are and how they're doing against the state learning goals," she said. "It means less pressure, and relieves some anxiety about whether they are keeping up with objectives."

PASeries is flagging performance issues at Irving ISD that may have otherwise escaped attention. "If the PASeries Reading assessment shows a child may require intervention, teachers are encouraged to give the diagnostic test to see which particular skills the student is missing," said Ramos. "It's a way of identifying which kids need help now."

Molinar stated, "We meet with the teachers twice a week and look at all the data, breaking it out by objective. It's been a great way to help our teachers look at students and growth. If we see a student's score decline or other negative indicators, we intervene immediately."

Irving ISD faces special challenges because of the high percentage of students with limited or no English skills. "We test everybody, whether or not they speak English, to see how they're doing," said Ramos. "PASeries helps us decide whether the Spanish-speaking students are ready to transition. If they don't appear ready, we'll continue to work with them in Spanish."

Irving ISD has easily added the four PASeries Reading assessments into its calendar. Test administration takes one classroom hour, and is delivered via laptop

computer, to the delight of the students. Results are available immediately so students and teachers alike can see progress.

"In the past, teachers have expressed frustration with assessments, but I've heard no complaints about PASeries," Ramos said. "It doesn't take much time away from instruction. The tests we had before required teachers to sit down individually with each student for 10-15 minutes. They can do this in one hour and get immediate results for the whole class."

While state assessments, such the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), are important in today's schools, Ramos keeps her focus on helping students learn. "Irving ISD doesn't look for tricks to prepare kids for the TAKS," she said. "We teach them to read and think."

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She continued, "However, we've found that students who meet expectations on PASeries assessments also pass the TAKS. And some students didn't initially meet expectations, but then passed the state test because of tutoring and extra help. I think it's a great indicator."

"PASeries is a great way to find out where your students stand and what needs to be done for growth and enrichment," Molinar added.

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