Educational Leadership Program Evaluation: Newsela and the Effectiveness for Improving Instruction and Student Achievement

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# Program Selection: Newsela

Newsela is one of the personalized learning reading programs that our school has adopted in order to help increase reading comprehension through high interest, non-fiction, current events articles. There are two types of programs offered, the freemium program or paid Newsela PRO with an expanded Binder feature. There are over 1000 articles that are differentiated to meet the varied abilities and interests from second to twelfth grade. Newsela also uses over forty different media sources, which include the Washington Post and the Associated Press. A comprehension quiz is available with most of the articles. The articles can either be printed off or read online [www.newsela.com](http://www.newsela.com) and students can annotate as they read online for the paid version.

Each article is scaled on five different Lexile reading levels. This allows all students to share in the same content, but on their independent reading levels. There are eight different categories that the Newsela articles fall under: Arts, Health, Kids, Law, Money, Science, Sports, and War & Peace. The quizzes are aligned to the Common Core Standards. Quizzes are also aligned to eight different categories and learning standards. The categories are: Arguments & Claims, Central Idea, Multimedia, People, Events & Ideas, Point of View/Purpose, Text Structure, What the Text Says, and Word Meaning & Choice.

## School’s Mission, Vision, and Strategic Plan

Stafford County Public Schools Strategic Process includes: Core Values, SCPS Vision, SCPS Mission, and SCPS Strategic Plan. The core values are: Learners, Community, Excellence, Respect, and Integrity. SCPS Vision is Stafford County Public Schools is a dynamic, goal-oriented learning community committed to preparing our students for success in further education, work, and citizenship. Third, the SCPS Mission statement is to inspire and empower all learners to thrive. Finally, there are four goals in the Stafford County Public Schools Strategic Plan for the current school where I work. Goal one is student achievement, goal two is work force, goal three is resource stewardship, and goal four is communication.

SCPS Strategic Plan Goal 1: Student Achievement: Engage, challenge, and prepare every student for success. SCPS Strategic Process Priority 1.1 is to Define, develop, implement, and measure effective teaching practices that maximize rigor and engagement for all students in support of C5W. C5W stands for Communication, Collaboration, Critical-Thinking, Creativity, Citizenship, and Wellness. SCPS Strategic Process Measure 1.1 states that Students will experience success through engaging and challenging curriculum, and innovative instructional strategies inclusive of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, citizenship, and wellness. Goal 1 (1.1) states that Staff will power up lessons using essential and higher order thinking questions, cross curricular connections and hands-on activities to gather evidence of learning, challenge students and drive instruction. The Reflection on Data to Justify Goal is that We have determined, through observations, assessments and communications with students, that we can better understand and meet their needs when they are given the opportunity to verbalize their thinking and explain their reasoning. This lends itself to students to making meaningful connections and thinking critically through analysis and collaboration.

The Newsela program falls under goal number one, Student Achievement, the best when comparing the four different goals. I believe that the staff members that use Newsela in their classrooms are “powering up” their lessons by making cross curricular connections. I think this program could be used in more than just the reading and English classes. Since they are non-fiction news articles, Newsela could be used in the history, science, health, music & art classes as well in order to increase reading comprehension for students by providing them with more opportunities to be exposed to non-fiction within the program.

### Instruction.

There are a variety of ways that Newsela can be used. Both the freemium and expanded binders allow teachers to have access to the Newsela ‘Binder.’ Site-generated access codes are given to students once their teachers invite them to their online class. In order to use the program correctly, teachers will need to know their student’s Lexile levels. Newsela can be used in a variety of ways. Teachers can select the Lexile level of the article they chose for the whole class. They can assign different articles to small groups in the class based on topic and/or Lexile levels. Newsela also offers the feature of bilingual reading comprehension lessons plans that help teachers of Spanish-speaking students.

Students can access the online library whether they are at home or at school. Every student has access to a personal assignment page. This page is where the student can view the materials assigned to them. Newsela provides immediate feedback to students after a quiz has been completed. Retakes of quizzes are available, however, teacher permission is needed first. If a student wishes to continue reading outside of the materials that are assigned to them, they have open access to the online library. However, if the student chooses this option, then they are responsible for selecting their own Lexile levels for the articles.

Currently, at my school, the amount of time that is dedicated to Newsela varies from teacher to teacher and grade level. Some teachers use it daily, some once a week, while I had one teacher who does not use it, nor have they ever considered using it to teach non-fiction.

#### Student Achievement.

If a school district or schools decides to use the freemium program, teachers can still track their students. They are able to see when students complete both assigned articles and the quizzes. Teachers can also review class-wide and individual student results. A teacher can also their class’s results in comparison to same age group of all the Newsela users.

However, paid users have access to the expanded Binder features. Tracking student progress can be taken to a higher level by determining overall reading comprehension growth and mastery of Common Core standards. Newsela PRO users also have access to a live chat feature if the user has difficulty with the website. The quizzes on Newsela PRO allow customizable written response questions. It also allows students to annotate articles. Lesson plans are available to teachers through the Newsela PRO.

According to an article in Business Insider, “When it looked at kids scoring below the 50th percentile in reading who regularly read Newsela articles and took quizzes, the startup saw an average increase of 12 percentile points in a three-month period.” At this time, there is not enough data at my school to make a connection to whether or not Newsela is improving student achievement. The reason why there is not enough data is because not all reading and language arts teachers are using the program. Even though every grade level meets on a weekly basis to discuss what is happening in their classes during horizontal meetings, I do not believe that these meetings are as effective as they could or should be. There are supposed to be common assessments and benchmarks being given, but again I do not believe the follow through is what it should be. In comparison to the math department and their data, quite a bit of growth is needed in the English department. The program is also too new within the school to compare reading SOL scores year to year and the use of Newsela on the student scores for non-fiction questions.

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**Academic Pledge:**

“I have neither given nor received help on this work, nor am I aware of any infraction of the Honor Code.” Signed by Shari Jones