Digital Promise
Accelerating Innovation in Education

Talladega County
Newsela Pilot Study Brief

Product Info

Product Name: Newsela

Product Description: Newsela is a database of current event articles that can be differentiated based on a student's Lexile reading level. Articles are indexed by broad theme (e.g. War and Peace, Arts, Science, Health, Law, Money) and are rewritten four times in order to provide the same story at 5 different lexile levels. Each article also has an embedded, Common Core aligned quiz that checks for reading reading; as well as, a writing prompt that is also designed to assess comprehension.

Newsela offers both a free version and a subscription based Pro version. The differences between these two options can be found on the following website - https://support. newsela.com/hc/en-us/articles/201218935-Newsela-vs-Newsela-PRO.

Learning Focus: Newsela offers a variety of articles that can applied in all content areas. Newsela's writers rewrite each article for different grade levels. The determination of grade level typically aligns with the following Lexile bands. However, background knowledge and subject maturity are also considered when determining grade levels.

Teacher Training: Newsela offers a variety of Teacher Training options. These options include face to face professional development (at an extra cost) and also free, online training and support through their Newsela Learning and Support Community (https://support. newsela.com/hc/en-us/).

Student Usage Minimum: Newsela recommends two quizzes per week for high reading gains.

Device Specifications: Newsela is accessible as both a web based program as well as an app. The web based version will work on any computer with a web browser and an internet connect. The Apple app requires iOS 8.1 or later and is compatible with iPhone, iPad and iPod touch. The Android app is compatible with any Android-powered device.

Cost: Newsela offers a free version as well as a paid, Pro version. Annual subscriptions to Newsela Pro are available for classrooms, grade levels, schools or districts. Subscription costs vary based on a variety of factors. Quotes are available at https://newsela.secure.force. com/scheduler.

District Context

District demographics: Talladega County Schools is comprised of 17 schools that serve 7,600 students in grades K-12. Of these 7,600 students, 70% qualify for Free/Reduced lunch status. There is very little diversity within Talladega County Schools with a racial distribution of 62% Caucasian, 34% African American, and only 4% representing other ethnicities. This lack in diversity yields a very low ELL population within the district with only 31 students being identified as ELL.

Talladega County Schools prides itself on its educational innovation and tech savvy students. Currently, all students within Talladega County Schools have access to a device. These devices include tablets in the primary grades and Chromebooks in the elementary, middle and high grades.

Pilot demographics: Talladega County choose 3 schools to participate in this pilot - BB Comer Memorial High School, Munford Middle School, and Winterboro High School. Within each school, only those students and teachers in grades 5-8 participated in this pilot. A total of 695 students participated - 141 for BB Comer, 392 from Munford, and 162 from Winterboro and a total of 24 teachers participated - 2 for BB Comer, 13 from Munford, and 9 from Winterboro.

Pilot Goal

Talladega County's goal for this pilot was to increase volume of reading within the classroom and, in turn, increase overall reading achievement.

Implementation Plan

Duration: September 2017 - February 2017

Quality of Support: Training on Newsela was offered by teachers at the local school level. Each school's Digital Learning Specialist/Technology Integration Specialist/Instructional Partner prepared and led this professional development. Teachers were also provided with information on where to find online support.

An example of a support hyperdoc can be found at the following link: https://goo.gl/ij7qU8.

Implementation Model: In order to gauge the true impact Newsela can have on reading achievement, our implementation mimicked the usage suggestion from Newsela. Educators who participated in the pilot were required to embed at least 2 Newsela assignments (article, quiz, writing prompt) per week. However, most educators were utilizing Newsela more frequently and within different contents.

Data collected: Before the pilot began, all students in grades 5-8 were given the Star360 Reading Assessment. The data provided served as our proficiency baseline. Students were given this same assessment twice during the course of our pilot implementation. After each administration, the data was entered into a data tracking sheet and proficiency levels were compared in order to note areas of growth and/or decline.

Select educators and students who participated within the pilot were also interviewed in order to gather feedback and personal insight on the use Newsela within the classroom.

Findings

Actual implementation model: Educators who participated in the pilot embedded at least 2 Newsela assignments (article, quiz, writing prompt) per week. However, most educators were utilized Newsela more frequently and within different contents.

Educator engagement: All educators who were part of the pilot utilized Newsela as outlined in the implementation plan. However, of these educations, 75% went above and beyond the required usage and continue to utilize Newsela within their classrooms.

Educator satisfaction: All educators who were part of the pilot were satisfied with the ease of use and functionality of Newsela. For many, Newsela has become a daily learning task within their classrooms. Educators were also highly satisfied with the level of support Newela's online Learning and Support Community provided. The online resources offered "how to" tutorials as well as troubleshooting suggestions.

Student engagement: Based on a survey given to all students who participated in the pilot, 70% of students indicated that they enjoy using Newsela in the classroom. The survey also showed that 73% of students found the articles offered by Newsela interesting.

Student satisfaction: Based on a survey given to all students who participated in the pilot, 93% of students indicated that they found Newsela easy to use. The survey also showed that 64% of students feel as though reading the articles on Newsela has made them a better reader.

Student learning: Based on the data collected, Newsela seems to have a positive impact on students' reading comprehension. After the first round of implementation, a progress monitoring assessment was given and 8/9 participating grade levels showed an increase in reading proficiency. Students' attitudes toward reading also seemed to make a turn towards the positive and students expressed a high level of enjoyment in relation to the articles that Newsela offers. Some even expressed that they visit Newsela on their own to read about current events.

Outcome

Purchasing Decision: Based on the results from this pilot, Talladega County Schools is considering purchasing Newsela for our Middle School grades as a tool to boost engagement in reading.