



JUVENILE JUSTICE

At-Risk Youth
Secondary Literacy
Struggling Readers

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– SYDNEY HARTZELL, TEACHER,
CSIU CORRECTIONAL SCHOOLS

Expanding Opportunities for Incarcerated Youth through Personalized Literacy Intervention

Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit
Juvenile Correctional Schools
Danville, PA

Challenge

The Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU), a regional educational service agency in Pennsylvania, oversees a group of four juvenile correctional schools. The program’s mission is to provide comprehensive educational services to adjudicated youth, including progress monitoring and assessment, psychological services, guidance support, career assessments, and more. Students can earn a high school equivalency credential or other certifications through the correctional schools.

Working with an incarcerated youth population involves practical, academic, and emotional challenges. The students are transient and bring a variety of academic and literacy backgrounds. For many, their education has been fragmented.

For teachers, this brings the challenge of differentiating instruction to meet each student’s specific needs.

“Some students come in at a first-grade reading level or below, unable to decode words; others can read just fine,” said Chris Mitcheltree, curriculum and instructional support specialist at CSIU. **“The challenge is, how do we address a first-grade reading level in adolescence without going back to ducks and rabbits?”**

Students in correctional settings have academic insecurities, according to Sydney Hartzell, an English Language Arts teacher at one of the CSIU correctional schools.

“These students don’t know what to think of themselves in the classroom; they don’t know how to experience success,” she said.

Decades of research link educational programs to reduced recidivism rates and delinquency.¹ The CSIU correctional schools aim to help students gain the literacy skills necessary for functional adulthood, such as reading workplace manuals and court documents, according to Hartzell. Many of the incarcerated youth are parents who hope to improve opportunities for the next generation by reading with their children and helping with their homework, she explained.

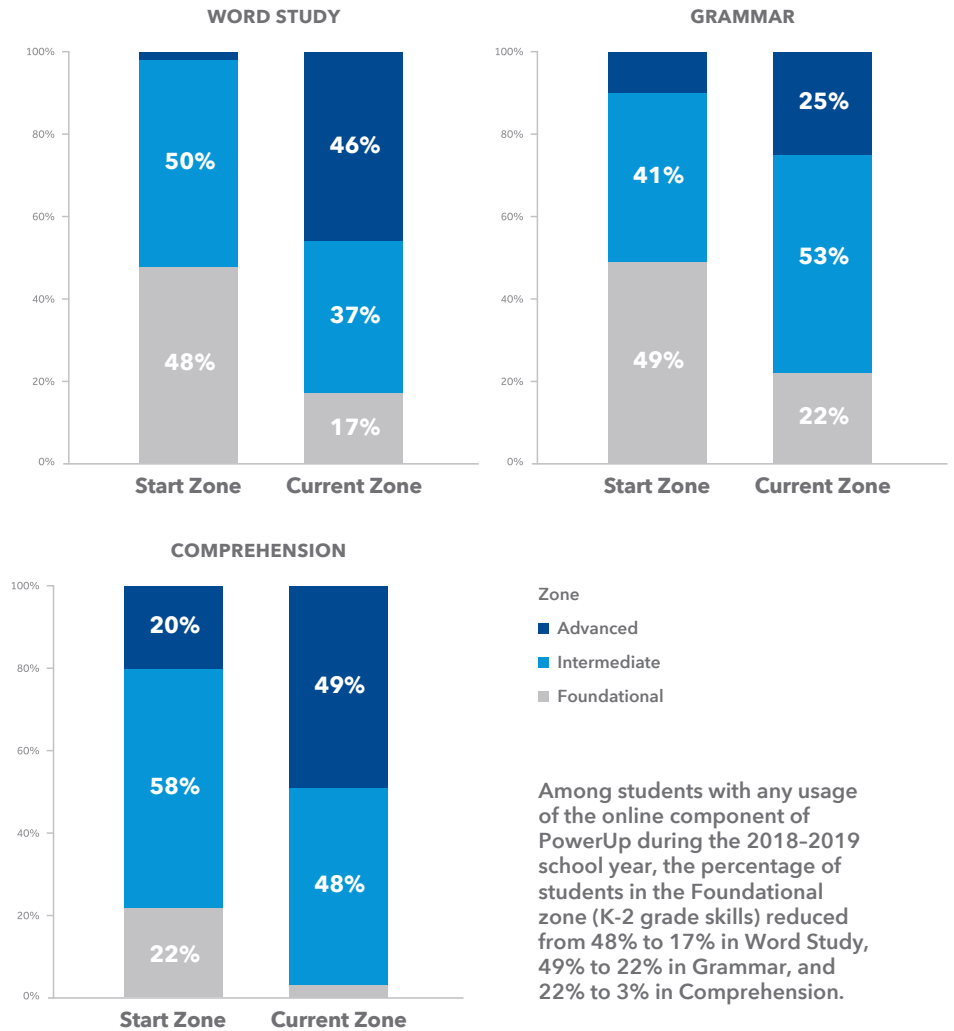
The CSIU correctional schools needed a universal screener to help identify instructional priorities and a literacy solution that offers students age-appropriate activities that are engaging and motivating, allows students to work independently at their own pace and skill level, and helps educators address fundamental skill gaps by providing actionable data and instructional resources.

Solution

CSIU purchased Lexia® PowerUp® Literacy (PowerUp), an adaptive, personalized literacy solution for non-proficient and struggling readers in grades six and above, as well as Lexia® RAPID™ Assessment (RAPID), a K-12 computer adaptive universal screener.

PowerUp determines one of 120 unique initial placement combinations for each student based on their grammar, word study, and comprehension skills, and prescribes individual weekly usage targets. Students take ownership of their learning by tracking their goals and progress on the student dashboard and making choices about areas to work within the program.

Figure 1. Progress of Students Using PowerUp (N=93)



Among students with any usage of the online component of PowerUp during the 2018-2019 school year, the percentage of students in the Foundational zone (K-2 grade skills) reduced from 48% to 17% in Word Study, 49% to 22% in Grammar, and 22% to 3% in Comprehension.

“Finding a program like PowerUp that allows students to achieve success within their own private comfort zone is very important,” Hartzell said. “In my classroom, that’s just the model for the way we do things: We meet you wherever you are, and allow you to grow. That’s where social-emotional growth happens, and that’s where academic growth happens.”

At the CSIU correctional schools, PowerUp usage is incorporated into every content area: English language arts, social studies, science, and math. Lexia’s tools are whitelisted in the schools’ web security software, so students can’t access unauthorized sites—a common concern in correctional settings.

PowerUp’s engaging graphics, game-based elements, and videos are targeted to an adolescent age group. Hook videos pique students’ interest when introducing a text, and instructional videos teach concepts using songs and humor. In one of Hartzell’s classes, students unplug their speakers and sing along.

“We make fun of those raps, but we know them. They’re teaching us and we don’t even realize it! I mean, they’re corny, but that’s what makes them funny,” one student said.

PowerUp supports a blended learning model with offline materials to complement the online program.

¹ <http://criminology.fsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Education-Employment-and-Recidivism-a-Review-of-the-Literature-Ch-5-2006-Annual-Report.pdf>

“We implemented Lexia’s programs and saw the results in just a couple of months.”

– CHUCK BOMBOY, CORRECTIONS EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR, CSIU CORRECTIONAL SCHOOLS

Hartzell’s students use Lexia’s anchor charts to reinforce skills students learned online. The scripted lessons, Lexia Lessons®, help teachers work with students one-on-one or in small groups to target the specific material students are struggling with online, and the pencil-and-paper activities, Lexia Skill Builders®, reinforce mastery of those skills.

While PowerUp is used daily, the CSIU correctional schools administer the RAPID screener three times a year. The screener measures complex knowledge, understanding and application of skills in the areas of word recognition, academic language and reading comprehension. RAPID provides actionable data that identifies literacy instructional priorities at the district, school, class, and student levels through the use of immediate scoring and online reports. In addition, RAPID includes Lexile® measures, which teachers use to assign appropriate reading materials.

According to Hartzell, students are eager to monitor their RAPID scores and discuss their progress.

“It’s a conversation starter,” Hartzell said. “They can show their scores to their counselor or talk about them during a phone call with their parents. **It’s one thing students can show they’re doing well at. It’s an accomplishment they can show the world at large, and they don’t have many opportunities for that.**”

Educators and administrators access both PowerUp and RAPID reports through myLexia, the educator dashboard. For example, Mitcheltree noticed when one of the four correctional schools was falling behind in the grammar section of PowerUp, and worked with the school to fit more usage in its schedule. At the student level, Hartzell and other teachers use the reports during student conferences and for reporting to other agencies, such as probation officers and advocates.

Results

Ninety-three CSIU correctional school students used PowerUp’s online component during the 2018-2019 academic year². The length of use varied greatly due to the transient nature of juvenile correctional programs, but on average, students used the online program for 20 weeks, 49 minutes per week. In addition, 24 educators logged in to myLexia an average of eight times per month.

In PowerUp, each literacy area (Word Study, Grammar, and Comprehension) is divided into three zones: Foundational, Intermediate, and Advanced. The Foundational and Intermediate zones provide the practice that builds automaticity of essential literacy skills. In the Advanced zone students tackle higher-order literacy skills, consistent with what proficient, on-grade-level adolescent readers should know and be able to do.

CSIU’s most dramatic progress was in Word Study, in which students develop automatic word recognition skills and an understanding of multisyllabic academic vocabulary words. In this area, nearly half (48%) of students started the program working on foundational skills, and half (50%) started in intermediate skills. **By the end of the academic year, the percentage of students in the Foundational zone reduced from 48% to 17%, while students in the Advanced zone grew from 2% to 46%.**

Based on these positive results, Corrections Education Administrator Chuck Bomboy recommends PowerUp and RAPID to other juvenile corrections programs.

“We’re one of five other Intermediate Unit programs in the state. We implemented Lexia’s programs and saw the results in just a couple of months. I’m hopeful we can convey the benefits of what we’ve accomplished here to other correctional settings and IUs,” he said.

The benefits to students go beyond academic progress. According to Hartzell, PowerUp supports students’ intrinsic motivation for learning, which opens up opportunities for their future.

“Just taking the time to focus on and improve literacy skills changes their whole idea of themselves,” she said. “When that perception changes, suddenly, doors they thought were closed are slowly opening, and they see different avenues for where their lives can go.”

Profile: Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit Juvenile Correctional Schools

- Enrollment 101
- Grades 7-12
- Race
 - Black 73%
 - White 24%
 - Hispanic 10%
 - Other 3%
- Special Education 31%
- Juvenile Correctional Setting

² 9/4/2018 to 5/31/2019