

How Garland ISD bridged the gap between literacy instruction and other subjects with Newsela ELA

DISTRICT PROFILE

District

GARLAND ISD

Location

GARLAND, TX

Student Population

52,300

Classroom Use Case

PRACTICE LITERACY SKILLS

THE CHALLENGE

Teachers needed engaging, accessible literacy resources to support both their english-speaking and bilingual classrooms.

Garland ISD is a large, diverse K-12 district in Texas with emergent bilingual students representing over a third of the student population. The district also offers a Spanish bilingual program in over half of its schools, where students spend half the week in classes taught in English, and the other half learning in Spanish.

The team at Garland is always looking for resources to support student literacy. “We know from the science of reading that reading comprehension skills are non-transferable. We discourage teachers from pulling a random passage to practice literacy skills because it won’t stick with their students. Background knowledge and vocabulary play such an important role in comprehension,” shared Sara Graff, a literacy coordinator who supports early literacy curriculum for the district’s K-5 classrooms.



The district needed high-quality resources that allow students to practice literacy skills—while building background knowledge—and drive comprehension. They also needed resources that were relevant and aligned to their curriculum and standards.

“The challenge was, these resources also have to be bilingual,” said Esther Bellah, who supports the bilingual program as a Spanish Language Arts and Reading (SLAR) Coordinator. “The resources have to be equitable. The Spanish version has to be just as good, just as robust, and just as rigorous as the English resource. And it has to be accessible for teachers and students.”

And the district needed a resource that extended beyond reading and language arts lessons. “The big thing for us was a cross-curricular resource to support literacy and bridge the gap between subjects,” shared Dr. Amber Hope, Secondary Director of Integrated Literacy Studies.

THE PLAN

Use Newsela ELA to practice literacy skills while building background knowledge on topics aligned to state standards.

Garland had already purchased Newsela Social Studies to build background knowledge through engaging, accessible content and saw great success in their classrooms. The elementary team decided to use Newsela ELA’s library of over 15,000 articles, available at five reading levels to support literacy instruction across the district. They created a resource document for teachers that highlighted the Newsela ELA texts available to support each unit, with details on when to use them and with which students. Newsela ELA offers content aligned to Garland’s state standards and curated Amplify ELA curriculum complements, making it easy for literacy coordinators to map resources to teachers’ scope and sequence.



In addition to leveled English content, Newsela ELA provides Spanish versions for about one third of texts, also available at five reading levels. This enables teachers to differentiate for all students.



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LITERACY COORDINATOR

“One of the things I like most about Newsela is that you can adjust the reading levels,” shared Ms. Bellah. “If you’re differentiating a passage in the classroom, you can have students reading the same story at different levels so they can be successful at their level of entry.”

In secondary and high school, the team focused on providing nonfiction texts to support cross-curricular literacy skills practice. “We use Newsela ELA in our social studies and science classes as well. It helps us bridge the gap between subjects and practice skills in context,” said Dr. Hope. Reading and Language Arts Middle School Coordinator Aleah Rasshan also commented, “We pull a lot of articles on topics covered in our science classes to make sure we have content that’s aligned with what’s happening in ELA lessons.”

Teachers at Garland also used Newsela ELA’s [writing prompts](#) to help students practice the comprehension skills they’ll need to demonstrate on their state assessment, State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Students used Newsela texts to practice constructing argumentative and informational responses to questions and pulling references from their readings into their writing.



THE IMPACT

More empowered teachers, more engaged students, and writing scores that outperformed the state.

When they received the district performance data from state testing on students’ extended constructive responses—or ECRs, in-depth written analysis of information provided in a reading—the literacy team was thrilled. “We’re so proud of our scores. Our writing scores outperformed the state and the region at every grade level in English and in Spanish,” said Ms. Graff. “I definitely think that Newsela’s resources and writing activities played a role in that.”



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Success for the team at Garland is teachers feeling like they have resources at their fingertips that are accessible, easy to use, aligned, and engaging. “Newsela keeps us from using a test practice workbook in small group instruction. We really like that students are engaging with texts digitally, the same way they’re tested,” shared Ms. Graff.

“Students were really engaged and enjoyed reading. My team is really happy with Newsela ELA. They feel like they have more autonomy, and are still able to follow the plans we’ve built for them,” said Jeff Pilcher, ELA High School Coordinator.

With Newsela ELA, the teachers and students at Garland ISD had resources that not only supported literacy development in ELA classes but also bridged the gap between subjects to apply those literacy skills to their other lessons. And providing accessible, flexible resources that are embedded into the curriculum meant it was easy for administrators and teachers to collaborate on ways to practice literacy skills with content and activities that were aligned to state standards.

Garland ISD also uses Newsela Social Studies in their social studies classrooms to build background knowledge for their students. Learn more about [how Garland ISD successfully uses Newsela Social Studies](#).

LESSONS LEARNED

- Build buy-in among teachers with a resource that **allows for autonomy** while showing clear **alignment to district curriculum**.
- Support **cross-curricular literacy skills practice** with nonfiction texts that build student knowledge on **standards-aligned topics** for every subject.
- Use writing prompts alongside relevant, engaging content to **build students’ analysis and literacy skills in context**.

Expect more from your ELA content



COMPREHENSIVE

Cover endless curricular and high-interest topics with a variety of ways for students to show learning.



RELEVANT

Create authentic learning experiences with materials that respond to the real world and students’ lived experiences.



DIFFERENTIATED

Respond to each student’s needs with scaffolding support for whole-class, small-group, and individual instruction.



SKILL BUILDING

Provide opportunities to practice key skills & critical thinking with content-rich materials rooted in learning science.



Go to newsela.com to learn how you can enhance your curriculum materials today!