

How Freehold Township School District achieved significant reading growth in one school year with Newsela ELA

DISTRICT PROFILE

District

FREEHOLD TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

Location

FREEHOLD TOWNSHIP, NJ

Student Population

3,500

Classroom Use Case

PRACTICE LITERACY SKILLS

THE CHALLENGE

Students in grades 3-8 struggled to achieve grade-level reading performance

Reading scores were down as a result of the pandemic. The educators at Freehold Township School District believed that they could build literacy across all subjects, not just in ELA classes. They knew they needed a solution that would infuse ELA skills practice in every subject to drive reading growth.

The district noticed that foundational literacy skills—like identifying the main idea and key details—were common challenges for students reading informational texts. This created roadblocks for learning in social studies and science classes, just as much as in ELA classrooms.



Freehold Township launched an ambitious district-wide initiative to focus on building literacy skills in every subject. All third- through eighth-grade teachers were asked to prioritize reading informational texts and practicing literacy skills as a regular part of their instruction.

The goal was to have at least 80% of the target student group—those at or below the median grade-level band in NWEA MAP assessments—grow at least one performance band from fall to spring MAP assessments.



Teachers knew students needed more support in reading and understanding texts, but it required a lot of time and effort to find the right content that supported their lessons and was accessible to every reader.

THE PLAN

Practice literacy skills with informational texts in every unit across classes, districtwide

Administrators wanted to make it easy and meaningful for classrooms to spend time practicing literacy with informational texts.

“As a department, our goal is to provide the training and resources teachers need to support their students in the classroom,” shared Rebecca Montgomery, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. “That’s where Newsela ELA came in for us. It was a really powerful tool to put in the hands of teachers.”



Newsela ELA offered a library of over 15,000 texts that were engaging, aligned to state standards, and available at five reading levels. Ms. Montgomery and her team aligned Newsela ELA content to teaching units in every subject area—even physical education and health—so every teacher could easily incorporate nonfiction articles into their lessons. In addition to reading the texts, students were also given an opportunity to practice their skills with the activities accompanying each Newsela ELA text.

“We didn’t focus solely on our language arts teachers. Getting our science teachers and social studies teachers involved in the initiative was really impactful,” said Ms. Montgomery. “It created a culture of collective responsibility for this goal. We’re all focused on helping kids grow as readers; it’s the responsibility of the entire school community.”



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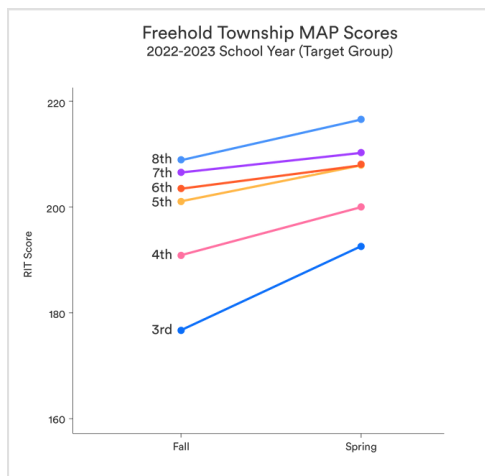
Rebecca Montgomery
ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT
OF CURRICULUM AND
INSTRUCTION

THE IMPACT

Students achieved reading growth goals across every grade level from fall to spring assessments

When the spring NWEA MAP scores came in, Freehold Township School District was successful. They achieved their goal across the district and at every grade level. Over 80% of target students in most grade levels grew at least one performance band, and some grade levels even achieved growth for over 90% of target students. This growth exceeded national benchmarks by up to 2x.*

“We are so proud of our results. We’re able to look at the student data and see how much students have accomplished,” shared Ms. Montgomery. “And scores are only one measure. The real impact is felt daily when teachers see that growth reflected in their students’ work. It’s a huge accomplishment to see kids able to pick up and interact with a text, identify the main idea, and engage with it in a meaningful way. That’s what adults have to do all the time, and we’re helping prepare them for those next steps in life.”



The team at Freehold Township was so blown away by their results that they expanded their product suite to add Newsela Science as an additional resource for the next school year. With Newsela Science, teachers have access to additional science-specific texts, videos, and activities to help students build background knowledge, develop claims with evidence, and connect science lessons to the real world.

Through collective dedication from all departments, Freehold Township created a groundswell response to improve literacy and deepen learning for its students. Educators leveraged resources tailored to their lessons to encourage regular literacy skills practice and reading comprehension. The district’s consistent, cross-curricular efforts drove same-year reading growth for students in all grade levels.

*On average, growth was 1.3x greater than expectations. This was a comparison in each grade between average growth for students in this district against average growth documented in MAP’s 2020 norming study.



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LESSONS LEARNED

- Make literacy a collective goal for all educators and practice literacy skills in every subject area, not just ELA, for greater reading growth.
- Incorporate informational texts into lessons wherever possible to expose students to the types of complex texts they’ll see in other subjects and in the real world.
- Make literacy skills practice easy for teachers with curated texts and activities aligned to state ELA standards.