

Higher scores on Newsela assessments linked to stronger ELA outcomes.

A Newsela validity report





Executive summary

- Newsela usage and performance in the 2021 - 2022 school year was compared to i-Ready® Diagnostic scores for over 2,500 students from four different states.
- Higher scores on Newsela ELA quizzes were associated with better i-Ready outcomes in the spring. 74% of students scoring 75% or above on Newsela quizzes were also at or above grade level, as measured by their Spring i-Ready score.
- Writing prompt scores were also associated with better Spring i-Ready outcomes. Almost 60% of students scoring mostly 4s (on a scale of 1-4) on their writing achieved grade-level performance on iReady at the end of the school year.
- Together, these findings show that pairing Newsela ELA writing prompts and quizzes is an effective low-stakes way for teachers to gauge student ELA achievement in between interim assessment administrations.
- In addition, Newsela usage was related to student learning outcomes similarly across different demographic factors, including race, SES, or urban/rural status.



KEY FINDINGS

Students performing above-average on formative assessments in Newsela ELA showed better outcomes on iReady than grade-level peers.

Higher scores on Newsela assessments predicted more on- and above-grade level performance in reading at the end of the year.

This positive relationship was consistent across various student demographics, demonstrating that Newsela ELA can effectively measure and support student ELA achievement for students from varied backgrounds.



Background

This study examines how students' performance on Newsela relates to their English Language Arts (ELA) achievement and growth within a single school year. Newsela is a digital instructional content platform offering teachers engaging and relevant texts for their classroom instruction in subjects such as ELA, Social Studies, and Science. Newsela's content library features over 15,000 texts across 20+ genres written at 5 different reading levels as well as fiction stories and multimedia content. In addition to leveled content, Newsela also offers standards-aligned quizzes, writing prompts, and vocabulary-building exercises.

Within Newsela ELA, there are quizzes composed of 4 or 8 multiple-choice questions, each of which is aligned to state-specific reading standards. In this report, a quiz score is defined as percent correct (i.e., the result of dividing total questions answered correctly by total questions attempted).

Newsela ELA writing prompts are designed to create differentiated opportunities for formative writing skills practice. In addition to using the existing standards-aligned writing prompts crafted by Newsela's assessment experts, teachers also have the option to create their own prompts using Newsela's assignment feature. Once students submit prompt responses, teachers have the option to score their responses on a scale of 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent). Average writing score here is defined as the average of those teacher-provided scores.

In this report, ELA achievement was measured using scores from the i-Ready® reading diagnostic assessment (referred to as just "i-Ready" for the rest of this report). i-Ready is an online adaptive interim assessment typically taken by students at three points throughout the school year (Fall, Winter, Spring). Interim assessments like i-Ready provide information to teachers, administrators, and parents about students' academic performance relative to grade-level standards. The analyses presented here focus on the Reading subject test, which covers vocabulary, informational comprehension, and literary comprehension. On / above grade level is defined as receiving a relative placement of Early On Grade Level or above.

Prior research has shown that i-Ready is highly correlated with multiple summative assessments, such as PARCC and SBAC (Curriculum Associates, 2020a; 2020b). Additionally, Newsela ELA quiz scores have been shown to be strongly correlated with performance on NWEA MAP, a different ELA interim assessment (Ryherd & Hurwitz, 2021).



Sample

Our sample consisted of 2,617 students in grades 3-8 from 4 school districts in AL, FL, SC, and WV. These districts represented urban, suburban, and rural areas with a range of racial/ethnic diversity. Some districts served primarily White students, while others had considerable Black and Hispanic/Latinx populations. To be included in the sample, students had to have Fall and Spring i-Ready scores shared with Newsela as well as use Newsela on an approximately monthly cadence.¹ Over the school year, the average student took about 24 quizzes and received 3 writing scores.

Students from these states are included in the study sample:



Alabama



West Virginia



South Carolina



Florida

Results

Quizzes and writing prompts are unique indicators of ELA achievement.

School-year Newsela ELA quiz scores showed a strong positive correlation with students' Spring i-Ready percentile. The correlation between quiz score and Spring i-Ready was 0.55,² reflecting a large effect size.³ Students who showed stronger performance on Newsela quizzes throughout the school year also showed higher scores on the i-Ready at the end of the year. As shown in Figure 1, 74% of students with an average Newsela ELA quiz score of 75% or higher achieved proficiency at the end of the school year.

Figure 1

Students on or above grade level on Spring i-Ready

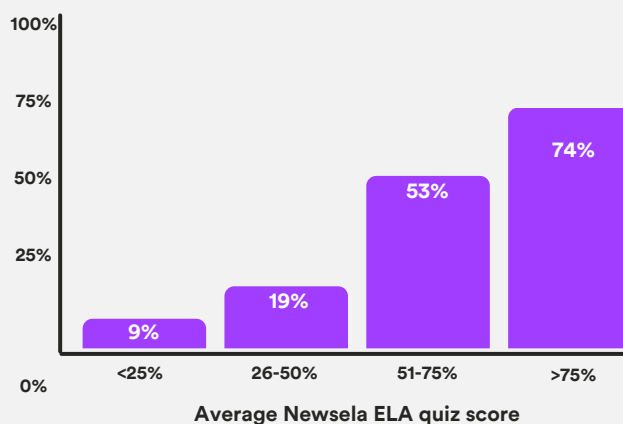


Figure 1. Newsela ELA quiz scores and i-Ready outcomes are highly correlated. Students who showed higher quiz scores over the school year also exhibited stronger performance on the Spring i-Ready Diagnostic assessment.

Similarly, average writing score was positively correlated with Spring i-Ready percentile ($r = 0.44$; see Figure 2).⁴ Nearly 60% of students who received mostly 4s on their writing achieved proficiency on i-Ready at the end of the year.

These results suggest that Newsela assessment data can be valuable formative data points to further evaluate student reading ability in between interim assessments. When combined, Newsela quiz, Newsela writing prompts, and Fall i-Ready data each uniquely and significantly predicted end of year performance.⁵ This suggests that Newsela ELA quizzes and write prompts can more strongly reflect students' underlying ELA performance when they are paired together, a method aligned with best practices that highlight the value and importance of triangulating multiple data sources to provide a holistic assessment of student achievement and learning (Mulligan & Landrigan).



Newsela usage affects different populations in an equitable way.

Academic achievement is related to multiple different demographic factors, such as race and socio-economic status (SES; Curriculum Associates, 2022; Paschall, Gershoff, & Kuhfeld, 2018). Newsela's editorial staff currently employs a culturally responsive lens and framework when evaluating Newsela's content fit for the website, focusing on content that inspires students to be knowledgeable and active global citizens who are well-informed, culturally inclusive and aware. Our texts are selected to serve as mirrors and windows for Newsela's diverse readership, teaching students about those different from themselves as well as giving them opportunities to identify with people within the content.

With this approach in mind, a series of school-level analyses were completed to investigate how demographic factors, Newsela usage/performance, and student academic outcomes were related. These analyses revealed that all students benefited from Newsela similarly,⁶ regardless of multiple demographic factors, including class size, SES, and race/ethnicity. This suggests that Newsela has an equitable impact on literacy skills regardless of a student's race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

Figure 2

Students on or above grade level on Spring i-Ready

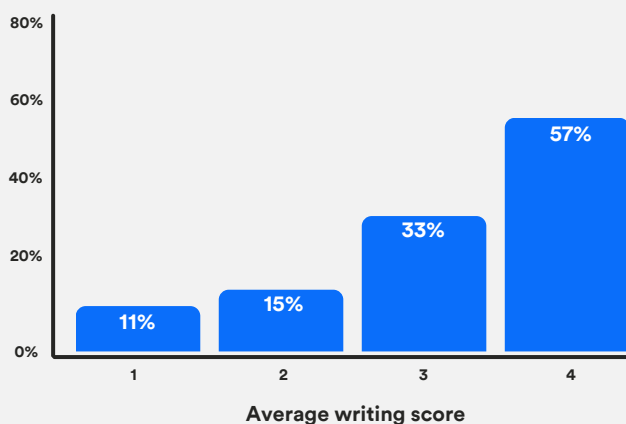


Figure 2. Students' writing scores are strongly correlated with their spring i-Ready outcomes. Students who received higher scores on Newsela ELA writing prompts scored higher on i-Ready.

Resources

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- 1 “Approximately monthly usage” is defined as at least 9 distinct months of usage in the Newsela platform over the 2021 - 2022 school year, assuming a 10-month school year.
 - 2 $r(2673) = 0.55, p < .001$. After accounting for Fall i-Ready percentile, the correlation is 0.17; $r(2673) = 0.17, p < .001$.
 - 3 Correlation effect sizes: 0.10 - 0.29 = small; 0.30 - 0.49 = medium; 0.50+ = large (Cohen, 1992).
 - 4 $r(1108) = 0.44, p < .001$. After accounting for Fall i-Ready percentile, the correlation is 0.16; $r(1108) = 0.16, p < .001$.
 - 5 This was determined by comparing BIC values for the three models predicting Spring i-Ready percentile from Fall i-Ready percentile and Newsela assessment scores. Just quiz scores (BIC = 9200.078) and just writing scores (BIC = 9195.664) had a higher BIC than the model using both predictors (BIC = 9182.985), suggesting that the model including both predictors had a better fit.
 - 6 Newsela usage group was determined by comparing the number of teachers and students within a school who used the platform once a month or more to the total number of teachers and students who used the platform at all during the school year. Any school where more than 20% of users logged in monthly (or more) was classified as a “higher-usage” school, while those with less than 20% monthly users were classified as “lower-usage.” 20% represents the average percentage of monthly users for any given school within the core sample. Adding interactions between demographic factors and Newsela usage group did not improve model fit, $F(9, 136) = 0.83, p = 0.58$.