An Interview with Lexia user, Principal Felecia Evans

Felecia Evans is the principal at Lander Elementary School, a K–5 school of about 500 students located just outside of Cleveland, Ohio. We spoke with Felecia about her successful implementation of a school-wide literacy initiative with [Lexia® Core5® Reading](). She shared strategies on building leadership, student and teacher motivation, and using data as part of the Response to Intervention process.

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

Becki Harrington-Davis, Lexia: Thank you so much for joining me. When I was speaking with your district, I learned that your school rose to the top in terms of your success with Core5 last year—specifically your students' fidelity of use and progress. I'm really excited to hear more about how you did that.

What are some of the things that are working well for you?

Felecia Evans, Lander Elementary School: We started by working with our Lexia [implementation manager]()—Sara—to train our building leadership team, which has one representative from each grade level. All of our PD was absolutely phenomenal. We used a train-the-trainer model, and Sara really got our leadership team on board. Then, our leadership team was able to support the grade levels in implementing the program. In the live Data Dive training, we actually had a trainer from Lexia come here; they helped us look at our data and our students, which was very helpful for the teachers.

We use Core5 as an integral part of our RTI process. We use STAR as our universal screener, and we started using Lexia as our progress monitoring tool. With Lexia, we are able to highlight the specific skills students are working on—for example, certain letter sounds in kindergarten. We're able to really dig into the Lexia data to really identify those small skills, then we work with the teachers on putting interventions in place for initial sounds, or four-letter sounds, or letter identification. Core5 really helped us break down our data into measurable bits and pieces.

Because students can see their progress, they want to celebrate, so we created a Lexia Tree in our hallway. Each time a student would pass a level, we'd write their name on a leaf. Our tree grew throughout the whole hallway, celebrating our kids' movement through the program.

BHD: Are the teachers sending home the certificates as well?

FE: Yes, and we use Seesaw, so the kids snap a picture holding up their certificate. I also have a usage challenge that I do every week: When 100% of the students in a class meet their weekly minutes, I give them a shoutout in the Monday morning announcements. I also send an update to the entire staff every Monday with a screenshot of the overall building data so they can see the usage for each grade level. The teachers get a little competitive because they don't want their grade level to be the one that's behind, so that helps with accountability and buy-in.

At our parent group meetings and parent-teacher conferences, we educate parents about Core5: what it is, how to help their student log in from home, and how to allow their child to use it independently at

home (i.e., not to help too much).

BHD: Are you encouraging students to use Core5 at home?

FE: Yes, because it helps them meet the usage minutes.

BHD: I'm sure that must help with fidelity. Admins have different opinions on it because of that challenge you mentioned—that the student data might not be accurate if parents help too much. How are you giving parents guidance?

FE: I send out a weekly Friday newsletter to all parents with little tips. Also, if we notice a student is moving through a lot of levels at 9 p.m., we'll call the parents and just say, "You know, we don't want your child on it at 9 p.m., we'd rather they be sleeping." You know, helping parents with that piece as well.

BHD: Wow, I didn't even realize that you can see exactly what time they're online. That's so detailed.

FE: You can really dig in deep.

BHD: And how are teachers fitting the usage into their school day?

FE: We have a literacy block in which the students have a reading and writing workshop, and we incorporate Core5 as a part of their Daily 5 choice. We also have a Lexia Lab in the morning; teachers target students who haven't met their minutes, give them a pass, and go with them to work on Core5 in the lab.

Midway through the year, we realized that kids were meeting their recommended usage minutes but weren't necessarily meeting their unit goals, so we shifted our focus to intervention. It's really supposed to be a [blended program](#), and we've gotten better at improving the teachers' ability to identify red flags when students are experiencing difficulty and then intervene. We started to group students who are working within the same level—our ESL teacher has done a really good job of that. She has students across K-5, but she's able to group them by Lexia level and target some of the skills they need to practice by using a combination of both the online program and the Lexia supporting materials.

It's really nice because it becomes a natural part of our RTI process. We meet with every teacher every nine weeks to look at their students. We're able to say, "Hey, you can see they've tried this, like, 45 times, and they haven't had success with it." And you know it's time to pull them into a small group and to give them some direct instruction on that skill or strategy.

BHD: It sounds like you're really involved with the data yourself. How often are you looking in myLexia?

FE: All the time! It's nice because I'm able to see trends and patterns. When I pull the first-grade data, for example, I can see when a

number of kids are struggling with a certain skill. I also gave my building leadership team administrative access to the program; when we have our building leadership team meetings, we're able to look at the data both by grade level and across grade levels, so we're able to have that conversation at a building level with our teacher leaders.

BHD: What are some of the challenges you faced before bringing in Lexia that Lexia is helping to address?

FE: I'd say the biggest piece is the RTI and the interventions. The real-time data that we're able to collect on students—along with having the real-time interventions that match those skills—has actually been a game-changer for us. Teachers would spend hours trying to find resources and materials and give little paper-based checkpoints. Core5 has completely shifted how they're able to spend their time; now they're focusing on the interventions rather than trying to create things and find things and diagnose kids. The program does that on its own.

And then obviously, as a building principal, being able to see that data myself and to be able to support teachers in that process have been helpful.

BHD: What would you say are some of the main benefits to students?

FE: I would say the ability to get those interventions that they need. I think kids like it, too, because it's interactive and it's engaging. They feel like they're involved as a school community because they see everybody else doing it and they hear the announcements. It brings some camaraderie amongst the students. And the kids don't know who's working on what level—they just know that they're all working

on Core5.

BHD: Would you recommend Core5 to other principals, and why?

FE: I would absolutely recommend it. If they're looking for something to support their teachers and their students with real-time interventions, real-time support, and to be able to see the growth, I recommend it to anyone. We saw tremendous growth in our number of students who came in two grade levels behind.

BHD: I agree, [your growth was absolutely incredible](). Last year, 33% of your students started working in or above grade level, and that grew to 89%. That's amazing. Your fidelity of usage and progress is far above average. I can see that your buy-in and all of your engagement is really helping to make that happen.

FE: I can tell you that from personal experience, it's been great for our school.