



“Find a Book, Florida”

by Dr. Eric J. Smith, Florida Department of Education Commissioner

One of the hardest things to deal with as parents and educators is the loss of academic achievement during the summer months. This loss of learning, often called “summer loss” or “summer slide,” is real, and studies have shown that all students lose at least some reading ability when they don’t participate in educational activities during the summer. Another sobering statistic—students score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer vacation than they do on the same tests at the beginning of summer vacation.¹

Bottom line? If children aren’t continually challenged to learn during the summer, they risk falling behind in school and may face an ongoing struggle to keep up with their studies. Unfortunately, most parents can’t leave their jobs and other responsibilities to devote the much-needed time and effort to help their children stay up to speed during these critical summer months.

The state of Florida is committed to providing children and families the opportunities and tools to make reading an important part of their lives, now and in the future. I’m excited to share with you the huge strides we’ve made as a state to encourage reading throughout the summer and the entire year.

Lexile® Measures and “Find a Book”

This past May, the Florida Department of Education (DOE) announced the “Commissioner’s Summer Reading Adventure,” a joint DOE effort alongside the Florida Department of State and MetaMetrics®—an educational measurement and research organization—to provide students with a new way to find great books to read.

We used MetaMetrics’ free online book search—“Find a Book”—to promote and encourage students to read more throughout the summer. “Find a Book” is a unique tool that uses Lexile measures to help students build personal book lists that match their reading ability and interests.

Lexile Measures

So, what is a Lexile measure? A Lexile measure indicates both a student’s reading ability and the complexity of a text. When

used together, Lexile measures help match a reader with books, articles and other reading materials that are at an appropriate difficulty level, and help gauge how well the reader will comprehend that text. The idea behind Lexile measures is to connect readers with books that provide an appropriate challenge (not too hard, but not too easy), that will ultimately help them build skills so they can grow as a reader.

Students in Florida receive a Lexile measure from a variety of progress-monitoring assessments throughout the school year. For example, students in grades 3–12 can get a Lexile measure from the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR), which is linked with The Lexile Framework for Reading as the result of a partnership between the Florida Center for Reading Research and MetaMetrics.

Commissioner’s Summer Reading Adventure

As we found in our Summer Reading Adventure, “Find a Book” matches students with books they’ll love to read not only during the summer, but all year long.

Children and their parents can use this tool (at no cost) to find books that fit their reading level and interests, whether they’ve received a Lexile measure or not. By simply entering in their grade level and answering whether they find the books they’re reading in school difficult, just right, or easy, they’ll receive a starting Lexile range to search for compatible books. It’s really that easy.

I’m happy to report that the Commissioner’s Summer Reading Adventure was a huge success. Since the Florida Department

For more information and to build custom reading lists using “Find a Book,” visit www.Lexile.com.



of Education adopted “Find a Book” to fuel this program, the Sunshine State led all other states in book search activity, scoring more than 40,000 unique visits to the site and averaging nearly 10 minutes per session. But what does that mean exactly? It means more students spent more time searching for and finding books that matched their reading levels. And, it means they took their results or reading lists to more public libraries or book stores to pick up these targeted books. Simply put—they read more over the summer.

Florida’s Year-Long Literacy Campaign

Using the momentum from our summer program success, we continued to encourage students and parents alike to use the search utility, which we now call “Find a Book, Florida!,” to build reading lists tailored to their favorite topics or even their school assignments.

With the support of the Governor’s office, the DOE launched a year-round campaign as part of the state’s observance of International Literacy Day, and as part of the Florida Departments of Education and Environmental Protection’s recognition of September as National Literacy Month. Throughout the year, the DOE will continue to promote Lexile measures and “Find a Book, Florida” as part of its various literacy events. We hope to use the “Find a Book, Florida” search tool and Lexile measures to create holiday reading lists for parents and students, and of course, we’ll continue with our summer reading program.

Celebrate Literacy, Florida

Florida’s third annual literacy week—appropriately named “Celebrate Literacy, Florida”—will kick off in January 2011. The goals are to promote literacy throughout the state by raising awareness of the programs and projects offered by the DOE and its partner agencies and organizations, and most of all, to promote the enjoyment of reading for children and adults of all ages.

I know for a fact that the free search tool, “Find a Book, Florida,” will help students and adults alike find appropriate and enjoyable books tailored to their reading levels. And, “Find a Book, Florida” will make it as easy as possible for them to find these books at their nearest public libraries or Barnes & Noble stores.

Common Core State Standards

As you know, literacy is the foundation of student success and the stepping stone toward future economic and social growth in our state. By working together and participating in these literacy programs, events and initiatives, we can ensure our students are equipped with the literacy skills they need to become productive citizens of our great state.

In support of this, the state of Florida has signed on to participate in the Common Core State Standards national initiative. The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The Standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers.

Encouraging reading, literacy and future academic and professional pursuits must be a collective effort—between educators, parents, librarians and students. I believe that Lexile measures and the “Find a Book” search tool are a great way to help gauge students’ readiness for the reading demands of their academic and professional pursuits.

Learn More

I hope you’ve enjoyed this article as much as I enjoyed writing it. I’m proud of the steps we’ve taken as a state to encourage reading and literacy. Please review the websites below for more information about the topics I’ve discussed.

- Lexile measures: www.Lexile.com
- “Find a Book, Florida”: <http://florida.lexile.com>
- Florida DOE: www.fldoe.org/default.asp
- Just Read, Florida!: www.justreadflorida.com
- Literacy Week: www.justreadflorida.com/literacyweek.asp
- Common Core State Standards: www.corestandards.org

¹Cooper, H., Nye, B., Charlton, K., Lindsay, J., & Greathouse, S. (1996). The effects of summer vacation on achievement test scores: A narrative and meta-analytic review. *Review of Educational Research*, 66, 227–268.

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The Lexile Framework for Reading (www.Lexile.com) provides a common, developmental scale and measure to match readers with resources and activities that are targeted to their ability level. Lexile measures help educators, librarians and families select books, articles and other materials that provide the right level of challenge for the reader’s skills and goals, and to monitor growth in reading ability. Tens of thousands of books and hundreds of millions of articles have Lexile measures, and the number of resources with Lexile measures continues to grow. Recognized as the most widely adopted reading metric, Lexile measures are used at the school level in all 50 states. More than 30 million Lexile measures are reported annually from reading assessments and programs, representing over half of U.S. students.