



## Rise with Reading: How Horry County Schools Are Using Lexile® Measures to Improve Literacy

Horry County Schools has an ambitious goal: **to have 95% of their students reading at or above grade level by 2030.** It's a lofty target, but one that Superintendent Clifford "Cliff" Jones believes they can hit. And he's taking action to make it happen.

Since becoming superintendent in February 2025, Mr. Jones has prioritized literacy across the district. He established a committee focused on literacy, and since their very first meeting, the committee agreed on one thing: literacy is more than an initiative. It's a movement based on two key beliefs: literacy is the foundation of opportunity and every child in Horry County deserves the opportunity to be a strong, confident reader.

With a focus on K-12, the committee brainstormed ideas to improve literacy across the district. They developed an idea and voted on its name. That's how Rise with Reading was born.



**I think what we've done [with Rise with Reading] is capture the community's heart and purpose around what they feel is central to kids' education—and that is literacy."**

**Cliff Jones**

Superintendent, Horry County Schools, South Carolina



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## The Role of Lexile Measures in Improving Literacy

Rise with Reading is “a county-wide movement based on the belief that every child in Horry County deserves the opportunity to be a strong, confident reader.” By combining systematic instruction aligned with the science of reading, transparent progress reporting, and community partnerships, Horry County Schools are transforming how literacy is taught, measured, monitored, and celebrated across the district.

The district began by establishing fall, winter, and spring Lexile grade-level bands—advanced, proficient, and basic. These bands translate Lexile scores into clear expectations: for example, a third grader progressing toward 645L–809L, a sixth grader toward 925L–1185L, and high school students moving toward the 1295L+ range.

To define these bands, Horry County Schools looked at bands from other states. Then, they matched that information with South Carolina standards to ensure alignment. The district includes Lexile measures alongside all its assessment scores, including DIBELS for K-2, MAP Growth for grades 3-6, and i-Ready for middle school students.

Lexile measures give schools within the district a common language for reading instruction and development, arming educators and parents with information about the complexity of text a student can read independently as well as the level of support needed to deliver the right level of challenge.

For parents, understanding how their child is performing against grade-level bands is often more meaningful than the grade they receive on their report card. That’s why Horry County Schools is working towards providing parents with a literacy update, including the most recent Lexile measures, three times a year. These progress checks would include a chart of where the student was last year at this time, where they are today, and how they are performing against grade-level expectations. The report would also include resources tailored to students’ abilities to aid parents as they support their child, wherever they fall within the grade-level bands. As a result, parents have more than just a report—they have actionable information that they can use to support their child.



**Standards and grades are important. But fundamental skills like literacy serve as a predictor of success for standards mastery and for grades. If you can’t read, your grades will not be good. So I would like us all to think about the fundamental skills all kids need, and then double down on making sure they all have them. And Lexile measures are a part of that.”**



**Cliff Jones**  
Superintendent, Horry County Schools

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## Students Get Lexile Measures. And Books Do, Too.

In addition to providing Lexile measures to all students within Horry County Schools, Mr. Jones is also working with Horry County libraries to add Lexile measures to children’s and young adult books in local libraries. Adding Lexile measures to library materials signals to a student or parent which books fall within a student’s Lexile range and provide the appropriate level of challenge. This support has been invaluable, not only by making it easy for all students to find books aligned with their Lexile measure, but also by providing the guidance parents and students need to select books that match their ability.

## Building Community, One Page at a Time

Improving literacy goes beyond what happens in the classroom. That's why, as part of Rise with Reading, Mr. Jones and his team launched the Superintendent's Reading Challenge. The goal? For every student in Horry County Schools to read 1,000 pages quarterly.

Initially, many parents found reading 1,000 pages to be a daunting task, with many questioning how their child could possibly accomplish this goal alongside everything else that was expected of them. But when you break it down, achieving this goal is actually quite simple. Take *Goodnight, Moon* as an example for younger readers. *Goodnight, Moon* is over 20 pages. If a parent reads that book—or one of a similar length—to or with their child six nights a week, every week of the semester, their child will meet, or possibly even exceed, the goal. It's that simple. And by the end of the first quarter, the results were impressive.

**40 million total pages**

logged by students across Horry County Schools

**11,000 students reached**

the goal of reading 1,000 pages

**450+ students doubled**

the goal, logging 2,000+ pages each

Horry County Schools also hosted special events to support the Superintendent's Reading Challenge, including the popular "Reading Under the Lights." Across the nine high schools in the districts, students and their families gathered in football stadiums to read under the lights. Students ranging from the youngest kindergarteners to high school seniors brought blankets and lawn chairs and spent the night reading together. In fact, the event was so



popular that the district plans to make it an annual event! Imagine the impression a unique event like this can leave on a child—and the impact that coming together as a community to read for an hour, under the lights, will have on their educational journey.



## Rise with Reading Receives Rave Reviews

The feedback for Rise with Reading has been overwhelmingly positive. What started out as an initiative to promote reading has grown into something the entire community is rallying behind. Reading is becoming a habit for Horry County students—it's part of their routine. Students are reading and tracking their pages. And it's inspiring parents and grandparents to pick up a book, too. Some even asked how they can log their pages!

Local politicians want a piece of the action as well. Many have requested "Rise with Reading" signs that they can put up in their county council meetings and other local venues and events so they can be part of the Rise with Reading brand. And partners are contributing books so that every student in the district has access to what they need to reach the goal.

When reflecting on the success of Rise with Reading, Mr. Jones shared “At this moment in time, it reflects a lot of positivity in our community that they can rally behind, rather than something that’s rallied against. It’s a positive glue within our community.”

## Results to Date

**Reading on grade level increased from 45.7% to 57.9%**

In the first year of Rise with Reading, the percentage of students reading on grade level in grades K–8 increased from **45.7% to 57.9%** between the fall and winter administrations of the formative assessments, even as expectations for each grade level became more rigorous.

## Setting the Stage for Success in Life

When it comes to literacy, everyone agrees that it is foundational to success in life. Mr. Jones stated, “There are a lot of things we deal with in education that can split us and where we have our different opinions. But I speak in front of a lot of groups, and there is only one side to literacy. It’s the one thing where we all agree on its importance.”

Case in point: Mr. Jones recently visited the Myrtle Beach campus of the Pittsburgh Institute of Aeronautics (PIA). And during his visit, the importance of literacy surfaced. PIA trains workers to fix airplane engines. When Mr. Jones asked the staff at PIA what the number one thing the school system can do better, they replied, “We need kids who can read—and read well.”

To be successful at PIA, students need the ability to read complicated manuals and checklists. And that’s why graduating high school with a Lexile measure of 1295L or higher is absolutely critical to Horry County Schools. Lexile measures not only enable the district to identify where a student is today based on their Lexile measure, but also allow them to look into the future and identify what Lexile measure they will need to be successful in college, in their career, and in life.

## Looking Ahead: What’s Next for Rise with Reading

As Mr. Jones looks ahead to what’s on the horizon, he sees potential for expanding the Rise with Reading initiative to related areas of instruction, such as writing. From writing challenges to creator experiences where kids can write their own books, there is great potential to grow this effort. He also believes the concept can support their numeracy and fact fluency efforts as well, helping to improve math ability and increase Quantile® measures across the district.



**Literacy is the strongest predictor of long-term success. That’s why we must do a better job teaching, lifting up, and assessing the skills, not just focusing on standards. To me, standards have come at a cost. But the ultimate skill that we want—and what I hear from the community—is that we want our kids to be effective and independent readers. And that’s something I think about a lot.”**

**Cliff Jones**  
Superintendent, Horry County Schools

## Words of Advice for Districts Looking to Improve Literacy Outcomes

Mr. Jones shared that when you put kids at the heart of an important issue like improving literacy, it's amazing to see the support you receive. To that end, he offers this advice to other district leaders:

- Be clear about the problem you're trying to solve.
- Present the problem to your teachers, administrators, and staff—and ask them to come to the table with ideas that help solve the challenge.
- Be truly collaborative.
- Get behind their ideas. Lift them up. And make them happen.



Every child is worth the courage of an initiative like this.”



### About MetaMetrics

Measures That Inspire

MetaMetrics is an award-winning edtech company that provides the global standard for measuring literacy and numeracy. The Lexile® and Quantile® Frameworks connect students' reading and math abilities to the complexity of content on the same scale, making learning more personalized. Millions of learners receive our measures, turning individual moments of assessment into meaningful connections that empower learning.

For over 40 years, our research-based, consistent, and actionable measures have been trusted by educators, publishers, assessment providers, and policymakers worldwide. Leveraging the most advanced language models and learning theory, MetaMetrics continues to innovate solutions for a wide range of applications, including early reading, career-connected learning, and literacy frameworks for non-English languages. Lexile and Quantile measures increase engagement with learning across the education ecosystem, inspiring everyone to build life skills for a brighter tomorrow. Learn more at [MetaMetrics.com](https://www.metametrics.com).

To find educator tools, visit [Hub.Lexile.com](https://www.hub.lexile.com).