



# Why P-16/P-20 Educational Systems?

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In response to the challenges of preparing students to compete in a global marketplace, policy makers have started to conceptualize education more broadly than kindergarten through high school. As such, a “21<sup>st</sup> century” view that includes preschool through postsecondary education (P-16/P-20), increasingly is becoming the norm.

## Challenges of Implementing P-16/P-20 Systems

The shift to a P-16/P-20 perspective has uncovered the difficulties that many students encounter when making the transition from secondary to post-secondary settings. A number of studies and reports released over the past few years indicate that the transition from high school to the post-secondary world is anything but smooth. According to the study, “Out of Many, One: Toward Rigorous Common Core Standards From the Ground Up” (July 2008), by the bipartisan, nonprofit organization Achieve, Inc., “too many students across the country meet state standards, pass state tests...only to be placed into remedial courses once they enroll in college or find they are unqualified for training programs and skilled employment in the modern workplace.” In 2003, the U.S. Department of Education reported that remediation rates of entering freshmen were 42 percent for public two-year institutions, 20 percent for public four-year institutions, and 12 percent for private four-year institutions. Data from ACT and The College Board also have pointed to the inability of many students to meet college- and career-readiness benchmarks.

## Bridging the Gaps

In order to have a seamless, well-connected P-16/P-20 system, there must be a consensus about what is considered to be “proficient” in high schools, community colleges, four-year colleges and other post-graduation pursuits. How can we address the discontinuity that exists today?

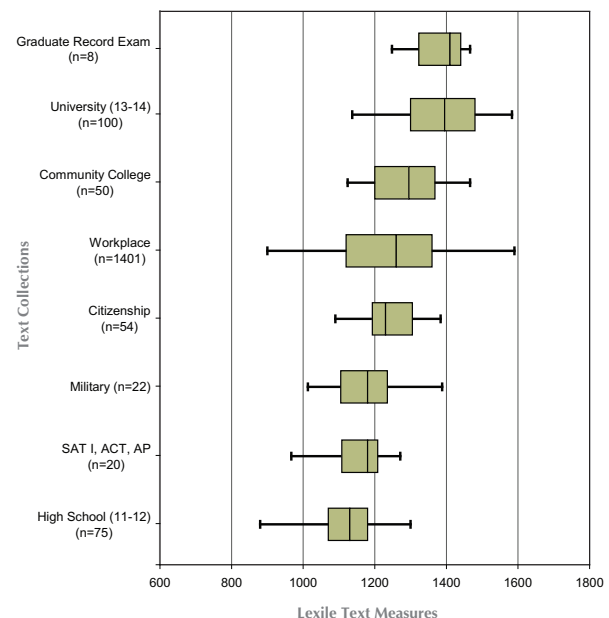
First, secondary and post-secondary environments must have a consistent way (i.e., common metric) to evaluate what “proficient” means in both worlds. Imagine the confusion that would result in health care if a patient (student) at 18 years of age transitioned (graduated) from pediatrics (high school) to a general internist (college, community college) and there were no consistent and standard metrics that spanned the developmental lifespan of the patient (student). Common indices of health (e.g., weight, temperature) are measured on the same scale whether one is 10 or 50 years old.

Consistency, clarity and continuity are just as critical in P-16/P-20 education. For the measurement of reading, The Lexile® Framework for Reading provides a common, developmental scale that allows one to examine the growth of reading proficiency over the lifespan of an individual. Today, there are many instruments that measure and express student reading ability as a Lexile measure—from emergent reader (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS®)) through adulthood (Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE)). For a list of instruments linked with the Lexile Framework, visit [www.Lexile.com](http://www.Lexile.com).

## Measuring Reading Ability and Text Difficulty on a Common Scale

In addition to providing a consistent metric for reporting student reading ability across the lifespan of the individual, Lexile measures allow one to look at the reading demands of P-16/P-20 education in an objective, empirical fashion. Just as one can obtain a student’s Lexile measure from a reading comprehension test that is linked with the Lexile scale, the difficulty of a particular text also can be measured and placed on the same Lexile scale. This allows educators to connect readers with appropriate text and forecast which students will likely need assistance with required readings. Today, more than 115,000 books across the P-16/P-20 landscape have been measured, as well as over 80 million articles

**Table 1: A Continuum of Text Difficulty for the Transition from High School to Postsecondary Experiences**  
(Box Plot Percentiles: 5th, 25th, 50th, 75th, 95th)



and 60,000 Web sites. One does not have to guess about the reading demands of the texts within a particular environment or domain—they can be measured objectively.

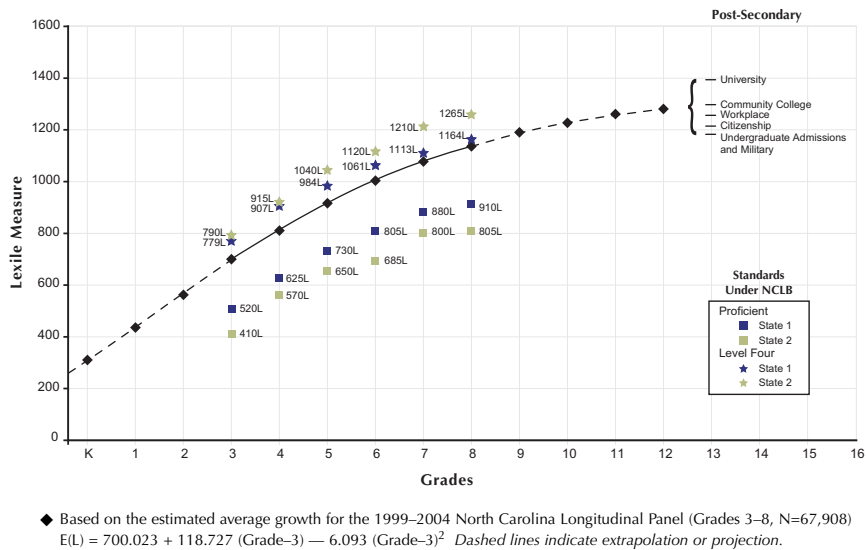
In 2004, Gary Williamson, Ph.D. conducted a study in which he analyzed the reading demands across a variety of post-secondary options, including the military, workplace and college. In terms of reading demands, the analysis illustrated in Table 1 (on the previous page) clearly indicates a significant increase in the reading demands from high school to college. The postsecondary reading demand is substantially and significantly higher than the reading demand that the typical “proficient” high school student has encountered.

In addition, research conducted by the International Center for Leadership in Education shows that a significant gap exists between students’ present reading levels and the reading requirements of the 16 Career Clusters defined by the U.S. Department of Education. Based on the results of a Lexile text analysis, the organization concluded that a large number of entry-level jobs have higher reading requirements than are required for high school graduation.

### Better Policy Decisions and Better Results: An Objective Measure of College and Career Readiness

Because the Lexile Framework can be used to measure the text demands within various environments, as well as to measure the reading ability of students, policy makers now have better information to “align the journey with the destination.” Table 2 shows the growth trajectory of approximately 70,000 North Carolina students who took the state’s End-of-Grade Tests in grades 3–8 and extends that growth trajectory to their likely secondary school exit ability levels. When these projected ability levels are compared to the likely text demands that students will encounter in the postsecondary world, the misalignment is clear. This type of analysis can be done for each student, and allows educators and policy makers to make more informed observations about where a student is and where he or she is likely to exit. Stephen Covey, author of “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Organizations,” argues that a key principle of effective organizations is to “start with the end in mind.” The Lexile Framework can help locate this

**Table 2: Proficiency Standards Comparison with Median Postsecondary Text Measures**



end point and create a path to reach it so that educators and policy makers can better understand the growth demands over the entire P–16/P–20 span, and help prepare all students for success in college and their careers after high school graduation.

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MetaMetrics, an educational measurement and research organization, develops scientific measures of student achievement that link assessment with targeted instruction to improve learning. The organization’s psychometric team developed the widely used Lexile Framework for Reading; El Sistema Lexile para Leer, the Spanish-language version of the reading framework; The Quantile® Framework for Mathematics; and The Lexile Framework for Writing. In addition to licensing Lexile and Quantile measures to state departments of education, testing and instructional companies, and publishers, MetaMetrics offers professional development, resource measurement and customized consulting services.

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