

CASE STUDY



South Carolina School District Creates Personal Pathways to Prepare All Students for Future Careers

Considered the gateway to the South Carolina Lowcountry, Berkeley County is a popular relocation destination, especially for businesses. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the county – less than an hour from Charleston – was the 17th fastest-growing in the country in 2017. Over the past two years, Berkeley County has experienced more than \$1.5 billion in new economic development that comes with thousands of jobs for area residents.

This rapid growth presents both opportunities and challenges for the large district as it experiences a growth rate of nearly 1,000 students per year, said Berkeley County School District Chief Academic Officer Kevin O’Gorman, Ph.D.

“A diverse group of extremely large companies are bringing operations to the area and want to fill these new jobs from the community,” he said. “However, our business partners told us that our students were lacking the



Berkeley County School District

(www.bcsdschools.net)

Moncks Corner, South Carolina

District Enrollment: PK-12
 35,000 students, 43 schools

Superintendent:
 Eddie Ingram, Ph.D.

Chief Academic Officer:
 Kevin O’Gorman, Ph.D.

skills necessary for these jobs. We needed a strategy to put them on track to be prepared for these new employment opportunities.”

With a deep commitment to Career and Technical Education (CTE), Berkeley County School District has a simple but ambitious goal: Every child will enter a career whether through college, trade program, certificate, military or straight into the workforce.

USING MEANINGFUL METRICS TO CREATE CAREER PATHWAYS

Understanding that strong reading and math abilities are at the heart of college and career readiness, district leadership turned to the Lexile Framework® for Reading and the Quantile Framework® for Mathematics, developed by MetaMetrics®, Inc. The Lexile Framework is a scientific approach to measuring reading ability and the text demand of reading materials on the same scale. Similar to the Lexile Framework, the Quantile Framework describes a student’s mathematical ability and the difficulty of specific mathematical skills and concepts on the same scale.

In addition, Berkeley County is using MetaMetrics’ Growth Planners, free online tools that allow students, educators and parents to forecast reading and math growth starting in third grade and compare that forecasted performance to text and mathematical demands of college and career.

A new state law, the South Carolina Read to Succeed Act, which passed in 2015, presented the district with new milestones for student literacy development. For example, third graders have to be reading on grade level by end of grade. In addition, district leaders were looking for a universal screener for IDEA and gifted and talented that was easy to use and provided teachers the information that they needed to individualize instruction. After being introduced to READ 180 and MATH 180 from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, they began to learn more about Lexile and Quantile measures.

Beginning in the 2016–2017 school year, district leaders worked hard to implement Lexile and Quantile measures and make them a part of the academic culture at Berkeley County.

O’Gorman added, “In the meantime, our community was seeing this rapid economic growth and we had a huge push from the Charleston Chamber of Commerce for us to connect what is happening in school to preparing students for careers. Lexile and Quantile measures provide a common language for the academic and business communities to talk about student growth. Rather than talking about standardized test scores, we can look at Lexile and Quantile growth and, using the Growth Planners, talk about potential careers for our students.”

Teachers are also using Lexile and Quantile measures in their classrooms to assess growth and personalize learning. “With Lexiles and Quantiles and the Growth Planners, we have tools for measuring ongoing student growth. It’s not just about any one test on any given day,” said O’Gorman.

PARTNERING WITH THE GROWING LOCAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY

School district leadership meets with the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce on a regular basis. The chamber provides an update on the community’s growth and what the high-demand, high-skills jobs are going to be in the region. Then, O’Gorman and his team look at courses that will directly impact students developing entry level skills for those jobs.

“Every two years, we have to go back and rethink what programs we are offering and decide if we are meeting our local industry demands. To support this, it really helps for us to know if a student has the aptitude and interest for these local jobs,” O’Gorman said.

As a result of this effort, the district revamped its “majors” and laid out student course paths for success in high school, four-year college degrees and other training that will help students develop the skills for these new jobs. New courses added include Introduction to Manufacturing, an expanded Certified Nursing Assistant program course offering that now includes summer school and other credentialing opportunities. On the horizon for the future is the possibility of adding a Dental Assistant program.

To support their progress, starting in eighth grade Berkeley County students develop an Individualized Graduation Plan (IGP) with a career goal and a pathway for achieving that goal. The plan is revisited every year until the student graduates from high school. The district has formally embedded Lexile and Quantile measures into those conversations with students which, O’Gorman said, “makes the process very clean and simple.”


The district is also using a tool called STEMPremier, a social media platform for high school students that is similar to LinkedIn. With this tool, local businesses and colleges can pay to access student profiles, see their resumes and learn of their career interests.

As another demonstration of its commitment to connect with the local business community, for its 2018 summer leadership institute, district principals toured local businesses and heard directly from leaders and employees about the hard and soft skills that they are looking for in new employees. They toured businesses such as a Volvo plant, Google, a hospital, the electric utility and an automotive dealership meeting with IT professionals, technicians, doctors and nurses. The principals walked away understanding the need for even more apprenticeship opportunities, a greater understanding of the soft skills students need and more information about the entry level jobs that are available to Berkeley County students following graduation.

PERSONALIZED PATHS TO STUDENT SUCCESS

Through its strong collaboration with the local business community and targeted strategies for supporting student growth as they plan for success in college and career, Berkeley County Schools is ensuring that all students navigate personalized learning paths.

O’Gorman said, “We can meet students where they are – no matter where they are – and create personal pathways for each of them to make them future ready. With the state providing Lexiles and Quantiles, our expanded collaboration with the business community, and tools such as the Growth Planners, this really has been the perfect storm for putting all of our students on the path to success.”



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Learn More

To access the *Lexile*® Growth Planner, visit hub.lexile.com/lexile-gp.

To access the *Quantile*® Growth Planner, visit hub.lexile.com/quantile-gp.