



Distilling Student Literacy Down to the Essence of Comprehension

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Dr. Ken Eastwood
Superintendent

Enlarged City School District of Middletown

Laying the Cornerstone for Reading Comprehension

- **Client:** Enlarged City School District of Middletown in Middletown, New York
- **Contact:** Dr. Ken Eastwood, Superintendent
- **Questar Product:** *Degrees of Reading Power*
- **Questar/Client History:** Client since spring 2005 (Previously, Superintendent Ken Eastwood was the Superintendent of the Oswego City School District in Oswego, New York, where he had used DRP since the 1980s.)
- **Product Use:** As a reading comprehension assessment administered districtwide every spring via paper/pencil for students in grades 2–8 and to senior high school students identified as at risk, and again in the fall to all incoming students and a targeted population of at risk secondary students, based on their fall DRP scores. The district has begun to pilot online DRP administration.
- **Students:** 7,300

Ensuring high academic achievement in a high-needs district

The Enlarged City School District of Middletown, located in Orange County, New York, about 65 miles northwest of New York City, in the Hudson Valley region, serves 7,300 students. Under the direction of Superintendent Ken Eastwood, the district supports its diverse population — of which 74 percent live in poverty — by offering competitive academic programs and opportunities for educational excellence.

Recognizing the important role that development of foundational reading skills plays in long-term academic success, Superintendent Eastwood makes a key distinction among numerous instruments on the market that measure literacy development, citing that most are comprehensive and tend to dilute figures about basic comprehension or combine them with other data. “Reading comprehension is a basic skill,” said Superintendent Eastwood. “If you don’t have comprehension, the other components of literacy development are suspect or problematic.” Focusing on this single core requirement, Middletown has been using *Degrees of Reading Power*[®] (DRP[®]) to isolate and measure students’ reading comprehension.

Getting to the heart of literacy

Degrees of Reading Power helps Middletown educators identify each student’s reading comprehension level. Reporting on a text complexity scale, DRP helps teachers interpret their students’ “reading power” across grade levels and set goals related to college and career readiness, while monitoring student growth and driving instruction and learning.

While Superintendent Eastwood acknowledges that most schools do an excellent job of teaching students how to read, his years of service to high-needs districts has increased his awareness of a place where schools can fall short — that of teaching students how to read *to learn*. Literacy studies from the American Education Research Association like this one reported on by Education Week, confirms that there are strong, positive curves for beginning readers. However, the learning curve slows down between third and fifth grade when students transition into reading to learn, and that reading on grade level in third grade can help ensure that students keep up with their peers, graduate on time, and achieve success beyond high school. Educators in Middletown use DRP to make sure their students stay on a college and career-ready track.

Putting literacy assessment in context

Degrees of Reading Power identifies weaknesses that students have with basic comprehension so teachers can work to resolve them before moving into more advanced cognitive aspects of comprehension. As a power test — one that measures students’ reading comprehension ability with progressively more difficult texts — DRP reports on a text complexity scale that drives toward college and career readiness. Just as important, it measures students’ reading comprehension *in context*, which is a major distinction between reading assessment tools.

Students are measured by how well they can make meaning from the text, not simply by how they respond to questions about it. Aligned with new standards that challenge students to read critically and to read with greater independence, DRP requires students to demonstrate their understanding of the text as they are reading it. This places their reading comprehension directly into the context of how well they are able to read to learn.

Using a low pressure assessment to replicate reading in the real world

Finally, among the benefits of *Degrees of Reading Power* most appreciated by Superintendent Eastwood and his staff is the fact that it is not a timed assessment so it doesn't add pressure to students who struggle academically, those in special education programs, and English language learners. "The question for us in the real world," said Superintendent Eastwood, "is what do the kids know and also what they don't know without the anxiety of being rushed." And as students test online, they will have the opportunity to review questions, respond to prompts about missed questions, and pause and return to the text if needed.

Building on a decade of success

With Middletown's anticipated move to *Degrees of Reading Power* online, the district will be able to count on the stability and reliability of Questar Assessment's testing platform for an even easier and more effective testing experience.