

The Changing Landscape of Workforce Readiness

Providing a Benchmark for Success and Support for Tomorrow's Jobs

NOVEMBER 2023



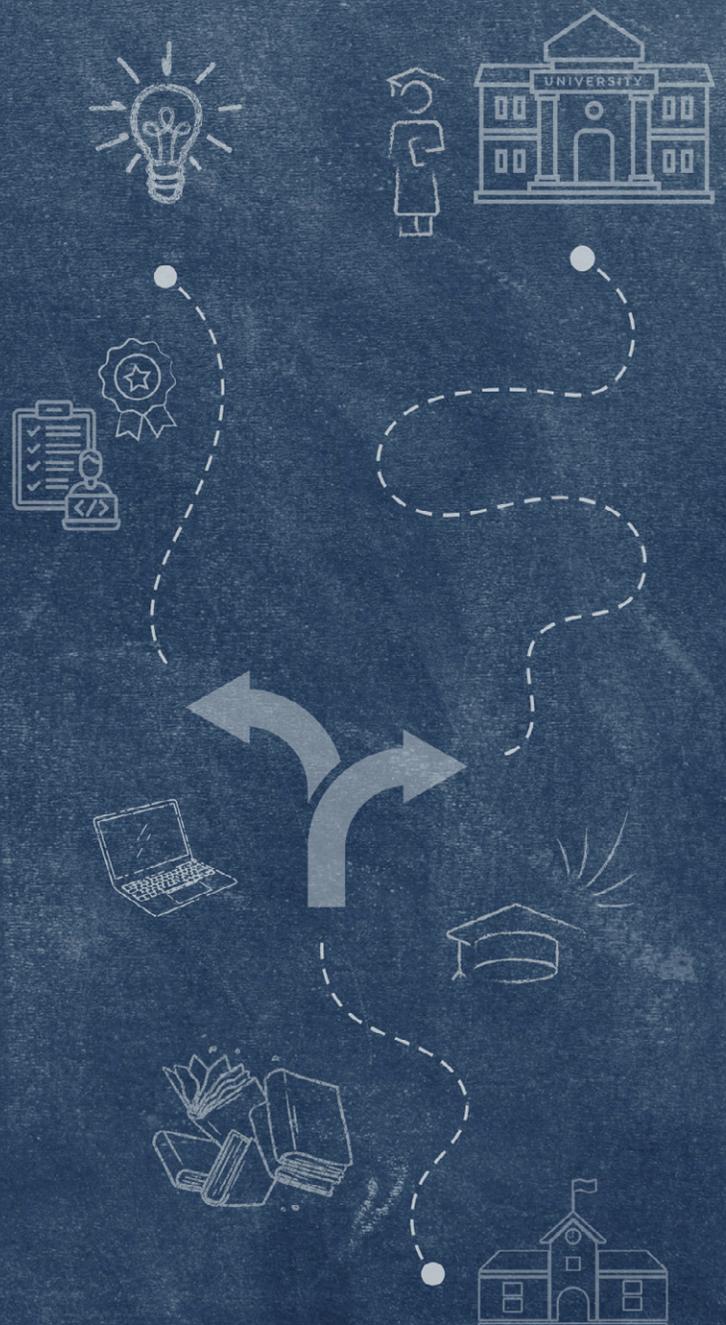
Malbert Smith, Ph.D.
CEO and Co-founder
MetaMetrics



Jillian Balow
Chief Client Relations Officer
MetaMetrics

MetaMetrics® | *Bringing Meaning to Measurement*

DEVELOPER OF THE
Lexile® Framework for Reading
Quantile® Framework for Mathematics



Our country – and perhaps the world – is in the midst of an existential transformation of the way we view post-secondary college and career preparation.



An increasing number of high school graduates are choosing not to attend college. The decrease in enrollment has been in progress since 2010 and is assumed to be the byproduct of a lack of employment and unaffordable college costs. The decrease became more acute in the wake of the pandemic. According to National Student Clearinghouse, undergraduate college enrollment has dropped eight percent from 2019 to 2022, with declines continuing after the return to in-person classes. The decrease in the college enrollment rate since 2018 is the steepest on record, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (Binkley, 2023).

Additionally, the student loan debt crisis is at the forefront of the national education conversation with millions of Americans collectively owing more than \$1.6 trillion (Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2023). Combine that with increasing college costs and the result has been increased public skepticism of the expense to pursue higher education (Schleifer et al., 2022).

These changes were already happening prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but, in many instances, what started as a trickle intensified into a flood during the two-year disruption of our lives.

These changes have brought about the opportunity to rethink and reframe what makes a student prepared for success in life. An increasing number of employers are rethinking requiring four-year degrees for jobs, including Accenture, Bank of America, Delta, IBM and recently ten states (Dodd, 2023; Donadel, 2023). Other employers are looking at microcredentials and upskilling programs to find a prepared workforce. In fact, a recent study showed that nearly 100 of organizational leaders saw benefits from employees having microcredentials (Greenberg, 2023).

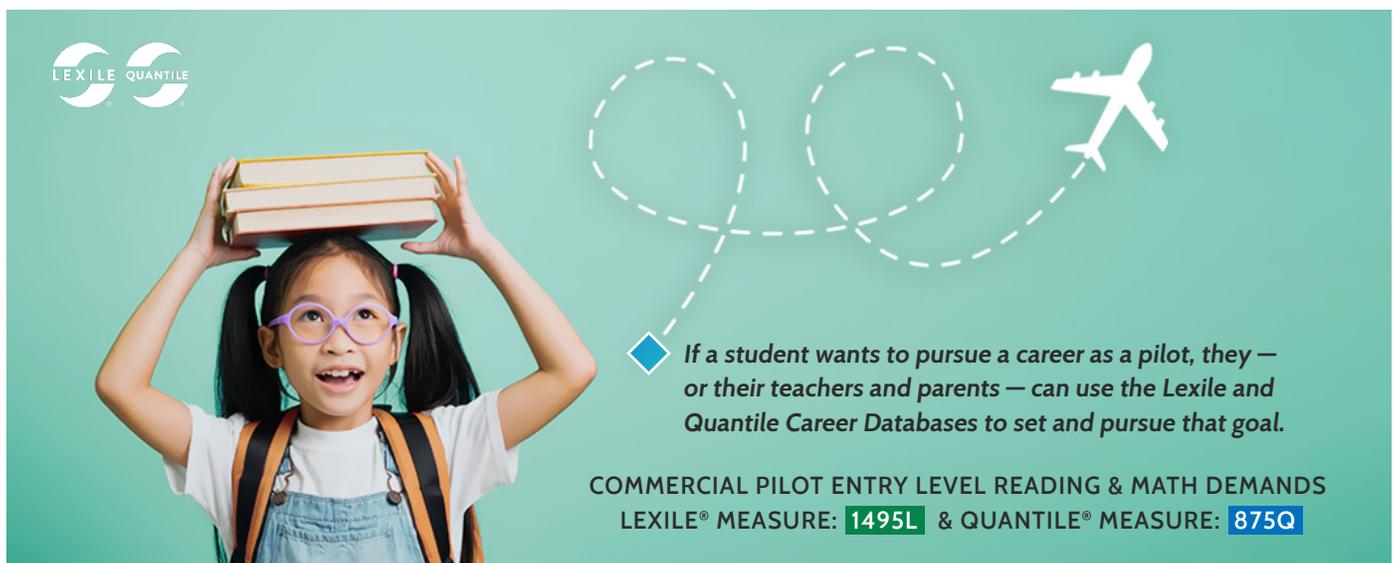
The public is also reconsidering the role of K-12. A recent survey by Populace ranked preparation for college nearly at the bottom of respondents' priorities for schools. The findings show Americans want K-12 to focus on "practical, tangible skills," such as managing personal finances, preparing meals and making appointments. These outcomes now rank as Americans' top educational priority (Populace, 2022).

Using a Common Scale to Map Career Pathway

To provide guidance on the reading and math demands required to enter a career, MetaMetrics measured and analyzed reading materials that are commonly encountered and/or used by individuals who are being trained for or are in their first year of employment in these careers. This first-of-its-kind, multi-year analysis examined the reading and math demands of specific career-focused materials like manuals, texts used in degree or certification programs, texts commonly used or disseminated by associated professional organizations and recruitment materials. Through this research, the **Lexile® and Quantile® Career Databases** were developed.

These Career Databases provide states, schools, students and parents with a measurable construct for developing those individual student academic paths. It contains reading and math demands measures for hundreds of careers as well as important descriptive information for each career. They offer a real-world view of the skills necessary for success in each field.

For example, if a student wants to pursue a career as a pilot, they — or their teachers and parents — can use the Lexile and Quantile Career Databases to identify the reading and math abilities needed for that career and then leverage that information to set and pursue that goal. Or a student who passionately wants to pursue a career in healthcare might use the information from the Career Databases to discover what type of health-related job might best match their academic skills. Powered by the only metric available to compare and describe reading and math demands of careers, the Lexile and Quantile Career Databases provide students, teachers and parents with tangible information to develop an academic path to a desired career.



LEXILE QUANTILE

If a student wants to pursue a career as a pilot, they — or their teachers and parents — can use the Lexile and Quantile Career Databases to set and pursue that goal.

COMMERCIAL PILOT ENTRY LEVEL READING & MATH DEMANDS
 LEXILE® MEASURE: **1495L** & QUANTILE® MEASURE: **875Q**

Gaining a Crystal Ball for New and Emerging Careers

The careers featured in the Lexile and Quantile Career Databases have been identified as Bright Outlook Occupations by O*NET, the premier online career search database designed for the U.S. Department of Labor. Bright Outlook Occupations are careers that are expected to grow and/or emerge in the next few years and offer large numbers of new job openings which is crucial to ensure training a workforce for tomorrow's jobs.

Job Corps, the nation's largest education and vocational training program for economically disadvantaged youth, uses the Career Databases to help the students identify the reading and math demands of occupations they are interested in. MetaMetrics' assessment partners use the Career Databases to provide both learners and job seekers with information on the demands of various careers.



Lexile and Quantile measures provide a common language for the academic and business communities to talk about student growth.”

— KEVIN O’GORMAN, PH.D.

Implementing Career Initiatives at the State and District Level

States across the nation are noticing our work at MetaMetrics, and they are using it to crack the code that has stalled progress in policy and practice. Our career tools and research can be used to inform both.

In West Virginia, the Department of Education used our Lexile and Quantile Career Databases, as well as Lexile and Quantile measures from their summative assessment, to see if their middle school students were on track to meet the reading and math demands to begin careers for current and projected workforce needs.

In Berkely County, South Carolina, district leaders turned to the **Lexile® and Quantile® Growth Planners** (online tool free for state partners) to forecast students' reading and math growth and compare that forecasted performance to text and mathematical demands of college and career (MetaMetrics, 2019). Then Chief Academic Officer, Kevin O’Gorman, Ph.D. reflected on the impact of the initiative saying, “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.”

To learn more about how Lexile and Quantile measures can help ensure students are career-ready, please reach out!



Malbert Smith
CEO and Co-founder
msmith@lexile.com



Jillian Balow
Chief Client Relations Officer
jbalow@lexile.com

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

MALBERT SMITH, PH.D.

cofounded MetaMetrics with A. Jackson Stenner, Ph.D. and has worked on a number of prestigious research projects with the National Center for Education Statistics, the Gates Foundation and others to study a myriad of issues such as summer reading loss, the effectiveness of the NAEP assessments and English language learning. Malbert has taught graduate seminars at Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, from which he received the Distinguished Alumni Award. He has also been named a research professor at UNC's School of Education, focusing on psychological and human development studies.

JILLIAN BALOW has made indelible impacts throughout her career with eight years of exemplary leadership as the state superintendent in Virginia and Wyoming. In Virginia, she led the implementation of the groundbreaking Virginia Literacy Act, fostered parental engagement through the establishment of the Office of Parental Engagement, and championed initiatives to enhance early care and education, career and technical education, and teacher recruitment and retention. In Wyoming, Jillian enacted vital legislation expanding tribal education, prioritizing reading science, codifying computer science education in K-12, and elevating career readiness. Her national leadership roles and contributions to federal policies like the Every Student Succeeds Act highlight her broad influence.

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MetaMetrics Brings Meaning to Measurement

MetaMetrics is guided by a powerful north star — to support student growth through actionable learning measurement. Over the last 35+ years, MetaMetrics' staff of educators, psychometricians and policy leaders have developed learning frameworks that now support over 35 million students in the US. More than half of the K-12 students in the US receive Lexile and Quantile measures and over a hundred million pieces of content have corresponding measures. MetaMetrics was founded in 1984 by Dr. A. Jackson Stenner (retired) and Dr. Malbert Smith with the singular goal of making measurement meaningful by matching students to learning resources using a scientific, universal scale. Today, Lexile and Quantile measures are available in all 50 states, either through formal partnership agreements with 21 state departments of education or at the local level through partnerships with edtech companies who deliver services to schools and districts. Leveraging the most advanced AI technology and learning theory, MetaMetrics continues to innovate solutions for a wide range of applications including early reading, career readiness and tutoring. For more information, visit [MetaMetricsInc.com](https://www.MetaMetricsInc.com).



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