

# Elevating ESL Learning for the Global High School Experience



Patricia Wouters



Martin Luther High School



Milwaukee, WI



User since 2015



## The Challenge



When Patricia Wouters began working with international students at Martin Luther High School, she faced a wide range of English proficiency levels—from students just beginning to read in English to those preparing for AP Literature. With limited budgets and no guaranteed curriculum support, Patricia needed a free, flexible, and effective tool to rapidly build reading comprehension, boost Lexile levels, and prepare students for standardized tests like the ACT and TOEFL.

"I had students entering at a 3rd-grade reading level who needed to be college-ready in two years," Patricia explained. "We needed something powerful, adaptable, and easy to implement."



## The Solution

Patricia discovered ReadTheory more than a decade ago while searching for free ESL resources. She introduced it to Martin Luther High School in 2015 and quickly made it a cornerstone of her program. Students are assigned 5–10 ReadTheory passages weekly, increasing to 15–25 for those reading below grade level.

Success is tracked through pass rates and Lexile improvements, and Patricia uses this data to tailor instruction and motivate students. Classroom competitions, timed challenges, and regular check-ins keep engagement high.

One student, for example, went from a 3rd-grade to 12th-grade Lexile in just two years. Another began in the international program with limited English and is now preparing for AP and dual-enrollment college courses.



### ESL Student's Reading Level Progression with ReadTheory



## The Impact

ReadTheory has transformed the way Martin Luther High School supports its international students. Patricia integrates the program at multiple levels: using it for **placement testing** with all incoming students (including native English speakers), **conducting ongoing assessments** throughout the school year, and **preparing seniors for college** by helping them reach high Lexile scores (1600+). This multi-purpose approach ensures students are not only placed accurately, but also continually supported and challenged.

Teachers in the English department now review ReadTheory data school-wide, and Patricia advocates for deeper data conversations among staff.

Her structured approach has paid off: most students show rapid growth within their first year, and many exceed expectations. ReadTheory is also used to demonstrate measurable progress during international recruiting trips—helping Patricia promote the school's academic rigor in countries like China, Vietnam, and Albania.

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“I've had kids start in ninth grade at a K-1 reading level and by 11th grade, they're taking AP English and dual credit classes. I credit it to ReadTheory because they're able to work at their own pace.”

