

Curriculum Update • Ellen Ullman

Software Improves Middle And High School Reading and Writing Skills

High school literature teachers are not typically reading specialists, so when the Pittsburgh Public School District needed to help its high school students improve their reading skills it needed to find an alternative solution. On top of that, most reading software is geared to the preK and elementary-level set. After some research, Carmelita Korbett, special programs coordinator for the district, discovered AutoSkill's Academy of Reading. "The Web-based version looks like a high school hallway with lockers and a trophy case. It was familiar and not babyish," says Korbett. Today, Pittsburgh has classrooms dedicated to the program in all 10 high schools, the alternative high school and two special education centers; children go to there in addition to their regular language arts classes when the data shows that they need extra help. They take a test to discover their weaknesses and the program generates an individualized action plan. "If a student is having trouble, the program stops and says 'teacher time,' so a teacher can reinforce the skill before the student continues," says Korbett. She also likes that she can manage the program remotely and forward students' records when they transfer.



When Conyers Middle School in Georgia failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress, former principal Sue Snow had to take action. Teachers began using data to find and address weak areas, but realized that writing skills were lagging. They decided to use Vantage Learning's

My Access, a Web-based writing program that instantly scores essays and provides remedial instruction. "Teachers have a hard time grading all those essays," says Snow, a former English teacher. "The instant feedback allowed us to have more quantity, which led to higher quality." After one year, the results were phenomenal: eighth graders' passing rate on meeting state standards in writing went from 84 percent to 91 percent. Snow, now principal at Rockdale County High School, uses the product with ninth graders.

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