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Grade 8.5 teacher Gina Brunelle helps student Brianna Cross with a problem in the school computer skills lab.

Grade 8.5 showing results

By CAROLINA MURILLO
The Brunswick News

Victoria Edwards, 15, is happy.

Her teacher, Gina Brunelle, is also happy.

And her Grade 8.5 coordinator, Randal Harvey, is even happier.

Teachers and administrators – everyone – are celebrating improvements in writing test scores.

“I am excited,” said Victoria. “Everybody studied hard and the teachers were very helpful.”

The former Glynn Middle student practiced grammar, spelling and methods on how to set up paragraphs for the state’s writing assessment, made up of essay tests which gauge the composition skills of students.

“I read and wrote at school and at home as much as I could to pass the test,” she added.

And it paid off. Fourteen of the 34 students in the program passed the most recent round of testing, including Victoria.

Although the number is still below 50 percent, it’s a substantial improvement from last year when only one student passed.

The school also saw big gains in the number of students who hit the target range in eighth grade writing assessments – 33 out of 34.

The average gain for these pupils was 22 points.

Harvey attributes the success to the conscious effort of educators in improving the reading and writing skills of students.

“Teachers used their structured time to implement writing skills,” he said. “Everyone was here on Saturdays to work even harder.”

“These kids are considered to be at risk. This accomplishment is a big step for them.”

The program, held in the Risley Learning Center building, tries to help eighth-graders who are not quite ready for high school stay on track for graduation.

According to Georgia Law, students who cannot pass the Georgia Criterion Referenced

Competency Test (CRCT), which measures their skills in reading and math, should be retained in eighth grade.

As the name implies, 8.5 is more intense than eighth grade, with a few ninth grade courses embedded in the curriculum.

Writing abilities were incorporated before the state assessment in January.

Gina Brunelle, computer skills lab teacher, says students were focusing on how to improve writing an essay’s introduction and conclusion as well as paragraph organization.

“We had them practice on paper and on their computer through MyAccess, an online writing tool.”

Brunelle said when students practice an online writing assignment using the program, they receive online constructive feedback within seconds with specific sound suggestions for improvement.

“The next challenge is to accomplish the same with the CRCTs,” said Brunelle.

The exams will be held in April.