

### The Challenge

Whittier Union High School District is an urban/suburban district east of Los Angeles, with five high schools and a mixed population of approximately 12,600 students, nearly 50% of which are economically disadvantaged. On a scale of 200-1000, the district's Academic Performance Index (API) scores in the baseline year of 1999 ranged from a high of 601 to a low of 480, all well below the targeted interim performance of 800. Whittier administrators and educators recognized that they needed to increase their students' achievement levels and chose to focus on teaching to essential standards and improving writing skills.

### The Solution

Whittier administrators and educators piloted MY Access! during the summer of 2001 as part of a summer school writing development program for at-risk students. Twenty-five English Language Intensive Learners (ELIL) Level 2 ELD students enrolled in the program. A central component of the developmental writing program was MY Access!, a prompt-driven, web-based assessment, diagnostic and instructional tool. Motivated by the immediate scoring and diagnostic feedback provided by MY Access!, students dramatically and quickly improved their writing skills. Teachers also provided each student with individualized, data-driven intervention, using the same instructional and diagnostic feedback.

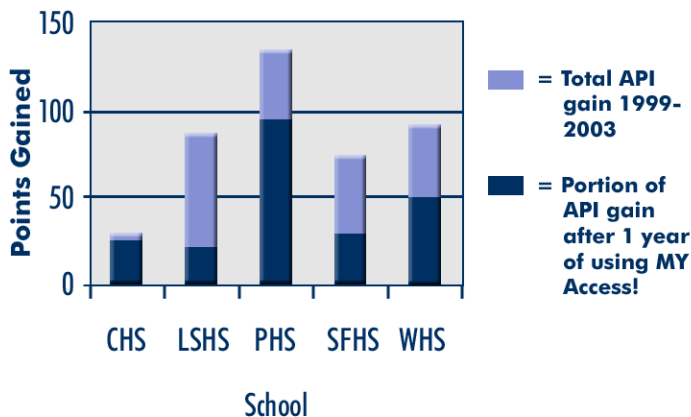
MY Access! is based on a simple premise: Provide students with more frequent opportunities to write, offer them immediate scoring and feedback, and encourage improvement through a continuous, iterative process of writing and revising.

### The Results

Nancy Bosserman, Director of Staff Development and Accountability at Whittier Union High School District, points out, "The students love to write something and then have feedback – instantaneously – as to whether they need work on their mechanics, focus, organization, style, conventions, grammar, whatever." Nicole Luna, a teacher in the District, agrees. "My students have enjoyed working on the Vantage program. It really has given them motivation to not only use computers, but to write, which is an extremely hard task!"

In a span of just over six weeks, the Whittier students who participated in the summer school program showed substantial improvement in their writing performance, gaining, on average, between one-half and one full point on a four point scale. The pilot results were so impressive that Whittier rolled out the use of MY Access! to all ninth- and tenth-graders throughout the District.

**California Academic Performance Index (API) Gains, Whittier High School District**



1) Standards-based teaching coupled with MY Access! writing development instruction had sizeable impact on increasing the API scores for the District's high schools.

- With the assistance of MY Access!, Whittier's 2003 API scores increased to a range of 610 to 687 from former 1999 baseline levels of 480 to 601.

2) Since MY Access! was incorporated in Whittier's curriculum after the pilot program in summer 2001, it has had a sizeable impact on API scores.

- The portion of the gain in API scores from 2002 to 2003 accounted for anywhere from 40% to 87% of the total gains since 1999.
- The two biggest improvements occurred in Pioneer High School and Whittier High School, the two schools in the district with the highest minority and economically disadvantaged populations.