

# Florida Middle School Students Make Orlando Writing Magic!

Eustis Middle School Increases FCAT Writing Scores thanks to the MY Access!® Instructional Writing Program.

Orlando Florida is one of the nation’s fastest growing cities, with a population of 225,000 and is the fourth largest metropolis in the Southeast United States, with close to 2 million people calling the “Greater Orlando Area” home.

Of course, Orlando is also one of the major tourist hubs in the world, with millions of people visiting Disneyworld and Sea World each year. Orlando brings smiles to the faces of millions of children each year, through its world famous theme parks, family-oriented entertainment, the NBA’s Orlando Magic, the city’s spectacular cultural events and it’s year-round sunny weather.

Eustis Florida is a beautiful city, with a population of close to 20,000 located just 20 miles outside of Orlando. While Micky and Shamu may reign supreme just miles away, Eustis is Mustang Country. The city of Eustis takes pride

in the Mustangs of the Eustis Middle School, one of the 11 middle schools in the Lake County School District. The district has a total of more than 38,000 students, in 23 elementary, 11 middle, and 17 high schools.

Eustis Middle School has a rich tradition of success, rooted in its staunch commitment to academics and student enrichment. Just like the Magic of

Orlando in basketball, winning is the bottom line at Eustis. And in Florida, it’s all about the FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test). Success on this high-stakes exam is critical to the ongoing recognition and accreditation of each school and

district.

Writing is a crucial component of the FCAT Test. English and Language Arts teachers throughout Florida spend the

year teaching and preparing students to write well on the Writing portion of the FCAT.

In 2007, Eustis Middle School Assistant Principal Marta Ramirez went in search of the perfect writing program, that would couple the need for FCAT

success with the ideal that making students better writers would help them succeed, not only on high-stakes tests, but in other subject areas as well. “Better writers make better students across the board,” said Ramirez. “But here in Florida, it’s all about the FCATs.”

**“Truly MY Access! is a quality program that is able to bring out the best in students and teachers. Plans are already in motion to expand the program beyond Language Arts Classes.”**

Ms. Ramirez continued, “After some investigation and trials of many programs, we chose Vantage Learning’s MY Access!® instructional writing program. This Web-based writing tutor instantly evaluates and offers suggestions for improving student essays through a simple process: Students write an essay based on a teacher’s assignment, submit the essay to the system, and immediately receive feedback through a rubric-based score.

MY Access! instantly analyzes over 350 semantic, syntactic, and discourse characteristics, and scores the students on focus and meaning, organization, content and development, language use and style, mechanics and conventions, and overall writing proficiency. MY Access! then scores the

essays on a scale of 1 to 6, which provides immediate feedback to students, and saves teachers valuable time to focus on personalized, targeted student instruction instead.

The program debuted in the school in 2007, and was an instant hit among 400 students. But according to Ms. Ramirez, it wasn’t necessarily so among teachers. “The teachers were very skeptical when I introduced the program. They didn’t want to have another ‘new technology’ to learn, or one more item added to their already busy curriculum. However, as soon as the teachers had the chance to use MY Access!, these sentiments easily faded away. Reluctant teachers were literally fighting to use the computer lab to continue using the program. It

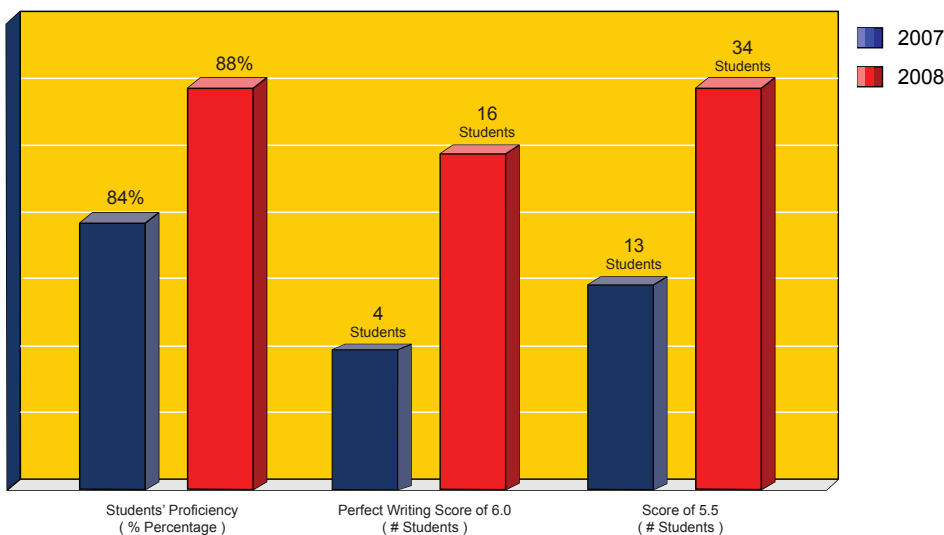
decreased their grading time and allowed them to diagnose the areas in which students needed the most attention.

MY Access! has excited students about writing, excited teachers about technology and excited everyone by helping raise FCAT scores!

Ms. Ramirez continued to glow about the program, “Truly MY Access! is a quality program that is able to bring out the best in students and teachers. Plans are already in motion to expand the program beyond Language Arts Classes.

There it is: Orlando Magic – Eustis takes home the FCAT Championship and is already back out on the court practicing for the 2009 FCATs, with their most vaunted asset: MY Access!

After a few short months of MY Access! use, it was time to take the 2008 FCATs: The results were amazing, compared to just one year before.



**Quick Facts**

**Who:** Eustis Middle School

**What:** Urban Fringe of Mid-Sized City – Orlando, FL

**Where:** Eustis, FL

**When:** MY Access! user since 2007

**Why:** To build better writers and better students and to improve FCAT Writing scores

**How Many:** 400 Students