

Alpine School District has the Write Stuff!

Alpine School District
Sets the Bar for
Writing Achievement
in Utah.

According to the Salt Lake Tribune, “Utah Students Shine in Math, but not Writing.” For a results-oriented state like Utah, the commitment to the advancement of education, especially in the area of writing, is critical as it works to find the answer to the writing challenge.

While the article reports that eighth graders in Utah performed poorly on national writing tests, one district stands in direct contrast to the Tribune’s findings. In fact, the Alpine School District, in the City of Highland, Utah, seems to have found the answer to this challenge – and to making consistent improvement on Direct Writing Assessment (DWA) Scores.

How did they do it?

Alpine School District believes that by promoting literacy across the curriculum and increasing the frequency of writing assignments in order to enhance writing ability, their students will perform better in all subject areas, and become better-rounded as a whole.

In October 2003, the District implemented the MY Access!® online instructional writing program in two of its junior high schools – Lakeridge and Mountain Ridge. MY Access! builds better writers by instantly scoring student essays, and providing

immediate, targeted feedback and focused instruction that engages and motivates students. Plus, the program is fully aligned to the Utah Standards, including the Six Trait Writing rubric.

Using Title II-D funds, the program was initially piloted in Mountain Ridge, a school of approximately 1250 seventh through ninth graders, with class sizes averaging between 30-40 students. MY Access! was an immediate hit with students, teachers and administrators.

“Using MY Access! has provided me with the ability to individualize instruction and provide feedback; and do it when the students need it,” said Kate Ross, an English/Language Arts teacher at Mountain Ridge, who has been using MY Access! since the initial pilot.

The results of using MY Access! were swift and powerful, as students measurably increased their writing skills – and essay scores – during the first two years of use.

When students use MY Access! to

write an essay based on a teacher’s assignment, the program instantly analyzes more than 300 semantic, syntactic, and discourse characteristics, and scores student essays on overall writing proficiency as well as five specific areas: focus and meaning; organization; content and development; language use and style; and mechanics

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and conventions.

“Better writers make better critical thinkers,” Rachel Thompson, the Secondary Language Arts Specialist for the District, points out. “The more students write, the more they become open to new ideas and thoughts that help them thrive in all subject areas. And writers get better by writing – it is that simple. That is where MY Access! comes in.”

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