

# Alpine School District has the Write Stuff!

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

**A**ccording 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.”

Due to the overwhelming increase in its students’ writing performance, the District has gone on to implement MY Access! in 17 more schools in the past three years. Students’ writing ability, confidence in their skills, and increase in test scores have continued to improve

steadily and dramatically.

Alpine School District has remained confident in MY Access! and loyal to the product because, according to Mrs.

Ross, "No other product has compared in its offerings for districts, schools, teachers and students."

Ms. Thompson concurs. "We greatly appreciate Vantage's openness and receptiveness to teacher feedback. Vantage is constantly working to improve the product, and much of this is

based on actual suggestions and feedback from teachers. Vantage truly listens to what we have to say; and that benefits our students greatly. As our population grows and becomes more diverse, we are very excited about continuing to use MY Access! to make better students out of ALL of our kids."

During this school year, the district intends to create grade level common assessments and benchmarks using MY Access!, and Alpine School District students have already submitted more than 50,000 essays. In Mountain Ridge alone, more than 10,000 essays have been completed this year by its 1255 participating students in 7th, 8th and 9th grades.

"Teachers are becoming more and more comfortable navigating through the program, so implementation has become a lot easier. We expect to see these numbers continue to grow at Mountain Ridge and district-wide as we incorporate MY Access! into more and more initiatives," Mrs. Ross added.

The commitment to Professional and Teacher Development is critical to the success of MY Access! – or any technology program – in classrooms.

Alpine School District employs a MY Access! district trainer, who offers at least two comprehensive training sessions during the course of the school year.

A committee of lead teachers from each school meets with the district trainer once a month

for ongoing professional development training, implementation support, and school data analysis. The lead teachers then return to their buildings and provide their peers with support and continued training.

"MY Access! has completely changed how we are able to teach writing at Mountain Ridge," notes Mrs. Ross. "Our class sizes are large and it is increasingly difficult to provide timely feedback to the students. MY Access! has allowed us to assign more writing, provide students with more feedback on their writing, develop common grade-level assessments, and create informed classroom instruction based on sophisticated and comprehensive reports."

Alpine School District is confident that once the 2007 Utah Writing Scores are released later this year, the district will continue to show marked improvement, reinforcing that their decision to use MY Access! is "The Write One!"

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### 9th Grade Direct Writing Assessment Scores 2005 vs. 2006

% Passed	2005	2006
American Fork *	89%	89%
Canyon View*	87%	93%
Lakeridge	88%	96%
Mountain Ridge	87%	96%
Oak Canyon*	86%	95%
Pleasant Grove*	86%	93%
Timberline*	93%	95%
Willowcreek*	88%	89%

The schools marked with an asterisk did not use MY Access during the 2004-2005 school year, but did use it in 2005-2006.

#### Quick Facts

**Who:** Alpine School District

**What:** Urban fringe of a mid-size city

**Where:** The City of Highland, Utah

**When:** MY Access! user since 2003

**Why:** Stronger writers make better overall students and critical thinkers, so the district utilizes MY Access! in order to build confidence and improve writing skills.

**How Many:** Approximately 14,000 students in 17 schools throughout the district.