It Takes a Village to Raise a Writer!

The Ann Arbor Public Schools Educational Foundation is committed to helping all Ann Arbor Public Schools students achieve their highest potential by providing community support for innovative and excellent educational opportunities within the Ann Arbor Public Schools. At the heart of the Foundation’s mission is the ideal that excellence in education is an essential component of the community’s economic vitality, and that the success of the Ann Arbor community, its schools, and its businesses are tightly interwoven—success for one means success for all.

This has never been more evident than in 2007, when the Foundation called upon the “Village to Raise a Writer,” thanks to an innovative community-wide initiative to increase students’ literacy and writing skills through classroom and volunteer collaboration. The program at the heart of the campaign is Vantage Learning’s MY Access®, an award-winning Web-based writing program that builds better writers by instantly scoring student essays, and providing immediate remedial instruction that engages and motivates students.

Ann Arbor School District was first introduced to MY Access! in 2004. After much research and comparison of products and competitors, the district selected MY Access! to pilot with 2,000 middle school students. Educators liked the immediate, detailed feedback that students received on their essays, and were impressed with how the program helps teachers focus instruction on those areas where students need the most assistance.

In addition to improving student’s writing, the program makes teachers more versatile, as they have more time to focus on areas of student improvement and on teaching—time that was previously spent grading essays by hand. Both students and teachers receive an overview of the student’s overall progress, as well as more specific feedback on how the student is doing in five areas of writing: focus & meaning; content & development; organization; language use, voice & style; and mechanics & conventions. MY Access! also provides bilingual support for English Language Learners, and contains a diverse selection of prompts which can be used in math, science and social studies as well as English Language Arts, making it a versatile program across the curriculum.

As a result of the overwhelming...
positive response from teachers and the improvement in students’ overall writing, the district purchased additional MY Access! licenses for more than 5,000 students in grades 4-12. As MY Access! use increases throughout the district, educators continue to witness improved student literacy rates and—best of all—increased student appreciation for, and enjoyment of, the writing process.

After seeing the success of the program in the schools, the Ann Arbor Public Schools Educational Foundation allocated $50,000 for its literacy campaign, encompassing both student licenses for MY Access! and professional development for staff in 33 schools.

Educational leadership has long recognized that effective professional development programs are those that use powerful teaching and learning tools for an overall positive impact on student achievement. Both the district and the Foundation have embraced this ideal, and have committed to the best possible teacher training and implementation of MY Access!.

As part of the grant, 15 teachers from Ann Arbor Public Schools will receive in-depth training on the MY Access! program, which includes interactive research components, detailed data on student progress, and lively exercises. These teachers will then train other teachers as well as representatives from local learning centers, after-school groups, and other non-profit organizations who will provide students with free high-speed Internet access and after-school tutoring at their facilities.

“MY Access! has united our town around a love for learning and language.”

“MY Access! has united our town around a love for learning and language and has quickly become the driving force behind this unique community partnership,” says Wendy Correll, Executive Director of Ann Arbor Public Schools Educational Foundation. “The fun, inspirational program gives everyone the opportunity to make a difference, whether you’re the student building new writing skills, the teacher enhancing the classroom environment, or the volunteer helping kids with their homework. It’s an incredible way to engage all of our citizens in public education, and endow our students with critical communication skills.”

Quick Facts

Who: Ann Arbor Public Schools and AAPS Educational Foundation

What: Mid-Size City

Where: The City of Ann Arbor, MI

When: MY Access! user since 2004

Why: AAPS Educational Foundation’s Literacy Campaign to enhance student’s writing and produce better results across the curriculum.

How Many: Approximately 5,000 students in 33 schools district-wide.