

## ESOL Students' Writing Shines in Florida!

Miami Students Turn up the Heat on FCAT Writing Scores using MY Access!® Instructional Writing Program!

**M**iami, Florida has tremendous pride in its cultural heritage, and renowned traditions. The city is known around the world for its arts, entertainment and events that embrace its culture.

Recognized as an international hub, Miami successfully hosted the 4th annual Latin Grammy Awards, a visit from the Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Summit.

The City of Miami is the largest municipality in Miami-Dade County... Miami, which is known as the Gateway to Latin America, attracts a tremendous amount of foreign born people, resulting in a large Latin American population that includes Cubans, Nicaraguans, Colombians, Venezuelans, Puerto Ricans, Argentines, Ecuadorians, Brazilians, Dominicans, Haitians and Mexicans. According to the U.S. census, Miami has a 60 percent Hispanic population.

The Miami-Dade School District, the largest in Florida, carries its own proud tradition of success. Like the city, the School District boasts one of the most culturally diverse student populations in the country.

One of the challenges facing the District is how to succeed on the English Language writing portion of the FCAT (Florida's High-Stakes Exam), when such a high percentage of its students speak English as a Second Language (ELL/ESOL).

In 2007, the District went in search of a solution to the challenge, and it is clear that one of its 218 Elementary Schools -- Dr. Bowman Foster Ashe Elementary School -- has found a solution: the MY Access! online instructional writing program

from Vantage Learning. The school, according to Language Arts Teacher Angela Nunez, and Assistant Principal Patti Perez, is an ideal one in which to use MY Access! "Ashe has a 90% ESOL

student population, so it was vitally important for us to find the right combination of technology, student engagement tools and professional development to allow our ESOL



students to embrace the English language and prepare for the FCAT Tests, where the ability to understand and write in English is a main objective." Based on this ideal, the school implemented MY Access! with nearly 500 students in fourth grade.

A feature of MY Access! that benefits ESOL students (or ELL, ESL) at elementary, middle and high schools across the world is

the instant feedback students can receive in their native language. Students submit essays in English, and can receive instant, targeted feedback and instruction in seven different languages.

Ms. Nunez was incredibly impressed with the feature, and is encouraging her students to get as much instruction as they can in English in order to master the language at a younger age and score higher on the FCAT Writing Tests.

To use MY Access!, students write an essay based on a teacher's assignment, and submit it to the Web-based system. The program instantly analyzes over 350 semantic, syntactic and discourse characteristics, and scores the essay on focus and meaning, organization, content and development, language use and style, mechanics and conventions, and overall writing proficiency.

According to Ms. Nunez, "Our students have benefited enormously from this program. Our students are so enthusiastic about using MY Access! and receiving their feedback right away. They have been writing

and revising more than ever, and feel challenged and motivated to continue to improve."

One of the most unique aspects of teaching writing with MY Access! is that teachers no

longer spend every spare minute scoring essays and marking corrections that students seldom read. "I can check an individual student's progress from essay to essay or check how my entire class is doing on an

essay. The data I obtain is very meaningful in helping me pinpoint where my students need instruction," continued Ms. Nunez.

While success on the FCAT Writing Tests in the spring is crucially important to Ms. Nunez and to the School District, she adds that MY Access! provides much more than test preparation. "Using MY Access! allows my students to think and to show their voice as a writer, something they have been hesitant to do in the past. Our students' essay scores increased, but more importantly, so has their confidence. I hope my students can use MY Access! throughout

their education and into other subject areas."

According to Assistant Principal Patti Perez, "Since we started using MY Access!, I've seen a dramatic difference in students' eagerness to write. Many of our students come from homes where they had little contact with computers. MY Access! gives them the chance to perfect their writing skills while also perfecting their technology and typing skills, all of which are so important for kids today," Perez continued.

There is no doubt that the students and teachers at Ashe Elementary in Miami are a tremendous example of how technology, coupled with dedicated students and teachers, have shined bright in the "Sunshine State." The Heat is on as the FCAT Writing Tests approach; and these great students are ready for the challenge!

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#### Quick Facts

**Who:** Ashe Elementary School

**What:** Urban District – Miami-Dade

**Where:** Miami, FL

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

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

**How Many:** 500 students