

Friday Night Writes!

Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD in Dallas, TX
Grooms
Championship-Level
Writers with MY
Access!®

Dallas, Texas, is well known for one of the greatest pro football dynasties of all time, the Dallas Cowboys. Perhaps less celebrated, but just as important, the city is also home to the Carrollton-Farmers Branch Independent School District. And in CFB, academic excellence is strived for just as much as excellence on the field.

The school district encompasses 53.42 square miles and more than 40 schools; it provides instructional services to 26,222 children who live in portions of Carrollton, Farmers Branch, Addison, Coppell, Dallas, and Irving.

In 2006, the district's Coordinator of Language Arts, Dr. Shirley Wright, who served as co-chair of the English Language Arts and Reading Committee for drafting the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for grades K-12, and Erica Ysbrandt, Secondary ELA Instructional Specialist, went in search of the ideal writing program, in order to

build championship students through the practice of writing, and score touchdowns on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

They decided that the MY Access!® online instructional writing program was the perfect coach for both their students and teachers.

The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) is a primary and secondary education standardized test used in Texas to assess student attainment of skills in core academic areas, including writing and reading, required under Texas education standards. On certain TAKS tests, students are required to respond to short answer questions and create a

written composition in addition to answering multiple-choice questions.

According to Ms. Ysbrandt,

“Preparing for the TAKS tests were certainly a major reason why we piloted MY Access!. But we believe in teaching beyond the test, and that literacy builds lifelong skills.



We saw that ideal come to life in MY Access!.”

CFB piloted MY Access! with 700 tenth graders in two of its high schools, Ranchview and R.L. Turner. “We were impressed right away with the instant, but detailed feedback, and the confidence it instilled in the students to keep writing. They kept on writing and they got better. We cannot say enough

about the MY Access! program!” Ms. Ysbrandt enthuses.

MY Access! contains multilingual capabilities, which help improve the writing skills of the district’s English Language Learners (ELL), who comprise approximately 25 percent of the student population. MY Access! tutoring and editing feedback is available in multiple

languages, giving ELL teachers the ability to adapt the program based on students’ English proficiency. Its unique translation feature lets ELL students write in English, but receive feedback and corrections in their native language.

“We have a very large Hispanic population,” continues Ms. Ysbrandt. “In fact, here at R.L. Turner, we have 70% Hispanic students, so the ability to receive feedback in Spanish was absolutely critical to our students’ success.” According to one ESL student, “MY Access! was the first time I was really able to talk.”

Due to the overwhelming positive

results, the district has increased its users to more than 4,500 students (almost 7 times the number of students

involved in the pilot) in two additional high schools, Newman-Smith and Creekview. In fact, Creekview’s students submitted 257 essays in less than 24 hours after having MY Access! installed in its classrooms.

MY Access! has also been implemented at CFB’s Early College Campus and at one of its alternative schools, Mary Grimes Academy, whose principal, Bob Tipton, was willing to put up his own money so that his students could benefit from the program.

Ms. Ysbrandt expects more students to be using MY Access! in the coming months and years and adds, “The expansion has already begun. The teacher trainings are key and one of the best parts of the model is being able to coach and mentor new teachers to use MY Access! to its fullest extent.”

Championships are won in Texas,

and it appears that the Carrollton-Farmers Branch Independent School District is well on its way to taking home another: The Writing Championship!



Quick Facts

Who: Carrollton-Farmers Branch Independent School District

What: Mid-Size City

Where: Dallas, TX

When: MY Access! user since 2006

Why: To build better writers, students and critical thinkers and prepare for TAKS Test

How Many: Approximately 4,500 students district-wide