

Viva MY Access!®

Students and Teachers in Marion, Arkansas “Shake, Rattle and Write” their way to a 31% Increase in AR State Test Scores using MY Access!®

“ There’s a Whole Lotta’ Writin’ Goin’ on in the Marion School District in Marion, AR. ”

Although accurate, this sentence would immediately be flagged for correction by the award-winning instructional program the District has used to build better writers and improve standardized test scores.

While Elvis Presley and his music still rule in nearby Memphis, education is King in Marion – and in 2005, Marion Junior High Principal John Heath, a world-renowned collector of Elvis memorabilia, said, “It’s time to improve students’ writing – it’s now or never.” With that, Heath went on a mission to find the best way and the best tools to make his students better writers, which he believed would make them better students across the curriculum. “He did it his way,” and after much research and product comparison, Heath implemented Vantage Learning’s MY Access!® instructional writing program for use by 325 Marion Junior High students.

“In literacy, it’s a known fact that the more you write, the more your skills are going to improve,” Heath points out, reflecting his belief that students need to write more in school. Using MY

Access!, students have the ability to receive instant feedback on their work, which allows teachers to work with students on the revision process as many times as needed to improve their work and identify key areas of strength and improvement. In addition, time formerly spent by teachers grading essays by hand can now be replaced with valuable student instruction.

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 students on focus and meaning, organization, content and development, language use and style, mechanics and conventions, and overall writing proficiency. MY Access! then scores the essays on a scale of 1 to 6, provides immediate feedback to

students, and saves teachers valuable time to focus on personalized, targeted student instruction instead.

Elizabeth Burroughs is the Junior High English teacher responsible for familiarizing students and teachers with the program – and the results speak for themselves. In just six weeks of use, students so dramatically improved their writing that Burroughs and Heath, under the direction of



District Superintendent Dan Shepherd and Technology Coordinator Tim Taylor, drove funds for the program and purchased computers to put MY Access! in Marion Middle School as well.

The most unique aspect of teaching writing with MY Access! is that teachers no longer spend every spare minute marking corrections that students seldom read. Now, says Ms. Burroughs, “I am co-editor with my

students; I am able to make those “red pen” comments before a grade is taken. A student never cares more about a clause error than before his essay is submitted. I also like the many prompt choices and have never run out of assignments that are relevant to our current lesson. I don’t have to stop teaching my reading assignment on writing days since the topics fit in well with all themes.”

This unique combination of online essay scoring and test preparation, provided by MY Access! and teacher use of this tool, produced staggering results. Marion Junior High School posted a 31% gain in literacy on the state benchmark exams in one year of using MY Access!. According to Ms. Burroughs, “To me, this incredible gain is supported by the use of MY Access!”

When asked for her thoughts on why the program was so successful and such an overwhelming hit with the students, Ms. Burroughs reflected, “The students really enjoy trying to beat IntelliMetric®

(the scoring engine in MY Access!). They love the challenge of competing with a machine much as they do with their video games. Parents also like having access to their child’s essay portfolio. As one of my co-workers stated, the choice of MY Access! is a no-brainer.”

This no-brainer, which produced such solid gains, has caused the district to expand its use of MY Access! from the original 325 licenses in 2005 to a total of almost 2,000 across its junior high, middle school and high school campuses – bringing total MY Access! use among students to more than half of the district’s 3,700 student population.

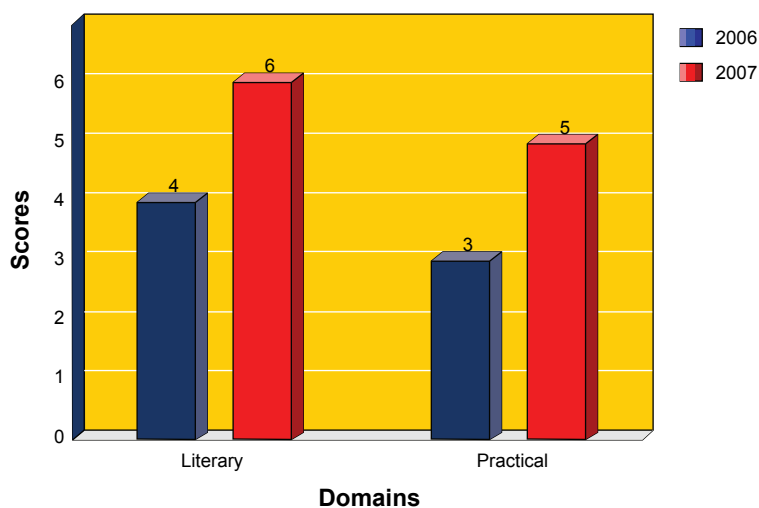
Ms. Burroughs continued, “As we begin our third year with MY Access!, Marion Junior High School continues to help students raise their state criterion reference test scores. The most dramatic results are on the essay writing test in the areas of content and style. The constant practice with writing has

also had a positive effect on the reading portion of the test where we also saw improvements in the open response questions.”

Marion Junior High has not been the only school to boost their writing scores. Marion Middle School has increased their benchmark scores by a whopping 11%. “Viva! MY Access!,” sang Marion Middle School Principal Dr. Robin Catt. “We are so impressed with this program and the training and support we receive each step of the way. We are confident our scores will continue to rise, but more importantly, our students will continue to write more, which can only help them as they enter higher education and the workforce.”

So, Don’t Be Cruel – Marion students have rocked and proven that, when it comes to writing, they are the true Kings!

Class of 2011 Open Response



State benchmark reading test open response scores from 7th to 8th grades, supported by the use of MY Access! text-based prompts.

Quick Facts

Who: Marion School District

What: Urban fringe of a mid-sized city

Where: The City of Marion, AR

When: MY Access! user since 2005

Why: To build better writers and better students and to improve test scores

How Many:
 Junior High: 601 users
 Middle School: 622 users
 High School: 638 users