

Students and Teachers at Texas Magnet School are on the Write Path!

A.J. Moore Academy in Waco Tackles TAKS Writing Test and College Readiness with MY Access!®

Just like on the field, you have to play hard, smart and aggressively to win; and in the end it all comes down to the points on the board. It's hard to argue with these results: on this year's Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills Writing Test, passing scores at A.J. Moore Academy Magnet School in Waco increased 10% - 22% over last year's performance, ranging from 87% to 96%! And even more impressive, the Special Education population of A.J. Moore achieved a 100% passing rate!

The heart, determination and desire to succeed shown by students and teachers at this magnet school are as big as the great State of Texas. Success for students beyond graduation is the goal of everyone who walks through the doors at the Academy, where students are prepared to excel academically, physically and socially. The school has taken careful steps

and great pride in ensuring each graduate has a solid foundation upon which to rely (and an advantage on the playing field) when making his or her way into college, the workforce and beyond.

A.J. Moore is a Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (T-STEM) Academy which boasts award-winning engineering/technology and business/ entrepreneurship programs, including regular and advanced high school courses with an emphasis on practical applications. Students participate in internships as part of their studies. Technical systems classes expose students to different careers in biomedicine,

technology, computer-assisted design, aerodynamics and audio/video production. Information technology, electronics and engineering are based on state-of-the-art science and technology programs, and video conferencing is used to provide unique course offerings. After 10th grade, advanced placement courses help students jump-start their

college careers. Business skills are infused into the rich curriculum, based on input from community business partners.

What's at the heart of A.J. Moore's philosophy of success? Great writers make great students, which make great thinkers, which make anything possible. The question was, "How do we build better writers at A.J. Moore?" With this in mind, in 2006, Principal Dr. Debra Bishop and Assistant Principal/Director of Career Academies Angela Reiher, began searching for the ideal writing improvement program.

After much research and comparison of products and competitors, the duo recommended the MY Access!® online instructional writing program. They were particularly impressed with the



Comparison of TAKS Writing Scores by Population	2006	2007
10th Grade African American	74% Passing	96% Passing
10th Grade Hispanic	78% Passing	87% Passing
10th Grade Economically Disadvantaged	75% Passing	90% Passing
11th Grade African American	74% Passing	81% Passing
11th Grade Hispanic	73% Passing	75% Passing
11th Grade Economically Disadvantaged	75% Passing	81% Passing

immediate, detailed feedback that students received on their essays, and how the program helps teachers target instruction to areas where students need additional assistance.

The school implemented MY Access! in January 2007 with 600 students in grades 9, 10 and 11, as well as in the special education program. A.J. Moore knew it had to practice to compete in its Super Bowl of assessment: the TAKS Writing Test, given to 10th and 11th graders – and which was scheduled in just three short months. Practice was the key; and teachers instantly started coaching students to improve their writing using MY Access!.

Ms. Reiher says the teachers and students alike were instantly impressed and intrigued by the program’s features and the possibilities it provided. “We were especially struck by the instant and extensive feedback the program offered,” she explains. “Not only does the program tell the student what he has done wrong, but what he needs to do to improve. This feedback is essential to improving test scores and building student confidence.”

After just three months of MY Access! use, A.J. Moore experienced phenomenal increases in the TAKS Writing scores across the student population, with the largest increase occurring in the Academy’s 10th grade African American students (see sidebar for details). And in what has to be considered a performance on par with some of the awesome big-game Cowboy wins, the

Special Education population of A.J. Moore scored – that’s right! –100% passing!

The District directly attributes the significant increase in test results to the implementation of MY Access!. “In order to write better, students have to practice their writing,” Ms. Reiher notes. “This is where MY Access! was invaluable. The students almost saw it as a game. They were so excited to beat their last score. While they were competing, they were drastically improving their writing at the same time.”

In addition to improving test

scores, MY Access! 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.

“The program is great for teachers,” continued Ms. Reiher. “While students are engaged in the actual writing assignment, teachers can focus on individualized instruction and with the instant feedback, teachers can assign more writing opportunities to students. The way to become a better writer is to write more, and MY Access! provides this important opportunity.”

“Everyone wants to know how our scores went up. We tell them there is only one way to do it. MY Access!”

In addition to the great teacher experience, MY Access! gives each student a unique and fun experience. The program contains interactive pre-writing exercises and other resources such as a thesaurus, editor and tutor that help prepare students for their writing assignment. “The program is so student-friendly, in that students often view the program in the same mindset as they would a video game. Students often say, ‘I got a 3 in mechanics, but I bet I make a 4 next time,’” beamed a proud Ms. Reiher.

Due to the tremendous benefits of the program, 5 campuses in Waco are now using MY Access! as part of a district “Writing Across the Curriculum” initiative.

According to Dr. Bishop, “A lot of educators tour our school, as we are a pilot; and we are telling everyone we meet about MY Access!. Everyone wants to know how our scores went up. We tell them there is only one way to do it. MY Access!”

Ms. Reiher agrees. “Better writers make better students, employees and overall communicators. We believe in building great writers, who will no doubt be the legacy of A.J. Moore. We salute programs like MY Access! for helping us make this possible.”

Quick Facts

Who: A.J. Moore Academy Magnet School

What: Mid-Size City

Where: Waco ISD, TX

When: MY Access! user since 2006

Why: To enhance students’ writing and produce better results across the curriculum.

How Many: Approximately 600 students in 9th, 10th and 11th grades