



Southeastern and MY Access!®: Supporting Writing Across the Disciplines in Career Technical Education



Southeastern Regional Vocational School District, MA

There is a prevailing misconception that vocational school academics are “easier” than traditional high school academics because students “only have to learn a trade during their time in high school.” As any Vo-Tech educator will tell you, this couldn’t be further from the truth.

In actuality, students who attend a career technical school, like Southeastern Regional Vocational Technical High School in South Easton, MA, tend to be challenged more broadly than other comprehensive school students. Not only do they master skills in a specific trade, but students also prepare for college in their academic courses.

As well as teaching traditional reading, writing, math and critical thinking skills, the school also addresses individual student needs through differentiated instruction and by embracing technology. One significant way Southeastern Regional uses technology in the classroom is with MY Access!®, a Web-based writing and assessment platform.



All 1,200 students are currently using the platform in the academic and career technical classes to ensure they are proficient writers.

Southeastern Regional services a high-risk population. More than 60 percent of its students come from low-income households. Yet, educators at Southeastern Regional understand that all of their students are 21st-century learners and believe that all have the right to be exposed to the same high-level curriculum. MY Access!®

was introduced to the school in 2008 by its director of academics, Heidi Driscoll.

“Because we’re a vocational school, not all of our teachers are traditionally trained in teaching writing,” said Driscoll. “Essay writing is crucial, and we wanted to help our teachers calibrate their correcting. MY Access!® has really helped us.”

Bolstering remediation, MY Access!® engages students by providing immediate, detailed and developmentally appropriate prescriptive feedback to their writing. This feedback includes revision plans with examples to help students focus edits,

recommendations for improvement and identification of errors in grammar, style and mechanics.

With the platform, teachers are making timely, data-driven decisions for successful differentiated instruction and motivating students to continue the writing process. Then, as students write more frequently, their writing improves.

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Southeastern began using the platform with a select group of its English teachers, who used it as part of their midterm and final exams. During that initial year, the school saw a 20 percent increase in Proficient/Advanced scores on the state Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System tests. Though the increase may be attributed to a combination of initiatives, there was a lot of positive buzz about MY Access!®.

Because of its early success, Southeastern rolled out MY Access!® to all English teachers. It wasn’t long before other programs, including vocational ones,

Spotlight on Success Southeastern Regional Vocational School District, MA

began asking for it. Now, all departments use MY Access!®, and the career technical courses have seen great improvement among their students, including one program that saw a 40 percent score increase between the first submission in September and the last submission in March.

“The way our classes are scheduled, students have vocational classes for six days and then academic classes for six days,” said Driscoll. “So, before MY Access!®, some students weren’t exposed to academic writing for at least six days. MY Access!® now bridges that gap and students are writing all the time.”

Ms. Driscoll hoped that MY Access!® would help motivate an increase in writing and writing revisions at Southeastern. Because of the time it takes for a teacher to correct a handwritten essay, the feedback alone students received was much less meaningful. As Ms. Driscoll also pointed out, her digital natives need instant feedback to make their essays the best they could be.

“I have students waiting outside of my office working on an essay on their portable devices,” said Driscoll. “They’re trying to resubmit their essays to get a better score, all so that they can tell me the good news. ‘I’ve submitted my essay 13 times, but now I’m almost at a 6!’ Kids didn’t talk about writing before MY Access!®. Now they have instant gratification. It keeps them motivated.”

Ms. Driscoll goes on to say that all of Southeastern’s teachers are very comfortable with the program. While the English teachers may use it for assessment purposes, math, history and science classes use it for open response items, and career technical classes

use it for quarterly term papers. However, that was not the case when the program was implemented originally.

“Some teachers’ initial reaction was, ‘What, are you trying to replace us?!’ Some were very anti-technology; they didn’t want the computers in their classrooms. Now? They absolutely love it. It has become such a major part of their instruction,” said Driscoll.

“Teachers also enjoy the program because it seems as though they’re no longer the bad guy,” joked Driscoll. “Instead of being the ones giving a student a poor grade, they get to act more like a coach and help the student improve his work.”

Beyond helping teachers implement and streamline effective writing instruction, MY Access!® helps Southeastern, and schools like it, align to common core and state standards. For Massachusetts, there are shared, consistent writing expectations across all content areas. These include all subjects assessing writing regularly, using the same standards and rubrics, and teachers ensuring that students adhere to the conventions of the English language and produce writing that communicates clearly and effectively.

Ms. Driscoll regularly recommends MY Access!® to other vocational schools. She noted that the platform complements career technical education because it increases opportunities for writing feedback during a

vocational cycle; promotes common standards of writing across academic and vocational disciplines; helps teachers and students speak a common vocabulary; and provides

instant support for teachers who need to meet writing assignment requirements but were not traditionally trained in ELA or writing.

“One feature of MY Access!® that impresses me is that each teacher has total control over the platform,” said Driscoll. “A teacher can change the program settings, turning off tutoring help in the case of an assessment, or allowing students to use word banks for instructional

purposes. Teachers have the freedom to make it their own tool.”

Ms. Driscoll outlined other key benefits for teachers, such as Web-based learning with access to the program anywhere from the Internet, real-time reporting with diagnostic reports for instantaneous feedback and to better differentiate instruction, and the message center that allows teachers and students to communicate easily.

“Writing is crucial to all areas of education. Students should be writing on a daily basis everywhere. Just because a teacher isn’t classically trained as a writing instructor, doesn’t mean that they shouldn’t expect the same kind of writing that a student would hand in to an English instructor. This tool helps us bridge the gap and truly support common writing expectations across the curriculum.”