

## VANTAGE LEARNING Measuring Success One Student at a Time

# **Spotlight on Success**

For Beaumont Independent School District: MY Access!<sup>®</sup> + Professional Development = Higher Assessment Scores



Beaumont Independent School District, TX

hanks to the MY Access!® instructional writing and assessment platform, as well as Vantage Learning's dynamic professional development, students in the Beaumont Independent School District in Jefferson County, Texas, are making measurable gains in their writing.

### "I really do love MY Access!® For me to say that it has improved my writing instruction would be an understatement." —Jacob Jett

Jacob Jett is the seventh grade English specialist at Marshall Middle School in Beaumont, where he has taught for seven years. In addition to classroom teaching, Jett and his colleague Jeffrey Farley write curriculum and create assessments in language arts for varying grade levels.

Mr. Farley, an eighth grade English language arts teacher, has been



teaching at Marshall Middle School for six years, previously teaching eighth grade English Language Arts. It was in that role that he first was introduced to MY Access!<sup>®</sup>. He and Mr. Jett attended a

three-day training when MY Access!<sup>®</sup> was first brought to his district in 2008.

"When I was first sent to training for MY Access!®, I distinctly remember going in and sitting with my arms across my chest," said Farley. "I was not buying what I had heard about MY Access!®. 'A

program that can do all

that they say it can? No way.' I've been to a lot of in-services in my 11 years, and I've been promised a lot. I've seen a lot of programs that were touted to be the holy grail of writing, and I just assumed MY Access!<sup>®</sup> would just be another one."

# You know what they say about assumptions...

Though he went into the training with suspicions, Mr. Farley says he came out after lunch "having drunk the Kool-Aid."

"The impact on writing that we've seen over the past few years has been amazing. And those results are consistent year after year. MY Access!® has become fundamental to the curriculum."

"Our trainer provided the right kind of information about MY Access!<sup>®</sup>," said Farley. "The facts she presented were fair, and she really leveled with the teachers on the program's capabilities.

> But one of the most valuable aspects of the training was how MY Access!<sup>®</sup> would be integrated with the current curriculum."

#### Crunch time

In Texas, seventh-graders were taking a writing exam as part of their Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test. TAKS is a standards-based test that measures how well students

are mastering specific skills defined for each grade by the state of Texas.

When BISD first signed on to the program and sent the teachers into training, it was mid-January. Not surprisingly, the teachers were already prepping their students for the TAKS exam scheduled for the first week of March, leaving teachers with only a few weeks to use MY Access!® before test time—another reason for Mr. Farley's initial skepticism. However, after only two days of training, Mr. Farley and Mr. Jett both felt they were comfortable with the program and had already set up their classes in the platform.

#### Plato once said, "The beginning is the most important part of the work."

"The structure of the introduction had a huge impact on my implementation of the program in the classroom," said Farley. "I was able to take the kids straight to the computer lab and get them writing. After working with the students to get them on track, I saw that they were writing and I was really heartened by this."

In the end, Mr. Farley worked with his students on two separate prompts before the TAKS exam. "I was truly astounded. Kids who hadn't been writing all year were writing. Like Mr. Jett and I, they were jumping in with both feet. I was really excited about the program when we came out of training. By the time I saw the kids using it, I was sold."

#### Surpassing standards in the Lone Star State

In 2011, 98 percent of the seventhgraders at Marshall Middle School met or exceeded the Texas standards for writing. Overall, 93 percent of the Beaumont Independent School District's seventh-grade students hit this benchmark, and based on its high TAKS scores, the district is rated exemplary in writing. Because of its success at the middleschool level, BISD extended the program to high school students. Mr. Farley also trained some elementary school teachers on MY Access!<sup>®</sup>.

"Our fourth-grade teachers demoed the program, and we told them that they need to go back and tell their principals that they want this program. Why? First, because of the impact it's had on our students. Second, the fourth-graders have to write a narrative for

their exam, but then don't write again until the sixth grade. There's an obvious lull in writing education that can be addressed by the program. And finally, kids that age are sponges. If fourth- and fifth-graders came to us already knowing how to use the program, we'd be able to get them writing right away."

#### New assessment, same great results

Beginning in the 2011–2012 school year, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, or STAAR, replaced the TAKS. MY Access!<sup>®</sup> already included specific prompts that are aligned to STARR. Through professional development provided by Vantage Learning, BISD receives scope and sequence training that touches on every standard that will be assessed by the exam, enabling teachers to include appropriate initiatives in their curriculum.

"I think some teachers are confused because they believe a program like MY Access!<sup>®</sup> is becoming the only writing

"I have absolutely loved having MY Access!® in my classroom," said Jett. "I said this earlier, but I will say it again: MY Access!® does what I can't do as one teacher in a classroom of 25 students." tool they are supposed to use in their classroom," said Jett. "This is definitely an incorrect assumption. When employed as one tool that a teacher uses along with a variety of other writing strategies, MY Access!<sup>®</sup> is amazing."

"Despite how enthusiastic I felt coming out of training, my expectations

for MY Access!<sup>®</sup> have still been surpassed," said Farley. "The impact on writing that we've seen over the past few years has been amazing. And those results are consistent year after year. MY Access!<sup>®</sup> has become fundamental to the curriculum."

#### What else is there to say?

"I have absolutely loved having MY Access!<sup>®</sup> in my classroom," said Jett. "I said this earlier, but I will say it again: MY Access!<sup>®</sup> does what I can't do as one teacher in a classroom of 25 students. It has changed the way I teach writing, and it has changed the way that students look at writing. It made writing no longer a tedious, boring process that most students feared and dreaded. It made it a process that students look forward to."

