



MARION COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

Jasper, Tennessee

Sarah Ziegler, Teacher, English Language Arts

PROFILE

School District:
Marion County Schools

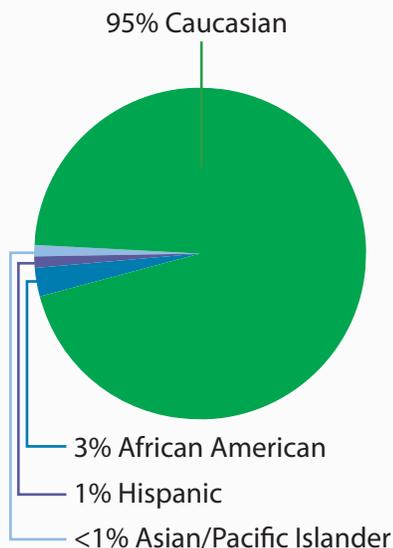
District Enrollment:
4,176 students

School Enrollment:
490

Grades:
9-12

Free/Reduced Price Lunch:
61.7%

Ethnicity:



CHALLENGE

It wasn't that the students at Marion County High School didn't have good ideas – they had a lot of them. But it was difficult to tell from their writing. Their teachers couldn't see those good ideas when they were covered in the red ink of grammar and spelling corrections.

The traditional practice of grading written work wasn't getting these students, the vast majority from low-income backgrounds, past the basics. And with the new Common Core State Standards' emphasis on writing, teachers felt stuck. They were focusing on rudimentary mechanics of writing, instead of helping students take on higher-level writing skills they'd need, such as organization, sentence fluency, word choice, and voice.

SOLUTION

Marion County first purchased Pearson's WriteToLearn™ in 2011 for its 9th- through 12th-grade English classes. With WriteToLearn, students build the literacy skills outlined in the new Common Core State Standards by practicing essay writing and summarization skills, and their efforts are measured by Pearson's Knowledge Analysis Technologies™ (KAT) engine. WriteToLearn places strong emphasis on the comprehension and analysis of the types of informational texts detailed in the new standards, and writing prompts are specifically targeted so students practice the informational and argumentative skills required by the Common Core.

The students took to it immediately. They logged into their own accounts via classroom PCs, and quickly immersed themselves into summarizing reading passages and writing essays. For each



assignment, students see their scores right after submitting work, along with tips to improve writing and reinforce positive writing habits. Sarah Ziegler, the first teacher to teach with WriteToLearn, found that her students liked this “competitive” aspect – they were motivated to beat past scores, while Ziegler tracked how all the exercises improved their writing.

The assessment tools also helped Ziegler see beyond grammar and spelling issues. She could get an overall picture of where the entire class needed to improve, as well as see individual ability levels.

“Before WriteToLearn, I would spend most of my planning period marking up grammar issues instead of looking forward, thinking about how I’d be able to raise the level of my students’ writing,” she said.

Ziegler emphasized that WriteToLearn doesn’t take the place of teaching. “WriteToLearn can help strengthen the basics – what students should already know – so I can look at each student individually and see what other functional skills they need to improve,” she said. “The reports let me pinpoint what students need to work on. One might need help with organization, and another one with supporting their ideas. I’m able to help them enhance their writing in a very specific, differentiated way.”

RESULTS

After one year of using WriteToLearn, the school’s writing scores on their state standardized tests were the best in the school’s history. Student writing is graded on a 6-point scale. Before using WriteToLearn, no student had scored a “6” (“Outstanding”). After WriteToLearn, one of the students scored a 6, and many others who had been scoring in the 2-to-3 range jumped up to scoring 4s and 5s.

The success in Ziegler’s classroom led to an expansion of WriteToLearn into other courses like Journalism and the freshman typing course. In addition, with Tennessee’s adoption of the Common Core State Standards on the horizon, teachers across content areas, such as history and science, began using WriteToLearn’s summary writing component in an effort to strengthen students’ abilities to understand and express informational text.

Overall, the early success of WriteToLearn has energized the entire staff to implement the software school wide for improvement in English, but also in anticipation of the more rigorous writing standards required of students with Common Core.

“Our whole school is excited about WriteToLearn,” said Ziegler. “Once you see what it can do, and how much your students improve not just their writing skills, but their thinking and analytical skills, you don’t go back to pen and paper.”