

Students in Orange County Have a BLASTT with EasyTech®

New program helps students develop reading strategies and improve benchmark scores

Innovation: Building Literacy and Skills Through Technology (BLASTT) program helps students pass FCAT Reading test and develop lifelong reading strategies.

Solution: EasyTech

DISTRICT PROFILE:

177,771 students in 161 schools

- White 36.43%
- Black 27.81%
- Hispanic 29.30%
- Asian/Pacific Islander 4.04%
- Multi-Cultural 1.99%
- American Indian/Alaska Native 43%

District Profile

The Orange County Public School (OCPS) system in Orlando, FL is the twelfth largest district in the nation and the fifth largest in Florida. Educators and administrators throughout the district are committed to the district’s mission statement: each student will acquire the skills, attributes and knowledge necessary to reach full potential.

The Challenge

As part of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), students in grades 3 through 10 take the FCAT Reading test each March. The test is part of Florida’s plan to improve student achievement and helps teachers, principals, and superintendents ensure that they are meeting the Sunshine State Standards. The FCAT Reading test questions are designed to measure the reading and comprehension skills that students need; test questions get more difficult each year, ensuring that students’ skills are developing on pace.

To make sure each student is gaining the skills they need to thrive in the future, OCPS recognizes the importance of passing test scores as students take the FCAT each year. The target group of students included those who were on grade level, but whose scores indicated that without intervention they would likely test below grade level in subsequent years.

The EasyTech Solution

Denise Cruz, Technology Integration Resource Teacher at OCPS, developed an innovative program for 6th graders with just-passing scores on the FCAT Reading test. Building Literacy and Skills Through Technology (BLASTT), which was implemented at Discovery Middle School at the beginning of the 2005-06 school year, uses a number of strategies, including EasyTech, a language (reading) handbook, and printed literature books to teach reading strategies. The goals of the program are to assist students with higher yearly progress on the FCAT and to help students develop new reading strategies that can be transferred and applied in all of their classes.

Ms. Cruz recognized that in order to help those at-risk students, she needed to teach them the subject matter in a way that would interest them and hold their attention. “After speaking to some of the students who scored a 3 on the 5th grade test, I realized that they were not engaged in what they were reading,” shares Cruz. “Most students said they were bored with worksheets and wished they were able to use the computer more. This gave me the idea to integrate reading strategies and technology productivity—building skills not playing games!”

When implementing technology programs, the single greatest factor in the success of a program is the skillful integration by the instructor. Ms. Cruz used EasyTech by Learning.com as an important element of the BLASTT program. Reading strategies were introduced through the use of technology integration incorporating Presentation Software, Spreadsheets, Databases, and Word Processors as the core for strategy introduction, skill development, and independent projects.

Students develop reading skills while working on projects in a variety of core subject areas. When a recent district benchmark test showed that students were deficient in reading charts and graphs, Cruz used the EasyTech Spreadsheet Basics unit to demonstrate to students the relationship between reading a table or graph in an article and reading a graph in math. Currently, students are using EasyTech's Audio/Video lesson to learn to edit film and create a video, which will welcome incoming 6th graders and acquaint them with the school.

Results

Integrating technology into teaching reading strategies makes learning more interesting and meaningful for students—and the results are clear. Of the 23 students in the program, 19 showed improvement on the Lexile Framework for Reading test, a test designed to measure reader ability and text difficulty on the same scale, from the fall to the spring. One student increased his Lexile score a staggering 450 points. In addition, the students' learning transferred back to their other courses: 3 had made "A/B" honor roll at the beginning of the school year; 18 had achieved "A/B" honor roll by the end of the year.

BLASTT has been such a success that Cruz is developing a Professional Development workshop so other schools in the district can duplicate her program—and continue the district's reading successes.