

Students Score Higher on TAAS and Conquer Nightmares

Scores and self-confidence improve dramatically for at-risk students



Math used to be Michelle Santa Cruz's "worst nightmare." Now, however, after using PLATO Instructional Solutions software, Michelle – a 10th grader at R.L. Turner High School in Carrollton, Texas – says that her score on the state's mandated competency exam (the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, or TAAS) has jumped from 30 to 79. And, she says, "Math is now the least of my fears."

Kids at risk

R.L. Turner serves a sizeable Hispanic population in suburban Carrollton, Texas, and many of these students have difficulty not only reading and writing English, but understanding spoken English, as well. These students often feel disenfranchised from the school environment, and many simply expect to fail. "We needed to help these kids," states educational aide Susan Holland. Her sentiments were shared by administrators and teachers alike – a sense of urgency in reversing a downward trend in test scores prevailed throughout the school. At one time, Turner boasted TAAS math scores that were ahead of state averages. But, in the academic year ending 1998, its math scores dropped to a 69.7 percent passing rate, while the state average continued to improve.

Strategy and action

Turner launched a strategy of identifying at-risk students early – based on 9th grade pre-TAAS test scores. Administrators and teachers believe that these students' best chance to pass the TAAS is on their first attempt. Once students have failed the TAAS in their sophomore year, they tend to lose motivation, making successful remediation in the junior and senior years more difficult.

Success

According to Turner records, since PLATO Instructional Solutions courseware was adopted in 1998, student TAAS math scores have increased dramatically. Pass rates have reversed a declining trend – improving from 69 percent in 1998 to 83 percent in 2000. Recent reports show that TAAS scores were

up again this year and Turner expects to be honored by the Texas Education Agency as a Recognized School for achieving a high level of success on the TAAS exams. "These kids deserve every chance we can give them," said Principal Kim Holland, "PLATO Instructional Solutions software was just what we needed to reach these kids – it worked when nothing else did."

Fringe benefits

While the one clear goal for PLATO Instructional Solutions software use at Turner was to provide individualized instruction to help poor performing students improve their TAAS scores, the program has resulted in an important unanticipated benefit – improved student self-esteem. "I used PLATO Learning math courseware and it was fun, educational," adds 10th grader Michelle, "PLATO Learning courseware has given me more confidence. If my classes don't use PLATO Learning courseware next year, I will try to come in before or after school to use it on my own. It made me feel good about myself."