

**A Validation Study of  
AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY'S  
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION TEST PREPARATION  
PROGRAMS**

**Presented to  
AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY**

**By  
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## ABOUT AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY

American Book Company was founded in 1996 by a family of educators. Dr. Frank Pintozzi, a special education and English professor at Kennesaw State University in Georgia, and Colleen Pintozzi, a 22-year veteran mathematics teacher and supervisor of GED programs at the county level have always been deeply committed to their work with underachieving student populations. Devin Pintozzi, joining in 1997, committed to the same vision, teaching Migrant ESL classes, writing book materials, and attaining an MBA to propel the company's marketing and vision forward. As the Pintozzis taught their classes, authored books for other publishers, and participated in professional events and organizations, their desire to be more directly involved in serving this population grew. They wanted to use their vast experience and classroom-tested strategies to help these students move forward with their lives and contribute positively to society.

Nearby South Carolina became the test case for their goal of publishing high school graduation test preparation books. In developing these first books, the company:

- studied the state's standards for the subjects in which students were tested,
- analyzed the textbooks in use in the state;
- involved teachers, supervisors, and assessment specialist in the development process;
- used a carefully structured logical sequence to diagnose, teach, and provide reinforcement;
- employed a variety of learning modalities to tap into students' innate instructional preferences;
- provided an abundance of practice tests and exercises to raise students' confidence level and target their challenge areas.

The books were a resounding success. They and their offspring revisions have been used in the state ever since. Then, by using and refining the successful development strategies described above, American Book Company has, to date, developed graduation test preparation books and supportive software for an additional 17 states; end-of-course test preparation programs for states who use such tests instead of or in addition to graduation tests; and generic skills preparation books and other supplements, such as flash cards and overhead transparencies. Recently the company published test preparation books for middle grades in selected states and have committed to expanding into other states, subject areas, and grade levels as the need arises.

## ABOUT THE RESEARCH

During the years that the state-specific test preparation books have been available, American Book Company has received an enormous amount of unsolicited anecdotal feedback on how the books and ancillaries are helping students. Customers' comments on the books' effectiveness, ease-of-use, student appeal, match with state standards, and so on have been used for revising and improving the books as well as the development process the company uses.

In the meantime, however, due to the increasing demands of NCLB, educators and parents alike have become focused on *test results*. They want to see statistical evidence that the programs being used in their schools will improve test scores. Here is one such case.

### A Case Study: La Feria High School, La Feria, Texas

In the winter semester of 2005, La Feria High School instituted special mathematics academic enrichment classes for high risk students who had repeatedly failed the mathematics portion of the TAAS Exit Exam. Passing this exam was then one of the requirements for earning a Texas high school diploma.

Seven classes were organized; a teacher was assigned to each. Sherry Stewart of La Feria High School was responsible for supervising the teachers. The purpose of the project was to ensure acceptable student test performance on the TAKS 11 Mathematics Exam, the new required exit exam. Key challenges were:

- 1) All students had repeatedly failed previous exams;
- 2) The classes consisted of a high risk, primarily Hispanic, student population;
- 3) The TAKS 11 Mathematics test required that students master more advanced mathematics concepts than they had encountered in the earlier TAAS Exit Exam.

The students and teachers used American Book Company's **TAKS 11 Mathematics Books** for classroom instruction and the **TAKS 11 Mathematics** software during their computer lab time. The classes were conducted from January 1, 2005 to March 22, 2005.

In early April, after completing these academic enrichment classes, students took the TAKS 11 Mathematics Exam. Of the 90 who took the exam, 36 students, or 40% of those who had participated in the instruction, passed the exam.

Questions about this project can be directed to Dr. Frank Pintozzi, Executive Vice President at American Book Company (770-928-2834 or [fpintozzi@americanbookcompany.com](mailto:fpintozzi@americanbookcompany.com)) or Sherry Stewart, La Feria High School, La Feria, Texas (956-797-1353).

In order to determine whether or not the above results were typical for users of American Book Company's test preparation books as well as to find out exactly what attributes of the books were most helpful, American Book Company engaged an independent consulting firm, Lois Eskin Associates, to interview a sample of users of the company's books. The president of the company, Lois Eskin, has over 40 years of experience as an educator, an educational publishing executive, and an independent consultant who works exclusively with educational publishers.

Lois Eskin Associates collected "before and after" test scores from state department Web sites for eight schools in which American Book Company's test preparation books are widely used. Scores in reading/language arts, mathematics and social studies exit exams states were analyzed. In most cases, 2005 data was the most current available at the time the study was conducted.

Next, the consultants interviewed teachers in these schools to obtain information about the specific features and characteristics of the books that teachers feel contributed to the improvement in their students' scores. The interview summaries are included in this report. All were reviewed and approved by the teachers who spoke with the consultants. District data, obtained from Market Data Retrieval's 2005-2006 state school directories, is included for each school to give the scores a demographic context. This data was also used to ensure that schools reflecting a variety of demographic characteristics were interviewed.

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

- Poverty levels among the districts surveyed range from a low of 1% to a high of 35%; per/pupil expenditures range from very low to very high.
- All teachers interviewed were highly enthusiastic about American Book Company's test preparation books.
- The most often mentioned positive features among Reading/Language Arts teachers are the books' alignment with state standards, the usefulness of the diagnostic test at the beginning of the books, the quality and relevance of the reading selections, the foundation given in basic concepts, and the well-written and easy-to-understand instructions.
- The most frequently mentioned positive features among Mathematics teachers are the books' alignment with state standards, the abundant practice material, the foundation given in basic concepts, and the opening diagnostic test.

- Social studies teachers most often mentioned the match with state standards, the diagnostic test, the clarity of instructions, the conciseness of the narrative, the relevance of the material, the skill instruction, and the outstanding maps and graphs.
- Other positive attributes noted by teachers include the ability of the books to instill confidence in students by helping them to experience success and gain familiarity with the form and content of the tests, and the value of the periodic chapter tests in helping to inform their instruction.
- Teachers use the American Book Company test preparation books in a variety of ways, even within the same school. For example, among mathematics teachers, the books are used for at-risk and special education students, but they are also used for average students as a supplement to or as part of the basic mathematics curriculum. A majority, however, use the books only for students who had failed in their first attempt to pass the graduation test, which are often taken first during the students' sophomore year.
- Reading/Language Arts teachers most often use the books in elective after school, Saturday, or school day programs, although about half also use the books as part of or as a supplement to their basic curriculum. Only one teacher mentioned using the book just for students who had failed their first or successive attempts at the graduation test.
- The social studies teachers interviewed use their test preparation books as supplements or as part of the basic curriculum.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Given the often dramatic score increases among schools using American Book Company's test preparation books, we recommend that teachers using these books make them available to students *before* their first attempt at the graduation tests in the various subject areas. Such an approach would boost the scores reported online for schools and districts and, equally importantly, could spare the students the experience of failure so early in their high school years.
- The teachers interviewed for this study generously shared creative classroom and school-wide strategies they use to motivate their students. These are described in the interview write-ups and the participating teachers made it clear they were willing and eager to share these ideas with others. We encourage readers to adopt or adapt these suggestions to their own classrooms and schools.

\* \* \*

**TEACHER INTERVIEWS: READING/LANGUAGE ARTS**

# **Batesville High School**

## **Batesville Community School District, Indiana**

### **Batesville Community School District Demographics:**

Total Enrollment: 1,910 Ethnic Mix: Asian 1% Caucasian 98% Hispanic 1%;  
Expenditures/Student: \$159 (low); Poverty: 1%

### **Batesville High School Demographics**

Number of Students in School: 630; Title 1 School: No

In Indiana, Language Arts scores have remained at roughly the same level since 2002 when 68% percent of the students in the state passed the mandatory ISTEP + GQE. In that same year, 77% of Batesville High School's students passed the ISTEP. In 2005, however, 85% of Batesville's students passed, an increase of greater than 10%. How were these students able to upgrade their scores while the rest of the state remained at the same level?

### **A Variety of Strategies Help to Bring Up the Scores**

According to Rose Lacey, who has been teaching at Batesville for four years, no one strategy gets all the credit for this healthy improvement in student performance. Rather, she indicated that a number of programs and resources contributed to helping students achieve better results; in particular, the school's lower ability level and special education students.

For example, students who have not passed the 8<sup>th</sup> grade exam in language arts take an intensive course called English 9 Grammar. While the rest of the school moves from subject to subject in 4 1/2-week blocks, the students in the intensive course attend the English 9 Grammar class every day, all year long for 1 1/2 hours.

In addition, for juniors and seniors who did not pass the ISTEP as sophomores, a remediation program is offered. Students have the option of taking this program for 1/2 hour 4 days a week during their lunch period or for an hour two days a week after school hours. In either case, the program lasts for roughly two months prior to the actual ISTEP test. With this program, Mrs. Lacey uses American Book Company's, "Passing the ISTEP + GQE in Language Arts" test preparation book plus a number of other online and print resources.



## **Students Relate to the Story Selections**

When Mrs. Lacey first arrived at Batesville, she was given an earlier edition of American Book Company's book to use with the remediation course. However, she spotted a newer edition in her department chair's office and quickly ordered it for herself. She pointed out that, "The story selections are more contemporary. They include references to movies and shows that are familiar to them. It's easier for students to relate to these stories."

Teachers are always looking for ways to motivate students, especially teenagers. "Often times stories just don't catch their interest," Mrs. Lacey observed. "When students relate to the stories, they will pay more attention and, in turn, will learn more."

In addition to the story selections, Mrs. Lacey says, "The book definitely prepares the students for the tests. It has the same types of questions in a similar format as the test and it gets them into the test-taking mode." According to Mrs. Lacey, the Diagnostic Test at the beginning of the book is a big help as well. It allows her to determine each student's weak areas so she can work more effectively with them on an individual basis.

Finally, Mrs. Lacey concluded, "I use the writing prompts at the back of the book a lot. In many cases, they're more interesting than those I get from other sources."

# **Marion High School**

## **Marion School District #1, South Carolina**

### **Marion School District #1 Demographics:**

Total Enrollment: 3,140 Ethnic Mix: African American 73% Caucasian 26% Hispanic 1%; Expenditures/Student: \$304 (high); Poverty: 31%

### **Marion High School Demographics**

Number of Students in School: 850; Title 1 School: Yes

Marion High School structures students' classes in three academic tracks: tech prep, college prep, and honors prep. Students in all three tracks are required to pass the South Carolina HSAP (High School Assessment Program) test in Language Arts in order to graduate. According to the school's English Department head, the school has been using American Book Company's test preparation book, "Passing the South Carolina HSAP in ELA: Reading" for years as part of their reading program.

A new edition of the book was published in 2003 and, because the book had been so successful for the school in the past, the newer version was purchased and put into use during the school year 2004-2005.

### **An Individual Plan for Each Child**

Diane Davis has been teaching for 17 years. In school year 2005-2006, she is teaching the English 1 and 2 courses to students in the technical track. Mrs. Davis teaches from her regular textbook from the start of the school year until January. At that point, she gives her students the Diagnostic Test found at the beginning of "Passing the South Carolina HSAP in ELA: Reading." The Diagnostic Test, as in all American Book Company's custom test preparation books, is followed by an Evaluation Chart on which the test questions are grouped by topic. The topics correspond to the chapters in the book. When they complete the Diagnostic Test, students are asked to circle the numbers of the questions they answered incorrectly on the Evaluation Chart.

Based on this analysis, Mrs. Davis devises an individual plan for each student, which concentrates instruction on the areas that need improvement. In cases where the majority of the students are struggling with a particular area, she will teach the class as one group. Otherwise, students work individually with the chapters and sections in "Passing the South Carolina HSAP in ELA: Reading" that correspond with the areas she has outlined in their plans.

## **“The Book is Student-Friendly”**

Mrs. Davis finds the lessons in the book very helpful and easy for the students to understand. “The literary passages are really good, they’ve chosen wonderful selections, and the question format and content align with our standards,” she said.

Because some of the technical prep students have weaker reading skills than students in the other tracks, Mrs. Davis sometimes reads through the passages with them, holds discussions about the material and then lets them do the practice work on their own. Over time, they learn to do the reading and thinking, as well as the practice work, by themselves.

In addition to the intensive test preparation work, improvement on the tests has become a highly valued goal at Marion High School. The school holds pep rallies, which include motivational speakers, door prizes, and so on. At the rallies, class officers talk with groups of students and encourage them to do their best work in preparing for and taking the tests.

When students at Marion High School took the HSAP in English/Language Arts in 2004, 77.1% passed the test. In 2005, 85.4% passed the test. Mrs. Davis thinks “Passing the South Carolina HSAP in ELA: Reading,” along with the other instructional and motivational strategies the school used, played a big part in this success. She commented, “If you’re looking for something that is student-friendly and matches South Carolina’s standards, this is it!”

# **Salmen High School**

## **St. Tammany Parish School District, Louisiana**

### **St. Tammany Parish School District Demographics:**

Total Enrollment: 36,169 Ethnic Mix: African American 17% Asian 1% Caucasian 80% Hispanic 2%; Expenditures/Student: \$191 (medium); Poverty: 12%

### **Salmen High School Demographics**

Number of Students in School: 924; Title 1 School: Yes

The teachers at Salmen High School say that some students achieve at very high levels and some at lower levels but, for the most part, the students here are about the norm. All students use a basic textbook for language arts instruction but teachers feel the need for an additional resource that specifically targets the information students will be expected to know when they take the LEAP 21 GEE (Graduation Exit Exam) in English Language Arts.

### **Many Test Preparation Programs Considered**

Mrs. Debra Bell, chair of Salmen's Language Arts Department pointed out that she and her teachers studied a number of test preparation programs before selecting American Book Company's, "Passing the LEAP 21 GEE in English Language Arts." She explained, "We looked at the materials to see how they compared to what we were teaching in class and to what would be on the tests." They chose the American Book Company book in 2004, according to Mrs. Bell, "because it included a great variety of exercises and lots of things we knew would be on the GEE."

Mrs. Bell likes to start with the Diagnostic Test at the very beginning of the book. "It tells you each students' strong and weak points so we know what we need to focus on most heavily," she explained. Most of the teachers use the book in conjunction with the basic textbook. When they study a concept such as identifying literary elements, for example, and find that the students need more practice, they turn immediately to American Book Company's test preparation book for a more "precise" approach. "We often use exercises from the book for practice and reinforcement. It teaches them how to respond to questions with good detail and how to use proper sentence structure," Mrs. Bell added.

Salmen High School also set up voluntary after school tutoring program, using "Passing the LEAP 21 GEE in English Language Arts," for students who needed more help. At various check points along the way, participating students received recognition for their participation and success, in the form of special activities, pizza parties, and the like. These "perks" helped to motivate and reward the students who took this extra step to achieve better scores on their GEE test.

## **Hard Work Pays Off**

Salmen High's scores have increased every year since implementing "Passing the LEAP 21 GEE in English Language Arts." In 2005, they were 12% ahead of where they were in 2003 with 91% of their students meeting or exceeding the test standards set by the state. It is common knowledge that the more confident you are, the better you will do at almost any task. According to Mrs. Bell, this factor was key in her school's improved scores. "This test preparation book made them feel prepared," she said. "They knew what to expect; they felt really good about themselves after using this program; it built up their self-confidence."

When asked if she would be willing to share her experiences with other teachers, Mrs. Bell replied, "if our experience can help other educators, I'm happy to help because you've (American Book Company) really helped us!"

# **Sinton High School**

## **Sinton Independent School District, Texas**

### **Sinton Independent School District Demographics:**

Total Enrollment: 2,100; Ethnic Mix: African American 1% Caucasian 21% Hispanic 78%; Expenditures/Student: \$498 (high); Poverty: 30%

### **Sinton High School Demographics**

Number of Students in School: 615; Title 1 School: Yes

In Texas, the graduation tests for Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies are called the TAKS 11 tests (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills). The TAKS 11 in Language Arts focuses very strongly on writing and includes a type of reading and writing test strategy that seems to be unique to Texas. That is, the students are given three different selections, or a “triplet,” to read or view, which are all on the same topic; for example, pets. One selection might be a personal narrative about an experience with a pet; another an essay on the importation of exotic pets; and the third might be a poster encouraging people to have their pets vaccinated.

For reading items on the test, these triplets are used, among other things, to test students’ ability to apply their knowledge in questions that require the use of information and insights gained from each selection. In the writing portion, triplets are used to generate ideas about the topic and about different writing approaches that one might take in writing about the topic. Then a specific writing prompt is given and students are required to write their own selection.

In 2003, Language Arts scores on the TAKS for the state as a whole were just fair; at Sinton they were on the low side. In the whole state, 69% of the students had passed the test while only 52% of the students at Sinton had reached this proficiency level.

### **Now They Know It Counts!**

Beginning with the school year 2003-2004, Texas passed a law requiring high school students to pass the TAKS 11 in Language Arts to order to obtain a diploma. By 2004, state scores had risen by 26% but Sinton’s scores had risen by 73%! In 2005, 94% of the students taking the TAKS 11 in Language Arts at Sinton High School passed the test; in the entire state 88% of students reached this level. These changes represent a hefty improvement for the state but a *remarkable* achievement for Sinton High School!

Ms. Deborah Burnell, an unusually creative teacher, has an extremely high success rate with her regular and tutorial students. She starts the year with her regular students by having them “Power Write.” To prompt the writing, she might, for example, put a pecan or a paper clip or some other common object on each student’s desk or perhaps she might play a piece of music for the class. Then she tells them to just go

ahead and write whatever comes to mind about the item or stimulus she has provided. The catch is that they must write for five minutes without lifting their pens from the paper! Then she asks for volunteers who wish to share their writing with the class.

As would be expected, these initial writing selections are generally very brief and few students are willing to share. However, with specific writing instruction and practice, the students' writing ability improves dramatically as the year progresses. Last year, every one of her students passed the TAKS 11 in Language Arts.

### **Tutorial Program Uses American Book Company's Test Preparation Book**

Ms. Burnell is also responsible for the school's tutorial program for weaker writers. The program runs four days a week after school hours from the beginning of the school year all the way through February. As she sees signs of significant improvement with specific students, Ms. Burnell cuts back on the amount of time those students are required to attend the after school sessions.

For this program, Ms. Burnell uses many of the same innovative strategies she uses with her regular classes but, in addition, uses American Book Company's "Tackling the TAKS 11 in Reading/Language Arts." One of Ms. Burnell's co-teachers found the book and they both agreed, "We can use this!" "It's an excellent supplemental book," commented Ms. Burnell. "I'm always looking for triplets to use and theirs are really helpful." She also uses "a lot of bits and pieces" from other parts of the book for instruction and practice work. "This book is worth buying. I'm happy to support its use," she added.

## **TEACHER INTERVIEWS: MATHEMATICS**



# **Goliad High School**

## **Goliad Independent School District, Texas**

### **Goliad Independent School District Demographics:**

Total Enrollment: 1,285; Ethnic Mix: African American 6% Caucasian 51% Hispanic 42%; Expenditures/Student: \$516 (high); Poverty: 25%

### **Goliad High School Demographics**

Number of Students in School: 315; Title 1 School: No

Goliad High School serves students with a broad range of abilities. Some average and above average ability students seem to do well enough with the basic mathematics programs to be able to pass the state's required TAKS 11 in Mathematics; some need additional supplemental help. However, the at-risk and special education students in the school all need a *lot* of extra help in order to pass this high stakes test.

### **You Have to Have a Plan**

Chris Pustka, a regular mathematics teacher and a football and baseball coach, seems to have a unique gift for working with at risk and special needs students. He taught at Goliad High School for some years and had very good success with this group of students. Then he took a position in another district. TAKS scores of the at-risk/special education students in Goliad declined.

Mr. Pustka was asked to return and, beginning with the 2003-2004 school year, revved up his program again. He had reviewed American Book Company's books, "Tackling the TAKS in Mathematics," designed for various grade levels and was very impressed by their succinct approach to the basics. Coach Pustka decided to create a sequence for his at-risk and special education students using this series of books. At the start of the year, he begins with the grade 8 book, which his students can walk through very quickly. Then he moves on up through the different levels until they reach the TAKS 11. He carefully paces the sequence so the students complete everything before the tests are taken.

### **Scores are Back Up Again!**

"The sequence of topics in these books is in line with the TAKS test," Coach Pustka commented. He estimated that 80-90% of what is tested on the TAKS is included in the American Book Company books. "I use the Pretest in the books to diagnose the students, work with them on the vocabulary and the problems, and use the Chapter Reviews to find out how well they're doing and where they need special help," he continued. He also pointed out that the problems are relevant to his students' lives. "They're real-world life application problems," he said.

Because the mathematics terminology is not specifically geared for special needs students, Coach Pustka uses special interpretive techniques to make sure his students understand the meaning. “The terminology might be a little sophisticated for these students,” he acknowledged. “But it will be on the test so they have to learn it.”

Overall, 85% of the school’s total student population had passed the TAKS 11 in Mathematics in 2003 before Coach Pustka returned. In 2005, that number reached 94%. “And I know *my* students are in that group,” he added. When he returned to Goliad again, he worked with one senior who had failed the TAKS exit level test several times and was in danger of not graduating with her class in 2006. After working with Coach Pustka and the American Book Company books, the student passed! “That girl was so excited, she came running to tell me she had passed,” he related happily.

Coach Pustka believes that the most important part of helping *all* students, no matter what their level, is to first determine what they know and what they don’t know and then build a plan to fit each student’s needs. “I’ll say this,” he concluded, “If my at-risk and special education students can succeed with this program, most everyone can.”

# **Jonesboro-Hodge High School Jackson Parish School District, Louisiana**

## **Jackson Parish School District Demographics:**

Total Enrollment: 2,177 Ethnic Mix: African American 37% Caucasian 62% Hispanic 1%; Expenditures/Student: \$304 (high); Poverty: 28%

## **Jonesboro-Hodge High School Demographics**

Number of Students in School: 353; Title I School: No.

Most of Jonesboro-Hodge High School' students are of average ability. Of the school's 353 students, 125, or 35% take Algebra. In 2003, 67% of the school's first time test-takers passed the Louisiana Graduation Exit Exam in mathematics compared to 75% who passed the test in the rest of the state of Louisiana. The administration felt their students could do better and began a concerted effort to improve the scores.

The State Department of Education pitched in by providing special workshops for teachers. In these sessions, teachers learned a variety of strategies for helping students master the materials that would be on the graduation test. Among these strategies was the suggestion that the school implement an after school tutoring program. Teachers were given a copy of American Book Company's "Passing the Leap 21 GEE in Mathematics" to review as a possible resource for the program.

## **American Book Company Rates a 9-10!**

Harrell Bond, Junior, one of several mathematics teachers who use the book reported, "We very much liked what we saw. From the outline we could see that the content was just perfect. It went right along with our tests." Now that he and the other teachers have been using the book for awhile, Mr. Bond says, "On a scale of 1-10, I rate it a 9-10!" Based on discussions with the other teachers who use the book, Mr. Bond indicated he knows all the other teachers feel the same way as he does. He also noted that a number of other schools in the district use it as well.

Originally the book was purchased to be used strictly as a supplement. Now, however, it has become an integral part of the curriculum. Mr. Bond uses it for extra problems, review, make-up work and as a resource for his own teacher-made tests. He happens to teach the students who need extra help but he points out that those who teach the more able students use "Passing the Leap 21 GEE in Mathematics" as well. "The book shows students how to work the problems," he said. "We've used a lot of different books but this one is the best. The sequence matches our curriculum. It is a super book to use in our state." He estimates that the book contains 80-90% of what students will need to know on the state's graduation test.

## **State Scores Remain Flat; Jonesboro-Hodge's Scores Increase over 16%**

In 2005, 78% of Jonesboro-Hodge's first time test-takers passed the Louisiana Graduation Exit Exam in Mathematics, an increase of over 16% since the 2003 tests, During the same period of time, scores for the rest of the state increased by just 1%. Mr. Bond said. "I think that using that book contributed at least 35-45% to the increase in our scores. A lot of students were very much behind on the basics when they got to me." He continued, "I've had any number of students come back and tell me how many problems on the test were just like those they had in American Book Company's book." He says his students are extremely proud of what they have managed to accomplish in a very short time. "I cannot tell you how valuable I've found this book."

# **Northwestern High School**

## **Northwestern School District, Indiana**

### **Northwestern School District Demographics:**

Total Enrollment: 1.564 Ethnic Mix: African American 1% Asian 1% Caucasian 96% Hispanic 2%; Expenditures/Student: \$126 (low); Poverty: 7%

### **Northwestern High School Demographics**

Number of Students in School: 530; Title 1 School: No

Students at Northwestern High School first take the ISTEP+ (Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress) test in Mathematics in their sophomore year. If they fail the test, they have several opportunities to retake and pass it before graduation. If they do, they graduate with their class. If not, they must pass it at some point afterwards in order to obtain a diploma.

The demographics of Northwestern High School have changed considerably over the past ten years. Previously, the school primarily served children of parents with white-collar jobs. These students were generally well-prepared for the academic rigors of high school and the ISTEP+. However, in recent years, an increasing number of at-risk and special education students, as well as students who qualify for the free lunch program have joined the student population. This shift has increased the challenge of ensuring that all students pass the ISTEP+.

Nonetheless, the school has managed to increase the percentage of students who pass the ISTEP+ from 82% in 2002 to 92% in 2006! During the same time period, the rest of the state hovered near the 65% level, moving up or down just a few points each year and finishing in 2006 with 64% passing the test.

## **Northwestern Has Perfected a System**

Mike Brazel has been at Northwestern for 12 years and teaches a wide range of courses, including honors mathematics and trigonometry, as well as remedial mathematics for those who failed the ISTEP+ in Mathematics in their sophomore year.

Mr. Brazel pointed out that, in the last three years, not a single senior has failed the retest. He feels the school has perfected a system for helping its students pass the test and the school's results certainly support that statement! The school has created a focused remedial class for those who have failed the ISTEP+ in their sophomore year. In order to accommodate the classes during the regular school day, these students take a study hall for one period a day for one semester. But instead of staying in the study hall, they are pulled out into the special remedial class. There are never more than 10 students in these classes so they can get the intensive instruction they need.

In his class, Mr. Brazel uses American Book Company's test preparation book, "Passing the ISTEP+GQE in Mathematics" almost exclusively. He starts with the Diagnostic Test in the book, which is correlated to Indiana's Mathematics standards, to determine where his students need the most help. "I hit those sections really hard in the remedial class," he commented. For the first five weeks of the semester, the students work on all the content in the book in preparation for the test. Then, for the five weeks just prior to the test, they have an intensive review. Once the test is over, they remain with Mr. Brazel and use the time as a general study hall period or can access his expertise as a math resource person if they continue to need help with the subject.

In addition to this remedial class, students who have failed the test are offered a "Jump Start" program during the two weeks before regular school begins in the Fall. In this program, students attend mathematics classes for two hours a day during which they work on basic skills.

### **"American Book Company Matches Students' Ability Level Perfectly"**

In his remedial classes, Mr. Brazel uses the chapter tests in "Passing the ISTEP+GQE in Mathematics" periodically to measure the progress students have made. "The volume and sheer number of problems in the book is great," he commented, "and the book matches our students' ability level perfectly."

He had used other test preparation books prior to 2003 but found the American Book Company book to be a better resource for their needs. He said the way the book is set up and organized makes it very user-friendly for his students. "I wouldn't change that at all," he said adding, "and the book has better alignment with our standards." He continued, "We are pretty stringent about how we run our math program at Northwestern." The combination of special programs and use of "Passing the ISTEP+GQE in Mathematics" seem to have become a formula for success at Northwestern!

# **Tranquility High School**

## **Golden Plains Unified School District, California**

### **Golden Plains Unified School District Demographics:**

Total Enrollment: 1,950; Ethnic Mix: Asian 1% Caucasian 4% Hispanic 95%;  
Expenditures/Student: \$421 (high); Poverty: 29%

### **Tranquility High School Demographics**

Number of Students in School: 450; Title 1 School: Yes; Vocational: Yes

California's high school graduation requirements in mathematics have changed several times over the past few years. Since the school year 2002-2003, however, students have been required to pass the state's exit exam (CAHSEE) in mathematics in order to graduate. The first time sophomores at Tranquility High School took this exam after the requirement went into effect, they did very poorly – only 32% met or exceeded the state's mathematics standards. Something dramatic was obviously needed in order to improve the students' performance.

### **Elective Tutorial Program Instituted**

Administrators at Tranquility High School decided to offer an elective mathematics program to help their students. The program was implemented in the school year 2003-2004. Even though no credit was given for the course, students were so concerned about the graduation requirement that over 80% signed up!

Teachers of other subject areas had to be brought in to help meet the demand for mathematics tutorial instruction. Because of the overwhelming response and immediate need, there was little time to create a cohesive program or carefully evaluate instructional materials. Teachers scanned a number of review-type programs briefly and settled on one. However, once classes started, they soon realized this program did not offer the right type of instruction for Tranquility's students. It made assumptions about prior knowledge that were far above the students' level and it just wasn't working.

Richard Gragnani, one of the teachers enlisted to teach the tutorial program took a look at American Book Company's CAHSEE Review Book for Mathematics. What a difference! "This book is so much better than what we were using," he said. "It gives the students a foundation in the basic concepts and then builds on that foundation." If a student has trouble with a particular concept, Mr. Gragnani can easily point to the page or pages that teach and reinforce that concept. "The instructions are written so well that the students can almost always figure out themselves what they're doing incorrectly and then correct it."

## **Scores Jump 135%!**

Tranquility High School's mathematics teachers are thrilled with the results of their efforts. In the school year 2003-2004, they crafted a carefully sequenced curriculum based upon the American Book Company's CAHSEE Review Book for Mathematics plus a separate software program that provided additional practice materials. Mr. Gragnani noted, "We use the American Book Company Review Book for diagnosis, instruction, basic practice and evaluation; we use the other program for review work that gives the students immediate feedback on their performance."

When sophomores took the California High School Exit Exam in 2004, a whopping 73% met or exceeded the state's mathematics requirements. This means that 42 % more of their students passed the test than had done so just one year earlier – an increase of over 135%! In the 2005 tests, students maintained this level of performance while performance of students in the rest of the state actually declined. "At this point, only two schools in the entire county have higher scores than we do," Mr. Gragnani pointed out proudly. And these two schools, unlike Tranquility High School, are both considered "academic" rather than general high schools.

Mr. Gragnani gives most of the credit for this dramatic improvement to their unique curriculum and the materials they use -- the American Book Company Review Book and the software practice exercises. "And, of course, we teachers were an important part of the equation as well!" he added.



# **Western High School Broward County School District, South Central Area, Florida**

## **Broward County School District Demographics:**

Total Enrollment: 272,191 Ethnic Mix: African American 36% Asian 3%  
Caucasian 37% Hispanic 23%; Expenditures/Student: \$179 (low); Poverty: 16%

## **Western High School Demographics**

Number of Students in School: 2,448 ; Title 1 School: No

The FCAT 10 has been used in Florida for years to measure students' progress in mathematics. Many of the average and above average students in Western High School are able to meet or exceed the standards that are tested by simply participating in regular mathematics classes. In these classes, a basal textbook is used for instruction. The ancillary materials that come with these textbooks are used for review and reinforcement and additional instruction is not necessary.

However, some of these students, as well as most of the lower level students, want and need more help than the basal textbook can supply.

## **FCAT Camp and Intensive 18-Week Program Provide a Boost**

Linda Morrell is the mathematics department chair at Western High School and is also one of five mathematics teachers who work with students in an intensive and voluntary five week Saturday program the school has dubbed "FCAT Camp." Any student who wishes can participate in this program. As a result, the classes include a mixture of students with differing ability levels -- those who are on and above level as well as those who have previously failed the FCAT 10 in Mathematics.

In addition, Western High School offers yet another innovation for lower level students who have not passed the FCAT in mathematics. To accommodate these students, they have set up an 18-week intensive math class using a mathematics test preparation program as the basic textbook.

Two years ago, the teachers decided they were not satisfied with the test preparation program they had been using for either program. While the students had improved somewhat, the teachers believed they would do even better if they had a better resource. The school's FCAT resource professional recommended the teachers look at American Book Company's book, "Forward With the FCAT 10" for Mathematics. When they reviewed it, the teachers agreed that this book met their needs much more completely than what they had used previously. "We like the way the book is set up," said Mrs. Morrell. "It's a very usable book with no shortage of problems," she continued.

## **Scores Are Up!**

When the 2005 scores on the FCAT 10 in mathematics were released, the teachers were happy to see that 75% of their students had met or exceeded the standards tested compared to 70% who achieved this level before “Forward With the FCAT 10” was implemented. While 2006 scores were not available at the time of this interview, Mrs. Morrell feels confident they will be even higher.

Because 50% of the FCAT mathematics test consists of Algebra and Geometry problems, both the Saturday and intensive 18-week programs begin with these content areas and then move to probability and the other topics included in the book and on the FCAT. “It covers the standards just fine,” pointed out Mrs. Morrell. When asked what distinguishes the American Book Company test preparation book from others she has reviewed, Mr. Morrell commented, “If you want a cursory review, there are other books that will give that but if you want something that’s more in-depth, this is much better.” She continued, “Our scores have gone up because of the effectiveness of our two special programs as well as our switch to American Book Company’s, “Forward with the FCAT 10.”

**TEACHER INTERVIEWS: SOCIAL STUDIES**

# **George W. Carver High School**

## **Birmingham City Public School District, Alabama**

### **District Demographics:**

Total Enrollment: 31,322 Ethnic Mix: African American 97% Caucasian 1% Hispanic 1%; Expenditures/Student: \$140 (low); Poverty: 35%

### **George W. Carver High School Demographics**

Number of Students in School: 1,100; Title 1 School: No

The demographics of George W. Carver High School, in general, mirror those of the district, with a fairly high poverty level and relatively low per pupil expenditures. However, these factors did not stop the administrators and teachers of the school from pushing for higher achievement on the Alabama Graduation Exam in Social Studies. Only 59% of the students had met or exceeded the standards of the test in 2003 but this was not good enough for George W. Carver.

Teachers and administrators searched for a book to supplement their basic textbooks that would be more concise, that would cover only the content that would be on the test, and that would work for the higher and lower ability students alike. This was a tall order! However, they found the solution in American Book Company's "Passing the New Alabama Graduation Examination in Social Studies."

### **"This Publisher Knows the Curriculum"**

Chuckie Ludgood, an exuberant social studies teacher at G.W Carver High School, characterizes the American Book Company's test preparation book as "all killer - no filler!" While he appreciates the comprehensive narrative included in the basic texts, he knows that students need key concepts highlighted in a way they can easily understand. "This publisher knows our curriculum and has made a book that goes right along with it," he commented. Mr. Ludgood uses the textbook first and "Passing the New Alabama Graduation Examination in Social Studies" as a co-curriculum resource to focus students on the main details. He finds the Pretest and Practice Tests especially useful for determining just what areas need special attention as the test date approaches.

Because there is so much content to absorb, Mr. Ludgood requires each student to maintain a portfolio of materials that includes the Chapter Reviews, various text assignments, practice tests and other summary-type information. "There's just so much in history, you have to have a mechanism to go back to that will remind you of what you've studied," he commented.

"For students who are doing well, this is a great resource; for those who could do better, it focuses on the minimum you need to know – both bases are covered," Mr. Ludgood observed. According to his students, the book "hits the nail on the head."

### **George W Carver Achieves a 42% Increase in Scores!**

In 2005, after using “Passing the New Alabama Graduation Examination in Social Studies” for two years, 25% more students passed the Alabama Graduation Examination in Social Studies than had passed it in 2003. This represents an amazing increase of 42%! By contrast, state results during this period increased only about two percentage points.

“We work hard,” said Mr. Ludgood. “By tying the test results to graduation, the onus is on the students. And by giving them a book that teaches what’s on the test, they know that the rest is in their hands.” He added, “Overall, I feel really good about this book. The illustrations are good, the information is concise. It’s a good addition to our repertoire.”

# **Morgan County High School**

## **Morgan County School District, Georgia**

### **Morgan County School District Demographics:**

Total Enrollment: 3,200; Ethnic Mix: African American 32% Asian 1% Caucasian 65% Hispanic 2%; Expenditures/Student: \$140 (low); Poverty: 14%

### **Morgan County High School Demographics**

Number of Students in School: 1,000; Title 1 School: No

In 2003, students at Morgan High School were doing relatively well so far as meeting Georgia's Social Studies standards were concerned. Throughout the state, 81% of students had passed the GHS GT (Georgia High School Graduation Test) in Social Studies; 78% of Morgan's students had passed.

But administrators and teachers at the school didn't think this was good enough. They recognized that they were not meeting the standard they wanted to reach and made a commitment to bring up the scores. This heightened awareness of the importance of the test permeated the environment and found its way into students' performance. By 2005, 85% of Morgan's students passed the Social Studies test (a 9% increase) while only 83% of the rest of the state's students passed (a 2% increase).

### **They Needed Something More**

Bill Malone, a veteran social studies teacher and coach said the school had been using a test preparation book well before 2003 but he felt something more substantial was needed and made this recommendation to his department chair. The department chair agreed, studied the available test preparation books, and decided that American Book Company's "Passing the Georgia Social Studies Graduation Test" was the best option.

Mr. Malone pointed out that the GHS GT contains about 80% U.S. History, Citizenship, and map and graphing skills. Many of Morgan's students can pass the test with no extra or special test preparation work; others cannot. Mr. Malone teaches U.S. History and starts off the year giving the Diagnostic Test that appears at the very beginning of "Passing the Georgia Social Studies Graduation Test." The results tell both the students and Mr. Malone where extra work may be needed—often this is in the area of map and graphing skills.

For the better part of the year, extra test preparation work is up to the students. A class set of "Passing the Georgia Social Studies Graduation Test" is always available for students to use during classroom free time or to borrow for use at home. About a week prior to the GHS GT, Mr. Malone repeats the Diagnostic Test given at the beginning of the year to see how much progress students have made. He uses the rest of that week to help the students focus on their particular problem areas. According to Mr. Malone, "How we use the book depends on the students' needs."

## **“Readability is AOK and Instruction in Map and Graphing Skills is Great!”**

“I’m very glad we have the American Book Company test preparation book,” said Mr. Malone. “It would be really difficult to prepare the kids if they didn’t have the kind of sample tests and information in the book.” He especially likes the choice of questions in the book and how it focuses on areas that will be on the test.

In helping students prepare for the test, Mr. Malone tends to concentrate more on the skills than on the factual content. He feels that absorbing and memorizing the content is something the students can practice on their own whereas the skills must be taught and applied. “If they understand mapping and graphing skills, this can make the difference in whether they pass or fail the GHS GT,” he observed. And Mr. Malone thinks the instruction on maps and graphs in “Passing the Georgia Social Studies Graduation Test” is great. “If I were a geography teacher, I’d use this book,” he commented.

Mr. Malone concluded, “The best things about the book, however, are how it’s broken into chapters based upon the periods of history, the fact that it’s relatively concise, is easily readable, and has no distractions. This book does the job you want it to do!”