

Writing A-Z/Raz-Plus Pilot Study Brief

PRODUCT INFO

Product name: Writing A-Z/Raz-Plus

Product description: Writing A-Z is a curricular tool that provides a collection of lessons and resources to teacher K-6 students writing. Additionally, Writing A-Z offers online tools for student compositions ranging from single page essays to entire books with illustrations. Raz-Plus offers over 50,000 books and resources for personalized blended learning.

Learning focus: ELA grades 2, 3, and 5

Teacher training: Each involved school selected a team

of teachers, ranging in size from 5-15, with the support of the schools' principals and the identification of a key point person to lead the effort. By participating in the pilot with MassNET, teams received ongoing support and professional development, as well as periodic data analyses. MassNET also facilitated communication between schools and products, but left negotiations and purchasing decisions up to the schools themselves.

Cost: A single class, annual license for Writing A-Z and Raz-Plus costs just under \$300.

DISTRICT CONTEXT

District demographics: Boston Public Schools educate over 56,000 students in 125 schools. Nearly half of the students speak a language other than English at home and the students come from nearly 140 different countries. About 20 percent of students have disabilities and 50

percent of students are economically disadvantaged.

Pilot demographics: Oliver Wendell Holmes Elementary involved 210 students and 9 teachers throughout grades 2, 3, and 5 in the pilot.

PILOT GOAL

The school's pilot goal was to move to personalized learning through the implementation of instructional software for ELA in grades K-8. The teacher team also identified an academic goal and how to measure it.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Duration: 2016-17 academic school year

Quality of support: The most common support was informal conversations with other teachers, which happened about half of the weeks of the 20 week pilot. Teachers with lower rates of usage reported receiving support more frequently than teachers who used the products more often. Low usage teachers often reported receiving support from coaches more often, as well. The product also provided support, but teachers did not note that support as particularly useful.

Data collected: A range of qualitative and quantitative data were collected, in addition to product data on usage and student progress. Teachers completed a Fall and Spring survey regarding personalized learning in their classrooms, six months of online logs with both qualitative and quantitative components, and a final reflection. Additionally, two teacher focus groups and two classroom observations occurred at each of the involved schools. The data collection provide a longitudinal perspective and included high rates of participation, leading to a rich and detailed picture of teacher thinking and instructional practices around the use of Writing A-Z/Rax-Plus.

FINDINGS

Educator engagement: Product data was not provided by Writing A-Z and Raz-Plus, making it difficult to classify implementation. Teacher reports indicated that they used Raz-Plus significantly more than Writing A-Z. Due to differences in contexts and usage at different school levels, researchers could not conclude that products caused the usage rates.

Educator satisfaction: Tech problems were reported on a broad range of issues including: Wi-Fi issues, logon problems,

lack of headphones, lack of working devices, and software problems. However, teachers who used the tool at or close to recommended levels noted less tech problems. This does not mean teachers did not encounter tech problems, but may not have reported them. Overall, most teachers reported an intention to continue to work toward personalized learning, often with an emphasis on differentiated learning.

Student satisfaction: Overall, teachers involved in focus groups reported that students were motivated by the objective feedback.

Student learning: Teachers reported that they found some value in it but eventually found that students were sometimes challenged with typing and that some issues with logistics of using it (including printing and editing) made it not worth the extra effort to use it.

See the full report by LearnLaunch at: <http://learnlaunch.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Final-MassNET-Report-April-2018.pdf>