



CASE STUDY:

SkillsTutor at Alva Middle School

Alva, FL

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Alva Middle School, Alva, Florida

I. Site Description

Alva Middle School is a rural school located in Alva, Florida about 20 miles inland from Fort Myers. The town of Alva has just over 2,000 residents, and Alva Middle School is one of 16 middle schools in the Lee County Public School System. Lee County Public School District is the ninth-largest district in Florida and one of the largest, fully accredited school districts in the nation.

Alva Middle School has 514 students of which 20% are Hispanic and 11% are African groups. The majority of students at Alva are on free or reduced lunch plans with 61% meeting this criteria. Only 12 students, 2 American, and 2% are from other ethnic percents of the student population, are of limited English proficiency. In Florida, schools are given letter grades based on student academic achievement. Alva was able to earn an A in two of the last three years (a “B” was received in 2009-2010). In 2011, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) scores were 79% for reading, 80% for math, and 90% for writing. For additional background information about Alva Middle School see: tinyurl.com/3mbaopg.

“My suggestion [to other schools] is make it as easy and available to the teachers as possible. The kids like it and the kids are engaged, and for us, we’ve looked at the results and we think it makes a difference.”

— Stephen Hutnik, Principal, Alva Middle School, Alva, Florida.

II. Details of Implementation

Overview

Steve Hutnick has been the principal of Alva Middle School for the past nineteen years and provides primary oversight for the SkillsTutor implementation. The school has a robust technology integration program with every academic classroom having a minimum of three computer stations. The school also has two computer labs with between 30 and 35 computers each. All computers in classrooms and labs have access to SkillsTutor. The second computer lab was added two years ago because demand for the first computer lab greatly exceeded its availability.

Alva uses seven general content areas of SkillsTutor including, in order of use, Math, Reading, Language Arts, Science, Information and Job Readiness Skills, Writing, and Algebra. Math and Reading were the most frequently used SkillsTutor modules for the 2010-2011 school year.

SkillsTutor is used for remediation, general skill development, and accelerated learning to keep students engaged. Teachers rotate students in the classroom onto three classroom computers for targeted remediation, and entire classrooms visit the computer lab several times each week for customized skill development on SkillsTutor. Teachers have reported that SkillsTutor seems to be especially effective and engaging for students in the bottom 25% of the class by providing individualized remediation on math and reading skills.

"I can look at the sign-up sheet for the use of both computer labs and they [teachers] only sign up for two reasons. Online testing or for the use of SkillsTutor, and both labs are getting a lot of use. I think that pretty much says it all."

— Stephen Hutnik, Principal, Alva Middle School, Alva, Florida.

Usage

During the 2010-2011 school year 509 students completed a total of 23,580 activities and spent 1,827 hours on SkillsTutor with an average of 46 lessons completed by each student. Reading, Beginning Language Arts, Basic Math and Beginning Math were the most frequently used modules with almost half of all lessons focused on these areas.

In the first ten weeks of the current school year (2011-2012), usage has increased significantly. If current trends continue throughout the current year, usage will come close to doubling from the previous year. In addition, the number of teachers using SkillsTutor has increased substantially. In 2010/2011, 6 teachers were consistently using the program, and in the first 2.5 months of the 2011-2012 school year 20 teachers were consistently using the program.

The teacher who uses the program the most, Barry Jenkins, also received an Outstanding Subject Area Teacher of The Year Award in 2011 by the Lee County School District. Mr. Jenkins teaches special education students at Alva. Administrators view SkillsTutor as an effective technique for helping the school achieve its AYP goals, and more teachers are receiving training on the effective use of SkillsTutor.

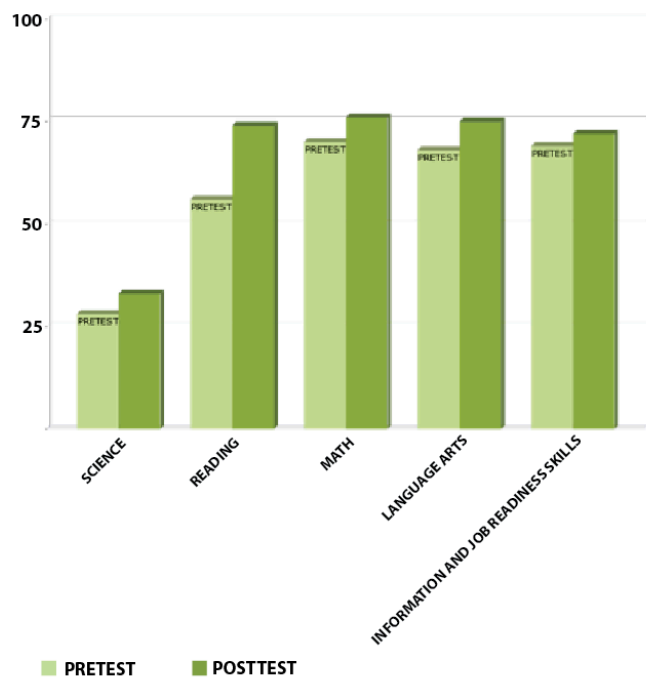
III. Gains Reported 2010-2011

Gains ranging from 4% to 32% were seen in all 5 areas pre- and post-tested. Reading showed the most significant improvement with 63 students completing pre- and post-tests and showing an average gain of 32%. Language Arts also showed a significant gain of 10% with 64 students completing pre- and post-tests. Anecdotally, the principal of Alva Middle School attributes gains in standardized test scores directly to the use of SkillsTutor in math and reading.

“We are making progress with the lower 25% of the students. Those kids, for the most part, haven’t experienced success in school; they have low self-esteem and are not very motivated. Kids like working on the computer and not just having the teacher tell them what to do.”

— Stephen Hutnik, Principal, Alva Middle School, Alva, Florida.

Table 1. Gains: Alva Middle School, 7/1/2010 to 6/30/2011



SkillsTutor

SkillsTutor is an online supplemental program that is used to help increase proficiency in math, reading, writing, language, science, and workforce readiness. SkillsTutor provides differentiated instruction, diagnostic testing, prescriptive assignments and automatic reporting for the K-adult learner. It can be integrated into classroom instruction or used after school with minimal guidance.

SkillsTutor has a flexible and easy-to-use management system that allows instructors to assign lessons by standard and monitor progress while providing real-time usage and performance data. This research-based system aligns to state and national standards. SkillsTutor is a division of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. For more information, go to www.skillstutor.com.

