



Assistive Technology Update

Fulton County Public Schools, GA

Middle School Implementation Program for Literacy Improvement for Students with Disabilities

This Assistive Technology Update describes an initiative to improve the literacy skills of middle school students with disabilities in Fulton County Public Schools, GA, using SOLO, an assistive technology writing software to achieve their objectives. Fulton County Schools serve approximately 9,000 students with disabilities. Under the leadership of Dr. Vickie Perdue Scott, and the Assistive Technology team within the Services for Exceptional Children Department, they purchased the technology through their local, Title VI-B and ARRA funds to implement this initiative.

This district was honored in 2009 by its local *Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Foundation* which recognized both general and special education teachers as early classroom adopters who pioneered this writing implementation program and bridged daily instruction through the use of assistive technology tools. They won the ***Writing Excellence and Innovation in the Classroom Award***. In this document, Sara Snyder, Director of Instruction, Services for Exceptional Children and Shonda Golden, AT Specialist, answer questions about the district's writing initiative.

Question: What are your district's goals for supporting students with disabilities?

Answer: Originally, the goal was to improve the status of schools at risk of not meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) and to improve student achievement for students with disabilities. We also wanted to provide digital access to general education instructional materials for middle school students served through the interrelated resource classroom. Based on this initial implementation, the district decided to move forward and purchase the latest version of SOLO for all middle and high school special education programs.

Question: How did you select the assistive technology tools for this initiative?

Answer: After investigation, research and discussion, we purchased SOLO to pilot test. Participating students received instruction in their Connections and Interrelated Resource classes on how to use SOLO. Instruction included reading aloud at-or near-grade passages, finding resources for English, Science and Social Studies projects, writing drafts and editing to make a final document.

SOLO is a software suite like Microsoft Office, but SOLO is fully accessible and accommodates reading and writing tasks. The technology was developed for students with disabilities in an education environment and includes four literacy accommodation tools:

1. Read:OutLoud, an eBookreader that provides access to the latest electronic book formats with audio support for multi-model reading. The software includes an accessible web browser to access the Internet and reading templates based on the National Reading Panel and Reading Next Report to help students comprehend what they read. Students can take notes and study independently.
2. Co:Writer is a word prediction writing tool for students who are poor spellers and have difficulty with grammar usage.

3. Draft:Builder is a graphic organizer that helps students organize thoughts and capture their main ideas in a structured writing outline.
4. Write:OutLoud is a talking word processor students use to write their final documents.



Question: How did you get general education teachers on board?

Answer: During the pilot, a special education teacher embraced the SOLO technology. She integrated SOLO into her classroom. She collaborated with the general education teachers to determine the major projects and grading rubrics that would occur in Science and Social Studies. Using the SOLO tool, she created a peer-to-peer editing process and a rubric on capitalization, usage, punctuation, and spelling (CUPS). This framework addressed her students' needs.

Evidence showed improvements in students' vocabulary, background knowledge and benchmark tests. Since this improvement was demonstrated through the work in general education, it was easy to increase the collaboration between general education and special education teachers.

Question: How did you achieve district-wide implementation?

Answer: We demonstrated the teacher-user model for Principals. We created a Summer Institute for middle school teachers and Curriculum Specialists (Science and Social Studies Central Office personnel). Teachers from each middle school were recommended by their Principals. The task was to create lessons geared to the Georgia Performance Standards for middle grade science and social studies courses. These lessons and assignments featured access to appropriate web content and digital access to the curriculum. The Summer Institute resulted in creating over 200 assignments and activities for teachers to use with the SOLO technology. Teachers described the benefit of using technology to improve student achievement across the curriculum. With the SOLO 6 license structure, teachers can use SOLO at home to build new assignments and students with IEP's can access SOLO at home for extended learning practice.

Question: What's next for your school improvement plan?

Answer: We'll take what we have learned from the middle school initiative and integrate SOLO into our high schools. ARRA stimulus funds make this possible. We have expanded teacher training and opened new opportunities for students to use SOLO in the media center. The benefits we achieved in this program are:

- Timely access to digital curriculum as required by IDEA
- Active participation in students' learning process at school and at home
- Intervention to prevent failure for students in later grades
- Accommodation for students practicing for skill assessments
- Learning independence and confidence in struggling readers and writers
- Collaboration between and among special and general education teams and courses
- Supplemental instruction for guided reading/writing skill practice and reinforcement
- School-wide improvement of literacy skills for students with disabilities

Feel free to share this AT Schools Update celebrating the success of Fulton County Schools, GA.

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