

Helping Students Succeed in Advanced Academics With Packback



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CHALLENGE:

Students Need Immediate Feedback To Improve Their Writing

Located in north central Florida, Marion County is a booming area within a fast-growing state. The county's population has grown by nearly 60% in the past two decades. This dramatic growth is being reflected in the school system, which recently enrolled over 45,000 students for the first time in district history. This massive boom in enrollment has put a tremendous strain on the Marion County Schools and teachers throughout the district.

Like many Florida districts, Marion County offers advanced academics courses through the Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Cambridge International programs. These classes regardless of discipline require a significant amount of writing — in many cases, far more than what students are accustomed to producing and much more than teachers are used to grading.

One of the most popular advanced academics courses offered in Marion County's public schools is a writing-intensive course offered to 9th and 10th graders. While the course is optional, more than 90% of the district's high school students choose to take it to fulfill a graduation requirement in English and earn college credit at no cost to their families.

Most students enter the course familiar with expository and argumentative writing. But this course introduces students to discursive writing, a more demanding style that requires students

to examine an issue through multiple lenses and explain all sides. The syllabus for the course focuses on helping students develop arguments; strengthen their independent reasoning and persuasion skills; present their own unique points of view, and reflect upon the perspectives of others.

To practice that approach to writing (and thinking), students in the course are generally required to write weekly essays to prepare for their two-part assessment given in the spring, in which an essay counts for 50% of their score. The quantity and quality of writing required in this course is a significant step up from their previous classes and a major increase in workload for their teachers.

All of these advanced courses require students to write more. The more writing you require, the more of a burden you put on your teachers to provide timely feedback so students can improve their writing."

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SOLUTION:

Instant Feedback Via Packback

Since 2015, Packback has worked with school districts and colleges across the country to help millions of students become better critical thinkers, researchers, and writers. Packback's proprietary platform acts as a digital writing tutor for every student and a grading assistant for every teacher that creates a complete interdisciplinary workflow for assigning, completing, and grading writing assignments across the curriculum. Unlike other tools designed to support student writing, Packback goes beyond the mechanics of grammar and spelling, providing instant feedback that helps students build critical thinking and writing skills throughout the process. Marion County Public Schools introduced Packback in early 2023 to all teachers of advanced classes taken largely by juniors and seniors. The district strongly encouraged teachers of the writing-intensive course described above to adopt the software, but also received interest from teachers in English language arts, social studies and the sciences. By offering access to the platform across multiple subject areas, the district signaled that it wished to improve writing instruction across the curriculum.

What wowed Marion County teachers about Packback was the instant feedback it provided on both discussion board posts and responses and student essays. Ingram said teachers report that they're able to customize their rubrics to make grading of written work more manageable and less time-consuming, which frees them up to work with students on more advanced aspects of their writing. Students, meanwhile, feel like their papers and discussion board posts are being read and graded quickly, not weeks after the fact when they've long moved on to other assignments.

Packback does not usurp the teachers' ability to give feedback at all," Ingram said. "It allows the software and the teacher to give feedback and means teachers don't have to spend all their time on rote feedback. By ensuring that minimum expectations have been met, Packback gives teachers the time to deal with the substance of their students' written work."

✓ Great work! Your question appears to be open-ended.

● Include a source to improve your post's credibility.



RESULTS:

Increased Enrollment, Improved Achievement

After just one full year with Packback, teachers in Marion County Public Schools like what they see. Among the district's seven high schools, enrollment has climbed in the writing-intensive course, and the students are scoring better.

Importantly, Marion County has found that boosting enrollment – and performance – in this accelerated course is helping a wider range of students become stronger writers. By using advanced academics as a pathway to support all students, not just those with consistently high academic achievement, the county is finding that improving writing and critical thinking in one course is strengthening students' performance in other areas as well.

In the first year since using Packback, Marion County saw its College and Career Acceleration increase from 63% to 67.3% — reflecting the positive impact of the program on student preparedness for postsecondary success. The impact was felt more specifically at a number of high schools in the district, as well:

"We've increased our numerator and our denominator. Enrollment and achievement are both up, and our teachers say the academic discourse has improved," Ingram said. "That's significant because not only do we want more students in our advanced classes, we want them to succeed and grow."



SPECIFIC IMPACTS:

34%

Increased Cambridge Advanced pass rate at Lake Weir High School from Spring 2022 to Spring 2023.

11%

Increased AP pass rate at Forest High School from Spring 2022 to Spring 2023.

12%

Increased AP pass rate at Dunnellon High School from Spring 2022 to Spring 2023.

Ultimately, Ingram wants to introduce Packback to core courses in grades 9-10 and in middle school. That's critical, as Florida in 2024 reintroduced a statewide writing assessment for all students in grades 4-10. It will take teachers in multiple subjects, not just English language arts, to help students improve their writing skills so they can pass state tests and college placement exams and succeed in high school, college and beyond.

"I want Packback to be used in all of our core courses so we're using it for every student in middle school and high school," Ingram said. "That would be my goal."



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Mark Ingram is a K-12 Curriculum Coordinator with Marion County Public Schools in Ocala, Florida. His responsibilities include student progressions, secondary literacy, and curriculum materials. His teaching background is in high school English, Reading, and Journalism.