

# Plugged ▶ in to Reading®



Sparks Student Interest  
and Lights Up Test Scores

Hamilton County High School  
Sees Lift in Test Scores Thanks  
to Reading Curriculum for  
Secondary Students

## THE CHALLENGE: DISENGAGED LEARNERS

Hamilton County High School in Jasper, Florida, faced several challenges with its reading curriculum as the 2008–2009 school year came to an end. A center of learning to more than 630 students, the high school's language arts and reading classes were suffering low reading scores across grade levels from disengaged students. Teachers needed new teaching strategies complemented by engaging text to motivate students.

The school district's Coordinator of Student Services, Assessment and Accountabilities, Karen Mitchell, found herself looking for a new reading curriculum that would be valuable to the district's secondary students. After purchasing a new reading curriculum less than two years prior to the 2008–2009 school year, reading scores were lower than ever and Mitchell knew she needed to flip this situation around.

"Effective and engaging reading curriculum products for secondary students are few and far between," says Mitchell. "I was looking for a program that would not

only encourage students to read the text, but provide methods for improving reading comprehension."

## THE SOLUTION: USING PLUGGED-IN TEACHERS & STUDENTS

Mitchell researched several options, eventually pinpointing the **Plugged-in to Reading™** and **Plugged-in to Nonfiction™** programs created by Dr. Janet Allen.

Her familiarity with Dr. Allen began more than seven years ago, and she was drawn in by Plugged-in's gradual-release-of-responsibility instructional model, which guides students from teacher-directed instruction to peer-supported learning, and finally to self-directed learning. Each level of the program includes the resources, scaffolds and strategies to guide teachers toward highly qualified, best-practice literacy instruction.

To engage students in all types of texts, Plugged-in uses a cross-genre, cross-content collection of authentic fiction and nonfiction literature by today's leading authors. The texts provide the vehicle for embedded

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strategy instruction, providing students the tools and techniques necessary for becoming more engaged, proficient learners as they encounter more complex texts. The continued guidance and repetitive practice allows students to integrate new information with what they already know.

Focused on engaging students of varying learning styles, readiness and interest levels, the program provides the teacher with methods for differentiated instruction to reach all students in today's inclusive, diverse classrooms. Plugged-in provides audio support through audiobooks from Recorded Books, which research shows to improve fluency, vocabulary acquisition and comprehension for all students, including ELL (English Language Learners) and ESS (Exceptional Student Services) students.

Hamilton County High School implemented the **Plugged-in to Reading™** and **Plugged-in to Nonfiction™** programs in 18 remedial reading courses—each with less than 18 students—across grades nine through 12 at the beginning of the 2009–2010 school year. Immediately, Mitchell began to notice a change in the students' attitudes.

“Each month, I make it a point to observe each remedial reading class,” said Mitchell. “After we began using the Plugged-in programs, I experienced something that was very unusual for me. Students were actually excited to show me what they were learning in class! I have never seen students so enthralled in reading—let alone reading nonfiction books.”

Because the program empowers students to utilize new skills, it leads to independent success and increased interest in fiction and nonfiction texts.

“The calculated release from teacher-directed instruction to peer-supported instruction, to self-directed learning built up the students' confidence,” said Mitchell. “The students were finally presented with text that they could read and comprehend. After finding success with their teacher and peers, they seemed as though they could pick up any book and read it.”

## THE RESULTS: ENGAGED STUDENTS, BETTER TEST SCORES

By the end of the 2009–2010 school year, Hamilton County High School students showed progress in every aspect they previously found challenging. Mitchell saw that students were more enthusiastic about discussing the texts and able to express core ideas more clearly. The change in attitude was one of the main goals of the program.

The gradual release increased confidence in reading and encouraged students to dive deeper into the texts. Mitchell also found that while using the program, one non-English speaking student was able to break language barriers, eventually seeking out help from his classmates when the other students began learning more swiftly. Now confident in their own comprehension skills, students were eager to help their peer.

“Teaching is a great way to learn,” said Mitchell. “These students became the teacher as they helped their fellow classmate succeed.”

Besides engaged students, the results were also visible in the test scores. The school's Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) results were the best in 10 years for eleventh and twelfth graders.

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