



December 2004

## Ocotillo Elementary School Wins NCLB Blue Ribbon Award

An Interview with Lisa Garcia, Program Coordinator  
Ocotillo Elementary School, Tucson, Arizona

School Profile: 375 Students, 96% Disadvantaged, 86% Hispanic, Title 1

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The significance of the award got to me when I saw the small group of schools being honored in Washington, DC. Only 272 elementary schools out of 10,000 nationwide were represented. Ocotillo qualified under the category for "dramatic academic improvement with disadvantaged students." We were in the company of the top 10% highest achieving public and private schools in the country — the elite and advantaged. Ninety-four percent of our students are considered disadvantaged; we only needed 30% to qualify.

### Outstanding Performance

Ocotillo received the NCLB Blue Ribbon Award primarily based on achievement data. Our students demonstrated a dramatic increase in their reading and math scores on the AIMS (state test).

Percentage of students meeting or exceeding the Arizona Standards in reading for grades 3 and 5:

**Grade 3: Reading scores rose from 39% in 1999-2000 to 67% in 2002-2003**

**Grade 5: Reading scores rose from 17% in 1999-2000 to 58% in 2002-2003.**

When we analyzed reading and math data in terms of ethnicity, Special Education students, and ELL students, each subgroup demonstrated dramatic improvements -- a requirement for getting the award.

While our students still rank lower than students from other schools, they are improving rapidly and closing the gap with the high achievers.

### My Reading Coach Contributes to Success

Grade 5 data includes the original group of students placed on My Reading Coach. In January 2002, we put all second grade students on My Reading Coach as part of their primary reading program. Our belief: If kids are reading by the second grade, we won't need to worry about them later. Current research is backing this strategy.

My Reading Coach successfully teaches our students to read because it includes:

- **Individual tutorial:** Students work at their own pace and get their individualized reading needs met. The teacher has the time to work with the student one-to-one using the reports and challenge intervention sheets
- **Reading Mastery:** The program has a strong phonics component, but it also includes grammar and comprehension strategies.
- **Virtual Coach:** A real man models perfect audio and visual pronunciation while interacting with our students.
- **Learning modalities:** The program matches a student's learning style: auditory, visual, oral, and tactile.

We have added a tutoring program for 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders. Now we can efficiently meet the reading needs of more students, 25 at a time. We offer the tutoring program during and after school hours as well as in summer school.

### Parents Are Involved

Since the inception of My Reading Coach, we have increased parent volunteerism significantly. In 2000 parents volunteered 400 hours; in 2003 that number was 4,000. This year we are projecting 7,000 hours.

The kids are proud that their parents are supporting them. The Hispanic parents are so excited by how their kids are progressing that they want to learn English on the computer too — *"We want to do what our kids are doing."* **This year we are starting a parent group on My Reading Coach.**

Our students want to succeed and make their parents proud. It looks as though the parents want to improve too. Students and parents are modeling success for each other. They both contributed to our award.

This award was also made possible by the generosity of Raytheon Engineering Group, the vision of Mindplay, and dedication of the Ocotillo teachers and staff. We helped disadvantaged children succeed. As I was being congratulated by so many people in Washington, DC, it hit me, *"Wow, we did something great!"*

## Students Attract Attention

### An Interview with Judy Hoffpauir North Shore Middle School Galena Park, Texas

*“Other kids are buying into My Reading Coach because of the changes they see in my first eight students. They want to know how they can use that program.”*

Eight students participated in the My Reading Coach after school tutoring program. Jose was one of them.

#### Jose’s Success

Jose, almost 16 years old, came to Galena Park from a school district where he had been stuck in the 4th grade. He was placed in the 7th grade. Jose did not qualify for Special Education, even though he scored 1st grade 3rd month on the Star Test in the fall. He was enrolled in the My Reading Coach tutoring program. **That spring, he scored 6th grade 7th month — more than 5 years growth in eight months.**

When Jose began My Reading Coach, he grumbled, fussed, and cussed out the online coach, but he never missed a day. He was frustrated using the program until he saw his own progress. He began speaking to the online coach. I overheard him say, *“Oh coach! So that’s why you put the C-K there and not just K.”* I watched the gaps in Jose’s understanding collapse. He progressed quickly!

**Once success took hold, Jose’s appearance improved, he spent less time in detention, and his involvement in gangs decreased. He became a positive role model for other Hispanic students.**

#### My Reading Coach Makes A Difference

As their skills and comfort level improved, Jose and the seven other students began meeting me at my classroom door after school. Together we walked to the lab, a good distance away. They stayed glued to My Reading Coach until the last moment of class time. Best of all, their other grades improved, and they began to participate in their classes. Both teachers and others students wanted to know what was going on. I told them about My Reading Coach. Soon, students were asking if they could try it.

My Reading Coach is also proving successful in my dyslexia class. These students are more confident with their abilities and are participating in their classes, too. The parents love it and have become a part of the learning process. I can now work one-to-one with my entire class. This leads the way for tremendous success for everyone.

## Reading Incentive Program

### Shared by Raquel Tamez Zavala Elementary Corpus Christi, Texas

Learning something new takes hard work and the desire to succeed. My Reading Coach requires students to pay attention and interact with the coach every 15 seconds or less. That’s intense! **To motivate students we have added an incentive program – prizes for lessons they complete.**

Students transfer their progress information from the computer to their individual progress chart posted on the wall in the lab (**See attached chart.**) As students “Log Off” My Reading Coach each day, their progress sheet appears on the screen. They count the blue dots and red checks to keep track of completed lessons. Twice a week they place checks for each lesson completed on their wall chart. Lessons they bi-passed on the placement test have a star on the blue dot.

**For every five checks, (one check per completed lesson), a student picks up a little token prize.** We started with design pencils, spider and bat rings, erasers, candy, tracing rulers, mechanical pencils, and other seasonal items. We buy these tokens at the Dollar Store and Party City using money from a student activity fund and student incentives account. We also include prizes according to what we have going on at school. We have given redeemable coupons for Friday PTA sales and our Fall Fest.

Students who finish two sections of My Reading Coach by December are entered in a drawing for a bike donated by a local attorney. We are working on getting another donation for a May drawing.

Paraprofessionals who work with the students, along with our incentive program, keep our students excited about reading. The Principal also gives students tokens when they bring him My Reading Coach certificates to be signed.

My Reading Coach teaches students to read; our incentive program makes learning fun.

## Help Us Help You!

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