



Educational Solutions

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## My Reading Coach in a Juvenile Justice System

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Fort Bend County Juvenile Detention Center; Texas; Boys and Girls Ages 10-17

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The 14-year old boy was picked up by the police for allegedly breaking into a car and stealing the radio. He was transported to the juvenile detention center in handcuffs and booked in. His fingerprints and picture were taken. He was tested for drugs. He was given a psychological test to determine his state of mind in this crisis situation, AND, his reading skills were assessed by My Reading Coach. This scenario is repeated many times each year in the Fort Bend County Juvenile Detention Center.

In 2007, a daily average of 49 boys and girls were temporarily detained in the juvenile detention center, a maximum security residential facility for juveniles. The center provides a restricted environment while these youth await court disposition or transportation to a residential placement. All ethnicities and socio-economic classes are represented.

As a result of a meeting with one of the detainees, Chief Mike Meade brought the problem of functional illiteracy among our juveniles to the attention of the Special Programs Unit of the probation department. "Angel" was 16 years old, 5'11" and 210 pounds. He attended the 9th grade at an alternative school because he was suspended many times from a regular school. He was big and tough, and he could not read.

Chief Meade requested that "Angel" be tutored. One of the Special Programs staff worked with him while he was in Detention using her first grader's reading flash cards. Not much was accomplished for that boy, but it did start a process of investigation into literacy programs that led us to My Reading Coach the end of 2006.

### My Reading Coach Makes a Difference

The Fort Bend County Juvenile Probation Department now uses My Reading Coach in the Detention Center and at two alternative education sites run by the Department and area school districts. This is the result of a collaborative effort between the Juvenile Probation Department, a non-profit organization supporting the department, and several community service organizations.

Now every juvenile processed into Detention has his or her reading level assessed through the Reading Assessment & Prescription Service program (RAPS). Those youth who score 70% or less on their assessment continue with My Reading Coach. Looking at a snapshot of one period of time, there were 70 juveniles in a "class" at the Detention Center who completed the assessment. Of those, 21 (30%) scored 70% or less. Between the initial scores and the review scores after the

first 20 lessons, all 21 students had an average improvement of 13.3%.

Four students stood out on the Review Test for lessons 1-20:

- A 16 year old Hispanic female: She is in the 9th grade in regular classes. Her "criminal record" consists of numerous trancies from school and marijuana use. She had a 21% improvement after working a relatively short time on the program.
- A 14 year old African American male: He is in the 6th grade in special education classes. During his time in Detention, he had a 38% improvement in his reading.
- A 17 year old African American male: He is in the 9th grade. He is in special education classes and is classified as learning disabled. He had a 45% improvement and was very proud of himself!
- A 16 year old African American male: He is in the 9th grade. He has been getting in trouble ever since he was 10 years old: Truancies, runaways, trespassing and marijuana use. When he did go to school, he did not attend class. He just wandered the halls. After being put back into Detention, he started working on My Reading Coach. To date, he has had a 58% improvement in his reading skills.

Young people involved with the law are not accustomed to achieving success. Learning to read gives them a sense of accomplishment, which says, "I have done something right." One 16 year old student remarked that working on My Reading Coach has given him an opportunity to improve his reading skills. He said, "*This is the first time anyone has wanted to help.*"

Students are able to work on the program in an environment that is non-threatening and private—a one to one relationship with the coach. The way the lessons build up gradually enables students to experience success at each lesson. This is particularly critical to our students because of their patterns of failure and low self-esteem.

A disturbingly high number of young people involved in the juvenile justice system have "fallen through the cracks" educationally. There is a direct correlation between their poor, sometimes nonexistent, reading skills and their truancies, discipline notices, suspensions and expulsions. Truancy has been referred to as a "gateway crime" and a first step to a lifetime of problems for youth. My Reading Coach is teaching our young people to read and giving them another chance.... before it is too late!

## Teachers and Special Education Director Praise My Reading Coach

**Michael Hill, Special Education Teacher - Email: [Michael.Hill@muhlenberg.kyschools.us](mailto:Michael.Hill@muhlenberg.kyschools.us)  
Greenville Elementary; Greenville, KY: 560 students; Grades K-5; 55% Disadvantaged, Title 1**

**Michelle Arnold, Resource Teacher - Email: [Michelle.Arnold@muhlenberg.kyschools.us](mailto:Michelle.Arnold@muhlenberg.kyschools.us)  
Central City Elementary, Central City, KY: 419 students; Grades K-5; 61% Disadvantaged; Title 1**

According to Patty Williams, Special Education Director for Muhlenberg County School District, teachers are using and praising My Reading Coach. We recognize that this program is helping our students raise their Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) scores. Not only is it being used for special education students, but for those at risk of being labeled with a disability. My Reading Coach has caught on in our schools. It was the hot topic of conversation at a recent board of education meeting. We started with one license in one school in 2005. We now have two licenses in eight schools and are getting outstanding results.

### Interview with Michael Hill

Twenty-two special education students began using My Reading Coach in the fall of 2005. From the beginning of this pilot program, I saw positive results, and the students said they thought My Reading Coach was helping them learn to read. By the end of the school year, I had hard data showing that students were making progress. I suggested that Patty Williams buy more My Reading Coach licenses.

Currently, students from first to fifth grade are on the program two to three times a week. Special education students have priority for working on My Reading Coach, but we are also using it for at-risk students. Many students who started on My Reading Coach did not have a measurable reading level. They did not recognize all letters or have a good understanding of the letter sounds.

All students currently working on My Reading Coach are showing progress at varying rates. Some have shown remarkable success. Two 5th grade girls were non-readers when they started the program in 2005. Now they both read grade level text with fluency in their regular education classrooms. My Reading Coach has also been effective for some of our higher functioning autistic children.

Many components contribute to student success in reading. I like that My Reading Coach provides consistency. No teacher could keep up the pace that the Reading Coach does. It will not let the students move on to the next lesson until they are ready. The coaches always give the same encouragement and praise. No human could do this. My Reading Coach works!

### Teacher Comments:

**Mrs. Meriwether:** Laura, a fifth grader, wrote a short piece for me today without prompting, spelling or grammatical help. I was able to read the entire four lines, and she only had two spelling errors out of 18 words. The words were short, but she used them well. She wrote this in about 3 minutes with one quick set of directions.

**Ms House:** After working on My Reading Coach several times during the last few months, Tasha volunteered to read out loud

during my science class. Before, she never offered to read in front of the other students. I believe My Reading Coach has given her more confidence.

### Interview with Michelle Arnold

Twenty-five special education students have been working on My Reading Coach in the Resource Room since September, 2007. This initial class consists of two 1st graders; seven 2nd graders, nine 3rd graders, three 4th graders, and four 5th graders. The majority of these students also receive interventions for speech. Students work with the program for 30 minutes two or three times a week. The lowest level readers have more time with the program.

We have tried several different types of reading interventions, but, some kids were still not learning to read. Other programs may not address each student's reading needs in a class of 20 students.

### Impressive Results

One fifth grade boy's placement score for lessons 1-20 was 55%; his review score was 78% (42% improvement in 17 hours on the computer). He is on lesson 21 and reviewing earlier lessons when prompted by the program. When he began My Reading Coach, he was reading a few sight words. Now he is applying the sounds to form words and working on grammar.

A fifth grade girl's placement score for lessons 1-20 was 78%, and the review score was 91% (17% improvement in 20 hours). She is now on lesson 32. She is working on grammar and is receiving certificates every couple of weeks. She started raising her hand to read aloud in social studies after working on the program for only a few weeks.

One third grade girl's placement score for lessons 1-20 was 54%, and the review score was 82% (52% improvement in 15 hours).

A first grade special education and speech student improved his ability to read words and sound them out. His confidence improved, and he volunteered to answer the questions his teacher asked in small group instruction. His reading level in the Accelerated Reader program (read books and take multiple choice tests) has also improved.

This program makes a huge difference to our students who are visual learners because the coach shows them where to put the tongue and lips. When students cannot figure out the word by listening, I tell him to watch the coach's mouth. Then, they can distinguish between the "m" and "n" sounds.

I am amazed that My Reading Coach identifies a student's reading weaknesses and prescribes what that student needs. The program repeatedly takes the student back to review what s/he does not know. My Reading Coach is making a world of difference with our students in a short period of time.

## Help Us Help You!

Tip to share in the newsletter? Want to brag about your students? Have a question about the program?  
Something you would like us to change or improve?

Get answers to your questions or send your tips to [mail@mindplay.com](mailto:mail@mindplay.com)