

## **Fort McCoy writes way to better FCAT scores**

**Teachers use special program to teach skills.**

**MAYA CARPENTER  
THE STAR-BANNER**

OCALA -- Students at Fort McCoy School are writing their way to success when it comes to measuring their achievements under the state's FCAT rankings.

The school's elementary-grade students ranked fourth in the state in terms of the percentage increase -- 46 percent -- in their FCAT writing scores from last year to this year. Fort McCoy middle schoolers increased their FCAT writing scores by 26 percent, good for a 44th place ranking.

Also, eight other local schools made the top 100 in the state when it comes to the improvement of their writing scores compared to 2005. They include Marion Charter School (61st), North Marion Middle School (68th), Howard Middle School and Oakcrest Elementary School (tied with a ranking of 84th), Dunnellon High School (25th), Lake Weir High School (50th), West Port High School (53rd), and Vanguard High School (93rd).

Teachers at Fort McCoy said their students' enthusiasm for learning is the key to their achievements.

Intermediate writing teachers Bette Nagele and Michelle Surman pride themselves on teaching third-, fourth- and fifth-graders the basic techniques of writing. They teach through programs that build students' confidence as well as writing skills, Surman said.

Students walk into her classroom not feeling like writers, but they leave eager to write, she said.

Both teach programs that have helped improve students' writing.

Nagele's Project CHILD program focuses on academic enhancement in all subjects.

Nagele also uses a technique called the Marching Order, which she likens to a boot camp for writing. It prepares students for the Florida Writing Assessment test. Students learn how to write complete sentences and increase their vocabulary, she said.

The MyAccess program is something that students and teachers enjoy. It features a Web site where students can write a story and then get instant feedback about the originality, focus and mechanics of their material.

"It's the same as if the students were taking the actual test," Surman said.

Some students were a little shaken at what the program entailed, but most managed to learn quite a bit.

"I was kind of scared, but MyAccess helped me a lot," said Ashley Schaeffer, a fourth-grader.

For student James Dickins, a program that pairs students together to each write their own story on the same topic has been helpful. Once they're done, the students critique each other's work, and they must be able to offer two constructive suggestions about their partner's story, Surman said.

Nagele, who will teach at Hammett Bowen Jr. Elementary school next year, said her students have become so excited about writing some have told her to watch for their books in the bookstores when they become famous.

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*Maya Carpenter may be reached at [maya.carpenter@starbanner.com](mailto:maya.carpenter@starbanner.com) or (352) 867-4119.*