Kurzweil Educational Systems

Customer Profile

Zach Bryant

Student Using Kurzweil 3000 for Statewide Standardized Testing

Believe you can

The Situation

Zach Bryant is a lively 6th grader. Despite his cerebral palsy, which has left him physically disabled, Zach is an outgoing, curious, active and happy kid. Zach's disability poses many challenges for him. He is wheelchair bound, unable to speak and has poor motor coordination. However, technology tools, such as Pathfinder, a touch-screen communication device that Zach uses to run other software, and Kurzweil 3000 reading, writing and learning software for struggling students, allow him to be fully integrated into life in the classroom.

Zach attends school in Carroll County Public Schools, a suburban school district located about 45 minutes from Baltimore, Maryland and one hour from Washington, DC. Since the passage of the Assistive Technology Act in 1998, the district has been actively investing in software. In particular, it has striven to provide appropriate software for its students with special needs.

Zach was starting 4th grade when he first began using Kurzweil 3000. While cognitively alert, Zach had been struggling with reading since first grade and was reading more than a year below grade level. Phonics, one of the foundations needed to become a proficient reader, wasn't working for Zach who found the process of decoding individual words very difficult. Visually, he had trouble dealing with large amounts of text on the page, and his mother, Danya Bryant, feared that he would never become a proficient reader.

The Solution

Zach was introduced to Kurzweil 3000 as the result of a successful grant written by Stevie Savar, Carroll County Supervisor of Special Education, and Molly Riggs, Carroll County AT Coordinator. The district had become aware that the state was planning to use Kurzweil 3000 as an official accommodation for students with learning or physical disabilities taking standardized tests. In preparation for this move, grant money had been made available to local communities interested in piloting Kurzweil 3000. The Carroll County grant, which was extended in its second year, provided funds for every school in the county to have a copy of the program. It also made Kurzweil 3000 available to all students, including Zach, who used a computer as a classroom accommodation.

Grant funds also provided for software training as well as for the hiring of Nettie Reese as an assistant to Molly Riggs. Nettie, the parent of a child with special learning needs, was familiar with the technology resources of the county and had been the head of the local chapter of Learning Disabilities Association (LDA).

For more information on Maryland statewide standardized tests, see www.marylandpublicschools.org.

"I love Kurzweil 3000, because it helps me do my work faster so I can keep up with the other kids."

Zach Bryant *Student*

"People know Kurzweil 3000 as a tool for able-bodied students with reading difficulties. I want them to know that it's also an excellent solution for students with physical disabilities."

Danya Bryant *Parent*

Together, she and Molly have built an integrated network to support Kurzweil 3000. They developed a hands-on Kurzweil 3000 tutorial that was used for the initial training of teachers, parents and students and is now available to anyone wishing additional Kurzweil 3000 support. Both make regular visits to schools and encourage teachers, parents or students to contact them by email or phone with any questions or concerns about the use of the software.

"Our students who use Kurzweil 3000 are pretty self-sufficient," remarks Nettie. "We train them to do their own scanning, except for more ambitious jobs such as scanning entire textbooks, which I handle." It's not unusual for student users to become the local Kurzweil 3000 experts for their school with teachers and other students coming to them for help. During the summer, the county usually runs a technology camp where students have a chance to work on a variety of software-based projects. Kurzweil 3000 users, such as Zach, are the first ones recruited as assistants.

The Results

To everyone's surprise, a month after Zach started to use Kurzweil 3000, his reading started to improve dramatically. For the first time, his mother recalls, Zach became interested in reading. Using Kurzweil 3000, he could simultaneously hear and visually track words as they were read aloud. Tracking proved to be a critical feature for Zach. He no longer had to struggle to sound out words, but could deal with them as single units as well as in the context of a phrase or sentence. Acquiring greater fluency aided both his comprehension as well as word recognition. Remarkably, by the end of the year, Zach's reading had caught up with his classmates. Now he reads silently with just the benefit of tracking. He also enjoys using the Kurzweil 3000 Sticky Note feature to jot down questions or ideas as he reads. Since his classmates are encouraged to use Sticky Notes, Zach prides himself on being able to use the same tools.

Kurzweil 3000 has also helped Zach improve as a writer and has enabled him to write more creatively. Since he does not have the benefit of speech, hearing his own written words spoken aloud by the software has enabled Zach to express himself with greater clarity and precision. This has made him a more effective self-editor and communicator. In fact, Zach now enjoys writing movie scripts and musical compositions.

Zach's mother recalls that prior to his using Kurzweil 3000, it was extremely difficult for anyone to know what Zach was really learning. Kurzweil 3000 made it easier to track Zach's reading speed, which is now on a par with his peers. It has also helped his teachers assess his mastery of content by giving him the tools he needs to answer comprehension questions about what he has read. At the end of 5th grade, for the first time, Zach took the statewide grade-level standardized tests in Math and Reading. He used Kurzweil 3000 as an accommodation to take the tests. To the delight of his teachers and parents, he received a proficient grade in both subjects. "I'm so excited about Zach's progress," Danya beams, "and that's why I want to share his success with other parents who have children with similar needs. People know Kurzweil 3000 as a tool for able-bodied students with reading difficulties. I want them to know that it's also an excellent solution for students with physical disabilities."

Zach Bryant (cont.)

Maryland State Assessments

Prior to *No Child Left Behind*, Maryland was one of only a few U.S. states that required high school students to pass a standardized test in order to graduate. With the passage of *No Child Left Behind*, the state now requires standardized testing not only at the high school level, but also at the middle school and elementary levels.

Beginning with the class of 2009, high school students are required to pass the Maryland High School Assessment (HSA) in order to earn a Maryland high school diploma. HSA is given in English, Algebra/Data Analysis, Biology and Government. In addition, high school students must take the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) in Reading in grade 10 and in Geometry after completing a geometry course.

In grades 3-8, students must take the MSA in Reading and Math. As early as March 2008, Science will be added to the MSA in grades 3, 5, and 8.

Kurzweil 3000 is an approved accommodation for the Maryland HSA and MSA. Any accommodation used in Maryland state assessments must also be used by the student in daily classroom instruction.