Norming student essays to inform instruction at Newport-Mesa USD

About Revision Assistant

Turnitin Revision Assistant is an algorithm-based writing program that compares and evaluates trait-level writing skills aligned to a rubric. Students respond to a prompt and Revision Assistant assigns a numeric score, not on the entire essay, but rather on individual aspects of a piece of writing, such as "use of evidence," and "language and style." Revision Assistant was original-ly designed to support students taking ownership over their writing by providing them with immediate, specific, actionable feedback while they write. Newport-Mesa recognized this value for its students, but saw additional, innovative benefits as support for their common assessments and shared formative and summative bench-mark exams.

Successful writing instruction depends greatly upon the effective grading of student work. However, since the scoring of writing assessment is often a manual and subjective process, the resultant data may be inconsistent and, at times, not fully reflective of student progress.

Newport-Mesa USD needed to train teachers how to use standardized grading rubrics using common protocols and exemplar essays, thus avoiding low "interrater reliabilities" and the "halo effects" of assessment graders. They wanted to evaluate how well district teachers are teaching writing and then track student improvement and inform instruction.

Solution

Well aware of the needs and challenges posed by assessment scoring, NMUSD implemented used cutting-edge technology to make the scoring process much more efficient, reliable, and effective, thus making it possible improving on reliability and confidence. The district used Turnitin Revision Assistant to create and assess benchmark essays for all students (over 10,000 total) in grades 7-12 to:

1) support teachers in writing instruction and give them a more accurate idea of student skill sets,

2) help teachers align better on benchmark scoring, using RA's scores as objective points of refeence, and

3) drive informed curriculum planning in writing instruction using normed, calibrated data.

Outcomes

In Fall 2016, every student wrote a narrative essay in response to a Revision Assistant prompt. Scores were loaded into the district's Illuminate data storage system and analyzed on using custom Tableau dashboards. Normed and objective scores allowed the district to:

1. give teachers exemplar essays to norm their essay scoring against the district shared rubrics, resulting in improved consistency in their instruction-al and grading practices.

2. use Revision Assistant as a periodic district-wide benchmark assessment system to generate reliable district-wide data on writing performance and growth.

3. drive adjustments to the district curriculum and scoring rubrics using data from the district-wide benchmark assessment.

4. help individual teachers identify trends in their instructional practices or recognize individual/group needs and then reteach or adjust instruction for the classroom, groups, or individuals.

Return on Investment

1. The benchmark scoring process became much more efficient in time and cost.

2. Scoring time sped up exponentially: RA generated scores immediately after students completed their essays.

3. Scores were solidly consistent and reliable across essays: Revision Assistant used the same set of algorithms and criteria against all essays, and was not affected by grader halo effects.

4. applied in training, greatly increased confidence that teachers were using and understanding their rubrics.

5. Curricular and instructional adjustments became much more responsive. Since RA's scores were generated immediately, teachers could see needed changes almost right away.