

Exceptional Outcomes with Exceptional Teachers:

A VizZle Value Report from Flour Bluff ISD, Corpus Christi, TX

Flour Bluff ISD

Corpus Christi, TX



Director, Special Education:

Mrs. Sharon Chapman

SLP Team Lead:

Ms. Nicole Morin

VizZle:

- Students served: 580, K-12
- Teacher licenses: 20

Needs:

- Correlate lessons to STAAR assessment
- Utilize existing computers
- Reach non-verbal students
- Enhance inclusion students' experience

Solution:

- Customized lessons to address STARR content
- VizZle interactive lessons play on any computer
- VizZle used by classroom teachers as well as SLPs
- VizZle incorporated into general ed. classes

Doing What's Best for Students



Flour Bluff Independent School District (Flour Bluff) was formed in 1892 and covers 156 square miles in and around Corpus Christi, Texas, near the Gulf of Mexico and Corpus Christi Bay. Flour Bluff serves students from the Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, the Corpus Christi Army Depot, the Flour Bluff ISD community in Corpus Christi and students from North Padre Island. Of its 5,600 students, approximately 10% qualify for special education services.

This one location, large campus district with six buildings boasts a number of outstanding programs: an early childhood center; an ocean class that includes kayaking on the Laguna Madre; and trips to a StarBase Atlantis space simulator on the Naval Air Station. But when it comes to bragging rights, Director of Special Education Sharon Chapman feels Flour Bluff has a really special one: "I have taught in 5 states and on 3 continents, and I can unequivocally say that everyone involved with Flour Bluff ISD schools has a singular guiding principle: choosing to do what is best for students." It makes Flour Bluff ISD a shining beacon of best practices in the region.

Key Factors: Credibility & Ease-of-Use

"We are always looking for resources for our students," says Speech Pathologist & VizZle team lead, Nicole Morin. "I heard about VizZle - that the program was the product of research to support students with autism. It looked very easy to learn and we decided to pilot with a few teachers." Those two factors—that VizZle is research-based and easy to use—drove their decision to invest time in learning more about the program and to give it a trial run.

Ms. Morin learned that VizZle was born out of a four year collaboration between Monarch Teaching Technologies (MTT) and The Monarch Center for Autism (Monarch) of Shaker Heights, Ohio. Research done by a team from Children's Hospital Boston/Harvard Medical School at Monarch established the efficacy of visually supporting every aspect of a student's day. The Monarch team found that screen-based, interactive content was more engaging and provided better outcomes for students on the autism spectrum. But Monarch also found that there was no existing way to efficiently create and share the materials needed to support such a program. So VizZle was thus conceived. In 2009, MTT introduced VizZle to public schools to meet those needs and share Monarch's best practices with other schools struggling to provide students on the ASD spectrum with the materials needed to be successful.

Once they had established VizZle's credentials, Ms. Morin and her colleague Janice Alves championed the district's review of the program, and arranged for VizZle team members to present to the

"...VizZle meets requirements that other programs simply have not," Mrs. Chapman [Director of Special Education for Flour Bluff ISD] says. "Two very important factors contributed to our decision to implement VizZle; the teachers find it easy to operate, and teachers are using it."

Flour Bluff ISD team.

Champions and Children Spread the Word

Ms. Morin and Ms. Alves searched the VizZle shared library and introduced lessons to teachers and students in the district. As the two experienced successes with students, word spread. Students got excited too, talking about what they were learning and requesting more VizZle lessons.

In the first few months, inclusion classrooms adopted VizZle.



Teachers there found that VizZle leveled the playing field--non-verbal students became actively engaged, and teachers reported that students were asking them to provide more VizZle lessons.

As VizZle expanded into more classrooms, its initial two champions became 20. "We do not have funds for programs that are not consistently used. VizZle meets requirements that other programs simply don't." Mrs. Chapman says. "Two very important factors contributed to our decision to implement VizZle; the teachers find it easy to operate, and teachers are using it."

Exceptional Teachers Accept the STAAR Challenge

To meet the federal requirements mandated under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Texas Education Agency developed the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness Alternate (STAAR™ Alternate). The STAAR Alternate is designed for the purpose of assessing students with significant cognitive disabilities in grades 3–8 and in high school. If a new program is introduced, it must appropriately address STAAR goals and be able to measure the learning outcomes.

The teaching staff realized that they could find ready-made VizZle lessons or create new lessons themselves to directly address the STAAR Alternate assessment. They could then easily share them with each other as well. "This could save all of us a lot of time with regular progress monitoring on IEPs" remarked Mrs. Poynter, a Junior High classroom teacher.

Teachers stepped up to the challenge, by finding, creating and modifying lessons which addressed the "Essence Statements" (fundamental learning objectives) in STARR. Students respond to the quizzes and the questions within VizZle on interactive whiteboards, and the data is automatically collected.

Teachers found that not only were



they able to match lessons to STAAR criteria, but that they could select lessons related to specific student IEP goals as well. Mrs. Chapman is proud of how the Flour Bluff ISD teachers rose to the challenge. "We've worked hard to build the capacity to serve the needs of our kids identified with autism. Our teachers are stellar professionals--they make my job so rewarding."

Exceptional Outcomes

In 2010, Flour Bluff ISD was formally recognized for its exemplary programs and services for special education students by the Coastal Bend Autism Advocacy Group. Flour Bluff ISD has a strong reputation across Texas for success in achieving student academic and assessment goals. Part of that success is due to the support of its very active community-based foundation. The Flour Bluff ISD Education Improvement Council meets at least six times during the school year to share information and hear progress reports on various programs throughout the district. To illustrate how VizZle was being used by students, 3 students were asked to present at a meeting to an audience of nearly 40 adults comprised of parents, business leaders, PTA representatives, school principals and members from the military base. Imagine their awe and admiration as a non-verbal, 8 year-old student concluded his VizZle lesson, and, without prompting, turned around to face the audience to take a bow.

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Staff and Leadership Deserve to Take a Bow Too

Flour Bluff ISD staff and leadership serve their students with distinction, and they welcome colleagues from other districts to learn from their experience. After a recent visit to Flour Bluff ISD, a neighboring district reported:

We saw teachers saving time with these lessons. We saw kids who were engaged and enjoyed working with technology--computers, smart boards and iPad devices. We saw how secondary teachers used VizZle to support the Essence Statements, and how they are planning and preparing for next year.

While VizZle contributed to this success, it is the care and dedication that this team of professionals shows every day as they meet their commitment to bring out the best of their students that makes them truly special educators.

About Monarch Teaching Technologies (MTT)

MTT produces VizZle - an award winning web-based tool for teachers that enables educators to create fun, interactive visually supported curriculum customized for children with autism and special learning needs. For more information on VizZle or MTT visit www.monarchtt.com or call 1-800-593-1934.

