

Kurzweil Educational Systems

Customer Profile

Roger Rachow, School Administrator

Area Education Agency 13, Iowa



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The Situation

Roger Rachow brings over 25 years of experience to his position as Assistive Technology (AT) Consultant for Area Education Agency (AEA) 13 in southwestern Iowa. Area 13, serving grades K-12 in 31 school districts, is one of 16 such agencies in the state that provides specialized support services aimed at improving overall school performance.

“We had a significant problem with students performing below the 40th percentile in reading,” recalls Roger, “and I was always on the look-out for tools that could offer struggling students, especially those with disabilities, the chance to be successful.” Five years ago, he attended a presentation on Kurzweil 3000, reading and writing software for people with learning difficulties. Impressed by its many features, especially the study skills module, Roger contacted Kurzweil Educational Systems and worked with them to set up a small experimental program. This eventually grew into the current state-funded project, now being piloted in 10 middle and high schools in six districts.

The Solution

“It didn’t take me long to realize,” Roger remembers, “that tools like Kurzweil 3000 weren’t just for students with disabilities, but could benefit all students performing below grade level in reading.” For this reason, the current project targets any student performing below the 40th percentile in reading and includes regular education and special education teachers as well as superintendents, principals and technology coordinators. Roger feels that the positive response from teachers, administrators, students and parents is largely due to their early involvement in the project.

Legislation in 1974 creating the AEA system placed Iowa among the nation's leaders in establishing regional, intermediate educational service units.



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“I’ve noticed many teachers have started to rethink their approach to teaching as they see students [using Kurzweil 3000] who were once operating at the margin becoming successful and excited about school. Good technology like Kurzweil 3000 helps good teachers get better.”

Roger Rachow, Assistive Technology Consultant, Area 13, IA

Roger Rachow (cont.)

"Training people is key," says Roger. Participating staff members receive 6 to 8 hours of training on Kurzweil 3000. In addition, students receive an equal amount of training on the software. Both groups learn how to use Kurzweil 3000 to design individual study guides, take notes, outline and summarize information, access text material, use the Internet and practice test-taking skills. Roger feels that the dual training provides an important balance. "Students can encourage hesitant teachers to use the technology — and conversely — teachers can motivate students to incorporate the technology into their day-to-day learning."

The Results

Assessing the pilot is facilitated by the fact that Iowa conducts standardized testing on every student in every grade once a year. While the data has not been completely analyzed, preliminary results have been extremely encouraging. "After two years," says Roger, "15% of students in the program have moved out of the high-risk area and are now performing well above the 40th percentile." He believes, as an added benefit, Kurzweil 3000 has improved the quality of teaching. "We use a special self-scoring rubric to help teachers assess their teaching," recounts Roger. "Teachers using the Kurzweil 3000 are definitely focusing more on identifying critical content and developing study skills."

Roger has also observed a change at the state AT Committee which meets regularly to share ideas and practices. "After reporting the results of our pilot," Roger is proud to relate, "8 of the 16 Area Education Agencies have begun to implement their own Kurzweil 3000 projects." Des Moines, Iowa's largest city, is encouraging all teachers to use Kurzweil 3000. The excitement generated by the program makes Roger optimistic that funds will be available for its continued expansion.



About Area Education Agency 13

During the 1999-2000 school year, Iowa's 15 area education agencies celebrated 25 years of service to Iowa's children, families, and school staff. AEAs are an important part of Iowa's educational system because they provide a variety of services that help all children succeed. AEA personnel work closely with local schools to develop programs based on their needs. A new statewide accreditation system assists AEAs in developing those programs.

The AEAs work as educational partners with local public and accredited private schools to help assure that all children reach their potential. The agencies provide special education support services, as well as media and technology services, a variety of instructional services and leadership to promote school improvement. In 1975, the Iowa General Assembly created Iowa's 15 AEAs which are widely regarded as the finest intermediate educational service agencies in the country.

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