

# Strengthening the Writing Process: A Systematic and Sustainable Approach to Improve Writing

EDLD 655 University of Oregon March 9, 2009

## Introduction

The following is a proposed change to our school's current writing model. It is our attempt to carve out the necessary time for collaboration around writing because we recognize that unless our students gain the power to think and express their thinking in a clear manner, they lose part of their birthright as citizens in a free society. Writing is not the property of a privileged elite. (Graves 1993)

## School Characteristics

Our school is a Kindergarten through fifth grade Title One elementary school located in Beaverton, Oregon. Currently there are 503 students enrolled in grades K-5. Approximately 56% of these students come from economically disadvantaged homes and the current mobility rate is 31%. Our students collectively speak 23 languages and just over 25% of them receive targeted English language development (ELD) instruction. Approximately 43% are minority students and 4% are identified as talented and gifted.

## Comprehensive Needs Assessment

The following is baseline data from student work samples from May of the respective year:

Grade	% M/E 5/06	% M/E 5/07	% M/E 5/08
Kindy	1%	1%	1%
1st	42%	53%	64%
2nd	49%	56%	74%
3rd	84%	85%	90%
4th	27%	40%	50%
5th	56%	59%	65%

In addition to the work sample data listed above, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the State Writing Assessment in 4th grade is far lower than in any other academic area. In 2007 only 40% of students met or exceeded the writing benchmark. Although the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the benchmark in 2008 increased to 53%, it is still significantly lower than the other academic areas.

The analysis if this baseline data is pivotal to ensuring that scoring, expectations, and instruction are consistent within grade levels and that curriculum across grade levels is spiraled, fluent, and complete.

## School Improvement Goal

The goal that has been selected for our School Improvement Plan is in the area of writing. The following goal has been determined by our needs assessment and have been identified as an urgent academic need:

**The percentage of fourth graders scoring proficient and higher on the classroom work samples in writing will increase from 50% to 60% as administered throughout the school year.**

It is our belief that as students show increased proficiency on the classroom work samples, this will translate into a higher percentage of fourth graders scoring proficient or higher on the state assessment in writing

## Options for Achieving School Improvement Goal

### Option #1- Create a master schedule specifically outlining each grade levels Writing instruction block.

The purpose of this goal is to ensure value is placed on Writing as a subject equally as important to Math, Reading and other content areas. Our master schedule holds the truth in what is valued in our building and without this step, we will not move forward in our work to support Writing instruction for our teachers and staff.

### Option #2 - Teachers of writing will implement writing conferences with students

The desired result from this strategy would be that student writing would improve as teachers tailor conferring lessons to individual student needs. We would know that strategy is having a positive impact when the teacher's ability to confer with their students improves and when student writing improves as measured by the state writing scoring guide. The teachers would meet in Professional Learning Communities to monitor results and teachers would continue to use formative assessment during in class conferring lessons.

### Option #3 - The school will implement a writing intervention club for struggling writers.

Although this club would be intended for all students, fourth grade students would have priority. The theory behind this option is that the performance of struggling writers will improve with appropriate interventions. Writing instruction for this club would be targeted at the grade level expectations based on the state writing scoring guide. This club would meet weekly throughout the school year and would be co-taught by the Literacy/Writing Coach, Resource Room teacher, selected classroom teachers, and the principal.

### Option #4 - Collaboratively collect, score and discuss a test protocol writing work sample every seven weeks.

Every seven weeks students would complete a writing piece under test conditions. The teachers would then collect the work samples and collaboratively score them. The collaborative scoring would lead to horizontal and vertical calibration throughout the school. The teachers would then meet to determine the instructional needs of students. The teachers then conference with students in an effort to give immediate feedback regarding their writing. The data would then be entered into a collection system for further analysis.

### Option #5 - Implement a school-wide writing assessment using the six trait scoring guide.

The school would collectively develop and implement a writing assessment tool that would be used to assess individual student growth in the six traits of writing. Teachers and support staff would have bi-weekly discussions to provide reflection and refinement to the assessment. In addition, time would be available to focus on instructional strategies and practices that meet the student's individual writing needs.

Option #6 - Partner with professional organization or individual who has been successful in helping schools improve in the area of writing. There are many talented professionals who we could contract with that could provide leadership in the area of writing. We could also ask our feeder middle school or another elementary school in the district to join us.

## Contact Information

For further information, or sources contact Jared Cordon at 503.672.3530

## Selected Options for Achieving School Improvement Goal

### Option #1- Create a master schedule specifically outlining each grade levels Writing instruction block.

*"If students are not engaged in writing at least four days out of five, and for a period of thirty-five to forty minutes, beginning in first grade, they will have little opportunity to learn to think through the medium of writing." (Graves 1994)*

### Option #4 - Collaboratively collect, score and discuss a test protocol writing work sample every seven weeks

*"If students' work cannot be judged fairly, there is no way of accurately monitoring their growth and progress." (Glazer 1994)*

## Implementation of School Improvement Goal:

### March 2009:

- ✓ Begin master schedule construction for all grade levels ensuring 50 minutes is provided daily for writing instruction
- ✓ Share schedule with grade levels
- ✓ Survey teachers to determine instructional needs in the area of writing
- ✓ Collaborate by grade level around current instructional practice in writing
- ✓ Analyze current writing data from 2008-2009 4th grade state writing test

### April- May 2009

- ✓ Share professional readings around effective writing instruction
- ✓ Construct 2009-2010 staff development calendar around needs from the writing instruction survey
- ✓ Provide staff development summer workshop opportunities for teacher leaders willing to support his/ her peers.

### June 2009

- ✓ Set collaboration dates for 2009-2010 school year with specific writing focus
- ✓ Teachers will begin planning writing instruction for the 2009-2010 school year including specific learning targets to be taught.
- ✓ Teachers will link reading and writing instruction to bridge the reading and writing connection for students
- ✓ Begin work with staff development (possibly consulting with outside resource)

### Fall 2009

- ✓ Collaborative scoring and calibration will occur every 7 weeks as formative assessment by grade level. Results will determine the instructional focus
- ✓ Communicate often as a staff and with our community about our instructional focus around writing
- ✓ Provide opportunities for parents and the community to learn more about our writing goals.

### Winter/Spring 2009

- ✓ Conduct school wide writing assessments throughout the year. The writing will be scored collectively as a staff to celebrate our successes and monitor and adjust our instructional goal.
- ✓ Analyze our efforts and results as a staff in the area of writing.
- ✓ Determine next steps to support our students in the area of writing

## Monitoring Tool

Indicator	Individuals Responsible/ Source of Data	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M
Writing work sample collected	Classroom teachers	-	X	-	X	-	X	-	X	-	X
Teacher collaboration in scoring	Classroom teachers, coach, principal	-	X	-	X	-	X	-	X	-	X
Teacher collaboration in curriculum and instruction	Classroom teachers, coach, principal	-	-	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X
Scores entered, analysis of score curve	Classroom teachers, coach, principal	-	X	-	X	-	X	-	X	-	X

## Funding and Staffing

Once the master schedule reflects Writing as a subject in our school, this school improvement goal will be most effectively addressed through staff development and the implementation of Professional Learning Communities in order to focus on writing instruction, collaboratively score work samples in an effort to calibrate scoring, and review student work to determine instructional needs. In addition, this time together will allow teams to analyze the most current student data and trends with respect to writing. In order to make this happen, a systematic approach to collaboration is needed. Each grade level team will meet for the entire day once every seven weeks, with three additional half-day, cross-grade level meetings throughout the school year. One of the key individuals in helping structure the Professional Learning Communities will be our full-time Literacy/Writing Coach.

In addition to the General Fund dollars from the State, the school receives approximately \$275,000 in Title One funding each year to support instruction and address the comprehensive needs assessment and School Improvement Plan. The following is a list of resource impacts from the implementation of this plan:

**Full-time Literacy/Writing Coach - \$67,900**

**Professional Learning Communities/Collaboration - \$25,935**

• 21 certified teachers in the building x 5 all-day collaborations x \$190 for substitute teacher = \$19,950

• 21 certified teachers in the building x 3 half-day collaborations x \$95 for a substitute teacher = \$5,985

*"Powerful, systemic collaboration among school staff is the key to school improvement!" (DuFour 1998)*

### Sources:

DuFour, R. & Eaker, R. (1998). Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement. State, Susan Marshall (1981). Assessment: Collaborating with Children to Assess Writing Objectively. Graves, Anne, and Richards Heagy (1993). Using Gates and Purpura to Improve Story Writing. Graves, Donald H. (1994). A Fresh Look at Writing.