



Crooked River Elementary 4th Grade: Improving Writing Skills



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EDLD 655, University of Oregon, Summer 2009

Introduction

Crooked River Elementary (CRE) is presently at 66% Free and Reduced Lunch. Due to an extreme budget shortfall, CRE has lost 9 positions out of 25. Class sizes will average approximately 32.

It is obvious in my two years as the Principal at CRE that we have a major deficiency with our state writing scores at the 4th grade level.

4th Grade State Writing results

	2008	2009
Exceeds	1%	3%
Meets	14%	28%
Conditional	41%	16%
Does Not Meet	44%	52%

Although this is an entire school problem, I feel it is best to start a strong intervention at 4th grade and learn from our actions to eventually improve our entire school writing performance. Therefore, my objective is to collaborate and facilitate improved state writing scores by 30% in the meets/exceeds/conditional categories for our incoming 4th graders.

Evidence and Support

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) states, "There is ample empirical evidence that anyone can get better at writing, and that what teachers do makes a difference in how much students are capable of achieving as writers. (NCTE Executive Committee, November 2004) It makes sense that the more we practice any activity, academic or otherwise, the better results we will achieve.

The 4th grade teachers at CRE participated in the 6 + 1 Writing Traits workshop through out last year. Looking at the scores, there was improvement in the Exceeds/Meets category and a drop in the conditional category. However, the Does Not Meet increased which shows we still have need of vast improvement. The 6 + 1 Writing Traits (www.thetrails.org) has an excellent support website and on site trainings I will schedule for in-service.

To help support more creative ideas and training I am also researching the *Writers' Workshop Program* (Lucy Calkins) which has very innovative, easy to use lessons to help improve the writing skills of our 4th graders at CRE. The *Writers' Workshop Program* also provides innovative workshops for our in-services.

With today's technology it is easy to research writing strategies on the internet that each 4th grade teacher can individualize for his/her learning styles. Team time will be provided in our weekly schedule for teachers to research and share such strategies.

Options for Improving 4th Grade Writing

- Utilize one day of our in-service week in August with a workshop on *Writer's Workshop Program* for all staff K-5. Focus on writing skills through out the curriculum.
- Add one half hour to our "Power Hour" block in the mornings and have teachers utilize such websites available for specific writing activities per grade level on a daily basis. Have teachers create lessons during team time.
- Focus on the 4th grade state writing assessment window and have teachers do intensive writing strategies for a minimum of two weeks during "Power Hour" exclusively before students take the state test.
- Continue to focus on 6 + 1 Writing Traits bringing in 2 or more workshops through out the year for 4th and 5th grade teachers to enhance the skills they have already learned.
- Add to # 4 by sending 3rd grade to the 6 + 1 Writing Traits workshops through out the year and each of the following years, add a new grade level until all have been trained.
- Receive more training by our local reading coaches who have been trained thoroughly with our reading adoption (*Treasures*). Have coaches meet with my 4th grade team once per month to develop and create writing samples from our adoption that can be utilized on a regular basis.
- Have our school Writing Goal Team meet twice per month to research and develop school-wide activities useful and beneficial to each grade level. Have them develop a list of websites for teachers to easily access creative assignments students would enjoy and find useful in improving their writing skills.
- Have a voluntary meeting in early August for any staff members who would like input on any one of the above options, a combination of options, or a new option that would satisfy our goal of improving 4th grade state writing assessments.

Options for Success

I have thought through all of the options I previously brainstormed and feel a combination of these options is the best direction to take.

We need to improve our school-wide writing process. However, our cuts have been so deep and our class sizes increased dramatically, I feel the smartest direction is to concentrate on 4th grade writing improvement and cope with the low morale issues.

By the same token, our writing scores are not just a 4th grade problem. My most veteran teachers are my 3rd through 5th grade teachers so I am going to propose a combination of option # 2, option # 3, option # 4 and option # 8.

When I have a final teacher count, I will develop a schedule that includes 1.5 hours of straight reading practice with .5 hours designated for writing improvement for 3rd through 5th grade. Two to three weeks before the state writing test for 4th graders, the 4th grade teachers will be required to use 1 hour of the 1.5 hours designated for reading to focus exclusively on writing skills.

I will schedule 6 + 1 Writing Trait workshops a minimum of two in-service days to help keep that knowledge fresh in 4th and 5th grade teachers' minds.

The most important piece to the success of our writing scores is option # 8. When teachers have buy-in, the chances of success are much greater. Since the morale is so low presently, it is vital for me to have teachers take ownership of this process.

When I email my staff for a voluntary meeting to discuss the schedule change and my goal of improving our writing scores, it must be presented in a way that they are motivated to try. Otherwise it is a waste of their time and mine to take on such a lofty goal.

I do feel that each teacher needs to be challenged on a yearly basis to improve their teaching skills in at least one area. I want my teachers to see this as a challenge they can get excited about trying because they can see the great possibility it will be successful for their students!

Expected Results and Conclusions

As stated before by NCTE, practice will improve student skills. (NCTE Executive Committee, November 2004) I truly believe we can raise our 4th grade state writing test scores by 20% the first year because we truly do not spend very much time on the skill of writing. When we spend .5 hours per day and 1 hour per day before the writing test, I am predicting no worse than the following data:

	2008	2009	2010
Exceeds	1%	3%	10%
Meets	14%	28%	47%
Conditional	41%	16%	20%
Does Not Meet	44%	52%	23%

Although many would feel this goal is unreachable, I feel with proper interventions and the time spent, these percentages are attainable within one year.

I have high expectations for my 4th/5th grade teachers and I know they can rise to the occasion.

Websites for use with lesson plans

www.Education.com/Worksheets

www.edHelper.com

www.TeacherVision.com

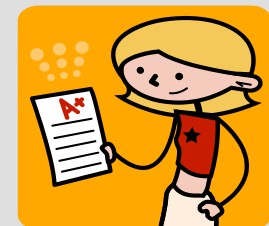
www.proteacher.org

www.tisbooks.com

www.teach-nology.com

www.teachers.henrico.k12.va.us

www.internet4classrooms.com



Contact Information or sharing of activities that have worked in your school...

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