

Collins Writing Program Implementation Profile

Great Bay eLearning Charter School • Exeter, New Hampshire

“The curriculum is rigorous and critical thinking is the cornerstone of the academic program. Project-based assessment and writing across the curriculum are fundamental to daily instruction.”

New Hampshire Excellence in Education Awards Committee
*About . . . Great Bay eLearning Charter School
NH School of Promise Award Winner*

Great Bay eLearning Charter School (GBeCS) opened in 2005 with 30 ninth grade students and has grown to its present enrollment of 170 students in grades eight through twelve. GBeCS emphasizes project-based learning in a flexible, competency-based environment. It provides students who may have previously struggled in traditional school environments with opportunities to demonstrate the results of their learning in a variety of ways. Writing is key to that mission.

With each of its students entering at varying points in their high school careers from as many as 25 different school districts, GBeCS is constantly challenged with bringing curricular consistency to its students and staff. According to Peter Stackhouse, Co-Principal, “The Collins Writing Program provides us with a consistent, easy-to-implement way to engage students as thinkers and writers. Through this program, we are able to ensure that students write across all learning areas through a common thread of effective, engaging strategies and expectations used by all teachers. This facilitates our school-wide expectation that all students will write in every class as a primary means to demonstrate their learning.”

Implementation and Training

Each teacher on staff was initially trained either through five-day summer institutes or a full-day training with a Collins Associate. Working with a consultant, teachers have opportunities to observe model lessons, receive feedback on their own activities, and meet to review student writing folders. Each new teacher joining the staff receives training and support opportunities.

Using Collins Writing has enhanced both my students’ understanding of art and my ability to assess that understanding. In particular, the vocabulary cards help students to retain content area terminology. Students are asked to go a step further than sentences and definitions and include illustrations that represent the meaning of the word. I feel that this extra step is an important tool for the reinforcement of the terminology and helps students to expand their visual literacy. Using this method of assessment has helped me to determine if a student has a decent working knowledge of the words. The 10% summary has also be a great tool to help guide reading and increase student comprehension of the many journal articles they are required to read.

*Hannah Pasquale
Upper and Lower School Art
Great Bay eLearning Charter School*

School-wide Expectations for Using the Five Types of Writing

Teachers typically begin each class with a Type One assignment to help frame the lesson, engage thinking, or place the lesson in context of the students' lives. As a school which does not rely on traditional paper and pencil tests and quizzes, Types One and Two writing assignments facilitate the ability of teachers to gather both formative and/or summative assessment data about course content.

Type Three and Type Four assignments are the cornerstone of writing at GBeCS. Student projects using the Seven Element Assignment format provide a meaningful structure that frames the task and removes the mystery about expectations. Two interdisciplinary teams collaborate on the development of Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) and assess these across disciplines for each project. Every assignment at GBeCS is assessed using FCAs.

Student exhibitions are used multiple times during the school year as a means of displaying assessment artifacts and engaging with an audience. Written and oral communication is a driving component of this exhibition with Type Five writing assignments the targeted level of quality.

I have been using Collins Writing in my math classes since our school opened. I like it because it provides opportunities for students to express their understanding of concepts in writing. It also builds understanding, allows students to brainstorm freely, and it helps students who have strengths in writing meet competencies in math. Every lab or project I assign has a written component with FCAs. The FCAs are great because they tell students exactly what I am assessing them on and they help students focus their writing on specific skills. I believe that Collins Writing has contributed to the success of GBeCS.

*Kristianne Lemieux
Upper School Lead Teacher
Great Bay eLearning Charter School*

Results

In only its third year, Great Bay eLearning Charter School was awarded recognition as the *New Hampshire School of Promise* by the New Hampshire Excellence in Education Committee. The consistent and effective writing initiative was one element cited by the committee. School-wide attention to its mission and focus on engaging students through thoughtful, challenging projects were key aspects of this achievement. The Collins Writing Program has become embedded in GBeCS practice and Roberta Tenney, School Standards Administrator for the New Hampshire Department of Education, has often cited the writing program and results as a model for schools in the state.

As a chartered public school in New Hampshire, GBeCS students are required to take the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) tests in Reading, Mathematics, and Writing at the beginning of grades eight and eleven. With students joining us at many entry points through the beginning of grade eleven, continuity of curriculum is particularly challenging. Since 2007, while an average of 90% of New Hampshire students were assessed as Partially Proficient or above, 96% of GBeCS students tested in these categories. Great Bay eLearning Charter School has achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) every year—an accomplishment that very few schools in New Hampshire share. This is even more significant considering that GBeCS is an

alternative learning environment offering a chance for success to many students who have not traditionally been successful. The Collins Writing Program has been essential in the academic preparation of these students.

The Collins Program has made it easy to infuse writing into everything I do in my social studies class. Everything done in my class incorporates writing in some way. The Seven Element Assignment has been a great way to craft projects that are differentiated and structured.

Our Advanced Placement (AP) students have always performed better on the writing responses than the multiple choice because of the ubiquitous nature of the Collins Program. Those AP U.S. History students who have passed the exam have done so by performing very well in the essay section, many times making up for their deficiencies in taking multiple choice exams with their strong writing and analytical skills. For example, in 2009 the Global Mean for the Standard Essay Group II was 3.0, while my students mean was 3.7. So far, we have had three students named AP Scholars for averaging a grade of 3 or better on all AP Exams they have taken.

*Shawn Bodi
Social Studies
Great Bay eLearning Charter School*

Collins Writing has also been used as the foundation for successful Advanced Placement initiatives. The AP program is open-enrollment (any student can take any AP offering), which is not how AP programs are traditionally run. Given three years of results, 13 students have earned scores that have made them eligible for college credit in English Composition, English Literature and/or United States History. GBeCS also received recognition from the College Board for the number of students who earned credit in multiple areas. Once again, this is good data in a traditional school—but exceptional in an alternative setting. Collins Writing was used every day in every AP course. Type One critical thinking prompts often set the stage for test practice and personalized Focus Correction Areas are used continuously as a test preparation tool.

Actively and faithfully applying the Collins Writing Program sets our students up for academic success.

*George A. I. McKenney, M.Ed., CAGS
Special Educator
Certified Reading and Writing Specialist
Great Bay eLearning Charter School*