

Collins Writing Program Implementation Profile

Allen Park High School Allen Park, Michigan
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The School

Allen Park High School is located in suburban Detroit, Michigan, in a district that also includes one middle school and three elementary schools. The community from which it draws its students is largely middle to upper-middle class. Twenty-seven percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Ethnically, it is 88% White, 9% Hispanic, and 2% Black. The school has 1,225 students with a student-teacher ratio of 24:1.

Allen Park High School staff is proud of the fact that all teachers are rated as “highly qualified,” as deemed by Michigan Department of Education standards. The school is accredited by AdvancED/NCA and received a test rating of 8 from education.com. In addition to Advanced Placement and dual-enrollment classes, the school has a state-of-the-art building trades program on campus that includes computer-aided drafting, as well as a manufacturing program, dynamic art, music, and physical education programs, and comprehensive health and life-skills classes.

Background

In 2008, Allen Park High School was looking for a writing program that would create a focus on literacy and improve writing scores on the ACT exam commensurate with what the leadership team thought was the true potential of its student body. It needed a program that bridged the transition from middle school to high school, increased the overall frequency of writing in all subjects, provided consistency in instruction across all disciplines, and was practical enough to be seen as manageable by the staff. This last point was very important considering the range of classes offered—from building trades to Advanced Placement, life skills to world languages. Administrators wanted a program that would be flexible enough to work for every teacher, in every class, every day.

Sarah Riley, an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, expressed the general consensus, “Before we started the Collins Writing Program, the teaching of writing and the quality of student work was all over the place.” Consequently, the district committed to a full implementation plan that included an appropriate and thorough introduction to the program, follow-up training, fine-tuning at the department level, and attention to accountability at every step of the process. This was seen from the outset as a multi-year, total-staff approach to integrating writing into virtually every course taught.

The Training

The professional development plan consisted of the following steps:

1. **A general introduction to the program in fall 2008.** Participants were introduced to the Collins Writing Program and the Five Types of Writing.
2. **Classroom demonstration lessons in early 2009.** A Collins associate demonstrated the use of Types of writing in classrooms, with teachers observing.
3. **A follow-up workshop focusing on creating Seven Element Assignments.** The staff created Seven Element Assignments for use in their area of study.
4. **A week-long graduate course in summer 2009.** Thirty teachers spent a week honing their use of the program as they developed specific assignments for their classrooms.
5. **Consultant meetings with individual departments in fall 2009.** A Collins associate met with individual departments to discuss more precisely what implementation looks like for them—designing assignments and focus correction areas (FCAs) appropriate to their subject matter.
6. **A general follow-up workshop in fall 2009.** Teachers were introduced to the folder review process and to using and maintaining the *Teacher's Implementation Portfolio* and the *Cumulative Writing Folder*.
7. **Folder reviews in winter 2009 to assess implementation.** *Implementation Portfolios* and *Cumulative Writing Folders* were collected and evaluated by a team of teachers selected based on their participation in the summer graduate course.
8. **Folder reviews in spring 2010.**
9. **A week-long graduate course in summer 2011.**

The Results

As a result of this multiyear commitment to implementing the program, Melanie Beeler, ELA Department Chair, says that “due to the increased rigor, focused lessons, and a whole-school approach, it is extremely rare that I see an off-topic piece of writing.”

Non-ELA courses have benefited as well. According to Mary Jordan McMaster, chemistry teacher, “I have found that through consistent implementation of the program, my students are more likely to think critically to answer a question as well as provide a more thorough answer than they would have before the Collins Writing Program was implemented.”

Involving the whole staff is a critical component of the program and positions Allen Park High School well to meet the demands of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and its emphasis on writing across the curriculum.

Amy West, ELA staff, adds, “The Collins Writing Program has given us a systematic approach to ensure that all learners, in all disciplines, are engaged and writing to learn. Doing so has increased students’ ability to communicate their learning efficiently, with more stamina.” When the Collins Program is implemented and the accountability for that implementation is regularly monitored through the use of periodic folder reviews, students write more frequently and more purposely.

Students are excited about the results as well. “The benefits to Collins Writing would mostly be that it creates guidelines for your writing. The FCAs help by stating clearly what is needed in your paper,” says Mariah Morris, an Allen Park High School ninth grader. Adds Adam Fabiano,

also a ninth grader, “It has helped me learn from my mistakes when peers critique my paper.” It has often been the case that from the student’s perspective, writing is one of the most frustrating disciplines primarily because the expectations for any particular assignment are often vague. The Collins Program’s emphasis on clear targets via FCA instruction helps alleviate that anxiety.

The Bottom Line

The current 11th grade class has been increasing its amount of daily writing since they were in fifth grade (2007–2008), the first year of implementation. The increased writing stamina has had an impact.

- In 2007–2008, 30.8% of 11th graders were scored as “proficient” on the ACT Writing Test.
- In 2010–2011, that number jumped to 59.1%.
- In 2012–2013, with the current 11th grade class, it continued to climb to 73.2%!