

# Collins Writing Program Implementation Profile

## South Shore Charter Public School–Norwell, Massachusetts

In the fall of 2008, at the invitation of Ted Hirsch, K–6 Principal of the South Shore Charter Public School (SSCPS), a Collins Writing Program Associate took up the challenge of improving student performance on the Massachusetts state test. To this end, the associate focused on equipping students and teachers with the necessary skills for tackling the test’s writing-based questions. Mr. Hirsch reports that, as a result of this professional development, the students’ scores on the open-response questions turned around almost instantly, going from below to well above the state average. In addition, the Collins Writing Program “changed the whole culture of writing” at SSCPS. By giving the students more frequent opportunities to practice their writing skills and a greater sense of purpose in each writing assignment, the Collins Writing Program has dramatically increased the students’ level of thinking and writing over the last three years.

### Background

Located south of Boston in Norwell, Massachusetts, the South Shore Charter Public School serves grades K-12. A diverse community with a strong focus on music, art, and environmental science, SSCPS is recognized for its innovative approach. Students are encouraged to address teachers by their first names, and in grades K-6 they use Singapore Math where students learn to visually model mathematical expressions. In 2010, the SSCPS was named the “greenest school in America” by IC Bus, for which it was awarded a hybrid school bus, an environmental makeover, and scholarships. In 2011 they were one of five schools to be named a finalist for Samsung’s “Solutions for Tomorrow” and received awards valued at \$80,000.

Despite SSCPS’s many strengths, the school struggled from 2006-2008 to meet the demands of NCLB and, in 2008, were placed in Improvement Year I for ELA. Though some teachers were already using parts of Collins Writing Program in their classrooms, none had practiced the core elements with enough consistency to yield results. Hirsch recalls that before the Collins Associate trained SSCPS’s teachers in person, writing assignments were given infrequently and tended to vary greatly among teachers and grade levels, so students had insufficient opportunities to build on a particular set of skills or to master a particular mode of writing.

## Implementation

In 2008, Hirsch hired Jerry Morris, a Collins Associate, to provide professional development to the faculty for the teaching of writing. Since then, Morris has visited the school six times per year to train the teachers in the Collins Writing Program by demonstrating model lessons in the classroom. He has also conducted staff meetings, coached teachers individually and in groups by subject area, and held meetings with administrators to address specific concerns. Ted Hirsch and Angie Pepin, Principal 7-12, credit the professional development provided by Morris (and later, Bill Atwood, another Collins Associate) with reinvigorating the faculty in its mission to improve the students' writing. "Our teachers couldn't get enough of the professional development," says Hirsch. "The associates developed valuable relationships with the teachers, mentoring them on special projects. The teachers understood that [the associates] cared; it never felt as if they were coming in from the outside."

The same year that Morris began to train the faculty at SSCPS, Hirsch introduced a plan to administer interim formative assessments (evaluations that closely resembled the MCAS) three times per year. Morris helped the teachers and administrators interpret and react to the data received through the assessments, providing a critical focus on student achievement in writing to complement the school's broader vision of success. A large part of Morris' training centered around how to effectively approach the open-response on state tests. First, he demonstrated how to accurately interpret the questions. Then he introduced strategies for active thinking and encouraged the students to anticipate what might be asked of them, given the data or passage provided. Finally, he addressed what constituted an excellent response: an organized argument supported by sufficient evidence, expressed through soundly-constructed sentences.

Another major focus of Morris' visits involved training the teachers to use Collins' short writing assignments on a daily basis in their classes. Hirsch and Pepin claim the Collins' Types One and Two writing assignments, which required students to record questions and to summarize what they'd learned in class at the end of each period, helped in three major ways. First, classroom management became easier across the board because students expected to be asked to write at the beginning and end of each class. Second, the high frequency of these brief, straightforward writing assignments vastly increased the confidence of student writing and thinking. "Their thoughts became more fluid," noted Hirsch, "and you could tell they were writing with a greater sense of purpose." Finally, and most importantly, once the quick assessments became routine, teachers noticed that the students were engaging more deeply with the material.

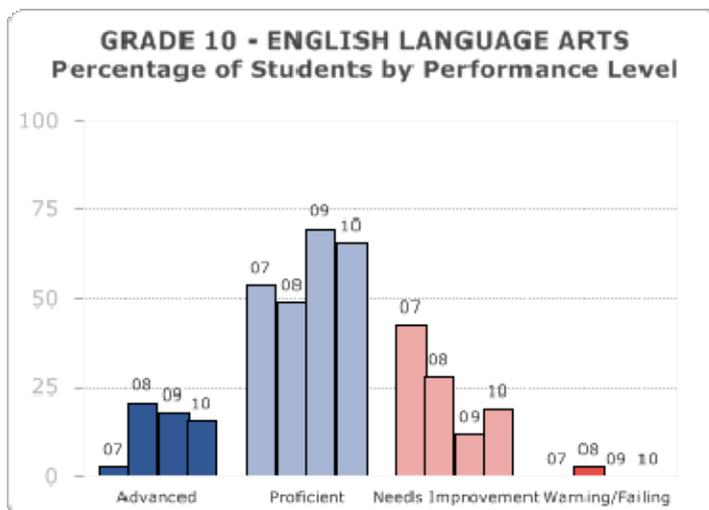
In August 2009, Bill Atwood, a Collins Associate with a specialty in math, conducted a two-day workshop for the 7th grade math teachers. Atwood demonstrated how Collins' Type One, Type Two, and Type Three writing assignments could be applied in math classes and used to help students show their work and thinking process more clearly. In

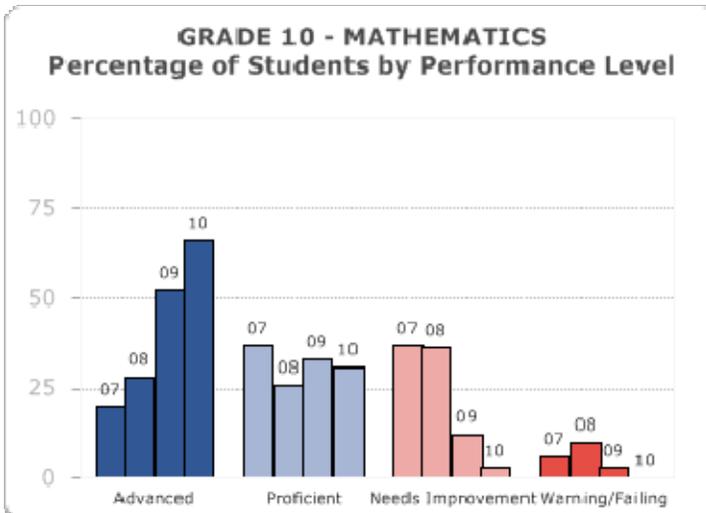
the spring of 2010, Atwood began to work with math teachers in all grade levels and, since then, has visited the school for training sessions 6-10 times.

Over the course of three years, Morris and Atwood have met with teachers from grades K-12. Hirsch and Pepin note that, in addition to the increased amount of writing students now practice, the uniformity of the writing assignments across the curriculum and consistent standards for evaluation have been key to the students' success. Looking forward, she says the next step for the Collins associates and the school's faculty is to develop grade-specific goals (Collins' "Focus Correction Areas") to ensure that the students are building their writing skills as much as possible at every level.

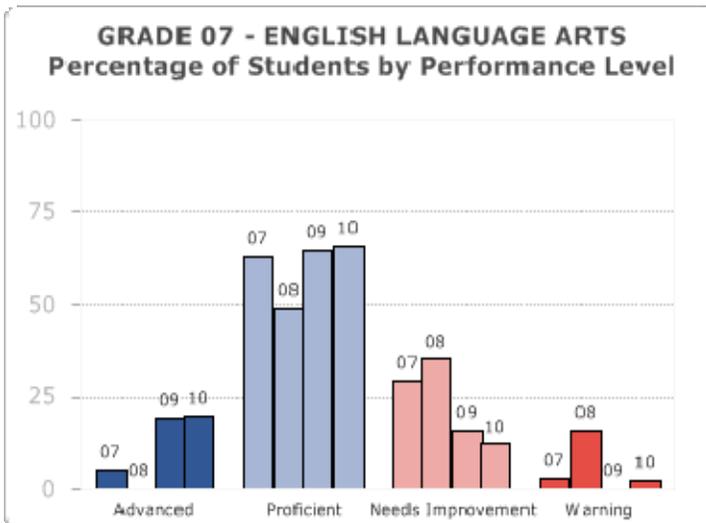
## Results

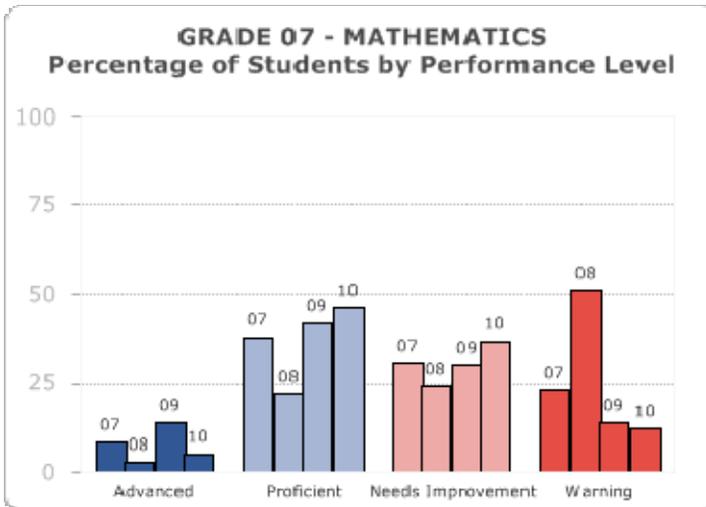
After 2008, student performance on the MCAS exam at SSCPS improved across the board. However, Hirsch notes that the grades in which the implementation of the Collins Program was "purist" saw the greatest improvement in student writing, as measured by their performance on the MCAS's open-response questions. The following graphs are the annual test results of these particular grades. Hirsch attributes the fact that in 2009 and 2010 the aggregate and all statistically significant subgroups made the gains needed to meet AYP goals. SSCPS is no longer in status for AYP and has regained the coveted "No Status" goal. In fact the South Shore Charter Public School received the Commendation Designation and was one of 69 schools *"that substantially narrowed proficiency gaps for low income, limited English proficient, formerly limited English proficient, and special education students over a two year period."* Hirsch and Pepin agree that this might well not have happened without the Professional Development from Collins.



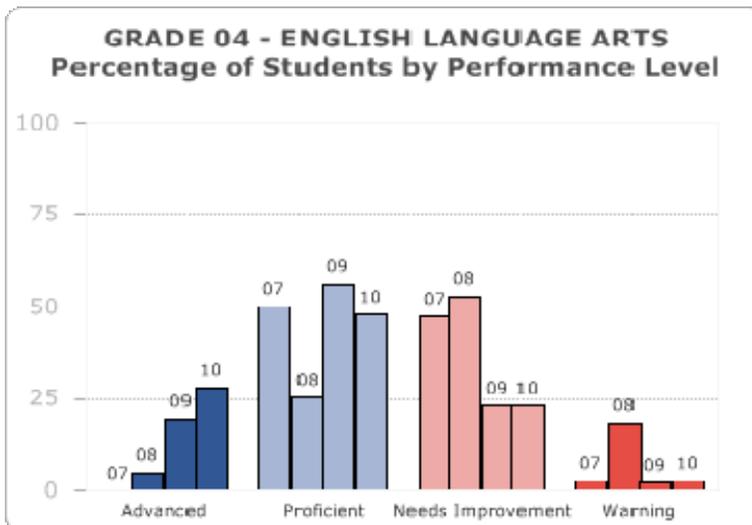


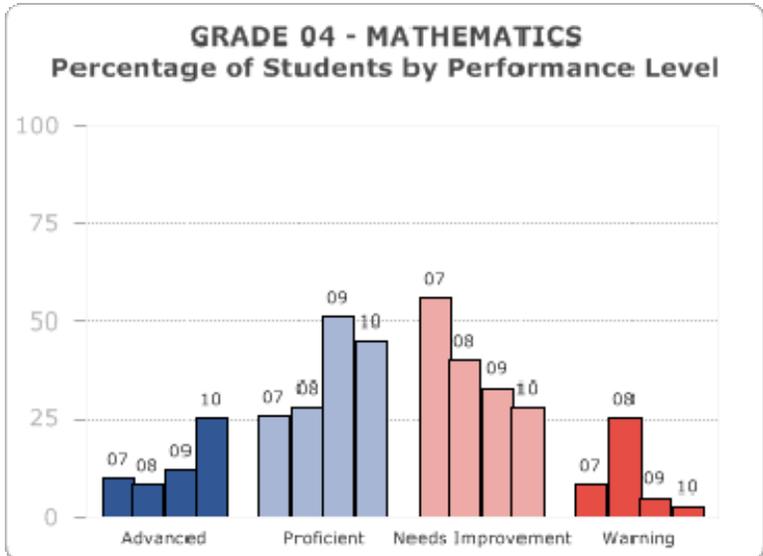
Between 2007 and 2010, on the English Language Arts section of the MCAS exam, the percentage of tenth grade students who performed at an advanced or proficient level increased by 25%. In that same period, the percentage of tenth graders who performed at an advanced or proficient level on the math section increased by 40%.





Between 2007 and 2010, on the English Language Arts section of the MCAS exam, the percentage of seventh grade students who performed at an advanced or proficient level increased by 18%. In that same period, the percentage of seventh graders who performed at an advanced or proficient level on the math section increased by 5%.





Between 2007 and 2010, on the English Language Arts section of the MCAS exam, the percentage of fourth grade students who performed at an advanced or proficient level increased by 26%. In that same period, on the math section, the percentage of fourth graders who performed at an advanced or proficient level increased by 34%.

All data and graphs from “MCAS Annual Comparisons, South Shore Charter Public School.” MCAS Charts Data. *Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*. September 14, 2010. Web. May 24, 2011.  
<http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/mcas/mcascharts2.aspx?linkid=33&orgcode=04880550&fycode=2009&orgtypecode=6&>

*For more information, contact Collins Education Associates at 1-800-932-4477.*