

Collins Writing Program Implementation Profile

I.S. 206 Ann Mersereau
Bronx, New York

Over the last five years, I.S. 206 Ann Mersereau School has made enormous progress in student performance—particularly in reading and writing. In 2006, I.S. 206 received a D rating and fell into the 12th percentile on the New York City’s Progress Report. Three years later, the school received an A and leapt into the 99th percentile; by the end of that year, 15% more students were proficient on the NYS ELA exams and 20% more students were proficient in math than in the previous year. Principal Dave Neering considers the Collins Writing Program one factor in a series of efforts that produced this dramatic change.

Background

I.S. 206 Ann Mersereau is a public school located in the University Heights neighborhood of the Bronx that serves grades 5–8. Nearly all of the approximately 400 students at I.S. 206 are African-American or Latino.

Before 2007, the problems facing I.S. 206 were of a more basic nature than the absence of strong academic standards. Located in a high crime neighborhood, the school lacked a solid approach to discipline as well as other fundamental structures for maintaining accountability. After the school scored in the 12th percentile on New York City’s Progress Report in 2006, a number of strategies were initiated for putting the school back on track.

Having spent his first two years as principal establishing a coherent disciplinary system and other structures of management, Neering felt it was time to focus on raising academic performance, and in the spring of 2008, he introduced the Collins Writing Program to the faculty. At this point, two other programs had already been put in place that were effectively addressing the students’ needs and helping to improve their performance: the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), a teaching model that combines language and content instruction for English language learners, and the National Reading Styles Program, a remediation program for students below grade level in reading.

With 25% of the school’s student population learning English as a second language, the faculty was responsible for improving the students’ language fluency as well as for ensuring their absorption of course content. For this reason, Neering was looking for “a straightforward strategy for teaching writing that the kids could quickly grasp.”

Implementation

Implementation began in the summer of 2008 with two full days of training, during which Collins Associate Bill Atwood modeled lessons in Type One, Type Two, and Type Three writing for a variety of disciplines. Each 90-minute demonstration was followed by a

debriefing which consisted of explanation and questions by observers. The discussions also included how to use the three-step editing process to transform a Type Three writing piece into a Type Four or Type Five writing piece. Neering reports that this initial training period, which was attended by staff in all content areas, confirmed that the “program was doable no matter whom or what you were teaching.”

These trainings continued through the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. Training for the 2010-2011 school year was provided in house by staff who had participated in the initial two years of training with Bill Atwood.

Between training periods, Neering reports that implementation of the program has been strong and consistent. Collins’ Five Types of Writing are applied school wide and across all disciplines. In every content area, a portfolio system for student work helps keep track of the quality of their writing over time, and the final objective for every unit of instruction is to produce a work of publishable quality. Teachers are held similarly accountable; by the end of each marking period, every teacher is expected to assign a minimal number of every writing “Type,” and the rigor of their grading and feedback is reviewed using students’ portfolios. According to Neering, the consistency and frequency of Collins’ writing assignments across the curriculum has had a significant impact on the students. “The strategies are now second nature to the kids and give them something to hang their hat on,” he says.

Neering cites Collins’ short writing assignments (Type One and Type Two) and its Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) as helpful tools for the teaching of writing. For a school full of English language learners, Type One and Type Two writing assignments have allowed students and teachers alike put aside language difficulties and focus instead on content. “As teachers, we can [use Type One and Type Two Writing] as a base of instruction to see where the misconceptions are,” says Neering. “We can say to ourselves ‘what do the students already know’? And we can figure out where to go from there.” He has also found that these short assignments “tie the kids into the topic well.” Meanwhile, the Focus Corrections Areas have allowed teachers to limit the areas of instruction to the issues of greatest priority and made it easier to keep the students accountable for the rules of writing that they’ve had ample opportunity to practice. “Instead of expecting the students to know all of the rules of good writing, you limit them,” says Neering. He adds, “I believe the reason the program works is because it’s based on common sense.”

Results

In 2006-2007, the school scored a D on the New York Department of Education’s Progress Report. In 2007-2008 the school scored an A on the DOE Progress Reports with a B in student performance. The following year, the Collins Writing Program was introduced. In 2008-2009 the school scored an A on the DOE Progress Report and its first A in student performance. The percentage of students proficient in ELA moved to 50.3%, **an increase of nearly 15%** as compared to scores from the previous year. The percentage of students in the lowest 1/3 making a year of progress in ELA was 81.9%. The percentage of students proficient in math rose to 82.6%, **an increase of over 20%** as compared to scores from the

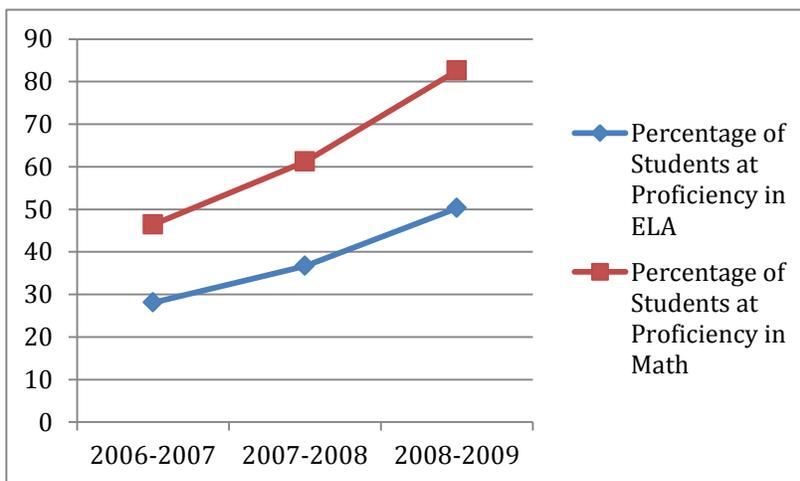
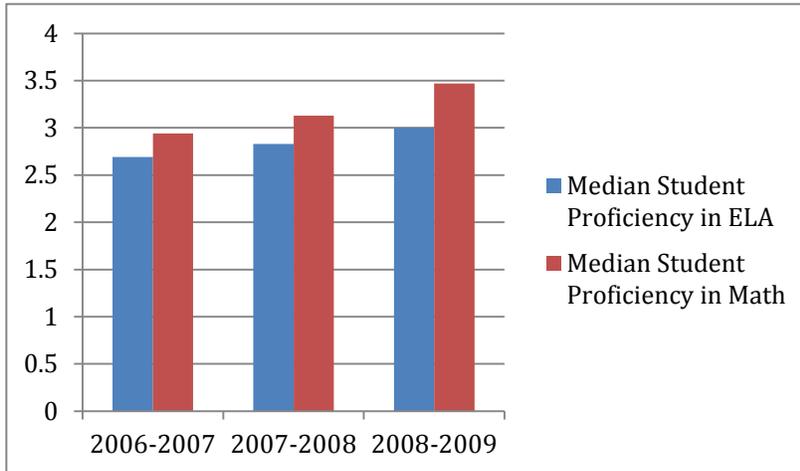
previous year, and the percentage of students in the lowest 1/3 making at least one year of progress in math was 90%.

When asked to explain the secret to the success of the program at his school, Neering emphasizes the importance of consistent implementation and patience. Like any other kind of professional development he says, “You have to nurture it and come back to it,” adding that it took two years for the program to become “fully entrenched” in the school’s culture.

Results from the New York Department of Education’s Annual Progress Report

	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Overall Grade	D	A	A
Grade for Student Performance	N/A	B	A

Proficiency Gains by Subject Area



Proficiency Gains in ELA by Student Group

	2007-2008	2008-2009
English Language Learners	20.4%	36.4%
Special Education Students	41.7%	43.9%
Hispanic Students in the Lowest Third Citywide	26.0%	49.0%
Black Students in the Lowest Third Citywide	24.1%	47.4%

Proficiency Gains in Math by Student Group

	2007-2008	2008-2009
English Language Learners	38.7%	40.0%
Special Education Students	39.7%	51.5%
Hispanic Students in the Lowest Third Citywide	37.3%	67.4%
Black Students in the Lowest Third Citywide	28.6%	52.4%