

Collins Writing Program

Implementation Profile

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After searching for many years for ways to achieve higher test scores for a significant at-risk population in our school district, we finally unlocked one of the doors: Promoting students to *think* and *write* has helped improve our students' performance on open-ended state test questions which has led to overall higher test scores. These gains have come about because of the Collins Writing Program (CWP).

Background

During school year 2002-2003 a few of our staff members attended a Collins Writing Program seminar provided by our county Educational Service Center. Knowing that our English Language Arts curriculum was going to be up for review the following school year, the district sent a few teachers to get some ideas as to how to improve our writing performance as a district. Up to that point our writing scores in grades 4, 7 and 10 on the Ohio Achievement/Graduation Tests had been mediocre—passing percentages ranging from mid-60s to upper 70s. The state benchmark was 75%. In addition, our average point score on two-point open-response questions on state tests across all content sub-tests was just 0.5 out of 2 points, and just 0.9 out of 4 points on the four-points open response questions, again across all content sub-tests.

During the English Language Arts curriculum revision process during the 2003-2004 school year, our focus was to improve not only student writing in grades K–12 but to develop a district-wide writing plan which would give teachers and students an articulated grade-to-grade framework that would build upon previous instructional and learning experiences. Our committee spent a lot of time investigating writing programs. Teachers who attended the Collins Writing Program seminar the previous year had begun to implement the program in their classrooms and were seeing some success with their students' ability to develop outlines and rough drafts which were resulting in more cohesive final products. These teachers were invited to be part of our district ELA committee and were asked to discuss the Collins Writing Program. As we listened, the group became more interested, and we decided to have a neighboring district share their experiences with the program as well.

Introduction to Collins Writing Program - 2004

Upon hearing the experiences of the neighboring district with the Collins Writing Program, the Franklin English Language Arts Curriculum Committee decided to schedule a formal in-service in April of 2004 with the purpose of providing an overview of the Collins Writing Program for all ELA committee members and all building and district administrators. After this initial training session, the combined ELA Committee and administrators discussed using the Collins Program district wide. We were unanimous in deciding that the Collins Writing Program should become our district's writing program K–12.

The Plan

The district ELA Committee spent the rest of the spring of 2004 developing grade-by-grade Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) for writing in each grade K–12 which was included as part of the district’s English Language Arts Curriculum Guide and distributed to all teachers. Teachers would be trained on the use of the grade-to-grade FCAs as part of the formal Collins training that would be scheduled throughout the 2004-2005 school year. In August 2004 we had consultants come to our district for an entire day of training to start the school year. Two consultants presented to the whole group and in the afternoon, one consultant worked with the K–6 staff and the other consultant worked with the 7–12 staff.

The focus of the training was to use the Five Types of Writing in English instruction and to use Types One, Two, and Three in all other content areas. Throughout the school year, on other planned staff development days, Collins consultants continued to work with our entire staff to implement the program and customize it for use in other content areas. Toward the end of that year, it became evident that the non-English content teachers needed something more specific. In addition, we decided that we needed to provide follow-up support in-service for the entire staff.

School year 2005-2006 was dedicated to providing three levels of training and support:

1. General follow-up training for K–12 English to continue to use the CWP in English instruction with the use of our grade-to-grade FCAs as outlined in our district ELA Curriculum Guide
2. Provide Q & A sessions with all teachers regarding their questions, concerns, problems and successes with the program; this also provided an avenue for district-wide sharing
3. Training for non-English teachers on how to address writing in their curriculum area including the open response questions on our state tests.

New Teacher Orientation

At our new teacher orientation days in mid-August 2005, we asked one of the consultants to return to Franklin to provide an overview training to get new staff acclimated to the program so that they could get started right away. This tradition has continued each year with all new teachers hired by the school district.

Model-Demonstration Lessons and Cross-Curricular Approach

After the August 2005 training, we decided to provide continued follow-up training through model-demonstration lessons at each of our schools. One consultant would work with grades K–5 and the other consultant would work with grades 6–12. During September and November of 2005, our consultants returned to the district for two days each and taught model lessons in using the program in classrooms. Through mutual agreement, we developed a schedule where each consultant would teach about six lessons each day across many content areas. One consultant visited the K–5 buildings to focus on the Five Types of Writing in English and Types One, Two, and Three in non-English subjects, focusing on FCAs in the prompts of open-ended state questions (using prior years’ tests). The other consultant visited the 6–12 buildings doing the same. Principals were made aware of the model-demonstration lesson schedule so that they could adjust building schedules to free up as many teachers as possible to watch the lesson in a “host” teacher’s classroom. Following the lesson, each consultant would conduct a debriefing

session with the observer and host teachers. After the model-demonstration lessons were completed, teachers were asked again to collect writing samples and these were sent to the consultants for review. Then on our winter 2006 staff development day, feedback was again provided to staff regarding work the students were doing along with additional Q & A sessions.

In between periodic visits by the consultants, administration was trained as to what to look for in writing as they visited classrooms. Teachers were also asked to share their successes and challenges with each other.

Since 2005-2006, the consultants have returned each year to meet with staff, provide model-demonstration lessons, answer questions in order to continue to fine-tune the process, continue to provide follow-up and support, and to help the district cement the use of the program into the very fabric of its culture. The Collins Writing Program is now something that just occurs naturally in the everyday events of what we do.

Results

Ohio ranks school districts on the basis of their results of state test passing percentage rates: Academic Emergency (lowest), Continuous Improvement, Effective, and Excellent or Excellent with Distinction (highest). Here are our results:

Year	Status
2002–2003	Academic Emergency
2003–2004	Continuous Improvement
2006-2007	Effective
2008-2009	Excellent

We believe our progress is based, in part, on our general writing test scores as well as our improvement on other content area tests; specifically, performance on the two- and four-point open response questions of these tests. In 2002-2003, the average performance on the two-point open response questions was 0.5 out of two points and 0.9 points out of four points on four-point question. Each year, these average performance rates have steadily increased. As of the 2008-2009 school year, the average performance on open-ended state tests questions is now about 1.2 out of two points and about 2.1 out of four points. Finally, our writing test results have increased from about a 70% average passing rate (on all writing tests) in 2002-2003 to about an 84% average passing rate (on all writing tests) in 2008-2009.