

Collins Writing Program

Implementation Profile

Lawrence High School • Lawrence, Massachusetts

An article in the March 2005 issue of ASCD's *Educational Leadership*, devoted entirely to urban schools, asserts that The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) "links teacher quality to improved student achievement, especially among low-income urban children of color. Consequently, improving teacher quality has become one of the hallmarks of current reform efforts." The authors conclude that a "principal recommendation for improving teachers' practice is high-quality professional development" (Foster, Lewis, and Onafowora, 2005). This approach has enabled the high school in Lawrence, Massachusetts significantly to improve student achievement and performance in English/Language Arts by training ninth- and tenth-grade teachers to use the Collins Writing Program.

Background

Lawrence is a mid-size city (population in 2000 U.S. Census: 72,043) located on the Merrimack River in northeastern Massachusetts. Like many urban areas, Lawrence has become a gate city for immigrants. Other census data reveal that Lawrence has the highest minority population in the state (59.7%) and ranks as the fourth poorest community in Massachusetts. The city has 17 elementary schools and one high school. In the 2003-2004 school year, 87.4% of the high school population of 2500 were Hispanic.

It is commonplace to hear that the educational problems of the urban high school are insurmountable. After serious criticisms of Lawrence High School's programs and performance were published in the 1998 evaluative report from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, staff and students had every reason to be discouraged. Perceived problems and shortcomings were so severe that the school lost its NEASC accreditation.

Teachers and administrators refused to be discouraged. Recognizing the value of professional development as a component of school improvement, administrators responded to NEASC concerns about low student scores in English/Language Arts on the state exam, the MCAS. After a careful examination of effective programs, the Collins Writing Program was selected as a proven means for improving student achievement and performance. Beginning in the 2000 school year, Collins Associates began training teachers. Since the ELA/MCAS is administered to tenth-graders, the ninth- and tenth-grade teachers were the first to be trained in the Collins program.

Implementation

The standard Collins implementation sequence was followed, beginning with full-day trainings for large groups, then subject-area groupings for English, math, science, and social studies teachers, augmented by demonstration lessons conducted by Collins associates. As teachers put the program to work in their classrooms, follow-up meetings for question-and-answer and troubleshooting were offered. New teachers received introductory training as they came on staff. English teachers developed writing FCAs to be used by their colleagues in other disciplines.

From the outset, teachers began using the Cumulative Writing Folder to retain and record student assignments. Minimum expectations were established, with English teachers required

to have their students produce, file, and record in their folders twelve pieces of literary analysis per year in the form of Type 3 and Type 4 papers. Math, science, and social studies teachers were given similar goals, expecting each student in each discipline to write twelve papers, again Type 3 or Type 4, on topics relevant to each discipline.

Meanwhile, Collins associates trained administrators to review and assess the folder contents. Twice each academic year, teachers submitted folders for review and their respective administrators reviewed their contents for quantity and quality of student work. Written feedback was given to each teacher and, again, support was made available in the form of continued coaching and modeling by Collins associates.

This pattern of training, practicing, observing model teaching, meeting minimum expectations, and receiving evaluative feedback has continued for five years at Lawrence High School, with very positive results.

Results

The initial goal of using the Collins Writing Program was to improve tenth-graders' performance on the ELA test of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. As demonstrated in the chart below, the program has succeeded in meeting that goal. With effective professional development, coaching and support, clear expectations accompanied by review, evaluation, and feedback, teachers have engaged students in more active learning, have pushed students toward higher-order thinking, and have increased the total amount of student writing• while also improving test scores.

	2000 – 2001	2001 – 2002	2002-2003	2003 – 2004
% of students “Advanced & Proficient”	16	27	28	22
% of students “Needs Improvement”	32	34	35	45
% of students “Failing”	53	39	37	32

(data from Massachusetts Department of Education)

As the chart demonstrates, scores have improved steadily over the four years shown. Combining “Advanced and Proficient” and “Needs Improvement” totals reveals that the number of students passing the tenth-grade ELA/MCAS exam at Lawrence High School has risen from less than **half** of all tenth-graders to **two-thirds**. As a result of these and other improvements at Lawrence High School, the school regained its accreditation in 2005.

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