

# Collins Writing Program

## Implementation Profile

### Pine Hill School – Sherborn, Massachusetts

When we looked at writing programs, we looked at several writing process models. We finally decided that our teachers were familiar with writing process. What we needed was help in managing the writing process.

David Nihill, Principal, Pine Hill School

### **Meeting a Curriculum Need**

Pine Hill's search for a writing program in 2000 was not motivated by a need to turn around low test scores. Located in the affluent Boston suburb of Sherborn, Pine Hill is actually among the highest scoring schools in Massachusetts' Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). In an analysis done in 2004 in *The Boston Globe* using combined grade achievement on MCAS, Pine Hill ranked third highest in Massachusetts.

The school has an outstanding staff and, for many of them, writing instruction is a strength. What they lacked was coordination of all their good efforts. According to Principal Nihill, the need was to bring "more consistency and focus" to writing instruction in their K-5 school. Implementing the Collins Writing Program accomplished that—and increased achievement scores even further.

One goal of the Collins Writing Program is to increase the frequency of writing to help students develop fluency and confidence. After implementing the program, first-grade teacher Ellen Tully, an experienced writing process teacher, noticed a difference with her students. "We have done so much writing with the Collins Program that my first graders are no longer fearful of the writing process and are more apt to take risks. I can't believe the growth I have seen since September," she reported.

All teachers seem to agree that using Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) has helped them enhance their instruction—and their students' writing. Third-grade teacher Jim Carnes commented that with FCAs, "Students have both direction and focus for their writing. The mystery of writing unravels!" Heather Mackay, another third-grade teacher, agrees: "I love the explicit structure of the Collins program. The FCAs provide clear expectations for students without overwhelming them."

Consistency in instruction meant involving the whole staff. At Pine Hill, the Collins Writing Program starts in Kindergarten, where students are introduced to key strategies such as Type One and Two Writing—even focus correcting. "We use Focus Correction Areas to guide our writing, too," reports one of the Kindergarten teachers. "It's a great strategy to use at the Kindergarten level. My students are more aware of what is expected of them, and I am better able to assess their writing using FCAs."

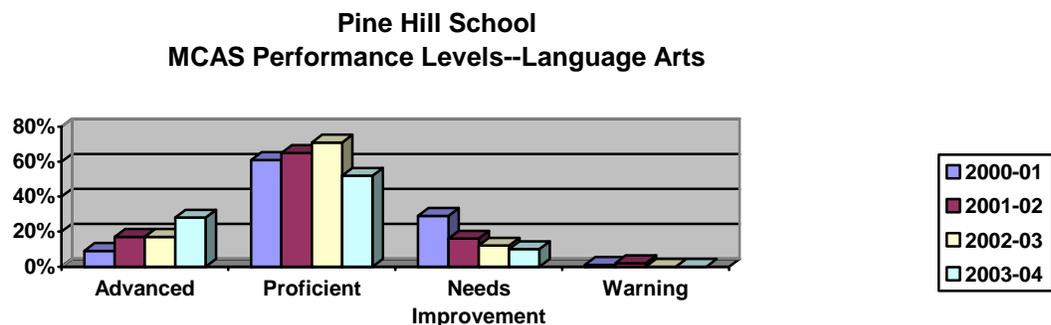
## Supporting the Implementation

The success of the program was due in large measure to the planning of Mr. Nihill and his language arts committee. They laid out a multi-year program of training and support. Beyond the initial training, Pine Hill used Collins Education associates for follow-up workshops, in-class demonstration lessons, consultations, and year-end folder reviews and goal setting.

Over the years, inservice and early-release days were used periodically to provide additional training and technical assistance for teachers. These sessions provided the impetus for the staff to undergo a careful examination of their writing curriculum and goals. The result was a grade-by-grade list of priority Focus Correction Areas—critical writing skills to be emphasized at each grade level. Pine Hill also asked a Collins associate to go into classrooms to teach writing lessons for teachers to observe. These observation opportunities, and the question-and-answer sessions that followed, went a long way toward bringing more consistency in classroom practice.

## Getting Results

In Massachusetts, MCAS performance results for schools are classified into four areas: Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement, and Warning. While test results were not a major concern at Pine Hill, there was room for improvement. The first four years of implementing the Collins Writing Program saw a significant increase in the number of students who scored at the Advanced level in English/Language Arts. As the chart below shows, students scoring at the Advanced level increased from 9% in 2000-01 to 28% in 2003-2004. During the same time, Pine Hill reduced the number of students scoring at the Warning level from 1% and 2% (in 2001 and 2002) to zero (in 2003 and 2004).



In mathematics and science, Mr. Nihill's analysis showed that Pine Hill students (like most) were weakest in those questions that required them to write an explanation of their thinking. With the Collins Writing Program's emphasis on writing across the curriculum, the school has seen a positive trend in MCAS scores in mathematics and science, too: In 2002-03, the first year of the MCAS Science test, 29% of students scored Advanced. The next year, the number increased to 54% -- and no students were at the Warning level. In mathematics over the last four years, Advanced scores have increased from 21% to 41%, and the number of students at the Warning level have been reduced to 1% or 0% in the last three years.

Looking back over the last several years, Mr. Nihill commented, "The Collins Program has been much more than a writing program for us. It has served as a comprehensive tool to improve teaching and learning in all areas of the curriculum."