



# The Writing Proficiency Project - Winter 2008

## Getting it Write!

Over 1700 students completed the fall Field Test of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade Process Writing Assessment (PWA). This standards-based assessment is the elementary extension of the PWA already in place for secondary students in grades 6 -9. Designed by Oakland teachers working with the Bay Area Writing Project, the PWA will replace the Open Court writing assessments in grades 4 and 5 next school year and in grades K-3 the following year. It will provide students, teachers, administrators, parents and researchers with a common understanding of what writing looks like across the district.

The 15 schools in

the elementary field test are located from near Highway 13 to below International Boulevard and from Lake Merritt to the San Leandro border. They are large and small, new and old, high-achieving and low-performing, English-only and majority English Language Learner schools.

We learned a lot from the first complete elementary assessment cycle that will guide our next steps. There was overwhelming evidence from teacher feedback and student essays that the 4<sup>th</sup> grade PWA was successful in accurately assessing student writing. There was equally compelling feedback that the 5<sup>th</sup> grade version was problematic. The

PWA Design Team is revising the 4<sup>th</sup> grade prompt and completely rewriting the 5<sup>th</sup> grade materials.

We also discovered that the model of having a Teacher Liaison at each site was critical to the success of the project. Liaisons reported that the collegial scoring sessions were the crucial step of the process and that their conversations around student work were exciting and packed with learning. More professional development is needed and we are planning a summer writing institute. As well, next year we will continue the successful series "Writing from the Start" with the Bay Area Writing Project.

## Ideas for Publishing Writing

Publishing student writing is an important step of the writing process. When students write for real audiences, they are more motivated to write and pay closer attention to writing correctly. There are many ways to publish student writing. Here are some ideas!

### Author's Chair

A student takes "center stage" in a chair designated solely for reading aloud. You can glue the word "AUTHOR" to the front side of a cushioned chair to illustrate its special status. Some teachers reserve author's chair for the end of

the week. You may want to have a sign-up sheet for author's chair. It is important to develop some "norms" with your students about behavioral expectations when someone is reading in the chair. When you introduce author's chair, it is helpful to give students sentence stems to aid them in giving positive

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### Special points of interest:

- 5th grade pilot reveals much!
- Reflective communities of practice build strong writing instruction
- The author's chair is the place to be!
- We have our own website, [oaklandwrites.org](http://oaklandwrites.org) now with loads of resources and information

## Because Writing Matters -Middle School PD

"Where do I start?" In the wake of the administration and scoring of the Process Writing Assessment, many teachers were left with a sense of urgency about addressing their students' writing needs, and a great desire to learn more about writing instruction. Many signed up for the Writing Proficiency Project's Middle School Writing Series in order to find out more.

The Middle School Writing Mini Conference series supports teachers by offering approaches for teaching expository and persuasive essay writing. Presenters Stephanie Robillard (6<sup>th</sup> grade) and Leslie Moitza (7<sup>th</sup> grade) model practical strategies for teaching the "features of writing" as defined by the Process Writing Assessment rubric: ideas and content, organization, audience awareness, language, and conventions. In addition, teachers learn the process of using protocols to look at student writing, and have a chance to dialogue with other grade-level colleagues.

The focus of the first mini-conference on October 17<sup>th</sup> was helping students develop ideas and content in their writing. Teachers learned how to teach the concept of a counter-

argument in persuasive writing. Moitza emphasized the need for teachers to begin persuasive writing instruction with a topic that students are familiar with and feel passionate about. For the 6<sup>th</sup> grade strand, Robillard led teachers through an activity involving M&M's - a yummy and practical activity for helping students in the art of expository explanation. The activity was completed with a mini-lesson in sentence starters a la Kate Kinsella.

The second mini-conference on December 19<sup>th</sup> addressed the use of language in writing. Teachers learned about establishing audience and tone in the writing prompt, which sets the stage for student understanding of appropriate language use. Another key learning

was around helping students develop complex sentences through grammar exercises that are based on logic rather than rote memorization.

If you have ever wondered how to help your students with writing conventions while teaching them an expository or persuasive essay, the upcoming mini-conference on **February 20<sup>th</sup>** is a place to start. In this session guest presenter Catharine Lucas will lead teachers through high-leverage strategies for helping students improve their writing grammar. Interested teachers should RSVP to Stephanie Travaille. We hope to see you there!

The next mini-conference will be held on February 20<sup>th</sup> at United for Success Academy, 3:30pm.

### Comments from Teachers

*"I love the dialogue."*

*"Handouts are interesting and relevant"*

*"I feel prepared to scaffold expository writing more effectively."*

*"I'd like to commend the instructor for her enthusiasm and repertoire of strategies and handouts. Thank you."*



## More Ideas for Publishing Student Writing

comments and feedback to the authors. Some teachers give participation points to students who read in the author's chair. Try to get all students to read in the chair at some point in the month/year. You may choose to read for very shy students if they are unwilling to read themselves (with their permission, of course.) Teachers should take a turn in the author's chair too!

### **Newsletters and Newspapers**

Microsoft Publisher makes the job of publishing a professional looking newsletter or newspaper easy! The chal-

lenge is collecting all the student work digitally. The easiest approach is to have students email their documents to you. Make sure you instruct students to name their documents with their own names and title of piece. This will save you time! If you don't want to deal with publisher software, you can also just use Word and simply create columns and download images. As well, you can give students a style guide for writing their final drafts in columns and then simply compile all of the final drafts together (reproduced double-sided and stapled

down the full side of the paper.) A reminder, as with all final draft work that will be published, students need to meticulously proof read their own papers and receive some assistance editing their work. Make enough copies for every student and make sure to give copies to the principal and other teachers. You will be amazed at how much pride students take in their work!

### **Wall of Fame and/or Golden Lines**

Reserve a wall of your classroom to post exemplary student work. If you post writing that is still in a draft

## Writing from the Start - K-5 Professional Development

Sixty Oakland elementary teachers are participating in the second year of a monthly writing workshop presented by the Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP) in collaboration with the Writing Proficiency Project. Teachers are grouped by grade level to learn instructional strategies for teaching writing. BAWP presenters Jeanette Bicias, Hatti Saunders, Gay Geiger-Lods and



Teachers at the center!

Michelle Hackel are addressing such issues as: the components of a balanced writing program within an Open Court classroom, differentiated instruction, planning for English Language Learners, assessments, writing across the content areas, genre study and developmentally appropriate writing prompts. In March the participants will preview the new Process Writing As-

sessments (PWA) with the PWA Design Team.

*"I am ready to try new things and examine my own teaching."*

*"The beauty has been added back into writing."*

*"I commend the district asking our opinion on assessment at the K/1 level."*

*"It makes me feel passionate about writing with my students."*

## The Art of the Argument

High school teachers from across the city gathered for Expository and Persuasive writing workshops in December and January. BAWP Presenter Joan Cone lead English teachers through a three part series focused on Persuasive writing. The focus of the workshop was using templates to teach students the logic of argumentation. While templates and structures have often lead to claims of deadening student voice and restricting student thought, Cone modeled three-part templates for teaching persuasion that high school teachers could embrace. "Templates help students make key intellectual moves that

they might not learn on their own," she reinforced, citing the work of Graff and Birkenstein's, *They Say, I Say*. "Templates help students focus on the rhetorical patterns that are key to academic success but often pass under the classroom radar." Each part of Cone's template for an Argument on an Argument included succinct guidelines. Teachers were especially grateful for the template's guidance around the structure of the body of the argumentative essay, which included a major concession and details for construct pros that would win over the most critical reader.

Participants enjoyed seeing Cone's examples of student work. "Not only did she provide the structure but she allowed us to grapple with and interpret what we saw in the students' writing," remarked a participant. Encouraging growth is what professional development is all about. Another participant intoned, "Each year with classes like this, I know more and more what I stand for and believe is best for my students." The Writing Proficiency Project seeks to develop not only the skills, but also mindfulness for the complex craft of teaching writing.

## More Ideas for Publishing Student Writing

stage and contains some errors, make sure to note this on the top of the writing. Also, write visible comments that highlight the feature of the writing that is exemplary. A wall of "golden lines" is another way to publish student work. "Golden lines" are especially nice when students are working on descriptive and figurative language in writing or focusing on sentence-combining. You want to highlight those interesting and lyrical, complex sentences.

### Student Books

Believe it or not, student-

produced books are easy to publish! Give students very clear formatting instructions and an example of what the final draft should look like. You may not want students to write the typical header information on a piece that will be published in a book. Be clear about where you want their names and titles, line spacing, font type and size, and margins. The more uniform the style, the more the book actually looks professional! Create a title page and reproduce it on heavier weight color paper, if available. After the entire book is compiled, number the pages and create a table of con-

tents. The New Teacher Support Center has a book-binding machine and spiral spines that you can use. An alternative to binding a book is to create a student binder of final draft writing using plastic sleeves. This is especially nice when students have decorated their writing with borders or images.

### Other Ideas

There are many other ways to publish student writing including zines, E-zines, portfolio parties, family writing nights, student websites, and more!

## The Writing Project Rocks!

Researchers have cited the National Writing Project, a federally supported network based at the University of California, Berkeley, as one effective model of professional development. Here are the group's core principals:

- Teachers are the agents of reform; universities and schools are partners for investing in that reform through professional development.
- Professional development programs provide opportunities for teachers to work together to un-

derstand the full spectrum of writing development across grades and across subject areas.

- Effective professional development programs provide frequent and ongoing opportunities for teachers to write and to examine theory, research, and practice together systematically.
- Teachers who are well informed and effective in their practice can be successful teachers of other teachers as well as partners in educational research, development, and implementation.



- A reflective and informed community of practice is in the best position to design and develop comprehensive writing programs.

SOURCE: The National Writing Project ([www.nwp.org](http://www.nwp.org))

*Please send us comments, feedback, and articles you would like to see in the next newsletter! We really want to hear from you! Amy, Sarah, Steph, and Mary*



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[www.oaklandwrites.org](http://www.oaklandwrites.org)

#### Timeline

2007-2008

**THIS YEAR**

- PWA administration grades 6-9 with collaborative scoring and teacher inquiry around writing instruction
- Field test of grades 4 and 5, selection of anchor papers
- Design of grades K-3 writing assessments

2008-2009

**NEXT YEAR**

- PWA administration grades 4-9 with collaborative scoring and teacher inquiry around writing instruction
- Pilot of grades K-3, selection of anchor papers
- Continued professional development