Flint Community Schools

A District-Wide Writing Initiative: Monitoring and Evaluating Implementation For the 2005-06 School Year

Final Report
The Busara Group, LLC
July, 2006

Flint Community Schools

Final Report, Writing Initiative 2005-06

Executive Summary

In 2004-05 Flint Community Schools piloted an initiative aimed at improving instruction in writing. In 2005-06, the initiative was implemented district for grades K-8. All teachers were expected to take their students through four different units of study reinforcing different writing genres. The units were developed either by Perry and Associates or by the district's Literacy Support Teachers, with support from Perry and Associates staff.

In 2005-06, almost all teachers in grades K-8 implemented the initiative to varying degrees. Principals had a more positive view of implementation compared to the literacy support teachers (LSTs). Principals saw their staff as more accepting of the initiative, both in their attitude and how thoroughly they implemented the units. Because the LSTs spent more time with teachers and were more familiar with the writing lessons, they may have been in a better position to judge what was happening in the classroom. Teachers may also have been more honest with LSTs regarding their views of the initiative.

The district provided direct support to teachers through formal professional development (PD) and the LSTs. Outside consultants also provided support for LSTs and principals. The August district institute focused on Writer's Workshop and the January institute on the fictional narrative. Several teachers from each school attended these institutes. The LSTs provided ongoing support by working directly with teachers and principals through classroom, lesson and PD activities. Teachers varied in their views of how well the district supported the initiative. About half of teachers surveyed thought support was inadequate because of little or no training, late delivery of units and materials, and lack of on-going support. Those LSTs who thought that district support was inadequate also mentioned training and materials. Teachers who thought that support was adequate had more training and more support from their LST. In rating the outside PD they received, principals and LSTs found it to be helpful.

Of the 5 units (2 cycles for personal narrative), grades 3-8 did all of them and grades K-2 did the personal narrative and the research and peer responses units. Completion rates increased for fictional narrative for grades 3-6 but were lower for the research report. Comments from some teachers indicated that the research unit had too much material and was too long, and that some students lost their drive to complete the report. A six-point rubric similar to the MEAP rubric was used to score the personal and fictional narratives for grades 3-6. Based on the narrative results, about two-fifths of Flint's students are prepared to pass the writing portion of the MEAP. Sixth graders had the highest scores, and all grades showed improvement over the two narratives with fourth graders showing the greatest gains. Students did well with the research unit especially in finding information on their topic but teachers noted that some struggled to make the transition from narrative writing. These improvements in student writing were reflected in comments by teachers, principals and students themselves. Teachers cited many ways that students' writing had improved and noted that students were more enthusiastic about writing. Students themselves confirmed these views. Most of those interviewed thought they were better writers and most wrote outside of school, more so than last year. Principals also said that students are better writers because of the initiative and reported positive changes in students' classroom behavior.

As a result of Writer's Workshop principals and LSTs have seen other positive changes. LSTs feel they are better coaches and teachers because of their training and experience with Writer's Workshop. Principals saw parents becoming more supportive of their children's writing. They also said that their teachers were excited about their students' progress in writing, with many becoming more supportive of the initiative as the year went by. Because of Writer's Workshop teachers also learned new strategies for teaching writing and better classroom management skills. Principals reported that their teachers are now more confident in their ability to teach writing. Teachers themselves reported being more comfortable teaching the units as the year went by. For the most part, they found the 2 narrative units to be logical and thorough, with clear objectives and appropriate mentor texts. Teachers felt free to change the units to meet the needs of their students, especially in using different mentor texts and taking more time to do the lessons.

Principals and LSTs were optimistic about being able to transfer new skills and behaviors to the new ELA program. LSTs think they can be effective at coaching teachers and sharing best teaching practices in the new ELA program. Principals think that teachers can use strategies and skills from Writer's Workshop to teach the writing portion of the new curriculum and possibly in other subject areas.

Recommendations and Lessons Learned

- Better preparation by the district would have made a smoother transition to a new writing program. Units and mentor texts should be ready on time and resources that students use should be at their reading level and be adequate to meet the requirements of the writing unit. Teachers also need more time to plan and prepare and should be provided with the opportunity to see a new approach being used before having to apply it themselves.

- Though the district provided initial and ongoing PD, many teachers thought there could be more. Not all teachers could attend the district institutes or work directly with their LST. Specifically, teachers would like to have more modeling of lessons, more opportunities to observe each other, a thorough plan prior to the start of the school year, more training on Writer's Workshop, and meetings with peers who have taught Writer's Workshop.
- Any curriculum adopted by the district should be integrated with the pacing charts so that teaching and learning is standards-based and continuous from year to year
- Full implementation of any program may take several years. Some schools were using Writer's Workshop during the 2004-05 school year and continued to use it with the addition of the writing units. For other schools, the units and strategies were new to teachers and students. Though most of Flint's teachers taught the units, not all were successful and complete in their implementation. Yet many students improved and are more positive about writing. Many teachers have skills and confidence that they didn't have before. Hopefully Flint's teachers and students will carry these gains into the next school year.

.

Flint Community Schools

Final Report, Writing Initiative 2005-06

Introduction

Flint's Balanced Literacy Plan focused on writing during the 2005-06 school year. Based on the available data on student achievement in writing, the district decided to implement a writing initiative emphasizing grade level standards. Specifically, the initiative was designed to meet K-8 grade level expectations by teaching units of study addressing different writing genres. Three units of study (personal narrative cycles 1 and 2, and peer response) were developed by Perry and Associates, Inc., and two units (fictional narrative and research) were prepared by Flint's literacy support teachers (LSTs) with support from Perry and Associates. Curriculum writers used the Michigan standards and grade level expectations to develop unit curriculum maps and essential questions to guide the units and identify student performance outcomes. Each unit contained embedded assessments and used detailed lessons in writing and language study to teach the writing process with instructional strategies from Writer's Workshop. All K-8 ELA teachers were expected to teach the units of study. The district in turn provided initial and continuous, embedded professional development to ELA teachers through the LSTs, GISD and Perry and Associates.

	Aug	*Sept*	*Oct*	*Nov*	*Dec*	*Jan*	*Feb*	*Mar*	*Apr*	*May*	*June*
District PD	4 day workshop			Bldg meetings, San Diego trip		2 day workshop					
G 3-8		Personal narrative, 1st cycle		Personal narrative, 2nd cycle		Fictional narrative			Research unit		Peer Response
K-2		Lucy Calkins (2 units)				Personal narrative			Research unit		Peer Response

The timeline above shows district professional development (PD) in relation to when the writing units were taught. All units were designed for multiple purposes – to help students enjoy writing and become good writers over time, and to prepare students for the writing section of the MEAP. Teaching strategies included student partnerships and reading and studying author's craft in mentor texts. Students published their work at the end of each unit and read their stories aloud to their classmates and parents.

For the personal narrative, students choose an event in their lives that was important to them and described the event and their feelings about it. In the writing students were to use their "voice" to connect with their audience and include personal reactions and insights that show the importance of the event.

For the fictional narrative, students developed a story that portrayed "imaginary" characters and events. The story was to be entertaining to the audience and also draw them into the lives of the people in the story. The story also had a purpose in informing the audience and causing them to think about their own lives and the world around them.

The research unit gave students a chance to search out new information on scientific topics and organize what they found based on their research question. Students used written materials and the Internet to gather opinions and research on their chosen topic. Their report should have compared the thoughts of experts to their own and students should have integrated the two in their writing.

The peer response unit offered students the opportunity to work with a peer in developing responses to the other student's work and to help them with revision. Students learned how to respond to a prompt and understand the rubric used to score MEAP writing responses. As with each of the units, besides writing their response to the prompt, students rehearsed their ideas orally with their partner.

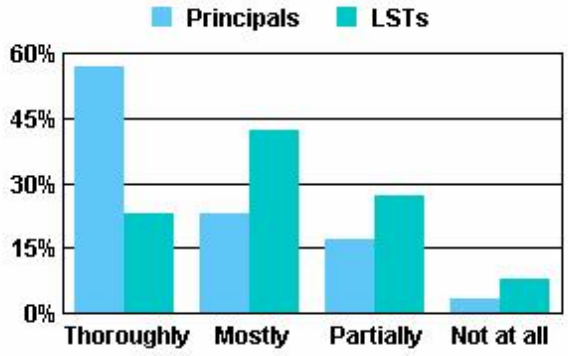
The reminder of this report will give perspectives on the initiative from teachers, principals, students and literacy support teachers. We will summarize support and professional development from the district and show student results for the personal, fictional and research units.

Implementation of Writing Initiative

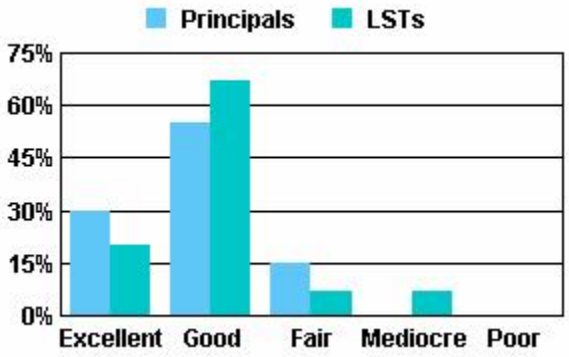
Both principals and LSTs were asked to about implementation of the writing initiative. In January, principals were asked to report on the number of teachers in their schools who were actively using the units of study. Principals provided information on the teaching of writing in grades 3 through 8. Data were collected from 20 of the 26 elementary schools and 5 of the 7 middle schools. These data concern the personal narrative being taught by teachers in grades 3-8 from September to January. For the 20 elementary and 5 middle schools providing data, 19 reported 100% of their teachers using the writing curriculum.

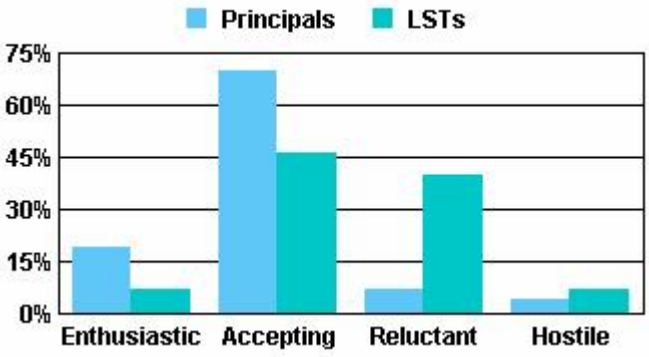
	Writing Teachers	Writing Teachers Using Units of Study	% of Writing Teachers Using Units of Study
Elementary	131	123	94%
Middle	22	21	95%

In June, principals and LSTs completed a survey about the writing initiative. They estimated the degree of implementation in their buildings, how well teachers did and their attitudes toward the initiative. These data apply to all of the writing units. For the degree of implementation, principals and LSTs estimated the percent of their teachers who implemented the initiative either thoroughly, mostly, partially or not at all. Complete implementation meant that teachers taught the four writing units, used the writer's workshop instructional strategies in teaching writing, and the unit culminated with students publishing their work. The graph below shows the percents of teachers and their degree of implementation as reported by both the principals and LSTs.



Principals estimated that 80% of their staff had thoroughly or mostly implemented the initiative compated to 65% for the LSTs. The graphs below summarize how principals and LSTs rated the job teachers did and their attitude toward the initiative. For those that thoroughly implemented the initiative, the principals and LSTs said that most (85% and 84%) did a good or excellent job. The LSTs said that about half their teachers were accepting or enthusiastic and half were reluctant or hostile. One LST noted that at her school, teachers were reluctant at first but became accepting and even enthusiastic as the year went by. Principals saw their staff as more enthusiastic or accepting compared to the LSTs.





Teacher Perspective, Fictional and Personal Narratives

In March, teachers completed a survey about the fictional and personal narratives. Lower elementary teachers (K-2) wrote about the personal narrative and upper elementary and middle school teachers (3-8) wrote about the fictional narrative. 177 teachers completed the survey, 71 from grades K-2, 95 from grades 3-6 and 14 from grades 7 and 8. A summary of the major findings of this survey is presented below. This is followed by a table that shows the percentage of teachers answering yes or no to four categories of questions.

- Most teachers who completed the survey found the units logical, thorough, with clear objectives, and appropriate mentor texts.

- Those who didn't think the units were well developed had specific comments about sequencing and pacing, and felt strongly about how inappropriate the mentor texts are.

- In contrast to the majority who expressed satisfaction with the units, most teachers did change the units and lessons in some way.
    - Many used different mentor texts which they felt were better and/or more appropriate.
    - Many slowed down the pace of the units, feeling overall that 25 lessons trades quantity for quality. They also felt they needed to spend more time developing specific skills, especially for students who need remediation.
    - Teachers appear to have only moved faster in order to keep up with the mandated calendar.
    - The language study portions were changed to add emphasis on basic skills or because lessons had been taught earlier in the school year.

- Most teachers felt comfortable using the units of study. Those who didn't feel comfortable cited lack of professional development, lack of adequate materials, needing more time to plan, and wanting more opportunities to see the approach being used before having to apply it themselves.

- Teachers provide numerous examples of how their students' writing and other classroom behaviors improved as a result of this initiative.

Elementary and middle school teachers differed in their opinions of the units in several ways. More elementary teachers (grade K-6) thought the units had a logical sequence and covered the genre thoroughly compared to middle school teachers (grades 7-8). Middle school teachers used different mentor texts more often and made more changes to the units, especially to the language study portion. Middle school teachers also felt they had less support from the district compared to elementary teachers. The table on the next page gives summaries of the yes/no responses on the survey.

Teacher Evaluation of the Units	Grades	Yes	No
1. Did the unit have a logical sequence of lessons?	K-2		32%
	3-6		20%
	7-8		10%
2. Did the unit cover the genre thoroughly?	K-2		27%
	3-6		25%
	7-8		15%
3. Was the purpose of each lesson clear?	K-2		15%
	3-6		23%
	7-8		14%
4. Were the mentor texts appropriate for the unit?	K-2		28%
	3-6		25%
	7-8		25%

Changes Made to Units	Grades	Yes	No
5. Did you use mentor texts that were different?	K-2	63%	
	3-6	55%	
	7-8	75%	
6. Did you have to slow down or repeat lessons?	K-2	73%	
	3-6	82%	
	7-8	86%	
7. Did you move faster through the lessons?	K-2	31%	
	3-6	23%	
	7-8	21%	
8. Did you change the language study portion of the unit?	K-2	35%	
	3-6	35%	
	7-8	92%	
9. Did you make other changes to the unit?	K-2	46%	
	3-6	52%	
	7-8	75%	

Teacher Comfort Using the Units	Grades	Yes	No
1. Did you feel comfortable in your ability to teach the lessons?	K-2		27%
	3-6		22%
	7-8		21%
2. Did you become more comfortable working with the second unit?	3-6		26%
	7-8		42%

Support from the District	Grades	Yes	No
3. Did you feel you had adequate support from the district?	K-2		45%
	3-6		49%
	7-8		67%

Teacher Perspective, Research Unit

In May, teachers completed a survey about the research unit. 149 teachers completed the survey, 68 from grades K-2, 75 from grades 3-6 and 7 from grades 7 and 8. A summary of the major findings of this survey is presented below.

- Most of the teachers who have taught research before thought the units were different from what they have done in the past.
  - About a third of these teachers thought the unit had more focus and organization or gave a more thorough and in-depth presentation of the research process.
  - About 16% of the teachers thought the unit had too much material for the time allotted or was too complicated for their grade level. Several teachers noted that they had trouble finding appropriate resources.
- Most of the teachers taught science in their classroom. Those who didn't teach science coordinated with their science teachers to varying degrees.
  - Over half shared materials or resources, discussed the unit with their science teacher, planned together or team taught.
  - Less than half didn't coordinate at all with their science teachers or didn't say what they did.
- Teachers reported areas where their students did well and also areas where they struggled.
  - Over a third of the teachers said that students had the most success at finding information on their topic using books and especially the Internet. About a fifth of the teachers said resources were a problem because there were not enough computers, not enough books on different subjects, outdated books or materials that were above their students' reading levels.
  - A related problem reported by a fourth of the teachers was being able to transfer information into writing. Students had trouble putting notes into their own words and wanted to copy word-for-word from the resource material.
  - Students did well with diagrams and labels and with taking notes using the 2-column system.
  - About a third of the teachers commented on their students' ability to organize their ideas and information. Half said their students did this well and the other half said their students struggled in this area.
  - Over a fourth of the teachers said their students struggled with writing the parts of the research paper such as the bibliography, index, glossary and table of contents. Fewer teachers reported that their students did well with research writing.

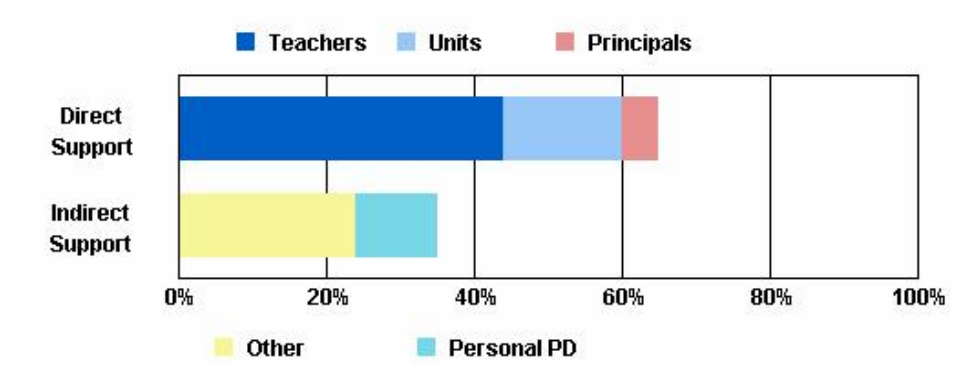
Support and Professional Development

The district provided district-wide professional development in August 2005 (4 days) and January 2006 (2 days). In addition the district sponsored a 4-day trip to San Diego for teams of teachers and principals. The table below shows the number of teachers who attended each event. November 30 was a district-wide PD day for meetings at individual schools. No sign-in sheets are available for these meetings.

	Number of Schools with Teachers Participating	Number of Teachers Participating
August PD	32	80
Trip to San Diego	16	23
November PD Day	data not available	data not available
January 9th PD	32	120
January 10th PD	28	108

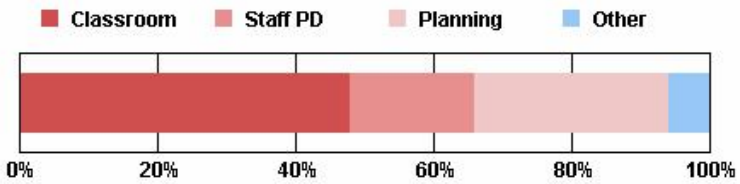
About a third of Flint's ELA teachers attended at least one of the district PD events. A few (6%) attended more than one event and 63% didn't attend any of the district PD.

Ongoing support was provided by the LSTs. Based on work logs for 14 LSTs, we have estimated how they spent their time in supporting the writing initiative. The graph below shows the percent of time spent on direct and indirect support of the initiative. Direct support means the LSTs worked with teachers and/or principals, or they worked on writing the units and PD preparation. Indirect support means they attended personal PD related to the writing initiative or did other work related to literacy. Other work includes meeting with the stewards, doing their work logs, working with MEAP or NWEA or working in related areas such as reading.



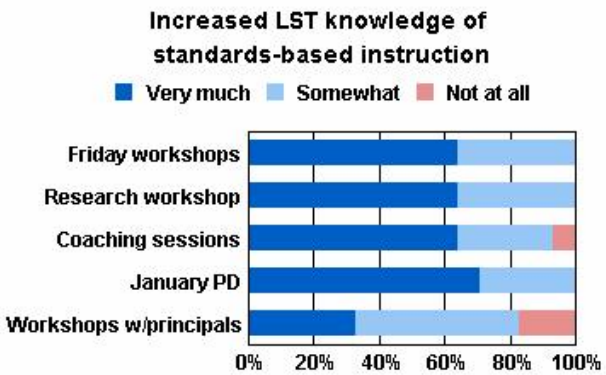
The graph below takes the same work and shows how it was spent on various activities. Classroom activities include collaborating on lessons, developing a model classroom, modeling or coaching, reciprocal teaching and team teaching. Lesson activities include planning standards-based lessons, researching or sharing literacy strategies and PD preparation. Staff PD is the time spent providing formal PD on the writing initiative. Most of the activities related to the classroom activities, lessons and staff PD would fall under the direct support category above while meetings would be considered indirect support. Meetings include participating in school activities, planning or supporting improvement strategies, meeting with stewards or principals, LST training and facilitating student work. Some of these types of meetings may be considered embedded PD especially if LSTs were meeting with individual teachers or grade level groups.

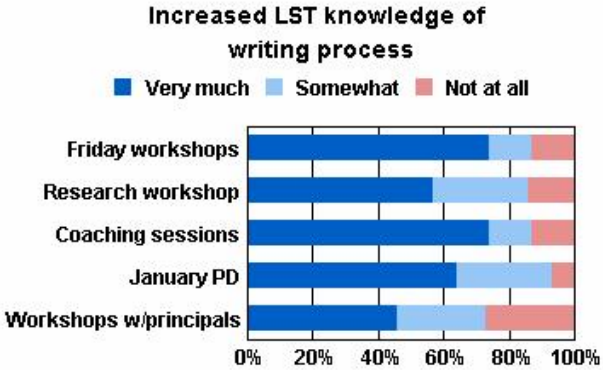
In their surveys, principals estimated the amount of time that LSTs spent doing various activities in their buildings. The main activities were direct classroom support, PD for the whole staff on Writer's Workshop and planning & implementation of Writer's Workshop. The data are summarized in the graph below. Both the principals' estimates and the LST work logs show that the LSTs spent about 60% of their time in direct support of the writing initiative through classroom, lesson and PD activities.

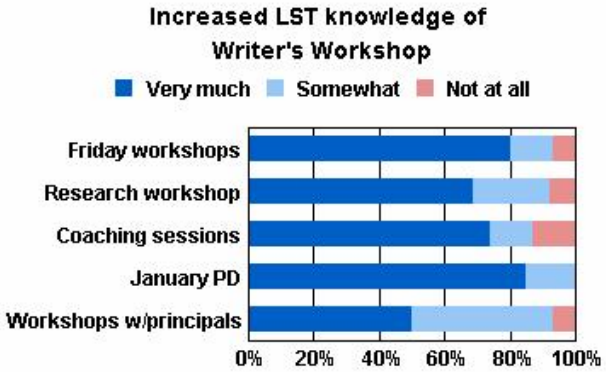


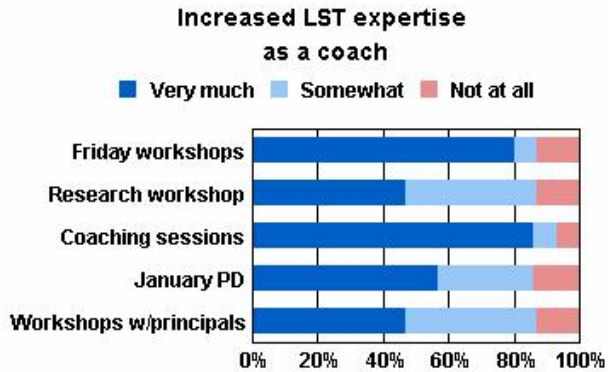
In the March survey, teachers responded to questions about district support and what support they would like to have. About half the teachers said support from the district was not adequate. Those who thought support was inadequate indicated they had not received PD, did not get the units and materials in time, where rushed to implement something they had not seen before, and did not get enough on-going support. In contrast, those who said support was adequate were the teachers who had received specific PD and/or who felt their LSTs were very supportive. Teachers provide many useful suggestions for additional help that could be provided to them: modeling of lessons, opportunities to observe each other, having a thorough plan prior to the start of the school year, more training on Writer's Workshop, meeting with peers who have taught Writer's Workshop, and having units and mentor texts available on time.

The Principals and LSTs also received support from the district and Perry and Associates. In their survey, the LSTs rated the support they got from Perry and Associates. Perry conducted five types of PD activities which LSTs attended: 1) monthly all-day workshops on units of study, 2) January 2006 four-day workshop on research unit, 3) monthly half-day coaching sessions with an LST partner, 4) January 2006 Writer's Workshop Institute, and 5) monthly workshops with principals on instructional strategies. The graphs below show their ratings for these 5 activities based on how well they increased knowledge of standards-based instruction, the writing process and Writer's Workshop as well as increasing their expertise as a coaches.



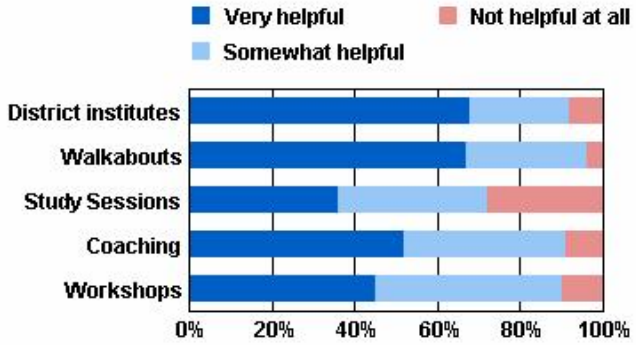






The LSTs also talked about support from the district. 57% felt they had adequate support from the district and one LST mentioned the benefit of workshops and training. 43% felt they didn't have adequate support because they didn't get enough PD, materials were not provided or they felt pulled in too many directions. 60% of the LSTs attended the August 2005 workshop and felt that it gave them a better understanding of Writer's Workshop and prepared them carryout school-based PD. Most wanted more training on becoming a better coach, specifically how to work with hostile or reluctant teachers, how to provide PD, and how to work with teachers. They also would like more time with their mentor coach and other coaches.

Principals also rated the support they received from Perry and Associates. This support included district institutes, walkabouts, study sessions, coaching to better support teachers in teaching writing and monthly workshops on instructional strategies. As shown in the graph below, they considered the district institutes and walkabouts to be the most helpful support activities.

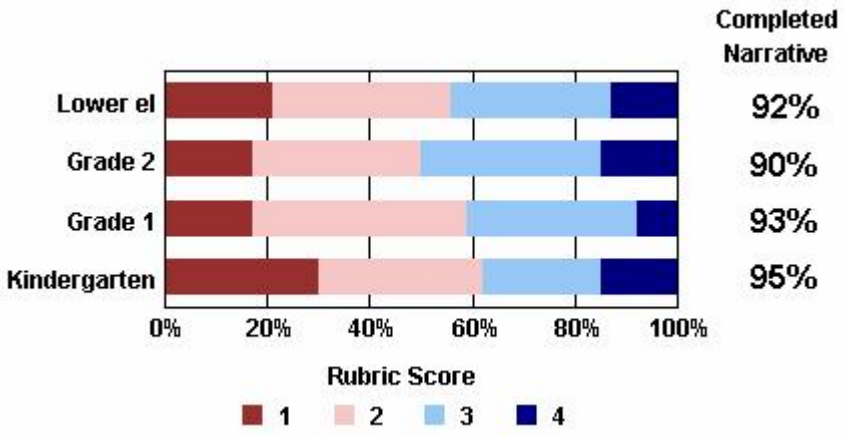


Student Results

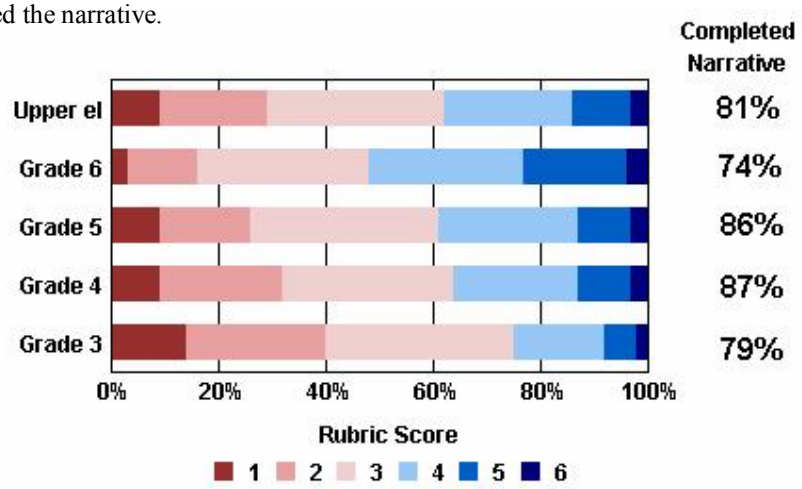
This section summarizes student scores on the personal and fictional narratives as well as the number who completed the research report. For the personal and fictional narratives, lower elementary results are presented separately from upper elementary results because of a different scoring scale and because upper elementary students had done both narratives. For the research unit, different rubrics were used so only the number of students who completed the unit are shown. 32 schools were asked to submit data on numbers of students completing the narratives and research report and also to provide the scores students achieved on the 2 narratives. Data were obtained from at most 21schools, but not all data were always useable for the summaries presented here. The table below show how many students and schools are included in each summary.

	Students	Students as % of grade levels	# of schools included	Comments
Personal Narrative K-2	1,483	35%	16	2 other schools supplied data, but 1 used a different rubric and 1 did not provide any scores
Personal Narrative 3-6	2,318	46%	13	5 other schools supplied data, but 3 used a different rubric, 1 had no scores, and 1 had no students who completed the narrative
Fictional Narrative 3-8	3,622	43%	19	2 other schools supplied data, but 1 used a different rubric and 1 did not provide any scores
Both Personal and Fictional Narratives 3-6	2,222	41%	11	
Research Report K-8	5,168	41%	19	

The graph below is a summary of results for the personal narrative for K-2, showing the percent of students with a given rubric score for each grade level and for K-2 combined. The numbers to the right of the graph show the percent of students who completed the narrative. The graph shows results for 1,483 K-2 students (35% of all K-2 students). Personal narrative scores for K-2 include data from 16 out of 26 schools. We obtained data from 18 schools, two of which could not be used, because one of them used a different rubric and the other didn't send scores, only a count of how many did the narrative.

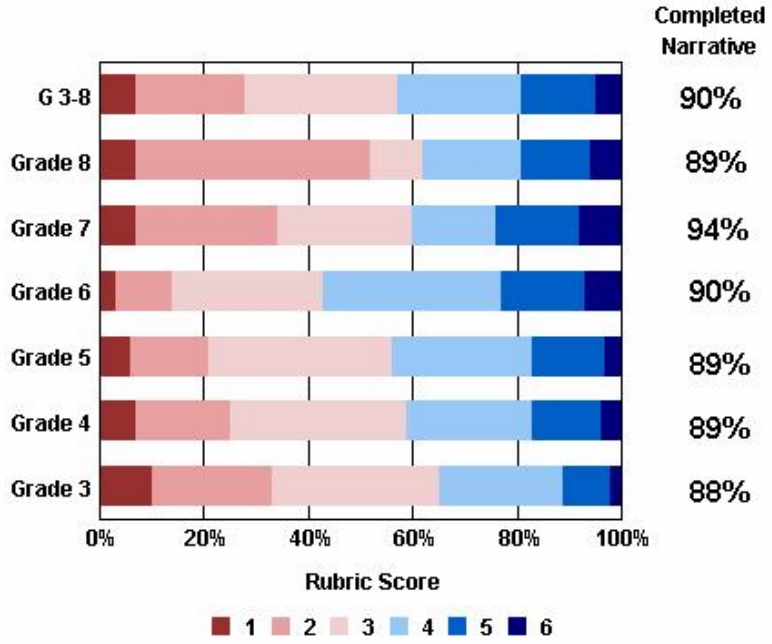


The graph below is a summary of results for the personal narrative for grades 3-6, showing the percent of students with a given rubric score for each grade level and for grades 3-6 combined. The numbers to the right of the graph show the percent of students who completed the narrative. The graph shows results for 2,318 students in grades 3-6 (46% of all 3-6 students), representing 13 out of 26 elementary schools. We got results from 18 schools but 5 of them either used a different scale (3), didn't score the narrative (1) or none of their students completed the narrative (1). Data from 18 schools were used to calculate the percent of students who completed the narrative.

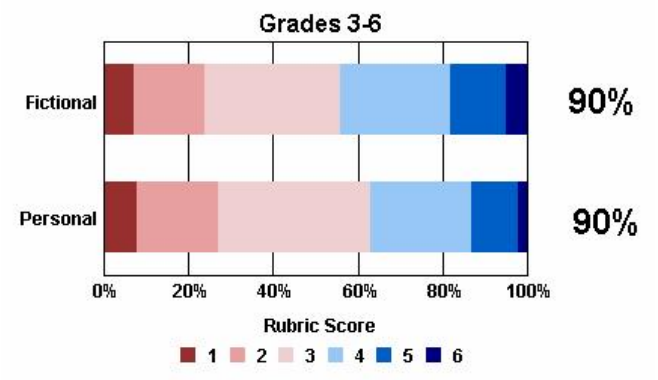


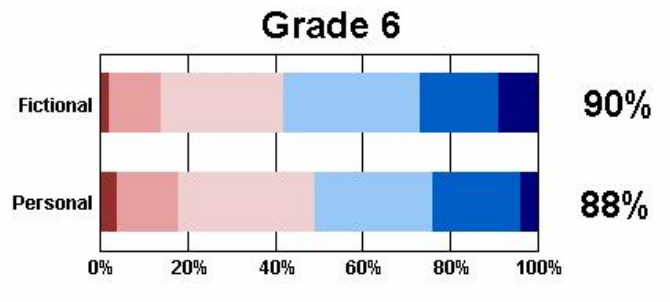
We have no scores for grades 7 and 8 for the personal narrative. For the one school, 91% of 7th graders and 40% of 8th graders completed the personal narrative.

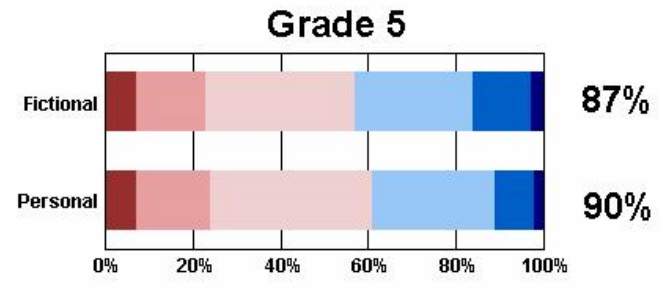
The graph below is a summary of results for the fictional narrative for grades 3-8, showing the percent of students with a given rubric score for each grade level and for grades 3-8 combined. The numbers to the right of the graph show the percent of students who completed the narrative. The graph shows results for 3,622 students in grades 3-8 (43% of all grade 3-8 students). The scores for grades 3-8 shown in the graph represent data from 19 out of 32 schools. We got results from 21schools, but one of them used a different rubric and the other didn't send scores, only a count of how many did the narrative.

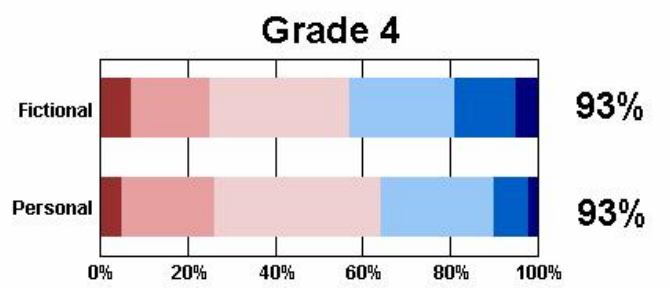


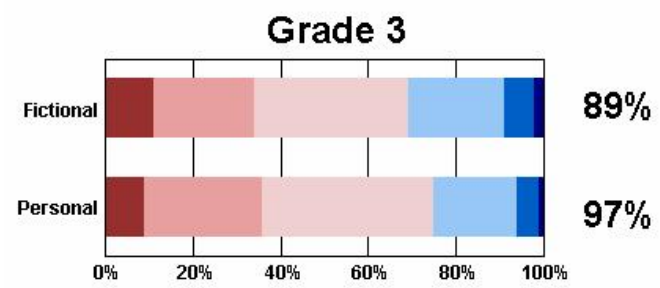
For 11 schools, we have scores on both the fictional and personal narratives for grades 3-6. The graphs below show the percent of students with a given rubric score for each narrative. The numbers to the right of the graphs show the percent of students who completed the narrative. The graphs show results for 2,222 students in grades 3-6 (41% of all 3-6 students).



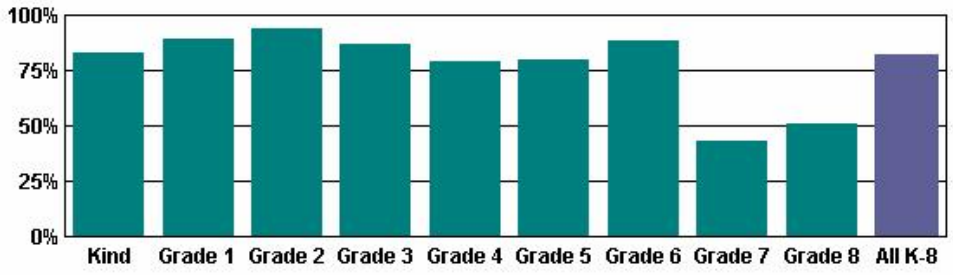








The graph below shows the percent of students in grades K-8 who completed the research report. We can't compare their scores on the report because different rubrics were used. The graph shows results for 5,168 students in grades K-8 (41% of all K-8 students) from 19 schools.



Student Perspective

In March, 167 students were either interviewed by an LST or filled out a survey on their own. 10 students are in grades 1-2, 111 are in grades 3-6, and 46 are in grades 7-8. The major findings are presented below, followed by tables showing grade level comparisons. Responses for most of the elementary students were written by the LST based on what the student said. Middle school students wrote their own responses, which are presented as the students wrote them.

- Most students said they were getting better at writing and their favorite parts of writing were revising and publishing.
- Over two-thirds of the students preferred the fictional narrative because they could be creative and make up whatever they wanted or they could write about someone else and not themselves.
- Students are most proud of specific characteristics about their writing such as description, punctuation, and spelling. They also felt a sense of accomplishment in getting the writing done and were proud when others liked their writing or they got good grades.
- Their main goals in writing were to become better writers, get better grades, improve specific characteristics of their writing and do more writing of their own.
- Over three-fourths of the students think it is helpful to work with someone else mainly because they can get help with the mechanics of writing and hear others' opinions and ideas. About a fifth of the students would rather work alone or with their teacher.
- Over three-fourths of the students feel differently about school this year mostly because of their teacher or what they are learning. Over a fifth of the students said they like school better this year because they get to write more or they like writing this year. Over a third think their classmates' behavior is worse than last year. Fewer students think their classmates' behavior is better this year and some said it is better during writing.
- Almost three-fourths of the students work on their own writing at home. For two-thirds of the students, this is different from last year, with most saying that they write more at home this year. A few students wrote more at home last year. For a third of the students, their behavior is not different from last year; they either wrote the same amount at home last year or they have never worked on their own writing at home.

Favorite Part of Writing (138 students)	1-2	3-6	7-8
Publishing	50%	28%	19%
Drafting	13%	23%	24%
Revising, editing	13%	30%	24%
Brainstorming, getting ideas	0%	11%	27%
Reading to someone else	24%	8%	6%

Working with Someone Else (165 students)	1-2	3-6	7-8
Students like working with another student	80%	85%	73%
Can get help, hear others' ideas and opinions	67%	90%	70%
Social reasons—likes partner, has fun	17%	4%	22%
Likes to help others	17%	6%	8%

Reason They are Proud of Their Writing (94 students)	1-2	3-6	7-8
Sense of accomplishment, getting it done	40%	26%	26%
Outside judgment—others liked it, got good grade	40%	27%	21%
Characteristic of writing (description, ideas, spelling)	20%	44%	16%
Penmanship	0%	3%	37%

Feelings about School (131 students)	1-2	3-6	7-8
Feel differently about school this year	90%	85%	71%
Why They Feel Differently (94 students)			
Teachers (more strict, nicer, explain things better)	25%	16%	17%
Friends	0%	11%	17%
Learning (harder classes, different subjects, doing better)	37%	35%	33%
Writing (like to write now, get to write more)	25%	24%	0%
Student behavior (usually worse)	13%	6%	25%

Behavior of Classmates (84 students)	1-2	3-6	7-8
Bad or worse than last year	25%	28%	73%
Good or better than last year	37%	32%	9%
Sometimes good, sometimes bad	13%	33%	7%
Better during writing time	25%	7%	0%

Writing Goals (136 students)	1-2	3-6	7-8
Be a better writer, get better grades	13%	25%	29%
Improve specific areas (spelling, vocabulary, description)	37%	24%	19%
Do more writing (stories, books), write about specific things	50%	23%	13%
Become a writer, get published	0%	16%	13%
No writing goals	0%	5%	23%

Writing Outside of Class (161 students)	1-2	3-6	7-8
Work on own writing outside of class (usually at home)	80%	78%	56%
Difference from Last Year (58 students)			
Wrote more at home this year	40%	65%	100%
Wrote at home last year	40%	17%	0%
Didn't write at home this year and last year	20%	12%	0%
Wrote more at home last year	0%	6%	0%

Literacy Support Teacher Perspective

In June, 15 of the 17 literacy support teachers completed a survey on the writing initiative. They responded to questions about their work goals, what they wish would have been different, what they've learned and how new skills can be used next year. LSTs' work goals focused on becoming more effective coaches and raising ELA scores. Related to coaching, they mentioned being able to motivate teachers, share best practices, and develop good relationships with teachers and principals. Most of the LSTs felt they had achieved their goals, at least in part.

Several wished they could have spend more time with teachers or been assigned to only one school. Other things they wished were different were having regular grade level meetings, giving teachers regular release time to look at student work, and being able to work on reading and writing equally.

The skills and knowledge that they acquired during the last 2 school years related to coaching and teaching. Many mentioned gaining better coaching skills or being better teachers. They also mentioned gaining a wider district perspective, a better understanding of Writer's Workshop, and the ability to develop good writing lessons. The LSTs were optimistic when they talked about being able to use these skills and knowledge with the new ELA program. Over half mentioned being able to coach teachers and share best teaching practices.

Principal Perspective

In June, 29 principals completed a survey about the writing initiative. They were asked to look at changes in students, teachers and parents as a result of Writer's Workshop. They also commented on new skills acquired by teachers and how Writer's Workshop could be integrated into the new ELA curriculum. A summary of what they said is presented below**.** Up to a third of principals did not respond to some questions or saw no changes related to Writer's Workshop.

- Principals saw many improvements in student writing. They understand writing better and write with more detail and voice. Students are also more excited about writing and using it to express themselves.
- Many principals saw other changes in student attitude, especially in classroom behavior. They reported fewer discipline problems because students are engaged in their writing. Students are also more confident as writers and want to share their stories with others.
- Principals saw a positive change in parents' attitudes. They are more interested in and supportive of their children's writing. Principals reported greater attendance at publishing parties and other displays of student writing.
- Most principals saw positive changes in their teachers' attitudes. Teachers were excited about their students' progress and though some were reluctant at first, they became more engaged in the program because they saw it working. Principals see their teachers as feeling more accomplished and confident in their ability to teach writing.
- Teachers have acquired new skills and behaviors as a result of Writer's Workshop. Overall, they know more about writing and how to teach it. Principals reported that their teachers have learned better strategies for teaching writing such as modeling, charting and mini-lessons. They also have better classroom management skills, especially in keeping students focused and on-task.
- Most principals thought that these new skills and behaviors could be used in the writing portion of the new ELA program. Several thought they could be used in other ELA subjects.
- Most principals were positive in their thoughts about integrating Writer's Workshop in the new ELA curriculum. Specific suggestions include: integrating Writer's Workshop units into the pacing charts, giving students the opportunity to respond in writing to what they're reading and PD sessions every 10 weeks to continue training in Writer's Workshop so it can be used in all ELA areas.

Reflections on Two Years of Writing Initiative

At the May meeting of the LST Steering Committee, those present gave their thoughts on the 2-year writing initiative. Principals said they greatly benefited from having LSTs and principal coaches, and that they learned a lot about improving student achievement, instruction and site-based professional development. They also appreciated the structure of school cohorts and learned from collaborating with colleagues.

Several comments centered on the LSTs and their role as support teachers for the writing initiative. In developing and coaching the units of study, they have added value to classroom instruction. The LSTs also provided an effective vehicle for central office and school communication, and their level of confidence has grown. Misunderstandings/myths about the LSTs or the units of study were addressed in various forums because information had been shared at steering committee meetings and at other times. Anticipating and addressing issues, and communicating about the units of study created a lot of additional work, but the committee agreed that it was worth it.

The committee members noted several changes that they attribute to the writing initiative. As a result of the initiative, teachers and students have learned how to write. Schools are more open and collaborative. Teachers are comfortable with administrators and visitors in their rooms, and teaching in the presence of adults as well as students. Teachers are more comfortable in their interactions with students and are able to share themselves with students through modeling their writing. Many classrooms and some schools have been transformed by engagement in the writing workshop instructional strategies. There have been constant improvements in performance data and attitudes about writing and student achievement across the district. The district learned together, for the first time. Steering committee members shared regret that the literacy initiative will not continue in its current form.