Governor's Expanding Excellence Grant 2014
Fox Chapel Area School District; Dr. Gene Freeman, Superintendent
Fairview Elementary; Mrs. Rebecca Stephan, Principal

District: Fox Chapel Area School District
Superintendent: Dr. Gene Freeman; gene_freeman@fcasd.edu
District Enrollment: 4234
School: Fairview Elementary
Principal: Mrs. Rebecca Stephan
Principal Contact: rebecca_stephan@fcasd.edu,
Information: 412-963-9315
School Enrollment: 356

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title I School:</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged:</td>
<td>2.94%</td>
<td>English Language Learners:</td>
<td>1.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education:</td>
<td>11.76%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead Grant Contact:</td>
<td>Becky Stephan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PLC Moderator</td>
<td>Becky Stephan</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPP Indicator:</td>
<td>Writing - Percent Proficient or Advanced on PSSA</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy:</td>
<td>The key strategy is teaching defined progressive grade level writing skills supported by communicating clear expectations, utilizing tools for organization, teaching the writing process, and administering common assessments.</td>
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**Improve Student Writing Through a Systematic, Progressive K-5 Writing Plan**

**Purpose:** Improve student writing through teaching strategies built upon grade appropriate techniques, school-wide expectations, and common assessments.

**Expected Results:** Increase writing achievement through focused writing instruction and increased student accountability and independence.

Fairview Elementary School began to focus on improving writing outcomes after 2006 PSSA data indicated that only 71% of Fairview students scored proficient or advanced. The philosophy of writing at Fairview Elementary was based on the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project, hosted by the University of Pittsburgh School of Education, which focused on implementing research-based strategies emphasizing the writing process in grades K-5. The WPWP engaged teachers in professional development to understand and incorporate six basic principles into the writing program:
• Writing is essential to student’s academic achievement, success and lifelong learning
• Writing begins when children enter school and is integrated throughout the curriculum
• Professional development must be ongoing throughout a teacher’s career
• Universities, schools, families, and communities should collaborate to improve writing
• Teachers who write are the most effective writing teachers
• Teachers are the best teachers of teachers

Through the WPWP, the teachers participated in a “Strategies for Writing in All Classrooms” series focused on introducing the writing process, integrating reading and writing, writing across the curriculum, evaluation and assessment, and implementing in the classroom. Teachers received on-site coaching as well as oral and written feedback by school administrators. All of the elementary buildings in the district were to select an area in which to focus for improvement. Fairview Elementary decided to focus on student writing.

In November 2006, designated teachers attended “Successful Preparation for the PSSA in Writing,” presented by the Allegheny Intermediate Unit. The presenter described reasons for the redesigned PSSA Writing Assessment and provided information on scoring guidelines, quality elements of writing, sample writing activities, information specific to each type of writing, graphic organizers, and rubrics. The Fairview Elementary Learning Team, a group of grade level representatives, began monthly meetings focused to design a writing plan for the school. The teachers developed specific, progressive grade level writing expectations supported by communicating clear expectations, utilizing tools for organization, teaching the writing process, and administering common assessments.

At each grade level, end-of-year goals were outlined for descriptive, narrative, informational and opinion genre writing. All grade levels taught the writing process of pre-writing, drafting, editing, revising and publishing. Tools for organization included revising checklists, exemplar writing examples, graphic organizers, design specific writing paper, colored paper specific to a genre, use of technology, rubrics and classroom posters. Writing across the curriculum included math and science journals, power conclusions, and writing in social studies. Clear expectations in every grade level focused on consistency of implementation, an absolute “you can do it” attitude for every student, teacher modeling, teacher-student writing conferences, examples of exemplar writing, and student accountability and independence through daily writing. Students worked on their writing projects only at school. All classroom teachers
participated in staff development sessions to improve outcomes by committing to writing as a school-wide focus, sharing student products to generate ideas and identify exemplars, deconstructing the writing process and determining how to teach the steps directly and explicitly to students. Teachers coached teachers through collaborative critiquing of student work during gallery walks to review student writing displayed in the building and utilized reflection journals for personal progress. Students were benchmarked and assessed by two writing prompts created by the school district, one at the beginning of the year and one in May. District grade level teachers scored the writing to be used for teacher analysis and to focus future instruction. Our efforts resulted in an immediate gain of 27% in 2007 with 98% of Fairview students tested scoring proficient or advanced in writing on the PSSA. With continued focus, scores have remained above 90% over the past six years.

Goal

*Increase student writing skills and achievement K-5*

- Establish a school-wide focus on writing
- Establish a common writing block
- Establish a core academic team to create, review, and refine the implementation of a K-5 writing plan with focused instruction by the teaching staff
- Engage in Professional Development by administrators/core academic team
- Conduct building gallery walks as a staff three times yearly to analyze student work and to provide focused feedback for collaborative teacher dialogue
- Administer common writing assessments once per semester each school year
- Utilize PLC moderator forum to ask questions

Change in Culture

Detail the basic tenets or principles necessary to achieve this goal.

- A desire to learn and take risks.
- The belief that all students can be successful in increasing their writing skills with the appropriate scaffolding.
Rationale

Quantitative data indicates that our strategies had a strong impact on student achievement. The project began after the 2006 PSSA writing scores indicated that only 71% of Fairview students assessed were proficient in writing. The effect of the increased focus on writing was immediately apparent in the 2007 PSSA writing results, with 98% of students scoring at or above proficiency. Results remained strong through 2013, with over 90% of students scoring proficient or advanced in writing in every year except 2008. The percent of Fairview students scoring proficient or advanced on writing PSSA in each year is as follows: 2006 - 71% 2007 - 98% 2008 - 88% 2009 - 94% 2010 - 93% 2011 - 98% 2012 - 95% 2013 - 93%. With the exception of 2010-2011 with 7.8% students scoring advanced, PSSA writing data for our grade five students indicates 17% or more students scoring at the advanced level in writing each year. In 2013-2014, 31% of students scored advanced on the writing PSSA.

Fairview Elementary established a common grade level writing block. The progressive grade level writing plan defined end of year goals. Kindergarten: Students created a simple organizer by folding a paper in thirds so they could visualize their writing. At first they drew pictures to tell their stories. By the end of the year they wrote a beginning sentence, one or two sentences in the body of the writing, and an ending sentence for the conclusion. Grade One: Writing a topic sentence with more detail, students then wrote three to four sentences in the body of the paragraph, and concluded with a sentence restating the topic sentence. Grade Two: In the introductory paragraph the students added an attention getter as well as topic sentence. They incorporated three to four supporting details in multiple paragraphs and used concluding sentences that summarized the main idea. Grade Three: Students were expected to include three sentences in their introductory paragraphs, write multiple sentences in two to three paragraphs, and end with a concluding paragraph of three sentences that restated the topic sentence and summarized main details. Grade Four: Students wrote four sentences in the introductory paragraph, four to five supporting details in three paragraphs in the body, and wrote a concluding paragraph consisting of a minimum of four sentences which restated the topic sentence and summarized the main details. Grade Five: Students created a five paragraph written piece, focusing on the quality of a thesis statement and gaining the attention of the intended audience. The introductory paragraph was a minimum of five sentences including a thesis statement, the body included at least five supporting details in three paragraphs, and the concluding paragraph consisted of five sentences including a restatement of the thesis statement.
Communication Clear Expectations:

- **Consistency:** Teachers implemented the plan across all grade levels through teaching of the writing process, using colored paper signifying specific genres, using a base graphic organizer, writing every day, and adhering to the grade level end-of-year goals.
- **Purpose:** Teachers focused more on how the students wrote rather than on what they wrote.
- **Attitude:** Everyone upheld a “you can do it” attitude with persistent encouragement and enthusiasm.
- **Communication:** Teachers emphasized the importance of student accountability and independence in his or her writing with students and to parents.
- **Presentation:** Teachers displayed student work in the building.
- **Modeling:** Teachers modeled and shared exemplar writing with the students.
- **Student conferencing:** Teachers and support staff conferenced with the students individually throughout the writing process.
- **Teachers as Coaches:** Teachers critiqued students’ work and taught students how to critique each other’s work.

Tools for organization:

- **Base graphic organizer:** Each grade level used the base organizer taught in kindergarten. With each progressive grade, the organizer was additionally folded to create an organizer with more sections. Teachers then had the flexibility to incorporate other organizers as needed to differentiate for their students.
- **Colored genre specific paper:** Teachers used Yellow: opinion, Green: narrative, Blue: informational, Pink: descriptive.
- **Thematic paper:** The type of paper set the expectation for the students. Teachers used thematic paper, blank paper, half blank and half lined paper, wide lined and thin lined paper.
- **Exemplar writing examples:** Teachers compiled, shared, and displayed high quality writing examples.
- **Rubrics:** Teachers designed rubrics for each grade level based on a five-point scale in the areas of focus, organization, content, style, and conventions.
- **Revising checklists:** These checklists clarified the expectations and allowed students to self assess as they wrote.
- **Posters:** Posters outlined the writing expectations of focus, organization, content, style, development and organization.
- **Writing across the curriculum:** Students wrote journals in math and science, as well as writing reflection and reading response journals.
• **Technology**: Use of interactive whiteboards and document cameras in the classroom allowed teachers and students to read exemplars, review rubrics, and critique student writing together. Student used computers to research their writing topics and type their finished piece of writing.

Assessment:
• **Diagnostic**: Students responded to a district created prompt at the beginning of the school year. District grade levels scored and analyzed the student writing to plan instruction.
• **Formative**: Teacher-teacher coaching through critique of student work during the writing process, peer editing and critiquing among students, and teacher-student writing conferences continued the analysis of student writing to plan instruction.
• **Benchmarking**: Teacher-teacher coaching/critique of student work produced for each genre and teacher-student writing conferences provided feedback to the students. Teachers and administrators held gallery walks in the building to critique student work and provide feedback to the teachers.
• **Summative**: Students responded to a district created prompt at the end of the school year and were scored by district grade levels.

Written feedback to the principal in February of 2010 by an administrator after walking the building and examining the display of student writing indicated that the students had improved in the use of action verbs, transition statements, multiple sentence structures, and figurative language. Student writing also demonstrated growth in creativity and individual thought.

**Action Steps with Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Establish a school-wide focus on writing.</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Establish grade level writing blocks.</td>
<td>Ongoing yearly</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Establish a core academic team to create, review, and refine the implementation of a K-5 writing plan with focused instruction by the teaching staff.</td>
<td>Monthly meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Engage in Professional Development by administrators/core academic team.</td>
<td>Two Days</td>
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### Personnel Engagement

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibility (ies)</th>
<th>Degree of Engagement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Facilitate design of the implementation plan; facilitate design and presentation of the professional development sessions for the mentee school.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Academic Team (Grade level representatives, Special Education, Gifted and Special Area representatives)</td>
<td>Facilitate on-going professional development. Facilitate the creation of End-Of-Year Goals and design common assessments (during the initial PD). Meet monthly to review the implementation and progress of the Implementation Plan. Evaluate school results and plan for future action. Utilize the SAS PLC forum as a resource.</td>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>School staff</td>
<td>Engage in professional development (including Gallery Walks and Writing Round Table)</td>
<td>High</td>
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sessions). Utilize a professional reflection journal. Engage in high quality writing instruction. Utilize the SAS PLC forum as a resource.

**Students**
Believe in themselves and exert effort into increasing their writing skills.
High

**Parents**
Support the school and their child/children in the development of writing at school.
Moderate

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### Professional Development Timeline

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Delivered by</th>
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| January  | **Observation**  
  • Core Team Visit to a high-achieving school to observe a Grade 5 writing lesson and conduct a collaborative gallery walk with school’s core academic team | School Administration and Core Team                  |
| January  | **Core Team Meeting**  
  • Gallery walk to discuss writing needs and determine needs for professional development | Administrators/Core team members                      |
| January  | **Professional Development Day 1 Draft Agenda**  
  • Introduction: Give history/context.  
  • The Strategy: Overview  
  • Foundation: Determine what the group expects to accomplish and change.  
  • Strategy Components: Video/PP  
  • Group Interaction: Organizational framework, examples and characteristics of quality writing  
  • Gallery Walk: Critique by building/whole group | Fairview Elementary Grant Team for mentee school/Video Series/PP Tutorial/Documents for non-mentee schools |
### Benchmarks to Guide and Measure Success

**Assessment:**
- *Diagnostic:* Students respond to a district created prompt at the beginning of the school year. Teachers analyze the student writing to plan instruction.
Formative: Teacher-teacher coaching occurs through critique of student work during the writing process, peer editing and critiquing among students, and teacher-student writing conferences.

Benchmarking: Teacher-teacher engage in coaching/critique of student work produced for each genre, and teachers conduct writing conferences with students. Gallery walks occur in the building by teachers and administrators to critique student work three times annually.

Summative: Students respond to a prompt at the end of the school year and are scored by the designated teachers.

**Estimated Cost to Replicate the Strategy**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Implementation Expenses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2014</td>
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**Implementation Challenges**
- The current schedule at schools may not accommodate a writing block for all grade levels. It may be necessary to rework the master schedule
• All classroom teachers in the school must commit to implementing the writing plan with fidelity and consistency and engage in teacher observation and discussion.
• Administrators must commit to conducting walkthroughs specific to the area of writing.
• Some classrooms may not have interactive whiteboards or document cameras; some classrooms may not have access to computers for students to publish their written pieces. Fundraising supported by the parent teacher organization may be necessary to update technology.

Current Status/Looking Ahead

• The commitment to the continued improvement of student writing in all grade levels and maintaining high expectations is at the core of our success and remains a focus at Fairview Elementary. Since 2013, the district administers one district writing assessment at the end of the year, rather than one at the beginning and the end of the school year. The graphic organizers have evolved over time with grades 3-5 students writing out the organization structure on their paper rather than folding the paper, or grade levels using designed graphic organizers that still maintain the necessary organizational structure. The number of expected details within a paragraph has also increased. Grade levels also included writing using TCI in Social Studies or through teacher created writing tasks. Some grade levels also write power conclusions. Our next steps are to align our instruction and expectations to the new format of the ELA PSSA connected to writing in grades three through five while continuing to increase the achievement and depth of growth of our students in writing.
• Fairview Elementary School Implementation Plan – Writing- Percent Proficient or Advanced on PSSA

• Video
  o Introduction
  o Clear Expectations/Tools
  o Graphic Organizers
  o Writing Process K-4
  o Writing Process Grade 5

• Power Point Presentation

• Professional Development Administrator Manual

• Organization and Assessment Toolbox
  o Base graphic organizer by grade level; 2 versions
  o Colored Paper
  o Thematic paper
  o Writing Paper
  o Checklists
  o Exemplars
  o Rubrics
  o Assessment Tools
  o Posters

Documents outlined in the video
• Colored Paper: 8:08
• Writing Paper: 9:12
• Checklists: 6:59, 9:18, 13:16
• Rubrics: 10:41
• Sample Writing Prompts: 15:05
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9/30/14