REVIEW OF THE
WRITING CURRICULUM
DUXBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MARCH 2015

Submitted by
Diana Grady
Site Director
Buzzards Bay Writing Project
CONTENTS

Executive Summary ........................................................................................................................................3

Bibliography of Recommended Resources.................................................................................................7

Syllabus: Teaching Writing in the K-12 Classroom.........................................................................................12

Syllabus: Principles and Practices of Effective Literacy Curriculum Design...........16

Reports

Duxbury High School .......................................................................................................................................18

Duxbury Middle School ...................................................................................................................................32

Alden School ....................................................................................................................................................42

Chandler School ..............................................................................................................................................57

Appendix

A. Duxbury High School Survey Responses ...............................................................................................66

B. Sample Scope and Sequence from DYS ELA Curriculum Guide .........................................................70

C. Chandler School Survey ...............................................................................................................................72

D. Sample Unit Plan: Reading Informational Texts
   (from the Chatham, N.J., Public Schools) ..................................................................................................75
REVIEW OF THE WRITING CURRICULUM

DUXBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

JANUARY – MARCH, 2015

conducted by the
MASSACHUSETTS WRITING PROJECT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this Executive Summary is to present an overview of the process, the conclusions, and the recommendations of the review team.

If students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with the details, wrestle with the facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else. In short, if students are to learn, they must write.


The review of the writing curriculum for Duxbury Public Schools was conducted by Bruce Penniman, Director of the Western Massachusetts Writing Project; Beth Herman-Davis, Buzzards Bay Writing Project; Deana Lew, Boston Writing Project; Donna Callanan, Buzzards Bay Writing Project; and Diana Grady, Director of the Buzzards Bay Writing Project.

Materials reviewed included:

- Student Assessment Overview, Fall 2014
- English Language Arts and Reading MCAS Analysis, October 2014
- School Improvement Plans, 2014-2015
- Curriculum Maps, Kindergarten – Grade 12
- Program of Studies for Duxbury High School and Duxbury Middle School
- Common Assessments
- Writing Rubrics
- Teacher Surveys
- Classroom Observations
- Teacher and Administrator Interviews
- Student Interviews

The following reports summarize findings from the review for Duxbury High School, Duxbury Middle School, Alden School, and Chandler School, and offer conclusions and recommendations for continued growth in writing instruction and student writing.

Classroom observations and interviews with teachers, administrators, and students were held as follows:
CONCLUSIONS

STRENGTHS

It is important to name writing program assets, factors that have contributed to the writing program’s overall success. Those assets observed are:

- A commitment to writing as a necessary 21st century tool of communication
- An understanding of the importance of writing for college and career success
- A determination to provide students with the opportunities to develop skills
- A commitment on the part of students to succeed as writers
- Student understanding of the importance of writing and a desire to become proficient
- A variety of opportunities for writing
- The amount of writing students are expected to do
- The extensive range of writing techniques and tasks in teachers’ lessons
- A rigorous schedule of common assessments
- Student engagement in purposeful writing assignments
- Teacher use of scaffolding techniques to support writers and to provide a step-by-step construction of the desired skills and concepts
- Teachers’ extensive use of technology such as laptops, Smart Boards, document cameras, and projectors which provides opportunities for collaboration, differentiation, and deeper learning.

WAYS THE PROGRAM MAY BE STRENGTHENED

Although the review team had only limited time to observe classes and talk with students and teachers, common themes emerged:

- Establishing horizontal and vertical articulation, which provides better mechanisms for consistency in teacher collaboration and practice
- Discussing and implementing common agreements about the core genres and skills to be focused on in each grade level
- Creating a standards-based progression from year to year that increases in both challenge and rigor
- Renewing attention to writing process
- Developing consistency in the time given to writing instruction and student writing
- Using formative assessments to monitor student progress and needs
- Choosing and maintaining a common vocabulary for writing instruction
- Incorporating writing workshop approaches including conferencing with students
- Including more opportunities for creative writing, especially in grades 7-12
• Encouraging students to see themselves as writers
• Underscoring the philosophy that everyone is a writer who makes deliberate choices to accomplish specific purposes for a designated audience
• Promoting more student choice in writing topics
• Expanding opportunities for student collaboration about their writing such as peer conferencing, peer response, informal sharing, and revising
• Setting up a classroom library of both mentor texts for writing and books for students to choose to read
• Expanding the collection of professional texts on writing instruction
• Viewing writing as a shared responsibility across disciplines.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The review team has developed several suggestions that could capitalize on the strengths of the writing program and address the areas where improvement is needed. Many of the suggestions do revolve around professional development, whether done by staff in-house or by an outside source.

• Schedule on-going teacher conversations about writing
• Revitalize writing workshop pedagogy
• Include a strong teacher-as-writer component in professional development
• Develop more student-centered writing tasks and assessments
• Rewrite course materials to emphasize the student as writer
• Provide in-depth professional development in literacy-based curriculum design
• Redesign the curriculum maps so that they provide more comprehensive representations of the targeted skills and act as “living” documents for new and veteran teachers and current and future staff
• Develop the specificity of the curriculum maps to indicate what is needed to achieve mastery of a skill
• Include activities and plans in the curriculum maps along with resources, both text and technology
• “Unpack” each of the Common Core standards and study, adapt, and implement exemplar units such as those available from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Model Curriculum project (http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/)
• Have teachers create and share their own “model curriculum units” grounded in the Common Core and best practices in the field
• Increase the consistency of writing instruction
  o Keep writing as a school-wide focus
  o Create guidelines for instructional time, student writing time, and volume for each grade level
  o Increase the environmental supports/resources in the classroom
  o Reexamine the benchmark assessments to explore how they are being used and how they could be used better
• Provide opportunities for teachers to visit one another’s classrooms to observe writing instruction
• Build a professional library for teachers with print and video resources on writing, speaking and listening, questioning, and assessment
• Establish professional learning communities that focus on writing
• Offer courses that address writing pedagogy and curriculum design (see sample syllabi for courses offered through the Western Massachusetts Writing Project and the Boston Writing Project).

The review team wishes to thank the administration, the faculty, and the staff of Duxbury Public Schools for their welcoming environment and their cooperation in this process. We commend your dedication to providing for the success of your students and the professional growth of your teachers.
Below is a bibliography of texts that the team recommends be part of a professional library for teachers of writing. Asterisks indicate books that would provide a strong base for a collection.


______. 2012. *Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work, Grades 6-8.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

______. 2012. *Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work, Grades 3-5.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

______. 2013. *Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work, Grades 9-12.*
Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.


Duxbury Public Schools Writing Program Report


______. 2001. *The Writing Workshop: Working Through the Hard Parts (and They’re All Hard Parts)*. Urbana, IL: NCTE. *

______. 2004. *About the Authors: Writing Workshop with Our Youngest Writers*. Portsmouth,
NH: Heinemann. (Age Range – 5-7 years) *


Instructor: Peter Golden
Email: petgold@comcast.net
Class location: W-001-006
Office Phone: (617) 287-7665
Office hours: Th. 4:00-6:00 (and by appt.)
Office Location: Wheatley-04-171

Section time: 6:00-9:00
Day: Tuesday, Thursday

Catalog description: This course deals with the teacher of writing, the teacher as writer, and the interactions between reading and writing. Readings and presentations offer up-to-date information, theory, and practical techniques for teaching writing in all subject areas. Students meet regularly in reader-writer response groups to work on their own writing and to respond to one another’s writing. There are a number of guest lecture-demonstrations by elementary and secondary teachers who are teacher/consultants with the Boston Writing Project. The course provides writing process theory with practical methods.

Objectives of the Course:

- To provide students with the philosophical and pedagogical base underlying current approaches to teaching writing in K-12 classrooms;
- To provide specific classroom activities and structures that facilitate the transfer from theory to practice;
- To familiarize students with sources for further study and support;
- To provide an opportunity for students to work on their own writing.

The course will be experiential in nature in that students will often engage in the types of activities recommended for their classrooms, and the instructor will model many classroom strategies for implementing new approaches to writing. In addition, students will use their journals to reflect on major issues affecting writing teachers today. The underlying belief is that writing can be used for a variety of purposes in all classes across the curriculum.

Prerequisites: None

Requirements (To the students)

Attendance: There is so much to cover and so little time to do so that attendance in class is a major requirement. Much of what we do will be experiential, and you cannot experience (and reflect on, and learn about) something if you’re not here. If you need to be out please speak to me. More than one lost session will result in a lowered grade.
**Readings:** There will be **one required common text** in the class and **one required “choice” text.**

**Common text:** Best Practices in Writing Instruction (Second Edition) (BPWI); Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, (2013, Guilford Press), a book whose chapters contain summaries of recent research in a variety of topics followed by specific classroom activities. We will read this as we explore the topics contained therein. Sometimes you will just read a chapter specific to your grade level.

The “choice” book should be chosen from the list below and will allow you to learn about an issue or approach specific to your own teaching level and subject area.

**In addition,** there will be several internet reading assignments dealing with the writing process, Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), issues of Looking at Student Work (LASW), class, race, culture and the language of Ebonics, ESL and non-standard English speakers.

Finally I will be sending you digital copies of some readings that are difficult to access otherwise. They are available here: [https://onedrive.live.com/redir?resid=B9624DFED3D6221A!174&authkey=!ABS0IArFPLR9y24&ithint=folder%2c.pdf](https://onedrive.live.com/redir?resid=B9624DFED3D6221A!174&authkey=!ABS0IArFPLR9y24&ithint=folder%2c.pdf).

[Important note: I have provided (and will continue to provide) websites and articles I have labeled “bonus” sites. These are for your information and later use. You do not need to read and respond to them as part of the course. You may find them interesting and helpful but they are not part of the required assignments.]

**Recommended “choice” texts:**

- Because Digital Writing Matters (BDWM); National Writing Project, with Dânielle Nicole DeVoss, Elyse Eidman-Aadahl, and Troy Hicks (Jossey-Bass, 2010). [all]
- Teaching Children to Write: Constructing Meaning and Mastering Mechanics; Daniel Meier (National Writing Project and Teachers College Press, 2011) [k-4]
- Strategic Writing: The Writing Process And Beyond in the Secondary English Classroom; Deborah Dean; Urbana Free Library; 2006 [ms-hs]
- What Works in Writing Instruction: Research and Practice; Deborah Dean (NCTE, 2010) [all]
- Inside Out: Strategies for Teaching Writing (4th Edition); Kirby and Crovitz, (Heinemann 2013)
- Writing Instruction that Works: Proven Methods for Middle and High School Classrooms; Arthur Applebee and Judith Langer; (Teachers College Press, 2013)
- Writing Better: Effective Strategies for teaching Students with Learning Difficulties; Graham and Harris; Paul Brookes Publishing, 2005 [el-ms]
- Powerful Writing Strategies for All Students; Karen Harris, Steve Grahem, Linda Mason, Barbara Friedlander; Paul H. Brookes publishing; 2008 [el-ms]
- Teaching Writing Grades 7-12 in an Era of Assessment; Mary Warner and Jonathon Lovell; (Pearson, 2014)
And then there is *Instruction and Assessment for Struggling Writers*; Gary A. Troia, (Guilford Press 2009). A collection of articles that summarizes research on aspects of writing instruction specific to students with a variety of special needs/situations. (Formerly a whole class required text, students have found this collection of research summaries very informative and helpful but also very tedious to read).

**Writings:** There will be five different types of writing assignments:

- **Journal writing:** You will be asked to keep a double entry journal that tracks your thinking and reflecting on the issues raised by the readings and class discussions. I will collect and respond to these journals throughout the semester. Further information about this process will be given during the first class.
- **Metacomment:** This is a two page commentary that distills your thinking about the issues raised by Morel, Rickford, Delpit, et al. It will be extracted from your responses to the individual authors during the term. I will explain this in detail during class.
- **Response Group Writing:** Done three times this semester, this writing will be approximately two pages of personal narrative to be used in practicing our responding techniques.
- **Growth Portfolio:** Five pages long and due the Monday after the last class, it should detail those elements of the course (readings, experiences, discussions, etc.) that most strongly affected your growth, and how they did so. For many people this growth will encompass a change in thinking about writing, for others it will be a deepening of existing understanding. It will contain representative selections from your journal and reading logs, along with explanatory/evaluative comments from you. I will explain this in detail several times during the term.
- **Book response log:** As you read your chosen book you will be required to keep a log of your responses to each chapter. These responses will be your thinking on what you have read. When you finish the book you will produce a typed, two-page synthesis of your comments. You will submit both the responses and the synthesis of your responses.

**Deadlines:** It is important that we keep to the posted deadlines. There’s nothing worse than working hard to be prepared for a group activity and finding that other members haven’t completed the assignment. If you need to be out on the day an assignment is due please email it to me.

**Courtesy and attentiveness:** We are all aware of how seductive digital toys can be. Digital tools too can turn into digital toys. Please put your phones on “vibrate” and refrain from sending and receiving texts during class. As teachers you do/will soon understand that an attending mind is as important as an attending body. Answer the question, “how can I tell when a student is otherwise engaged electronically?” Yes, that’s how I do it too.

**Evaluation:** Your final grade will be a combination of several factors. The individual grades on the Portfolio; the quality of your journal as reflected in its completeness, consistency, and depth; all of which can be helped by your metacomment, and timely completion of the written assignments. I can’t give absolute percentages but approximately:

40% will be from your papers
40% will be from your journal
20% will be from your participation

**Accommodations**: Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 offer guidelines for curriculum modifications and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. If applicable, students may obtain adaptation recommendations from the Ross Center (617-287-7430). The student must present and discuss these recommendations to each professor within a reasonable period, preferably by the end of the Drop/Add period.

[Students are required to adhere to the Code of Student Conduct, including requirements for academic honesty, delineated in the University of Massachusetts Boston Graduate Studiers Bulletin, Undergraduate Catalog, and relevant program student handbook(s).]

Students are advised to retain a copy of this syllabus in personal files for use when applying for certification, licensure, or transfer credit.
Principles and Practices of Effective Literacy Curriculum Design
North Middle School, Westfield, MA – Spring/Summer 2012

Instructors: Bruce M. Penniman, Leslie Skantz-Hodgson, and Jane Baer-Leighton
Guest presenters (May 22): Will Bangs, Wilma Ortiz, and Momodou Sarr

Dates/Times: February 28, March 27, April 24, May 22, June 12, 3 – 6 p.m.;
June 19 – 22 (?), five hours per day for curriculum development

Course Content: The aim of this course will be to immerse secondary ELA and ELL/special education teachers in the new Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy, principles of backwards design, and current best practices in literacy instruction for the purposes of developing their capacity for designing effective curriculum maps and units.

Optional Credit: 3 graduate credits in English in the UMass summer session. Cost: $345.

Primary Texts: Wiggins, Grant, and Jay McTighe, The Understanding by Design Guide to Creating High-Quality Units; Penniman, Bruce M., Building the English Classroom: Foundations, Support, Success; additional articles and websites.

Tentative Syllabus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Focus Area</th>
<th>Assignments Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 28</td>
<td>Principles of Effective Curriculum Design</td>
<td>Reading: Wiggins/McTighe, Module A; ELA framework, Introduction and grade-level standards</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Understanding by Design framework</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Literacy by Design and PARCC models</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Backwards planning in course design</td>
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<td>Mar. 27</td>
<td>Elements of an Effective Writing Program</td>
<td>Reading: Penniman, Chs. 2,5; Writing Next</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Argument, explanation, and narrative</td>
<td>Writing: Post response to course blog by March 20 (see below)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Creating a balanced writing curriculum</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Writing to learn and learning to write</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>Elements of an Effective Reading Program</td>
<td>Reading: Penniman, Chs. 3,6; Reading Next</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Balancing literature and informational text</td>
<td>Writing: Post response to course blog by April 17 (see below)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Text complexity, rigor, and scaffolding</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Literature curriculum and literary skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 22</td>
<td>Panel: Diverse Learners and Diverse Texts</td>
<td>Reading: Penniman, Chs. 7,10; articles TBA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Special education and universal design</td>
<td>Writing: Post response to course blog by May 15 (see below)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Literacy for all: lessons from ELL classes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Digital literacy: reading, research, writing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Course Expectations

**Attendance:** The work of this course will be cumulative and collaborative, so it is essential that all participants attend regularly and contribute actively to all discussions. In the event of an unavoidable absence, please contact the instructors for information on how to make up what you have missed.

**Reading:** In addition to the two main texts, readings will include occasional articles, monographs, or websites. The volume of reading will not be great, but much of it will require careful thought and reflection. Please plan to complete the readings one week before the class meeting when they will be discussed (except in the summer). Also, please bring the assigned readings and the Massachusetts ELA frameworks to class each time.

**Writing:** One week before each class (March – June), an informal reflective response to the assigned readings will be due. These responses should be posted to the class blog, [http://blogs.umass.edu/english592d-penniman/](http://blogs.umass.edu/english592d-penniman/), where you will find prompts to spur your thinking. Please note: to protect your privacy, the blog posts will be password protected. To read them and add your comments, you will need to enter the case-sensitive password `ELA@westfield`.

A final paper (~1,000 words) will be due June 20 (or the second day of the summer session). This will be a synthesis essay – a drawing together of the insights you have gained about literacy instruction from the course readings and discussions (and at least one additional source). This piece will be, in effect, your own theoretical framework for designing ELA curriculum.

**Curriculum:** Design teams will co-author units following UbD principles that feature shifts in the new standards and provide for diverse learners and texts. Details TBA.

| June 12 | Designing an Effective Assessment System | Reading: Penniman, Chs. 4, 8; Wiggins/McTighe, Modules C, G  
Writing: Post response to course blog by June 5 (see below) |
<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bruce and Leslie</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 19</td>
<td>Curriculum Unit Development: Stage 1</td>
<td>Writing: Synthesis essay on ELA theoretical framework (see below)</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 20</td>
<td>Curriculum Unit Development: Stage 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 21</td>
<td>Curriculum Unit Development: Stage 3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>June 22</td>
<td>Curriculum Unit Polishing and Sharing</td>
<td>Writing: Finished curriculum unit with integrated goals, assessments, and learning plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Schedule

**June 12**  
Bruce and Leslie  
**Designing an Effective Assessment System**  
- Curriculum-embedded performance tasks  
- Formative and summative assessments  
- Policies and practices to promote growth  
**Reading:** Penniman, Chs. 4, 8; Wiggins/McTighe, Modules C, G  
**Writing:** Post response to course blog by June 5 (see below)

**June 19**  
**Curriculum Unit Development: Stage 1**  
- Understanding the array of UbD unit goals  
- Goal writing with feedback protocol  
**Reading:** Wiggins/McTighe, Modules D, E, F  
**Writing:** Notes for a unit sketch

**June 20**  
**Curriculum Unit Development: Stage 2**  
- Goal revising and transition to assessments  
- Assessment writing with feedback protocol  
**Writing:** Notes for a unit sketch

**June 21**  
**Curriculum Unit Development: Stage 3**  
- Assessment revising, intro to learning plans  
- Learning plan writing, feedback protocol  
**Reading:** Wiggins/McTighe, Module H  
**Writing:** Notes for learning plan

**June 22**  
**Curriculum Unit Polishing and Sharing**  
- Revising and polishing of unit plans  
- Sharing with colleagues at curriculum fair  
**Writing:** Finished curriculum unit with integrated goals, assessments, and learning plan
Review of the English Department writing program at Duxbury High School (DHS) was conducted by Bruce M. Penniman of the Western Massachusetts Writing Project and Diana Grady of the Buzzards Bay Writing Project during January and February of 2015. Materials reviewed included a variety of school documents and a teacher survey. A full-day site visit on February 4 included class observations, interviews with students and teachers, and a meeting with the DHS principal. This report summarizes findings from the review and offers some conclusions and recommendations.

School Documents

English Department Chair Karen Baynes and Assistant Superintendent Laurie Hunter provided several documents that offered insights into the writing program at DHS:

Curriculum Maps. The district’s website includes curriculum maps for English 9, 10, 11, and 12 that are linked to the current Massachusetts ELA framework (based on the Common Core State Standards) and for English electives based on the previous Massachusetts framework (see http://www.duxbury.k12.ma.us/Page/58). Each curriculum map divides the course into several units, each of which includes content (primarily readings), essential questions, standards, skills, and assessment options. The essential questions are thought-provoking probes into themes raised by the literature. The skills in the English 9-12 maps are the College and Career Readiness anchor standards from the ELA framework. Each unit includes several writing standards, usually at least five and in some cases all eleven. The assessment options column includes a range of formal and informal measures, from quizzes and exit tickets to passage analyses and student reflections. Most could be used as formative assessments. In addition, at the end of each curriculum map, a series of common assessments are listed, including at least one for each term (e.g., these include narrative writing, research paper, informational/explanatory writing, and argumentative writing in tenth grade).

Program of Studies. The Program Design and Sequence section of the English Department’s program of studies shows a strong commitment to writing: “All students at each grade level are instructed in persuasive, expository, and narrative writing, and produce at least four pieces of multi-paragraph writing each term. Students also write MLA-formatted research papers that increase in length and complexity from one grade to the next.” The English curriculum consists
of four required courses (English 9, 10, 11, 12) offered at college preparatory and honors levels plus AP options in Grade 11 and 12. In addition, the department offers several electives. Course descriptions indicate the writing focus for each year:

- **English 9:** “specific emphasis is placed on writing clear, well-constructed paragraphs and essays.”
- **English 10:** “Writing skills are developed through a variety of frequent written responses to the literature including formal and informal essays. Students also continue to write from observation and may keep journals or journal folders.”

Both of the above courses also place strong emphasis on improving grammar skills.

- **English 11:** “Writing skills are developed through short, analytical responses to the literature and longer, more formal expository, analytical, and argumentative essays. The technical skills stressed include variety of sentence beginnings, variety of sentence structure, parallel structure, and organization of ideas.”
- **English 12:** “Writing assignments will focus on the critical analysis of literature and will include essays on exposition and argument, and the college application essay. Essays vary in length and often require more than one draft. Students will keep journals or journal folders.”
- **The AP course descriptions do not specify different writing expectations, though the grade 11 offering does state, “Emphasis is on writing.” Admission to an AP course requires a sample essay.**
- **Three of the four English Department electives also focus on writing:** Skills for the Real World (blogs, résumés, job applications, letters, e-mails, etc., with an emphasis on rhetoric), Elements of Writing (fluency, organization, support, sentence structure, etc., with a focus on word processing), and Journalism (researching, interviewing, writing, revising, etc., with the purpose of publishing the school newspaper).

While the course descriptions all emphasize writing tasks as core components, they do not focus on or refer to students as writers. Development of skills seems to be the central concern.

**Common Assessments.** The English Department has established a substantial program of common assessments for grades 6-12 that include one or more writing tasks for each quarter (see https://docs.google.com/a/duxbury.k12.ma.us/spreadsheets/d/1QXoAv8Pazo06jQf759PP7XgRSmYHR1cPEy_qrNiNuBM/edit?usp=sharing). For example, in grade 9 students complete a writing pretest and a summer reading essay on character in Term 1, a definition essay (writing to inform/explain) in Term 2, a theme-related argument about a core text in Term 3, and a personal narrative based on a conflict and resolution in Term 4. These are in addition to reading and communication assessments and additional assessments related to the core texts. Taken together, these assessments provide ample opportunity to monitor students’ same-year and cross-year progress toward meeting Common Core College and Career Readiness standards.

**Duxbury High School Writing Rubric.** This rubric, one of several school-wide rubrics, highlights elements of writing common to academic texts in all subjects: main idea, content, organization, diction, and mechanics. It also implies, through a blank “additional requirements” row, that
other, more discipline- or task-specific criteria may need to be added when the rubric is used for specific assignments. The descriptors used in the rubric are compatible with, if not always identical to, terminology used in the Common Core writing standards (e.g., thesis vs. claim, mechanics vs. conventions). While not applicable to all writing tasks, the rubric provides a basis for developing common expectations for writing in performance on typical academic tasks.

**ELA & Reading MCAS Item Analysis.** DHS’s 2014 grade 10 MCAS results were very strong: 71% advanced, 28% proficient, 1% needs improvement, 0% failing. Even among disabled students, the vast majority scored proficient or better. However, analysis of student performance on writing prompts raised some concerns. On the long composition, DHS students scored high on conventions (7.69 of a possible 8), but their performance in topic development, while still strong, was not as strong (8.26 of a possible 12). Similarly, the mean score for open-response items (2.92 of a possible 4) was lower than might be expected in a school where so many students scored in the advanced range. Authors of the October 2, 2014, analysis suggested that goals for all teachers this year should “involve developing strategies for teaching topic development in writing.” The reports’ action plan included the following items:

- Teachers will continue to create and implement instructional strategies in topic development.
- Teachers will engage students in frequent open-response practice, using the appropriate, DESE-approved graphic organizer.
- As time allows, the English Department will work with teachers of other departments on writing instruction.

**Duxbury High School 2014-2015 School Improvement Plan.** The first two bullets of the action plan above were integrated into the October 9, 2014, DHS School Improvement Plan for 2014-2015 as part of goal 6.1, which relates to maintaining and improving MCAS scores. Another goal in the plan, 1.1, focuses on students’ ability to write to texts: “By June, 2015, all DHS students will complete the Academic Merit assessments (September and April). All ELA and Social Studies teachers will utilize the benchmark data to adjust individual and group writing instruction such that students increase their respective scores on the post-test.” The Academic Merit assessments include an essay rubric with similar indicators to the DHS school-wide rubric.

**Survey Results**

In mid-January 2015, Bruce Penniman sent a Google Forms survey to Karen Baynes for distribution to DHS English teachers, special educations teachers, and department chairs. The survey is available at [http://goo.gl/forms/oX1rhOsC0K](http://goo.gl/forms/oX1rhOsC0K). Twenty staff members responded to the survey, including ten English teachers, five special education teachers, and five department chairs. The results are compiled in Appendix A and summarized below.

The first five items in the survey (after one on the respondent’s teaching assignment) were statements about the DHS writing program that asked for responses on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree). The items and the mean scores for English teachers and all respondents are presented in the following table:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Mean English Score (n=10)</th>
<th>Mean Overall Score (n=20)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Duxbury High School has a culture of writing (i.e., writing is a high priority and embedded in the curriculum).</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In my department/program, writing is taught, not just assigned (i.e., writing classes are process oriented and include explicit skills instruction).</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>In my department/program, students demonstrate learning by writing (e.g., in formal essays, research projects, or open-response tests).</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>In my department/program, students learn new content by writing (e.g., through informal writing-to-learn activities).</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Responsibility for writing is shared across the curriculum at Duxbury High (i.e., classes other than ELA regularly include writing activities and instruction).</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, these results reflect positive feelings about the writing program at DHS. A majority of teachers and supervisors agree that there is a culture of writing at the school, that writing is taught rather than merely assigned, that students demonstrate their learning by writing, and that students learn new content by writing.

However, a closer reading of the data reveals some differences of opinion. For example, on the item about the culture of writing at DHS, as many respondents (5) chose “disagree” as “strongly agree,” so the mean score of 2.00 represents a range of views. Items 3-5, which were based on respondents’ views of their own departments, showed significant differences between English teachers and other respondents. English teachers responded almost exclusively “strongly agree” or “agree” on all three of these items, while other respondents had a wider range of views, including several “strongly disagree” responses on items 3 and 5. While most respondents in all areas agreed that DHS students demonstrate their learning by writing, there was less agreement on whether writing is taught in all programs and on whether students write to learn new content.

The only statement that produced an overall negative score was #6, about writing being a shared responsibility across the curriculum. About two-thirds of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, reinforcing the differences noted in items 3-5. The optional comment section also underscored the disparity in attention to writing across the disciplines. While some respondents noted that content areas other than English were increasing the amount of writing assigned and that the school has a culture of writing that encourages them to do so, others felt that content-area teachers lacked the confidence to teach writing and indicated that there needed to be more school-wide conversation about writing expectations.

The survey also included open-response items on the strengths and weaknesses of the DHS writing program and on teachers’ professional preparation for teaching writing.

**Strengths.** English teachers responding to this item made frequent reference to the range and frequency of writing required at DHS. Students “are comfortable writing in a variety of situations, both impromptu and planned,” said one respondent. Respondents from special
education and other departments reinforced this view and also cited the presence of school-wide rubrics as a strength of the program. Less frequently mentioned by English teachers or others was a focus on developing writing process skills, though one special education teacher expressed appreciation for the numerous supports that English teachers provide, including breaking down research paper assignments into manageable steps, using technology to support writing, and offering remedial help on grammar and mechanics.

Areas for Improvement. Paradoxically, one English teacher listed “the volume of writing that our students produce” as both a strength and a weakness of the program. S/he and several others stated that the departmental expectation that students produce a large volume of writing (four multi-paragraph pieces per term) limited their ability to give adequate attention to elements of writing process, especially collaboration, peer response, and individual conferences. A special education teacher called for more attention to modeling, and several respondents expressed a need for attention to grammar. Among department chairs, the chief recommendations were more attention to writing across the curriculum and more communication among departments.

Professional Development. A final question asked respondents what training they had received in the teaching of writing, and the responses, even among English teachers, ranged from extensive to none. Among those who had had training, the chief sources were graduate courses, the Boston Writing Project, and a variety of training programs (e.g., John Collins, AP, Academic Merit), including some in other districts. Several respondents noted that they had not received any school-based professional development in teaching writing in Duxbury. “For my time at Duxbury most of the professional development has been geared toward the integration of technology rather than writing or other aspects of the curriculum,” said one. “I feel that I would benefit from having the opportunity to take part in school-based professional development regarding teaching writing,” commented another.

Classroom Visits

Bruce Penniman and Diana Grady visited DHS for a full day on February 4, and thanks to Karen Baynes had the opportunity to visit classes taught by 10 of 12 English Department members across four of the five class periods. These classes included all four grades and different levels. Since the visits were short and the lessons were not planned to showcase writing instruction, the observations recorded were necessarily impressionistic and do not present a complete picture of the writing program, but they do offer some insights into its character and intensity. The following are some vignettes from the day’s lessons:

- In both the English 9 and 10 classes, technology was a key piece of instruction. Students used their laptops for referencing information on Schoology, researching essay topics, turning in essays, receiving feedback, and blogging with classmates and the teacher.
- In one English 9 class, the teacher began class with a mechanics review of correct apostrophe use based on a need she had observed in reading essays the students had submitted. While working with the MUG 6 exercise from Schoology, she also addressed other grammar concerns that arose such as punctuating appositives and run-on sentences. In a follow-up conversation, she said she felt that Grade 9 teachers shared a common vocabulary for both literary and writing terminology. She said that writing is used to
show background knowledge and to demonstrate learning in addition to teaching essays.

- In another English 9 class, students were beginning their study of *Romeo and Juliet* with shared reading and written response to their reading. The teacher emphasized the purpose of the writing – to use specific evidence and references from the text in their reflective writing.

- In an English 10 class, as class began, students were asked to open their laptops to check the agenda and homework for the day on Schoology. They then wrestled with the word of the day (*intrepid*), proposing synonyms and antonyms and then writing sentences and drawing pictures to illustrate its meaning. They then turned to an ongoing creative writing assignment related to Shakespeare that involved writing an ad and a story. Students were using rubrics to assess their writing.

- In another English 10 class, students were working on an open-response prompt related to a passage from a novel. The lesson included close reading of the passage, partially responding to the prompt, and processing of those responses. The teacher asked students to share what they had written and stressed writing tips such as restating the prompt and using quotations with explanation. Students were to write a full response for homework.

- In a third English 10 class, students were working on comprehension questions related to the literature text under study. The students worked on their laptops and submitted their assignments online. The atmosphere was focused, with a minimum of distraction.

- In a final English 10 class, the students and teacher were reviewing a set of literal comprehension questions about the book they were studying. Later, students moved on to a character mapping activity, for which the teacher encouraged them to use online tools. The teacher circulated among the students to assist them with this task.

- In an English 11 classroom, the teacher revisited writing introductory paragraphs. She had noted that students had had difficulty referring back to the thesis in essays recently submitted. Using the New England Patriots as the source for multiple research topics, the teacher modeled writing a sample introductory paragraph. Then, in small groups, students, using their choice of a specific topic, worked on writing an introductory paragraph. The teacher conferred with individual groups as she monitored their work.

- In another English 11 class, the students, working collaboratively, examined chapters in the book they had read on Frederick Douglass for examples of rhetorical devices they had studied. The teacher also started preparing the students for a project that they would be working on that could be done as a PowerPoint or shared on Google docs.

- In an English 12 class, the agenda for the day included blog writing, a quiz, and the upcoming research paper. The blog entry focused on advising a character in the novel under study about whom to trust and not trust. The instructions included using a quotation from the novel. Students seemed engaged in the task.

- In another English 12 class, which was studying Shakespeare, students first watched a humorous video on iambic pentameter, then attempted to write a “rant” using that meter. The students were eager to engage in the task, and when it was complete, the teacher asked them to share their creations. Several volunteered and received much appreciation.

- In a Journalism class, students were working on articles for the school newspaper or, in one case, on a grant proposal. The classroom had the atmosphere of a newsroom, with a variety of purposeful student-centered activities, including peer interaction: specifically, student editors offering advice and working out details and deadlines with reporters.
The subject matter and activities ranged widely in these classes, which included a rich variety of writing tasks, some challenging, some routine; some authentic, some academic; some innovative, some conventional. Technology played a major role in much of the work; students used their laptops to access assignments and texts and to compose responses and create presentations, while teachers used hardware and software to present resources and create workspaces for students. In general, students were at least compliant and often deeply engaged with their work, which most worked on independently. Informal and formal sharing and collaborating on writing were less evident, with the exceptions noted above. Students seemed focused on getting the work done well.

**Student Interviews**

During the first and third lunch periods, Bruce Penniman and Diana Grady met with prearranged groups of students, most of them enrolled in Level 1 or AP classes. These students were very eager to talk about their writing experiences at DHS, and most of their comments were positive. They described a program in which students review or are taught the “basics” in ninth grade, including grammar skills, with a focus on writing process and peer editing. After this early preparation, they said, process steps are “internalized” in the later grades; however, some older students did express a need for “refreshers” on key writing skills. “Teachers think you know stuff,” one commented, “but sometimes you don’t.” Some said that they were not required to write rough drafts of their papers, but others said that they were expected to do detailed outlines. In general, they said that they did not have the opportunity to rewrite for a better grade.

Students noted and seemed to support the academic focus of most writing tasks, which they said ranged from five-paragraph essays to sophisticated arguments, rhetorical analyses, and syntheses (in AP Language). They gave the impression that they found their work stimulating and challenging. One AP student wanted to learn even more rhetorical devices. Still, some students craved more opportunities than they say they currently have for open-ended and creative writing, including poetry, though “it might not have as many applications in real life,” as one student put it. When Karen Baynes pointed out that a creative writing elective had not filled, some of the students said that they would like creative assignments to be integrated more into core classes. On the other hand, students were appreciative of the opportunities they have to integrate technology into their work, not only as a learning tool but also as a means of production. One mentioned a video project as a memorable activity.

Overall, this group of students (admittedly, not a cross-section of the student body) gave the impression of feeling confident as writers of academic prose and well prepared for college.

**Teacher Interviews**

Several members of the English Department visited with Bruce Penniman and Diana Grady during the latter part of the first three periods for open-ended discussions about the writing program. Their comments were wide-ranging, but several themes emerged:

- Affirming the students’ feelings, teachers indicated that they received positive feedback
from DHS graduates about their level of preparedness for college and career writing.

- Some teachers indicated that class work includes a good deal of informal, ungraded writing: lesson starters, journals, grammar practice, and other writing to learn activities. One wondered whether this work should be assessed.
- In contrast, some teachers said that there was too much emphasis in the department on “formulaic” academic writing; these teachers felt that student voice was lost with the focus on preparing for standardized tests.
- Several teachers noted the significant emphasis within the department on incorporating technology into the writing program and cited software such as Schoology, Google Drive, and Turnitin.com, as well as opportunities to publish writing outside the school walls. While most supported this effort, some questioned the value added by technology, and some were concerned by what they perceived as increased cheating on research projects.
- Despite the adoption of a joint English/Social Studies District-Determined Measure (DDM), teachers said that they did not have much knowledge about writing instruction in other departments.
- By far the most recurrent theme in the teacher meetings was the question of whether too much writing is required (the department guideline is four multi-paragraph pieces per term). Opinions varied on the requirement, but some teachers believed that the volume of writing required limited the time available for process work, including peer review. Others felt that there was not enough scaffolding of writing skills from year to year.

Despite their differences of opinion, all of the teachers gave the impression that they were highly committed to writing as a priority in the curriculum and desirous of opportunities to strengthen their teaching skills and to collaborate to develop an even more cohesive program.

**Principal Interview**

During the last period and after school, Bruce Penniman and Diana Grady met with Principal Andrew Stephens to learn his views on the writing program and to discuss possible next steps.

Mr. Stephens expressed a desire that the curriculum review process would validate what is going well in the writing program and name areas to work on. He described some changes that are happening in the school to provide context. One initiative, already alluded to frequently above, is technology integration. He indicated that a key focus in his process is making the use of technology meaningful by incorporating best practices. Another change that is coming is a new schedule. Designed in part to alleviate student stress, the new schedule will incorporate professional learning communities for teachers, and their structure and focus is still to be determined. Curriculum alignment and developing scope and sequence charts are possibilities.

Mr. Stephens indicated that curriculum mapping is accomplished in the summer using Atlas Rubicon. He would like to see development of “anchor points” (including diagnostics) in the program’s scope and sequence to facilitate alignment among teachers. He noted that 6-12 collaboration has increased, with some joint department meetings. He also referred to the MCAS results discussed above, which indicated that inferential reasoning and topic development are not as strong as other skills among DHS students.
Among the topics that Mr. Stephens expressed an interest in pursuing are student portfolios, peer and teacher feedback, and authentic writing tasks. All of these possibilities could encourage increased student ownership of writing and deeper engagement in the writing process.

Conclusions and Recommendations

School and district documents, survey results, classroom observations, and interviews all point to the conclusion that the Duxbury High School English Department has a strong writing program that produces capable writers of academic prose. The 2014 ELA MCAS scores (99% of tenth-grade students at advanced or proficient) would make most districts in Massachusetts envious. Even so, there are some ways in which the program might be enhanced, perhaps producing even better writing scores and almost certainly developing more engaged writers. This section will examine the strengths of the program, potential areas of improvement, and recommendations from the review team.

Strengths. Before making suggestions to improve the writing program, it is important to name some of its major assets, factors that have no doubt contributed to its overall success:

- The English Department’s commitment to writing is evident in published documents, class activities, and teachers’ comments. All of the evidence points to an understanding of the importance of writing for college and career success and a determination to provide students with the opportunities to develop this vital skill.
- Students’ commitment to succeeding as writers is no less evident. In class and in interviews, students seem “on board” with the department’s writing expectations and evince a willingness and determination to meet them. They too show that they understand the importance of writing and want to become proficient at it.
- The amount of writing that students produce is commendable. The Common Core calls for students to “write routinely over extended time frames … and shorter time frames … for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences” (emphasis added) and the department’s guideline that students write four multi-paragraph pieces per quarter helps to ensure that this standard is met. Though some teachers are concerned that this requirement limits the ability to focus on process skills, there are many ways to fulfill the expectation, which is not at all unreasonable for a nine-week term.
- The department’s rigorous schedule of common assessments provides abundant opportunities for monitoring students’ progress in writing. The assessments are frequent and focused on academic writing. Individual teacher and departmental reviews of the results should point out strengths and identify aspects of writing to target in instruction.
- Teachers’ and students’ extensive use of technology opens many opportunities for collaboration, differentiation, and deeper learning. While using the latest technology should never be an end in itself, it was evident at DHS that teachers have endeavored to make technology integration meaningful and that students have adjusted to using digital tools successfully. Technological tools are incorporated seamlessly into many lessons.
- Taken together, the department’s courses and faculty offer a variety of opportunities for writing. Teachers use a range of writing techniques and tasks in their lessons, ranging from quickwrites to formal outlines, from rants to rhetorical analyses. Over the course of four years, students are likely to be exposed to many approaches to writing.
Areas for Improvement. Although the review team had only limited time to observe classes and talk with students and teachers, some themes emerged from the visit and the documents that indicate some ways in which the program could be strengthened:

- While the program overall shows range and rigor, there seems to be a need for better mechanisms to ensure consistency within grade levels and articulation across levels. This is not to say that all classes should be doing the same writing lessons at the same times, but rather that there should be some common agreements about the core genres and skills focused on in each grade, and that there should be a standards-based progression from year to year.

- A related observation is that communication with other departments about writing is very limited. Although it is beyond the scope of this review to examine the writing programs in other subject areas, it is clear from survey results and interviews that writing is not generally perceived as a shared responsibility at DHS. The Common Core and decades of research underscore the importance of discipline-based writing instruction and cross-curricular conversations about strategies and expectations.

- Classes could give more attention to process work in all four grades. While the program currently sets clear targets for writing performance, it is less clear how students learn the skills of invention, arrangement, and style. Writing workshop approaches, including student-teacher conferences, could help students build a repertoire of problem-solving skills (as opposed to a step-by-step writing procedure). Renewed attention to writing process could have a beneficial effect on their topic development strategies and thus ameliorate their MCAS scores in that area.

- The program’s emphasis on “college and career ready” writing skills such as argument, analysis, and research are understandable and commendable – and certainly in keeping with the expectations of the Common Core – but including more occasions for creative writing would be welcome and beneficial. Students crave opportunities to produce their own stories, poems, plays, and memoirs as well as to study the works of others. Creative writing deepens students’ understanding of literature (just as planting a garden or cooking a meal deepens anyone’s understanding of food). Also, creative interventions in literary works (e.g., retelling a story from another character’s point of view, adding a sequel, changing the setting) require as much analysis of the text as critical essays.

- Observations reveal surprisingly little peer interaction related to writing. Students and teachers report that peer editing is a focus in the ninth and tenth grades, but broader versions of peer response or even informal sharing of student writing is limited. Peer writing groups could provide, at a minimum, an authentic audience for student work and, once students have learned effective response techniques, valuable opportunities to improve writing skills as students share approaches and offer critiques.

- While students generally seem compliant with class activities and eager to succeed on their writing assignments, their ownership of their own writing seems limited. They clearly understand the need to develop the skills of writing, but it was not clear that they see themselves as writers. The program could place more emphasis on the idea that everyone is a writer who makes deliberate choices to accomplish specific purposes for an audience that matters. The points enumerated above about writing process, creative writing, and peer response are closely related to the theme of ownership.
Recommendations. The review team has developed several suggestions for the DHS English Department that could capitalize on the many strengths of its writing program and address the areas for improvement. These recommendations begin and end with professional development, because investing in teachers is the most productive path to growth:

- **Recommendation #1: Schedule ongoing teacher conversations about writing.** The coming schedule change at DHS offers a unique opportunity to establish professional learning communities within the English Department to discuss the teaching of writing. These groups should probably be organized by grade level at first, with the goal of reaching some common agreements about writing – which genres and tasks should be required of all students, which should be included at teacher or student discretion, whether the requirement of four multi-paragraph pieces per term should be modified, what that requirement should entail (especially in terms of stakes and process – graded vs. ungraded, planned vs. on demand, formal vs. informal, etc.). Ideally, these discussions (which may take some time and be difficult) should produce a mutually agreed-upon writing template for each course that balances consistency and teacher autonomy, and whose rationale all teachers understand and support. These grade-level agreements could then serve as the basis for cross-grade and cross-disciplinary discussions, leading to a more unified understanding of writing across the school.

- **Recommendation #2: Revitalize writing workshop pedagogy.** As noted above, there is a need to strengthen writing process elements in the DHS writing program. Teachers seem aware of the need for process-related activities, but the current focus on technology integration and the number of assessments for which they are responsible have shifted the focus in the department. Renewed attention to aspects of writing process pedagogy such as invention, teacher modeling, conferences, peer response (as opposed to peer editing), and deep revision would strengthen the program and students’ capacity as writers. However, it is important in undertaking any such changes to avoid the implication that there is a single, linear writing process; it is better to acknowledge that writing is messy and recursive and help students develop a repertoire of strategies. Useful professional development for teachers in writing pedagogy could range from a departmental book study (using one of the resources listed below, perhaps) to a semester-long graduate course. In either case, it should include a strong teacher-as-writer component.

- **Recommendation #3: Develop more student-centered writing tasks and assessments.** Amid the pressure that all high schools face to prepare students for college and careers, to monitor and document their progress, and to prepare them for high-stakes assessments and tasks (such as college essays), it is easy to lose sight of the more authentic purposes of writing – to reflect, to communicate, to create with words. Students could be forgiven for thinking that writing is more about getting over hurdles than expressing themselves. However, it is possible to create a program that balances the need for accountability with the desire for authenticity. Offering more choices in writing tasks (including both whimsical and rigorous creative writing opportunities) and developing assignments that serve real purposes for real audiences would increase student engagement and provide intrinsic incentives for growth. (The work that students are currently doing in the Journalism class is a case in point.) Similarly, students should have more of a stake in the assessment process. Introducing a portfolio program in which students collect work
over a period of time, select pieces that say something about them as writers, and reflect on their progress would increase their ownership of their writing and provide an individualized counter-narrative to the ongoing local and state assessment programs.

- **Recommendation #4: Rewrite course materials to emphasize the student as writer.** While course descriptions and curriculum maps currently indicate the importance of writing, they do not clearly express the idea that students are developing as writers. This may seem like a subtle distinction, but these documents set the tone for curriculum development and pedagogy within individual classes. Revising these documents – and modifying classroom materials and presentations accordingly – would encourage students to identify as writers, within a community of writers, and to recognize that they have particular skills and challenges, likes and dislikes, strategies and blocks, and above all, that they have agency in the development of writing skills. Teachers can facilitate creation of this sort of culture of writing by also seeing themselves as writers and sharing their writing experiences, including their struggles, with students.

- **Recommendation #5: Provide in-depth professional development for the English Department (or perhaps several departments) in literacy-based curriculum design.** The surest way to improve the writing program and implement the pedagogical shifts embedded in the Common Core standards is to increase teachers’ understanding of backward design, and thus their capacity to create goal-driven curriculum maps and units, to develop valid and writing-rich authentic assessments, and to formulate lesson plans that scaffold toward transfer of knowledge, understanding, and skills. Redesigning the department’s curriculum maps so that they provide more comprehensive representations of the courses and more targeted skills development would be helpful to new and veteran teachers. A useful model is provided in the PARCC Model Content Frameworks for ELA-Literacy (available for download at http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-model-content-frameworks). This chart (6) can be used as a template for developing course maps (more detailed grade-level examples are included throughout the document):
An example of how this model has been adapted to create a richly detailed curriculum map with targeted standards can be found in the *English Language Arts Instructional Guide for DYS Schools* developed by the Western Massachusetts Writing Project (3.1.4-5; see scope and sequence chart in Appendix B – view as a two-page spread, as in the image below). The guide also includes exemplar units and lessons based on the curriculum map (the entire ELA instructional guide is available for download at http://www.collaborative.org/programs/dys/dys-instructional-guides).

In addition to redesigning the curriculum maps, teachers should have the opportunity to study, adapt, and implement exemplar units such those available from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Model Curriculum project (http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/). Unpacking these units will offer insights into the curriculum design process and the potential roles for writing as a learning tool and as an assessment tool – and as an authentic means of expression for students. Most important, though, is that teachers have the opportunity to create and share their own “model curriculum units” grounded in the Common Core and best practices in the field. The best way to provide this opportunity may be through a professional development course such as *Principles and Practices of Effective Content-Area Literacy Curriculum Design* (see sample syllabus above), created by the Western Massachusetts Writing Project. In a course of this type, teachers can gain a deeper understanding of what the Common Core standards look like in practice, acquire or review strategies that help students learn to write and write to learn, and learn the principles of backward design.

The review team feels privileged to have had the opportunity to learn about the DHS writing program and to interact with teachers and students in the English Department – and hopes that these conclusions and recommendations will prove helpful. Bruce Penniman and Diana Grady are available to answer questions and provide clarification as needed.
Recommended Resources


Duxbury Middle School English Department Writing Program Report

Compiled by Beth Herman-Davis, Educational Consultant and
Diana Grady, Director, Buzzards Bay Writing Project

March 2015

Introduction

Review of the English Department writing program at Duxbury Middle School (DMS) was conducted by Beth Herman-Davis and Diana Grady of the Buzzards Bay Writing Project during January and February of 2015. Materials reviewed included a variety of school documents and a teacher survey. A full-day site visit on February 5 included classroom observations, interviews with students and teachers, and Laurie Hunter, Assistant Superintendent. This report summarizes findings from the review and offers some conclusions and recommendations.

School Documents

English Department Chair Karen Baynes and Assistant Superintendent Laurie Hunter provided several documents that offered insights into the writing program at DMS:

Curriculum Maps. The district’s website includes curriculum maps for ELA 6, 7, and 8 that are linked to the current Massachusetts ELA framework (based on the Common Core State Standards). Each curriculum map divides the course into several units, each of which includes content (primarily readings), essential questions, frameworks, skills, and assessment options. The essential questions are thought-provoking probes into themes and topics raised by the literature, as well as questions addressing writing. The skills in the ELA 6-8 maps are the College and Career Readiness anchor standards from the ELA framework. Each unit includes several writing standards, usually at least five and in some cases all eleven. The assessment options column includes a range of formal and informal measures, from quizzes and worksheets to tests, reading journals, and graphic organizers. Most could be used as formative assessments. In addition, at the end of each curriculum map, a series of common assessments are listed, including at least one for each term (e.g., these include: text analysis and reader response, expository writing, research-based writing, persuasive writing, theme analysis, and literary analysis).

Program of Studies. The Program Design and Sequence section of the English Department’s program of studies shows a strong commitment to writing, especially at grade 6 where students have the opportunity for two periods of ELA broken down into reading and writing. At grade 6 “Writing instruction focuses on the proper construction of sentences and paragraphs, leading to the composition of longer pieces, including a research paper written in MLA format. Students also write as a means of responding to literature.” The DMS ELA curriculum consists of four required courses: at grade 6, Literacy, which is divided into reading & writing, English 7 and Critical Reading and Thinking (grade 7, half year) and English 8. At grades 7 and 8, course descriptions indicate the writing focus for each year:
• English 7: “Writing serves as a means for exploring literature and self, and emphasizes analytical, narrative, journal, persuasive and research-based writing. Students are expected to write both in and out of class. Instruction in language mechanics focuses on parts of speech and basic sentence parts.”

• Critical Reading and Thinking (Grade 7, half year): “Since writing in response to texts helps to improve reading comprehension, students are expected to write frequently in and out of class.”

• English 8: “Student writing is an outgrowth of the literature and the students respond through creative and reflective pieces, as well as through analytical writing. Instruction on how to write a research paper, a persuasive essay, a compare/contrast essay, and a theme analysis essay is provided.”

While the course descriptions all emphasize writing tasks as core components, they do not focus on or refer to students as writers. Development of skills seems to be the focus.

Common Assessments. The English Department has established a substantial program of common assessments for grades 6-12 that include one or more writing tasks for each quarter (see https://docs.google.com/a/duxbury.k12.ma.us/spreadsheets/d/1QXoAv8Pazo06jQt759PP7XgRSmYHR1cPEy_qrNiNuBM/edit?usp=sharing). For example, in grade 6 students complete a writing pretest and a summer reading essay in Term 1, an expository essay (writing “how to”) in Term 2, research-based writing in Term 3, and persuasive writing and an Academic Merit assessment in Term 4. These are in addition to reading and communication assessments and additional assessments related to the core texts. These assessments provide ample opportunity to monitor students’ same-year and cross-year progress toward meeting Common Core College and Career Readiness standards.

ELA and Reading MCAS Item Analysis. DMS’s 2014 grade 7 MCAS results are quite strong: 29% advanced, 67% proficient, 3% needs improvement, and 1% warning/failing. Even among disabled students, the vast majority scored proficient or better. However, if you look closely at the long composition scores, there does seem to be room for growth in topic development. While students scored very high in conventions (7.67 out of a possible 8), the topic development mean score, while still strong, was 8.31 out of a possible 12. The mean score for grade 7 open response yielded a 2.76 out of a possible 4, which indicates that there is also room for growth on open response writing. In Grade 6 the open response mean score was 2.33 out of a possible 4 and at grade 8 the mean score was 2.8 out of a possible 4, both scores indicating that there is room for growth at both grade levels, especially grade 6. Authors of the October 2, 2014, analysis suggested the following action plan steps regarding the long composition:

• Teachers will engage students in frequent open response practice, using the appropriate, DESE-approved graphic organizer.

• As time allows, the English Department will work with teachers of other departments on writing instruction.

Duxbury Middle School 2014-2015 School Improvement Plan (SIP). The DMS school improvement plan doesn’t include any writing goals for the 2014-2015 school year.
Survey Results

In mid-January 2015, Beth Herman-Davis sent a Google Forms survey to Karen Baynes for distribution to DMS ELA teachers, special education teachers, social studies teachers, department chairs/supervisors, and administrators. The survey is available at https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1kLOgIDJucXsuVkmYgeRRQXNwCMTe-DosZANjDeDMQ/viewform?usp=send_form#start=invite. Twenty staff members responded to the survey, including 8 English teachers, 6 special education teachers, 4 (non-ELA) teachers, 1 department chair/supervisor, and 1 administrator. The first five items in the survey (after one on the respondent’s teaching assignment) were statements about the DMS writing program that asked for responses on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree). The items and the mean scores for English teachers and all respondents are presented in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Survey Item</th>
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<td>1.9</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Duxbury Middle School students demonstrate learning by writing (e.g., in formal essays, research projects, or open-response tests).</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Duxbury Middle School students learn new content by writing (e.g., through informal writing-to-learn activities).</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Responsibility for writing is shared across the curriculum at Duxbury Middle School (i.e., classes other than ELA regularly include writing activities and instruction).</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, these are positive reflections about the writing program at DMS. The majority of survey participants agree that DMS has a culture of writing, that writing is taught and not just assigned, and students demonstrate learning by writing. However, if you look more closely at the data it appears that there are some differences in opinion, especially regarding items 3-5. Data from item 3 shows a range of views between ELA teachers and other respondents. Seventy-five percent of the ELA teachers strongly agreed on item 3, while only sixteen percent of other respondents strongly agreed. Responses to item 5 were varied among ELA teachers between strongly agree, agree, and disagree. Other respondents also had varied views with 8 respondents selecting disagree. Responses to item 6, about writing being a shared responsibility across the curriculum, were viewed similarly between the ELA teachers and other respondents. There was also an optional comment section for respondents to list examples or add explanations for item 6. One teacher reported, “While many classes require students to write as a means of showing mastery, most teachers don’t teach writing. They believe that it’s the job of English teachers to teach kids how to write.”

The survey also included “open-response items” on the strengths and weaknesses of the DMS writing program and on teachers’ professional preparation for teaching writing.
**Strengths.** Several teachers mentioned using the writing process with students to develop their thoughts and ideas in a systematic way, eventually culminating in a multi-paragraph and/or 5 paragraph essay. Graphic organizers were also mentioned as a vehicle to help students organize their writing. Respondents reported that they provided detailed rubrics for students to edit their own work to meet the high expectations set by teachers. Teachers also reported that they model and show exemplary samples of writing for students to critique and learn from. Only one respondent mentioned that the writing program was strong in conventions and mechanics.

**Areas for Improvement.** Two respondents felt that grammar and spelling were overlooked at DMS. Many teachers suggested that writing should be taught using a common language in order for students to understand what teachers are talking about from grade to grade. One respondent suggested that there needed to be more continuity between grades and content areas. Many respondents suggested that there needed to be more writing in the content areas with consistent expectations across grade levels. At least 4 respondents expressed confusion as to whether or not there was a specific writing program at DMS. One respondent suggested more time for collaboration between the ELA and history departments to discuss different strategies and how to teach different types of writing. Two teachers suggested that students could benefit from further instruction in adding evidence and citations and learning how to connect the quotes with their own ideas.

**Professional Development.** The final question asked respondents about the training they have received in the area of teaching writing. ELA teachers responded that they had professional development for Academic Merit and taken a BER seminar on the Common Core State Standards and writing. One teacher reported taking a 6+1 writing traits training on their own. Other professional development included Project Read, and the Links Writing System. In regard to receiving professional development on writing, two ELA teachers reported that they had “not that many” and “none in teaching writing”. One respondent reported that they would “love to see more PD days focused on teaching writing.” Special education teachers reported that they had received training in Academic Merit, Writing Across the Curriculum, John Collins, and the LINKS Writing System training on writing at the Landmark School.

**Classroom Visits**

Beth Herman-Davis and Diana Grady visited DMS for a full day on February 5 and visited 11 classrooms in grades 6-8. Since the visits were short and the lessons were not planned to showcase writing instruction, the observations recorded were necessarily impressionistic and do not present a complete picture of the writing program, but they do offer some insights into its character and intensity. The following are some vignettes from the day’s lessons:

- In a grade 6 classroom focused on writing, a teacher facilitated a scaffolded lesson on possessives. The students were engaged and eager to participate as the teacher used a mirror with several students throughout the lesson to explain possessives.
- In another grade 6 classroom focused on writing, the teacher asked students to write answers to questions regarding the novel they were reading together. Students had a choice of which question they wanted to answer.
In another 6th grade classroom, the teacher was using an ELMO for instruction on how to respond to the reading students had just completed.

In the last sixth grade class visited, the teacher modeled the method for writing a response to a question about the reading. The students then collaborated on their answers. The teacher also used a “write to remember” technique. Students wrote a word from the reading and a brief definition. They could also write a sentence to remind themselves of the focus of what they had just read.

In both the 7th and 8th grade classes, technology was a key piece of instruction. Students used their laptops for referencing information on Schoology, researching essay topics, turning in essays, receiving feedback, and selecting and completing graphic organizers to organize writing.

In a 7th grade classroom, students worked on completing a persuasive writing graphic organizer on laptops or by hand using paper and pen. The teacher moved about the room to check in with students.

In another 7th grade classroom students used laptops to research their topic for a persuasive writing essay, while some students had completed the organizer and had already begun writing their essay.

In the last seventh grade class visited, the teacher had students write responses to four questions about the writing study they had been doing. They could use their notes if necessary. The four questions were:

- List all the steps included in the writing process and briefly explain/describe each step.
- List the four different types of writing and give an example of this type of writing we practiced this year.
- Using triangles and rectangles draw the graphic organizer for a 5-paragraph essay.
- List the four writing techniques that writers use to enhance their writing.

In an 8th grade classroom, students read a short story together with students volunteering to read a part of the story. The teacher inquired about a few vocabulary words from the story to check for student understanding. After students completed the reading of the short story, they were then asked to answer 14 basic comprehension questions about the story. The next step in the lesson was to create their own Dystopian future using a graphic organizer and criteria sheet.

In another 8th grade classroom, students were completing graphic organizers for brainstorming and organizing their persuasive writing. Most students worked on their graphic organizers on their laptops, while some completed the organizer using paper and pen. When asked, students said that they liked having several organizers to choose from and the choice to complete it by hand or on the laptop.

In the last grade 8 class visited, students reviewed for a test on a novel. The students went over information they would need to answer one of three open-response questions on the test. They had a choice of which open-response question to answer.

There was a variety of lessons and writing taking place in the classrooms visited. Technology played a major role in many of the classrooms, especially in the 7th and 8th grades. Students used their laptops for a variety of tasks, including: completing graphic organizers, writing essays, revising and editing their writing, research, and Schoology. There was obvious continuity between the 7th and 8th grades, which used the same graphic organizer for persuasive writing.
the classrooms we visited students appeared to be engaged in their work and at the appropriate times, quietly shared with their peers what they were working on.

**Student Interviews**

During the middle school lunch periods, Beth Herman-Davis and Diana Grady met with prearranged groups of students from grades 6-8. Most of the students were eager to talk about their writing experiences at DMS, and most of their comments were positive.

- Most of the students reported that they felt that there was a strong writing program at the middle school.
- Students were genuinely enthusiastic about writing.
- Sixth graders reported having shorter, but frequent writing assignments.
- Sixth graders reported that teachers ask them to be detailed in their writing.
- Sixth graders indicated that teachers offer exemplary samples of writing during writing instruction.
- Seventh and eighth grade students reported that they had received opportunities for creative writing in 6th grade, but there was limited and at times no opportunities for creative writing in grades 7 and 8; and they indeed missed having opportunities to write creatively.
- 8th graders reported that they felt that the DMS writing program was preparing them for high school writing tasks.
- Students also reported that some teachers only offered written feedback on essays, while a few teachers offered feedback through conferencing.
- Students reported that they were provided with opportunities to show their understanding through writing.
- Students reported that they found grammar instruction to be helpful in their writing.
- One student commented that ELA classes seemed to be more reading-based then writing-based.
- Students reported that they had experienced writing across the content areas; i.e.: in science, they had written lab reports.
- Students at all three grade levels mentioned that they were assigned frequent MCAS writing tasks in preparation for MCAS.
- Students at all three grade levels reported that they are all required to do open response writing frequently.
- Several students mentioned that they no longer enjoyed writing for fun.

Overall, these students seemed to feel confident as writers and offered positive comments about the writing instruction they were receiving at DMS.

**Teacher Interviews**

Beth Herman-Davis and Diana Grady met with grades 6-8 ELA teachers throughout the day for open-ended discussions about the writing program. Their comments were wide-ranging, but several themes emerged:
At all three grade levels teachers indicated that MCAS writing preparation took up a substantial amount of instructional time in the classroom.

All teachers indicated that they would appreciate a common vocabulary/terminology regarding the teaching of writing within ELA and perhaps across the content areas.

7th and 8th grade teachers indicated that they were unsure if there was a consistent template/organizer for students to use for argumentative writing; they also wondered about the continuity of terms being used for argumentative writing across the grade levels.

All teachers believed that revision is a vital piece of the writing process, but they seem to embrace and reinforce student revision to varying degrees across the grade levels.

A few teachers indicated that they conference with students, but many felt that they didn’t have enough time for conferencing.

Most teachers seemed to feel positive about the technology being offered to students for writing and liked using Google Docs to offer feedback.

Several teachers indicated that they used a reading journal for students to write about readings.

Several teachers at the 7th and 8th grade levels indicated that they would like to collaborate more with teachers in other content areas, and in particular social studies.

Of the several themes that emerged during the teacher interviews, having a common language regarding the teaching of writing seemed to be a priority for teachers. It is obvious that the middle school teachers are committed to writing instruction and are open to collaborating with other content areas.

Conclusions and Recommendations

School and district documents, survey results, classroom observations, and interviews all point to the conclusion that the Duxbury Middle School ELA Department has a strong writing program that produces capable writers. The 2014 ELA MCAS scores (96% of seventh-grade students at advanced or proficient) would make most districts in Massachusetts envious. Even so, there are some ways in which the program might be enhanced, perhaps producing even better writing scores and almost certainly developing more engaged writers. This section will examine the strengths of the program, limitations, and recommendations from the review team.

Strengths. Before making suggestions to improve the writing program, it is important to name some of its major assets, factors that have no doubt contributed to its overall success:

- The ELA department’s passion and commitment to writing is evident in the variety of writing opportunities and instruction offered to students.
- Teachers offer students a variety of writing opportunities ranging from open response to theme and analysis essays to journal writing to poetry, exposing them to many modes of writing upon entering DHS.
- Separating the grade 6 ELA course into 2 separate courses of writing and reading shows a strong commitment not only to writing, but also to overall student success in literacy.
- Providing students in grade 7 with an additional half-year course that includes writing shows the commitment DMS has to writing and literacy.
• Teachers’ and students’ extensive use of technology opens many opportunities for collaboration, differentiation, and deeper learning. While using the latest technology should never be an end in itself, it was evident at DMS that teachers have endeavored to make technology integration meaningful and that students have adjusted to using digital tools successfully.

• The department’s schedule of common assessments provides multiple opportunities for monitoring students’ progress in writing. The assessments are frequent and focused on academic writing. Individual teacher and departmental reviews of the results should point out strengths and identify aspects of writing to target in instruction.

Limitations: Although the review team had limited time to observe classes and talk with students and teachers, some themes emerged from the visit and the documents that indicate some ways the program could be strengthened.

• While the program overall shows range and rigor, there seems to be a need for better mechanisms to ensure consistency within grade levels and articulation across levels. This is not to say that all classes should be doing the same writing lessons at the same time, but rather that there should be some common agreements about the core genres and skills focused on in each grade, and that there should be a standards-based progression from year-to-year.

• Communication with other content areas regarding the teaching of writing seems limited. The survey and interviews indicated that writing is not generally perceived as a shared responsibility at DMS. The Common Core and decades of research underscore the importance of discipline-based writing instruction and cross-curricular conversations about strategies and expectations.

• The survey and interviews revealed that all ELA teachers use the writing process to some extent. Very few teachers hold writing conferences with their students and most feedback offered to students is in the form of written feedback. Writing workshop approaches, including student-teacher conferences, could help students build a repertoire of problem-solving skills (as opposed to a step-by-step writing procedure). Renewed attention to the writing process could have a beneficial effect on their topic development strategies and thus improve their MCAS scores in that area.

• In a related observation, peer interaction related to writing seemed limited, although some students reported offering peers written feedback in Google Docs. Peer response or writing groups can be powerful for students during any stage of the writing process to help improve, expand, and refine their writing.

• Students in 7th and 8th grade reported a lack of creative writing opportunities, which they found abundant in 6th grade. While the Common Core State Standards’ expectations include frequent academic writing, creative writing deepens students’ understanding of literature and allows students the freedom to experiment with writing in ways that academic writing does not.

• While students generally seem compliant with class activities and eager to succeed on their writing assignments, their ownership of their own writing seems limited. They clearly understand the need to develop the skills of writing, but it was not clear that they see themselves as writers. The program could place more emphasis on the idea that everyone is a writer who makes deliberate choices to accomplish specific purposes for an
audience that matters. The points enumerated above about writing process, creative writing, and peer response are closely related to the theme of ownership.

**Recommendations.** The review team has developed several suggestions for the DMS ELA Department that could capitalize on the many strengths of its writing program and address the limitations noted above.

- **Revitalize the writing workshop model.** At the middle school level, writer’s workshop should be an integral part of the ELA classroom. Renewed attention to the writing process such as teacher modeling, scaffolding, peer response, student/teacher conferencing, and effective revision would strengthen the program and students’ capacity as writers. In addition, classrooms should offer supportive writing environments, which can include student writing centers. Writing centers offer students self-assessment tools like checklists, which aide students in assessing and revising their writing.

- **Create and implement a middle school writing rubric.** To provide students with consistency and common expectations throughout their middle school career and to prepare them for the DHS writing program, a middle school writing rubric should be developed and implemented. The rubric will provide teachers and students with common expectations (and continuity) for writing performance on assignments. A rubric also offers teachers and students a common language regarding the teaching of writing.

- **Look at student writing together.** Teachers need designated time within their grade level and across grade levels to review and discuss student writing. These conversations can lead to meaningful discussions about the teaching of writing and offer ELA teachers opportunities to share best practices and lessons and make agreements about a common language regarding the teaching of writing.

- **Collaboration between the grade six reading and writing teachers.** There is a dynamic opportunity at this grade level for teachers to collaborate and plan lessons to integrate and connect reading and writing between the two classes.

- **Redesign the department’s curriculum maps.** This can benefit all teachers, but especially teachers new to the school. Curriculum maps should provide more comprehensive representations of the ELA courses and more targeted skills development. A useful model is provided in the PARCC Model Content Frameworks for ELA-Literacy (available for download at [http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-model-content-frameworks](http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-model-content-frameworks)). An example of how this model has been adapted to create a richly detailed curriculum map with targeted standards can be found in the *English Language Arts Instructional Guide for DYS Schools* developed by the Western Massachusetts Writing Project (3.1.4-5; see attached scope and sequence chart – view as a two-page spread, as in the image below). The guide also includes exemplar units and lessons based on the curriculum map (the entire ELA instructional guide is available for download at [http://www.collaborative.org/programs/dys/dys-instructional-guides](http://www.collaborative.org/programs/dys/dys-instructional-guides)).

- **Provide ongoing professional development in writing.** Teacher surveys and interviews indicated that teachers were interested in having opportunities for professional development focused on writing. In addition to professional development in writing for ELA teachers, it would be valuable to also include teachers from other content areas in writing PD. Areas of professional development can include: writer’s workshop, the writing process, unpacking the Common Core State Standards with a focus on writing,
and teachers as writers. It would also be beneficial to conduct book study groups with teachers in conjunction with professional development. A resource list has been provided at the end of this report and in the Bibliography of Recommended Resources.

- Add writing goal(s) to the DMS School Improvement Plan (SIP). SIP goals can include targeted professional development in writing, designated time for teachers to discuss student writing on grade level and across grade levels, and redesigning the ELA curriculum maps.

It has been a pleasure to work with the teachers, administrators and students of DMS. We applaud the effort to strengthen and build upon the writing program in place and everyone’s willingness to reflect on current practices and steer a course toward more consistency and alignment. Beth Herman-Davis and Diana Grady are available to answer questions and provide clarification as needed.

Recommended Resources

Report on Writing at Alden Elementary School:
Survey, Classroom Observations and Interview
Completed by Deana Lew, Boston Writing Project
March 12, 2015

Background Information:

This review of the writing program at Alden Elementary School, requested by Assistant Superintendent, Laurie Hunter was completed by Deana Lew as part of a K-12 Duxbury Public Schools writing review performed by the Massachusetts Writing Project in January-February, 2015. Alden Elementary School serves 699 students in 32 classes, grades three through five. 93.1% of the students are white, 3.8% are low income and .4% are English Language Learners. In 2014, they were a Level 1 school, and met all targets for growth and narrowing the achievement gap on the MCAS state assessment. They will continue to use the MCAS this year. Over the past few years, Alden School has had a school-wide focus on open-response writing, supported by professional development from BER. Faculty have also received some professional development on the Six-Traits writing model. Most recently, resource materials from the Empowering Writers program were purchased for each teacher. A small number of teachers met over the summer, to look into the materials and plan some instruction. The entire faculty took part in a half-day professional development workshop with an Empowering Writers (EW) trainer.

This report will describe the review process, indicate survey results, note observations from visits, and summarize responses to interview questions. Resulting patterns of strengths and limitations observed in the writing program at Alden School will be noted and recommendations made for continued growth in writing instruction and student writing.

Review Process:

The review process consisted of a survey completed by 23 staff members, two days of classroom visits in 17 classrooms, and interviews with several teachers and administrators.

Survey:

23 staff members completed an on-line survey designed to uncover how teachers teach writing

Breakdown of survey participants’ teaching roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Role</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third Grade Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Grade Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Grade Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Teacher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Coach/Specialist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aide/Paraprofessional</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
across the Alden school, and what sorts of professional development opportunities are available to staff.

**Four ratings questions**, with a four point scale, were accompanied by an opportunity to explain or add examples:

Questions:

1. Alden School has a strong writing program.
2. In my classroom, writing is explicitly taught.
3. Students I work with demonstrate their learning by writing.
4. Students I work with use writing to learn content.

Summary of Responses to Questions 1-4:

Examples or Explanations to support ratings included the following:

- **Published Materials Used:**
  - Empowering Writers (4)
  - Comprehension Toolkit
- Open Response Writing (4)
- Graphic Organizers (3)
- Frequency of Writing
  - Daily as part of rotations
- Summary Writing
- Writing Process
- Spelling and Mechanics
- Writing Notebooks
- Pictorial Representation
- Trying to fit everything in. “You’re always rising to the top in one area to feel like
you’re falling down a bit in another.”

Qualitative survey questions asked about the strengths and needs of the writing program, students’ strengths and needs, professional development opportunities and desires, planning and curriculum.

| Strengths and Needs in Alden School Writing Program |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| **Strengths** | **Needs** | |
| Empowering Writers (11) | More guidance/training on using EW (5) | |
| - models/examples (2) | Hard to teach all genres at the same time | |
| - move toward uniformity/working toward same goal (2) | Common Language and tools (4) | |
| - literature | | |
| - common language, build understanding | | |
| - in-depth | | |
| - gives students greater understanding of structure and author’s purpose | | |
| - differentiate between genres | | |
| - offered as resource rather than directive | | |
| - more time and focus on writing | | |
| Writing is important/valued/primary focus (3) | Clarify if EW is a tool or a program. | |
| Open Response Practice (3) | Map out use of EW by grade level | |
| Many resources (2) | Balancing time with math instruction | |
| Lots of PD (2) | Improve topic development on MCAS long comp | |
| Teachers enthusiastic, choose interesting topics (2) | Citing evidence | |
| Strong support teams | Writing work correlate better with MCAS performance | |
| Benchmarks | Real-world opportunities to write/ outside audience | |
| Learning about genres | Fitting writing into Literacy center time | |
| Teachers able to use professional judgment about how to teach writing | Students need to know how to write paragraphs at the end of 3rd grade. | |

<p>| Alden Students’ Strengths and Needs |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <strong>Strengths</strong> | <strong>Needs</strong> | |
| Very creative/creative writing (11) | Elaborating/expanding ideas/Topic development (7) | |
| Love to learn how to become better/ enthusiasm, excitement (4) | Planning and Organizing (4) | |
| Conventions, grammar (4) | Revising (3) | |
| Personal narratives/narrative writing (3) | Varying language/word choice (3) | |
| | Models/examples (2) | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answering open response questions (3)</th>
<th>Conventions/mechanics (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great ideas (2)</td>
<td>Consistent instruction from K-5 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Being asked to do more than they are ready for developmentally (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertaining beginnings</td>
<td>Aversion to process writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating to edit and brainstorm ideas</td>
<td>Writing weak overall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using exact details to support a written response</td>
<td>Difficulty getting ideas down on paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using more details</td>
<td>More opportunities for creative writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length and complexity of stories</td>
<td>Using graphic organizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinguishing among genres</td>
<td>Writing entertaining beginnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Editing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not following same pattern for all prompts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Getting started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Showing vs. telling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Strict” writing instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Varying between long/complex and short/concise pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structuring an essay and supporting ideas with textual evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explaining their thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being more descriptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>more work with figurative language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stamina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing significantly below grade level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simpler graphic organizers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PD/Training received in teaching writing:</th>
<th>What training/PD would you like?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowering Writers (1/2 day)</td>
<td>Time to collaborate/work with EW Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BER Workshops 2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Traits 2</td>
<td>More EW training 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRSD</td>
<td>find contests, publication 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Read - Framing Your Thoughts</td>
<td>How to make children enjoy writing more/opportunities to write more/better 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### What curriculum do you use to teach writing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What curriculum do you use to teach writing?</th>
<th>What changes, if any, would you make to the curriculum?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowering Writers – 14,</td>
<td>None (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Street – 3,</td>
<td>Not sure yet, still getting used to materials (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Organizers – 3</td>
<td>More research, argument writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Traits</td>
<td>More strict writing program – Writers’ Lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher created curriculum</td>
<td>Continued PD and more time planning with team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readworks</td>
<td>More time for writing in schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Read Materials</td>
<td>A recommended guide or map for the year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BER materials</td>
<td>More student examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory Denman</td>
<td>Dislike the theme approach (from EW grade-level guides)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writers’ Express</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time for Kids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story Works</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### How do you plan your writing instruction?

- In conjunction with reading/grade level standards. (5)
- Start with model of finished product and work backwards (2)
- Constant analysis of students’ writing needs. (2)
- With my team (9)
- One term on narrative, one on expository, one on persuasive.
- Using Empowering Writers (5)
- Based on Benchmark

**Quantitative survey questions** asked the amount of time spent on writing instruction and the
time students spend writing each week.

- **Range of time dedicated to writing instruction as reported by teachers: 45-300 minutes/week.**

  **How much time is dedicated to writing instruction?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>15-30</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>20+</th>
<th>20-30</th>
<th>20-60</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>30-90</th>
<th>35</th>
<th>60</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no of respondents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional responses: 3 days/week (2), 1 day X 45 minutes, 2X30 minutes, 1-2 X 60 minutes, 2-3 X 60 minutes, 3 X 40 minutes, varies.

- **Range of time students write during a writing period as reported by teachers: 15-90 minutes/day.**

  **How much time do students spend writing during a writing period?**

<table>
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<th>15-30</th>
<th>20-30</th>
<th>20-60</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>30-45</th>
<th>30-90</th>
<th>40</th>
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</table>

Additional responses: varies, depends on IEP

- **How do you assess students’ writing and how frequently?**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>1-2 times/term</th>
<th>2 times/month</th>
<th>weekly</th>
<th>2 times / week</th>
<th>2-3 times/ week</th>
<th>3-5X/ wk</th>
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<table>
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<th>Types of Assessments</th>
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<th>open response</th>
<th>rubrics</th>
<th>informal assis</th>
<th>conferences</th>
<th>benchmarks</th>
<th>long comp</th>
<th>peer assis</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Classroom Visits:

Over a two-day period, 17 classrooms were visited for 20-40 minutes each: 6 third grade classes, 5 fourth grade classes, and 6 fifth grade classes. A protocol sheet was filled out for each class with a quantitative section and sections for comments about the classroom environment, nature of the lesson (whole-class, small-group, topic), genre taught, instructional model and practices. Whenever possible, the classroom teacher was interviewed briefly about the context for the lesson, typical writing instruction, and use and opinion of the Empowering Writers Curriculum and other curricula. In a few classes, the co-taught teacher or instructional assistant participated in the interview. One classroom had a substitute teacher. In three or four classes, the teacher was busy teaching for the entire visit and wasn’t interviewed.

Topics and assignments observed (n=17 classrooms, some with more than one writing assignment/lesson/activity):

Open response (most from past MCAS items or MCAS-like passages) (6)
  - One more open-ended reader response to be brought to book club discussion

Lesson directly from Empowering Writers (3)
  - Adding Elaborative Detail techniques (2)
  - Writing a fully-elaborated main event (1)

Lesson using Empowering Writers (1)
  - Paragraph about “What I did over vacation.”

Project from Six Traits program – students working independently in centers (2)
  - “Diary of a (bug)” – 6 week project, resulting in pop-up book
  - Whole class lesson (1)

“Writing Excursions,” (2)
  - Bi-weekly assignments, completed at home, with specific revising and editing techniques, exploring different genres, scored with a rubric.

Narrative Writing (6)
  - “Write a well-developed paragraph telling what you did over vacation.”
  - “Snow Day”
  - “Finding a Magic Carpet”
  - Diary of a (bug) project (2) (incorporated some research/information in one class).
  - Choice of prompts from EW or students use their own.

Opinion Writing (1)
  - “Claim: Harry Houdini was the greatest magician of all time.” Students synthesize notes from two readings and a video.
Informational Writing (1)
- How-to lesson modeled by teacher – how to draw a flower, guided practice with students -- how to make a play-dough worm.
- Summary of mini-book
- Alphabet book on solar system based on Jerry Pallotta’s books, study of non-fiction text features, and study of solar-system

Revising/Editing (2)
- Video on peer revision, students have editing badges, papers go to jail if errors not corrected.
- Proofreading/editing for capitals, ending punctuation.

Breakout by grade level:

**Grade 3:** 1 narrative paragraph, 2 Empowering Writer’s Narrative lessons, 1 editing lesson, 1 open response, 1 informational piece (alphabet book on solar system).

**Grade 4:** 2 open responses, 1 Empowering Writer’s Narrative lesson, 1 informational (procedural) writing lesson, 1 editing lesson

**Grade 5:** 2 narrative projects (worked on independently during rotations), 4 classes working on open response (2 lessons, 2 independent work), 1 informational piece, 1 class working on summaries (independent work), 1 class making comic books with interjections (independent work)

Instructional Models (number of classes using each):

Whole class writing instruction: 12
Students writing independently with no lesson/conferences: 4
Small group writing instruction: 1
Individual writing conferences: 8

Quantitative Data:

The quantitative data represented in the chart below is based on a combination of observation and interviews and should be viewed as highly context-dependent. For example, in six classrooms, technology was not used in the lesson taught, referred to by the teacher, or evident in student work displayed in the classroom, in portfolios or folders, so these classrooms were rated as showing “no evidence” of technology use in writing instruction. However, it is entirely possible that any number of these teachers use technology for writing instruction at other times.
Interviews:

In addition to the brief interviews with teachers in their classrooms, two teachers and two administrators participated in 30 minute interview sessions.

Themes that emerged included: a historical lack of consistent writing instruction, low open response scores on MCAS resulting in a school-wide focus on open response writing, and
professional development over recent years through BER, Six Traits and Empowering Writers. Writing was an area of strong interest for teachers and administrators. Administrators were concerned about rigor and opportunities for students to write. The principal did some school-wide formative assessment and personally read each piece of student writing in two different genres. Administrators expressed satisfaction with the Empowering Writers resources given to each teacher in Fall, 2014 (guides to Narrative, Persuasive and Expository Writing, plus grade level guides), work done over the summer by a small group of teachers, choosing some resources from the EW materials to use at each grade level, and a half-day professional development session provided by an EW trainer. They were enthusiastic about teachers having a common resource and a school-wide emphasis on writing instruction, which they felt had been weaker than some other subject areas and “not a common practice,” across all classrooms. They felt they were “on the right track,” in terms of building consistency and strong writing instruction, and expressed a desire for increased time for professional development, to continue building on the work that had begun.

Teachers interviewed appreciated the past focus on open response writing, during which each grade level had chosen a common graphic organizer, although some felt that the organizers lacked vertical alignment, and that the two BER workshops on open response had given conflicting messages. Many teachers were happy to have a common resource (Empowering Writers) and professional development and every person interviewed made positive comments about the EW materials. Some liked the graphic organizers, some the common language and others the quantity of sample writing to analyze. While some teachers appreciated the themes in the grade level guides and were able to incorporate the recommended literature, others did not like the restrictions of the themes and preferred to pull from the genre-specific resources to tie writing into other curricular themes from reading or content areas. A few thought the PD was rushed and “not considerate of learning styles,” and some mentioned being “overwhelmed” by the volume of resources. Both teachers and administrators referred to simultaneous competing initiatives in math and other areas, which combined to make a “here you go,” philosophy, covering several areas, with little depth.

Several teachers expressed a desire for clearer and more consistent expectations for writing instruction across the school, a “need for structure,” or an “outline,” for the year. They spoke of “randomness,” and “inconsistency” from teacher to teacher, describing a need to “find your own path,” and “piece things together” from various resources and trainings. Because of the large number of teachers at each grade level, children enter a class with widely varied experiences from the previous year. Many teachers wanted more time for professional development in Empowering Writers, as well as time to meet with teams and grade levels to look at materials and plan instruction. A few teachers wondered how to best fit writing instruction into the literacy block. Some wondered how to tie together the EW organizers and practices with the open response organizers and practices.

Emerging Patterns from Observations, Interviews and Surveys:

Strengths of Alden School writing program:

- Teachers have received some common professional development as well as some high quality resources for writing instruction.
A school-wide focus on open-response writing has led to a common practice of extensive work on open-response: grade-level organizers, frequent instruction and practice.

Many teachers integrated technology for instruction, as well as in various parts of student writing processes. Many teachers used document cameras, projectors and smart boards to mark passages together, plan writing, fill out organizers and look at pieces for revision and editing ideas. Some students were drafting on computers and one teacher had a project which used voice recordings, activated by QR codes.

Several teachers had begun using aspects of the Empowering Writers program, developing common language and practices.

In several classrooms teachers conferred with students individually, giving differentiated feedback.

In six classrooms, students were observed collaborating to work on reading passages and formulating open-responses.

In many classes, teachers were purposeful in their instruction, focusing on different genres each term, using a gradual release of responsibility model to foster independence.

In most classrooms students were compliant and worked diligently, producing sufficient volume of writing, and employing some organizational structures, craft and elaboration techniques, and grade-appropriate use of conventions.

Teachers used a number of scaffolding techniques to support writers – printed directions, analysis of EW writing samples, graphic organizers, teacher modeling.

Teams of two-three classroom teachers and sometimes special education teachers collaborated to plan writing instruction, teach lessons and confer with students.

Limitations of writing instruction:

1. **Variability in Time for Writing Instruction and Student Writing**
   Writing is incorporated into both the daily two-hour literacy block and homework assignments at teachers’ individual discretion. This results in wide variability in instructional time and time students spend writing each day, week, and term. Much writing research has shown that major factors in student growth include frequent, explicit writing instruction and amount of student writing time.

2. **Inconsistent Practice**
   Although every teacher interviewed has taken some steps toward using the Empowering Writers resources and practices, there is considerable variability in genres taught, language used, instructional scope and sequence, and quantity of teacher modeling, analysis of sample writing, guided practice, and formative assessment. There was some consistency among teachers on the same teams, who planned together, but little across each grade level.

3. **Student Choice, Agency, Authentic Purposes and Audiences for Writing**
   With a few exceptions, all writing topics and prompts were assigned by teachers, with teachers as the primary audience/readers/evaluators. When students were asked, “What are you working on today?” they invariably responded with the topic or the prompt: “I’m writing about what I did over vacation,” or “I’m filling out a graphic organizer to write an open-response about ____.” Even with significant follow-up questions, not a single student asked was able to identify the genre s/he was writing or the specific techniques or
structures s/he was employing to make the writing interesting, clear, or structured. Only three classrooms showed evidence of students choosing their own topics – one in free-write journals, never read by anyone but the writers.

4. Teacher/Student Talk
The prevalent instructional mode for whole class and small groups lessons was teacher-centered, Initiate-Respond-Evaluate or “ping-pong” questioning, characterized by the teacher asking a question, a single student answering, and the teacher evaluating, affirming or correcting the student’s answer.

A few notable exceptions included one classroom, in which the teacher worked very successfully at the “teaching table,” with small groups of students, who also listened to and responded to one another’s writing. In a few classrooms, students collaborated to find evidence in passages and plan their open-response writing together. In one classroom, peers helped one another to edit mechanics.

5. Variable Instructional Practice/Student Engagement
There were some excellent writing instructors at Alden School. Their students were enthusiastic about writing and highly engaged in purposeful writing tasks with focus, stamina, collaboration and volume. In a couple of classes, several students were disengaged and a few were disruptive and required refocusing or even changing seats. Even though the MCAS was just a few weeks away, these students were much further from being independent at open response tasks. The teachers were using high levels of scaffolding, using modeling and shared writing, releasing little responsibility to students. In one class, in spite of the teacher’s claim that she had only worked on open response so far this year, because she thought that was the expectation from the district, it was clear that students did not yet understand the concept of topic or concluding sentences, much less how to write them.

Recommendations:

These recommendations fall into two categories: Increasing the consistency of writing instruction, and highly effective instructional practices to support student writing. Some recommendations could be implemented relatively quickly and easily, while others would require long-term investment and effort.

Increasing the consistency of writing instruction:

Administrators and many teachers expressed a desire for more consistent practice in writing. While some teachers appreciated that they were given resources and choice to use their professional judgment, as opposed to being handed a curriculum, many others articulated a need for greater consistency. With so many different classrooms in a grade, a need for a “guaranteed curriculum” is even more crucial. Just as fourth grade teachers can be certain that the third grade math curriculum has covered topics such as calculating area and perimeter or multiplying and dividing one and two digit numbers, specific topics in third grade writing instruction should be equally clear. The writing curriculum, genre-specific strategies, techniques and expectations at each grade level should be transparent to teachers, students and parents. There are many ways to support consistency, some of which include:
1. **Keep writing “on the front burner,” as a school-wide focus: reduce the number of conflicting initiatives.** This would include providing additional training and PD sessions (likely in Empowering Writers), and additional time for teachers to work on writing in teams as well as among and across grade levels. It would also include communication with students and parents about goals and objectives.

2. **Create guidelines for instructional time, student writing time and volume for each grade level.** Teachers, students and families should know how much time per day or per week teachers are directly instructing students in writing, and how many minutes students are spending writing each day or week, both at home and at school. Also expectations for volume should be consistent by grade level (for example, ¼ of a page at a sitting by January of third grade, a page by January of fourth grade, one-and-a-half pages by the end of fifth grade).

3. **Create a schoolwide model of how writing is incorporated into the literacy block.** Is it taught in rotations at the teacher table, in whole class lessons, or some combination? How often do teachers confer with individual students?

4. **Articulate some degree of scope and sequence.** This could be done on a month by month basis, or even term by term. What are expectations for instruction in each genre, in open response, or in poetry, which is a Massachusetts state standard not covered in the Empowering Writers genre guides. How much should instruction rely on EW practices such as analyzing sample texts, reading related trade books and filling out summary frames about these books, teacher modeling, gradual release of responsibility?

5. **Increase the environmental supports/resources in classrooms.** Every classroom could post specific writing objectives. Poster-sized versions of the narrative diamond, the expository pillar, and the EW summary frame could be displayed on writing sections of walls, along with current strategies being taught (elaborating on the main event, writing leads, etc). Students could have copies of these resources in writing binders or folders. Classrooms could have writing centers with resources and supplies for drafting revision and editing.

6. **Provide opportunities for conversation and alignment with grade levels above and below.** Teachers could talk both among and across grade levels within the school. Also, third and fifth grade teachers could have conversations and look at student work with teachers from Chandler School and Duxbury Middle School, to plan some continuity of experience across schools.

7. **Reexamine benchmark assessments.** What do they look like now and how are they being used? **How could they be used better?** Common performance assessments could be given across grades (even K-5 or 3-8). These assessments could be aligned with the writing program to measure growth in the three genres. Teachers could meet to look at student work in common and practice calibrating scoring with a rubric, then plan instruction in response to student needs. Students could also use the assessments to measure and reflect on their own growth.
8. **Continue refining practices around open response writing.**

Instruction in open response writing was one of the most prevalent practices viewed and discussed, yet the quality instruction varied considerably from class to class, even among partner teachers. Please see the recommendation below on providing opportunities for teachers to visit one another’s classrooms.

**Supporting the quality of writing instruction and student writing:**

Again, both administrators and many teachers expressed concerns about rigor and expectations in writing. Some recommendations to support these areas include:

1. **Increase time and expectations for teachers to meet together to plan writing instruction and assessment using common materials, as well as to look at student work.** Teachers should develop a cycle of sharing formative assessments and ongoing student writing, creating common goals for students and planning subsequent instruction. Empowering Writers suggests several mentor texts to accompany each genre. Some of these titles could be selected by teachers, purchased and incorporated into reading instruction.

2. **Provide opportunities for teachers to visit one another’s classrooms to observe writing instruction.** Teachers demonstrated some excellent instructional practices. In some classrooms, every student was highly engaged. In others, students wrote with great volume. There were highly effective and purposeful cross-curricular writing projects. Teachers would benefit from watching one another’s best practices, building common understandings and teaching repertoires. Viewing videotapes would be another way to look at practice together. If possible, groups of teachers could even visit other schools using Empowering Writers effectively, or even with other strong writing programs.

3. **Increase student choice and agency.**

Students would benefit from more choice in topic, purpose and audience for their writing. Teachers could plan authentic purposes and audiences for all genres of writing, in which students would choose their own topics. In addition, goals for writing need to be clear to students, so they know not just the topics or assignments they are working on, but the genre-specific structures and techniques employed, their purposes, and how their use makes writing more effective. For example, instead of responding, “I’m writing about what I did on my winter vacation,” a student might explain, “I’m elaborating on the main event of my vacation, when I skied over moguls on a black-diamond trail, by using dialogue, sensory details, and thoughts and feelings to show suspense and how I was so scared to do this.” Additionally, students would benefit from using self-assessment tools such as checklists or rubrics to clarify and set their own goals and assess their own progress, reflecting on their benchmark assessments and their ongoing writing.

4. **Increase student - student talk and interaction.**

Techniques such as turn and talk, think-pair-share, would encourage higher-level thinking and twenty-first century skills, including collaborating, communicating and critical thinking, as well as encouraging students to see themselves as owners of knowledge, rather than the teacher as repositories of all correct answers.

*Duxbury Public Schools Writing Program Report – 55*
5. **Build a professional library for teachers with print and video resources on writing, speaking and listening, and assessment.**

It has been a pleasure to work with the teachers, administrators and students of the Alden Elementary School. I applaud the effort to bring a unified writing program to the school and the initiative to reflect on current practices and steer a course toward more consistency across the district.

Sincerely,

Deana Lew  
Boston Writing Project Teacher-Consultant
Summary:

The Massachusetts Writing Project was contacted by Laurie Hunter, Assistant Superintendent of Duxbury Public Schools, to review the district’s K-12 writing curriculum. Ms. Hunter met with Ms. Diana Grady, Director of the Buzzards Bay Writing Project (Massachusetts Southeast Chapter). The charge of the writing group was to review the K-12 writing program by examining the district’s curriculum documents, interviewing administrators and teachers and observing teacher instruction and student learning in classrooms. Donna Callanan is the representative of the Massachusetts Writing Project to review K-2 writing curriculum at Chandler School in Duxbury. This process was accomplished by designing and conducting surveys to be completed anonymously by both administrators and teachers, along with site visits on February 23, 2015 and February 24, 2015. Chandler School visits included informal meetings with several kindergarten, first grade and second grade teachers followed by classroom observations. These classroom observations included three kindergarten, two first grade and three second grade classes during each calendar visit. Ms. Wiesehahn, Curriculum Supervisor PS-2, and Principal Billingham met with this reviewer to discuss Empowering Writers that has been adopted as their writing program as well as other topics associated with the work of curriculum review.

Strengths and limitations of the Duxbury writing curriculum have been analyzed and identified. A particular area of strength found in each observed class was the teachers’ and students’ interest and commitment to writing as a necessary twenty-first tool of communication. Students were engaged in purposeful writing assignments. Whole group instruction for those assignments limited the time that students had to practice the lessons that were consistently and expertly modeled by the teachers. This whole-class instructional technique limited student collaboration and peer support in the review of each other’s ideas and skills. Grammar and mechanics were strengths demonstrated in both instruction and student practice. As evidenced through the surveys there are inconsistencies with the allocation of time in K-2 for both opportunities to write and formal lessons in writing. Differentiating for student range in ability was limited, thereby limiting the individual growth of each student. Through scaffolding teachers provided a step-by-step construction of the desired skills and concepts to be learned.

Design of the Review Process:

The following steps were followed for the review:

1. Determine objectives.
2. Establish specific criteria and protocols against which the effectiveness of student learning would be assessed.
3. Design surveys and other instruments to gather data and collect evidence.
4. Collect data through meetings and classroom observations.
5. Analyze collected data to compare to and contrast with criteria and protocols.
6. Draw conclusions.
7. Write a summary of findings including strengths, limitations and recommendations to achieve improved writing instruction and learning.

Objectives:
1. To study and recommend revisions to the current curriculum guide and curriculum mapping documents
2. To determine the effectiveness and functionality of these documents in reference to the current writing program goals (as in Empowering Writers) and areas of focus in writing across the grade levels, instructional strategies, assessment tools and resources
3. To analyze data from site visits and align to criteria and protocols
4. To present recommendations to achieve standard-based organized curriculum as well as a scope and sequence with the ability for revision of instruction, resources and professional development

Criteria/Protocols:
1. Common Core State Standards
2. National Writing Project’s mission to focus on the knowledge, expertise and leadership of educators to improve writing and learning for all students
3. Noted, published authors and researchers of how students learn to write and progress through the process of writing
4. Necessary effective, manageable classroom practices that help students to produce and recognize a well-written piece in all genres of writing
5. NCTE’s mission supports research and recognition of writing as the primary tool of thinking, learning and communication.

Survey Data:

The Chandler School Survey (Appendix C) was completed by eleven teachers K-2, approximately seventy percent of the classroom teachers at Chandler School. The first two questions on the survey addressed time opportunities for writing per day and formal writing instruction per week. The results are:

1. Opportunity to write daily in kindergarten ranges from 30-120 minutes per day. In grade one there is a range from 20-120 minutes of informal writing per day. Second grade students have an opportunity to write daily from 60-120 minutes.
2. Formal writing lessons in kindergarten range from 30-60 minutes per week. In first grade formal writing lessons range from 45-100 minutes per week, and in second grade formal writing instruction ranges between 30-60 minutes per week.

Results in the types of writing such as shared writing, guided writing, interactive and
independent writing in which students engage are:

1. All kindergarten, first and second grade students write independently.
2. All kindergarten students participate in shared writing.
3. Three of the four kindergarten teachers are active in guided writing instruction.
4. All first and second grade teachers engage in guided writing practice with their students.
5. One of four kindergarten classes writes interactively.
6. One of three first grade classes writes interactively.
7. One of the four second grade classes writes interactively.

Professional growth opportunities such as horizontal and vertical articulation and professional development to implement current writing curriculum resulted in the following information:

1. All kindergarten, first and second grade teachers attend monthly meetings across grade level as well as regular, informal collegial conversations.
2. There is no indication of planned vertical articulation opportunities for teachers.
3. Professional development includes Six Traits Writing and Empowering Writers on a yearly basis.
4. All teachers surveyed indicate a need for further training in the Empowering Writers program.
5. Training in writing workshop was indicated as an interest.

Among the strengths that teachers recognize in their students are the following:

1. Kindergarten teachers include creativity, willingness to use invented spelling, independent thinkers and journal writing.
2. All kindergarten teachers indicate the difficulty of transferring spoken ideas to written form and revision.
3. Two of three first grade teachers respond with grammar and mechanics as strengths while one of the first grade teachers indicates that adding details to writing is a strength with her students.
4. First grade teachers indicate difficulty for students to understand what a sentence is and write one, sticking to one topic or the main idea in a piece of writing.
5. The responses regarding student strengths from the second grade teachers vary from creative ideas and organization with paragraph form to use of adjectives.
6. Second grade teachers indicate weaknesses with nonfiction writing, open response, editing/revising, voice and word choice.

The text types or genres of writing that students write are as follows:

1. All kindergarten, first and second grade students write in the narrative genre.
2. Two of the four kindergarten teachers indicate their students write opinion pieces.
3. All first grade teachers surveyed teach and use opinion writing with their students.
4. Two of the second grade teachers indicate that their students write opinion pieces.
5. Three of the four kindergarten teachers indicate their students write for/with information.
6. Three of the four second grade teachers actively engage their students in information writing.
The teachers indicate that their students express their learning by writing as follows:

1. All kindergarten students express their learning by writing in science, social studies and less often in math.
2. All first grade students express their learning by writing in science and social studies, but less often in math.
3. All second grade students express their learning in writing most often in science and social studies and half as often in math.

Some areas of interest and need for professional development for kindergarten, first and second grade teachers include the following:

1. Writers’ Workshop
2. Empowering Writers
3. Structured writing programs with scope and sequence
4. Implementing Empowering Writers

**Protocol for Classroom Visits:**

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Analysis of Protocol:

Strengths:

There was strong evidence of modeling the skill or concept to be learned in all kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms visited. This structured practice demonstrated the desired goals and outcomes of lessons. Additionally, teachers used sample products or performances to indicate quality of expectations. In grade two classrooms the teachers modeled how to improve writing; that is, making revisions. They offered specific use of adverbs to enhance imagery and add detail to the piece of writing. In kindergarten shared writing was modeled on the whiteboard to demonstrate the use of high frequency words, what a good sentence is and its connection to what good writers do. In grade one, one teacher modeled the name word, the noun, and students generated describing words—adjectives. The teacher modeled various pairs of nouns and adjectives to expand student understanding of an adjective. Choice allowed students to select what and how they will learn, but teachers controlled their choice to a particular structure. All observed classrooms followed these procedures with their students. The structure was determined by the teacher, while the vehicles and products of their learning were within control of student choice. A kindergarten mini-lesson centered on the use of speech bubbles. The purpose of the students’ learning was clearly stated as well as the use of a speech bubble. Students could use this technique in their journals. In a first grade class adjectives were the focus of the whole group instruction. Clear directions were stated by the teacher. She indicated to students to write a noun as well as adding an adjective to describe the noun in their writing today. Elaborative detail was the trait observed in all second grade classes. The Show, Don’t Tell strategy was demonstrated by teachers to engage the students. By the exaggeration of this technique by the teacher, students maintained attention and demonstrated deeper understanding of the concept. Further evidence in the strengths of the current writing program was in scaffolding and chunking. Connecting previous learned background knowledge to new information enabled students to create a whole idea that is connected and complete. In kindergarten, and grades one and two, teachers effectively demonstrated this skill to increase student understanding and thinking. Students and teachers in all visited classes were involved in digital learning. Ease in the use of technological skills was evidence of frequent practice and training, particularly with teachers.

Limitations:

Writing process, formative assessments, individual student conferencing, student collaboration, peer editing/revising and sharing, time consistency across the grade level, and challenging, rigorous content in writing were limited.

It is difficult to assess writing process as a whole in eight forty-minute classroom visits spanning...
three grade levels. My observations were limited due to this time constraint. Latitude and consideration of this point is recognized and allowed for in this report. Scaffolding and chunking are instructional techniques regularly used in the observed classes. Expansion of these concepts is needed to encompass the process itself, that is prewriting, drafting, sharing personal writing as well as peer reviews for conferring, revising and editing. The rereading and quick assessment both by student and teacher enables identification of specific differences from piece to piece indicating documented growth.

Formative assessments are concerned with performance, processes and products. They take place during the students’ learning time to provide immediate feedback to both teachers and learners regarding the effectiveness of the teacher’s instructional procedures. During whole group times and during independent practice of the skills presented in the formal lesson, there was no evidence of either planned or spontaneous evaluation of student learning. Most teachers used the model in whole group with students raising their hands and one student responding to the teacher’s question. This instructional model limits the number of students able to demonstrate their learning. No zone of proximal development can be assessed and teacher instruction adjusted to it because the student feedback is usually limited to one learner.

In kindergarten and grade one classrooms small group instruction was ongoing. However, the format was to present a mini lesson geared to the ability grouping of the students assembled. No individual conferencing was observed in this arena. In the writing workshop environment, students volunteer to conference with their teachers due to their specific needs or to ask questions to address writing skills. Conferencing supports and maintains individual growth. This form of dialogue leads and lends itself to conversations about writing, whether it is between adult and student or student and student. Student collaboration on writing is an essential component of good writing. Writers’ groups occur among the most celebrated and successful professional writers. ”Buddy writing” is a foundational skill in the writing process to specifically share, reread, edit, revise and ultimately enrich writing pieces. There was an absence of evidence in students’ participation in these peer interactions.

In the kindergarten classes there was evidence of students reading above grade level texts. Some of the center activities contained packets of stapled sheets to be completed by the students. For students who already are fluent readers, more rigorous activities are appropriate and recommended. In one kindergarten class students were involved in an ongoing unit on penguins. Some students were copying letters to form words associated with penguins. Unfortunately, the students could not read the words and so lacked meaning for or connections to the words. It was an exercise of handwriting rather than the development of good writing. There was also an absence of texts about penguins except one picture book with sophisticated text. The literacy skills stated in CCSS need to be embedded in the center activities in kindergarten, not necessarily the facts about penguins. Embedding the higher level thinking skills for more advanced learners can also be adapted to a unit on penguins. Critical thinking, analyzing, comparing/contrasting, and synthesizing are not beyond the abilities of kindergarteners, but rather are essential skills to be explored, developed and even mastered. In second grade classes there was evidence of rigor in content. One second grade class dispersed into small groups from the whole group lesson to talk about what they learned and then record information and examples of adverbs. The students also created a chart of “ly” words, read texts with “ly” words and then used adverbs in their
writing. The application of that knowledge in their writing elevated the level of sustained knowledge and recall.

Recommendations:

The curriculum maps require additions and revisions to content. Replacement of the Massachusetts Framework Standards to CCSS affirms conformation to prevailing norms. Individual skills are listed, using repetitive language of the standard. To further teacher understanding of expectations, expanded specificity and clarification of what is needed to achieve student mastery of a skill are advised. The activities and plans that teachers use along with resources, both text and technology, are valuable components of a curriculum map. As teachers’ practice broadens in each skill area, so will the map. The map becomes a “live” document as teachers add their best practices to student success in that particular standard and skill. (See Appendix D for an example from the Chatham, N.J., Public Schools). Curriculum maps need to address the writing process from grade level to grade level with the addition of a portfolio assessment tool. The portfolios include the students’ exemplar writing piece at each grade level. Scope and sequence charts and continuum documents increase rigor vertically and horizontally. Professional development to establish professional learning communities that focus on writing is strongly recommended. PLC’s facilitate student literacy growth both across grade levels and vertically in a school district. Teachers’ isolation to one classroom of students is replaced with a collaborative community of teachers who share practice, achievement, and other forms of data to ensure success for students. Commitment to cross –curricula writing is needed to provide for multiple planned assignments that apply and extend writing skills through regular daily practice. The writing workshop model is a daily time to balance the intricacies of early literacy. Particularly, in primary education literacy, early learners require a blending of all English Language skills that include listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teacher training in the process of writing (workshop model) is urged to attain continued proficiency and mastery of state standards.

The development of a professional library in the school library ensures ongoing professional growth. Authors who are leaders in the field, Katie Wood Ray, Elin Keene, Donald Graves, Ruth Culham, Georgia Heard, and Donald Murray, to name only a few, are excellent resources for teachers of writing. The expansion of classroom libraries for students needs further development. Guided reading and writing texts need to be available to students in their classrooms for rereading and buddy reading of texts with which students are already familiar. At Chandler School it appears that these texts are stored in a common resource room. Teachers borrow and return the materials to share regularly with their colleagues. This system prevents the opportunity for rereading of materials with which early literacy learners have some development and mastery. Rereading of texts promotes fluency and comprehension. Further endorsements include the increase of the quantity of leveled readers in the individual classrooms that are “owned” by its members. Other additional resources for individual classrooms are mentor texts that correspond to Empowering Writers. When students have direct evidence of strategies that published authors use, their awareness is heightened and their motivation is optimized.

Cooperative learning structures are recommended to replace the frequency of whole-group instruction. Recommendations of particular community-building activities include teambuilding structures such as the T-Shirt activity, All About Me Question Cards and Find-the-Fiction.
Response Cards. Class building structures include class meetings, class books, Find Someone Who… and simultaneous sharing. Thinking structures include Locked Out, Fairy Tale Cube, How Much? and If You Were…. Management structures include the quiet signal, room arrangement, class rules, class thermometer, noise clock and sponges. Center activities for kindergarten and first grade that promote text dependent activities for rereading and critical thinking are recommended. The National Council of Teachers of English, sites of the National Writing Project, and ReadWriteThink are excellent resources for literacy lessons that develop many strategies referred to in this report. Evidence of thinking and learning with specificity of products and outcomes are also embedded into many of the plans that are posted on these websites.

I thank Ms. Billingham, Ms. Wiesehahn and the kindergarten, first and second grade teachers who volunteered their classrooms for my observation. The dedication to your students is obvious. The commitment to your work, your own professional growth and the success of the students is commendable. Thanks extend to Ms. Hunter for undertaking this process and for allowing the Massachusetts Writing Project to be an integral part.
Appendix

A. Duxbury High School Survey Responses

B. Sample Scope and Sequence from DYS ELA Curriculum Guide

C. Chandler School Survey

D. Sample Unit Plan: Reading Informational Texts (from the Chatham, N.J. Public Schools)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. What is your role at Duxbury High School?</th>
<th>2. Duxbury High School has a culture of writing.</th>
<th>3. In my department / program, writing is taught, not just assigned.</th>
<th>4. In my department / program, students demonstrate learning by writing.</th>
<th>5. In my department / program, students learn new content by writing.</th>
<th>6. Responsibility for writing is shared across the curriculum at Duxbury High.</th>
<th>What sort of training, individual or in school-based professional development, have you received in teaching writing?</th>
<th>Please list examples or add explanations as needed for the items above.</th>
<th>What do you think are the chief strengths of the Duxbury High School writing program?</th>
<th>What aspects of the Duxbury High School writing program do you think most need improvement?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher - English</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>I have taken many college courses on the teaching of writing, however have not had the opportunity to take a in school-based course or professional development. For my time at Duxbury most of the professional development has been geared toward the integration of technology rather than writing or other aspects of the curriculum.</td>
<td>Students learn to write many different types of papers: formal and informal; creative and informational; Persuasive and Expository, etc. This gives them a chance to see their strengths and weaknesses in writing.</td>
<td>We need a progressive grammar curriculum.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher - English</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>John Connors &amp; WIT Bard</td>
<td>Based on my conversations with colleagues in non-English departments, I have found that many are reluctant to &quot;teach&quot; writing, because they are not confident about assessing grammar and mechanics. A real &quot;writing across the curriculum&quot; would require some Professional Development that would reinforce all teachers' skills and train them to assess writing in a consistent manner.</td>
<td>The volume of writing that our students produce. They are comfortable writing in a variety of situations, both impromptu and planned.</td>
<td>The volume of writing that our students produce. It is virtually impossible to take a piece of writing through an adequate revision process with the number of essays required at the high school each term. We also spend so much time and emphasis on the five paragraph essay that students find it difficult to write anything else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher - English</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Boston Writing Project (years ago) John Collins Writing Program Harvard School of Education (using classroom as laboratory), also years ago</td>
<td>In ELA, most students write to learn, but this is indigenous pretty much to ELA......whereas I believe that a stellar writing program would work across disciplines.</td>
<td>topic development the teaching of grammar,....a grammar program.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher - English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>I attended workshops for English when I worked for previous schools, but the only conference I have attended while employed at DHS was a technology conference. School-based professional development on writing is rare to nonexistent.</td>
<td>Assignments, revision time, specific instruction in writing in English classes.</td>
<td>Department meeting time for department members to share techniques for teaching writing. This could be both within and between departments. Under our current schedule, department and faculty meeting time is used to introduce new technology and discuss evaluation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher - English</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Our students do write to demonstrate their understanding.</td>
<td>We do so much that we do not have time for the process – feedback is often the grade.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher - English</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I have received training through the Master's program I attended. Courses that included information regarding teaching writing were Reading and Communication in Secondary Schools, Secondary and Middle School Methods, and Classroom Assessment. I feel that I would benefit from having the opportunity to take part in school-based professional development regarding teaching writing.</td>
<td>Students are writing frequently and are required to complete one long written assignment each semester, along with many smaller assessments. Students have many opportunities to practice with different types of writing.</td>
<td>Draft writing and having the time to conference with students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher - English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>The students must write a minimum of 4 multi-paragraph compositions per term.</td>
<td>There needs to be more writing across the curriculum – not just a concentration in English and history.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What is your role at Duxbury High School?</td>
<td>2. Duxbury High School has a culture of writing.</td>
<td>3. In my department / program, writing is taught, not just assigned.</td>
<td>4. In my department / program, students demonstrate new learning by writing.</td>
<td>5. In my department / program, students learn new content by writing.</td>
<td>6. Responsibility for writing is shared across the curriculum at Duxbury High.</td>
<td>What sort of training, individual or in school-based professional development, have you received in teaching writing?</td>
<td>Please list examples or add explanations as needed for the items above.</td>
<td>What do you think are the chief strengths of the Duxbury High School writing program?</td>
<td>What aspects of the Duxbury High School writing program do you think need most improvement?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher - English</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Most of my school-based professional development has been in technology implementation rather than teaching writing. My individual training in teaching writing stems from my undergraduate and graduate studies.</td>
<td>One of the chief strengths of the DHSH writing program is that students write regularly, in large amounts, in multiple forms (e.g., essays, research papers, etc.). Students are used to rigorously writing.</td>
<td>I believe that the DHS writing program needs to allow for more time for teachers to conference with students individually in order to provide more substantial feedback, and to hold writing workshops that enable students to focus on specific areas of writing. While there is a benefit to having students write as much as they do, I fear that students are missing out on opportunities to truly practice and improve upon specific writing strategies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher - English</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>AP Institute Writing Great Fiction course Writing Creative Non-fiction course</td>
<td>The various types of essays (argument, analytical, research, etc.), as well as the frequency</td>
<td>To try to have students move beyond the limits of the five-paragraph essay More opportunities for creative writing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher - English, Classroom teacher - other content area</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>BC: Degree in English, Suma Cum Laude BC: M. Ed. BU: Doctoral work Robert Pinsky’s Summer Poetry Institute at BU (took it one summer; recommend secondary education facilitator for five years) Class and workshops: short story, poetry, non-fiction Arthur Vining Davis Foundation grant; collaborated with teachers from Georgia, Alaska, and Pennsylvania about teaching students to write plays Boston Writing Project Georgia Heard and Barry Lane Collaboration with department colleagues and area teachers</td>
<td>#6: we do have a culture that fosters writing across the disciplines, but I’m not sure if it done. We focus on process and skills needed to become confident and accomplished writers. Students must write a minimum of four essays a term, of varied type. Freshmen also do a minimum of one MCAS related open response per month. We also focus on teacher editing, peer editing, and self-editing as a means to learn and become better writers. Speaking just for myself, my students do a lot of (various types) of writing, both as individuals and collaboratively. More collaborative writing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher - other content area, Department chair / supervisor / coach, Administrator</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>My responses do not reflect the work of the ELA department, they are simply the observations that I have made in my own department. DHS has a common scoring rubric to assess writing.</td>
<td>I believe that non-ELA contents need time to process how to adapt the writing rubric so that it includes our content specifications at each unit level. My staff has no training on how to formally assess writing in our content nor on teaching writing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department chair / supervisor / coach</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Academic Merit</td>
<td>School-wide rubrics 6-12 supervisory structure Recent collaboration between ELA and Social Studies Frequency of writing assignments</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Department chair / supervisor / coach</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>I have received training in a previous district on writing across the curriculum and participated in a district wide initiative to encourage writing in all content areas.</td>
<td>I'm sure this is done in other departments, however my department specifically does not write enough.</td>
<td>I am too unfamiliar to comment. So I will say Karen Baynes.</td>
<td>Writing in Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department chair / supervisor / coach</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>I do think that writing is a major piece of the ELA curriculum and it is assigned in other departments but I do not think it is shared responsibility with other departments.</td>
<td>If you look at the SAT scores in terms of writing, we seem to be behind so I think perhaps it needs to be more of a focus within all departments and should perhaps be a major part of the freshmen curriculum. I am also not sure that the middle school does in terms of writing as many parents report as their child transitions to high school that they do not feel as though their child writes well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department chair / supervisor / coach</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Calibrated scoring of essays (training for Academic Merit) - English and Social Studies teachers, 2013-2014.</td>
<td>In the English department, students are required to produce at least four pieces of multi-paragraph writing (narrative, expository, or persuasive) per term. Overall, other departments seem to be increasing the amount of writing they require from students, but there is still disparity across departments. English teachers definitely teach elements of writing; I am not sure how writing is taught (vs. assigned) in other departments. I would like us to have school-wide conversations on this topic.</td>
<td>Teachers in the English department understand that they are expected to have students write regularly. However, teachers have the freedom to choose topics and genres.</td>
<td>Writing is too big a subject to be taught by only one or two departments. I think that writing is taught in the English department, but perhaps only assigned in other departments. I would like to see the task of actually teaching writing to be shared across all departments. This will involve, in part, holding teachers accountable for having their students produce a certain amount of writing each term. Teachers in the English department struggle to teach grammar--mostly because of time, but partly because some of the younger teachers perhaps weren't taught grammar themselves and so aren't comfortable with it. &quot;English&quot; is essentially two subjects--grammar/writing, and literature. It is hard to do both in one period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Academic Merit</td>
<td>I think our students have a lot of strengths. One important strength, I think, is their ability to write in a variety of ways and within a variety of subjects.</td>
<td>None at this time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>The chief strengths is that students are required to write multiple research papers.</td>
<td>Communication between departments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>John Collins writing.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>High expectations, rubrics, and communication within the department.</td>
<td>more modeling with exemplars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>received limited training through Landmark School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>well-developed graphic organizers</td>
<td>students do not place as much value on graded essays as they do on tests/project school assessments... need to look at how to change this mindset teacher time spent individually conferencing with students about how to improve their own writing is limited increased opportunities to revise graded essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Academic, workshops, experience</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Many special ed students cannot write grade-appropriate arguments to support claims in an analysis of topics/texts. Difficulties w/reasoning and providing relevant or sufficient evidence. Difficulty writing opinion pieces supporting a point of view with reasons or information. Difficulty writing explanatory text to examine a topic or convey ideas. Difficulty writing narratives w/descriptive details and clear sequence. Editing and revision is a big hurdle.</td>
<td>The basics</td>
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</table>

**Mean Scores (n=20) and Most Frequent Comments**

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Scores (n=20)</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>Past training ranges from extensive to none. Several comments that Duxbury PD has focused on technology rather than other aspects of writing.</td>
<td>The extent to which writing is taught across the curriculum is unclear/unknown. Special education students struggle with some aspects of writing.</td>
<td>Range and frequency of writing expectations; emphasis on teaching writing process, especially in complex genres. More time for process, collaboration, and student conferences. More WAC. More grammar. Less emphasis on 5F essays.</td>
<td></td>
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**Mean Scores (n=10) of ELA Teachers**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Scores (n=10)</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>of ELA Teachers</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Chapter 3, Section 1  |  Massachusetts DYS Education Initiative—English Language Arts—2014 Edition

### Appendix B. Sample Scope & Sequence from DYS Curriculum Guide

#### SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

**Scope and Sequence Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seasons</th>
<th>Essential Questions</th>
<th>Emphasized Standards</th>
<th>Reading Complex Texts: RL/RI10</th>
<th>1-2 Extended Texts</th>
<th>3-5 Supplementary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exploring Traditions</strong>&lt;br&gt;Sept.-Oct. Literature Focus</td>
<td>What is the meaning of life? How do we know what is right and wrong? How much control do we have over our own lives?</td>
<td>W1. Write arguments to support claims in analysis of texts, use reasoning. &lt;br&gt;W2. Write informative or explanatory texts to examine complex ideas.</td>
<td>Classic Literature: The Odyssey &lt;br&gt;Antigone &lt;br&gt;Romeo and Juliet &lt;br&gt;Othello &lt;br&gt;Of Mice and Men &lt;br&gt;A Raisin in the Sun</td>
<td>Literary Nonfiction: Night &lt;br&gt;Black Boy &lt;br&gt;Coming of Age in Miss. When I Was Puerto Rican &lt;br&gt;Hunger of Memory &lt;br&gt;God Grew Tired of Us</td>
<td>Literature: Poems and songs based on main text &lt;br&gt;Film clips (different versions of story) &lt;br&gt;Theme-related stories (including from the Bible)</td>
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<td><strong>Finding a Voice</strong>&lt;br&gt;Nov.-Dec. Writing Focus</td>
<td>What do I have to say to the world? What are my various identities and how do they intersect? How do my community and I influence and shape each other?</td>
<td>W3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events. &lt;br&gt;W4. Analyze how and why individuals, events, ideas develop and interact.</td>
<td>Literary Nonfiction: Night &lt;br&gt;Black Boy &lt;br&gt;Coming of Age in Miss. When I Was Puerto Rican &lt;br&gt;Hunger of Memory &lt;br&gt;God Grew Tired of Us</td>
<td>Literary: Poetry of personal experience &lt;br&gt;Vignettes Feature films on related themes (presented as art works for analysis)</td>
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<td><strong>Expanding Horizons</strong>&lt;br&gt;Jan.-Feb. Literature Focus</td>
<td>Who lives in the “global village”? What is culture? How do we understand our culture in relation to others? How do people react to “otherness”?</td>
<td>W5. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects.</td>
<td>Informational Text: Nickel and Dimed &lt;br&gt;Fast Food Nation &lt;br&gt;Freakonomics &lt;br&gt;Outliers The New Jim Crow Earth Better</td>
<td>Literature: Myths, legends, and folk tales from several traditions &lt;br&gt;Short stories from a variety of cultures &lt;br&gt;World music</td>
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<td><strong>Reaching an Audience</strong>&lt;br&gt;March-April Writing Focus</td>
<td>Who’s listening out there? What are the most effective techniques of persuasion, and how can we use them responsibly? How can mass media promote social justice?</td>
<td>W6. Use technology to produce/publish writing and interact/collaborate.</td>
<td>Modern Literature: Pygmalion &lt;br&gt;Their Eyes Were Watching God &lt;br&gt;The Curious Incident ... &lt;br&gt;How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent &lt;br&gt;House on Mango Street</td>
<td>Literature: Performance poetry &lt;br&gt;Rap song lyrics &lt;br&gt;Short stories on language themes &lt;br&gt;Digital stories &lt;br&gt;Graphic novels</td>
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<td><strong>Evolving Communication</strong>&lt;br&gt;May-June Literature Focus</td>
<td>How and why does language change? What is the relationship between language and power? How are the varieties of English used in literature and the arts?</td>
<td>W7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects.</td>
<td>Informational Text: Nickel and Dimed &lt;br&gt;Fast Food Nation &lt;br&gt;Freakonomics &lt;br&gt;Outliers The New Jim Crow Earth Better</td>
<td>Literature: Myths, legends, and folk tales from several traditions &lt;br&gt;Short stories from a variety of cultures &lt;br&gt;World music</td>
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<td><strong>All Seasons Skill Activities Integrated into units throughout the School Year</strong></td>
<td>Cite Evidence: RL/R11&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Analyze Content: RL/R12-9, SL2-3</td>
<td>Study/Apply Grammar: L1-3, SL2-3</td>
<td>Protocols for oral and silent reading and rereading of complex texts &lt;br&gt;Small–group response to sets of text–dependent questions &lt;br&gt;Scaffolded analysis activities: teacher model to group to individual &lt;br&gt;Analytical responses to peers’ work</td>
<td>Sentence composing and combining activities related to unit content &lt;br&gt;Phrase poetry (composed with specific grammatical elements) &lt;br&gt;Grammar/Usage/Mechanics warmups &lt;br&gt;Individual and group copyediting practice as part of writing process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing to Texts: W1-6, 9-10, RL/R1-10</td>
<td>Research: W1-2, 4-9, RI1-10</td>
<td>Performance Assessment</td>
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<td><strong>Short Texts</strong></td>
<td><strong>Routine Writing</strong></td>
<td><strong>Focused inquiry activity</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Nonfiction:</strong></td>
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<td>Historical articles related to unit readings</td>
<td>Focus of PA: Plot analysis (star chart)</td>
<td>Art: Find and analyze art works (paintings, sculptures, photography, etc.), plus background and commentary, related to readings and Essential Questions. Results will be incorporated into final performance assessment.</td>
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<td>Articles on relevant current social issues</td>
<td>Focus of PA: Intervention in literary text (add scene, modernize) Letter to character on essential question</td>
<td>Analytical essay (written in the form of a catalog for a museum exhibition on one of the unit’s key Essential Questions)</td>
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<td><strong>Nonfiction:</strong></td>
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<td>Newspaper or magazine stories on topics related to main text</td>
<td>Focus of PA: Character analysis Genre and structure analysis Learning reflection</td>
<td>Genres: Develop a portfolio of pieces in several genres that can serve as mentor texts for the performance assessment. Analysis should include learning the conventions of each genre.</td>
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<td>Podcasts: “Story Corps”, “The Moth”, “This I Believe”</td>
<td>Focus of PA: Original poetry in a variety of forms Vignettes on aspects of daily life</td>
<td>Autobiography (written in the form of a multi-genre project with several thematically related pieces)</td>
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<td><strong>Nonfiction:</strong></td>
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<td>Writer interviews Laws, historical documents on “otherness”</td>
<td>Focus of PA: Definition essay on culture Comparison of texts essay Learning reflection</td>
<td>Author/Country: Gather and analyze biographical information about the author of the text selected for the Performance Task, as well as cultural and historical information about the setting of the text at the time of the story and currently.</td>
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<td>Documentaries on issues raised by texts</td>
<td>Changed or multiple point of view story Imaginative anthropology piece (e.g., on Americans)</td>
<td>Explanatory essay (written in the form of a research–based presentation on a social justice or empowerment issue)</td>
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<td><strong>Nonfiction:</strong></td>
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<td>U.S. historical documents with strong rhetoric</td>
<td>Focus of PA: Rhetorical analysis Opinion piece Media evaluation Learning reflection</td>
<td>Focus of PA: Social Justice Issue: Seek historical data and a range of perspectives in various media on the social justice issue picked for the Performance Assessment Task, as well as cultural and historical information about the setting of the text at the time of the story and currently.</td>
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<td>News stories, op-ed pieces</td>
<td>Advertisement (parody) Memoir, short story or poem on social justice issue</td>
<td>Persuasive speech (written in the form of a research–based presentation on a social justice or empowerment issue)</td>
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<td>Informational websites and podcasts</td>
<td><strong>Focus of PA: Student Choice</strong></td>
<td>Language: Investigate topics in linguistic change and diversity related to focus of performance assessment: information for expository or creative project.</td>
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<td><strong>Nonfiction:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Digital Media:</strong> Research platforms to find the best fit for the planned production</td>
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<td>Articles on AAE, dialects, history of English</td>
<td>Style analysis Synthesis essay Learning reflection Voice piece in nonstandard dialect Digital story</td>
<td><strong>Notes</strong></td>
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<td>Articles on public language policy and immigrant experiences</td>
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<td><em>Daily prompts can include strategies such as admit or exit slips, writing breaks, diagrams, clustering, individual or carousel brainstorming,</em></td>
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<td><strong>Study/Apply Vocabulary:</strong> L4-6</td>
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<td>Multiple encounters with Tier Two words selected from readings</td>
<td>Think-pair-share activities “The Last Word” protocol Small-group close readings Writing response groups Literature circles Socratic seminars</td>
<td>Oral reports from group work with visual aids Speeches or debates on essential question topics Oral interpretation of texts Sharing compositions and responding to questions</td>
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<td>Explicit teaching and reinforcement of academic vocabulary</td>
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<td>Analysis of word etymologies Graphic word work: Frayer model, root trees, word wall, paint chips</td>
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<td>*Massachusetts DYS Education Initiative— English Language Arts—2014 Edition</td>
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Appendix C

Massachusetts Writing Project: Chandler School Survey

Dear Colleagues,

I am looking forward to working with you at the Chandler School. In an effort to learn more information regarding your writing program and your own personal writing goals and instruction, I have created this survey. Please complete and return to me tomorrow, Tuesday, January 27, 2015. Thank you.

Donna Callanan, M.Ed.
Massachusetts Writing Project, Teacher-Consultant
Massachusetts Writing Project: Chandler School Survey

Please circle your responses

1. What is your position at Chandler School?

Kindergarten Teacher

First Grade Teacher

Second Grade Teacher

Other (please specify) ________________

2. How many minutes per day do your students have the opportunity to write in any form/context?

3. How many minutes per day/week do you engage your students in specific, formal writing instruction?

4. Please choose your most commonly used methods of writing practice in your classroom.

Shared Writing

Guided Writing

Interactive Writing

Independent Writing

5. What opportunities exist for horizontal and/or vertical articulation concerning scaffolding of instruction among K-2 teachers?

Monthly

Yearly

6. What professional development (in house or otherwise) have you received to implement current writing curriculum?
7. What are your students' strengths in writing?

8. What are your students' greatest needs to be addressed in your writing instruction to produce outcomes in your curriculum?

9. In what text types do your students write?
   - Narrative
   - Opinion
   - Informative

10. In what subjects do your students write to express their learning?
    - Math
    - Science
    - Social studies

11. Please share any information that would be valuable for me to know during this process of curriculum review:
Appendix D

Sample Unit Plan: Reading Informational Texts (from the Chatham, N.J., Public Schools)

Title of course: English Language Arts – Grade level: 1 – Month(s) taught: September-June

**Big Idea:** The ability to read informational texts requires independence, comprehension, and fluency.

**Areas of focus:** Reading Informational Text

**Comprehension Skills and Response to Text**
- Recognize purpose of the text.
- Distinguish cause/effect, fact/opinion, and main idea/supporting details in interpreting texts.
- Interpret information in graphs, charts, and diagrams.
- Ask how, why, and what-if questions in interpreting nonfiction texts.
- Discuss theme or message in interpreting non-fiction texts.
- Summarize major points from fiction and nonfiction texts.
- Draw conclusions and inferences from non-fiction texts.
- Participate in creative responses to texts (e.g., dramatizations, oral presentations).
- Read regularly in materials appropriate for their independent reading level.
- Read and comprehend both fiction and nonfiction that is appropriately designed for grade level.
- Use information and reasoning to examine bases of hypotheses and opinions.

**Inquiry and Research**
- Use library classification systems, print or electronic, to locate information.
- Draw conclusions from information and data gathered.
- Read a variety of nonfiction and fiction books and produce evidence of understanding.

New Jersey Standards Clarification Project Grade 3 Reading 3.1
- Comprehension Skills and Response to Texts #1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14
- Inquiry and Research #1-3
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential Question</th>
<th>Enduring Understandings from NJCCS</th>
<th>Activities/Materials</th>
<th>Pre- and Formative Assessments</th>
<th>Technology Literacy</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How do readers construct meaning from informational texts? | Understanding of a non-fiction features, structures, and characteristics to facilitate the reader’s ability to make meaning of the text. Good readers employ strategies to help them understand non-fiction texts. Strategic readers can develop, select, and apply strategies to enhance their comprehension. Words powerfully affect meaning. Good readers compare, infer, synthesize, and make connections (text to text, text to word, text to self) to make text personally relevant and useful. Researchers gather and critique information on a topic from a variety of sources for specific purposes. | Activities:  
**Key Ideas and Details**  
- Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.  
- Identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.  
- Describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.  
**Craft and Structure**  
- Ask and answer questions to help determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases in a text.  
- Know and use various text features (e.g., headings, tables of contents, glossaries, electronic menus, icons, labels, captions, bold faced, italics) to locate key facts or information in a text.  
- Distinguish between information provided by pictures or other illustrations and information provided by the words in a text.  
**Integration of Knowledge and Ideas**  
- Use the illustrations and details in a text to describe its key ideas.  
- Identify the reasons an author gives to support points in a text.  
- Identify basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic (e.g., in illustrations, descriptions, or procedures). | Pre-Assessment:  
- Fall ELA District Assessments  
**Formative Assessment:**  
- **Behaviors to notice:**  
  - ability to identify new questions based on information the child learned in a book  
  - ability to recognize and use new information in a text  
  - ability to generate new questions and find answers to the new questions about a topic  
  - ability to recognize and use a table of contents page  
  - ability to preview and predict what the child will learn  
  - ability to use recognize and use photographs to help understand the text  
  - ability to recognize and use headings to find information in a text  
  - ability to locate boldface words  
  - ability to recognize and use a glossary to find information  
| Literacy:  
- Good Habits books:  
  - Eva the Beekeeper  
  - Eat Your Vegetables  
- Gail Gibbons books  
- Time For Kids  
- Science Texts from Science Curriculum  
- Other non-fiction texts available at K-3 schools | **Technology**  
- Good Habits Great Writers CD  
- Stationary Studio  
- Bailey’s Bookhouse  
- Writing A-Z  
- Reading A-Z (graphic Organizers)  
- Enchanted Learning  
[www.brainpopjr.com](http://www.brainpopjr.com)  
[www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com)  
[www.starfall.com](http://www.starfall.com)  
[www.discoverystreaming.com](http://www.discoverystreaming.com) | In connection with non-fiction writing  
Good Habits Great Readers, Celebration Press Shared Reading Teacher’s Guide  
Good Habits Great Readers Writing Teacher’s Guide, Celebration Press |
### Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- With prompting and support, read informational texts appropriately complex for grade 1.
- Picture walk-title, captions, illustrations, headings, labels, boldfaced words, glossary, italics, contents page- to encourage predictions and meaning

### Materials:
- Graphic organizers (T-Chart pg. 400 GHGR, Concept Web pg. 401 GHGR, Description Wheel pg. 404 GHGR, Sequence Chart pg. 405 GHGR)
- Sticky notes (bookmarks)
- Charts
- Photographs

- The meaning of boldface words
  - The ability to describe how non-fiction books are organized
  - The ability to use text organization to help understand information
  - The ability to recognize and use italicized words in a text
  - The ability to recognize and use labels in text and photographs
  - The ability to recognize and use captions to help understand what a photograph shows
  - The ability to recognize and use a chart as a source of information for understanding

### Summative assessment:
Have children work together to create a class chart showing birthdays, children’s pets, favorite foods, or other subjects.
Have children prepare a glossary for a favorite non-fiction book, including simple definitions for each word from a grade appropriate dictionary if necessary.
The teacher will use a digital camera to take candid photographs of the class at work and the students will write captions for each photograph. Students will create a display for a bulletin board.
Students will create an All About Book including the various non-fiction text features described in the Good Habits Great Readers program.