

Somerset Elementary School BELLEVUE SCHOOL DISTRICT - BELLEVUE, WA WRITING

Introduction

Under the leadership of Principal Betty Hannaford, the school began their work with **Regie Routman** in **2006** with the goal of providing high quality writing instruction for every student. Somerset serves a diverse, affluent population where 34% of the students are English Language Learners. The school's commitment to focusing on high expectations and instructional leadership has not only produced gains in student achievement, where high scores already existed, but it has also ensured that gains are sustained.

Student Performance Data

Somerset has demonstrated strong, sustained growth in writing and reading as measured by the Washington Assessment of Student Learning. The following chart captures writing and reading scores for 4th grade students meeting and exceeding the standard over the past 7 years. Notice the recent large gain in writing, attributable to full staff participation in *Writing for Audience and Purpose*. The school's commitment to high expectations, professional development, and teacher support promises continued gains.

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Writing % Meeting Standard	81%	81%	72%	76%	81%	88%	86%	95%
Reading % Meeting Standard	91%	87%	87%	90%	91%	91%	92%	93%

Lessons Learned

- Principal support and whole school commitment are the most important keys to successful implementation and sustainability.
- Daily application of the Optimal Learning Model has underscored the importance of demonstration, made for much more explicit teaching, and impacted instruction across all curriculum.
- Working to establish common core beliefs around the purpose and essence of writing instruction is critical for schoolwide collaboration, teacher effectiveness, and greater student success and enjoyment, not just in writing but across the curriculum.
- Even though we have at times found ourselves in conflict with district beliefs, we have worked hard to stay true to our beliefs about what's best for students; that means being willing to be risk takers and continue to provide feedback to central office on writing practices.
- Ongoing, weekly professional development with whole-school vertical team and grade-level teams that center on professional book and article study and examine and discuss student work greatly impact teaching knowledge, effectiveness, and enjoyment.
- Having all staff members participate and have an opportunity to lead the writing effort has bonded the staff with common goals and a firm commitment to writing.
- Celebrating and examining the writing work makes our writing work more transparent, and sharing our successes and struggles has made teachers more open, honest, and trusting with each other.
- Just because a school has good test scores doesn't mean students are engaged and enjoying writing.
- Capitalizing on the reading-writing connection increases achievement in both writing and reading.

Testimonials

Principal, Betty Hannaford: *Establishing common writing goals, beliefs, and practices around student learning, achievement, and enjoyment has shifted and unified the whole school into a learning community.*

1st grade teacher, Krysta French: *I learned that daily writing, shared writing, and writing being authentic and purposeful transformed my students as writers. Daily celebration and publishing students' writing changed me as a teacher and empowered my students as writers.*

Parent, Debra Kumar: *My oldest, who is now in middle school, really did not learn to write very well, and still does not know how to write well. His goal is to get the writing over with as soon as possible. Writing wears this kid out! My two little ones, however, easily get their ideas down on paper, readily create rough drafts and are willing to edit and re-edit before creating their final copy. My little ones at Somerset enjoy writing! They are proud of their writing and are aware when they have not done their best effort. As a parent, it's a delight to see them enjoy writing. It will serve them well the rest of their lives.*