

Catching Up With Curriculum

Helpful suggestions from the Curriculum Office of Woodbury Public Schools

Parents: Partners in Writing

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Often, teachers and schools ask parents to assist in developing early reading skills at home by reading daily to their children and providing a print rich environment at home. Parents accomplish this task by reading nightly stories to their young ones and keeping a wide variety of age appropriate books, magazines and newspapers readily available. While we have learned the value of partnering with parents to improve reading literacy, high schools across the nation report that standardized tests show only modest gains in writing. Recent statistics from colleges indicate that students are twice as likely to need writing support classes in their freshmen year.

The need to increase emphasis on developing proficient writing skills is underscored in a 2004 report prepared by the National Commission on Writing for the CollegeBoard. They provide the following summary."A survey of 120 major American corporations employing nearly 8 million people concludes that in today's workplace writing is a "threshold skill" for hiring and promotion among salaried (i.e., professional) employees. Survey results indicate that writing is a ticket to professional opportunity, while poorly written job applications are a "figurative kiss of death."

A report prepared by George A. Clowes, School Reform News, June 2003 explains the need to increase and improve the quantity and quality of writing experiences both in and apart from the school day. In response to growing concerns in the business, education, and policy-making communities about the low level of student writing skills, a blue-ribbon panel is recommending a writing agenda for the nation that includes doubling the time most K-12 students currently spend on writing. Although increasing the amount of time spent writing during a school day seems like the perfect solution, the reality is that subject area content and concepts especially at the secondary level become increasingly complex and compete for time.

Our teachers' response to this critical need in literacy is to infuse writing in every opportunity throughout the lesson. Students use writing in meaningful ways to explain content and concepts in math, social studies, science and, of course, literacy. However, increasing demands from colleges, business, and industry remind us we need to do more. Parents can be a valuable resource in addressing the writing gap.

What can you do to provide your child with "writing readiness"?

Ages 2-7

Modeling is the best teacher. Let your child see you writing often and for a variety of purposes. In addition to the obvious, texting and emails, write cards and letters to friends and family. Start a journal or scrapbook to record important events in you and your family's life. Jot down the cute or funny things they say or do, then save and read them aloud weeks or years later on birthdays

or holidays. Remember to keep the task fun and age appropriate. Help create these habits and encourage your children to imitate them.

Ages 8-teens

Communicate with your preteen and teenagers. Talk to your youngsters about their day at school and ways they learn. Do they use note taking? What type of note taking have they been taught? Do they write letters to teachers? Perhaps they use a writing portfolio Let them show you examples and ask questions. Use your child's lunch bag or coat pocket as a way to leave messages of encouragement or reminders of how much you care about them. Ask them to use a small board or message center at home to leave you messages (instead of voicemail or texting). Look for a special talent and help your child develop it. Perhaps your child likes to write poetry, short stories or has been inspired by theatre. Look for competitive opportunities (children's magazine and the internet) to enter your child's work.

Above all, do not give up. Be patient and consistent as your children grow and their interests change. Together we can work on developing solid writing skills to help our children face the challenges of the 21st century with confidence.