

# Writing Scores Soar at Wakefield Elementary School

A Multisensory focus helps 93% of 5<sup>th</sup> graders reach proficiency on the state writing exam

by Cathy Sanford, Director, Hasbro Center for Teaching Excellence at the Dunn Institute

At a recent Learning Walk at Wakefield Elementary School, South Kingstown principals and administrators congregated to analyze how professional development, instructional practices, and curriculum have worked in concert to raise 5<sup>th</sup> grade NECAP writing proficiency levels from 61% in 2005 to 93% in 2007.

NECAP Writing Assessments: Wakefield Elementary School			
School Year	'04- '05	'05- '06	'06- '07
Proficient with Distinction	28%	45%	50%
Proficient	33%	33%	43%
Partially Proficient	35%	20%	2%
Substantially Below	4%	2%	4%

Developing excellent writers is clearly a focus at Wakefield. Examples of students' written work fill hallways and classrooms; students and adults alike take time to read the displays as they transition to different activities during the day.

Teachers across grade levels – including resource teachers – integrate the objectives outlined in Write Traits writing curriculum

with the explicit scope and sequence developed by Project Read Written Expression. Curriculum implementation is responsive to the needs of students in each classroom; the multisensory and systematic approach found in Project Read materials breaks through memory and language barriers that can prevent students from successful writing production. The 6 Write Traits shape the overarching writing framework.

Professional development for teachers has been critical. In the fall of 2006, Wakefield Elementary / South Kingstown Schools initiated a partnership with the Dunn Institute to bring a Project Read training to South County. Ninety percent of Wakefield teachers spent three days participating in the Written Expression strand. Simultaneously, teachers participated in district-wide Write Traits training over the course of two years. Internally, a Writing Committee (led by fifth grade teacher Robin Wildman and first grade teacher Jeanne Congdon) sets assessment schedules that are connected to grade level benchmarks. Grade level teams assess student writing and analyze specific areas of student strength and weakness as well as aggregate trends. Alison Bateson-Toupin, SLP, provides leadership for the Project Read curriculum by mentoring, co-teaching, and helping teachers deliver content with fidelity. By working together, teacher-leaders take

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pressure off the faculty by streamlining processes, focusing teachers and keeping things as simple as possible – while supporting creativity and innovation around lesson delivery.

Bateson-Toupin credits Project Read Written Expression curriculum with empowering teachers to “cast a wider net” in the general classroom setting, providing effective supports for bringing partially proficient writers to benchmark while decreasing the number of students who require intensive intervention. She also believes that the systematic scope and sequence has simultaneously enabled proficient writers to reach distinction benchmarks.

Will we continue to see 90+% writing proficiency levels from Wakefield 5<sup>th</sup> graders? Principal Michelle Little believes that teachers are on the right path, but everyone will need to continue working hard and “smart” in the months ahead. The current 4<sup>th</sup> grade has a larger cohort of struggling learners and will certainly test the framework – which will result in the continued reflection and self-improvement that Little praises in her faculty.

Meanwhile, Wakefield educators are focusing resources on other literacy target areas in an effort to create a tiered instructional model that successfully reaches all students. This summer teachers will have access to three Project Read strands, which are all taking place in South Kingstown through the Dunn Institute:

**Written Expression**, August 5 – 7, South Kingstown High School Library

**Phonics**, August 20 – 22, URI Club

**Report Form** (Comprehension), August 25 – 26, South Kingstown High School Library

Little and Bateson-Toupin agree that a multisensory focus as well as explicit skill instruction in all literacy components will allow faculty to continue the momentum initiated by their writing framework. By clarifying connections between classroom instruction / intervention and therapy interventions offered by specialists, Wakefield elementary is poised to make No Child Left Behind a reality for their students.

For more information on writing instruction at Wakefield Elementary – or to visit the school – please contact Cathy Sanford at [sanfordcw@aol.com](mailto:sanfordcw@aol.com) or Principal Michelle Little at [mlittle@skschools.net](mailto:mlittle@skschools.net).

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