



Make Every Step the Write Step

CASE STUDY:

Chauncey Davis Elementary, South Bend, Washington

Cultivating a Strong Culture of Writing

Moving From Point A to Point B
with Tools that Work



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Kresta Byington, Principal of Chauncey Davis Elementary School, witnessed an encouraging sight the other day as she walked into one of her fourth-grade classrooms.

Students were deep in concentration and the only sound was the collective hum of pencils scribbling and scratching as they wrote their words on paper.

Rewind the clock back a few years and the scenario was decidedly different at Chauncey Davis Elementary School in South Bend, Washington. Coming into her role as principal in 2004 (after nine years of working as a teacher in the same district), Kresta immediately noticed less writing displayed in classrooms. And, as a parent of two students in her school, she saw less writing coming home.

Then reality hit. In the spring of 2013, her concerns were confirmed when only 40 percent of her fourth-grade students met standards on the state writing test. This was unacceptable to her; something needed to change.

“We just weren’t getting the quality and quantity of writing that is achievable with an effective writing community. We needed to do more, and I was ready to spearhead the effort,” said Kresta. “I just needed the right insights and tools to make it happen.”



Kresta Byington, Principal of Chauncey Davis Elementary

The Top 3 Challenges Teachers Face When Teaching Writing:

- 1 Lack of time.
- 2 Lack of knowledge.
- 3 Lack of quality writing materials.

Getting From Point A to Point B

Early on, Kresta knew that moving forward with their writing goals wasn’t going to be easy. First, she had to roll up her sleeves and find out what problems her teachers were facing when it came to teaching writing. She discovered one of their greatest challenges was a lack of time. Her teachers felt like they didn’t have enough hours in the day. Elementary teachers are generalists, not specialists, and they teach a wide variety of subjects in a six-hour day. Take recess, lunch, and other obligations out of the day and the time-instruction balance becomes even more difficult to achieve.

During her research, she also learned that in many instances, when she was told, “I don’t have time,” what it actually translated into was, “I really don’t know how to

teach writing.” So the second problem her teachers had was a lack of knowledge when it came to writing instruction.

“I asked 18 of my teachers (two of them are recent college graduates) if they had a college class specifically devoted to the teaching of writing. Not one out of the 18 reported having any college preparation to teach this core subject,” said Kresta.

“When you don’t know how to do something, you tend to avoid it.”

Filling in the Gaps with Writing Tools: Crunch the Numbers and Questions Teachers Have When Teaching Writing

Before her school’s writing challenges could be overcome, they had to jump over one more hurdle—namely, a lack of quality writing materials.

For several years at Chauncey Davis Elementary, writing instruction was tied in with the basal reading program.

Although it was a quality reading program, writing always came last in the lesson and a terrible pattern

had begun; her teachers were running out of time. Having dealt personally with this challenge, Kresta knew exactly what her teachers were grappling with and she set out to fix it.

Her first step was to tap into a resource called [Crunch the Numbers](#), which shows three different teachers’ lesson plans for the day. Teachers calculate how much time each teacher spends teaching the different subject areas. Teachers then judge the lesson plans according to ASCD’s recommended minutes of instruction in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies.



“The object is to pick out the daily plan that best matches the recommendation. Our first year we simply looked at Crunch the Numbers with the expectation teachers were to begin scheduling writing as its own explicit content area. This year I didn’t hear “I don’t have time to teach writing” because

they experienced the benefits of daily writing instruction,” said Kresta.

Chauncey Davis Elementary teachers also

used the document, [Questions Teachers Have When Teaching Writing](#), for knowledge awareness and to determine their strengths and weaknesses in writing instruction. This survey breaks writing instruction into critical components such as; classroom management, material management, writing motivation, teaching the writing process, conferencing and assessment. Once teachers completed the survey, they started to set goals for their writing instruction. In a staff meeting teachers shared their results, which allowed for pairing teachers based on areas of strength and weakness. They immediately began to support and learn from one another.

eWriteSteps is the most teacher-friendly, 100% Common Core writing and grammar program for K-5 on the market. The digital curriculum:

- fuses its daily lesson plans with best practices such as the 6 traits of writing, Madeline Hunter lesson steps, Writer’s Workshop, Multiple Intelligences, and Bloom’s Taxonomy.
- gives teachers and students everything they need to develop their craft with confidence.
- can be used with interactive whiteboards, visual projectors, computers, tablets, iPads, and document cameras.





The Final Piece of the Puzzle

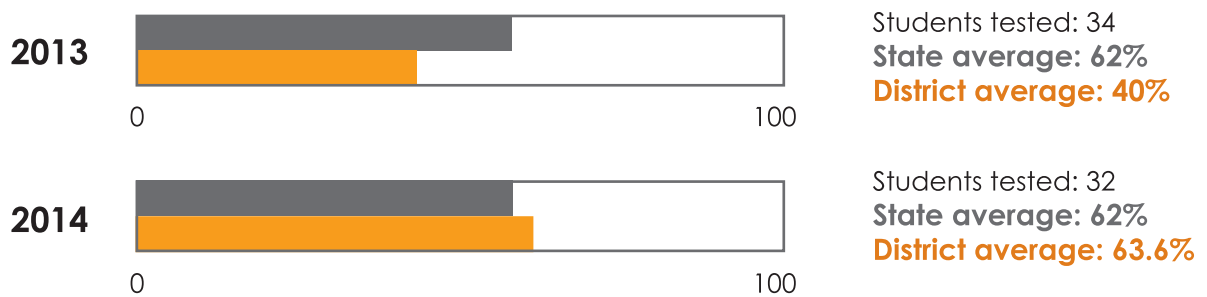
With “Crunch the Numbers” helping teachers better manage their instructional time and “Questions Teachers Have When Teaching Writing” assisting with knowledge awareness, Kresta still had one more puzzle piece missing. She needed better and more relevant writing materials for her elementary classrooms.

“I started looking into the various writing programs available to assist teachers with their writing instruction while teaching them the craft of writing. We found what we were looking for in the K-5 Common Core writing and grammar program WriteSteps,” explains Kresta. “Our teachers are using the solution’s daily lesson plans, demonstration videos, Prezi lessons, visual aids (such as authentic student writing samples), and core rubrics to improve student writing success.”

Chauncey Davis Elementary piloted WriteSteps in 2013, and then rolled out a full implementation in 2014.

By filling the “lack of quality writing materials” gap, they’ve fostered a community of teachers that realizes that writing deserves its own block of instructional time, and that it shouldn’t just be combined with reading instruction.

In the fall of 2014, **63.6%** of fourth-grade students at Chauncey Davis were meeting standard on the state test, making an improvement of almost **24%** from the previous year.



4th Grade Students meeting standard on the Measurements of Student Progress Assessment, Washington States' Standards Based Test.

“I’m so proud to visit classrooms and observe effective writing instruction taking place within our halls. As we wrap up our first year using WriteSteps, our teachers are amazed at the progress their students have made and love sharing their stories with other staff,” says Kresta. “It’s nice to see student writing on display again.”