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The effectiveness of teacher involvement in the design of a writing curriculum

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHER
INVOLVMENT IN THE DESIGN OF
A WRITING CURRICULUM

A Thesis

by

JENNIFER O. GARCIA

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHER
INVOLVEMENT IN THE DESIGN
OF A WRITING CURRICULUM

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August 2016

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ABSTRACT

Garcia, Jennifer O., The Effectiveness of Teacher Involvement in the Design of a Writing Curriculum. Master of Arts (MA), August, 2016, 108 pp., 22 tables, 4 figures, 2 diagrams, 51 references, 21 titles.

A South Texas school district, PSJA ISD was studied to demonstrate whether classroom teachers can collaborate and create an effective curriculum and resources for the students of the district. The paper will include data from the STAAR Test that has been released during 2011-2015, interviews of teachers that were part of the curriculum team, and data from the United States Census Bureau to understand the demographics of the region. Data that is included will compare the State of Texas to the district before the teacher-created curriculum was in place and after the teacher-created curriculum was implemented.

DEDICATION

The completion of my graduate studies would not have been possible without the grace of God, the love and support of my family, and the motivation and encouragement of all my students. Mom and Dad, thank you for always supporting my education all that I am and all that I do is always for you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I will always be grateful to Dr. Jonikka Charlton, chair of my thesis committee, for all the mentoring and advice. From the moment I stepped into her room I was influenced to make a difference in teaching Writing, thank you for reigniting my passion to teach writing. Thanks goes out to my thesis committee members: Dr. Mark Noe, for teaching me the History of Writing and exposing me to the conversation of rhetoric in various ways, and Alyssa Cavazos, for saying yes to working with another fellow teacher, your advice and input is truly valued because of your years in public school.

I would also like to thank the school district I work for, Pharr- San Juan- Alamo ISD, for giving me the opportunity to make a difference in the education of our students. Over the years I have watched this district make many changes, and with much confidence I say that the changes are for the good of our students. To all the PSJA ISD employees that helped me and encouraged me I am eternally grateful.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a difficult skill that often takes practice to perfect. E.L. Doctorow once said, “Writing is an exploration. You start from nothing and learn as you go.” As an educator I have sat and wondered how far do today’s students go in exploring through writing? Do we work at helping every child become an effective writer or do we expect only a handful of student to excel and the majority to merely be able to get by? What practices are today’s students receiving in regards to writing? What does today’s data reveal about student writing?

The ability to write allows students to express their thoughts and it allows the teacher to truly see what a child knows. While there are many people that can express a thought effectively being able to articulate a thought after proper planning is a skill that all educated people should have as they exit from their education track and receive a diploma. Today’s world demands more than a high school education. This country requires that all students receive an education. As teachers, parents, or even fellow citizens would we not want the youth to be avid readers, fluent speakers, and effective writers?

In “Informing Writing: The Benefits of Formative Assessment,” by Steve Graham, Karen Harris, and Michael Hebert:

Good writing is not just an option for young people; it is essential. An inability to effectively use writing to convey thoughts and ideas prevents many American students from completing high school, obtaining a

postsecondary degree, acquiring a job that pays a living wage, and participating fully in community and civic life. Although the nation has made some small progress in improving students' writing, too many adolescents are not good writers. According to findings from the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; Salahu-Din et al., 2008), only 33 percent of eighth-grade students and 24 percent of twelfth-grade students performed at or above the "proficient" level (defined as solid academic performance) in writing. In contrast, 55 percent and 58 percent of eighth- and twelfth-grade students, respectively, scored at the "basic" level, denoting only partial mastery of the writing skills needed at their grade level. The rest of the students (12 percent of eighth graders and 18 percent of twelfth graders) scored below the basic level. (pg. 10)

Such research indicates that little success in writing is occurring with today's youth; therefore, changes must happen in the education of students. As the National Commission on Writing once stated, "It would be false to claim that most students cannot write. What most students cannot do is write well." (Magrath, pg.16) Recently, while at a training, I heard about the differences in writing from students between the STAAR state test and the TAKS state test for the State of Texas. Student writing (in the past five years) has shown drastic signs of improvement. Students' ideas and organization are at a higher level, their word choice is intentional, and their writing is purposeful and challenged. The question that often arises in my mind is how do we continue going in the direction that we are going in regards to writing? How

do we continue to obtain the gains that we have been seeing and ensuring that all students are skilled in writing?

Statement of Problem and Purpose

In today's public school system it is common for districts to purchase resources to incorporate into their curriculum that are compiled by a company that may not have the districts particular students in mind. Whether it is the district's new curriculum or merely resources to assist the teacher in the classroom, it remains a coin toss as to how effective the practices in these resources will be for students, especially for sub groups (migrant students, English Language Learners, special education students, economically disadvantaged, at risk, or 504). Schools today are heavily data driven; therefore, when many students are not proving to be successful on the state standardized tests there are interventions in place. In most cases this means purchasing new material with the hope that it will demonstrate a more effective result. But who is designing these resources and who are they targeted for?

This research study will answer the question, "Can the teacher in the classroom design the resources that have the greatest effect for student growth? Can scores become better if the primary resource in the classroom, the teacher, designs the resources and curriculum for the students of the district? To answer this question I decided to study the outcome of the district that I work for, Pharr San Juan Alamo ISD, also known as PSJA ISD, a district that I have worked at for 11 years. Unlike most districts, PSJA ISD is a tri-city district, and so the data that will be provided will include the three cities that make up PSJA ISD: Pharr, San Juan, and Alamo, which are located in South Texas. Year after year PSJA ISD has spent a great deal of money on adopting new texts and purchasing resources, such as: CScope and Springboard for its students,

but not much has changed in regards to the data from the state standardized test, STAAR. And so, with the new teacher designed framework and teacher created resources created by PSJA teachers can PSJA students demonstrate understanding of the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge Skills) better? Students are meeting state standards by performing better on the grammar portion of the test and not necessarily on the essay portion of the exam. After looking at the data there is proof that more students are mastering the state test in writing, but surprisingly the skill of writing itself is not improving among PSJA students. This discovery concerns me because it appears that many students are merely learning grammar rules and not articulating a thought effectively. Peter Magrath states, “Writing extends far beyond mastering grammar and punctuation. The ability to diagram a sentence does not make a good writer. There are many students capable of identifying every part of speech who are barely able to produce a piece of prose.” (Magrath, p.13) As an educator I aspire to aid my students in being fully prepared for a higher education; and thus, uncovering the truth in students writing can help in structuring the classroom not only in receiving passing scores as expected, but to produce effective writers.

Repeatedly, over the years, I have had many students ask me questions about college: how difficult is college, what college I should go to, is it expensive, what subjects do I really need to know or what skills should I possess to be successful. Before I decided to focus on studying the data in writing, I originally wanted to study the advance placement classes and the dual credit classes because I wanted to be able to inform students so that they could make the best possible decision for their education journey.

Quickly, my focus shifted after I was asked to participate in the district Writing Curriculum Team for PSJA ISD. This was the first year that PSJA created teams of teachers for each content area to discuss ideas of what should be taught in every classroom. The idea was to

help students that were transferring from one middle school to another within the district. If every teacher in the district was covering the same TEKS at the same time then students would not miss out on instruction for a particular TEK. The collaboration was also created to support new teachers coming into the district; these teachers would have access to a plan, and veteran teachers that stuck to the same lesson material for many years would have access to new resources. The team was to bring in new ideas on how to execute every lesson so that each student could learn. In the summer of 2014, I was engulfed with writing information from meetings, classes, and discussions. I wanted to find a way to piece every bit of information from what I have learned over the years, articles I had read, and what the data was revealing together, so that I would uncover a major focus for our students. Though many things made sense, I was unsure if PSJA students were really getting better at writing; and so, I decided to study the district writing data parallel to the State of Texas. After looking at the state and the district data, PSJA students were 21% below the state writing data; the state had a 71% passing rate while PSJA students displayed a 50% passing rate in 2012. In fact, PSJA students were falling short in Reading, Math, Science, and Social Studies as well; and thus, I decided to follow the regression or progression of student scores in the 7th grade writing state test.

While every child's success is important, the data I gathered from the last 4 years STAAR Writing Test demonstrates how PSJA ISD has shown larger gains verses the small gains by the State of Texas on the state exam. As previously stated in 2012 PSJA ISD was 21% below the State of Texas passing rate, but by 2015 PSJA ISD was only 10%below that State of Texas passing rate. A major contributing factor has been the collaboration of the teachers that work with these particular demographics and the implementation of effective resources for student success. Throughout this paper I plan to share expectations for 7th grade students in writing over

the course of four years and data that indicates successes and failures in students' writing. Chapter 1 will introduce the State of Texas expectations for all 7th grade students in writing as well as a breakdown of the curriculum that PSJA ISD teachers and central office personnel created to help support students in their writing. Chapter 2 will share what experts of writing have come to understand in regards to making writing better; such as, the benefits of writing portfolios to measure improvement in writing, the need to write in every grade level and in all contents, and the importance of professional development in writing for all teachers. This chapter will also include the constant call to make changes within the education system; as well as ideas from Cheryl Kish, Janet Sheehan, Karen Cole, Ruth Struyk, Diane Kinder, and Bonita Wilcox on writing portfolios, ideas from Lou LaBrant, Robert E. Slavin, Cecellia Daniels, and Nancy A. Madden on writing across contents, Richard Coop, Kinnard White, Barbara Tapscott, and Linda Lee on professional development, Gary A. Olson and Lynn who wrote *Education as Civic Engagement*, Susan Florio-Ruane who addressed the idea of education reform in the United States. It will also identify crises within literacy and share best practices that could better a writing program. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology for the study, how I obtained approval and what the study contains. This chapter will also include a survey completed by several teachers that were involved in the writing curriculum team; they identified concerns as educators and solutions to the major problem of lack of motivation as emphasized from the ideas of Donald Murray who wrote *Teaching Writing as a Process Not a Product*, and how Texas schools are held accountable. After which, chapter 4 will reveal findings of 7th grade students in the 8 middle schools at PSJA ISD. This chapter will not only contain the passing percentages of the middle schools, but it will also include the passing percentages of the students across the State of Texas. To entirely understand the need as to why PSJA ISD sought change within the curriculum we

would have to understand the demographics of the students; this chapter will also include an in-depth look at the demographics of the PSJA ISD boundaries and end with suggestions for implementation from Kathleen Blake Yancey a past NCTE President who wrote *Writing in the 21st Century*. In summation chapter 5 will include the ideas for how PSJA ISD could further assist student writing and going beyond PSJA ISD wanting to improve writing for all students.

In 2011, our middle school was selected to part of the Gear Up program, and at the start of that year I was asked to attend a workshop by Gear Up, a program that funded and assisted schools with students who were planning on going to college and that lived in low income/poverty areas. Gear Up was a grant that awarded funds for to schools for resources to help students for 6 years beginning in 7th grade and ending in 12th grade. This program was introduced by the U.S. Department of Education and rather than selecting several students the program was implemented among all students as a cohort. During the meeting Gear Up presenters presented several statistics that changed my way of thinking as an educator; for example, they shared that 13% of the students that came from the region that our school serviced graduated college, which meant that 87% of the students we serviced did not graduate from college. This allowed me to look deeper at the fundamental skills, skills such as reading and writing, my students needed in order to become college students who would have the capability to receive a degree. I began to pay more attention to the literacy problem that has existed and continues to exist. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) data that was collected worldwide in 2011, “87% of female youth (ages 15-24) have basic literacy skills, and 92% of males.” This information does not indicate that youth are illiterate; it indicates that the majority are at a basic level. Additionally, “774 million adults (15 years and older) still cannot read and write – two-thirds of them (493 million) are

women. Among youth, 123 million are illiterate of which 76 million are female.” Such statistics are often just numbers until those numbers begin to hit closer to home. One night I vividly remember feeling sad for a local elderly man that went to vote and could not read the ballot. On another note, I remember having a student that never wanted to do assignments. One day I finally asked him, “Why do you fight me so hard when it comes to reading and writing? Did someone tell you that you’re not a good reader or writer?” Eventually he admitted that no teacher had taken the time to teach him. In time he began to pick up writing and one day he came into the classroom with a letter in his hand. He said, “Ms., do you want to read the letter.” Trying not to be invasive I merely said, “Only if you want me to.” The letter was from his imprisoned father that he had not spoken to in years. He was so happy that he was finally able to write to his dad and his dad had responded. For him writing began to matter and in time he even had me teach him cursive. Many times I think I cannot solve the millions of illiterate cases around the world, but if I begin with one then I begin to make a difference.

To make change one must know where to start; and so, I would like to bring in the ideas of Mike Schmoker, a former school administrator and English teacher. Schmoker has published several books that are used across the United States by school leaders.

In the book *Focus* by Mike Schmoker, he begins with a Jim Collins quote that reads, “The real path to greatness, it turns out, requires simplicity and diligence. It requires clarity, not instant illumination. It demands each of us to focus on what is vital—and to eliminate all of the extraneous distractions.” (Collins, p.1) Year after year campuses reflect on what the scores from the previous year and the current year and often praise themselves for their successes or question where they went wrong. Many times this results in change whether it is hiring new staff,

revamping the curriculum, or buying more resources; interventions are made. Mike Schmoker identifies 3 key “essentials” to take into account for schools who want reform.

Because the only reason our schools haven’t made astonishing progress in the last 30 years of “reform” is quite simple: very few schools ever implemented “what is essential”—the most powerful, simple actions and structures that would dramatically increase the proportion of students prepared for college or careers.

What is “essential” for schools? Three simple things: reasonably coherent curriculum (what we teach); sound lessons (how we teach); and far more purposeful reading and writing in every discipline, or authentic literacy (integral to both what and how we teach). But as numerous studies demonstrate, these three essential elements are only rarely implemented; every credible study confirms that they are still pushed aside by various initiatives, every year, in the majority of schools (Schmoker, p. 2).

I identify these three “essentials” because that was the focus of PSJA ISD. In order to begin to see growth in student scores, the district abandoned the outside resources and went directly to the key resource – the teacher, to create effective resources that targeted PSJA students. Not only did PSJA teachers compile the resources, those that were involved with the curriculum writing team trained the other writing teachers on best practices that became district initiatives, and they integrated close reading across contents in intentionally selected passages.

Ultimately, this paper focuses on the successes that come with simplicity and concentration in a writing curriculum.

State Expectations for Students in STAAR Writing

Before the curriculum could be designed, teachers must be aware of the state expectation for all students. What essential skills should all students have within the grade level year that they enter and exit a classroom? Therefore, teachers should not teach to the test, but they should be aware of TEKS that should be taught to every student whether tested or not and teach them for overall student success.

From 2011-2015 seventh grade students were required to take a STAAR Writing test. It consisted of 40 multiple questions, writing an expository essay, and writing a personal narrative essay. In the multiple-choice section students were given passages where they demonstrated knowledge of grammar rules through editing and revising the given passages. Students revising questions included knowledge on arranging sentences, combining sentences, removing sentences, using effective transitional words, or correcting a run-on sentence. Students were also exposed to editing questions where they demonstrated knowledge in grammar by answering questions on capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. Below you will find a diagram of the STAAR Writing rubric that was released by TEA in 2010; it identifies the three reporting categories that students were tested on: composition, revision, and editing along with the number of questions that students saw in each category.

Reporting Categories	Number of Standards	Number of Questions
Reporting Category 1:	Readiness Standards 5	2 Compositions
Composition	Supporting Standards 0	
	Total: 5	
Reporting Category 2:	Readiness Standards 1	16 Multiple Choice
Revision	Supporting Standards 7	
	Total: 8	
Reporting Category 3:	Readiness Standards 6	24 Multiple Choice
Editing	Supporting Standards 11	
	Total: 17	

Diagram 1: STAAR Writing Blueprint (TEA 2010)

All seventh grade students were expected to write an expository essay and a narrative essay. The objective was that students at this level should be able to effectively compose a personal narrative, a written account on a personal experience that they have experienced. Students were also expected to compose an expository essay, an explanation of how they view a particular topic and support their ideas. They were graded on a scale of 0-4 for each essay. Each essay went through two raters and received a number score; if there was a discrepancy between the two scores that the raters issued out, then a third rater would read and score the essay. After both raters have scored the essay the number was multiplied and the sums were added, this indicated the number of points received from each essay. The following diagram will help visualize the scoring process in obtaining a summed score and the label for what the Composition Scoring Rubric Rating was given. According to the table a 0-4 (light blue) is a below basic to basic writer and a 5-8 (black) classifies a between basic and satisfactory to an accomplished writer.

Score 1	Score 2	Summed Score	CSR Rating
0	0	0	Nonscorable Performance
1	1	2	Very Limited Performance
1	2	3	Between Very Limited & Basic Performance
2	2	4	Basic Performance
2	3	5	Between Basic & Satisfactory Performance
3	3	6	Satisfactory Performance
3	4	7	Between Satisfactory & Accomplished
4	4	8	Accomplished Performance

Table 1: STAAR Writing Table according to TEA resources

For Example: Student - A (Expository Essay)

Rater 1 – scores it a 2

Rater 2 – scores it a 3

$2 \times 2 = 4$ $3 \times 2 = 6$ Total points for Expository Essay $4 + 6 = 10$

The students Scale Score ranges from obtaining 0-72 possible points. From the year 2011 – 2015 the State of Texas identifies a student to be passing if they accumulate 39 points, which is equivalent to 3500 points on the raw score scale. In the multiple choice portion, a student can obtain up to 40 points, one point per question. Each essay can bring in a possible 16 points, after being multiplied by two. Students were and continue to be graded on three categories in essay writing: 1) Organization/Progression, 2) Development of Ideas, and 3) Conventions/ Word Choice. According to a powerpoint by Victoria Young, Director of Reading, Writing, and Social Studies Assessments for TEA, there are eight bullets that emphasize what the state’s rater is looking for in regards to each category. She identified and elaborated on each of the categories in a Deconstructing the Writing Rubric presentation. The following figure organizes the writing focus in each category.

Organization / Progression	Development of Idea	Conventions/ Word Choice
<p>Bullet #1: Responsiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The organizing structure of the response must “fit” the purpose for writing. The content of the response must be focused on the central “charge” of the prompt (the “Write about”). <p>Bullet #2: Focus/Sustaining Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What the student wants to accomplish—in essence, the “center” of the writing (the story line, main point, central/controlling idea, thesis) A general rule of thumb on STAAR: the narrower the focus, the better, since what a student writes has to be manageable in one page (26 lines). <p>Bullet #3: Progression/ Connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What isn’t required: a specific number of ideas or paragraphs What is required: moving logically from sentence to sentence and connecting ideas. Each sentence connects to the next sentence—no sentences overlap. Meaningful transitions clarify relationships—between sentences, paragraphs, and ideas. The reader can really (easily) follow the student’s train of thought because the story line, explanation, or argument is well controlled. 	<p>Bullet #4: Quality of the Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prompts focus on topics that DO NOT require students to bring particular background knowledge or facts to the table. The best development is real, based on a student’s own experiences and thinking about the world. Why? Because this allows the student to base the writing on what he or she TRULY knows and understands. For young and inexperienced writers, the “closer” and more first-hand the development is, the more effective it tends to be. <p>Bullet #5: Thoughtfulness/ Individuality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student’s “presence” in the writing itself (in effect, the face behind the writing): his personal feelings and thinking about the task (purpose + topic)—all expressed through what the student chooses to develop and how. The more original and individualistic the writing, the more engaging. Why? Because the reader is able to “see” the student and understand something about who he is and what he thinks. 	<p>Bullet #6: Word Choice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The words students use must “fit” the purpose (which includes establishing an appropriate tone). The most effective word choice always makes the writing clearer, more precise, and more interesting. <p>Bullet #7: Sentence Control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sentences are the primary vehicle (the framework) students use to communicate their idea—that’s why sentences have such a great effect on the quality and clarity of a narrative or essay. What isn’t required: a particular combination of sentence structures and lengths? What is required: sentences that are logical, meaningful, and controlled, making the flow of details or ideas easy to follow and understand? <p>Bullet #8: Sentence Boundaries and Conventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conventions = the correctness of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage: specifically, we’re looking for the degree to which students can apply the rules of written language to their own writing. Demonstrating consistent control of conventions does not equal “error-free” writing. It does mean that students have an overall command of conventions, even if some errors are evident. Because 4th and 7th graders are young and relatively inexperienced writers, we expect them to have mastered age-appropriate conventions rules, not

		necessarily all conventions rules.
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Figure 1: Deconstructing the Writing Rubric

In 2015, TEA released upcoming legislative changes for the year 2015-2016 to several state tests. House Bill 743 states that “STAAR grades 6-8 assessments should be redesigned so that 85% of students can complete in 3 hours, the writing test will therefore become a one day test, have fewer multiple-choice questions items, and only include one writing prompt (an expository).” (House Bill 743, Section 39.023 A-12(2)) The Texas Legislative released new blueprints, test design schematics, and assessed curriculum documents in the fall of 2015. The following changes were in fact made to the 7th grade STAAR writing test. Students are to complete the exam in one 4-hour day as opposed to the two 4-hour days. The personal narrative was removed and students only wrote an expository essay. Students only have 30 multiple questions as opposed to the 40 multiple questions they had the previous years. The test also dropped the number of passages the students would have to read; in the previous years students had 6 passages whereas in 2016 students had 4 passages.

While it may appear that the TEA is still trying to finalize exactly how to test writing and what changes are necessary, PSJA teachers must be familiar with all the state expectations in order to discuss how to structure a curriculum that embedded all expectations into a yearlong framework.

District Curriculum Design

While teachers were given the opportunity to be more involved in the curriculum, the central office personal had the final decision and adjustments before it was presented to the

superintendent and campus principals. First, teams were set for every grade level which included teachers from most campuses; this was done for every core content subject. Considering that this paper has a focus the writing curriculum the following information will discuss how the 7th grade reading and writing team designed the curriculum. The selection process required that every middle school campus select one teacher to represent the grade level. In May, the selected teachers met for a week at central office to meet with the Administrator for Middle School from the Office of Curriculum and Instruction, the ELA Coordinator from the district, the Superintendent, and the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum/Instruction to hear the upcoming plan and vision for the design of the curriculum. That week the team was to design the year-at-a-glance, so that when the summer would arrive there would be a plan in place.

To create the year-at-a-glance, teachers collaborated about the weakest genre that was evident with PSJA students according to the state standardized test data reports provided by the previous year. Reading informational text had proven to be the biggest weakness for students in both reading and writing. The lowest number of questions correct was multiple choice questions involving informational text and students writing expository essays. In order to align the two classes, reading and writing, the plan was to mirror what the students would be reading. One stipulation that the district has is that reading and writing must be two separate classes and they cannot be back to back; and so, students had the same ELA teacher two times a day. And so, if informational text was to start off the year then students were going to begin learning how to write an expository paper. Considering that expository essays were weaker when it came to writing, the team decided that the sooner the students would master reading informational text and writing expository essays the longer we would expose them to that material.

On the next page you will see a basic diagram with the first original plan for the 2014-2015 year. In the writing column I did not include the grammar that was taught by six weeks. Each selected literature piece also included a grammar focus and so most were selected from the story so that grammar would be emphasized in both classes. This would allow students the opportunity to use the story as a model for their own writing. I feel that I should mention that the following diagram has seen changes for the 2015-2016 year. After the first piloted year, several modifications were done after teachers made suggestions for what worked, what did not, and mainly that each six weeks had too much to cover, so it had to be condensed.

2014-2015 YAG	Reading	Writing
1 st Six Weeks	Informational Text, Essay, Poem	Expository Essay: Sentence variety, thesis statement, introductions, conclusions
2 nd Six Weeks	Myths, Folktales, Drama	Expository Essay, paragraphing, transitions,
3 rd Six Weeks	Short Stories	Narrative Essay: word choice, dialogue, sequence
4 th Six Weeks	Media, Speech, Functional Document, Persuasive	Narrative & Expository
5 th Six Weeks	Poetry, Fiction, Non-Fiction	Editing & Revising
6 th Six Weeks	Novel	Research Paper

Diagram 2: Model of 2014-2015 Year-at-a-Glance

In June 2014, the selected teachers that made up the team devoted three weeks to create a framework for the instruction and began creating resources that targeted common questions that the students would see on the state test. Resources were created using question stems from the release tests let out by TEA. Several teachers took on the challenge of working on the 7th grade reading resources and plan while others took on the task of designing the framework and compiling resources for the writing class. At the end of every day and sometimes throughout the day all of the work created was viewed and approved by central office personal that were

overseeing the progress and that were in charge of the district's curriculum. It was not until after the first week that the district had all teachers, who were involved with writing the curriculum, attend a training given by the Dana Center. The Dana Center, out of The University of Texas at Austin, Texas, was hired by PSJA to provide professional development to the members of all curriculum teams. Their presenter heavily addressed the TEKS from the State of Texas and how to determine what needs to be taught and what needs to be reviewed. At the end of their presentation the presenter closed by discussing levels of instruction for learners. Understanding the levels would help set a framework in which to work assignments into. The levels are as follows: Level 1 – developing (introduce the skill), Level 2 – reinforcing (guided practice), and Level 3- drill and practice (independent practice). After being trained, PSJA was able to begin designing a curriculum for its students that followed a foundation for the classroom. The mission of the Charles A. Dana Center is as follows:

How can we enable all students- those who are underserved- to achieve postsecondary success? This question guides our work to develop education tools and resources that are worthy of those we serve. It is why we collaborate with states and districts to provide sustained technical assistance, convene national networks, and create professional development programs and resources to help educators. It challenges us to identify stumbling blocks for students and develop innovative courses to encourage persistence, reshape academic identities, and build critical skills and knowledge. It drives us to advocate for rigorous standards and help education systems ensure that all students can master the content and practices described in these standards. Finally, it is why we strive to ensure that these efforts move beyond labs and

pilots and into classrooms and campuses across the country. In all our work, we are dedicated to nurturing student’s intellectual passions and ensuring that the accident of where a student lives does not limit his or her access to an excellent education.” (www.utdanacenter.org)

After vertically aligning the ELAR TEKS with all secondary teachers we were able to compose a framework for the students of PSJA. The Writing framework was as follows:

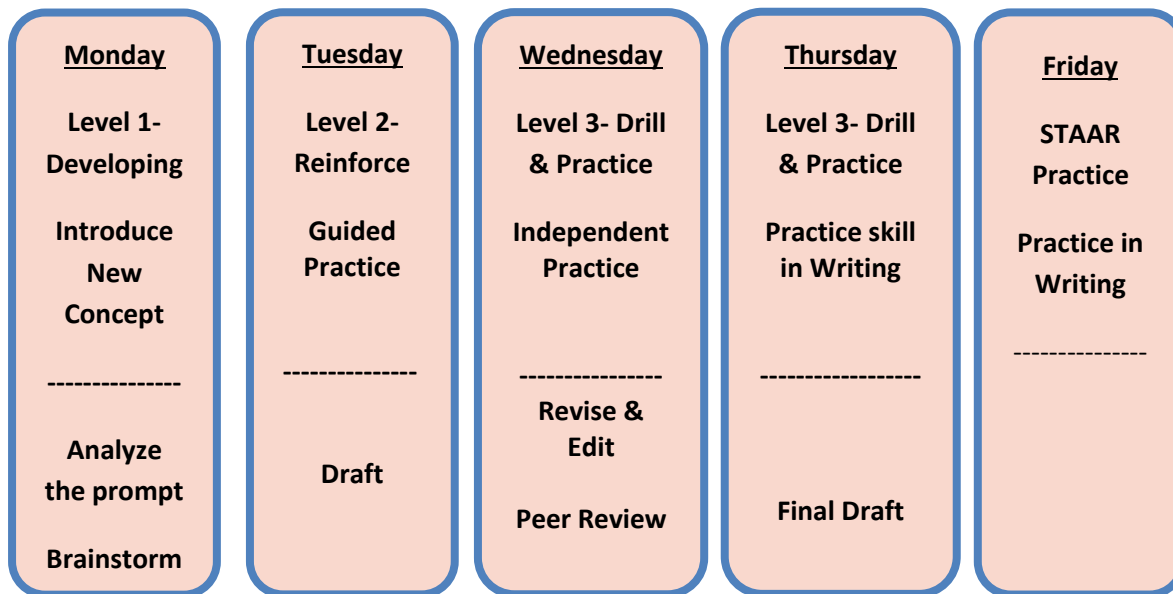


Figure 2: First Framework designed for the Writing Curriculum

Ultimately, the goal was to engage students in writing as often as possible. The framework demonstrates a new concept introduced weekly, but the majority of the time was going to be devoted to writing. In order to strengthen writing PSJA decided to devote more time for writing. According to Lou LaBrant, the primary need to become better at writing is to practice writing,

“The way to develop any ability is through consistent practice.” (LaBrant, p. 417) LaBrant opens up “Writing is Learned by Writing” by stating,

Again and again teachers or schools are accused of failing to teach students to write decent English, and again and again investigations show that students have been taught about punctuation, the function of the paragraph, parts of speech, selection of “vivid” words, spelling- that students have done everything but the writing of many complete papers.” (LaBrandt, p. 417)

La Brant’s words echoed in my head as we established the new framework that PSJA middle school writing classes would implement. In the previous year (2013-2014) PSJA 7th grade students had one English class in which the teacher had to teach both writing and reading skills. The upcoming year of 2014-2015, 7th grade students would see a change in the schedule; students would have a reading class and a writing class with the same teacher. This would allow enough time to practice the skills of revising, editing, and simply writing on a daily basis. The hope lies in the idea that students would be exposed to formal writing on a weekly basis and that this repeated practice would help improve writing. For example, teachers were to take a grammatical TEK and emphasize it in writing. After the teacher models examples and provides guided practice, students would independently embed the new TEK in their writing which focused solely on that new skill, and yet always adding to what was previously learned. This method would allow students to continuously practice actual writing on a weekly basis while reviewing grammar rules. Grammar skills that were previously introduced in earlier years would be reviewed or taught as mini lessons, such as TEK 7.17C using punctuation at the end of a sentence, a skill that has been taught to students since elementary. On the other hand, a new

concept would require English teachers to spend more time and explain the new concept such as TEK 7.20B(i) commas after introductory words, phrase, and clauses, a new concept would require identifying introductory words, phrases, or clauses, and understanding why a comma would be necessary and finally recognizing the effect that the comma would have in the sentence.

Writing a new prompt every week was not the focus, the focus was on working with the same prompt for several weeks implementing teacher-student conferences and peer editing. Several times throughout the year the curriculum writing teams would gather to discuss what was working and what was not. It was during one of those collaborative meetings that teachers learned early on that if given the opportunity to work on the same piece for several weeks students would develop the skills of revising, editing, and engaging in conversation about writing. Ideally, classes would be structured to devote the first 15-20 minutes to grammar and 30-35 minutes to writing essays or engaging in conferences about their essay whether with a peer or the teacher.

When designing the framework, the team was told that middle school classrooms needed more structure and students needed to know what to expect daily. The district also wanted them to be assessed for mastery as most elementary schools were doing. Mondays were considered level 1 days where teachers would introduce a new concept, for example, sentence variety such as: simple, compound, and complex sentences. Students could include notes onto an interactive notebook or foldable; then, be introduced to the new writing prompt and discuss the expectation, the quote or picture, or brainstorm and generate ideas. Tuesdays were for Level 2 days where teachers would reinforce by providing examples and working on the concept in class, usually on these days students paired up with a partner. For example, students could pair up and find two

examples of each sentence in the story from the reading class during the first minutes of class. Then, students would begin their rough draft on Monday's discussion of the writing prompt. Wednesdays were for Level 3 – drill and practice by having students write their own simple, compound, or complex sentences. Then, students could engage in peer conferences or teacher student conferences to receive feedback on outline of the paper and discuss the direction of the paper. Thursdays were for Level 3- drill and practice in writing. On this day students would revisit their essay and either identify the types of sentences that their paper contains or challenge themselves and include (x) number of simple, compound, or complex sentences. Fridays were a test day – students would see test questions that were on a released test and be able to understand how the state exam would ask questions about simple, compound, and complex sentences. Students were then exposed to the question stems for those particular questions; then they would take a practice test to check for mastery on the concept that was the focus. The goal was not just to teach students grammar rules, but to allow them to identify grammar in literature, practice it in their own writing, and truly understand the concepts being taught.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Nation Literacy Crisis

America, a country that is not third world and that gives the opportunity for all children to receive an education. Despite the fact that this country offers a free education there is a national literacy crisis that exists today and has existed in the United States of America. To help understand the crisis I am sharing data from the ProLiteracy, a non-profit international literacy organization that focuses on developing and promoting adult literacy learning. According to ProLiteracy, “With 36 million adults who do not read higher than a 3rd grade reading level in the United States,” we run the crises of economic instability, rising health cost, a digital literacy divide, and the need for student leadership because if not then the government funding programs are in jeopardy. Economic instability is created because illiterate people fail to understand many of the financial documents they receive and their investments are placed in the hands of companies that do not have their best interest at heart. Such people who have low reading levels also run a risk of unemployment and thus create unemployment rates to rise. According to the Center of Healthcare Strategies, “Nearly half of American adults have difficulty understanding and using health information. This lack of understanding impedes their ability to make appropriate health decisions and increases the likelihood that they'll incur higher health costs.” (ProLiteracy) Studies conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life project, “Have indicated that 1/5 households do not have internet access; thus, limiting the ability to connect to

the technology driven world that we live in.” Most job applications, e-mail accessibly, and internet information access occurs on-line, and if households lack the fundamental skills of literacy then the country sees an effect in a digital literacy divide. According to the National Assessment of Adult Learning, “Funding for adult literacy programs decreased by \$6 million in 2011,” and so if people do not take advantage of the programs offered to create a literate society then people will continue seeing a decrease in funds allotted to the literacy crisis. The Proliteracy Organization is urging people to become leaders in promoting literacy. Consequently, a lack of the basic education skills has repeatedly demonstrated the national effects that can happen to an individual, a family, or a community who chooses to ignore the literacy crisis that exists in today’s world.

Implementing Change

If people are aware of the literacy problem then people must also be made aware of the way to help change the literacy problem. The biggest change that can occur must begin in our school systems; students need to understand the value in reading and writing. Administrative leaders must educate themselves and teachers in best practices for students. Schools must integrate innovative ways of promoting literacy through collaborative learning, incorporating technology, and allowing opportunity to listen to and engage in public speaking.

Mike Schmoker introduced 3 key essentials for education reform; similarly, Susan Florio-Ruane, a professor of Teacher Education at Michigan State University who has published on literacy education, ethnographic and sociolinguistic research, and teacher education shares her ideas on reformation in education. Susan Florio-Ruane wrote, “Literacy, as central to all education, is most heavily implicated when a crisis is called and educational reforms are

introduced. Therefore, literacy educators bear both the burden and the responsibility of enacting change when a crisis is called.” (Florio-Ruane, P.173) She addresses the concerns with the education system by using three impactful metaphorical, metaphorical because she describes these moments as on a “swinging pendulum” (Florio-Ruane, p.160) moments “1) the inter-war years of the Great Depression, 2) the Cold War launch of Sputnik in the 1950s; and 3) recent era of reform under the law, No Child Left Behind, spanning 2001-2007” and speeches that influenced the education system. (Florio-Ruane, 163) Why metaphors? Florio-Ruane feels that

One of the most powerful figures of speech we use to accomplish change in times of crisis is metaphor. When orators use metaphor to move readers and listeners, they are using a heightened form of the ordinary human capacity to make and share experiences by means of figurative language... metaphors are central to how we explore and understand the world because they provide an experimental framework for making sense of abstract concepts. (Florio-Ruane, p. 160)

I include Susan Florio-Ruane’s three metaphors to show that in the last century reform had been called in education through various impactful moments. I feel that PSJA ISD shared in the reform idea. For teachers that did not buy into the change or the direction that the district sought then there was little room for going against the mission of the district, which included change for the success of students.

First, she identifies a metaphor “ship of state,” in which she discusses the years of when the nation suffered the Great Depression. In 1937 the Educational Policies Commission releases an essay in which educators are considered the crew members of a ship and

...teachers will have a major role to play in rescuing the ship of state in crisis – it is a role of re-asserting core knowledge...education is not part of the solution, but it is implicated in the crisis. Failing to keep democratic principles strong, teachers, left the nation unprepared to weather the storms of national and international events.... Thus, the essay enjoins teachers to help save the nation, yet it also reminds them that they are the crew that let the ship adrift. The essay evokes the image of teacher as both “vigilant father” and “indulgent mother” – strict yet also lax – in ways they have put both children and the nation at risk. (Florio- Ruane, p. 164)

This essay makes an urgent call to all teachers to help with the literacy problem and to aid the country in getting back on the right direction. Like the crew members of a ship, every teacher of core content was to play a role in increasing literacy across the district. Writing would also be expected in every classroom, whether core content or elective.

Secondly, Florio-Ruane discusses the moment that Sputnik was launched by Soviet Union. “The “Cold War” centered education in the struggle to protect both American ideology and values, and also its very existence and the security and safety of its citizens.” (Florio-Ruane, p.165) Knowing that Americans were witnessing the event from home and that America was broadcasting the success of Soviet Union’s rocket development caused a reaction from the nation once more. And thus, caused, “A growth in science interest that took over, the first Federal legislation to fund state and local education initiatives were passed, and Congress formed the formation of National Defense Education Act (NDEA) and the National Science Foundation.” (Florio-Ruane, p. 165) Which once again places the problem in education thus creating a call for

change by change, an implementation in the fields of math and science? This idea resonates as the accountability that districts uphold, campuses uphold, and individual schools uphold in the sense that we are constantly under a microscope compared to who possesses the most success and how to obtain that.

Lastly, the implementation of “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) also called for reform because of the purpose for education. While the U.S. strived to educate every child, it was for the intention to be competitive and prosperous. According to The Guide to Education and NCLB, in 2004, “Education is one of the most important functions of government... [and] satisfying the demand for highly skilled workers is a key to maintaining competitiveness and prosperity in the global economy.” Florio-Ruane adds that this idea emphasized that the purpose of schools was to produce skilled workers for corporate enterprises. The NCLB:

“Mirrored that of the corporation, replete with standards, benchmarks, high stake assessments, and outwards based awards and sanctions.” (Florio-Raune, 168) Under NCLB performance on state reading and mathematics tests determines whether schools make annual yearly progress (AYP). Schools failing to meet these achievement goals are subject to an escalating series of severe sanctions over time... For the first time in the history of Title 1, the federal government is dictating the pace of progress required to all schools, regardless of the students they serve and the resources they have and requires prescriptive standards for low-performing schools to that fail to improve scores on standardized reading and math test. (NCLB, 167, 2005 ix-x)

While Susan Florio-Raune's metaphors of calling teachers to action stand at a national level, districts today are still calling teachers into action. As we look to the teacher for support in change we must also understand the role of the teacher. There is a sense of urgency in the education that is provided for each American student and any student in general. Florio-Raune's definition of the role of a teacher is what PSJA ISD expects:

As practitioners, teachers must also take action in three areas: literacy education, preparation of literacy educators, and research on literacy teaching and learning. They are recipients of policies, practices, and materials not of their own design but with which they must work.... Thus, educators take creative ownership of the terms of their work, including the way they make use of materials and mandates... They are creative professionals who act according to the law, knowledge of best practices, and their own professional judgment to educate. (Florio-Ruane, p.173)

As Mike Schmoker names his 3 key essential to be how we teach, what we teach, and purposeful reading and writing, Susan Florio-Ruane ends with fairly the same what we are teaching, how we are preparing, and an emphasis in reading and writing. The idea that all educators take ownership shares in the idea of collaborating and creating effective lessons that target all students. Such actions require all teachers, central office personnel, and administrators to be on board of the ship. After carefully examining the STAAR writing state data, I feel that the following recommendations that could help the PSJA ISD district: creating writing portfolios to measure student growth in writing, include writing across all contents in all grade

levels not just state tested grade levels, and provide all teachers with professional development in teaching writing.

As we proceed into the methodology and findings we must be reminded of the “call to action” that exists within the district and the purpose of the collaboration between administrative leaders and teachers. Ultimately the goal was to create solidarity in the education that is given to the students at PSJA ISD.

Improving Writing By Writing

In chapter 1, I introduced Lou LaBrant who said that, “Students have been taught grammar rules, but have not done enough writing in the classroom.” (LaBrant, p.417) LaBrant’s article “Writing is Learned by Writing” focuses on the role of the writing teacher. LaBrant mentions that writing teachers often make excuses as to why students have basic writing skills, “first reason given for having students do language exercises instead of using language in connected discourse is that ‘my students don’t want to write,’... second excuse of the teacher is that he has no time for marking papers,... and finally [teachers need to] do a little writing yourself.” (LaBrant, p.417-419) According to LaBrant, students have much to say, but many teachers do not give them the opportunity to select a topic. Instead teachers are assigning writing prompts that are dull or about experiences that many students may have not gone through. Giving students the opportunity to select their topic may help students connect to the prompt or give them the opportunity to write about something that they truly know. Secondly, LaBrant mentions that teachers are not making enough time for feedback; as a teacher, I have come to know that this is vital in student writing. By feedback teachers must respond to the content and not focus on the grammar. Positive feedback is as important as negative feedback; personally, I

feel that there must be a balance when working with students because if you fail to give positive feedback and only focus on the negative then students will feel that the writing is always bad and eventually they will grow to dislike it. Finally, teachers must practice their craft as well.

Teachers must be able to meet the same expectation that they set for their students. If teachers do not write then how will they be able to model to the class, so that students can learn and meet the expectations set by them?

Shelley Mattson Gahn, an 8th grade language arts teacher at Liberty Junior School in West Chester, Ohio, wrote “A Practical Guide for Teaching Writing in the Content Areas,” where she focuses on the idea that writing should happen in all classes not just the writing classroom. She mentions that, “Good content writing does demand instruction by the content teacher...modeling means that teachers provide both good and bad examples of the completed product...demonstration helps students to visualize the end product and proves that the assignment is doable.” (Gahn, p. 526) One common assignment that I have seen is the response paper assigned by content teachers. An assignment that leaves many students lost as to how to respond or what is expected of them in the assignment. Gahn makes an interesting point because often the content teachers that assign the assignment do not model to the students how to produce the final product. In fact, today’s technological world has made it easy for students to copy and paste information that they have access to on the computer and submit that as their written paper. To assist in the evaluation of the final product Gahn agrees with Daniel L. Pearce in having teachers utilize, “Checklists and rubrics to promote self-evaluation of writing.” (Gahn, p.530) If students have a checklist or rubric that outlines the requirements and expectations then they will be more capable of producing a written assignment as expected.

LaBrant's ideas cover the writing class and Gahn's ideas cover the other contents, but what is the purpose of having students write more. Gahn ends by stating that, "The rewards of teaching students to write are lifelong." (Gahn, p.531) Alan Dittmer also said, "It [writing] is more than just a means for expressing what we think, writing is a means to knowing what we think, a means of shaping, clarifying, discovering, and illuminating out thoughts." (Dittmer, p.63) If teachers truly wanted to know exactly what a child has learned then writing would truly provide a window into the mind of the child and the knowledge that he may have obtained.

Development of Writing Portfolios

As students produce writing it is unjust to merely put a check mark on their paper or a single grade. Students must be proud of their work and that will happen by the amount of emphasis the teacher placed on the process that it took to brainstorm, write, revise, edit, conference, and create a final draft. And so, creating a writing portfolio for every student would allow students to constantly learn from one writing prompt to the next; students will even begin to reflect and notice the growth in their own writing skill. In "Portfolios in the Classroom: A Vehicle for Developing Reflective Thinking," the article focused on the idea that portfolios help create reflective thinking in students, "It moves one way from the primary concern of product to a concern with process." (Kish, C., et. al, p.254) By creating portfolios teachers allow all students to measure their own growth and monitor what they have learned and how they have arrived at their ideas. The article that having a reflective thought will uncover "positive educational outcomes such as: 1) reflection reduces the tendency to be impulsive and improves general problem-solving skills, 2) reflective thinking helps individuals analyze and deliberate issues, 3) reflection enhances communication of differing perspectives, 4) reflection promotes

self-awareness of our psychological selves by forcing one basic questions about himself.” (Kish, C., et. al, p.255) Not only will students begin to learn to weigh decisions and engage in conversation and embrace different views, but they will make discoveries about themselves.

Several years ago, I had a child come up to me and comment about how he felt his writing had not improved. Immediately I pulled out his writing portfolio, my students receive their portfolios at the end of the year, and took out a paper written by him in at the start of the year and one of his latest pieces. I remember that we were both floored when we realized the amount of improvement we saw in his writing. As he read one of his first pieces, he was surprised how quick he was unconsciously making corrections. I cannot forget the look on his face as he discovered what he had learned these past months and how much his writing skill had improved. As the words, “Ms. I can’t believe I wrote that,” came out of his mouth I could not help but smile at the self-discovery he had just made.

There are two different kinds of portfolios, active and passive. Bonita L. Wilcox who wrote, “Writing Portfolios: Active and Passive” defines the two types of portfolios, “A passive portfolio is a ‘showcase’ portfolio out of the writer’s hands, while an active portfolio is a ‘working’ portfolio which changes and grows with new input as it creates and generates new output.” (Wilcox, 34) Which portfolio would be best for students in a writing class? That it would depend on the purpose of the portfolio. A passive portfolio would showcase final products produced by an individual, but it would eliminate the developmental journey that the individual took to get there. While an active portfolio would include reading artifacts, thinking artifacts, writing artifacts, interacting artifacts, and demonstrating artifacts, and such artifacts would reveal the thinking and developing process that the individual has put into the work. An active portfolio allows an individual to continue to work on the craft and continue to strengthen the skill that the

individual is working on. Wilcox mentions that, “The point is that when different artifacts are evaluated in different ways by different evaluators, the chances increase for a more authentic assessment of the final portfolio. Furthermore, classroom assessment strategies become models for students to follow as they learn to manage and monitor their own learning.” (Wilcox, p.36) Personally, I feel that measuring student growth in writing would best be done through portfolios; than, assessing students with multiple choice questions and a written composition that has a time limit. Subjects such as reading and mathematics are tested every year; therefore, students receive growth points from one year to the next when their score improves affirming that their skills are developing. With a portfolio student writing can be assessed from the point of entry to the point of exit and evaluate the improvement in writing in different forms and development of an essay. Whether it is a way to assess students for the state or a way to merely assess students in a district, writing portfolios can serve as a more genuine way to measure writing improvement with students.

Writing Professional Development

Now that we have established that students can benefit from writing in every classroom and the benefits of writing portfolios we are still missing one major aspect, providing proper training for educators who will be involved in aiding students in becoming better writers. Professional development is essential in helping all teaching staff understand the expectation for them as teachers and for their students. It helps understand how and what needs to taught, and it allows them to ask questions for clarity and collaborate with others teachers in the field that could help those that might be undertaking a task that they may not be too comfortable with. In “A Program to Develop Basic Writing Skills in Grades 4-9,” it discusses how they designed *The*

Right to Write Project. The project was designed to strengthen writing skills among students in Burlington City Schools in Burlington, North Carolina. “To accomplish improving student basic writing skills the project utilized staff development and classroom assistance provided by resource teachers.” (Coop, R. et al, p.76) First, they trained the, “language arts teachers and administrators in writing conducted by the project staff and writing consultants from universities,” (Coop, R. et al, p.76) this allowed teachers and administrators who were involved with the project to truly understand the goal and expectation set for writing. (Coop, R. et al., p. 77) During the learning phase, teachers and administrators were asked to keep a writing portfolio of their own writing for the duration of the project; this allowed them to have concrete artifacts of the writing process and techniques on writing instruction. (Coop, R. et al., p.78) The next professional development was administered to teachers of other core subject and electives. The project enforced that all subjects included writing, so all teachers had to be trained in the writing process to help encourage other subject teachers to assign writing in class, understand the process, give feedback, and assist students who need help. Then they decided to train all instructional aids in the writing process, so that everyone involved in assisting students would have a concrete understanding of what the students were expected to do. After training all personnel in the writing process another professional development took place; this training focused on “describing and evaluating student writing.” (Coop, R. et al., p.78) Ultimately, if a program wants to see success on any concept then teachers must be on the same page and that involves training your personnel. Writing will always be left to the writing teacher if we do not invest the energy to teach the other teachers of other core area contents and elective teachers; if by chance they do include the writing the feedback will never be effective if schools fail to teach them how to evaluate a piece of writing. The same way that every student comes from a different

background into a classroom is the same way that many teachers come with a different background. Many teachers are from different cities, attended different universities, and obtained different degrees and thus districts must understand that if we want student to master writing then all teachers must be trained in teaching writing. Without professional development teachers will resort to teaching writing the way they were taught when they were in school or merely assign a writing task to fulfill a campus initiative.

Providing teachers with professional development in writing, enforcing that students write in every class and constantly monitoring student writing through writing portfolios are ways that schools can begin moving into excellence. If the ultimate goal is that students are successful writers in college then we must take a look at what is expected at that level and begin to help students develop the skills needed for college.

After mentoring several teachers, often I have noticed that many come with a lack of foundation in understanding the expectation from the state for students. Ideally, a course in understanding the state indices, standards, and rubrics would benefit today's educators. Including a course that also taught future teachers how to give feedback to student work would also benefit many teachers, not just new teachers. Perhaps forming a partnership with the local university would help assist in strengthening teachers; and thus, help to make our students better writers.

Moving Into Excellence

"Marketing Excellence in Higher Education," Christopher Carters quotes Louis Althusser in stating, "The idea of 'excellence extends across classifications - alongside concepts like services, accountability, flexibility – and is typically connotes the viability of higher education in the global marketplace. Excellence evokes classical competition: to excel is to fare well in the

race... The need for excellence is what we all agree on'." (Carter, 131) How do we create excellence within a writing program? In order to experience success we would have to add to Althusser's three classifications. Services – What professional development is provided and what resources are implemented? Accountability- Understanding the accountability of everyone: district, administrator, teacher, and student. Flexibility – Constant reflections for a true picture and the willingness to implement change. With change, we must begin to think with the end in mind and the end ultimately is college success for all students. The following practices will lay out an outline for college success: Post –Secondary Framework for writing followed by 11 essential practices from "Writing Next", by Steven Graham and Dolores Perin. The 11 essential practices strengthen writing as a skill along the Common Instructional Framework that was compiled by Early College Design Services and Jobs for the Future to build college readiness. The purpose for including these three references is because PSJA ISD prides itself in developing students that are "college ready," and so, the Framework for Post-Secondary is essential in the ultimate target, but to develop those skills PSJA ISD is implementing the 11 essential practices from Writing Next along with the common Instructional Framework to include engagement.

In 2011, the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project published a Framework for Success in Post-Secondary Writing. "This framework describes the rhetorical and twenty-first century skills as well as habits of mind and experiences that are critical for college success." (FP-SS, p.1) Success in college writing entails that a student must possess the following habits of mind: curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition. These habits of mind are acquired through writing, reading, and critical analysis.

If effectively implemented students will develop rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, writing processes, knowledge of conventions, and the ability to compose in multiple environments.

To build on such skills I will bring in the 11 essential elements from “Writing Next: A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York.” The report addresses important facts about the importance of writing for adolescences, such statics are essential for any educator or personnel that work in the education field to know and understand the value of writing. Often times students ask “Why is writing important?” The report states that writing is crucial to all:

Contexts of life (school, the workplace, and the community) call for some level of writing skill, and each context makes overlapping, but not identical, demands. Proficient writers can adapt their writing flexibly to the context in which it takes place. In the school setting, writing plays two distinct but complementary roles. First, it is a skill that draws on the use of strategies (such as planning, evaluating, and revising text) to accomplish a variety of goals, such as writing a report or expressing an opinion with the support of evidence. Second, writing is a means of extending and deepening students’ knowledge; it acts as a tool for learning subject matter (Keys, 2000; Shanahan, 2004; Sperling & Freedman, 2001). (Graham and Perin, p. 18-19).

In order for students to want to learn they must understand the value of being able to write well. When introducing essay writing, I have realized that many students believe that every essay is approached the same way or that a prompt is a question and if they respond in a full page then that constitutes as an essay. Early on in the first semester we teach students the difference between a narrative, expository, and persuasive essay. First, students include notes in their

interactive notebook with visuals to help understand that difference. Secondly, students view paragraphs written in the form of a narrative, an expository, and a persuasive essay and discuss technique, approach, and characteristics that make it that particular essay. This is done to provide clarity in the mind of a developing writer in understanding different forms of writing as well as purpose.

A child who lacks writing skills is a child,

“Who does not have the ability to transform thoughts, experiences, and ideas into written words and is in danger of losing touch with the joy of inquiry, the sense of intellectual curiosity, and the inestimable satisfaction of acquiring wisdom that are the touchstones of humanity. What that means for all of us is that the essential educative transmissions that have been passed along century after century, generation after generation, are in danger of fading away, or even falling silent.” (Graham and Perin, p. 10)

In a recent report, the National Commission on Writing, a committee formed by over 4300 schools and colleges due to the concern of the writing level in the United States, also addresses this concern; they say, “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.” (Graham and Perin, p.11) Many teachers and students are under the misconception that writing should only be done in an English classroom, but according to the National Commission on Writing students must write in order to learn. Additionally, it should be done anywhere that learning is taking place. One of the six common instructional strategies

implemented by the district includes writing to learn, a practice that is done at least 3 times a week in every classroom at PSJA ISD. Writing to learn is not necessarily formal writing; it can be used to scaffold ideas, an exit ticket, a bell ringer to generate ideas on the topic of the day, a response to what is being learned, or something to merely think, pair, and share with a peer or with the class. Nonetheless, writing to learn is expected and implemented to help develop ideas and practice the written language.

Thus, the report listed several key practices that support a student in their learning to write, “11 elements of current writing instruction found to be effective for helping adolescent students learn to write well and to use writing as a tool for learning. It is important to note that all of the elements are supported by rigorous research (Graham and Perin, p. 10).”

- I. “Writing Strategies - which involves teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions.” (Graham and Perin, p.4)
- II. “Summarization - which involves explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize texts.” (Graham and Perin, p.4)
- III. “Collaborative Writing - which uses instructional arrangements in which adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions.” (Graham and Perin, p.4)
- IV. “Specific Product Goals - which assigns students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete.” (Graham and Perin, p.4)
- V. “Word Processing - which uses computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing assignments.” (Graham and Perin, p.4)
- VI. “Sentence Combining - which involves teaching students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences.” (Graham and Perin, p.4)
- VII. “Prewriting - which engages students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition.” (Graham and Perin, p.4)
- VIII. “Inquiry Activities - which engages students in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task.” (Graham and Perin, p.4)

- IX. “Process Writing Approach - which interweaves a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing.” (Graham and Perin, p.4)
- X. “Study of Models - which provides students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing.” (Graham and Perin, p.5)
- XI. “Writing for Content Learning, which uses writing as a tool for learning content material.” (Graham and Perin, p.5)

The Institute for Public School Initiatives at the University of Texas at Austin took these 11 essential practices and developed a reflection survey for teachers to evaluate themselves in the classroom and identify which of these practices they use in their classrooms or in their district. As I took the survey I realized that PSJA students were exposed to all of these practices; however, some practices were practiced more than others. This survey allowed teachers to see what is occurring or not occurring in supporting growth for all writers. These 11 practices identify useful ways in which writing can improve, but yet they can be modified for any given student. Take for example word processing, students who have trouble spelling might benefit by using the computer to identify misspelled words; all the while, other students might use the computer to help with punctuation within sentences.

The following graph lays out the three researched ideas for implementing a successful writing program and writer. In the first column you would find the target characteristic that a “college ready” student should possess according to the Framework for Success. The middle column identifies the 11 elements from Writing Next by the characteristic that it would impact the most. The 11 elements are placed in the center because they are not strictly implemented for success on the state exam, but implemented to solely develop or strengthen the writing skills of a writer. “We teach composition we are not teaching a product, we are teaching a process.”

(Murray, p.1) Often students and teachers alike feel that a perfect paper is what scores the highest grade in the STAAR. That is not necessarily the case students’ original ideas and how they organize them will often earn them a high score even on the state exam. Looking back to Figure 1, the rubric states that a 4 paper is not necessarily an “error free paper” this is why including time for student engagement is vital to a curriculum because there are some students with limited life experiences, and yet they can learn from their peers or from discussing stories and experiences of characters. Hence, the reason PSJA ISD includes time to think, pair, and share almost daily; we have become aware of the number of students that have not travelled out of South Texas, and need to discuss the experiences with their peers to understand. Lastly, the final column included the CIF strategies that the district required from every teacher in every content to increase student engagement.

Framework for Success in Post-Secondary Writing Habits of Mind	Writing Next: A Report to Carnegie Corporation of NY 11 Elements	Common Instructional Framework
Curiosity - desire to know more.	-Inquiry Activities -Study of Models	- Scaffolding - Questioning
Openness –willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking.	-Collaborative Writing	- Collaborative Group work - Literacy Groups - Classroom Talk
Engagement – investment and involvement in learning.	-Writing Strategies -Pre-Write	- Write to Learn - Classroom Talk
Creativity – Using novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas.	-Process Writing Approach	- Literacy Groups - Scaffolding - Questioning
Persistence – ability to sustain interest and attention to short and long-term projects.	-Process Writing Approach	- Scaffolding - Classroom Talk - Questioning
Responsibility – ability to ownership of one’s actions and understand the consequences of actions for oneself and others.	-Specific Product Goals	- Collaborative Group Work - Literacy Group
Flexibility – ability to adapt to	-Sentence Combining	- Collaborative Group Work

situations, expectations, or demands.	-Writing for Content Learning	- Write to Learn
Metacognition – reflect on one’s own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge.	-Summarization -Word Process Technology	- Writing to Learn - Scaffolding - Questioning - Literacy Groups - Classroom Talk

Figure 3: Alignment of Writing Best Practices, Common Instructional Framework, and Success in Post-Secondary Writing

The 11 elements are necessary to build the writing skill for all students, not for testing purposes, but simply as a writer. According to WPA, NCTE, and the NWP, “Standardized writing curricula or assessment instruments that emphasize formulaic writing for non-authentic audiences will not reinforce habits of mind and the experiences necessary for success as students encounter the writing demands of post- secondary education.” (WPA, NCTE, NWP, p.3) And so, at this point I would like to tie in how the 11 elements from Writing Next aid a writer in developing the writing demands needed for post-secondary success and how they are embedded in the curriculum. I would also like to add that for over 7 years PSJA has trained and implemented CIF (Common Instructional Framework) strategies with their students. A Teacher’s role is to primarily be a facilitator for learning rather than a lecturer. The 6 focuses with CIF are: collaborative group work, writing to learn, scaffolding, questioning, literacy groups, and classroom talk. As teachers put together their lesson plans they must indicate which CIF strategy/s will be used.

For building on the habit of mind of curiosity, “a desire to know more,” (FP-SS, pg. 4) it matched well with inquiry activities and study of models. Through inquiry activities students could be looking at pictures or quotes that trigger ideas for their writing; they could scaffold and discuss what they know about the writer and build from each other. The teacher can bring in information and allow them to classroom talk or think- pair- share with a partner. Most

commonly students are given ample time to study models of writing; whether it is that the teacher is modeling or if they are looking at student samples students are given the opportunity to engage in discussion about techniques, structure, and ideas.

To develop openness, “willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking” (FP-SS, p.4) could be a challenge for some students who feel that writing is not their forte. Collaborative writing could help with that – if you intentionally group students with a skilled writer, average writer and developing writer they could collaborate on creating an essay together. The goal would be that all can contribute ideas and together listen and observe how those ideas are articulated on paper. Such essays are usually written on butcher paper and displayed for a gallery walk to receive more feedback from peers.

Engagement, “investment and involvement in learning,” (FP-SS, p.4) is easy to incorporate if you can help students see the relevance in learning the skill. Building their confidence with positive reinforcement helps middle school students invest in their learning. One of the major challenges I have encountered is getting students to want to brainstorm, revise, or edit their work. For engagement pre writing and writing strategies coincided because PSJA incorporates opportunities for peer editing and teacher-student conference. In fact, students understand that before I can conference with them their paper must go through 2 other students for feedback. As a teacher this allows me to not only see the writing of one student, but I can monitor the editing and revising skills of 2 other students. For pre-writing and writing strategies calling students to model for the class is also effective and allows opportunity for engagement. Calling one student to show their brainstorming, calling another to discuss their rough draft and what they noticed as strengths and weaknesses, and finally calling a final student to show their final draft helps in adding value to pre-writing and writing strategies.

Creativity, “using novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas” (FP-SS, p. 4-5) is easily linked to the reading class for PSJA students. The reading and writing curriculum go hand in hand when reading informational text students are writing expository essays. This is done so that students can see how expository writing is modeled by professional writers in literature and they can remember and mimic style in the writing class. From the 11 writing elements creativity linked with process writing approach because students visually see and engage in discussion over purpose, style, and word choice; therefore, students would be able to see various ways of presenting ideas in writing. Many times this also allowed students to have knowledge (from a resource) for their essay and this added support for their ideas. For example, students may closely see how a particular writer presented one idea and then transitioned into another idea; perhaps they could discuss the effect of the transitional word (s) and discuss other possible fitting words or why particular words would not fit. Students might attempt to find the thesis statement and discuss why some writing includes a thesis statement in the front of the paper and some include it in the back of the paper and what effect that creates.

Persistence, “the ability to sustain interest and attention to short and long-term projects,” (FP-SS, p. 5) with middle school students is a challenge especially in a writing class because writing is work. In “Remembering Writing, Remembering Reading” Deborah Brandt researches how people view reading and writing. She also shares what relationship both subjects have in schools “where prestige around reading and ambivalence around writing play out in a somewhat different and somewhat paradoxical configuration,...writing almost always plays second fiddle to reading in terms of the time and resources spent on each,... writing seems to be introduced in order to induce, support, or verify reading.” (Brandt, p.473) Brandt shares that people usually have a positive outlook towards reading because their first memory of learning to reading was

with someone and received praise whereas writing carried a negative outlook because student memory of writing involved markings all over their paper and writing was used as a means of punishment or isolation. Persistence interconnected along with the process writing approach share the goal of interweave writing with a piece of text that students found interesting, so that when they write they had background knowledge which gave them a sense of accomplishment. Coincidentally, the positive impact has worked with our students for the last several years; I have heard repeatedly by several students that “maybe I wouldn’t mind being a writing teacher.” While it takes a while to teach “peer editing,” it really builds student confidence as they feel more comfortable in engaging in writing conversations.

Responsibility, “ability to ownership of one’s actions and understand the consequences of actions for oneself and others,” (FP-SS, p. 5) it tied to specific product goals because students keep a folder that contains their goals, scores, and breakdown or TEKS. The purpose for this folder is so that students begin to be aware of strengths and weakness, so that they can focus more on problematic concerns. As a teacher I might pinpoint one main concern in their writing and when I notice that they have corrected that concern then I might bring up another concern on another paper that they submit. This is done so that students will not become discouraged and so that they can only focus on one weakness at a time. After addressing the concern they are responsible for improving the paper and this is where effort is required from their part if they want to improve.

Flexibility, “the ability to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands,” (FP-SS, p. 5) was paired with sentence combining and writing in content learning. Writing in content learning was a district-wide implementation because writing should be done in all contents. It is a way to measure what a student truly knows if they can respond back about the concept that is taught.

Considering that PSJA has a big number of ELL students, such students must take a TELPAS test that requires them to write several academic papers; and so, writing across contents helps support our ELL population. Flexibility is also evident in their writing because students have the freedom to choose how to construct sentences and word selection. One challenge that I often give them is to label all the sentences to see what types of sentence they often construct then they have to try to include a compound sentence or a complex sentence.

Metacognition, “reflect on one’s own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural process used to structure knowledge,” (FP-SS, p.5) associated with summarization and word processing. If students had the opportunity they would type out their paper in word so that they could monitor spelling or sentence errors. This was done for individual monitoring.

Summarization in a writing class was often done as a reflection on the concept that they were learning. For example, in the beginning of the year students number down how many sentences were in their essay and they write the first 4 words each sentence and they count how many words are in each sentence. This helps them evaluate if they begin every sentence the same and sentence lengths. Students then summarize what they learned about their writing. Often I grade the reflection and not the writing piece because I am trying to help them build a foundation from which to spring off of.

While I cannot guarantee that any of these practices will provide an accomplished performance, implementing them can help aid a writing curriculum and any student that wanting to know the benefits of writing and the strategies to become better.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This segment will discuss the methods for the study and the procedures that I went through to obtain the information. The selection of PSJA ISD as the district for study stemmed from the size of the student body, the large number of middle schools in the district for me to obtain different information from, the demographics that varied from the State of Texas and the newly implemented change to the curriculum. PSJA ISD offered a perfect example for a district that was implementing change for an increase in student success on the state standardized test and in student performance because of their connection to the local college and university through Early College Programs. In 2016, PSJA ISD ranked #41 among the largest districts across Texas, with 31,997 students enrolled, and the third largest in the Rio Grande Valley behind Brownsville (49,370) and Edinburg (34,104). (www.k12.niche.com/rankings/public-school-districts)

After being selected by the district to participate in the writing curriculum team I became curious to study the results of the changes that were being made; changes that were not only revealed for that year but between the scope of previous years and upcoming years. While it appeared that some years students did well and other years they did not I was interested in uncovering in what area were students not performing well and how as teachers we could come up with solutions. The idea in how the team would work was that it allowed many teachers to be involved. While I was invited to participate the 1st year, I knew that the following year another

teacher would be invited and so forth. The idea was not to always revamp the plan, but to reflect on what worked and what did not and involve other possible ways to teach TEKS. Due to my involvement that year my first step was to receive approval from the district of PSJA ISD, without district approval I knew University approval would have been denied. I first approached the Coordinator for Curriculum and Instruction and the ELA Coordinator for Middle School, these people oversaw the writing team and would be able to aid me in retrieving any information that I would have to obtain from the district and from TEA. After speaking to them I was urged to e-mail the Deputy Superintendent of PSJA ISD and receive complete approval from the district; it was granted. My second step was to obtain IRB approval; I tested and obtained CITI Certification (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative), a course I had to complete in order to understand the rules and regulations in obtaining information from educational settings and research from human subjects. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley granted me approval to proceed with my study on January 21, 2015.

The sole purpose and objective of this research was to verify that positive changes were being made for the students, that the teaching practices were effective, and that progressing results were going to be ongoing and not remain stagnant. By this point in time teachers and administrators had become aware of the new state exam and had noticed that PSJA students did not have the same passing rate as the state, as stated before PSJA fell 21% below the state percentage in student passing rates in writing. While my presence in the writing team gave insight to what teachers were doing on one campus this collaboration was to affect the students of eight middle schools. As a teacher I know that I make a difference in my classroom with 70 students a day, and as a department head I know that I have the capability to make a difference on a campus

level with 750 students a day, but this participation gave me the opportunity to make a difference across a major district and impact the learning of 2100 students in a year.

The first goal of the curriculum writing team was to form a foundation by creating a research based framework that would be effective for the students of PSJA ISD and the major demographics that PSJA ISD services. To do so, PSJA ISD brought in researchers from the University of Texas in Austin to present to the participants of all core subjects before beginning to design the new curriculum, primarily they were to assist in helping design the framework and the year-at-a-glance. Teachers were then to incorporate resources after understanding the TEKS that were aligned in the year-at-a-glance.

The focus of this research was the STAAR multiple choice and composition data increase or decrease and the curriculum; therefore, I did not feel the need to interview students. In fact, the only feedback that was included in this study was the answers from a questionnaire that the teachers from the writing curriculum team completed. Consent for the questionnaire was done in person as every participant received a consent form prior to receiving the questionnaire informing them on the purpose of the questions and of the study that is being conducted. The team itself was compiled with 3-5 people, and so while the responses may vary the number of teachers that completed the survey was small. The first teachers selected by the district were teachers that had experience in the content and grade level and proved to have made an impact in the classroom with their students through effective lessons or high passing rates in the STAAR test. The questionnaire allows teachers to identify whether change needs to be made and if so where and how. Upon planning we were reminded to begin with the end in mind, so the final question asked was about the ultimate goal that the teachers would like to see if any. This was asked to put into perspective the end results at the start of the planning. After all the data is

gathered from each school it would be inputted into a graph to measurable see the increase or decrease caused by the curriculums in the past 4 years. According to a presentation by Middle School Matters, a partnership between the George W. Bush Research Institute and The Meadows Center for aiding student who are educational risks, they identify research strategies that can help with middle school improvement and have post secondary success, “If students were not showing expectant gains questions such as the following might be considered:

- Did teachers receive adequate professional development?
- Are appropriate strategies being selected and taught?
- Are the implemented stages being implemented with high fidelity?”

After looking at the data, central office personnel must ask themselves- what are the reasons for low results and they must devise a plan to modify the curriculum by receiving feedback as to what worked and what didn't and perhaps include professional development where the district is seeing major gaps in the learning.

Although Writing takes place in various grade levels due to the fact that there is not a writing class in every grade level and my experience is in secondary; therefore, I choose to single out 7th grade because that was the writing team that I was assisting on and data would have revealed the growth measures that correlated to the work I was working with. Unfortunately, in PSJA a writing class is only in 7th grade because that is the grade level that students will complete a state exam. Prior to 7th students are tested in 4th grade, but those students are in the classroom with their teacher the entire day. While write occurs in other classes in all grade levels it is not the writing process that is usually taught to students or writing that received feedback for revision and editing.

The data that was obtained included percentages of passers and non-passers in the State of Texas, in PSJA ISD, and throughout the 8 middle schools. State data was gathered to serve as the general overall population that takes the state exam and the objective of the research was to zero in on a particular area such as South Texas, and PSJA ISD to be specific. State and district data was obtained for four years and measure in the respect of growth across the state and growth within the district. Such growth patterns focused on the writing portion of the test and overall passing rates. The quantitative data that is provided is public information and was obtained from the TEA website (Texas Education Agency). The demographics of PSJA ISD are also included by campus. When looking at why one school out performs the other it is important to note that some schools serve more students and some campuses have a high population of sub-groups (English language learners, migrant, or special education students). Aside from identifying State data and district data, no teacher or middle school was identified or labeled all 8 middle schools were identified as School A – School H; therefore, there is no harm or risk to students or teachers. While all the data obtained is public information I still feel the need to not name the specific schools that was used in the study.

In regards to reviewing the data, while at the start of 2011 the major change that the state made by switching from TAKS to STAAR PSJA students scored 21% below the State of Texas. I wanted to show a rapid growth pattern in closing the huge gap that existed verses the small movement made across the state. The concern came the second year that students took the STAAR because after testing 21% below and now having access to resources and PSJA students dropped from 50% passing to 44% passing; all the while, that year (2013) the state showed an increase from 71% passing to 77% passing, which gave PSJA a 33% gap compared to the State of Texas. At this time PSJA saw a reason to implement changes for growth and now I often ask

myself, “Why has the rest of the state remained stagnant?” By carefully analyzing the data we see substantial growth from a teacher created curriculum verses the purchased resources. After that 33% deficit in 2013, PSJA implemented the new curriculum for the 2013-2014 year, in which PSJA’s passing rate increased from 44% passing to 64% passing a 20% increase, all the while the state dropped 2% going from 77% to 75% passing. It is evident that what has been implemented has worked, but we still must keep in mind that while the gains are there the work is not over. In the 2015 year PSJA still remains 11% behind the state passing rate.

I feel that that this study can benefit PSJA ISD and any other district that has similar demographics and/or a district that is trying to implement change to a writing curriculum to ensure success. PSJA demographics include large numbers of English Language Learners, large number of economically disadvantaged students, and students with special needs. The hope is that it reveals positive growth when a teacher is involved with the design of the students’ curriculum by uncovering the results of a curriculum that is intentionally designed for the student population at PSJA ISD for the primary purpose of increasing student success in writing. While the state test has proven to be more rigorous the focuses was on teacher investment in the writing curriculum and as a result show an increase in student scores in the Writing STAAR Test.

Survey

Teachers and central office personal that worked in the writing curriculum were asked to complete a series of five questions that discussed an inside viewpoint as to why it would be beneficial to revamp the curriculum. The questions were as follows: 1) before putting the 2014-2015 writing curriculum together, what problems had you noticed in the writing class? How were those problems being addressed? 2) What are the primary changes you are incorporating in

the teacher created curriculum verse the adopted curriculums from the past? 3) Explain the writing curriculum's framework that was designed for the 2014-2015 year? 4) Is there research that supports the framework? If so, please explain the research? 5) What is (are) your goal(s) for the teacher created curriculum for the students of PSJA? What type of growth pattern are you hoping to see in regards to the STAAR scores?

I wanted teachers to be able to identify problems that they saw in the curriculum so that from their perspective we would have an understanding as to why many sought change. Before the curriculum was in place, the majority of the surveys revealed that the sequence of the curriculum had not been considering in accordance with the TEKS. The original curriculum seemed to have too many gaps and teachers were concerned because there was never any time to reteach the concepts that struggling students were having difficulty with. When addressing the writing prompt an issue arose that students had difficulty relating to prompts that were provided and so they suggested adding more relevance to the topics that students are expected to write about. With the new curriculum we also received an extra class period to teach writing, one major problem was finding the time to teach reading and writing in one ELA class period. As previously mentioned, the writing class was to align with the reading class.

Such problems deemed solutions; and thus, the primary changes that the curriculum writers were going to incorporate into the teacher created curriculum needed to be discussed and many wanted grammar to be a primary focus. As students began to learn the writing process it was evident that many students needed to review basic grammar rules; as a result, teachers wanted time to refresh grammar rules that had been previously taught in earlier grade levels. Teachers felt that this would help students understand the feedback that would aid them in revising and editing. The expectation was that students merely would not go into their paper and

change something because the teacher said to, but to understand why the change would be made. The curriculum would include a realistic timeline that allotted time for teaching parts of speech and re-teaching when necessary. Another added practice would be STAAR formatted questions, when the STAAR was first released there were not many resources available for teachers to use. Now that the state has released several released test, the team has compiled question practices so that students would familiarize themselves with test-like questions.

After discussing problems and solutions, it was important for the curriculum team to be able to explain the framework of the writing curriculum to demonstrate a common understanding. The feedback varied from, “It is still a work in progress,” to simply stating that the curriculum is based on the writing TEKS through the use of the adopted textbook and STAAR released tests. One respondent addressed focusing on the areas of weakness by using Lead 4ward. Lead 4ward is a “vertical alignment for K-English IV” (TEA/UTS) and consists of the following sections:

- Introduction
- Reading Strand
- Comprehension skills found in Figure 19
- Writing Strand
- Oral and Written Conventions Strand
- Research Strand
- Listening and Speaking Strand

The book itself was compiled with the intention that it would “help teachers integrate the reading and writing student expectations when planning instruction.” (TEA/UTS) Lead 4ward is a book that was compiled together with all of the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge Skills) and ELPS (English Language Proficiency Standard) in one manual to help teachers plan and target every student. It serves as a way for the teacher planning to see the entire targeted TEK from Kinder through 12th grade all the while ensure that the teacher also cover the components of reading,

writing, listening, and speaking for ELL's. By comparing the heavily tested TEKS and the data of the previous years, the writing curriculum team mentioned focusing more on the specific TEKS that belonged to that grade level. Lead 4ward is a guide that is heavily used when putting together targeted lessons for specific TEKS.

Aside from Lead 4ward, it was important to address the support that was obtained for the new ideas for the framework, resources, or curriculum. While the responses varied depending on what particular teachers had used in their classroom and proved to have worked, many teachers did not provide specific resources. Discussions about the readiness standards, a strand that supports students for college-readiness, and supporting standards, a TEK that had previously been taught another year and is reinforced to support the next year, changing arose and the need was to focus on student's needs. For example, readiness standard 7.14C: "revise drafts to ensure precise word choice and vivid images; consistent point of view; use simple, compound, and complex sentences; internal and external coherence; and the use of effective transitions after rethinking how well questions of purpose, audience, and genre have been addressed," (TEA) was tested 6 times in the 2012 STAAR administration, 6 times in 2013, 7 times in 2014, and 10 times in 2015. When looking at the construction of the test teachers need to make sure to cover this TEK repeatedly because the state keeps putting more emphasis on this particular skill. Whereas, TEKS 7.17A: "write a multi-paragraph essay to convey information about a topic that (i) presents effective introductions and concluding sentences, (ii) contains a clearly stated purpose or controlling idea, (iii) is logically organized with appropriate facts and details and includes no extraneous information or inconsistencies, (iv) accurately synthesizes ideas from several sources, (v) uses a variety of sentences structures, rhetorical devices, and transitions to link paragraphs," (TEA) was tested 10 times in the 2012 STAAR administration, eight times in 2013, seven times

in 2014, and four times in 2015. Unlike TEKS 7.14C that showed more questions being asked, 7.17A shows that the state is dropping questions that address this skill. The Dana Center professional development gave an inside into what concepts are new concepts and which merely have to be reviewed. Ideas from Linda Feaman and Nancy Geldermann in regards to close reading were brought up, this year one major focus is close reading and resources were pulled from their book, “Unlocking Close Reading.” Most teachers also included the 11-minute essay by Gretchen Barnabi to be an effective tool for teaching the expository essay to students. Barnabi’s 11 minute essay teaches students that the writing skill itself does not take a long time once the brainstorming has been done; it also allows students to understand the different resources they can use in their expository essays. For instance, students begin with a truism then write paragraph 1 supporting their idea with a book they have read, paragraph 2 would support the same idea by using a movie they have seen, and paragraph 3 would support the same idea using a historical event they have learned through their history class. While we do not teach the 5-paragraph essay this practice is done to demonstrate to students the different knowledge they contain for their essays.

Lastly, it was essential to address the goal(s) for the students of PSJA ISD after the implementation of the new framework, resources, and curriculum. Due to the fact that our students writing is assessed through the STAAR Writing Exam, every survey mentioned wanting to see growth, if the State of Texas’s passing rate was 72% last year and PSJA ISD’s passing rate was 61% then the primary goal is to close that gap and hopefully exceed the expectation. Above all, the goal that remains, aside from the state test, is that students benefit fully from the progression of the writing curriculum so that they will be college ready and experience college success.

Texas Schools Accountability

To fully understand why this district, like many, had to revamp the curriculum or the resources being used one must first understand how the State of Texas is holding schools accountable. After the standardized testing is complete schools receive an accountability summary report by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The first section indicates whether or not the school has “met standards” if it has not the school will be identified as a “needs improvement campus,” this is identified as the accountability rating. The accountability rating is established by four indexes: index 1- student achievement, index 2 – student progress, index 3 – closing performance gaps, and index 4 – post secondary readiness, these indexes are found in the performance index report. Based on how the school performs on the indexes the state will award distinction designations to the school on good performance. The designations that can be earned are as follows: academic achievement in reading/ ELA, academic achievement in mathematics, academic achievement in science, academic achievement in social studies, top 25 percent student progress, top 25 percent closing performance gaps, and postsecondary readiness.

Index 1: Student Achievement	Index 2: Student Progress	Index 3: Closing Performance Gaps	Index 4: Post-Secondary Readiness
<p>- All students only - Combined over all subject areas - Credit given for Satisfactory level (Level II) on: - STAAR Grades 3-8 English and Spanish at final Level II performance standard for assessments administered in the spring; - EOC at final Level II performance standard for assessments administered in the spring and the previous fall and summer; - STAAR Grades 3-8 and EOC Modified and Alternate at final Level II performance standard; - STAAR L (linguistically accommodated) are included based on the ATAC ELL Workgroup recommendations, in progress</p>	<p>- Ten Student groups evaluated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students • Each Race/ Ethnicity African American American Indian Asian Hispanic Pacific Islander White • Two or more races • Students with disabilities • English Language Learners(ELLs) <p>- By Subject Areas (Reading, Mathematics, and Writing) - Same assessments used in Index 1 where student progress measures are available - Credit given for meeting the student progress measure requirements for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress toward Satisfactory performance (Level II), or • Progress toward advanced performance (Level III) 	<p>-All Economically Disadvantaged Students and Two Lowest Performing Racial/Ethnic Groups based on the Index 1 student achievement indicator reported in the prior year. - By Subject Area (Reading/ELA, Mathematics, Writing, Science, and Social Studies) - Same Assessment Used in Index 1 - Credit based on weighted performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One point credit given for each percentage of students at the final Level II Satisfactory performance standard - Two point credit given for each percentage of students at the final Level III Advanced performance standard 	<p>Credit based on average of two postsecondary indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) STAAR Advanced performance Level (Level III) and 2) high school graduation rates and diploma plans <p>STAAR Advanced Performance -Eight Student Groups Evaluated: All Students and each Race/Ethnicity - Combined over All Subject Areas - Credit given for Advanced performance level (Level III) on one or more tests at final Level III performance standard</p>

Figure 4: Overview of Performance Index Framework (TEA, 2014)

Index 1 is compiled by taking the total number of students that are enrolled in the campus the day of snapshot (October 31) and totaling the number of all tests given to those particular students. For example, PSJA ISD middle schools include 6th grade, 7th grade, and 8th grade and so each individual test that is released will fall under *total tests*. To acquire the percentage TEA will credit all the number at phase- in satisfactory standard (all the students that met standards) as a sum of all state tested distributed from the following contents: reading grades 6, 7, and 8,

mathematics grades 6, 7, and 8, writing grade 7, science grade 8, and social studies grade 8. The total is determined by taking total number passed from the total number tested. For example, if a campus has 200 students in each grade level that would mean that a campus has 600 students. Well, 6th graders take two exams (reading, and math), 7th graders take three exams (reading, math, and writing), and 8th graders take four exams (reading, math, science, and social studies) that would make a combined total of 1800 tests administered for that campus (400 in 6th grade, 600 in 7th grade, and 800 in 8th grade). Index 1 is determined by taking the passing number of all 1800 exams and converting it to a percentage; as a result each campus must have 55% of all exams administered passed by their students. The target score that has existed from the year the STAAR was released in 2011 has remained 55%. That percentage must be met to receive sufficient recognition in Index 1 which focuses on student achievement. Percentages of students who met standards are released under the categories of: all Students, African American, Hispanic, White, American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, two or more races, special Education, economically disadvantage, and English language learner.

Index 2 measures student progresses; thus, TEA releases a report entitled student progress calculation report that measures student's individual growth. In index 2 students are only measured in reading and mathematics. Students have the capability of individually bringing in up to 2 points in each test if they demonstrate significant gains on the state test, STAAR. The student does not have to receive a passing score in order to show growth. According to the raw score table (this number varies depending on what the student scored the previous year because it measures personal growth year to year) if a student increases by 50 grade points they will earn 1 point showing *increase*, but if a student increases by 100 grade points from the previous year then that child would have earned two points which indicated he is *exceeding* in learning. The

reading and the mathematics exams are the only ones administered every year that the child is in school, therefore, it is evident when a child shows a noticeable incline or decline in the skills acquired in such classes. The target score for Index 2 is 28%. To determine where the points come from a sub category must be made up of 10% of the school population. The Index 2 calculations are obtained by taking the # met or exceeded progress and dividing it by the *number of tests*, the same calculation is repeated for exceeded progress – take the # exceeded progress and divide it by the *number of tests*, this calculation will give you a percentage. TEA will add the % met or exceeded progress and the % exceeded progress and arrive at a reading weighted progress rate and a mathematics weighted progress rate. The calculation will be determined for populations that make up over 10% such as English language learners, special education, or the majority of ethnic student population, and all students. The maximum amount of points that can be obtained from each category are 200 points because they are based on percentages and the calculated percentages could only equal 100 points for % met or exceeded progress and 100 for % Exceeded Progress.

Index 3 is entitled closing performance gaps. TEA measures the economically disadvantage students in all five subjects tested (reading, mathematics, writing, science, and social studies). The target score for index 3 is 27 points. Each subject can bring in a maximum of 200 points, when looking only at the economically disadvantage students percentages are obtained by taking the # phase-in satisfactory standard and dividing it by number of tests. Then TEA takes the # advanced standard and divides it by the number of tests and when both percentages are obtained they are added. That calculation is repeated for each subject and added together. As in index 2 a school can acquire 100 points % phase-in satisfactory standard and 100 points in % advanced standard.

Index 4 measures postsecondary readiness by calculating the total number of students that excel in more than one subject. Students must meet recommended level on two subjects to demonstrate a readiness for the next level. Calculations are determined by taking the total number of how many students passed two exams and dividing it by the total students tested. The total number is considered the STAAR postsecondary readiness. For middle schools in Texas that is the only required number that falls under Index 4, but for high schools in Texas index 4 also includes: 4 year graduation rate, 5-year extended graduation rate, annual dropout rate, longitudinal RHSP/DAP graduates (recommended high school program/distinguished advanced placement), annual RHSP/DAP graduates, and college ready graduates.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

State Data

In the past four years more students across Texas have met standards in Reading than in Writing. The data charts that are included in this research will include both reading and writing because two out of the four years that are discussed both the Reading STAAR Test and the Writing STAAR Test were taught in a one period ELAR class. Personally, the students that performed the best in my class have come from a two period class that was not separated, but the district feels that middle school students cannot be in the classroom that long without a break; therefore, students enter the classroom for one period and leave to another class and come back later on in the day. When the district condensed the two period schedules into teaching reading and writing in one 50 minutes class period it was impossible to teach all TEKS thoroughly especially for ELL students, special education students, and at-risk students; thus left us with the agreement that we can have two class periods, but they could not be back to back.

On a power point compiled by Steve Wilder, Manager for ELA Assessment for the State Assessment Division of the Texas Education Agency, he informed school leaders about the obvious mistakes 7th grade students are making on the STAAR test. In reading, “students have the most difficulty reading on a “macro,” or broad, level.” After individually going through every grade level, the reading data indicated the following conclusions:

- Students are having difficulties making connections within and across the selections.

- Students are not going back to the selections and checking to make sure their answers are correct.
- There are indications that students are not actually reading the selections before they begin answering questions.

Wilder also included what the writing data indicated in regards to difficulties that students are facing on the STAAR Test. Students are having difficulties in the following:

- Students are having difficulty recognizing grammatically correct complete sentences.
- Students are having difficulties recognizing that transitional sentences do not merely repeat the information preceding the statement.
- Students are having difficulty recognizing effective thesis statements.

Based on the points that Wilder makes about students test taking skills I feel that some resonate as if there is a lack of motivation. James Moffett said, “The first reason why one might fail to learn is not caring, lack of motivation to scan the results and transfer that experience to the next trial (Moffett, p.236)...when the exercises themselves ignore the motivational and learning needs of the student... the learner dissociates the technical issues in the exercise from honest discourse.” (Moffett, p.247) The second and third bullets under reading indicate a lack of motivation from the student. While the writing difficulties and the first reading bullet deal with comprehension; the first reading bullet indicates that students must be able to identify a common theme between two genres. The three bullets in writing indicate that students must know what a thesis statement is, must understand the purpose of a transitional sentence and know that there is not just one way to write a sentence, and know what a complete sentence is.

Below you will see the standings of the 7th grade students across the State of Texas and how they measured based on performance in both reading and writing. Consistently, every year

more students across Texas are meeting standards in reading than in writing. On another note, when looking at the two subjects the percentage has remained within a 2% increase or decrease year after year. For example, reading has ranged between 75% and 77% in the past 4 years and writing has ranged between 70% and 72% in the past 4 years. Throughout the four years that STAAR has existed student scores have not changed much from year to year.

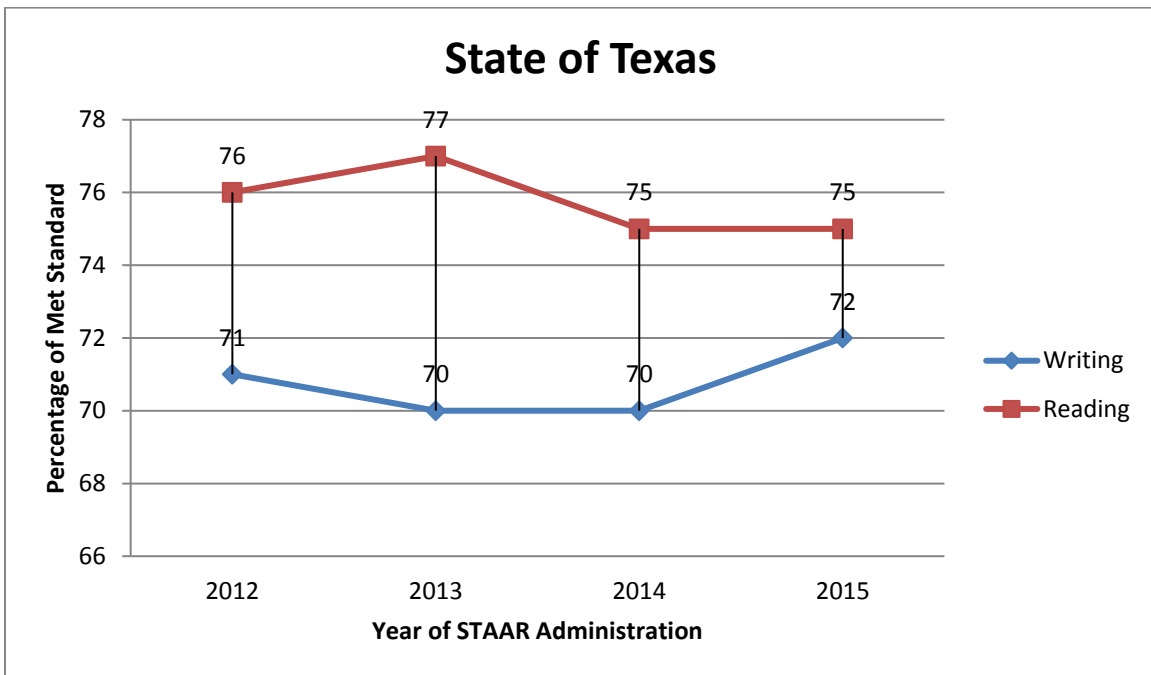


Table 2: State of Texas Performance Data in Reading and Writing

To further look into how 7th grade students are performing across Texas the following chart reflects the percentage of students across Texas over the course of 4 years and how student writing has shown minimal growth every year. Ideally, students should be scoring a 6, 7, or 8 to be considered an effective writer. In 2012 only 12% of students received 6-8 points on the expository writing portion. In 2013 there was a 9% increase, which means that 21% of students across Texas received 6-8 points on the expository writing portions. In 2014 there was a 7%

decrease, which means that only 14% of students across Texas received 6-8 points on the expository writing portion. In 2015 there was a 1% increase, revealing that 15% of the students across Texas received 6-8 points on the expository writing portion. The data reveals that most students are scoring 2's in their writing ("2's" are indicated by a 4 because of the two raters that the paper goes through). According to TEA a score 2 essay is considered "basic writing performance." (Refer back to Table 1) Year after year across Texas 35% - 44% of the seventh grade students writing level are considered basic. In fact, in 2012-2015 60-72% of students' scores are classified at basic or below basic in composition writing.

	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>
0	1%	1%	1%	1%
2	14%	10%	10%	10%
3	18%	13%	13%	15%
4	39%	35%	44%	41%
5	17%	21%	17%	18%
6	9%	14%	10%	11%
7	2%	5%	3%	3%
8	1%	2%	1%	1%

Table 3: Percentage of Students across Texas in Expository Writing

While the 2015-2016 year has seen changes to the writing test, a new company has also taken over the production of the state exams. I find that it will be interesting to see if any of these percentages will change from the years that Pearson produced and graded the exam to 2015-2016

when ETS began producing and grading the exam. Will the removal of the personal narrative impact the scores significantly or not?

PSJA Demographics

Before I share the data from PSJA ISD, it is important to understand the demographics of the people from the cities of Pharr, San Juan, and Alamo. To obtain this information I pulled up the data from the most recent census that was conducted by United States Census Bureau in 2010. The graph not only included the population, but the percentage of Hispanic population, education data, and household income in comparison with the State of Texas.

	Pharr	San Juan	Alamo	State of Texas
Population (2010)	70,470	33,856	18,518	25,146,104
Hispanic Population	93%	96.7%	84.6%	37.6%
Language other than English Spoken	88.3%	91.6%	79.7%	34.7%
High School Graduate or higher	61.3%	55.8%	59.4%	81.2%
Bachelor's degree or higher	13.0%	9.4%	10.0%	26.7%
Median Household income	\$32,087	\$33,893	\$34,924	\$51,900
Persons below poverty level	35.9%	31.7%	28.9%	17.6%

Table 4: Pharr, San Juan, and Alamo Census Facts

Across Texas 37.6% of the population is Hispanic, which is a little over a third of the state's population, but in the PSJA ISD area Hispanics make up 84.6% to 96.7% of the

population, which means that most of the students that PSJA ISD serves are Hispanic. In fact the following graph will give an idea as to exactly how many Hispanics are served within the district. I took the seventh graders from 2014 and included the following chart to demonstrate exactly the population of students that received their education from PSJA ISD that year.

	Hispanic/ ALL	Economically Disadvantaged	English Language Learner
School A	99.37%	87.22%	34.57%
School B	97.68%	75.16%	21.85%
School C	99.59%	92.65%	42.04%
School D	99.52%	95.71%	49.52%
School E	98.61%	90.30%	32.13%
School F	99.56%	90.43%	30.43%
School G	100%	91.15%	26.99%
School H	98.25%	84.61%	17.83%
Total	98.99%	89.08%	31.27%

Table 5: PSJA ISD Seventh Grade Hispanic, Economically Disadvantaged, and ELL Population in 2014

In 2014 only 22 out of 2,181 seventh grade students in the entire district were not Hispanic. Out of 2,181 students in seventh grade only 238 came from households that are not economically disadvantaged. Roughly 1/3 of the seventh grade population in 2014 was classified ELL (English Language Learner), which means that those students come from Spanish speaking homes and such students have still not acquired enough of the English language to pass the state test and the TELPAS (Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System). One of the

major challenges that PSJA ISD faced year after year is teaching students the English language that is seldom reinforced at home. On the contrary, the district excels in enforcing a dual language program for students to develop both languages academically.

PSJA ISD Middle School Data

Since STAAR became the state standardized test the following graph demonstrates how the entire PSJA ISD seventh grade body has done in the last 4 years. We have seen major growth in writing especially in the year of 2014. Unfortunately, there has also been an evident decrease in reading.

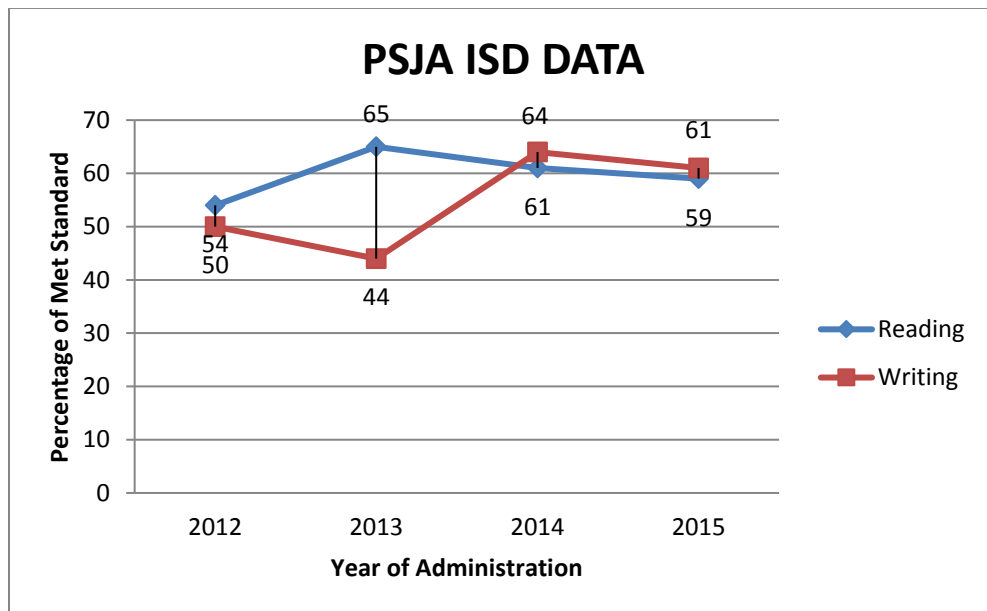


Table 6: PSJA ISD data in Reading and Writing

In 2012, PSJA ISD adopted a new Glencoe Literature Book and teachers would use it as a resource along with CScope. ELA classes were also a block period in which students remained in class for 90 minutes. That year little information about the questions in the Writing STAAR

test was released from the state; thus, a lot of the focus was in the reading class. In 2013, PSJA ISD abandoned the Glencoe book and primarily used Springboard (a newly adopted advanced placement resource) to drive instruction in the classroom. ELA classes were also reduced to one period that was 55 minutes. In 2014, Springboard was dropped and teachers resorted back to the Glencoe Literature Book and used the lessons that were compiled by several teachers that were selected from each campus. The primary reason as to why Springboard was dropped stemmed from money, the adoption of Springboard included a consumable that had to be purchased for each student. A minor problem also occurred when ELL students, migrant students, and special education students were having difficulty with the rigor in the consumable. The Glencoe Literature book had many resources specially written for all the demographics that the district serviced. And so, in 2015 the district decided to continue using the teacher created resources that align with the state TEKS and the Glencoe Literature book and merely listened to teacher suggestions to modify the curriculum as needed for the students.

The following graphs will include the percentage of students that met standard in the reading and writing STAAR test in the last four years, or since the existence of the STAAR test. As we go through the graphs of the 8 different middle schools I want you to pay close attention to the line graph that indicates growth from year to year. When I removed the multiple choice section of the exam and only included composition results of the students then students writing remained stagnant. When I began this research I was under the indication that the district was heading in the right direction in seeing success in student writing, I have come to realize that we are making our gains in question strategies and not in writing.

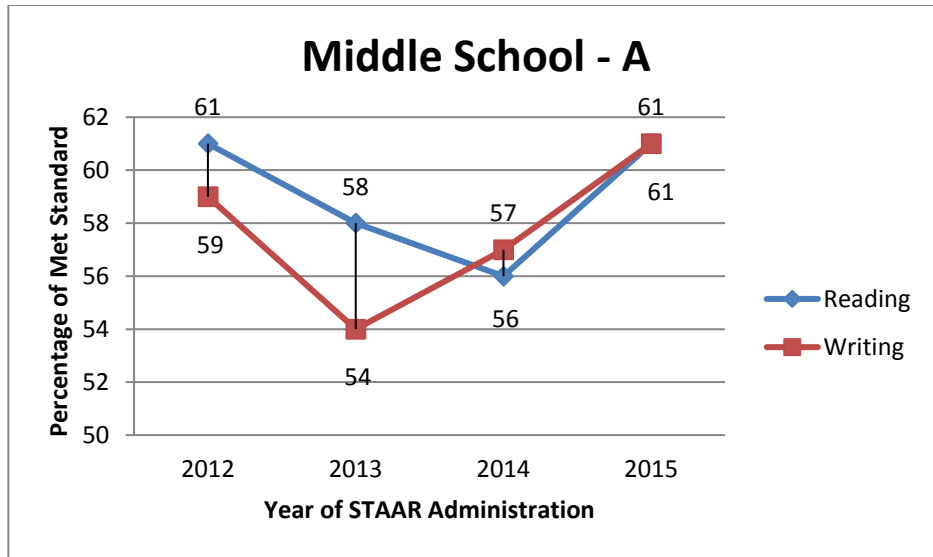


Table 7: School “A” STAAR Performance Data in Reading and Writing

Middle School A

2012		2013		2014		2015	
Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative
0-7	0-3	0-4	0-0	0-5	0-2	0-2	0-2
2-38	2-38	2-49	2-33	2-68	2-55	2-43	2-56
3-53	3-31	3-45	3-45	3-54	3-53	3-63	3-50
4-122	4-104	4-108	4-91	4-113	4-119	4-142	4-118
5-32	5-43	5-63	5-70	5-57	5-50	5-55	5-50
6-13	6-36	6-13	6-46	6-21	6-37	6-19	6-38
7-0	7-8	7-10	7-5	7-3	7-4	7-3	7-14
8-1	8-3	8-1	8-3	8-0	8-1	8-0	8-1

Table 8: STAAR writing data for School A by student without multiple choices

Middle School A is the districts only IB middle school. This school had a higher number of GT students and has one of the highest student body populations in the district. When looking at their data one can notice a similar dip in reading and writing. In 2013, when the district gave ELA classrooms one period to teach reading and writing their scores dropped drastically in

writing, and since the new curriculum was put into effect scores have not only risen, but it synced the reading and writing passing rate.

Table 8 indicates that the majority of these students are basic writers in both the narrative and the expository. This campus has shown no growth from year to year in regards to student writing. Ironically, the year that ELA teachers had the students for one class period is the year that the campus shows its lowest passing rate and the year that student writing increased.

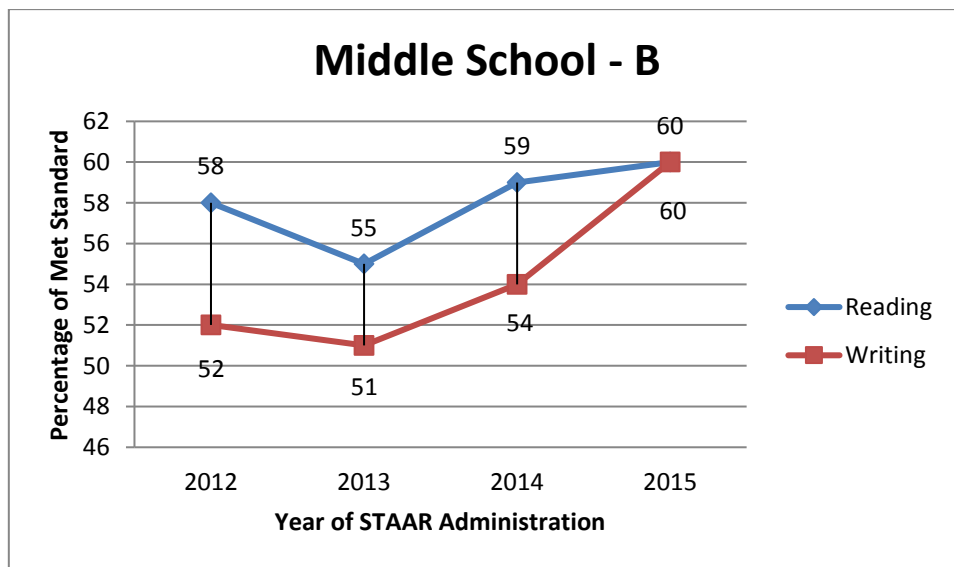


Table 9: School “B” STAAR Performance Data in Reading and Writing

Middle School B

2012		2013		2014		2015	
Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative
0-5	0-3	0-4	0-2	0-3	0-1	0-2	0-1
2-54	2-38	2-54	2-43	2-64	2-49	2-32	2-48
3-73	3-30	3-54	3-33	3-62	3-42	3-67	3-53
4-14	4-99	4-90	4-79	4-113	4-107	4-136	4-108
5-46	5-57	5-47	5-74	5-35	5-61	5-50	5-57
6-12	6-64	6-33	6-40	6-20	6-31	6-17	6-34
7-0	7-11	7-9	7-17	7-4	7-9	7-3	7-5
8-0	8-2	8-3	8-6	8-1	8-2	8-0	8-2

Table10: STAAR writing data for School B by student without multiple choices

Middle School B also has a large student body and is heavily focused on pushing reading with their students, as you can see in their graph their reading scores have often been higher than the writing scores from 4-6%. Once again we see that 2013 marked their lowest dip in both reading and writing, and since the implementation of the teacher created curriculum their scores have risen. The biggest gains have been in the writing exam by a 9% increase over the last 2 years and as MS-A, they have synced both the reading and writing passing percentages.

Table 10 demonstrates that the majority of student writing is basic or below basic and that the skill of writing has not shown any gains.

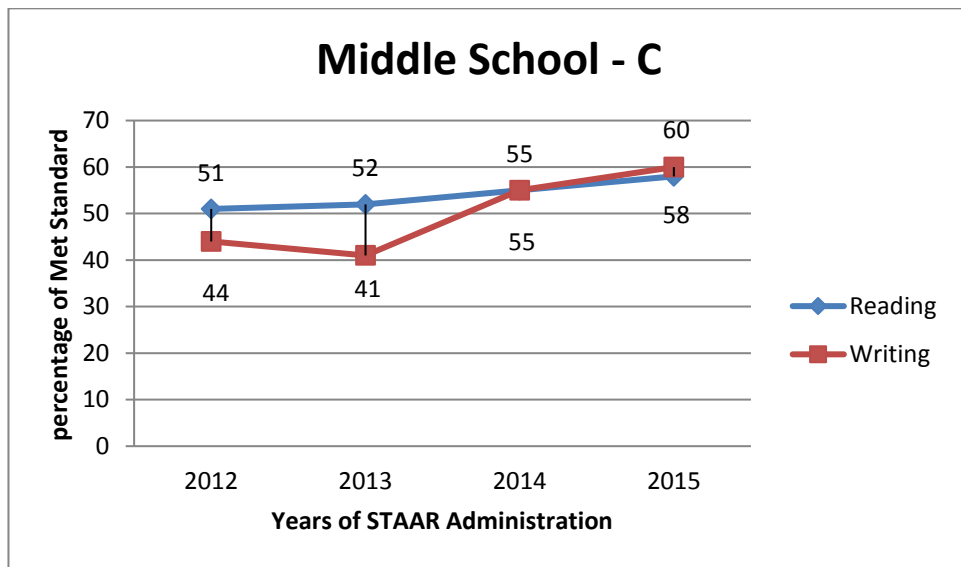


Table 11: School “C” STAAR Performance Data in Reading and Writing

Middle School C

2012		2013		2014		2015	
Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative
0-5	0-3	0-2	0-2	0-3	0-1	0-0	0-1
2-56	2-41	2-50	2-30	2-61	2-53	2-36	2-47
3-71	3-27	3-53	3-41	3-49	3-47	3-45	3-30
4-86	4-96	4-97	4-99	4-80	4-79	4-107	4-103
5-21	5-45	5-28	5-49	5-37	5-45	5-31	5-32
6-1	6-27	6-6	6-19	6-14	6-15	6-11	6-19
7-0	7-1	7-3	7-2	7-1	7-5	7-1	7-14
8-0	8-0	8-1	8-0	8-0	8-0	8-0	8-1

Table12: STAAR writing data for School C by student without multiple choices

Middle School C contains one of the smallest student bodies, but is one of two campuses that have the highest number of ELLs. Students at this campus struggle with the English language and have low reading levels. Many of the students on this campus tested the state exam in Spanish in elementary and in middle school they are required to test in English. As the previous 2 campuses 2013 shows the lowest percentage in writing, but allowing them the 2 class periods for reading and writing has shown a 19% increase in writing. Since the implementation of the new curriculum this campus has seen slight gains in reading and major gains in writing.

Table 12 proves otherwise, while Middle School C shows a 19% increase in the Writing STAAR Exam student writing has not improved. Year after year, the majority of the students' writing is basic or below basic writing.

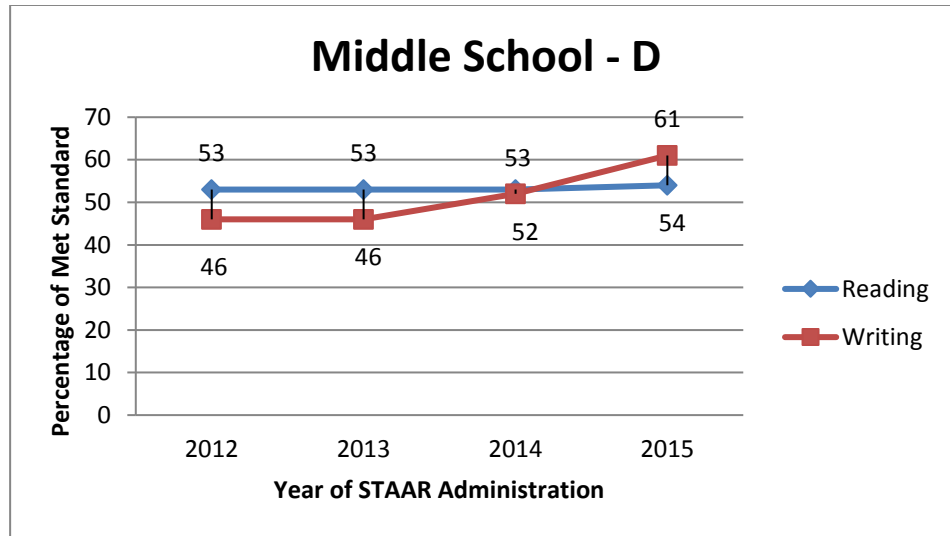


Table 13: School “D” STAAR Performance Data in Reading and Writing

Middle School D

2012		2013		2014		2015	
Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative
0-5	0-3	0-8	0-1	0-9	0-4	0-1	0-2
2-44	2-32	2-44	2-46	2-57	2-57	2-38	2-42
3-57	3-34	3-36	3-30	3-32	3-31	3-35	3-32
4-78	4-69	4-77	4-50	4-71	4-71	4-103	4-91
5-12	5-42	5-19	5-49	5-26	5-27	5-18	5-21
6-1	6-13	6-14	6-19	6-14	6-17	6-1	6-9
7-0	7-2	7-2	7-5	7-1	7-3	7-0	7-0
8-0	8-2	8-0	8-0	8-0	8-0	8-0	8-0

Table 14: STAAR writing data for School D by student without multiple choices

Middle School D has similar demographics to MS-C; it too has a smaller student body, and contains a large number of ELL students. Many students on this campus also tested in Spanish in elementary and are testing in English for the first time in middle school. Students on this campus also have low reading levels, and if you look at their reading passing percentages they have remained the same almost every year. The writing is where you see major gains since the implementation of the new curriculum. They have a 15% increase in developing writing skills.

Until you look at Table 14, which indicates that they are developing test strategies, making gains in the multiple choice section, and the majority of student writing is basic or below basic.

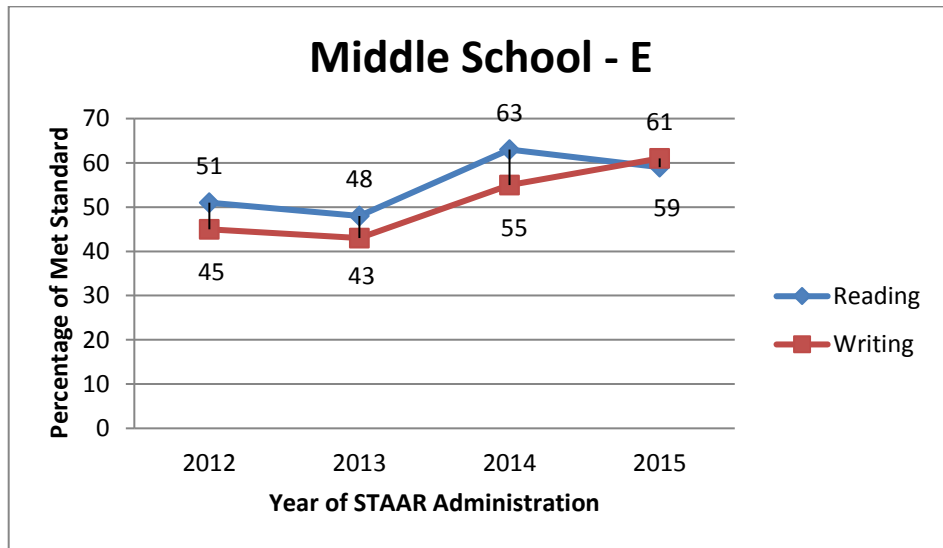


Table 15: School “E” STAAR Performance Data in Reading and Writing

Middle School E

2012		2013		2014		2015	
Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative
0-3	0-1	0-6	0-4	0-9	0-5	0-0	0-2
2-71	2-42	2-66	2-33	2-89	2-69	2-67	2-72
3-67	3-40	3-65	3-38	3-75	3-53	3-63	3-51
4-77	4-86	4-104	4-125	4-127	4-129	4-169	4-129
5-14	5-34	5-42	5-48	5-38	5-54	5-35	5-55
6-8	6-29	6-9	6-39	6-19	6-40	6-18	6-44
7-0	7-6	7-1	7-5	7-4	7-7	7-6	7-6
8-0	8-2	8-1	8-2	8-0	8-4	8-0	8-1

Table 16: STAAR writing data for School E by student without multiple choices

Middle School E contains the largest student body and also contains a large number of ELL students. Like many of the campuses 2013 marked the lowest passing rate for students in both reading and writing. On the other hand, 2014 and 2015 display major gains in both reading

and writing with the new curriculum. While reading dropped 2% in 2015 writing percentages keeps rising; in writing they have shown an 18% increase.

Like MS-A, MS- E shows the best writing performance the year that ELA teachers only had one class period to teach both subjects. Ironically, that is also the year that MS-E scores had the lowest passing rate in both reading and writing. However, this campus also has the majority of their students performing as basic writers.

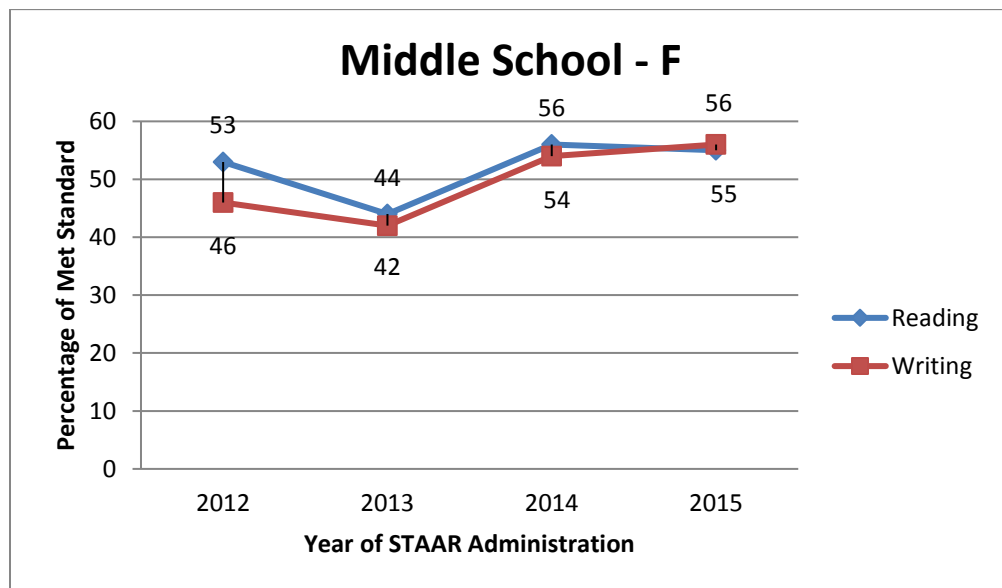


Table 17: School “F” STAAR Performance Data in Reading and Writing

Middle School F

2012		2013		2014		2015	
Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative
0-5	0-1	0-1	0-1	0-4	0-2	0-3	0-3
2-57	2-41	2-68	2-38	2-61	2-48	2-44	2-55
3-50	3-34	3-51	3-35	3-41	3-39	3-37	3-36
4-88	4-91	4-86	4-103	4-79	4-75	4-106	4-84
5-29	5-30	5-26	5-47	5-30	5-39	5-29	5-34
6-7	6-36	6-9	6-18	6-14	6-20	6-11	6-18
7-3	7-6	7-5	7-4	7-0	7-5	7-2	7-2
8-0	8-0	8-2	8-2	8-1	8-2	8-0	8-1

Table 18: STAAR writing data for School F by student without multiple choices

Middle School F has a smaller student body population but contains most disciplinary issues. It is easy to note the same dips and rises in both reading and writing. The 2013 year MS-F drops the lowest and has equal gains in 2014 and 2015 in reading and writing. Writing shows a 14% increase and reading shows a 12% increase since the new curriculum was implemented.

According to Table 18, the students have not shown any increase from the basic level that the majority are writing in. Ironically, their students would have several students write above basic in the personal narrative and even that writing has shown a decrease by 2015.

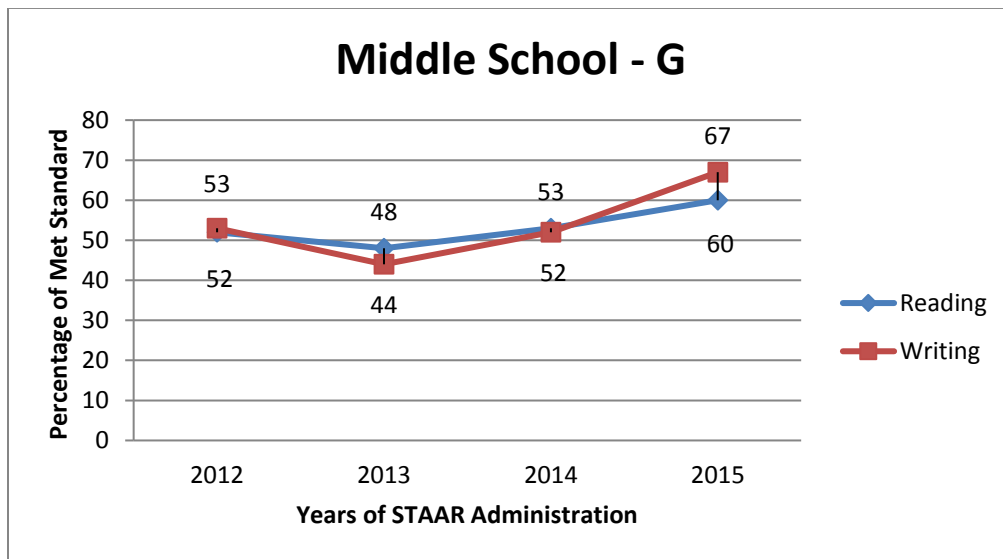


Table 19: School “G” STAAR Performance Data in Reading and Writing

Middle School G

2012		2013		2014		2015	
Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative
0-5	0-2	0-0	0-1	0-0	0-1	0-3	0-4
2-40	2-31	2-40	2-31	2-49	2-48	2-29	2-28
3-53	3-25	3-47	3-34	3-48	3-30	3-38	3-21
4-81	4-73	4-67	4-55	4-71	4-66	4-89	4-70
5-21	5-44	5-42	5-55	5-40	5-38	5-51	5-41
6-2	6-24	6-13	6-34	6-15	6-37	6-22	6-46
7-1	7-4	7-8	7-7	7-3	7-5	7-3	7-10
8-0	8-0	8-0	8-0	8-0	8-1	8-1	8-5

Table 20: STAAR writing data for School G by student without multiple choices

Middle School G has recently increased in student body numbers. At this campus 2013 marks the lowest passing percentage and major gains with the new curriculum. The students have shown a 23% increase in the last 2 years and contain the closest passing percentage to the state.

Ironically, Table 20 indicates that in 2013 that the passing rate dropped to its lowest point, yet student writing was at its best performance. Of all the tables MS-G has the highest number in producing “satisfactory writers.”

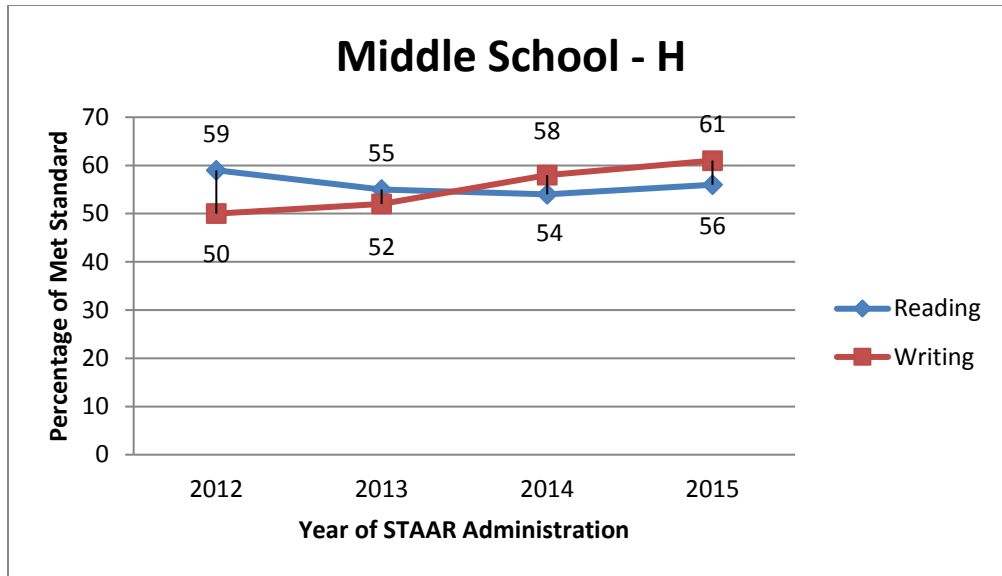


Table 21: School “H” STAAR Performance Data in Reading and Writing

Middle School H

2012		2013		2014		2015	
Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative	Expository	Narrative
0-4	0-1	0-6	0-2	0-1	0-1	0-1	0-1
2-67	2-44	2-62	2-43	2-61	2-43	2-38	2-32
3-93	3-48	3-53	3-47	3-63	3-42	3-43	3-23
4-104	4-96	4-110	4-71	4-108	4-105	4-59	4-59
5-27	5-53	5-49	5-75	5-29	5-50	5-21	5-32
6-5	6-54	6-29	6-46	6-17	6-33	6-20	6-29
7-2	7-5	7-10	7-12	7-7	7-10	7-5	7-7
8-0	8-1	8-2	8-5	8-0	8-2	8-1	8-1

Table 22: STAAR writing data for School H by student without multiple choices

Middle School H also has a large student body. Ironically, this chart contains the only pattern that does not match all the other 7 campuses. Reading has dropped and remained fairly lower than writing. On the other hand, writing continues to show gains as in all the other campuses. Since 2013 the Writing STAAR passing rates have gone up 9%.

While the writing passing rate has showing an increase, according to Table 22, the writing skill has shown a decrease.

In regards to writing it is quite noticeable that all middle schools have shown an increase in the past two years, ever since the teachers were involved in compiling the resources that the students will be exposed to. Since the design of the teacher –created curriculum writing has showing increases such as: MS-A went up 7 point, MS-B went up 9 points, MS-C went up 19 points, MS-D went up 15 points, MS-E went up 18 points, MS-F went up 14 points, MS-G went up 23 points, and MS-H went up 11 points. In comparison to the State of Texas PSJA ISD has shown major gains in writing, considering that the state has only gone from 70% to 72%, which is a 2 point increase in the past 2 years.

However while the standardized test indicated mastery of skills, it has become evident that student writing itself in not on the rise. This forces me to question the resources that have been complied by teachers and the district. Is the aim to only get students to pass and are we satisfied with that or should we change the aim and revisit the issue of trying to develop better writers.

Along with studying the 8 middle school I would like to add that in the year of 2014-2015 the district recommended to each campus a specific writing consultant. The consultant was to meet with a handful of the students and model for the teachers how to implement some of the material from the training he had with the 7th grade writing teachers of the district. Every school with the exception of school C scheduled a session or more with the consultant. The primary reason why I am including this detail is because it is important to note that the purpose of this study is to see how effective teacher input and implementation of material can work. As a result

there was no more growth from the students that brought in a consultant to the ones that did not bring a professional consultant.

If this study was to address the effects of adopting resources merely to spend money for initiatives then it is clear to see that if teachers can get properly trained and implement the material that will benefit their students then teachers can show growth in all aspects of student learning.

When teachers collaborated after one year of implementation, the district discovered that writing one essay a week was too much for a writer who was trying to improve. The district decided that taking one essay or two a six weeks and developing that essay would benefit the child more. Rather than making writing a routine and a task that was redundant teachers planned out different focuses in the essays such as: writing a paper collaboratively, writing different forms of essays, responding to stories, and identifying weakness with in their own in order to set individual effective goals.

As James Moffett commented student need motivation and Kathleen Blake Yancey, a past NCTE President, encourages that those who teach literacy should bring it more up to date.

In this context, let me identify three tasks that those of us who care about literacy and who are literacy educators need to take up. 1) Articulate the new models of composing developing right in front of our eyes. 2) Design a new model of writing curriculum K-graduate school. 3) Create new models for teaching. (Yancey, 7-8).

Is it possible for writing to improve at this district, I believe so. One this is evident student writing is not getting better and changes need to occur from the writing environment to the aim at professional development for the teachers.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The overall gains of this district would not have been possible without the engagement of the students, the time of the teachers, the support by central office personal, and the vision for improvement. In the book *Turning High-Poverty Schools Into High-Performing Schools* by William H. Parrett and Kathleen M. Budge, they discussed a “study conducted by Meredith Honig, Mike Copland, and their colleagues in 2010 at the University of Washington titled *Central Office Transformation for District-Wide Teaching and Learning Improvement*” (Parrett, W. & Budge, K., p.184) the study mentions that in order to see improvement central office must serve as a support system and so they did the following:

- Focused the work of the central office “centrally and meaningfully” on improvement of teaching and learning, move beyond rhetoric about being of service to schools, leaders in these districts could demonstrate how their work supported schools in concrete ways.
- Engaged everyone in the effort, even personnel whose function had not been traditionally defined as connected to “teaching and learning.”
- Called upon central office personnel to fundamentally restructure their relationship with schools so that their daily work was in the service of schools’ efforts to improve teaching and learning.
- Aimed to transcend programs or initiatives, in contrast to reforming the district office for the purpose of implementing a particular program.

Despite the size of the district, it takes a vision and many people working together to begin to make things change for the better. At the start of this study I mentioned the idea of “reform” – this district had a vision of student success, and while the work is not done it is still in a progress mode. The goal was always to empower student to be better writers for college success, and after taking a deep look at the data the state passing rates have gone up and it appears that we are improving in student writing, but the reality is PSJA students are not. There is still room for growth and this research merely helps identify where.

After looking at the data, if I could make any recommendation it would be that writing must exist throughout a child’s education track. Writing must take place across contents and receive feedback from teachers. Students must learn more than just the writing form that the state test will evaluate students in. I feel that if 7th grade students worked on writing in 6th grade then it would not come to such a shock in 7th grade. Seventh grade teachers have to close the gap of two years if students are not formally writing in 5th and 6th grade.

I would also recommend developing a writing portfolio to measure student growth. I have witnessed many students evaluate their own growth and take ownership of their writing after they see their improvement.

Finally, I would highly recommend professional development for teachers. After looking at the data I have noticed that while more students are passing, there has not been much change to the actual writing scores. I think teachers are emphasizing the grammar, but not the writing. Writing is the craft that students need to master in order to feel accomplished in college, not just accomplished on a state test.

As stated at the start of this paper, this research was not to supply anyone with one set answer for how to ensure mastery in the writing skill. It was to reveal that if teachers created resources could they make better writers. At this particular district the answer was misleading because while student scores were on the rise; actual writing skills were not improving. Can students at PSJA ISD see better writers in time? I feel that the answer to that question is “yes” if the 11 essential practices, CIF strategies, and the Framework for Post-Secondary Success was implemented with fidelity.

My initial interest in studying writing stemmed the article Deborah Brandt wrote “Remembering Reading, Remembering Writing.” She discussed the idea that students often have positive first experience in developing reading and negative first experiences in developing writing. After having a similar discussion with my students I discovered that her statistics were equally accurate with my students. The hope in helping develop the new writing resources was that writing would be enjoyable in the classroom so that students would have a different attitude towards writing. After closely looking at data and working with students I feel that positivity is important in improving student writing as well as supplying support for developing writers. At the start of this paper I mentioned that writing was difficult and an exploration that takes plenty of practice. The data supports that writing is difficult despite that amount of practice, on the other hand I have noticed the exploration that students go through as they develop into stronger writers. I have also witnessed the appreciation they develop after they develop a piece that they are proud of. While the study did not show exactly the results I anticipated; that student writing is getting better. It did however, point me in the direction of where we need to continue working in the curriculum of the writing class.

Plan for the Future

If writing is truly an exploration, and if writing will only get better with practice, then the plan must include exposing students to writing in all grade levels not only the ones taking the Writing STAAR Test. Teachers must always understand that students must feel comfort and interested in what is being taught. Lisa Delpit once wrote, “First, they [teachers] should recognize that the linguistic form a student brings to school is intimately connected with loved ones, community, and personal identity. To suggest this form is “wrong” or, even worse, ignorant, is to suggest that something is wrong with the student and his or her family.” (LDAL pg. 327) Writing whether it is formal writing or informal writing must be practiced on a regular basis. Allow students to write about what they know and in most cases that is their life experiences.

The district has stated many times that changing the resources has not proved to have a positive effect and so the teacher-created curriculum is expected to stay for the next several years. The gains have been evident, although PSJA ISD has not been able to reach the met standard level of the State of Texas the district has not given up in getting every student to become a better writer.

Kristen Stewart once said, “I do want to work on writing, because writing's a skill. Writing is something that you can train yourself to know better. To know yourself better. And it's intimidating as hell.” If all students can have the skill of writing rather than the fear of writing then they will truly be capable of being college ready and college connected, after all, that is the mission of the district, as it should be for all students.

Beyond PSJA ISD

This study has not only allowed me to be more conscious of the literacy crisis, but it has encouraged me to keep learning. Hopefully one day I can make a bigger impact than just a classroom.

One year I would like to participate in a Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program, initiated by the United States Department of Education, in which it calls experienced teachers to live in a partnered country and collaborate with educators from the region. This summer the program offers opportunity to work with countries such as Africa, India, Vietnam, and Mexico. If accepted this would allow me the opportunity to go beyond the walls of PSJA ISD to learn and collaborate with educators from other countries. One program calls for an opportunity to help with curriculum design, such an opportunity would allow me to be part of a major writing curriculum project and further study best practices.

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Glossary

At Risk- a student at-risk of dropping out of school is one who is under age 21 and who meets one of the following criteria: 1) is in Pre-K, K, or grades 1st-3rd and did not perform satisfactory on a readiness test or assessment instrument administered during the current school year; 2) is in grade 7th – 12th and did not maintain an average equivalent to 70 on a scale of 100 in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum during the semester; 3) was not advanced from one grade level to the next; 4) did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered to the student; 5) is pregnant or a parent; 6) has been placed in an alternative education program; 7) has been expelled; 8) is on parole, probation, deferred Prosecution or other conditional release; 9) was previously reported through the Public Education Information Management System (PIEMS) to have dropped out of school; 10) is of limited English proficiency; 11) is in the custody or care of the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services; 12) is homeless as defined by the No Child Left Behind; or 13) resided in the preceding school year or resides in the current school year in a residential placement facility, substance abuse treatment facility in the district.

AYP- (adequate yearly progress) according to the Texas Education Agency AYP is the means by which campuses, districts, and the state is evaluated. Districts, campuses, and the state are required to meet AYP criteria on three measures: reading/language arts, mathematics, and either graduation rate (for high schools and districts) or attendance rate (for elementary and middle/junior high schools). A campus, district, or state that receives Title I, Part A funds and fails to meet AYP for two consecutive years is subject to certain requirements such as offering supplemental education services, offering school choice, or taking corrective actions.

CIF- (Common Instructional Framework) – a partnership between University Park Campus School and Jobs for the Future in which they have developed six instructional strategies that drive the instructional practices. The skills engage all students in learning and require them to take an active role in their education. The strategies include: Collaborative group work, writing to learn, questioning, scaffolding, classroom talk, and, literacy group.

CITI- (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) – the means by which to promote the public's trust in the research enterprise by providing high quality, peer reviewed, web based, research education materials to enhance the integrity and professionalism of investigators and staff conducting research.

CScope – an educational curriculum created by Texas Education Service Center Curriculum Collaborative (TESCCC).

CSR Rating – (Confidential Student Report) – level of writing performance your child demonstrated on the composition.

DAP – (Distinguish Achievement Program) – graduation program in which students would receive more than the minimum or recommended graduation credits. It requires advanced school work that reflects college- or professional-level skills.

Economically Disadvantaged – one who is eligible for free or reduced priced meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program.

ELL – (English Language Learner) – students who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English, who often come from non-English-speaking homes and backgrounds, and who typically require specialized or modified instruction in both the English language and in their academic courses.

ETS - (Education Testing Services) – is a private nonprofit organization devoted to educational measurement and research, primarily through testing.

IB – (International Baccalaureate) – it authorizes schools to offer their students one or more of the following programs: Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP), Diploma Programme (DP), or the Career-related Programme (CP).

IRB – (Institutional Review Board) – is a committee established to review and approve research involving human subjects. The purpose of the IRB is to ensure is to ensure that all human subject research be conducted in accordance with all federal, institutional, and ethical guidelines.

GT - (Gifted and Talented) – is one who performs at or shows the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others at the same age, experience, or environment, and who: 1) exhibit high performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic area; 2) possesses an unusual capability for leadership; or, 3) excels in a specific academic field.

LEP – (Limited English Proficient) – a student whose primary language is other than English and whose English language skills are such that the student has difficulty performing ordinary classwork in English.

Migrant – is one who is a migratory agricultural worker (or whose parent, spouse, or guardian is a migratory agricultural worker) and who, in the preceding 36 months, in order to obtain temporary employment in agriculture or fishing or to accompany a parent, spouse, or guardian to obtain such employment: 1) has moved from one school district to another, or 2) resided in a school district of more than 15,000 square miles, and migrates a distance of 20 miles or more to a temporary residence in order to engage in a fishing activity.

NCLB – (No Child Left Behind) – it grew from the concern that the American education system was no longer internationally competitive; it increased the federal role in holding schools responsible for the academic progress of all students. It put a special focus on ensuring that states boost the performance of certain groups of students such as English-language learners, students in special education, and poor and minority children, whose achievement, on average, trails their peers. States did not have to comply with the new requirements, but if they didn't, they risked losing federal Title 1 money.

National Commission on Writing – a non-profit membership organization composed of more than 4,300 schools and colleges. This committee formed due to the growing concern within the education, business, and policy-making communities that the level of writing in the United States is not what it should be.

National Council of Teachers of English – (NTCE) – is a professional association of education in English studies, literacy, and language arts. The NTCE is devoted to improving the teaching and learning of English and the language arts at all levels of education.

National Writing Project – is a network of sites anchored at colleges and universities and serving teachers across disciplines and at all levels, early childhood through university. The NWP provides professional development, development, develop resources, generate research, and act on knowledge to improve the teaching of writing and learning in schools and communities.

Pearson – is a British owned education publishing and assessment service to schools and corporations. Pearson was the company that was contracted by the state of Texas to develop the standardized tests before they hired ETS.

Readiness Standard- they are essential for success in the current grade or course; they are important for preparedness; they support college and career readiness; they necessitate in-depth instruction; they address broad and deep ideas.

RHSP – (Recommended High School Program) – is the default curriculum for Texas public high school students. It offers courses that give you the best opportunities to succeed in technical school, community college, or a four-year university in Texas.

Special Education – is a program that serves students with disabilities. Special education programs include special education instructional and related services programs and general education programs using special education support services, supplementary aids, and other special arrangements.

Springboard – is the College Board's comprehensive instructional program in English Language Arts and Mathematics for all students in grade 6-12. Springboard offers research-

based instructional strategies and practices that provide a clear road map forward and helps students take ownership of and accountability for their own learning.

STAAR – (State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness) – the testing program for students in Texas public schools. The assessments are based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), the state-mandated curriculum. The curriculum contains the content and skills the students need to learn in order to be successful in the current grade and to make academic progress from year to year.

Supporting Standard – although introduced in the current grade or course, they may be emphasized in a subsequent year; although reinforced in the current grade or course, they may be emphasized in the previous year; they play a role in preparing students for the next grade or course but not a central role; they address more narrowly defined ideas.

TAKS – (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) – The standardized test used to measure students education in Texas during the years 2003-2013.

TEA - (Texas Education Agency) – is the state agency that oversees primary and secondary public education in the state of Texas. It helps deliver education to more than 5 million students. TEA’s mission is to provide leadership, guidance, and resources to help students meet the educational needs of all students and prepare them for success in the global economy.

TEKS – (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) – state standards for which students should know and be able to do.

TELPAS – (Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System) – used to assess the progress limited English proficient (LEP) students make in learning the English language.

Title 1 – students participating in a program authorized under Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which is designed to improve the academic achievement of distinguished students.

UNESCO – (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) – an agency of the United Nations charged with instituting and administering programs for cooperative, coordinating action by member states in education, science, and the arts.

WPA- (Council of Writing Program Administrators) – a national association of college and university faculty with professional interest in directing writing programs.

YAG - (Year – at – a – Glance) – is a document that informs school personnel and teachers of the recommended pace and content standards for selected courses. It includes the topics to be taught week by week each six weeks period and a list of instructional resources.

504 students - Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a civil rights law that prohibits recipients of federal funding from discriminating against individuals with disabilities. As it relates to public education, the law states that a school cannot place a student in segregated classes or facilities “solely by reason of her or his disability.”

APPENDIX A

Appendix A:

Questionnaire

1. Before putting the 2014-2015 writing curriculum together, what problems had you noticed in the writing class? How are those problems being addressed?

2. What are the primary changes you are incorporating in the teacher created curriculum verses the adopted curriculums from the past?

3. Explain the framework of the writing curriculum that was designed for the 2014-2015 year?

4. Is there research that supports the framework? If so, please explain the research.

5. What is your goal(s) of the teacher created curriculum for the students of PSJA? What type of growth pattern are you hoping to see in regards to the STAAR scores?

APPENDIX B

Appendix B:

The Effects of Teacher Investment in the Curriculum of a Writing Class (District Wide)

This survey is being conducted by Jennifer Garcia, graduate student of Rhetoric and Composition at The University of Texas-Pan American (email: JGarcia1K@utpa.edu).

The purpose of this study is to uncover the results of a curriculum that is intentionally design for student population at PSJA ISD. While the state test has proven to be more rigorous I plan to focus on teacher investment in the writing curriculum and hopefully see an increase of success in the Writing STAAR Test. If the data shows an increase in scores in the editing and revision section and in the actually writing prompts then we can assure ourselves they the district will better prepare the students for college success and in the ability to articulate their thought through the written language.

This survey should take about 5-10 minutes to complete.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. If there are any individual questions that you would prefer to skip, simply leave the answer blank.

You must be at least 18 years old to participate. If you are not 18 or older, please do not complete the survey.

All survey responses are anonymous. You should not include any identifying information on the survey. Deidentified data may be shared with other researchers in the future, but will not contain information about your individual identity.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protection (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at 956-665-2889 or irb@utpa.edu. You are also invited to provide anonymous feedback to the IRB by visiting www.utpa.edu/IRBfeedback.

APPENDIX C

Appendix C:

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

“Hello, my name is Jennifer Garcia. I am a researcher at the University of Texas – Pan American. I am conducting a research study about the outcome of a teacher invested curriculum designed for the particular students of a specific school district. Would you mind completing a short survey? It should take about 10 minutes of your time. Your responses are anonymous; you should not include any identifying information on this survey. We ask that you try to answer all questions. However, if there are any questions that you would prefer to skip, simply leave the answer blank.

APPENDIX D

Appendix D:

Permission Letter from PSJA ISD to Conduct Research



PHARR-SAN JUAN-ALAMO ISD
Office of Deputy Superintendent

Narciso Garcia, *Deputy Superintendent of Schools*

December 11, 2014

Jennifer Garcia
Kennedy Middle School
Jennifer.garcia@psjaisd.us

RE: The Effects of Teacher Investment in the Curriculum of a Writing Class (District Wide)

Dear Jennifer,

I am granting permission for you to conduct research on the writing curriculum and on data from the results of the STAAR writing at Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD as part of your research project, *The Effects of Teacher Investment in the Curriculum of a Writing Class (District Wide)*. I understand that participants will be asked to complete a survey in order to obtain data needed for the study. All participant responses will be completely anonymous and confidential. All participant data will be coded to maintain anonymity.

In addition, I grant permission to Jennifer Garcia to analyze the results of the study.

If you have any questions regarding site permission, please contact: Dr. Sandra Quiroz, sandra.quiroz@psjaisd.us, 956-354-2005.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Narciso Garcia'.

Narciso Garcia,
Deputy Superintendent

APPENDIX E

Appendix E:

Permission Letter from PSJA ISD to Conduct Research



PHARR-SAN JUAN-ALAMO ISD
Office of Curriculum and Instruction
Diana Ruiz, *Administrator for Middle Schools*

December 11, 2014

Jennifer Obeth Garcia
904 Treyson Dr.
San Juan, Texas 78589
Jennifer.garcia@psjaisd.us

RE: The Effects of Teacher Investment in the Curriculum of a Writing Class

Dear Jennifer Garcia,

We are writing this letter in support of your UTPA research study titled, "The Effects of Teacher Investment in the Curriculum of a Writing Class." We understand that participants will be asked to complete a survey, but that all data collection will be conducted off-site. Data will be gathered from writing results of last year (STAAR and benchmark) both from the state of Texas and from PSJA ISD. I understand that the data included in the study will be anonymous student data and even the school will never be mentioned in the report. Teachers who volunteer to participate will be asked complete a questionnaire, in which subjects will be provided with a copy of the informed consent document and the questionnaire. Surveys will be completed anonymously and subjects will return completed surveys to the researcher physically in a blank envelope.

We agree to facilitate your research by providing you with the results of the benchmarks, Content-based exams, and STAAR data for the current year and the last 4 years. As primary personal for curriculum and instruction at PSJA most of this data will be obtained from the PSJA's Central Office and/or campus site.

If you have any questions regarding site support, please contact: diana.ruiz@psjaisd.us
Phone number: 956- 354- 2004

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Diana Ruiz', written over a large, light-colored oval shape.

Administrator for Middle Schools
Pharr San Juan Alamo ISD

APPENDIX F

Appendix F:

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

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Diagram 2	Model of 2014-2015 Year-at-a Glance.....	16

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jennifer Obeth Garcia received her diploma from Mercedes H.S. in Mercedes, Texas. She then attending the University of Texas Pan-American in August 2000 and received a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology and Minor in English on December of 2004. In 2016, Jennifer received her Master of Arts with a concentration in Rhetoric and Composition from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Currently she resides at 904 Treyson Drive in San Juan, Texas 78589.

Jennifer has been a public school teacher for 11 years at Pharr- San Juan- Alamo ISD. During her first 6 years she worked at PSJA H.S. from 2005-2011, in which she taught English I, II and IV. She then transferred to Kennedy M.S. where she has taught 7th grade Reading and Writing from 2011- present. In 2012, Jennifer was assigned the English Department Head at Kennedy. This has allowed her to be part of the Campus Leadership Team and a CLF for the TIF Grant that the campus is currently participating in. In 2013, she was invited to participate in a selected Review Committee by ETS which includes certifications of Texas Secondary English Teachers. In 2014 she was selected by TEA for CTEP Institute Training (Creating Turnaround Educator Pipeline) and in 2015 she was selected by Person for the TEKS Reading Review Committee. While at Kennedy, Jennifer has been the Duke Tip Teacher and has been involved in developing the foundation of the district curriculum with the PSJA ISD Curriculum Writing Team in 2014. Jennifer serves as a representative on the GT Advisory Committee for PSJA ISD GT students. Currently, Jennifer is also working for ETS as a Texas State Rater for the End of Course English II Exam.