

Educational Services

Beliefs About Writing

The Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District holds the following core beliefs about writing instruction:

- **All students have the capacity to write.** Writing can be taught to every child through carefully designed writing instruction.
- **Students in grades K-5 need to write every single day.** Students improve in writing through daily practice. For younger students this can include sketching, labeling or creating word lists. For older students this can involve writing across the curriculum (language arts, science, math, social studies, etc.).
- **Writing needs to be explicitly taught and modeled for students.** Students require targeted instruction in writing skills and strategies coupled with multiple opportunities to see teachers model good writing in action. Writing instruction should be drawn from research-based best practices.
- **Teachers must build their own content knowledge in writing.** Teachers need to meet regularly (through site-determined banked time) to examine and assess student writing and to dialogue about research-proven practices in order to improve student writing achievement.
- **Writing is an essential tool for thinking and communication.** Writing is an essential part of adult life; students must learn to write so they can become productive, creative and informed members of society.

The components of a quality writing program include:

- ❖ A balance of instruction between *process writing* (prewriting, drafting, revising, publishing) and *writer's craft* (how writers write, examples of student and professional text, living a “writerly” life, etc.)
- ❖ Multiple experiences writing across genres for different audiences and a variety of purposes
- ❖ Explicit, clear criteria for the qualities of good writing, writing assignments and the evaluation of writing projects
- ❖ Regular formative and summative assessments to determine what students know and what teachers need to teach next
- ❖ Opportunities for students to dialogue about writing with teachers and peers (e.g., conferences with teachers and peers, “author’s chair”)
- ❖ Consistent language across grade levels about writing content

Programs and resources for quality writing instruction include:

- *The 6 Traits of Writing*
- *Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (Lucy Calkins)*
- *Houghton Mifflin Reading Series*
- *SMMUSD Formative District Writing Assessment (DWA)*

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