

Collins Writing Program Implementation Profile

Bridgeport Middle School Bridgeport, TX

This profile outlines Bridgeport Middle School’s implementation plan and the improvement in students’ content knowledge as a direct result of the Collins Writing Program. Bridgeport Middle School in Bridgeport, Texas, began implementing the Collins Writing Program in 2016 and tracked student improvement over the next three school years using the STAAR program. STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness) is a standardized assessment program designed to measure the extent to which students have learned and are able to apply the knowledge and skills defined in the state-mandated curriculum standards. The most notable growth was observed in science and social studies, with measurable gains also evident among Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students specifically. Principal Travis Whisenant reported, “We were trained by Dr. Collins in 2016 and 2017 and had exceptional growth on the STAAR assessment, particularly in Science and Social Studies, during that tenure.”

Background

Bridgeport Independent School District is located about 40 miles northwest of Fort Worth in the rolling hills of Wise County, Texas. This rural district is home to just over 2,000 students. About 50% of Bridgeport students are of Hispanic origin, 65% are considered economically disadvantaged, and greater than 25% demonstrate limited English language proficiency.

While the Texas Education Agency historically assigned a “Met Standard” accountability rating to Bridgeport ISD, prior to 2019, the district had never performed above the state average in social studies and science. In 2017, Bridgeport Middle School housed 468 students in grades 6 through 8. Based on the STAAR assessment administered in Grade 8, only 52% of students that year were designated as “approaching grade level or above” in social studies, well below the 70% state average. Similarly, only 69% of students were designated as “approaching grade level or above” in science, against a state average of 79%.

Travis Whisenant, principal of Bridgeport Middle School, identified social studies and science as the areas of greatest urgency as he analyzed the school’s performance. After training with Dr. John Collins at the Harvard Principals’ Center in July 2016, he was inspired to bring what he had learned to Bridgeport and make writing across the curriculum a focus for professional development. Bridgeport had attempted cross curricular writing in the past, but they found that previous efforts were too ambiguous and left teachers unprepared and overwhelmed. Collins Writing would provide the clarity and common language that was missing up until this point. “By the time I got home on the plane,” says Principal Whisenant, “I had already drafted a plan for bringing Collins Writing to Bridgeport.”

Implementation

Bridgeport ISD brought in Dr. Collins for a soft roll-out of the Collins Writing Program districtwide during the 2016 school year. Teachers became familiar with the Five Types of Writing, and many began using some of the strategies in their classrooms. In August 2017, Dr. Collins returned for three days of more intensive training. During these sessions, teachers learned how to use the retrieval routine and Type Two writing to improve content learning and retention. They also learned four essential assignments for improving general academic and domain-specific vocabulary, summarizing, comparing and contrasting complex nonfiction texts, and building and supporting evidence-based arguments. As part of the training process, teachers broke into smaller department area groups to apply their learning to district curriculum and plan how they would implement Collins Writing in their subject areas.

Principal Whisenant understood that staff would need continued support as they implemented the new strategies as part of their instructional practice. He set campus-wide expectations for using Types One, Two, and Three writing and looked for evidence of use in lesson plans and classroom observation. He followed up with teachers throughout the school year with short presentations and sharing sessions. He and other school leaders worked hard to link Collins Writing with other school initiatives clearly and explicitly. “We implemented Collins Writing and the Collins Retrieval Routine with 100% fidelity,” says Principal Whisenant. Social studies teachers were especially invested in Collins Writing. They implemented the Retrieval Routine “by the book”—Make a Question Monday, Take It Tuesday, Work Together Wednesday, and Throwback Thursday drove teachers’ weekly routine.

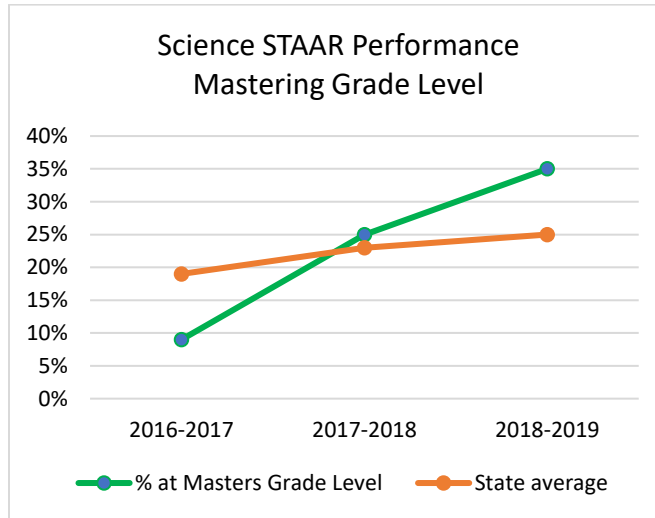
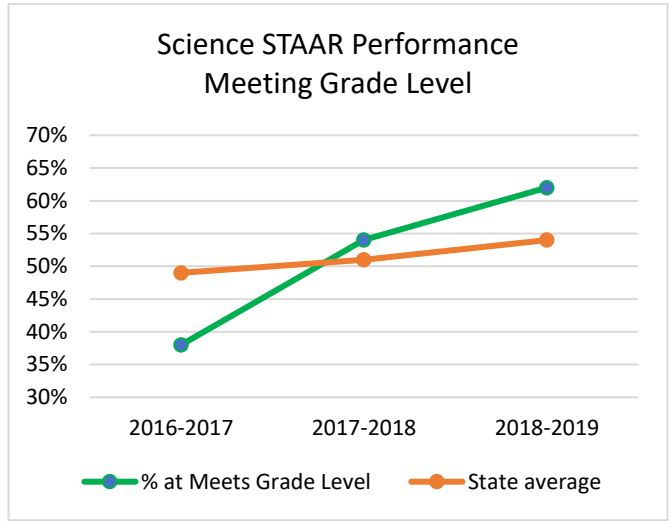
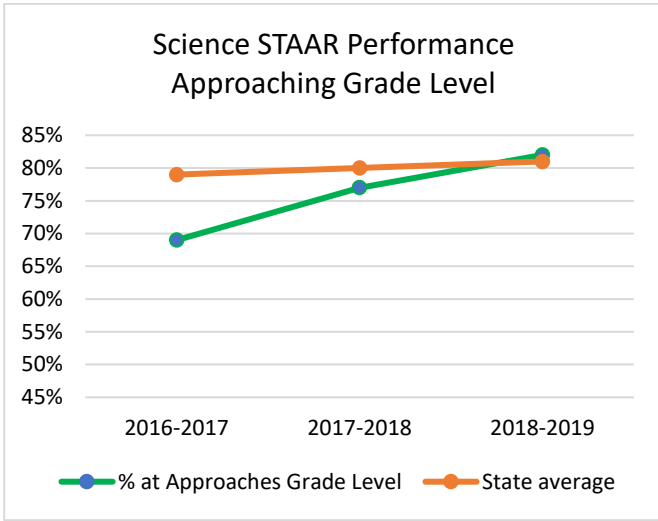
Bridgeport’s concerted efforts paid off. The focused and ongoing training provided clarity for how cross-curricular writing ought to look in classrooms. Teachers had a clear language and routines in place, and they had a support system that encouraged their efforts.

Results

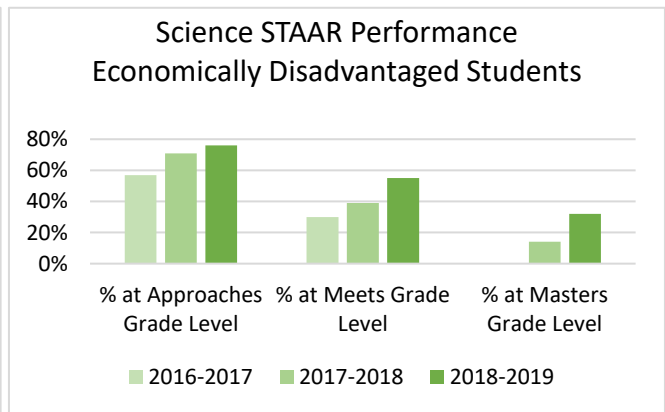
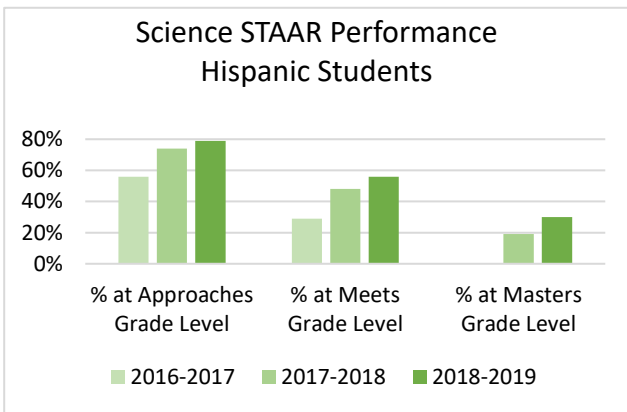
The primary goal for Bridgeport Middle School was to improve students’ science and social studies knowledge as measured by scores on the Texas STAAR assessment. Over the three-year period during which the Collins Writing Program was introduced, the number of students who met each of three benchmark levels increased steadily in both subject areas. Principal Whisenant notes, “These results were the highest performance on the assessments in school district history! I have seen firsthand the value of this program.”

The most notable progress was made in science, where not only did scores increase across the board, but after the first year of implementation, student scores exceeded state averages at both the Meets Grade Level and Masters Grade Level benchmarks. After the second year of implementation, science scores bypassed state averages at all three benchmark levels. And in both 2018 and 2019, Bridgeport Middle School received Distinction Designations for Science on the Texas Education Agency School Report Card.

The following graphs represent the growth in science achievement between 2016, when Collins Writing was first introduced at Bridgepoint Middle School, and 2019, the last time the STAAR assessment was administered prior to the pandemic.

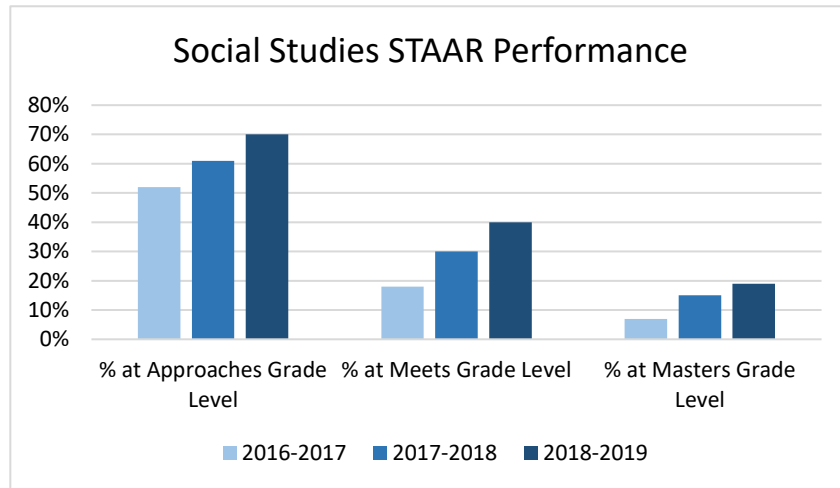


Growth was also seen among Hispanic students and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, each of which makes up at least 50% of the student population at Bridgeport Middle School.



Similar year-over-year growth was recorded in Social Studies, with increases of at least 12% over the initial two-year implementation period at all three benchmark levels, and the percentage of students more than doubled at the Meets Grade Level and Masters Grade Level markers.

Year	% at Approaches Grade Level	% at Meets Grade Level	% at Masters Grade Level
2016-2017	52%	18%	7%
2017-2018	61%	30%	15%
2018-2019	70%	40%	19%



The Bottom Line

In 2016, Bridgeport Middle School set a goal: to improve social studies and science performance. To meet this goal, the district implemented a professional development program that included multiple rounds of training with Dr. Collins, clear campus-wide expectations, classroom observations, team meetings, and ongoing administrative support and professional development. The plan was tailored over a two-year period, and results showed steady improvement during that time: both science and social studies scores increased to the highest levels the school had seen.