

Collins Writing Program

Friendship Public Charter Schools: Ideal Academy

District of Columbia

Friendship Charter School's Ideal Academy in the District of Columbia began implementing the Collins Writing Program in 2022 and documented immediate improvement in standardized test scores using the PARCC assessment. The PARCC test measures the most critical knowledge and skills for students, including understanding complex texts and evidence-based writing, as outlined by the Common Core State Standards. This profile outlines Ideal Academy's implementation plan and improvement in ELA scores as a result of implementing the Collins Writing Program.

Background

Friendship's Ideal Academy is the newest school in the Friendship Public Charter School's network of campuses, opening in 2019. Ideal Academy serves approximately 380 students from PK to 8 in the District of Columbia. The student body is 100% minority with 97.8% Black or African American, 1.5% Hispanic/Latino, and .7% Asian or Pacific Islander. 21% of students are classified as having special needs, including students with autism and learning disabilities.

In 2022, Yvonne Tackie, the ELA Instructional Specialist for English/Language Arts 3-8, determined there was a pressing need for a writing program. In particular, she noticed a lack of writing stamina, partly attributed to the limited practice during the Covid crisis. Because she had previously worked with the Collins Writing Program in two Friendship Public D.C. Charter schools (Blow-Pierce Charter, and the Southeast Charter), and had seen firsthand the achievement gains these two schools experienced, she began implementation of Collins Writing in grades 3 to 8 in the fall of 2022.

Implementation

Teachers at Ideal Academy began using the Collins Writing Program in their classrooms in the fall of 2022, and Ms. Tackie and Dr. Collins conducted additional professional development with staff over the course of the 2022-2023 school year. Implementation began with a half-day introduction to Collins' Five Types of Writing and was followed by weekly content meetings to track and discuss student growth by reviewing student writing samples throughout the year.

Ms. Tackie also facilitated specialized training sessions for individual departments. Social Studies and Science educators learned to integrate the Ten Percent Summary skill seamlessly into their daily instruction while maintaining a strong focus on their subject matter. Math teachers were provided with go-to Type One and Type Two prompts and actively engaged in hands-on exercises, crafting PARCC prompts and Focus Correction Areas to target the most critical writing skills in math.

During biweekly content meetings, educators presented student work samples encompassing both Type One and Type Two writing. Following a thorough analysis of the progress made each week, teachers curated Prose Constructed Responses that underscored the nuanced structure of multileveled prompts. This iterative process not only showcased the evolution of student writing but also served as a valuable forum for refining campus-wide instructional approaches.

Results

Ideal Academy, like all other schools in Washington D.C., uses the PARCC test to determine student growth. The test is administered in the spring to students in grades 3 to high school. The results of these tests are reported in 5 levels:

- Level 1: Did Not Meet Expectations
- Level 2: Partially Met Expectations
- Level 3: Approaching Expectations
- Level 4: Met Expectations
- Level 5: Exceeded Expectations

In the inaugural year of implementation, the percentage of students approaching or meeting grade level expectations soared, illustrating the transformative power of dedicated teaching and inspired learning. In grade 3, the percentage of students who met or approached grade level expectations jumped from 29% to 60%, and in grades 4-8, that percentage jumped from 48% to 98%, more than doubling performance levels in both grade bands.

Below is a breakdown of Ideal Academy's comparative ELA scores in 2022 and 2023.

Grade 3 PARCC ELA Scores

Year	% of Scores at Level 3	% of Scores at Level 4
2021-2022	25%	4%
2022-2023	40%	20%

Grades 4-8 PARCC ELA Scores

Year	% of Scores at Level 3	% of Scores at Level 4
2021-2022	36%	12%
2022-2023	62%	36%

Summarizing the results, Ms. Tackie states:

Before introducing the Collins program, students lacked the endurance to effectively organize their thoughts for writing and teachers weren't adept at teaching writing, making it imperative to champion this initiative. I'm immensely pleased that we took this step forward, as it has proven to be a transformative endeavor for our students and their writing skills.

The Bottom Line

In 2022, Ideal Academy set a goal to improve student writing stamina and skills through a unified approach to writing. To meet this goal, the school implemented a professional development program that included introductory training and weekly progress analysis. With just one year of focused emphasis, student writing achievement increased dramatically. What accounted for these dramatic increases? At Ideal Academy there were no major changes in staffing or in the make-up of the student body. There were no other 3-8 ELA programs introduced. The change was the Collins Writing Program implemented with consistency and fidelity. As Ms. Tackie aptly observes, “Education has the remarkable ability to unlock the full potential within each student, paving the way for a brighter future.”