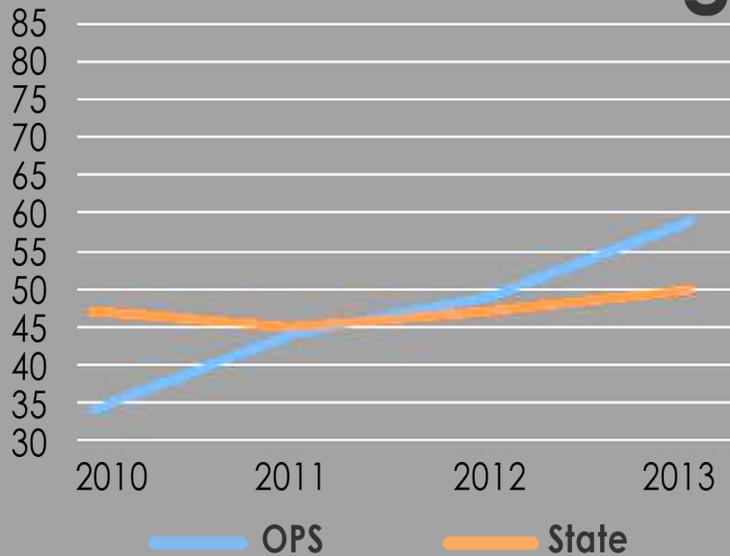


Otsego Public School District CASE STUDY



4th Grade Writing



WriteSteps

100% Common Core Writing and Grammar Program

Case Study: *Otsego Public Schools, Otsego, MI*

WriteSteps and PLCs Create Writing Success and Lead Otsego to National District of Distinction Award

Melissa Koenig, Principal of Alamo Elementary and Director of Elementary Instruction at Otsego Public Schools, agrees with her teachers that writing is one of the toughest subjects to teach. Fifth grade teacher, Sara Jewett, recognized a trend among her students. She said they showed a lack of enthusiasm for writing which translated into mediocre writing. Melissa Koenig realized that this wasn't an isolated case, but rather a district-wide issue. Something needed to be done.

Otsego Public Schools is a school district located 15 miles north of Kalamazoo, Michigan. The district consists of 2,300 students and encompasses one high school, one middle school and three elementary buildings. The district's free and reduced percentage is 44%. Two of the three elementary buildings qualify and receive Title I funding, with each building having just slightly over 50% free and reduced.

Prior to adopting WriteSteps, the writing program Otsego had was not being used with fidelity. There were inconsistencies within the district on how much time was spent teaching writing and how frequently writing instruction was occurring at each grade level. It seemed to be the first thing to go when teachers were running short on time. The schools did not have common prompts or assessments to compare data; conversations about writing were few and far between; and teachers were not comfortable teaching writing. The task seemed overwhelming.

In 2012, after receiving another dismal report from the state writing assessment, the Superintendent asked the directors of instruction to focus their work on developing a plan of improvement for their declining writing scores. The district decided to make a district-wide purchase of WriteSteps in the winter of 2012, to improve their writing and grammar skills among kindergarten through fifth grade students.



Melissa Koenig, Principal of Alamo Elementary



www.WriteStepsWriting.com

WriteSteps

eWriteSteps is the most teacher-friendly, 100% Common Core writing and grammar program for K-5 on the market. Period. We fuse **best practices** such as the 6 traits of writing, Madeline Hunter lesson steps, Writer's Workshop, Multiple Intelligences, and Bloom's Taxonomy.

This comprehensive program gives teachers and students everything they need to develop their craft with confidence.

eWriteSteps is a digital curriculum for teachers that can be used with interactive whiteboards, visual projectors, computers, tablets, iPads, and document cameras.



It was at this time that Otsego began a voluntary third grade professional learning community (PLC) district-wide. Two of the three elementary buildings chose to participate in the PLC. When the meetings began, they delved into the data and sought out to see what the data revealed. In the buildings that participated in the PLC, test scores improved by 37%; while in the building that didn't participate, the scores continued to decline. After results showed drastic improvement, all three buildings implemented the PLC process and all three showed growth.



Teachers from Alamo Elementary working together in a PLC.

Writing Goes From Zero to Hero

When fifth grade teacher Sara Jewett began implementing WriteSteps in the winter of 2012, she noticed for the first time in her career that she heard students say, "I love to write."

Sara began to notice that students who typically struggled in reading and writing were now having success. "On a daily basis they enjoyed writing and were applying the skills they learned across the curriculum."

One of the things Sara appreciates about WriteSteps is the ease of use of the online subscription. She clicks the day she is on and gets her detailed daily lesson plans and supporting materials. Sara has a clear scope and sequence of each unit.

"With WriteSteps, it was the first time I felt confident in teaching writing."

~Sara Jewett, 5th Grade

WriteSteps + PLCs = Success

“When I met Melissa, I knew she was going to be one of those principals that makes sure a new program gets the attention it needs. A dedicated leader can make all the difference in a program succeeding or failing. Melissa’s dedication to implementing WriteSteps with 100% fidelity has paid off.”- Suzanne Klein, WriteSteps Founder and CEO



As a district, they saw marked improvement in their fourth grade writing scores from 34% in 2010 to 59% in 2013.
*OPS = Otsego Public Schools

Percentage of 4th Graders by District who Met or Exceeded Michigan’s Writing Score

District	2013	2012
Oakland*	67%	50%
Portage	66%	64%
Paramount*	62%	44%
Schoolcraft	62%	49%
Paw Paw	61%	40%
Hopkins	59%	49%
Otsego	59%	49%
Mattawan	58%	62%
Plainwell	57%	55%
Gobles	56%	49%
Parchment	55%	39%
Mendon	55%	40%
Decatur	54%	18%
Wayland	54%	57%
Lawrence	53%	37%
Marcellus	53%	56%
Martin	52%	37%
Bangor	52%	13%
Statewide	51%	47%
Lawton	49%	41%
Vicksburg	45%	52%
Gull Lake	44%	44%
Kalamazoo	41%	39%
Bloomington	41%	35%
Forest*	40%	21%
Three Rivers	40%	38%
Allegan	40%	37%
South Haven	38%	30%
Burr Oak	37%	69%
Sturgis	36%	30%
Delton	35%	46%
Colon	35%	38%
Comstock	34%	31%
Nottawa	33%	41%
Galesburg	31%	37%
Climax	31%	27%
Hartford	30%	25%
White Pigeon	30%	28%
Constantine	29%	43%
Centreville	21%	36%

Otsego scored 7th in writing out of 6 counties

Melissa Koenig attributes the power of PLCs in conjunction with WriteSteps as the reason for Otsego Public Schools’ improved writing scores. In Otsego, PLCs are centered on Richard DuFour’s work and the four questions he outlines that have become the pillars for Otsego’s PLC work:

1. What do we expect our students to learn?
2. How will we know when they are learning?
3. How will we respond when they don’t learn?
4. How will we respond if they already know it?

Teachers met monthly to review student progress, compare data and develop a plan for improvement for the next month.

Vertical Writing Team-puts a focus on:

- Argumentative/opinion Writing
- District Writing Prompt
- WriteSteps Implementation

Melissa is an avid supporter of PLCs and has found that they strengthen teaching skills and ensure that students aren’t just being taught, but that they are learning. The PLC format allows teachers to utilize data to inform their instruction.

Melissa believes WriteSteps gave her teachers the confidence they needed to turn writing around at Alamo Elementary. WriteSteps provided a framework that worked well with all of her teachers, ranging from recent graduates to veteran teachers with 20+ years of experience.

Otsego Receives District of Distinction Award

“In my twenty years of education, I would rate WriteSteps as the best writing program.”

~Melissa Koenig,
Principal of Alamo
Elementary

The increased scores caught the attention of the media and made the front page of the *Kalamazoo Gazette* and Mlive.

Otsego made “unprecedented growth” in all areas, in all buildings, in the fall of 2013. With this improvement, the district was awarded the Districts of Distinction award by *District Administration* magazine in November 2014. This national recognition program honors school districts leading the way in establishing initiatives that yield quantifiable benefits that other districts could replicate.

Teachers at Melissa’s building are excited about the continuous upgrades to the WriteSteps program. Engagers, the new interactive whiteboard lessons, address the need for responsive writing in the next generation assessments. The interactive whiteboard lessons are increasing student engagement, are thorough, and ensure that teachers do not forget key concepts. The organization of the WriteSteps platform saves teachers time on a daily basis since everything they need is right at their fingertips, there’s no searching for materials.

It’s been an incredible journey for Otsego schools.

Writing instruction, which was once an overwhelming task, is now the catalyst for improved test scores.

Creating district-wide consistency in writing instruction

through WriteSteps and participating in PLCs has lead Otsego to receive a national award while creating more confident and successful writers.

“In my 20 years in education, I would rate WriteSteps as the best writing program.” said Melissa Koenig.

For more information, feel free to contact Melissa at mkoenig@otsegops.org.



Alamo Elementary School

WriteSteps

www.WriteStepsWriting.com