Implementing Writing Strategies in Secondary Classrooms Across Multiple Content Areas

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

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Abstract

This school improvement plan integrates different writing strategies, such as (a) collaborative writing; (b) peer editing; (c) technology integration; and (c) writing for a specific task, purpose, and style to improve writing scores in a rural school district in the Midwest. Through the use of a pilot team, members will test what specific writing strategies are effective in each content area and apply it in their own classrooms. Then, the pilot team will coach staff members in writing strategies and implementation in their own content areas for a building-wide initiative to increase self-efficacy with writing and improve student Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) writing scores.

Keywords: School improvement plan, collaborative writing, peer editing, self-efficacy, writing instruction, technology integration
Implementing Writing Strategies in Secondary Classrooms Across Multiple Content Areas

Amid the rise of ever-changing adaptive and artificially intelligent technology, the world of writing is far from its roots of simple paper and pencil and grammar trees. Writing has quickly developed into a challenge for many students as predictive and auto-generated text has become more seamlessly embedded into even the most mundane pieces of technology (Hamilton, 2023). Writing, both grammar and the formulating and expansion of ideas, is a critical component of learning. Across both Iowa and the nation, standardized writing test scores have decreased (Elliott, 2023); yet, the need for writing and expanding upon ideas and learning is as imperative as it ever has been (Griffin, 2020). Being able to think critically, and then communicate those thoughts through writing, is an essential skill required in the Common Core State Standards in nearly all grade levels, but especially for secondary education students. The problem is many students still lack the writing skills necessary to meet proficiency.

Objective

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to address one of the largest deficits in student learning in recent years based on numerous studies and Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) and ACT data (Elliott, 2023). Still, leaving the writing dilemma to be solved only by English language arts instruction would be a disservice to students and would limit their exposure to different forms of writing for different purposes. Writing can and should be something addressed across all curricular areas and adapted to fit the specific style and task for those areas (Elliott, 2023).

Background

In the Wilton Community School District (CSD), writing scores have decreased starkly the last 5 years since the ISASP was used as the benchmark measurement in 2019. Secondary
teachers at Wilton CSD have reported that the quality of student writing has decreased significantly in recent years, especially after the COVID-19 global pandemic. Although many teachers schoolwide have reported having an interest in applying writing instruction to their own classrooms, writing has not been addressed by teachers outside of the Wilton CSD English language arts department. The plan is to introduce writing strategies and interventions to support teachers’ implementation of writing strategies across multiple content areas. Teachers can use these data to make informed instructional decisions and track improvements through continuous progress monitoring and team collaboration.

**Scope**

A review of existing literature spanned multiple platforms, most notably through Northwestern College’s online journal accesses. The most common online databases used were ProQuest Education Collection, ERIC, or the DeWitt Library. The articles used in the literature review were under 10 years old and were peer reviewed. Resources contained a mixture of various writing strategies, grade levels, and locations in which the studies occurred. The researcher focused mainly on finding specific writing strategies that could be implemented across multiple content areas at a low cost.

Not all of the studies were at the secondary level, as some were situated at postsecondary and elementary levels; however, the research outlined applicable strategies that applied to the secondary setting. Many of the articles discussed cowriting, or collaborative writing (Listyani, 2018; Roxas, 2023; Wonglakorn & Deerajviset, 2023). Other common topics included technology-based writing strategies and various frameworks that are specific to different content areas. Certain research articles were omitted because a great number focused specifically on English language learner (ELL) or English as a second language (ESL) writing research alone.
Wilton CSD has a limited number of ELL students, making the aforementioned research less relevant to the specific improvement plan even though it discussed writing strategies.

The researcher believes there are many strategies in the research that would benefit student learning and improve writing skills in the secondary setting. Some of these strategies involve incorporating collaborative writing, technology-based tasks, and targeted topic-based interventions. Through a collaborative pilot team and diagnostic tools, teachers can measure growth in relation to the three writing strategies and track progress while they implement these efforts. In doing so, teachers can refine their writing strategies and align them to existing professional development. Authentic intellectual work (AIW) framework is the current professional development curriculum used at Wilton, which can be extended to include writing strategies for the rest of the staff over time through research-based practices.

**Review of the Literature**

From the literature review, key themes emerged relating to the implementation of writing strategies and their effects on students. The literature review first discusses collaborative writing and peer editing in the writing process, followed by the use of technology for both the task itself and for intervention purposes. The third section involves a discussion of specific task styles and purposes of writing tasks, which relates to both the type of task asked of students and the specific content areas the individual strategies support. Lastly, the literature review focuses on the component of building both student and teacher confidence and self-efficacy with writing, and how such confidence relates to the improvement of the writing skills of secondary students.

**Collaborative Writing and Peer Editing**

Listyani (2018), a researcher in Salatiga, Indonesia, conducted a study to measure the impact of peer editing on students and how the practice affected their views on writing. The
students were secondary students sampled from a writing class where they implemented process writing. The process writing task on which Listyani focused the most was the process of collaborative peer editing; Listyani measured the effects the practice had on students’ views about writing overall. Students were asked a series of questions throughout their writing process that prompted them to analyze different writing strategies and how the strategies impacted their learning and views on writing. According to the findings, Listyani found nearly all students reported that peer editing had a positive impact on their learning. Furthermore, 19 out of 20 students preferred brainstorming for their writing as a collaborative team rather than as an individual. This finding demonstrated a correlation between collaboration and peer editing and a positive view on writing and learning outcomes.

In a similar study, Roxas (2023) researched the implications of collaborative writing on student achievement and views on writing. Roxas used a comparable-sized demographic and study size with 30 secondary students in the Philippines. The researcher placed students into collaborative teams based on specialty areas, such as STEM, social sciences, and general education, where students were given an essay prompt. With the prompt, Roxas asked students to research a topic and write a collaborative, extended research paper on their topic. Like Listyani (2018), Roxas discovered the majority of students found significant learning benefits from collaborative writing. Many students reported they felt more confident with writing and they learned other valuable skills such as communication and patience; however, Roxas found some participants, though they felt it was valuable for learning, did find the process of collaborative writing to be challenging, and surmised the reliance on other students could add stress to the task. This finding indicated although there can be learning benefits, as with both Roxas’s and Listyani’s studies, additional elements of collaborative writing can be challenging for students.
Both Roxas (2023) and Listyani (2018) used qualitative means, specifically survey and student response, as a measurement for the impacts of collaborative writing and peer editing on student learning. Wonglakorn and Deerajviset (2023) researched the same topic, but in a contrasting style. By using quantitative measurements, Wonglakorn and Deerajviset conducted a study with over 140 eighth-grade students, which was nearly 4–5 times larger than the other two studies conducted. In this study, Wonglakorn and Deerajviset placed half of the students in a control group with traditional, individualized writing instruction, and the other half in an experimental set, where students engaged in collaborative writing strategies. Wonglakorn and Deerajviset measured the students’ growth based on standardized tests from previous school years to the same test at the end of the experiment. The results suggested students in the experimental group showed significant growth in comparison to those in the control group and reported having a more positive attitude about writing than those in the control group. This finding demonstrated, as with Roxas’s and Listyani’s studies, Wonglakorn and Deerajviset found an increase in student achievement and learning after implementing collaborative writing. Additionally, Wonglakorn and Deerajviset solidified the notion that collaborative writing might have a positive impact on students’ attitudes and their views on the writing process, which was similar to Listyani’s findings.

Another study that incorporated the use of both a control group and an experimental group to test the effect of particular writing strategies on student learning came from Pacheco and Huertas (2022), who analyzed the impact of the autonomous, collaborative, technology-based work (ACOTEC) strategy on primary aged students. Though Pacheco and Huertas’s (2022) study focused on students from ages 9–12, it held many similarities to that of Wonglakorn and Deerajviset (2023), whose students were between ages 13–14. Pacheco and Huerta split 63
students into two groups: one in a traditional learning environment and one that incorporated the ACOTEC writing strategy, which blends technology with collaborative writing strategies to implement writing instruction. Pacheco and Huertas not only focused on the effect of these collaborative writing strategies on students, but they researched the comfortability and fidelity in which the teachers in the study implemented the strategies. Pacheco and Huertas found students in the experimental group showed greater improvement than those in the control group; however, in contrast to the previous studies, Pacheco and Huertas felt there needed to be additional professional development and training opportunities for the teachers before the study could be found conclusive. Although Pacheco and Huertas indicated the need for further studies, there might be some merit to the fact that the students in the experimental group, or those involved in collaborative writing strategies, showed growth over the course of the study. The results demonstrated, as with the other studies, there are benefits to student learning when students engage in collaborative writing strategies (Pacheco & Huertas, 2022).

Technology and Integration

In the study by Bailey and Almusharraf (2022), 256 South Korean postsecondary students were given online writing tasks in their second language, or L2, of English. Bailey and Almusharraf gave students a qualitative survey at the beginning and start of the year to measure their perception and attitude toward writing tasks. Bailey and Almusharraf found after a semester of online writing tasks, students reported having more time to devote to writing when the tasks were online and felt they had increased motivation to complete the tasks. However, Bailey and Almusharraf discovered there was an increase in mistakes due to the use of technology and inaccurate translations. Although an increase in errors is not a positive aspect of technology, it is critical to note that the current improvement plan contrasts from Bailey and Almusharraf’s study,
as no students have English as their L2, which would minimize the issue of translation errors on writing tasks. Bailey and Almusharraf’s results showed many students, especially older students, had more time and more motivation when using technology for writing tasks.

Another researcher, Nash (2018), found the format of online and multimodal writing tasks increased motivation. Nash employed a more comprehensive and larger scale application of online and multimodal writing tasks than Bailey and Almusharraf (2022). Nash studied 28 secondary English education teachers and their students over the span of several years and found multimodal and technology-based writing tasks led to more student engagement and motivation. Similar to Bailey and Almusharraf, Nash found the technology alone did not improve writing scores. Their results demonstrated that the use of technology and its integration is effective when the teachers are given proper training on how to implement the technology and multimodal tools. Many of the teachers in Nash’s study were inexperienced or even 1st-year teachers who had little-to-no training on integrating technology into their writing curriculum.

Other researchers have found a strong correlation between the implementation of technology-based writing tasks and the improvement of writing scores. Miranda and Hanson (2021) conducted a study that focused on the implementation of cowriting tasks for technology-based revision. In their study, 58 university students engaged in the implementation of the digital revision tasks. Miranda and Hanson found that students felt more confident and engaged with their learning and felt the online tasks provided them with a higher rate of positive learning outcomes compared to traditional learning tasks. Additionally, Miranda and Hanson discovered all groups who engaged in some type of technology-based writing task showed significant growth in comparison to the groups who participated in traditional writing tasks. This finding indicated that technology increases engagement and confidence with writing, which was similar
to Nash’s (2018) and Bailey and Almusharraf’s (2022) findings, and, if implemented correctly, improves learning outcomes and can lead to significant growth.

Roscoe et al. (2018) used technology not only as the platform for writing tasks, but also incorporated a software called W-Pal for online tutoring. Similar to Miranda and Hanson (2021), Roscoe et al. used a variety of technology-based writing tasks and split students into groups with differing tasks. Roscoe et al. researched the impacts of various online writing strategies on 153 ethnically diverse high school students. These students were randomly grouped and each given different technological writing tasks, some with game-based learning, others with essay-based learning, and others with strategy-based practice. Roscoe et al. found all groups showed significant growth in their writing skills, which was similar to that of Miranda and Hanson; however, unlike the previous studies, Roscoe et al. discovered even though students’ learning outcomes increased significantly, those who were expected to complete both technology-based interventions and the online tutoring system felt fatigued and grew increasingly negative toward writing tasks. It is unclear what the reasoning was for an increase in the students’ negative views; however, one might wonder if the negative attitudes developed from spending too much time focusing on writing tasks to the point of fatigue. This study demonstrated that the use of technology increases engagement and motivation in many cases (Miranda & Hanson, 2021; Nash, 2018), but too-frequent implementation of one specific type of writing task may lead to exhaustion or frustration.

Krishnan et al. (2019) focused on 30 eighth-grade students in a rural district in California, where many of the students were ELLs. Krishnan et al. (2019) implemented online synchronous collaborative writing with formative assessments and continuous feedback cycles. By the end of the intervention, the students showed increased confidence with their writing abilities, which was
similar to the results of Bailey and Almusharraf (2022), who also worked with ELLs as the focus of their study. Unlike Bailey and Almusharraf, Krishnan et al. found online collaborative writing increased the students’ language acquisition and their writing abilities. The findings of Krishnan et al. suggested collaborative, technology-based tasks can support student growth in multiple areas. This finding aligned with those of Miranda and Hanson (2021), who agreed collaborative skill building through digital tools can increase achievement outcomes significantly.

**Task, Style, and Purpose**

Many of the previous studies discussed the implementation of various writing strategies in an English language arts domain; however, the importance of writing transcends just one subject area. Collins et al. (2021) researched the implementation of writing strategies in a social studies setting, including self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) to write expository essays. The intervention involved 180 third-grade students and lasted over the span of 16 weeks. At the conclusion of this study, Collins et al. discovered through mixed methodology that students with the SRSD interventions scored significantly higher on their essay tasks than those in the control group. Furthermore, Collins et al. felt through observational data, they noticed students in the experimental group significantly outperformed students in the control group on other related writing tasks. Collins et al.’s findings signified the importance of writing across multiple content curricular areas.

Another study similar to Collins et al. (2021) was Weston-Sementelli et al. (2016), who looked at the specific social science of psychology with undergraduate students. Like Collins et al., Weston-Sementelli et al. researched the effects of specific writing interventions on essay tasks. In all, 175 undergraduate students at Arizona State University used W-Pal, which was also used by Roscoe et al.’s (2018) later study, along with iSTART, another online writing program.
According to Collins et al.’s findings, targeted writing strategy instruction had a positive impact on the students’ essays. Those students who used both iSTART and W-Pal for their source-based, content-specific essays scored higher than those who used one of the programs in isolation or none at all. These results demonstrated the use of targeted writing instruction, especially when using technological-based tools, improves content-specific writing.

Unlike Collins et al. (2021) and Weston-Sementelli et al. (2016), Byung-In (2019) focused on mathematical writing rather than social sciences. Byung-In’s research involved 125 seventh-grade students and 130 eighth-grade students over the course of 1 school year. Students were given daily bell-ringers with intervention strategies to teach mathematical writing. The students were placed in different groups where they were taught different strategies in each group. Byung-In found that students’ progress and the writing quality depended heavily on the task that was given. Students conformed to the task and audience that was asked of them. Though different from previous studies, Byung-In’s study indicated the importance of ensuring students understand the task and audience for whom they are writing. The quality of writing is also dependent on the clarity of the task given and the prior instruction, which demonstrates how imperative it is to create high-quality writing tasks and instruction.

The importance of selected appropriate writing tasks was also explored by Gillam (2014), who researched students in Grades 4–8 and the implementation of the 5-E framework, which involves five steps: engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate. These steps are used in science classrooms as a writing strategy when students encounter new information or data and must reflect on it. Gillam also incorporated varying levels of technology into the writing instruction and found students responded well to the 5-E framework and that it had a positive
outcome on their writing skills. In other words, specific writing frameworks can be highly effective with science curriculum in late elementary to early secondary students.

Erbasan and Dedeoglu (2023) also researched late elementary-aged students, only they instead focused on talented and gifted (TAG) students instead of science, social studies, or mathematics. Erbasan and Dedeoglu used daily diary prompts to measure students’ abilities to write informative essays and found the average rubric score increased from 52% – 87.67%. However, it is difficult to determine if the results from this research would be applicable to a general education classroom or if the results were specific to TAG students. Regardless, there appeared to be merit to frequent, specific writing tasks repeated over the course of a semester.

Another similar study that looked at advanced students and the effect of specific writing tasks came from Na and Yoon (2016), who researched 69 Korean university students with an average age of 22. These students attended a prestigious university that emphasized writing in both Korean and English. Na and Yoon created a series of untimed and timed writing tasks, then conducted retrospective interviews about the students’ experiences. The results of the research indicated that students adopted negative writing strategies when given timed writing tasks. The findings suggested a negative correlation with introducing timed tasks to the quality of writing, which could be a result of cultural pressures or another outside influence. Both Na and Yoon and Byung-In (2019) exemplified the importance of selecting the appropriate writing task that best supports student learning.

**Confidence and Self-Efficacy**

Many of the previous studies illustrated the impact of certain writing tasks or types on student learning and confidence. As Na and Yoon (2016) discovered, certain high-stakes writing tasks can inhibit student learning or cause students to regress to negative writing habits.
However, with other interventions, such as the implementation of collaborative writing from Listyani (2018) and Roxas (2023) and technology-based instruction from Bailey and Almusharraf (2022), certain writing tasks can increase motivation and confidence. Sabarun et al. (2023) studied the impact of learning styles on argumentative writing tasks. In their study, 58 secondary learners from Florida were selected and had a variety of learning styles (i.e., auditory, kinesthetic, and visual). Sabarun et al. aligned the writing instruction to the type of learning style of the students, then measured their growth in argumentative writing essays. Their results indicated when the interventions corresponded to the proper learning style, students performed better on their writing tasks and students took more ownership over their learning. The results suggested when proper writing interventions can be aligned to specific students’ needs, significant growth can be achieved.

Demir (2018) measured various external factors to determine the effect the factors would have on learning and self-efficacy with writing tasks. Demir examined gender, grade, parents’ education level, television usage, and whether or not the student read daily to measure the effect of these factors on the development of writing skills. The researchers used the Writing Strategies Awareness Level Scale (WSAS) and the Writing Self-Efficacy Scale (WSS) to measure skill and students’ perceptions of writing.

Demir (2018) determined as the duration of daily reading decreased and the time of television increased, writing strategies awareness and students’ self-efficacy scores decreased. Additionally, female students scored higher in both exams. The results indicated female students reported having more confidence with writing tasks than their male counterparts. Demir determined when parents’ education level decreased, so did the students’ scores on both exams. Demir’s study seemed to contrast ideas from Sabarun et al. (2023), where if each learner’s needs
are addressed, the students score higher. The results of Demir’s study illustrated there are additional factors that can greatly alter the efficacy and impact of writing strategies, despite targeted interventions.

Blunden’s (2019) study supported Demir’s (2018) results that writing interventions are not always successful for every student if they are not implemented thoroughly and effectively. Blunden followed five art teachers who taught 10th- and 11th-grade students in the United Kingdom. Students were asked to self-report troubled areas and then were taught specific writing interventions based on their own surveys. At the conclusion of the study, students expressed the writing interventions felt confusing or highly repetitive. Blunden reported much of the students’ written responses focused on what they did instead of critical thinking and analysis. The five teachers were given inadequate professional development on how to address the various needs of learners. The teachers in the study also reported they found the content challenging and were unsure how to best approach the interventions. Without proper professional development and continuous reflection on learners’ needs, targeted interventions may create more confusion and deteriorate students’ confidence and self-efficacy with extended writing tasks.

School Profile

Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School, the secondary level of Wilton CSD, is the site for the school improvement project. Wilton is located in a rural district in east–central Iowa off of Interstate 80. It was founded as an agricultural town and many of the families still have this profession. As of 2018, there were 427 students in Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School spanning Grades 7–12 (Iowa School Performance, 2023). The school has a strong athletic history, especially in wrestling and football. There is a flourishing Future Farmers of America (FFA) program. High quantities of students are rooted in agriculture, so during the spring and fall months, students miss multiple classes for
harvest and planting season. The band and choir programs are in the rebuilding process, so many students are testing out these clubs for the first time. Parents are heavily involved in their students’ extracurriculars and academics, and Wilton is a tight-knit, small community. The students have 1:1 technology where each student has a Chromebook as a personal device to use throughout the school day and at home. Additionally, the school has a close partnership with the Muscatine Community College, meaning most upperclassmen students (i.e., Grades 11–12) are dual-enrolled in both Muscatine Community College and Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School.

The school’s mission statement is, “The mission of the Wilton Community School District is to provide an education that encourages continual progress through the improvement of one’s abilities, the expansion of one’s interests and knowledge, and the growth of one’s character” (Wilton CSD, n.d., para. 5). The school does not have a current vision statement. In the elementary end, recent ISASP data have revealed a deficit in mathematics and special education. Across nearly all grade levels, both elementary and secondary, the discrepancy in special education students in comparison to the general education students has increased in recent years. In Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School, students have struggled in writing and language standards according to both teacher feedback and ISASP data. Students have also demonstrated insufficient growth in the ISASP science scores. These results at the junior and senior high school level have led to a focus on enhancing science curriculum and providing more tiered intervention supports for special education students. School personnel would also like to implement writing supports, but are in the early stages of focusing on this curricular area.

According to IDOE’s (2023) School Performance Report Card, Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School’s overall performance rating was acceptable as of 2023. Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School is targeted for students with disabilities, or individualized education plan (IEP) students. Overall,
the school scored a 50.85 out of 100 in 2023, which was 3 points below the state average (IDOE, 2023). The school’s profile indicates that there was a 25.8% free and reduced lunch rate. The school’s composition was also 48.5% female students and 51.5% male students during this time frame, making male students more prominent in the school. Furthermore, there was a 90.4% white population, a 7.3% Hispanic population, and 1.9% multiracial population. Wilton Jr. –Sr. High School had no students who were ELLs in 2023. The school’s graduation rate (96.23%) was above the state average (89.95%). For the 2022 ISASP results, only 70% of students scored proficiency in English language arts, which was significantly below the state average of 71.4%. These metrics also marked a decrease from the previous 2 years of Wilton’s ISASP results. For the growth factor of English language arts, there was only a growth factor of 35, well below the state average of 50. The school’s postsecondary readiness index indicated the school was at 47.65% and below the state average at the time of this study (IDOE, 2023).

Reviewing data from the district’s curriculum director broke down the ISASP data for Wilton into differing categories. When observing data on the socioeconomic (SES) achievement gap, the school’s achievement had greatly increased between the free-and-reduced lunch population and non-free-and-reduced lunch students. The reading proficiency gap between SES groups was 15.7% in the 2018–2019 school year, 15.6% in 2020–2021, 17% in 2021–2022, and 17.7% in 2022–2023. In the secondary end, the proficiency gap for high school math scores improved from 26.9% in 2018–2019 to 16.9% in 2022–2023. Female students, though smaller in population, consistently have outscored male students across all grades for English language arts ISASP scores. Male students, however, have outscored female students in math and science in ISASP results. These data indicate discrepancies between gender and student achievement gaps in certain subjects.
Professional development at Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School varies significantly based on multiple factors, such as timing, resources, and initiatives directed through multiple levels of administration. One of the major initiatives at Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School is the authentic intellectual work (AIW, n.d.) framework developed by Fred Newmann. The AIW framework focuses on three tenets of education: construction of knowledge, value beyond school, and disciplined inquiry (AIW, n.d.). For professional development in the past, teachers met in small groups of five to six people and used rubrics to analyze tasks, instruction, and student work. These rubrics were applicable across all content areas and covered different standards of student learning, such as construction of knowledge, elaborated communication, higher order thinking (HOT), and value beyond school. Elaborated communication focused on writing and having students reflect on their process for learning. The AIW framework was introduced to Wilton approximately 8 years ago and has continued to develop and fully embed itself into the professional development experience. The AIW framework also involves the instructional coach and curriculum director to perform classroom implementation profile (CIP) walkthroughs. In walkthroughs, the instructional coach, curriculum director, and building administration measure when they hear examples of the various tenets of AIW, such as HOT tasks or application of value beyond school. These data are collected in the fall and spring and then discussed as a staff.

In the 2023–2024 school year, Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School introduced a new professional development initiative in addition to the AIW framework. The secondary staff was informed that they would be moving from A–B blocks to an eight-period day. The administration felt it would be critical for teachers to acquire extra training on how to shift their content to a new timeframe of learning. As part of this learning effort, teachers are expected to meet in content teams to discuss priority standards and vertical alignment. Representatives from the local Area Education
Agency (AEA) attend the Wednesday morning professional development sessions from 7:45 AM to 8:50 AM before students arrive.

Teachers in Wilton Jr.–Sr. High are highly autonomous. There is no set curriculum that teachers are expected to follow, except for aligning their instruction to state standards. Vertical alignment happens occasionally and there are early signs of developing professional learning communities, but nothing official has been established yet. The unofficial nature of the current professional learning communities has caused most collaborative efforts between staff members to happen either through the use of the school’s instructional coach or during or after school time based on each teacher’s individual interest. Some teachers use a flipped classroom, whereas others focus more on lecture. Many teachers blend a variety of instructional strategies. Most curriculum is created and assigned via the Google Suite. Similar to curricular development, assessments for courses are entirely dependent on the teacher. All teachers are expected to give semester finals, but these final assessments can be project-based or traditional paper and pencil, depending on the individual. The ISASP is disseminated each year in April and those assessment data are used to place students in certain classes, such as advanced math courses or intervention courses based on the results. The ISASP data are reviewed typically early in the fall semester following the previous ISASP, where growth and proficiency is discussed.

**Needs Assessment**

Based upon the school profile, there are two major areas that need assessment: (a) curriculum and instruction and (b) professional development. Improving curriculum and instruction is critical to addressing the diverse needs of the school and the school’s struggles with reading and writing. Targeted implementation of reading and writing strategies, when isolated to English courses alone, has not proven to be effective in ISASP data scores and in observational
data in the district. These data indicate the need to create quality instructional strategies that benefit students in a whole system, rather than in individual classes.

Creating effective curriculum and providing quality instruction is a crucial element of improving students’ abilities with writing. According to research out of Indiana University:

Effective writing is a skill that is grounded in the cognitive domain. It involves learning, comprehension, application and synthesis of new knowledge. From a faculty member’s perspective, writing well entails more than adhering to writing conventions. Writing also encompasses creative inspiration, problem-solving, reflection and revision. (Defazio et al., 2010, p. 34)

Defazio et al.’s (2010) research demonstrate that writing, though traditionally taught in English language arts classrooms, is a skill that transcends beyond the classroom. Therefore, it is imperative that writing curriculum be designed effectively and instructional practices both engage and enrich the writing experience. The district data are discussed in the next section as to the specific scores that indicate a systemwide necessity for intervention.

Quality curriculum does not solve the issue on its own. The need for enhanced professional development in an integral piece of the educational puzzle. Without proper professional development, teachers could struggle to implement a new skill set into their own content areas. In past years, professional development at Wilton primarily focused on AIW, where teachers worked in cross-curricular teams to assess instructional tasks in the areas of construction of knowledge, elaborated communication, and value beyond school. The cross-curricular teams could be comprised of any subject areas; however, there was no guarantee that a member from each content area would be represented, meaning a team might have had two math teachers and no English teachers or some other conglomerate of educational domains.
The work with AIW and the language surrounding the framework has continued into recent years, but the collaborative cross-curricular teams were disbanded entirely in 2023 and 2024. At the time of this study, teachers were rarely collaborating with others and often felt isolated in their practices. When teachers did work together, it was only in content area teams to discuss standards. Teachers engaged in no collaborative work with those of varied content areas, leaving writing further isolated to be handled by the English team alone. Researchers have found that writing is a critical component of learning across all subject areas, not just in traditional writing-associated subjects. A researcher at Arizona State University studied writing across multiple disciplines, including math, social studies, and science; they found writing in these areas significantly enhanced learning (Terada, 2021). Terada (2021) also explained that writing, especially in math, science, and social studies, improves students’ recall and memories, supports them making connections, and engages students in deeper thinking with the material.

Teachers need proper training on how to implement writing instruction that can be tailored to their own classrooms. Without proper professional development, teachers may be left on their own and the school may lack uniformity and cohesive language students need for deeper learning. All teachers must learn how writing fits into their curriculum to enhance the understanding of their content, rather than relying on the few English teachers in the building to shoulder the weight of an ever-growing challenge. Writing looks different across different content areas. An artist reflecting on their portfolio process may have a different task, purpose, and audience for a scientist writing a lab report or a band member reflecting on scores and dynamics. Those who are the masters of their domain should tailor the writing to fit their curriculum, while receiving additional support and clarity about how to implement it effectively.
Data Analysis

Perhaps one of the largest indications of Wilton’s need for writing intervention across multiple content areas stems from the district’s recent ISASP data. The 2022 ISASP results showed that the English language arts proficiency fell below the Iowa state average. The proficiency rate had also decreased in the previous 2 years. According to these data, the state average for the English language arts growth factor was 50, whereas Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School only had a growth factor of 35. The proficiency data from 2023 ISASP results provide additional insight to writing needs in Wilton. Table 1 indicates the ISAP English Language Arts proficiency data broken down by grade level, gender, and SES status.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISAP English Language Arts Proficiency Data</th>
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<tr>
<td>Category</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth grade (overall)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ninth grade (male, female)</td>
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<td>Ninth grade (low SES, non-low SES)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10th Grade (overall)</td>
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<td>10th grade (male, female)</td>
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<td>11th grade (low SES, non-low SES)</td>
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These data indicate multiple gaps in proficiency achievement depending on the various subgroupings. Female students at Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School scored higher across all grade levels in English language arts than their male counterparts, often by margins of over 20%.
Contrastingly, male students at Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School outscored their female counterparts on all the science scores and over half of the math scores across grade levels. With male students frequently outscoring female students in STEM yet scoring significantly less in English language arts, it demonstrates that implementing writing strategies into areas of strength for male students would help familiarize them with the content and may bridge the understanding gap.

Additionally, across all subject areas and grade levels, students who are low SES scored significantly lower than their non-low SES counterparts. This result indicates that additional practice of writing across all subject areas would increase students’ interactions with the content and provide students with additional practice in areas of struggle.

The need for writing across various content areas is not only evident from ISASP scores. The instructional coach and curriculum director at Wilton conduct frequent AIW walkthroughs where they measure the type of tasks students are doing in classrooms at a given time. For example, in the 2022–2023 school year, the AIW observation team conducted 272 observations. In those observations, they identified that when teachers asked 135 HOT questions, students gave 107 HOT verbal responses, but students were only asked to engage in HOT writing tasks five times. This result indicates a lack of HOT writing tasks in Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School across all subject areas. The observation data in previous years (e.g., the 2021–2022 school year) only had two observed HOT writing tasks across 400 observations. Teachers and students engage in frequent HOT discussions, but often fail to convert those verbal discussions into written response. AIW (n.d.) indicates the need for extended written response and identifies it as one of the core four areas for student achievement across all content areas, yet observational data consistently point to the lack of HOT writing tasks in Wilton at the current time.
ISASP and observational data demonstrate a need for writing curriculum across all content areas, but it is unclear how the teachers at Wilton Jr.–Sr. High feel about this need. In a 2024 survey, the Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School staff members expressed immense concern for students’ writing abilities in their classrooms. The survey had 31 respondents across all content areas, from the fine arts, to STEM, to English language arts, to social studies. In all, 30 out of the 31 survey responders expressed severe concern with students’ writing abilities and indicated them as low or extremely low. Some expressed that students are unable to write complete sentences in grades as high as 11th grade. Furthermore, 28 of the 31 teachers indicated that students’ writing skills have gotten worse in recent years, and all teachers who have been in the classroom longer than 5 years marked that writing quality had decreased since they began teaching. Two teachers indicated that writing quality has stayed the same since they began teaching, but those teachers had been in the profession less than 5 years. Thirty out of 31 teachers also marked that they would be interested in implementing more writing into their curricular area. These survey results demonstrated that the teachers themselves at Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School identified a need for writing curriculum in their content area and were willing to implement additional practices to support student learning.

Additional assessment is needed with the students to determine what specific skills with which students struggle. Conducting a schoolwide writing screener would be a method of measuring what specific skills in which students need additional support and how to best address those skills. Assessment is also needed to determine the skillsets of the staff members in implementing writing strategies into their curricular area. Many indicated in the survey that they do not currently implement writing into their curriculum, so additional training needs to occur so students receive consistent and quality writing instruction in all subject areas.
Action Plan

There are multiple necessary steps and strategies to address the shortcomings of current writing curriculum in the district. To successfully support student learning, teachers across all content areas must feel comfortable and confident with implementing writing strategies into their own courses. According to both Nash (2018) and Blunden (2019), the more confident the teachers feel with the implementation of writing into their curriculum, the higher the student learning outcomes tend to be. Teachers need sufficient professional development and training. Training educators on how to specifically implement writing strategies in their own content areas is a crucial step in the process of improving student writing.

Instead of having all teachers begin the professional development and implementation process immediately, Wilton Jr.–Sr. High School should select a pilot team. Having a skilled, motivated pilot team would be beneficial in many ways. One benefit of having a pilot team is having educators from a variety of content areas who could test which strategies work best for them. These teachers could then aid other teachers later in the process, so there would be skilled teachers from multiple content areas ready to support other teachers during the professional development. The pilot team would have representatives from many of the different content areas (e.g., fine arts, STEM, social sciences, languages). The school’s instructional coach and curriculum director would also be on the pilot team to support implementation.

The pilot team would then focus implementing some form of the researched strategies with support from the instructional coach and curriculum director. The strategies are broken down into subcategories that could be blended together to create a well-rounded and comprehensive writing curriculum in each subject area. These subcategories align with the strategies addressed in the literature review: collaborative writing; integrating technology;
building self-efficacy; and aligning the writing to task, purpose, and audience. As the literature review explained, writing looks different in each content area, so the instructional coach and individual teachers should collaborate to determine what writing styles and tasks are most appropriate for their individual areas. The pilot team will use additional writing tasks tailored to their content area that are backed in one or more of the subcategories listed previously.

During the pilot team’s implementation, a pretest will be given so data can be collected and reviewed frequently to measure growth and effectiveness of the implemented writing strategies. The pretest would be used again at the end of the unit to determine what strategies were effective in which content area and with which groups of students. The pretest asks the following prompt and then provides the rubric criteria for teachers and students alike to assess their understanding (see Figure 1).
Students will be assessed on a scale of 1–4, 1 being *beginning*, 2 being *developing*, 3 being *proficient*, and 4 being *advanced*. Each student will be assessed over the four areas listed in the rubric: strong evidence and argumentation, conventions and style, content, and style and
task. Breaking down writing tasks in these ways can help the pilot team better understand which specific aspects of writing with which students are struggling and where they need additional support and interventions. It will also indicate the areas in which students demonstrate growth.

After the pilot team implements writing interventions and assesses the student data, they can refine their practices and instructional strategies to teach them to the remaining staff through a series of professional development sessions. Each content area could have a mentor teacher from the pilot team who helps brainstorm how to implement the writing strategies into specific content areas. These writing interventions can incorporate collaborative writing and integration of technology; for example, students in an art class may peer-critique another’s art project for collaborative writing. Students in an art class could also write a brief reflection as to the process they used to create their art piece and their reactions to their critiques. Students in a STEM course could collaboratively conduct experiments and write about their research topic using technology and additional studies.

In addition to matching the style, task, and audience, the interventions would also involve building students’ sense of confidence and self-efficacy with writing. With sustained writing tasks and additional practice and support, students can have more interactions with writing and potentially grow in confidence. In addition to the pre and posttest data, students will also be given a survey that asks their comfortability with writing in different subject areas at the beginning and end of the interventions. This step would qualitatively measure if students felt their self-efficacy increased as their exposure to writing in each content area increased. Teachers would use these data to address any concerns and identify further needs when they review the survey and test results.
**Implementation of School Improvement Plan**

To take proper time and consideration moving forward with the plan, it is necessary to work through the process in a manner that is both conscientious of the teachers’ time and paced appropriately for introducing new materials. The pilot team must first be trained and carry out interventions in their own classrooms. Then, additional review of the data and training may need to occur based on the data found by the pilot team. After this extra work, then teachers will undergo a series of professional development opportunities about writing in their curricular area. Lastly, teachers need time to implement these strategies and review the data in their own rooms with the students. The staff would then come back together to assess how effective the writing interventions have been and what next steps are necessary to improve student learning outcomes.

Table 2 demonstrates an appropriate timeline to conduct the interventions in an efficient manner, while also allowing for flexibility to respond to data results and hiccups along the road with professional development.

**Table 2**

*Timeline of Implementation*

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Description of action plan implementation</th>
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| August| **Locate resources:** Distribute Chromebooks, accrue classroom and office supplies, log in to Google Classroom and Google Suites, acquire *No Red Ink Premium* accounts for all staff members  
**Select pilot team members:** Send Google Form to all staff members to determine interest in Pilot Team, select member from each of the major content areas (ELA, STEM, Fine Arts, Trades, Social Studies, SPED) |
| September| **Determine strengths and weakness for pilot team:** Poll pilot team members to determine which aspects of writing they feel comfortable with and where they feel they need more support.  
**Establish group norms:** Collaboratively set norms and goals for the Pilot Team so members can be held accountable.  
**Acquire additional training and materials:** Based on the results of the polls, have instructional coach and lead implementation teacher gather additional resources needed to develop the Pilot Team’s knowledge about the subject (collaborative |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td><strong>Finish professional development with pilot team</strong>: Finalize professional development curriculum to ensure all Pilot Team members feel comfortable implementing writing strategies and interventions in their classrooms. Instructional coach, administration, and lead teacher will assist and support the learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td><strong>Collect pretest assessment data</strong>: Review No Red Ink data collected, assess skills for each grade level, determine which areas need specific focus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td><strong>Continue writing interventions</strong>: Pilot team teachers continue implementing their writing interventions for their classes. Instructional coach, administration, and teacher lead assist in implementation. Track and monitor specific strategies used by each Pilot Team teacher.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td><strong>Review posttest data</strong>: Compare results from Pre-test to post-test, analyze areas of growth in student learning, identify areas of need for students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>February–</td>
<td><strong>Present finding and information to entire staff</strong>: Have members from the Pilot Team present what they learned and what their findings were to the whole staff, allow for questions and conversations about writing to occur.</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td><strong>Pilot team members teach like-content area teachers</strong>: Pilot Team Members become team leads for their own content areas (i.e. all STEM teachers together, all Fine Arts together, etc.). Pilot team members teach the material, instructional practices, and implementation strategies. This will take multiple professional development workshop sessions for the Wednesday morning PD time. Have team lead, instructional coach, and administration float to support each group as needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td><strong>Plan for implementation in the fall</strong>: Create an implementation plan for each teacher to select one block to try with students for the fall, what strategies they are going to implement and how they will implement the different strategies.</td>
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<td>August–</td>
<td><strong>Implement schoolwide writing</strong>: All teachers implement the writing strategies into at least one course. Pilot Team members will support the implementation process for those in their content areas. At the end of September, administer the post-test again for all students to determine overall growth for students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td><strong>Align new training to previous concepts</strong>: Use familiar terminology and assess similarities to previous professional development curriculum, including terminology from AIW Institute. Determine similarities and differences in the new writing interventions to the AIW concepts previously addressed.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Determine implementation timeline</strong>: Pilot Team teachers select a class and block time they would feel comfortable implementing the writing strategies (collaborative writing, technology, task/style/purpose, and confidence/self-efficacy) in their curriculum. Instructional coach, administration, and lead teacher will assist and support the learning.</td>
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<td><strong>Administer pretest</strong>: Establish which members of the Pilot Team will give the pre-test and when. Ensure all grade levels are represented in the pre-test. Troubleshoot the No Red Ink pre-test format. Administer the pre-test to each grade level.</td>
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<td><strong>Administer posttest</strong>: Prior to Christmas Break, administer the post-test to students.</td>
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<td><strong>Determine next steps</strong>: Research additional professional development to address learning gaps and review successful practices for each content area.</td>
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**Note**: This action plan is designed to ensure a comprehensive approach to implementing writing strategies across various subject areas, with alignment to professional development and instructional support. It aims to support teachers in selecting appropriate strategies, implementing these strategies effectively, and monitoring student growth through assessment practices. The plan also encourages collaboration and continuous improvement through professional development sessions and feedback loops.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Description of action plan implementation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td><strong>Review data and determine next steps</strong>: Instructional coach, administration, and team lead will collect the data and compile the information. They will share the information with the staff and together, the staff will determine next steps, additional implementation support, and any additional professional development to address learner needs.</td>
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**Resources**

At the time of this study, Wilton CSD had access to the Google Suite, including Google Forms, Docs, Slides, Sheets, and Mail. These resources will be valuable in the collaboration process for both the pilot team and the entire staff. Students also need access to Google for their writing assignments and activities. Students and staff currently use 1:1 technology with Chromebooks. Technology support is necessary to maintain the laptops, as students use them to work on writing tasks. *No Red Ink Premium* is a tool that would need to be purchased for the school improvement plan. *No Red Ink* collects student data, tracks progress through monitoring systems, creates responsive assignments based on student scores, and personalizes content for students. The program also aligns to Iowa’s Common Core State Standards, which will align to ISASP testing. This technology integration will expedite the process of both reviewing data for the pilot team and creating differentiated writing instruction for students.

Staff members will also need access to Wednesday morning professional development time to review data and learn how to implement writing strategies in their content areas. The pilot team will either need a common planning time to meet or a stipend if they are asked to meet outside of contract time hours. Collaborating with the Mississippi Bend AEA may also be a viable option for ensuring quality implementation of writing strategies in multiple content areas.

**Responsibilities and Monitoring**

The instructional coach and the lead teacher (i.e., the researcher) implementing this school improvement plan will have heavier responsibilities to jumpstart the school improvement
plan. First, the instructional coach and the lead teacher will need to create and conduct a survey of interest for those to take part in a pilot team. Then, they will need to select a pilot team based on those responses and ensure each of the core areas are represented: STEM, Fine arts, English, social sciences, and trades (i.e., family consumer science, ag, shop, business). The pilot team will meet and establish group norms, then they will discuss and decide the areas of writing with which students most struggle.

The instructional coach and lead teacher will then create a pre- and post-test to disseminate to students via No Red Ink. The building administrator will ensure access to No Red Ink to collect and monitor data. The pilot team will decide which teachers see all students so that all grade levels are represented in the pretest data. Those selected teachers will assign and give the pre-test via No Red Ink. The curriculum director, instructional coach, lead teacher, and building administrator will review data and determine specific student needs based on the results. Then, they will collaborate with the AEA to determine what training is needed for the pilot team to implement writing interventions and strategies in each of their content areas. The pilot team will be responsible for attending meetings and learning new writing strategies and implementing them into their own curriculum. Pilot team members will be expected to ask questions if they need additional support and to tailor the writing strategies to best meet the needs of their specific content areas.

After the pilot team implements writing strategies, the instructional coach and lead teacher will issue the posttest to measure growth. The posttest data will be compared to the pretest data to determine what steps are necessary and what interventions seemed effective or ineffective. No Red Ink collects data, so the platform can show the scores on each attempt. No Red Ink also shows any assignments given via the site, which can also be used as additional
progress monitoring. Pilot team members may also collect observational data, especially regarding self-efficacy and writing, and the team may review that information as well. Once the data are collected and assessed, the lead teacher, curriculum director, building administrator, and instructional coach will determine if another round of writing intervention strategies are necessary with the pilot team or if the writing interventions are ready to be rolled out to the entirety of the staff.

Once the team determines the interventions are ready to be schoolwide, the curriculum director, instructional coach, building administrator, and lead teacher will coteach the rest of the staff writing strategies and how they would look in each content area. This process may require additional resources, such as expertise from the AEA or professional development materials. The team can determine based on teacher feedback what professional development is necessary and for how long. Teachers are expected to engage fully with the professional development and ask questions as needed to develop competency in writing strategy implementation.

The pilot team (including the instructional coach and lead teacher) will support teachers in the implementation process, occasionally conducting classroom visits to support the general staff. The building administrator would be expected to cover the pilot team’s classes rarely or find coverage early on to ensure teachers felt supported in the implementation process. Teachers are expected to implement writing strategies with fidelity and seek support if there is any confusion. After the initial round of implementation of writing strategies in all classrooms in all content areas, the instructional coach, building administrator, curriculum director, and lead teacher will administer a secondary posttest to assess and monitor growth again. The team will determine next steps based on the collected student data.
**Barriers and Challenges**

The largest challenge involves ensuring that the district has the proper professional development and materials to instruct both the pilot team and the general staff in writing implementation strategies. The staff will be trained in AIW, but will lack professional development in additional writing strategies. The current lack of professional development indicates a high level of variability in the amount of time it could take both the pilot team and the general staff to learn how to implement writing strategies in their specific content areas. It is imperative that the professional development is thorough, otherwise the staff members may miss crucial information in teaching their students the necessary strategies.

Another barrier may be staff buy-in. Some members may be resistant to implementing writing strategies into their content area. It will be necessary to explain the data and rationale as to why writing is necessary across all content areas. The pilot team and building administrator should encourage staff members and relate writing back to each content area. Establishing the need for writing is important, and using data to emphasize the need is critical. Teachers need to understand the importance each subject area brings to writing curriculum and how each staff member is necessary.

**Conclusion**

The ISASP data for the Wilton CSD indicate a need for writing interventions at the secondary level, in addition to observational data from the staff members in the building. Additionally, nation-wide writing ACT scores have plummeted (Elliott, 2023). Writing is not, and cannot be, isolated to English classrooms alone. Writing is present across all content areas and must be aligned to the different tasks, styles, and purpose asked of that specific discipline. Each content area has varying styles and purposes for writing, meaning that professional
development for each content area needs to be tailored to that domain to ensure staff members are prepared. Collaborative writing and peer editing are strategies that can be applied to any subject areas and can build positive peer relationships. Technology is also a writing tool that can be implemented in all content areas. For example, No Red Ink, the adaptive tech tool used for collecting data, can be tailored to any domain. Additionally, teachers can use technology to give and assess writing tasks, such as usages of Google Suites and 1:1 technology. With sufficient professional development, the pilot team and the general staff will learn how to integrate technology and collaborative writing into their own subject areas and align the task to the purpose and style that fits their domains.

Through repeated writing instruction and targeted interventions, the goal is that both students and staff members alike will grow in confidence and self-efficacy with writing curriculum. Staff members need frequent, responsive professional training that supports their planning and implementation of writing into their own subject areas. Students need continuous exposure in a wide variety of subject areas to determine how writing looks in different content areas and to transcend writing beyond the English classroom walls.
References


