Below are this week’s updates. Enjoy!

Mark your calendar

The final PD session is scheduled for April 30th from 8:30pm – 12:30pm.

Food for Thought

The “Write” Stuff

Bobbye spends time each week connecting her students with the passion and drama in Shakespeare’s Romeo & Juliet. She continues to encourage students to think about the content being covered and share their thinking with the classmates.

Leah continues to use practice activities for her students to develop better command of conventions. This week, she gave her students an entire paragraph to edit/correct. The paragraph had many types of convention errors. After the students edited, she went over the errors in the paragraph and provided some clarifications. Many students were surprised to hear the answers, indicating that this activity was valuable.

Juliana’s students gave small group presentations about nutritional guidelines. They used powerpoint slides and an overhead. While each group presented, the audience of peers took notes, summarizing the content. Juliana provided descriptive feedback to each group of presenters, based on a rubric students had in advance.
Before class started in Koren's 5th period math class, students were looking at brightly colored sheets of paper displayed around the classroom. Evidently they had been assigned to select a vocabulary word, illustrate it and then write an explanation for both their drawing and formula. They really enjoyed seeing their own and others displayed. Once class officially began, she assigned students to do two writing bell work tasks. One required them to do “define” a concept and the other to “translate” a formula. It appears that some students seem to balk when asked to think and write, compared to copying from the screen. Remember, expect more and you’ll get more!

Shiloh allowed her students to chose from five different quality writing activities to show level of understanding about multiple perspectives of being involved in a war: 1) create a welcome home poster, 2) write a letter to a soldier, 3) write a poem, 4) write a speech, or 5) compose lyrics to a song. As guided practice, she led her students through a brainstorming activity using a T-chart.

During this week’s observation, Greg allocated over 60 minutes for students to respond to a MYAccess prompt: “After carefully reading Amigo Brothers, write a multi-paragraph essay describing the characteristics of a quality plot structure and what specifically qualifies Amigo Brothers as a well written story. Use detail and examples from the text to support your analysis of the plot.” Two students have reached proficiency so far!

**We’re on the right track**

When you read this article below, you’ll soon realize how far we’ve come this year. You have all added more writing instruction to your curriculum and made a point of letting students know that “writing does matter!”

**The Word on Writing**

*New studies reveal gaps in writing instruction and preparation to teach writing*

by Melanie Moran and Kurt Brobeck

With all the attention paid to math and science over the last several years, one might be forgiven for forgetting that learning to write remains a necessary precondition for educational and professional success in any discipline. The National Commission on Writing has described writing as a "threshold skill" critical to obtaining and keeping employment.

The public also sees writing as important. In an opinion poll published this year by the National Writing Project, 80 percent of respondents believed that writing is more important than in the past. With the development of new media, in fact, many Americans are writing more-via Web sites, e-mail, blogs, and social media. Yet 40 percent of respondents were "less than totally satisfied" with their own writing skills, and only 17 percent believed that students graduating from high school have the writing skills required for college.

Even teachers seem to agree. In a new national survey of high school writing instruction, 50 percent of teachers reported they are not prepared to teach students how to write well and rarely assign complex writing tasks. Vanderbilt Peabody professor Steve Graham, along with Sharlene A. Kiuhara of the University of Utah, conducted the survey and detailed the results in a February issue of the Journal of Educational Psychology.
"The lack of writing and writing instruction was more pronounced in social studies and science, but even language arts teachers provided little writing instruction for their students," Graham, Currey Ingram Professor of Special Education, said. "Another disturbing finding was the sizable number of teachers who made few or no adaptations in their teaching efforts to assist weaker writers."

According to the results, teachers rarely ask high school students to complete assignments that involve writing more than a single paragraph, and most common writing assignments involve little to no analysis or interpretation. Some teachers reported using a variety of effective writing practices, but indicated that the use was infrequent, removing their effectiveness.

"Writing is an important tool for educational, occupational and social success," Graham said. "Writing instruction needs to be reformed to improve high school student work as well as strengthening the ability for success in college and beyond."

**Reforming writing instruction**

According to Graham, writing instruction reform must be multi-faceted.

"Students need to be engaged in writing longer compositions that involve analysis and interpretation; teachers should apply evidence-based writing practices and adaptations for struggling writers; teacher education programs and school districts need to better prepare teachers for writing instruction at the high school level," he said. "All of these recommendations should be tailored to meet the needs of each major discipline."

Graham's survey found that 71 percent of high school teachers received minimal to no preparation to teach writing in college. Forty-four percent also reported low levels of in-service training. Perhaps unsurprisingly, language arts teachers reported feeling more prepared to teach writing than did science or social studies teachers.

Writing instruction also needs to begin early. In addition to the survey of high school teachers, Graham conducted two studies to offer guidance for primary teachers to help them improve writing instruction and develop stronger student writers. These studies were published last November in the Journal of Educational Psychology.

"We're hoping to help give teachers the opportunity to creatively incorporate effective writing strategies in the classroom to improve the writing of their students," Graham said.

In "A Meta-Analysis of Single Subject Design Writing Intervention Research," Graham and Leslie Rogers, a current doctoral student in special education, identified effective writing practices for all students, including students who struggle within the classroom. This research focuses on the current writing practices in grades 1 through 12.

"Among the more important findings is the need for students to be taught how to plan, revise and set clear and specific goals for their writing," Graham said. "Students also need to be taught the skills to write clear and effective paragraphs."

**Picture This - Bellwork Idea:**

![Image](image_url)

What connections might students make to this picture in your content area?

"It's not where you start that matters, but where you finish"