

Results of Implementation

How do we know Empowering Writers approach to writing instruction works?
Here is a sample of the results schools and districts have achieved.

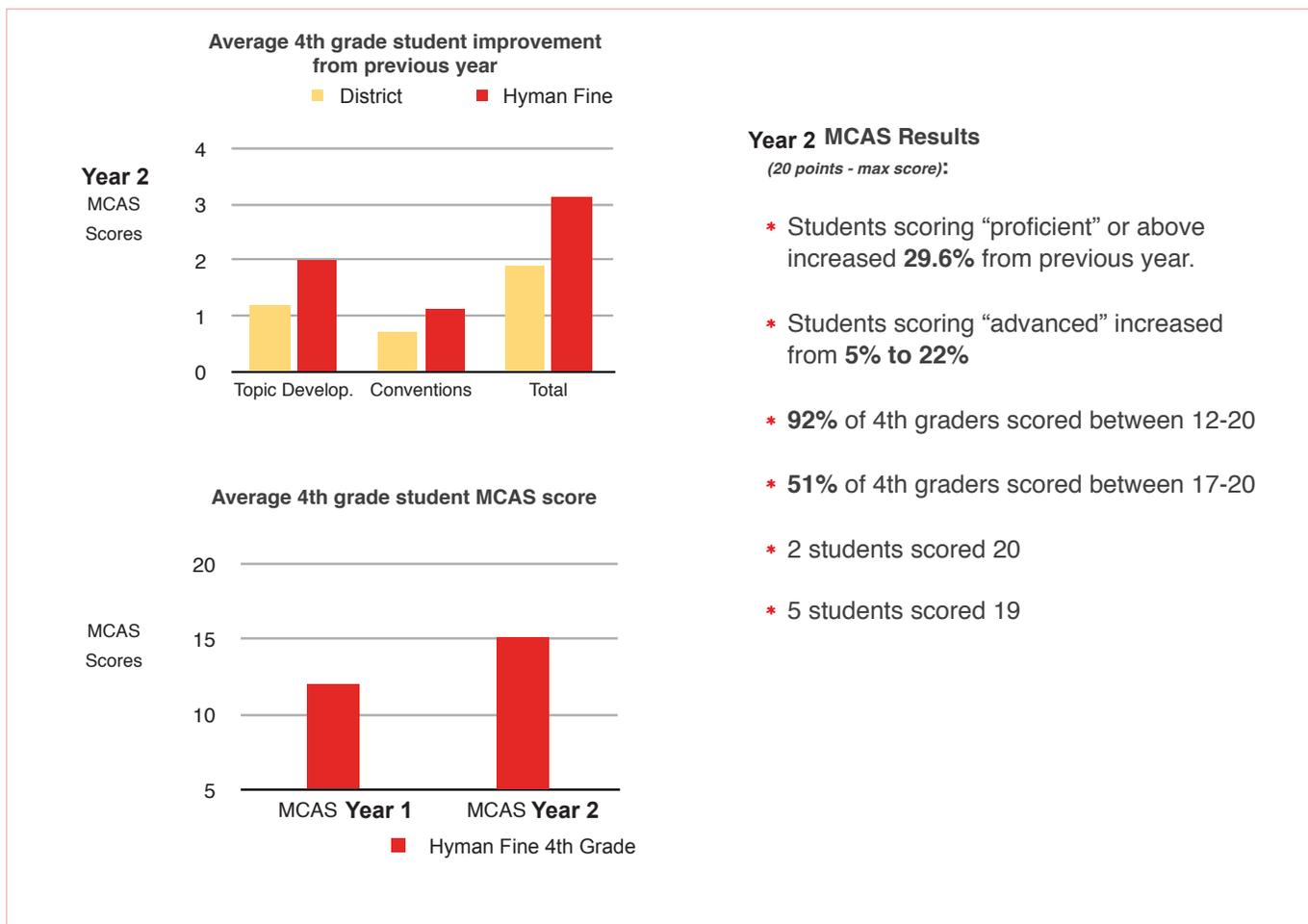
Record Breaking Results

Hyman Fine Elementary School Case Study

The principal of Hyman Fine knew the EW approach to writing instruction being implemented by her staff was having an immediate impact on student writing. *“Student samples started to come alive on the walls of our school.”* Months later when the results of MCAS were announced, her thoughts were confirmed.

“This training and methodology has allowed our district to break an 11 year run of stagnant scores.”

Cathy White, Principal
Hyman Fine ES
Attleboro Public Schools



Hyman Fine Case Study Continued

Results of Implementation

Cathy White, Principal
Hyman Fine Elementary, Attleboro, MA

What was the writing instruction like at your school/classroom before implementing EW?

Inconsistent best describes our previous approach and results. Teachers used Write Traits and Collins tools however writing was at the discretion of each teacher. They could not really identify where in their curriculum map it belonged, nor could they articulate the kinds of writing needed. Some students wrote a lot because the teacher was a teacher of writing and others wrote little and mostly for the purposes of determining comprehension. I can remember when we first began Reading Street (Scott Foresman), there is one unit that suggests a writing project called the “to do list”. For example in grade four you have to take something you do every day and describe the steps in detail. Teachers thought this was such a waste of time, however when I went up to model the lesson for them I reminded students that this was the type of writing they would do most often in the world of work and it had some very specific techniques that they should learn as it would carry them through their lifetime. It was the perfect place to teach the “snapshot” moment. We did a lesson over a two day period and the kids loved it and teachers had a new opinion of the list and its importance... this was before empowering writers...

As administrators we didn't talk about writing like we talked about math... so in one class they were heart mapping, in another class they were skipping lines in good Collin fashion. Teachers were teaching about strong verbs but it wasn't in the context of a larger picture of instruction and skill building. As a result, our writing scores looked like scattershot.

Why did you choose the EW model?

When I left my coaching position to become principal I knew we had to do something different in terms of writing. Traits and Collins were not the problem – students and teachers alike lacked structure when it came to writing. Lack of structure and the understanding or recognition of the purpose of instruction around writing was a real problem. So I made a list of the kinds of things I wanted to see: designated writing time, defined writing assignments by genre and purpose, consistent teaching of writing across the grade level, training on how to use rubrics for scoring and time to calibrate among teachers as professionals. I knew I didn't want heart mapping in one class, the hamburger in the next and some other writing program in another. I wanted something that was pedagogical in nature or at least had a scope and sequence that was compatible with content area instruction. When I told teachers what they wanted, one teacher came to me with the little blue book by Barbara Mariconda. The teacher had found the book the previous year at a yard sale and was “sneaking” in the lessons here and there. When I took the book home and read through it, it had all the elements that I wanted. Sequential scope and sequence, consistent vocabulary, a simple graphic (one that our special education and ELL students could master) and an approach that was compatible with their Write Traits training. The lessons were simple and actually gave the teachers the “language” to have the writing conversation with students. Many teachers were so insecure about teaching writing that this took the mystery out of how to begin the conversation and how to guide students through the exercise.

How much time did it take for you to see a difference in your teacher/students' reaction/students' writing?

About eight weeks. Student samples started to come alive on the walls of our school. In our leadership walkthroughs team members were not only stopping to read them but finding their teammates to bring them over to read what they had just read. They were interrupting teacher instruction to ask questions about how they got the kids to write that way. After 16 weeks kids were going home and having conversations with their parents about their writing. They were using social networking to read each other's papers (and yes we are in elementary school). You couldn't drag them out of the writing centers.

Did using the EW model improve writing scores on the state writing test?

Yes. For the first time since the initiation of MCAS, Attleboro had two students score a perfect 20 points (I mean in the whole district looking back at every grade level long comp was tested in). Five more scored 19 points. In 2009 our average writing score was 12.0 points. Just seven months after initiating Empower Writers lessons 92% of our fourth grade class (86 students) scored between 12 and 20! 55% of those students scored a 17 or above. Our average went from 12.0 to 15.13 points. Huge!

Hyman Fine Case Study Continued

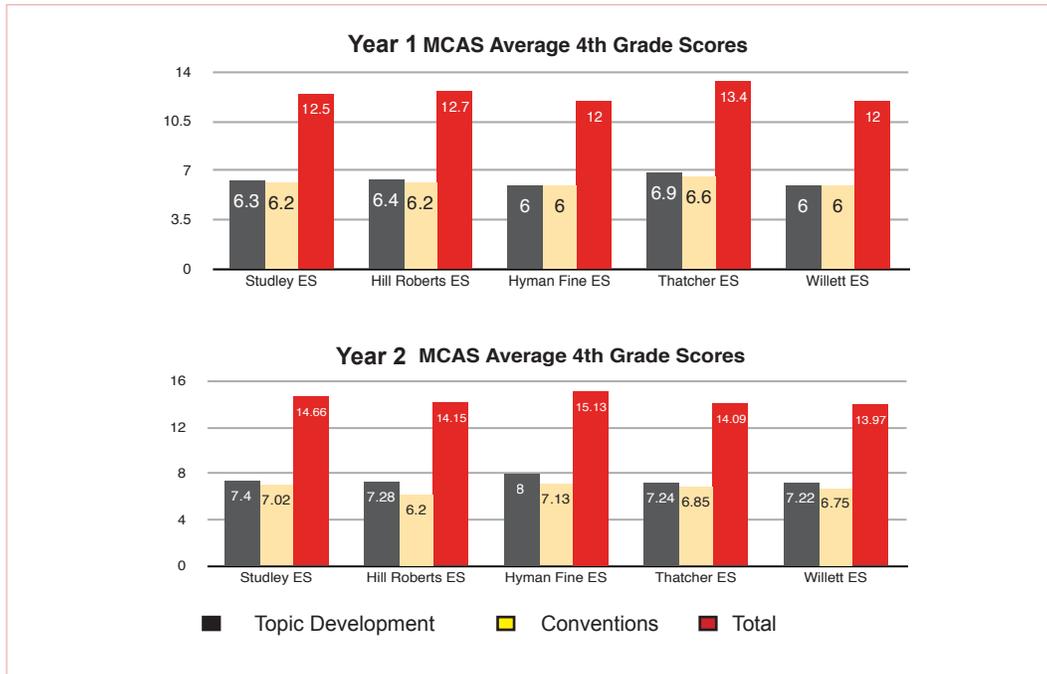
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Can you provide the before and after scores for your school and district?

TD = Topic Development, Maximum Score=12

Con=Conventions, Maximum Score = 8

Maximum Total = 20



What would you say to a teacher, principal or administrator who wanted to improve their writing instruction and test scores?

If you can only do a little - use the blue book. If you have access to resources bring in EW to train district-wide. Be systematic – early writing, narrative, expository, persuasive – they need all that training. We owe it to teachers to give them that training and the bottom line is that students deserve it. The key to long term success that takes students through their high school experience is the consistent approach they receive K-8. As administrators you must designate block time for writing daily. At least 45 minutes. You should be identifying other types of writing such as readers response throughout your content areas and do not overlook the cross curricular opportunities for writing opportunities.

Do you have a unique story about a particular student that was positively impacted by using the EW model?

“T. A.” was a student who received a large amount of special education support throughout his elementary experience. Teachers often thought he would be a good candidate for a small language based learning classroom. In addition to having academic and behavioral challenges, T. A. lived in a bi-lingual environment. We often wondered the impact that language had on building a solid schema. He thrived with the EW lessons. At MCAS time, T.A. began writing at 9:15 AM and did not stop until 2:50 PM with the exception of a 20 minute lunch. **He received a score of 17 on the MCAS.**

Other thoughts?

For the first time that teachers could remember, no one cried during the long composition in our school. Also no one threw up (another first). Students wrote most of the day and when they were done they cheered. No complaints, no anger, just great enthusiasm for a job well done. I was never so proud of the Hyman Fine students and teachers.