

What Works in Classrooms for Teaching the Writing Process

Since the 1980s, Dr. Warren Combs has nurtured the development of instructional tools and strategies for teaching the writing process in classroom practice. The resulting framework for teaching the writing process, the *Writing Cycle Packets*, includes two booklets. The first, a *Working Portfolio*, teaches students the standard of a writing *genre* in six stages. The first three stages are first drafts written on separate topics in the *genre*; the last three stages include revision of one first draft and proofreading and evaluation of the final draft. The second is an *Unassisted Writing Sample* that tests students' ability to write an independent final draft in the *genre*. When teachers implement the *Writing Cycle Packets* with fidelity, student scores of written expression are impacted significantly. Six Georgia middle schools provide cases in point.

School (R-rural, U-urban, S-suburban)	2007-09 average pass-rate	2010 pass-rate	In-crease	Enrol-ment	Student demographics (percent)			
					Poverty	Hispanic	Black	White
Newbern MS (U)	48	83	+ 35	602	85	3	94	2
Atkinson Co HS (R)	52	80	+ 28	506	74	31	19	50
Terrell Co MS (R)	67	82	+ 15	325	56	1	96	3
Hart Co MS (R)	70	82	+ 12	789	55	6	24	69
Valdosta MS (U)	68	78	+ 10	886	64	3	65	32
Heritage MS (S)	77	86	+ 9	1028	32	2	2	95

These data show that student scores on the 2010 Georgia *Eighth-Grade Writing Assessment* increased from 9-35% compared to the average of the three previous years. Neither size, race nor ethnicity of student population appeared to affect the outcome appreciably. Salient factors in the treatment include:

1. Teachers quantified expectations for each stage of the *Writing Cycle*.
2. Teachers modeled the writing at each stage.
3. Students self-assessed their performance at each stage: exceeded expectation (+), met expectation (⊙) and missed expectation (=).
4. Teachers assigned a grade for each stage of the *Writing Cycle*.

Recently, four high schools chose to use *Writing Cycle Packets (WCP)* for persuasive *genre* to correct falling test scores on the Georgia *High School Writing Test* required for graduation. Implementing the *WCP* nine weeks prior to the test produced these results.

School (R-rural, U-urban)	3-year Trend	Pilot WCP	In-crease	Enrol-ment	Student demographics (percent)			
					Poverty	Hispanic	Black	White
Twiggs Co HS (R)	83 → 72	90	+ 18	340	74	4	75	21
Atkinson Co (R)	92 → 76	92	+ 16	533	85	31	19	50
Valdosta HS (U)	89 → 73	86	+ 13	1986	74	3	78	19
Terrell Co HS (R)	87 → 75	85	+ 10	363	56	2	96	2

Results at both the middle and high school levels indicate that teaching the writing process to students using *Writing Cycle Packets* is a classroom practice that really works.



Results at several Georgia elementary schools replicate the results of the middle and high schools above.

School (R-rural, U-urban)	2007-09 average pass- rate	Pilot <i>WCP</i>	In- crease	Enrol ment	Student demographics (percent)			
					Poverty	Hispanic	Black	White
Twin City ES (R)	59	94	+ 35	520	68	2	37	59
Hartwell ES (R)	51	70	+ 19	518	60	4	38	448
Gresham Park ES (U)	40	59	+19	351	95	<1	99	<1
Bryan Co ES (R)	64.5	79.5	+ 15	429	64	<1	20	74
Twiggs Co MS (R)	47	59	+ 12	296	83	<1	70	30