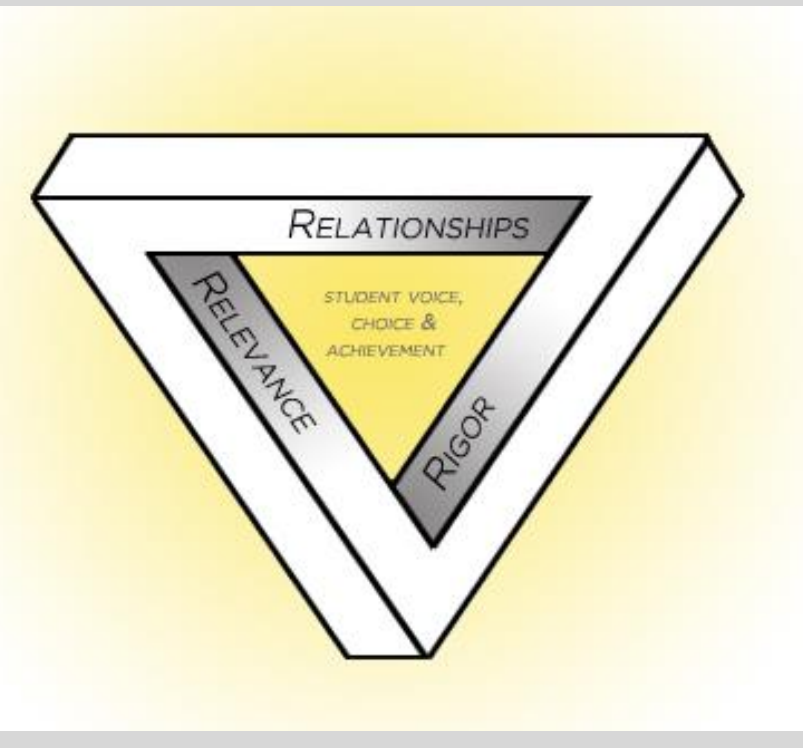




# Improving Student Achievement in Writing at Lake Ridge Middle School

Wes Flinn; Winter Term January-March 2011; EDLD 655



## SIP Goal and Background

### SIP Measurable Goal:

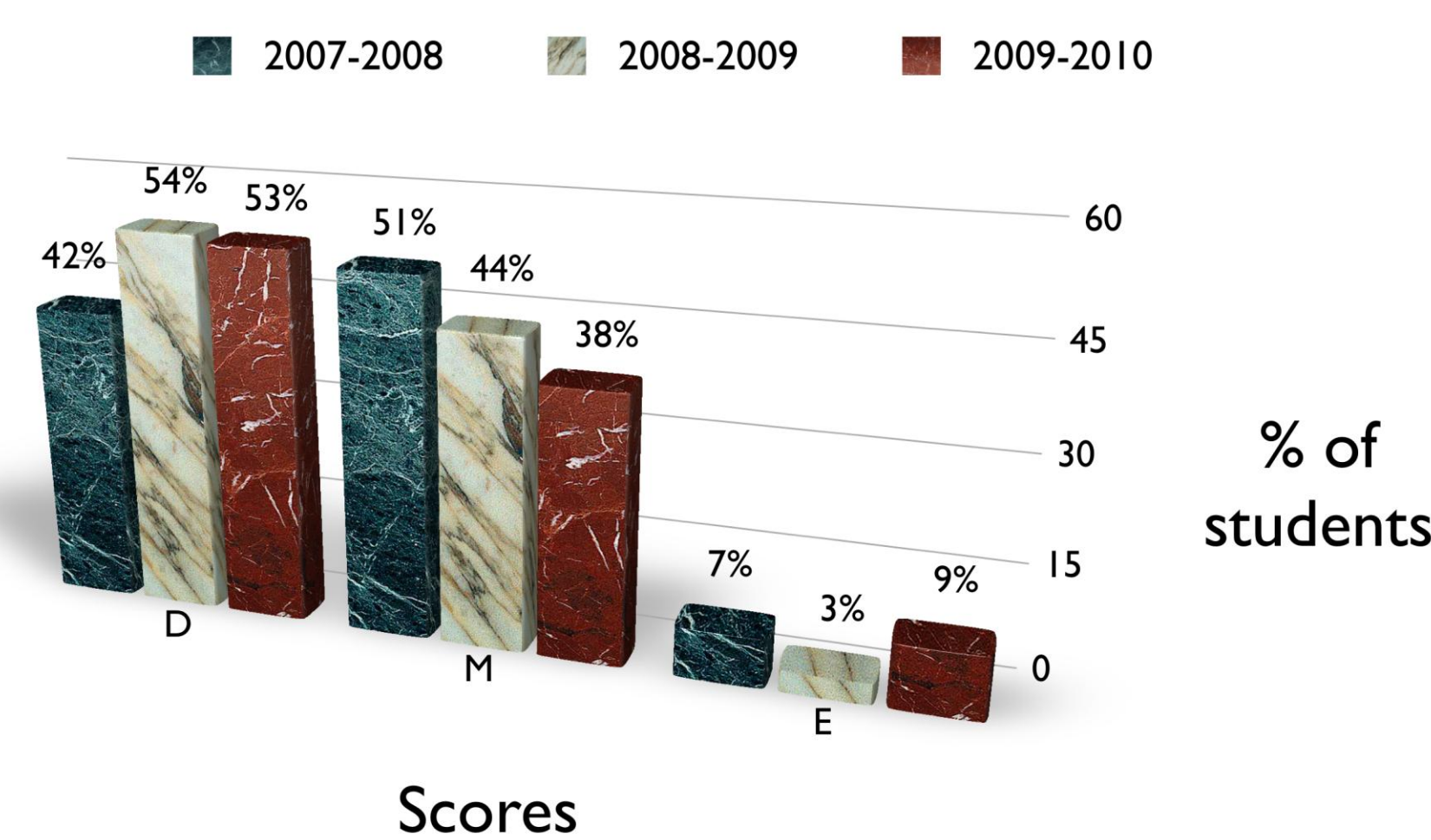
The average score of students, at grade 7, meeting state benchmarks in writing will increase by 5% annually as measured by the state writing assessment (OAKS); in addition students at all grade levels will engage in a writing curriculum that will increase the amount and quality of writing in every class.

Though this is only a one year SIP, it is anticipated that a focus on writing will need to continue over subsequent years in order to continue to attain the results desired and continual improvement.

### Background:

The Lake Ridge Middle School population is comprised primarily of students coming from four elementary schools: O'Hara Alternative School, Mei Juan Japanese Immersion School, Taft Elementary School, and Happy Landing, a Spanish dual immersion school. Over the past three years, our writing scores have declined substantially with a larger portion of students not meeting writing benchmarks. Currently we have 53% of our 7<sup>th</sup> grade students not meeting benchmark.

OAKS Writing Passing Rates 2007-2010



Next year as a result of budget cuts and declining enrollment, we are expected to lose nearly 25% of our current FTE. This means that we will have fewer teachers, larger class sizes and fewer resources to make sure students are ready for high school.

## Why Writing?

Studies completed in 2007 and 2008 from Lee, Grigg, Donahue, Salah-Din, Perskey, and Miller find that:

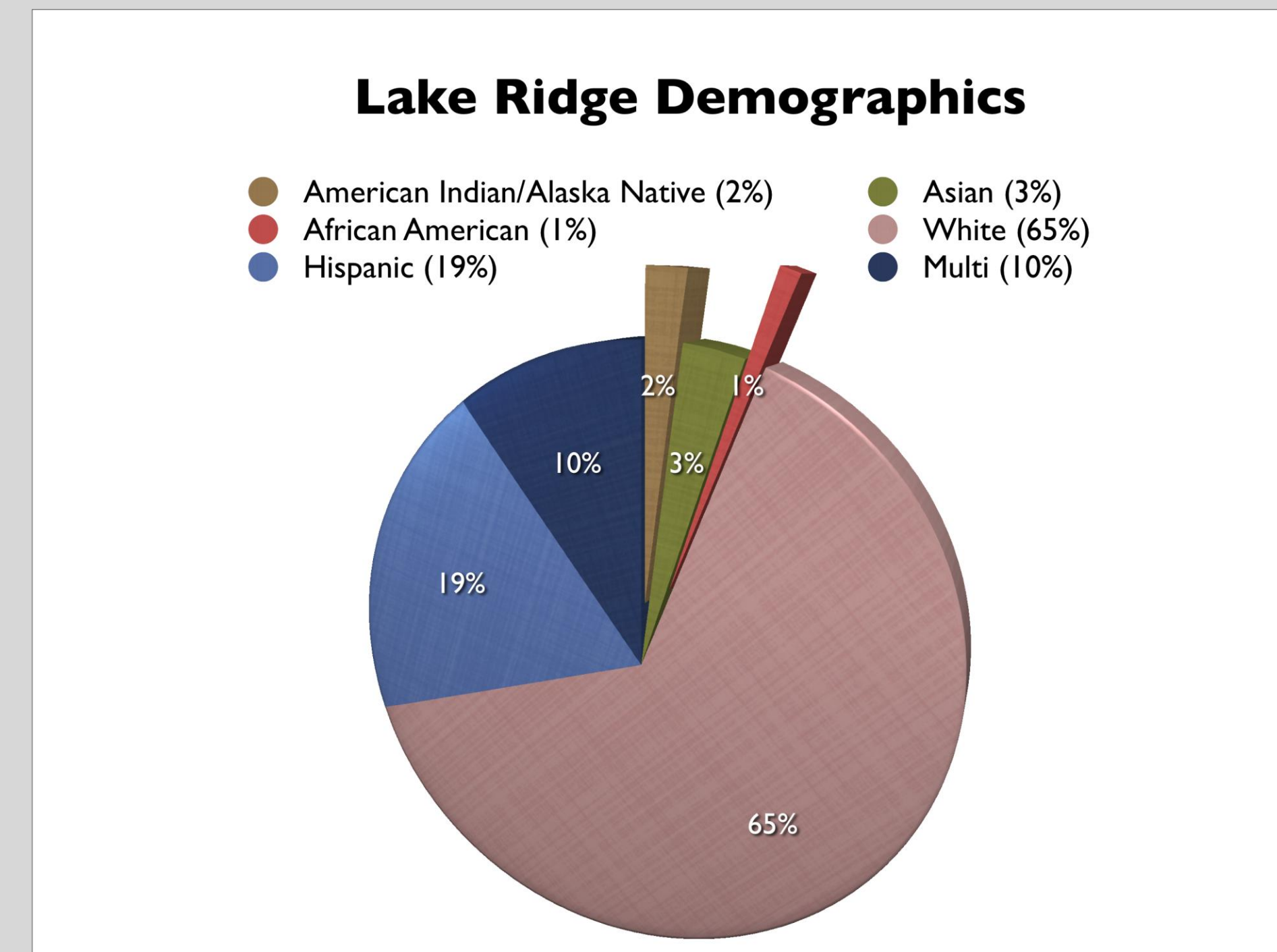
"the majority of students still do not write (or read) well enough to meet grade-level demands."

"The consequences of poor writing (and reading) not only threaten the well-being of individual Americans, but the country as a whole. Writing (and reading) are now essential skills in most white- and blue-collar jobs. Ensuring that adolescents become skilled writers (and readers) is not merely an option for America, it is an absolute necessity."

"Writing can be a vehicle for improving reading... and content learning."

## Demographics

Our Special Education population stands at 17%, and our free and reduced population stands at 60.7%. In addition to this, our ethnicity breakout is as follows:



## Step by Step Action Plan for SIP Goal

**1) May 2011** Create "Writing Across Curriculum" teacher team to explore research and develop teacher buy-in plan and plan PD days for the entire 2011-12 school year. This group will make recommendations about number of minutes/day students should be engaged in writing.

**2) Summer 2011** This teacher team will meet to develop a writing plan that details a clear scope and sequence including state standards and when they will be covered during the year. This group will also fine-tune the school writing handbook.

**3) September 2011:** Enlist our volunteer coordinator to solicit community members/business leaders to come and talk to students about the importance of written communications (ongoing throughout the year.)

**4) September 2011** Create Professional Learning Communities to focus on Writing across the curriculum. Each PLC will have a member from the teacher team and be comprised of various grade levels and subject areas. Looking at student work will be a focus. This group will read various books and articles, such as *In the Middle* by Nancie Atwell. This group will meet 1 hour every two weeks on an agreed upon day throughout the year. They will use a common note taking procedure focused on outcomes so that progress can be monitored.

**5) October 2011** Professional development for this month will work with Language Arts teachers to develop a portfolio system that assures that students have 4 graded writing samples a year and a way chart this progress. The portfolio will be kept all 3 years and passed up to High School. The grading will mirror that used on state assessments. Two will be completed by the end of January.

**6) November 2011** The Professional Development for this month will focus on creating a common language that all staff are using with students regarding writing instruction.

**7) December/January 2011-12** The PD for this month will focus on sharing PLC learnings as well as sharing student work. Critical Friends protocols can be used to display work. We have a trained CFG coach on staff that we can use for this purpose.

**8) February/March** Staff Development Specialist (SDS) will compile and review progress of students by reviewing student portfolios of 7<sup>th</sup> graders.

**9) April/May:** PD will focus on authentic writing opportunities for students in all subject areas as well as a review and assessment of the year's SIP and how it was implemented.

## Potential Financial Impacts

- Summer Release time for teacher team 2 days 12 hours x 5 personnel. Approximately \$2000.00
- Volunteer Coordinator – 20 hours – approx: \$350.00
- Various release time to plane and implement Professional development - \$3000.00
- Professional Learning Community (PLC) creation fund/training: \$500.00
- Materials and books for teacher team and PLCs: \$1000.00

## Potential Options and Decisions for Meeting SIP Goal

Options	Decisions
➤ Writing across the curriculum with substantial staff development and encouragement for all staff to participate.	<b>Adopted:</b> After careful research of schools that have adopted such programs and seen test scores rise. This is the direction the team would like to investigate and pursue
➤ Change schedule to assure increase instructional time for writing	<b>Rejected:</b> We already use a blocked schedule for our Math/Science curriculum as well as Language Arts/Social Studies. There is ample time and flexibility to implement a more rigorous writing curriculum
➤ Invest resources to purchase new writing curriculum	<b>Rejected:</b> Our staff feels like they have the expertise and energy in the building to make this happen, over the past year, we have created a writing handbook with common language, rubrics, as well as a method for teaching writing (4 square method). Also, given the budget, we feel that we could spend our money more effectively on release time to observe each other in classrooms.
➤ Focus only on 6 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> grades as 7 <sup>th</sup> grade is the testing year for writing.	<b>Rejected:</b> We felt that the focus needed to be on all grades, not just 6&7 in order to assure that students are ready for high school expectations.
➤ Engage Language Arts teachers in learning how to teach and use Writer's Workshop techniques	<b>Adopted:</b> After reading the research around best practices in Writing, it became clear that Atwell's approaches to teaching writing dovetails nicely with many aspects of this research
➤ Better Alignment: Create a scope and sequence grades 6-8 while connecting with feeder schools to build a comprehensive scope and sequence for students prior to them reaching Kelly.	<b>Adopted:</b> Making sure that there is a clear scope and sequence for writing at each grade-level that is in line with state standards will help to make sure that students are progressing toward proficiency.
➤ Have community/business leaders come in to discuss with students the importance of written communication	<b>Adopted:</b> Connecting with community and building relevance for students is at the core of our school belief. As such, we have made a commitment to include our community in our SIP
➤ Hire a writing coach to come in and work with teachers and students	<b>Rejected:</b> As mentioned earlier, we feel like we have vast writing expertise in the building and we can better use the money spent on a professional developer to use release time for our teachers.
➤ Visit other schools who have raised their writing scores substantially to learn best field practices	<b>Rejected:</b> By using common planning time and professional development time to develop Professional Learning Communities with a writing focus, we will continue to read and bring new research to our classrooms and conversation.
➤ Use of writing portfolios and standard grading rubrics for students as a way to monitor and see student progress	<b>Adopted:</b> Having a systematic way of measuring student progress is essential; we are reluctant to only use OAKS as a measure of success. This will also allow us to identify students who may need extra help.
➤ Create a common language, common grading rubrics, and proofreading / editing marks that all teachers will use.	<b>Adopted:</b> Knowing that common expectations are a characteristic of a strong writing program, this will be an essential component of this SIP.

## Expected Outcomes

- 1) Students' writing scores on OAKS and facility with writing will increase
- 2) Teachers will understand how writing can help raise scores in other content areas and will improve their ability of how to teach writing in their classes and how to assess student writing.
- 3) We will have a clear scope and sequence in writing that is linked to standards
- 4) We will have made connections with the community and business leaders
- 5) The school will have a clear and unified vocabulary, vision and mission around writing.
- 6) Students will have writing portfolios to show evidence of improvement

## References

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