



Supporting Student Writers: George Hersey Robertson School Video Reflection Guide

This video introduces how George Hersey Robertson School changed its writing program to better support students, including perspectives from students, teachers, and school leaders. For educators interested in applying lessons learned from the video to their district or school context, this accompanying reflection guide offers questions to consider after watching the video, as well as some additional resources.

Choosing and Adapting the Right Foundation for Professional Development

“So I think some of our success here at GHR in making our writing program so strong was, first, starting with a professional development resource that was strongly vetted, and that we all agreed met most of the needs of our students. And that was Columbia’s Teachers College writing units. And then the second part that we needed to do is we needed to look at our students, and ground our decisions in data and how we might want to adapt that program”. Kara Hennessey, K-12 Literacy Specialist

- How does your school or district define high quality professional development? What are the essential components that differentiate an average professional development experience from a truly transformational one?
- Even a great professional development program may need to be adapted to meet the needs of a particular school, and individual students. What steps would need to be taken to successfully do this? Who from your school or district would need to be involved?

Writing Opportunities with Authenticity and Student Choice

*“Our philosophy regarding writing instruction, is really about teaching our students to write like real writers do in the real world. And to do that, it has to be authentic. So, they need the ability to write across different genres. They need the ability to write on topics of choice, and so, while we follow the units of study, there’s still a lot of flexibility in there to make sure that students are motivated to write about things that they are really passionate about. I think making sure that it is authentic and that when they publish a piece, it goes to a real audience.”
Jennifer DeRagon, School Principal*

- How would you articulate your school or district’s philosophy around writing? Are there specific characteristics, skills, or traits a successful graduate of your school or district will embody when it comes to their writing? How do you align your instruction to that vision?
- What are some ways that your district or school provides students with opportunities to write about topics of their choice? What about ‘authentic’ opportunities, such as Robertson’s farm fundraiser writing project? How might your students use their writing to advocate for a community issue that matters to them?

Additional Resources

[George Hersey Robertson School](#) - Read Robertson’s National Blue Ribbon Schools program application to learn more about how they approach instruction and support for students in all areas.

[National Blue Ribbon Schools: Literacy & Writing Practices](#) - Learn more about effective practices related to literacy and writing from other National Blue Ribbon schools.