



**Write for Texas  
Annual Report  
2015–2016**

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# Write for Texas

## Annual Report

### 2015–2016

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# Acknowledgments

Write for Texas is a partnership of The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk at The University of Texas at Austin, Texas Education Agency, and Institute for Public School Initiatives at The University of Texas at Austin. Write for Texas is funded by the Texas Education Agency. The online resources and materials were designed with the support and talent of many individuals whose names do not appear here but whose hard work and ideas are represented throughout, including national and state content experts, researchers, and staff members from the participating agencies. The commitment and hard work of the Write for Texas coaches based at the education service centers and National Writing Project sites are essential to the continued growth and success of the initiative.

## Texas Education Agency

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## Project Staff

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For more information about the Write for Texas staff, please visit [writefortexas.org/about-us](http://writefortexas.org/about-us)

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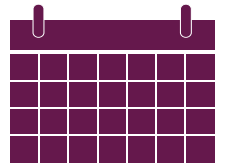
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# 1

## Executive Summary

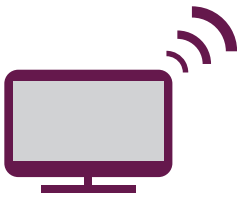
Write for Texas flips the script on statewide professional development; instead of subscribing to the typical train-the-trainer model, the project supports improved classroom instruction through a cadre of regionally based instructional coaches and an extensive collection of online materials.

Initiated in the 2014–2015 school year and currently funded through the 2016–2017 school year, Write for Texas is a Texas Education Agency-funded initiative based at The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk at The University of Texas at Austin.



### Write for Texas promotes four guiding principles of effective writing instruction:

1. Use reading and writing to support learning in all content areas.
2. Teach students the thinking skills, processes, and knowledge needed to write effectively.
3. Teach students skills for writing effective sentences in order to create coherent sentences.
4. Provide extra assistance and instruction to students who experience difficulty learning to write.



The Write for Texas online resources collection is aligned with these principles. Accessible for free at [www.writefortexas.org](http://www.writefortexas.org), the collection includes sample lessons; demonstration videos; and classroom materials for reading, writing and discussing for all content areas at the secondary level. In addition, Write for Texas provides online subscriptions to PEG Writing and hosts institutes in Austin, where teachers can learn from national and state leaders in literacy and from Write for Texas coaches and other teachers.

The coaching component is at the heart of Write for Texas, which has more than 100 coaches from education service centers and National Writing Project sites serving almost 200 schools. Because the coaches are not school or district employees, they don't evaluate the teachers with whom they work. This distinction allows coaches to build a truly collaborative and supportive relationship with educators at their schools, providing support that is sustained over time and tailored to the needs of individual teachers and their students.





## Coaches made an average of 40 visits to each participating school in the 2015–2016 school year.

During these visits, coaches collaborated with teachers on lesson planning; observed lessons; guided reflection and provided feedback; presented or facilitated workshops, book study sessions, and demonstration lessons; modeled effective literacy instruction in the classroom; co-taught; and trained and planned with vertical and cross-curricular teams.

Teachers not only benefit from coaching time, but also gain skills from exploring the online resources, such as demonstration videos and sample lessons. These resources empower teachers across all content areas to build their own awareness and skills for teaching literacy.

Educators participating in the Write for Texas project credit it with having a strong, positive impact on teaching practices (89% of responding teachers), literacy instruction (96% of responding administrators), student reading and writing skills (83% of responding teachers), and student engagement (82% of responding teachers). Coaches cite project support through structured, reflective practice and access to a statewide network as major contributors to their own professional growth.

Teachers reported that the biggest obstacle to implementing Write for Texas practices was limited time due to other demands on teachers, administrators, and students. Despite this challenge, many teachers made pivotal instructional changes with support from coaches, applying what they learned and using materials from Write for Texas in the classroom. Because of the successes that resulted from this kind of direct and customized support, teachers and administrators overwhelmingly identified time spent with coaches as the most valuable aspect of the project.

One challenge for the future of Write for Texas, currently funded through May 2017, is identifying ways to sustain and expand the initiative's positive impact on educators and students over the past 3 years. A significant factor to continued success is funding, which is needed to maintain and expand schools' access to Write for Texas coaches, support the growing network of coaches, and continue growing the database of professional development resources. Current funding for Write for Texas was made possible through recognition by the Texas Education Agency's leadership and their commitment to supporting student learning through dynamic and supportive teacher-centered initiatives. This annual report provides evidence of the positive outcomes of Write for Texas and the continued need for such initiatives.

# 2

## Program Overview

Write for Texas, a Texas Education Agency (TEA)-funded initiative based at The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk at The University of Texas at Austin, grew out of a history of successful staff development projects focused on improving reading and writing instruction in secondary schools across the state. The initiative began in the 2014–2015 school year and is currently funded through the 2016–2017 school year. Write for Texas promotes four guiding principles of effective writing instruction and supports classroom implementation through instructional coaches and online materials.

### ***Four Guiding Principles of Effective Writing Instruction***

1. Use reading and writing to support learning in all content areas.
2. Teach students the thinking skills, processes, and knowledge needed to write effectively.
3. Teach students skills for writing effective sentences in order to create coherent sentences.
4. Provide extra assistance and instruction to students who experience difficulty learning to write.

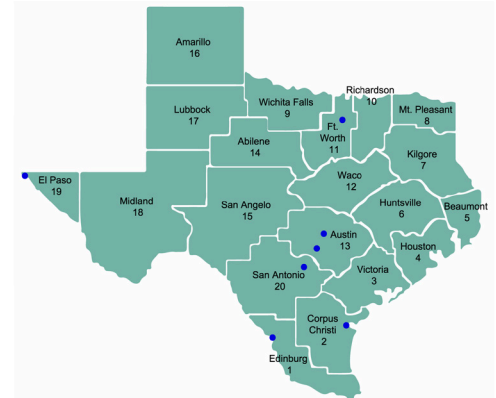
### ***Approach***

The Write for Texas approach to staff development includes modeling best practices for teaching reading and writing, promoting reading and writing across the curriculum, and tailoring delivery to target improvements through instruction. Teachers of all content areas are encouraged to include daily reading and writing activities in their lesson plans to enhance learning in all classes. Write for Texas instructional coaches provide direct support to classroom teachers to ensure effective implementation of research-based instructional routines.



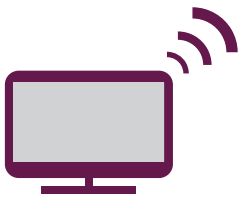
## Writing Coaches

The Write for Texas initiative has a cadre of instructional coaches from Education Service Centers (ESCs) 1–20 and seven Texas National Writing Project (NWP) sites who work directly with district and campus administrators, classroom teachers, and other staff members. The initiative supports more than 100 of these coaches who work in almost 200 schools across more than 100 districts. Coaches support the development of teacher knowledge and skills through demonstrations, co-teaching, and reflective practice. This approach, which does not rely on a prescribed program or curriculum, allows coaches to meet the diverse needs of a wide range of campuses.



Write for Texas coaching support is provided by Education Service Centers 1–20 and seven National Writing Project sites (blue dots).

## Online Resources



In addition to supporting instructional coaches, Write for Texas maintains a collection of research-based online courses and materials aimed at improving the teaching of reading and writing. These resources provide essential knowledge, sample lessons, demonstration videos, and classroom materials. The online materials are available at no cost to all educators through our website, [www.writefortexas.org](http://www.writefortexas.org).

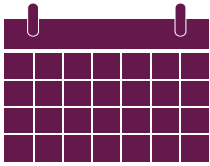
## PEG Writing

In 2014, TEA selected PEG Writing, an online tool for providing formative feedback to students, as the vendor for a statewide pilot project. The Write for Texas initiative distributed approximately 50,000 student accounts to secondary schools across Texas during the 2014–2015 school year, and it distributed more than 100,000 student accounts to approximately 264 secondary schools in 89 districts the following school year. Write for Texas has extended the contract with PEG Writing through the 2016–2017 school year and will provide accounts to more than 60,000 students.

# 3

## Data Sources

This report is based on information collected during the 2015–2016 school year from the following sources:



- Coach activity logs (8,029 entries)
- Coach and participant reflection forms (81 responses)
- Teacher surveys (311 responses)
- Administrator surveys (76 responses)

During the 2015–2016 school year, 99 coaches completed 8,029 activity log entries, which detail the professional services that coaches provide in terms of the people assisted, activities, and time spent coaching.

In spring 2016, coaches, teacher consultants, and program contacts completed 81 reflection forms with feedback for the Write for Texas staff. These forms shed light on which activities are being implemented across the state and how The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk staff can better assist Write for Texas participants.

Also in spring 2016, 311 teachers and 76 administrators completed anonymous online surveys, indicating their participation in Write for Texas activities. The results of these surveys are presented throughout this report along with information from the coach activity logs and reflection forms.





# 4

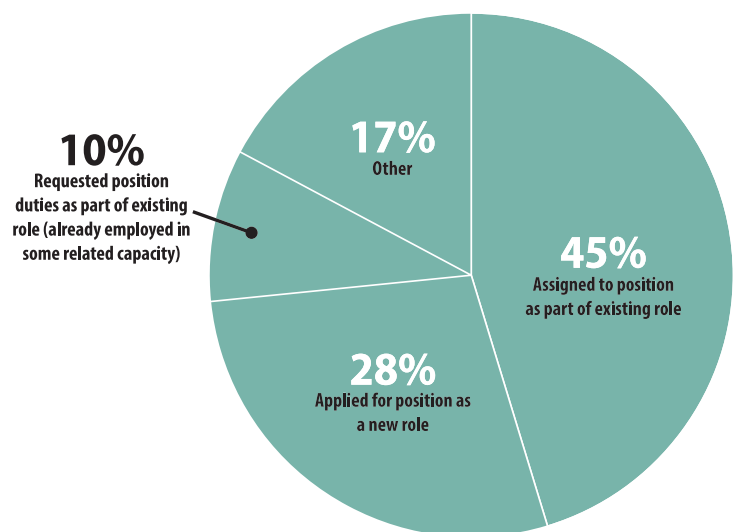
## Coaching Component

### Staffing

With funding from TEA, coaches from 27 sites across the state (i.e., ESCs 1–20; seven NWP sites) provide professional development training—one-on-one, in small groups, and at the school or district level—based on the guiding principles of Write for Texas. As employees of the ESCs and NWP sites, coaches may have additional duties. Approximately 45% of the coaches were assigned the position as part of an existing role held at the ESC or NWP site, 28% applied for the position as a new role, and 10% requested the position duties as part of an existing role. The remaining 17% of coaches fell into the Other category, coming into the position another way, such as being recruited based on previous work as an independent consultant and word of mouth.

Write for Texas requested that sites allocate at least half-time (.50 FTE) to Write for Texas coaching duties. Coaches are expected to visit schools on at least a weekly basis. As a result, 36% of the Write for Texas coaches were assigned on a half-time basis, 11% on a three-quarters basis, and 16% on a full-time basis. The remaining 37% of Write for Texas coaches, such as content-area specialists at ESCs who work closely with another Write for Texas coach to support content-area teachers, were assigned to the initiative on a less frequent basis.

Figure 1. Coach Assignment



### Write for Texas Schools

During the summer of 2014, sites were provided with a list of low-performing schools and asked to select schools while taking into account previous relationships, support from district and school leadership, and teacher receptiveness to working with instructional coaches. Of the 153 schools participating in the 2014–2015 school year, 79 continued to be part of the initiative in the 2015–2016 school year, and another 115 were added during the expansion of the initiative that year.

TEA ranks districts in eight categories (plus “charter”) according to enrollment, growth, economic status, and proximity to metropolitan areas. Of the 104 districts Write for Texas coaches worked with during the 2015–2016 school year, 25% were classified as rural (e.g., Floydada ISD in ESC Region 17); 20% were classified as non-metropolitan stable, which is defined by an enrollment equal to or greater than the median district enrollment for the state (e.g., Elgin ISD in ESC Region 13); and 17% were classified as other central city suburban (e.g., Laredo ISD in ESC Region 1). The remaining districts were distributed among five categories: major suburban, charter school district, independent town, major urban, and other central city. Figure 2 shows the percentages of districts by category.

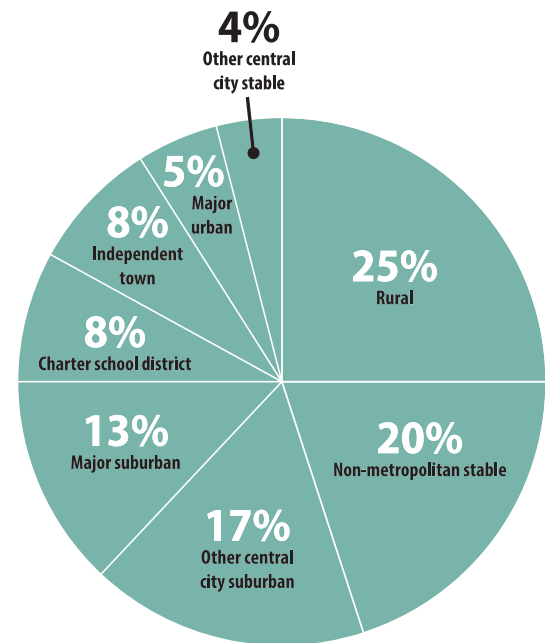


Figure 2. Districts by Category

### ***Coaching Support***

In the 2015–2016 school year, 99 coaches served 194 schools in 104 districts, according to activity log data. The average number of visits per school was 40, with a range of 1 to 226 visits. Coaches completed on average 80 log entries, with a range from 1 to 481 entries. Logged activities ranged in length from 15 minutes to more than four hours. Coach meetings most frequently lasted 30–60 minutes, followed by 60–90 minutes, and two to four hours.

On 395 occasions, coaches also reported districtwide meetings that included district personnel and/or teachers from several schools across the district. At these large-group districtwide events—frequently longer than school-based coaching visits—participants learned and shared ideas outside of specific classroom environments.

**Table 1. Length and Type of Coach Visits**

Length of coach visit	Number of school visits	Number of districtwide events
15–30 minutes	746	21
30–60 minutes	3,478	51
60–90 minutes	1,404	61
90–120 minutes	621	28
2–4 hours	1,024	102
More than 4 hours	756	132

***Coach Contact With School Staff Members***

Coaches recorded the number of meetings with teachers of English language arts and reading (ELA/R; nearly 5,000), social studies (more than 800), science (more than 700), math (534), special education (approximately 400), English language learners (323), and career and technical education (125). In addition, coaches recorded the number of meetings with aides (almost 60) and teachers of languages other than English (42). The meetings included visits with a single teacher, visits with a small group of four to five teachers, and visits with large groups of as many as 50 ELA/R teachers. Table 2 provides specific information about meetings with classroom teachers by teacher type or subject area.

**Table 2. Coach Visits by Teacher**

Teacher category	Number of meetings	Number of participants
ELA/R	4,798	1–50
Social studies	806	1–27
Science	722	1–26
Math	534	1–29
Special education	409	1–8
English language learners	323	1–11
Career and technical education	125	1–45
Aide	58	1–11
Languages other than English	42	1–13

*“The most useful aspects were the discussions that followed the mini-lessons we received. It is almost always helpful to have the time to think through what we are doing with our colleagues in a productive setting.”*



Teachers welcomed the Write for Texas coaches into their classrooms and embraced the opportunity to meet, learn, practice, and plan together. A first-year ELA/R teacher recounted how a Write for Texas coach helped her teach students how to develop controlling ideas in their writing: “My Write for Texas coach modeled a lesson that showed students various controlling ideas. Students read 8–10 samples, and placed them on the board either under the ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ side. Then they had a discussion about why the controlling ideas were strong or weak. After watching that lesson, I tried it with my other classes and experienced success. My students began writing better controlling ideas.” Another ELA/R teacher valued discussions with and feedback from the coach: “The most useful aspects were the discussions that followed the mini-lessons we received. It is almost always helpful to have the time to think through what we are doing with our colleagues in a productive setting.”

The coach role was flexible enough to meet a range of needs encountered across campuses. A coach recalled, “One teacher seemed to be open to coaching through Write for Texas, but I never saw evidence of the strategies being used in her classes. I learned she wanted to implement the strategies but did not feel comfortable doing so on her own, even after seeing me model the lesson/strategy with her students. So after seeing the lesson modeled, we would co-teach the strategy to another class period before she would try it on her own. This gradual-release model helped build her confidence and our relationship.” Another coach used the school’s existing professional learning community structure to provide assistance: “Teachers collaborated to draft writing lessons and then reflected on the implementation of those lesson plans. Also, we worked together to respond to student work, practicing appreciative assessment with authentic examples.”

### ***Coach Contact With School Administrators***

Coaches met with school administrators to garner support for the initiative, provide information about approaches to reading and writing instruction across the content areas, and plan for implementation. In many cases, administrators also attended professional development sessions and meetings with coaches and teachers. A total of 3,400 log entries indicated the presence of an administrator. Table 3 shows which types of school-level administrators were present and the number of participants.

**Table 3. Coach Visits With School Administrators**

<b>School-level administration</b>	<b>Number of meetings</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Administrator	1,233	1–40
School-based instructional coach	914	1–6
Professional learning community	492	1–50
Academic department head	230	1–31
School-based content area specialist	202	1–12
Leadership team	180	1–25
Librarian	76	1
Entire faculty	73	N/A

### ***Coach Contact With District Staff Members***

Coaches also met with district-level administrators at, for example, information sessions and staff development sessions held at schools. District administrators included curriculum directors, central office staff, and superintendents. Table 4 shows the number of meetings and participants.

**Table 4. Coach Visits With District Administrators**

<b>District-level administration</b>	<b>Number of meetings</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Curriculum director	347	1–6
Central office staff member	268	1–5
Superintendent	73	1–3

School and district administrators appreciated the effort Write for Texas coaches made to adapt to the needs of individual teachers and campuses. One principal remarked, “The Write for Texas coaches were able to tailor professional development training to each content area; this allowed for immediate rollout into the classroom.”

A curriculum director made the connection between instruction and student performance: “The coach held small-group meetings with our teachers and really helped them to do some self-reflection and sincerely look at why our students’ writing performance is what it is.”

Another administrator noted how the initiative enhances, rather than replaces, existing approaches: “Many of the instructional practices advocated for by Write for Texas were in line with what our teachers already use, so it was nice for me to see how everything fits together. It was nice for coaches to present the instructional strategies as ways to help teachers do what they’re already doing instead of adding something else.”

A curriculum director pointed out the changes in both teacher practice and confidence levels: “Planning practices have changed. The instructional practices include strategies shared by the Write for Texas coach and teacher, who develop greater confidence in the classroom.”

Another district-level curriculum director connected the work of the coach to changes in teachers and predicted improvements in student outcomes as a result of the Write for Texas initiative: “We have been able to align the goals for my district with those suggested by the coach. Through ongoing support from Write for Texas, there has been an increase in my teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and implementation of best practices. I believe that through our collaborative efforts, we will move student achievement forward.”

# 5

## Survey Responses

### Teacher Demographics From Survey

As shown in Figure 3, the majority of the 311 survey respondents were ELA/R teachers (62%), followed by an equal, smaller percentage of math, science, and social studies teachers (11%). The remaining percentage of respondents were in the Other category, including teachers of art, physical education, English language learners, and special education (5%).

Survey respondents were fairly evenly distributed among the seven grades served by Write for Texas (grades 6 through 12). The smallest percentage of teachers were in grade 6 (11% of respondents) and grade 12 (9%). The greatest percentage was in grade 7 (19%).

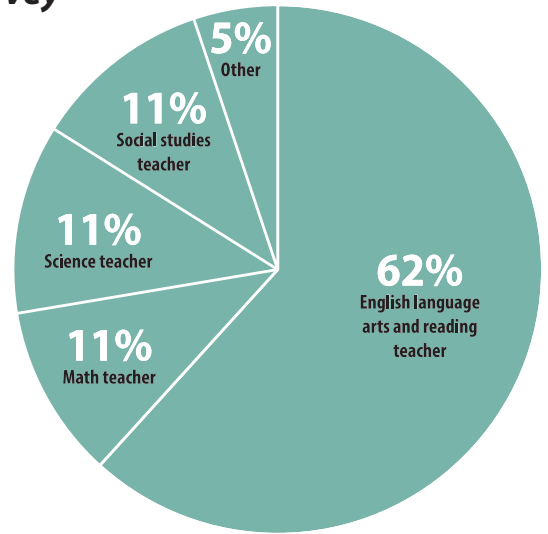


Figure 3. Percentage of Teachers by Content Area

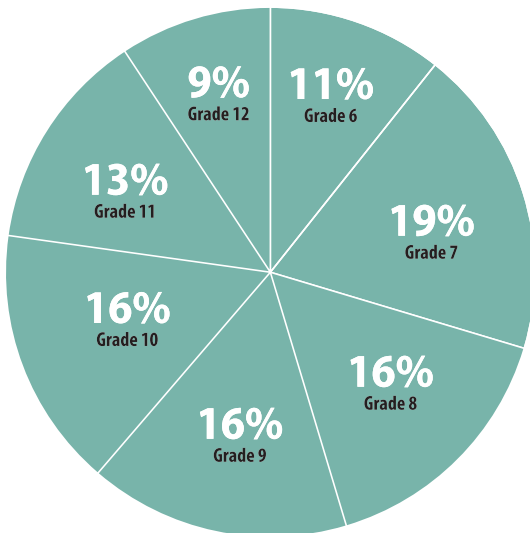


Figure 4. Teachers by Grade Level

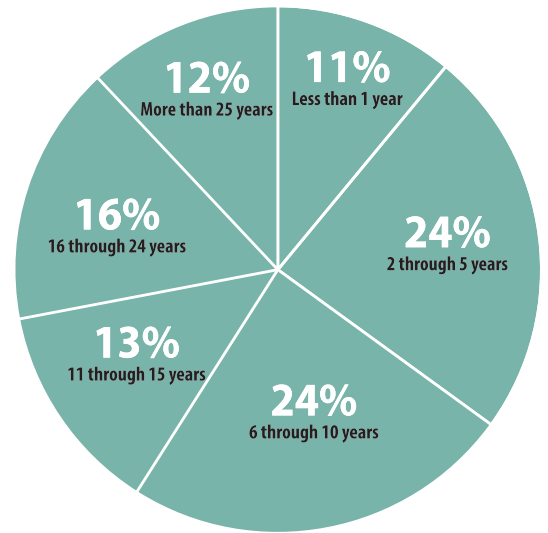
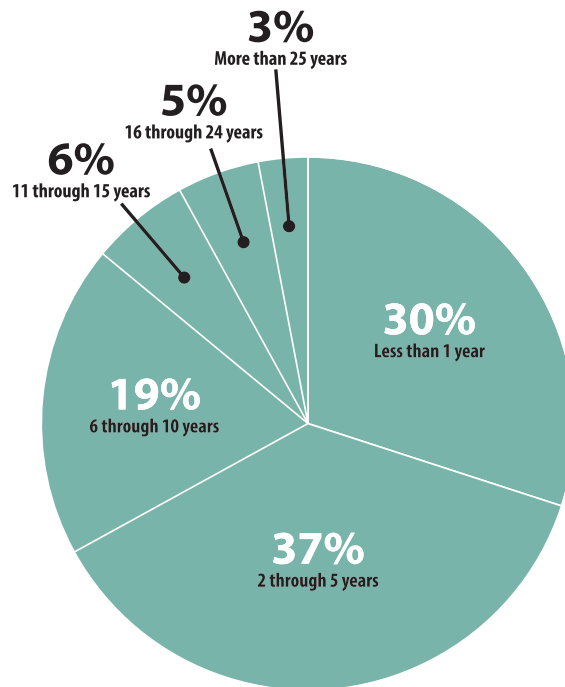


Figure 5. Teaching Experience in Years

Survey respondents indicated a range of teaching experience. Nearly 50% had between 2 and 10 years of teaching experience, 16% had between 16 and 24 years, 13% had between 11 and 15 years, 12% had more than 25 years, and 11% had less than a year.

More striking is the brief length of teacher tenure on their current campus; many schools experience high levels of teacher turnover, which makes changing schoolwide practices challenging. Nearly 70% of respondents indicated teaching 5 years or less on their current campus. Of those, 30% were in their first year. Almost 20% of the respondents indicated 6 to 10 years on their current campus. The remaining 14% of respondents had been on their current campus at least 11 years.



**Figure 6. Number of Years on Current Campus**



# 6

## Activity Log Data

### *Types of Support*

Coaches reported a variety of activities during visits to schools and classrooms. Activities include assessing coaching needs, gathering feedback from teachers and administrators, examining student writing and other data, and identifying strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners including English language learners and students with learning disabilities. Coaches used information learned from planning meetings to better understand the needs of the campus.

**Table 5. Coach Planning Activity by Visit**

Planning activity during coach visit	Number of log entries
Assess coaching needs	2,546
Gather teacher or administrator feedback	2,106
Examine student writing	1,591
Identify strategies for English language learners	1,298
Examine student data	1,005
Identify strategies for students with learning disabilities	964

As part of their positions, Write for Texas coaches led many discussions with individual teachers, professional learning communities, school leadership teams, and other groups of educators. The most frequent discussion topics included instructional strategies, concepts, materials, and technology followed by student needs, curriculum, and standards. Coaches also spent time talking about the Write for Texas initiative and the PEG Writing program.

**Table 6. Coach Discussion Activity by Visit**

Planning activity during coach visit	Number of log entries
Discuss instructional strategies, concepts, materials, or technology	3,803
Discuss student needs	3,469
Discuss curriculum or standards	2,079
Discuss or plan Write for Texas	2,037
Discuss or plan PEG Writing	512

Working directly with classroom teachers is one of the most important aspects of being a Write for Texas coach. Coaches support teachers as they implement new strategies and instructional routines with their students. Coaches often begin by observing classroom instruction and then working collaboratively with teachers to determine which aspects of instruction to improve through planning, modeling, and co-teaching. Coaches support teachers through demonstrating a technique or routine and discussing the outcomes of trying new classroom methods.

**Table 7. Coach Planning Activity by Visit**

Instructional activity during coach visit	Number of log entries
Observe instruction	2,968
Debrief after observing lesson	2,387
Plan lessons	1,885
Present or facilitate a workshop, book study, or demonstration lesson	1,059
Model in the classrooms	1,020
Co-teach	918
Train or plan with vertical or cross-curricular teams	606

# 7 Effect on Teaching Practice

Of those who took the teacher survey, 84% reported receiving coaching support and 53% reported working one-on-one with a coach. Approximately 20% indicated using the online materials. Almost all the teacher respondents (89%) indicated that the experience of working with a Write for Texas coach had a positive impact on teaching practice. Overall, the coaching support was viewed positively by 75% of teacher respondents. Also, 96% of administrators indicated that the Write for Texas initiative had a positive effect on literacy instruction on a campus level.

## ***Coach Impact on Instructional Practices***



The role of the Write for Texas coach is unique in terms of recent initiatives. Write for Texas coaches are not employees of the schools or districts and thus do not have expectations for teacher evaluations and are not subject to other demands on their time when visiting a school. Coaches spend considerable time building relationships with administrators and teachers while getting to know the needs of teachers and students. A Write for Texas coach recalled, “Working with campus teachers helped me develop a greater understanding of the Write for Texas materials and my role as a coach while we planned, taught, and reflected upon our experiences together. As coaches, we are not there to be the ‘sage on the stage,’ but the ‘guide on the side.’ Through my participation in the project, I was able to spend time in classrooms with teachers and kids and I loved every moment of the experience! To know what teachers and students truly need, we must spend time with them in their environment. As coaches, it is easy to become removed from the reality of the classroom. We must never lose touch with our roots and those we serve.”

Coaches adjusted their approaches and services based on the needs of individual teachers and campuses. One ELA/R teacher described the impact: “My coach provided several unique instructional strategies to engage students and to improve their reading and writing abilities. She is always available to assist and/or observe in the classroom to determine the learning needs of my students and to offer instructional guidance if I need it. She has made collaboration purposeful in our department and even our district, as we are now taking strides toward becoming more vertically aligned in reading and writing.”

Another ELA/R teacher echoed the sentiment: “The support was timely and always practical. The needs of our campus and our students were addressed. As an English department, addressing specifics like ‘developing a thesis statement’ (addressing a prompt) was particularly helpful. I also appreciated that our coach would inquire about our needs and then follow up. Thank you!”

A Write for Texas coach shared an anecdote about a particularly successful instructional change that resulted from her work on a school campus. She noted that a teacher realized that the reading and writing connection should be explicitly taught in the classroom with opportunities for students to learn reciprocal skills. The teacher said, "I'll never separate the two again." This was an important breakthrough because this campus had a history of teaching the skills separately during alternate weeks.

### ***Coach Impact Across the Content Areas***

Content-area teachers were also especially vocal in their support for the direct, individualized classroom coaching. "Tremendous!" said an ELA/R teacher in his second year. "Being new to the profession, I have struggled with ideas [for classroom routines]. Using Write for Texas activities has allowed me to have a support system and try new approaches in the classroom."

In some cases, principals and Write for Texas coaches worked together to support new teachers. One principal noted, "In many ways, the practices and instructional strategies allowed for me to take young teachers and help grow them. This in turn allows for our kids to show growth." Another principal summed up the changes: "Teachers seem better prepared, students are more involved in class discussions, and there is less student resistance to writing."

One of the hallmarks of Write for Texas is the inclusion of reading and writing activities across the content areas, which has proved to be a successful approach. A first-year science teacher said that Write for Texas has "helped me to see how important reading and writing instruction is in all content areas. It showed me that when students face a challenging nonfiction text, they tend to stop or 'use context clues,' which aren't always correct. I am glad to have the resources to show students how to move through a nonfiction text without frustration. I also learned about how to grow as a teacher to better support my students in their reading and writing instruction in science."

A math teacher said, "I am now more aware of the importance of teaching vocabulary and I have skills to teach vocabulary to my young middle grade students. As a math teacher, this has been vital."

A ninth-grade science teacher noted, "Working with the Write for Texas coach gave me extra activities to do with the students in the classroom that helped them to improve their writing skills."

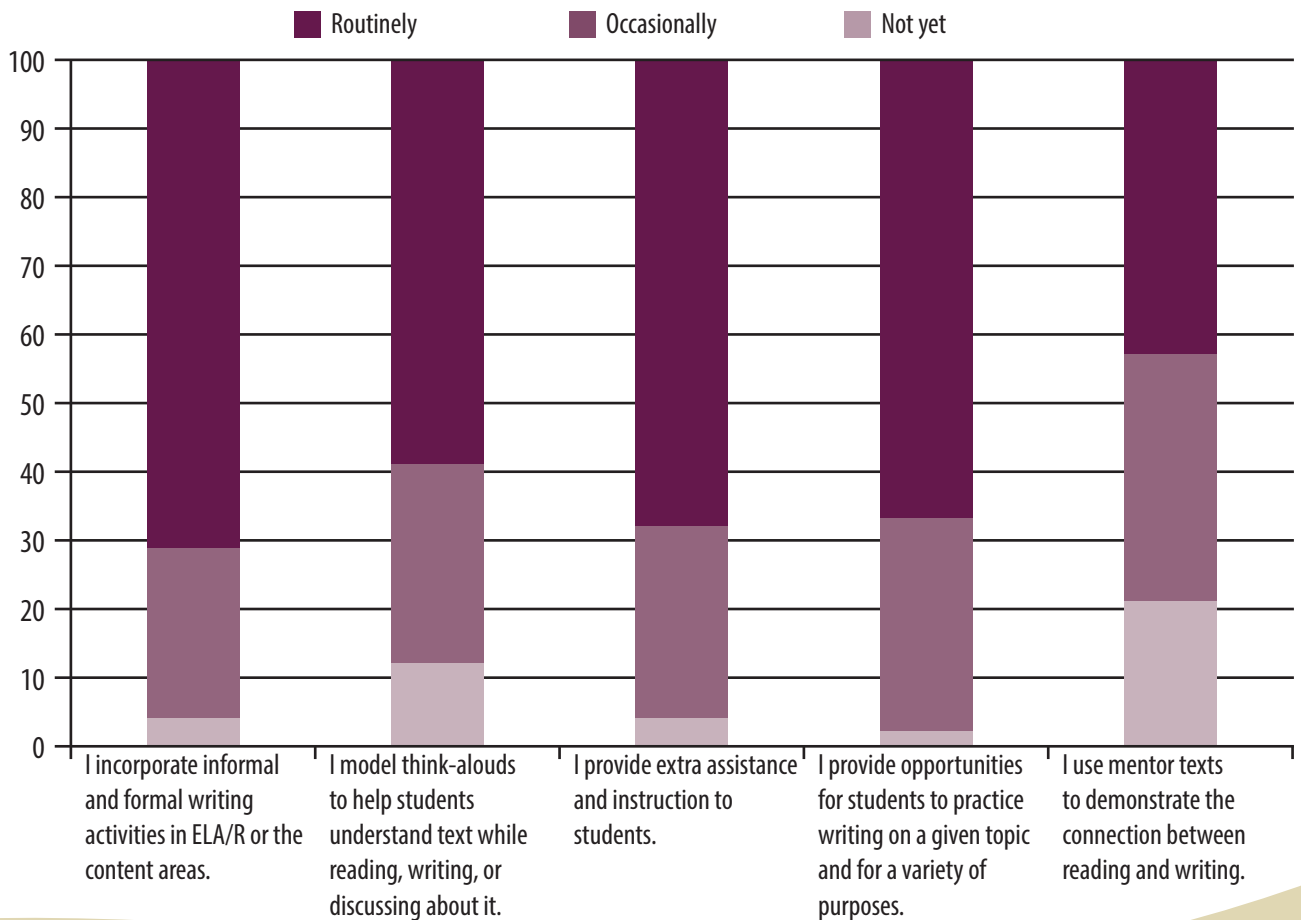
***"I am now more aware of the importance of teaching vocabulary and I have skills to teach vocabulary to my young middle grade students. As a math teacher, this has been vital."***

A social studies teacher reported that Write for Texas instructional practices had helped her “develop a better understanding of the writing process and how to get kids to take ownership of their work. It has allowed for a deeper knowledge of a variety of topics in our classroom.”

### ***Development of Instructional Practices***

The teacher survey also asked questions related to recommended classroom instructional practices. Teachers were asked to indicate how frequently (i.e., not yet, occasionally, routinely) they incorporated the following instructional practices into their teaching: using informal and formal writing activities; modeling think-alouds to demonstrate the nonvisible aspects of reading and writing; supporting students who need extra assistance; providing opportunities for students to write in a variety of genres for various purposes and audiences; and using mentor texts to demonstrate connections between reading and writing. Figure 7 shows that more than half of the teachers reported routinely incorporating the first four instructional practices into their classroom teaching. Slightly less than half reported routinely using mentor texts.

**Figure 7. Frequency of Instructional Practices**



Teachers also described some of the ways that these practices affected their instruction. Teachers reported altering instructional practices to include a clear focus on the reading-writing connection, think-aloud and write-aloud routines to make thinking visible to students, use of mentor texts, and clearer expectations for students. Teachers also noted how the practices led them to adopt more thoughtful, reflective, and adaptive approaches to planning and teaching. One 9th- and 10th-grade ELA/R teacher said, “I feel that my curriculum is more cohesive because the writing is more directly related to the reading material. The students are able to gain a deeper understanding of the topics as they explore various angles and dimensions.”

A teacher of 10th- and 11th-grade math recalled how she was able to provide better instruction by sharing her thoughts with students as she wrote a model essay: “I had students write an essay. I gave them specific details to include in the essay, but I was disappointed with the results. Then, I modeled the process and actually wrote a sample essay in front of them. Next time, I will do an essay (or any involved assignment) with the class before I assign one.”

A high school teacher with several years of experience noted how her shifts in instructional practices had affected students: “This year, my students have reflected upon their writing more purposefully and more intensely. I do not simply tell them to revise and edit and expect them to know what that means. Rather, we spend quality time examining and practicing the processes involved, which has allowed my students to produce a higher-quality essay with more meaning and personal significance.”

Remarking on this change, a coach said, “Teachers are really asking kids to tune into their own thinking and write from their own ideas—not responding to a teacher-created prompt. This is often hard for teachers, as it seems scary and they think kids cannot do it. But the students can do it, especially if we share good strategies for how writers come up with ideas.”

Still, as the teachers noted, it takes time and practice to implement new approaches and achieve mastery. A first-year eighth-grade teacher said, “Some instructional practices took me a few times to finally master and have the students’ full cooperation.”

***“It is more of a mindset change for me. Trying to find opportunities for writing in science is something I have to think about a bit more, but I feel the results will be well worth it.”***

***“There was evidence from walkthroughs and lesson plans that my teachers were using high-level strategies based on the [Write for Texas] training. This was an improvement from last year. The focus on writing was more intentional.”***

Another teacher remarked on the need to be mindful and adapt based on student needs: “I tend to overestimate students’ ability and understanding and frequently have to go back and slow down and give more detailed explanations.”

A science teacher noted the demands and benefits of adopting new instructional approaches: “It is more of a mindset change for me. Trying to find opportunities for writing in science is something I have to think about a bit more, but I feel the results will be well worth it.”

Write for Texas coaches also noted the importance of time and practice in changing teacher practices. One coach recalled, “The teachers I worked with responded well to the Write for Texas resources. They let go of some of the ‘formulas’ that they were using that were not working because students were not really learning **how** to write. I was also able to help with planning, so that teachers were more strategic about introducing skills and discuss how to evaluate learning. Some teachers were not looking through the lens of mastery; they were more concerned about task completion.”

Changes in instructional practices were also evident to school administrators. One principal noted, “It has helped teachers to step away from lecturing and teach students in a more interesting and interacting way. Our teachers have been offered a variety of professional reading materials to help them with their professional growth as well as a plethora of writing and reading activities. I personally have seen a very positive impact on the students’ writing, as it has greatly improved and so has their understanding of what good writing is and what is to be expected of them. Teachers have also greatly improved in their instruction. Greatly improved!”

Another administrator noticed important shifts in instructional practices during classroom observations and discussions with teachers: “There was evidence from walkthroughs and lesson plans that my teachers were using high-level strategies based on the [Write for Texas] training. This was an improvement from last year. The focus on writing was more intentional.”

# 8

## Effect on Student Learning

Table 8. Effect of Participation on Student Skills and Engagement

	Improvement	No impact
Change in student reading and writing skills	83%	16%
Change in student engagement	82%	17%

Overwhelmingly, teachers reported noticeable improvement in student reading and writing skills as a result of the new instructional routines. They said their students became more confident, more comfortable with the writing process, and better able to approach writing tasks in new and creative ways. A seventh-grade history and humanities teacher commented, “My students are reading more like authors. They can appreciate the deliberate word choice in texts. They are more mindful of their audience when they write.”



As students became more thoughtful and purposeful when reading and writing, teachers noted improvements in students’ thinking skills as well. A high school ELA/R teacher noted, “Students were so comfortable with [what they were used to], but these methods didn’t allow for any critical thinking. Students weren’t thinking outside their comfort zone. The coach helped me teach new methods that opened up students’ minds and allowed for higher-level thinking.”

Increased student engagement was also attributed to the adoption of Write for Texas approaches to instruction. A 10th- and 11th-grade ELA/R teacher commented, “The students’ engagement has increased as has their willingness to participate in the writing activities. They are more willing to read their writing aloud now than they were at the beginning of the year.”

A middle school ELA/R teacher noted how changes in her instructional approaches had a positive effect on student writing skills **and** engagement: “I am able to be more concise about my expectations; students are no longer intimidated by the writing. They now have guidance through an assortment of graphic organizers, so they no longer wander around in their writing; they are much more engaged.”

In some instances, students were able to articulate the benefits of frequent writing opportunities. A Write for Texas coach shared the following anecdote: “One student posted a note on his paper that said, ‘Teacher, I do not like writing, but I like it at the same time. Jonathan D!’ When asked to elaborate, he stated that writing is hard, but it made him think and helped him put all the pieces together.”



# 9 Implications for Planning

In response to an open-ended survey question about how Write for Texas could be improved, the majority of teachers said, “More time with the coach.” This feedback was shared equally by veteran teachers and those new to the profession. Teachers and administrators clearly valued the time spent with Write for Texas coaches and requested more frequent and longer visits. A science teacher with 10 years of experience stated, “I would have enjoyed and benefited from more one-on-one time. I feel like I learned so much and would have enjoyed more time with my coach.”

A first-year ELA/R teacher shared, “In areas of reading where I struggled to come up with useful teaching points, my coach was always able to guide me to a lesson or concept that suited my students. Additionally, having my coach as a sort of checkpoint in my monthly planning inspired me to always be thinking of new lessons, adapted reading focus concepts, and inventive thinking activities. I know my students benefited just as much (if not more) than I did by having my Write for Texas coach this year. I was able to see the metaphorical light bulb coming to life for so many of my students as a result of the methods made available to me through my Write for Texas coach.”

A veteran middle school teacher responded, “I think it would be helpful if we were to meet with the Write for Texas coaches with our teams as well as our departments. This way, language arts can aid math, science, and other subjects that need help or ideas with writing activities. Plus, we could collaborate on projects to be more cross-curricular with our learning.”

A respondent at a different site commented on how the coach assisted with a more cohesive approach: “The department planning and development was most helpful with our coach as a department. I liked our consultations, as we were able to target priorities within our district.”

## **Challenges to Implementation**

Again, time was the most frequently mentioned challenge to implementation. Teachers, administrators, and coaches noted that, in addition to more time with coaches, more time to prepare lessons incorporating new instructional routines was sorely needed. One ninth-grade teacher remarked, “Just having the time to incorporate changes [is a challenge]. I have prioritized the new practices and plan to continue to improve my instructional practices, adding new ideas, skills, and techniques as I continue to teach.”

Many Write for Texas coaches sympathized with teachers, and for ESC- and university-based coaches who had been out of the classroom for several years, the challenge was evident. One coach reflected, “Being on campuses instead of seeing teachers at workshops made me painfully aware of how much is on everyone’s plate: teachers, students, and administrators. I became more of an instructional coach, as that’s where the potential is for influencing more change. There were more opportunities to help plan, model, and collaborate. I loved providing them with the Write for Texas resources. I also loved the opportunities to discuss lesson planning and reflect after classroom implementation.”

Additionally, teachers engaged in long-term planning, anticipating future applications of Write for Texas in their work. One sixth-grade ELA/R teacher reflected, “I am a first-year English teacher, and often find myself stuck in the book. It is hard to try a lot of new things when I feel like I am getting my feet wet. I think having the ability to communicate with [my coach] this summer while I plan will be amazing. I also think that next year, now that I have a better understanding of what I want to and need to be doing, I will incorporate even more of the activities.”

### ***Impact on Coaches***

Coaches were invited to share how their participation in the project had affected them professionally. By far, the most frequent response was an appreciation for the time to reflect and grow as educator leaders. Coaches described how opportunities to interact with teachers and students in classrooms helped them refine their approaches. Coaches were grateful to have the freedom to focus on what was needed by individuals rather than following a prescribed program or set of lessons. One coach remarked, “The time for reflection was invaluable. The teachers and I could then make decisions about what instructional routines would work best.”

Another coach noted, “The support from Write for Texas allowed me to build relationships and encourage teacher growth in a district that for the most part did not reach out for support. I love growing teachers, which in turn grows students, so this was an extremely rewarding year for me.”

Reflecting on her own growth process, one coach said, “I feel like I am developing into a true coach. Instead of just telling teachers what they should do, I help them discover on their own.”

Another common theme emerged around the Write for Texas coaching network and the efforts made by Write for Texas staff to facilitate shared planning and discussions between coaches at sites from across the state. In the words of one coach, “Discussions about instructional routines and practices really helped me to develop as a coach. I love to see what other coaches and their teachers are doing and how they are putting the resources into practice.”

Another coach commented, “I have gone into situations and made an impact for the better over and over. Reflections provide one of the best tools in this business, and [MCPER staff members] have provided ample opportunity at the end of these last 2 years to see where I am and what I need to keep and tweak. I have learned new ways to see old problems and many times will stay the course when in the past I might have given up and moved on. I know I am stronger and smarter than I was when I started this project.”

Write for Texas coaches developed reflective ideas through sharing and discussing common challenges during face-to-face and virtual meetings hosted by MCPER. “This has been a wonderful experience. The collaboration opportunities with other coaches and the Write for Texas staff have been key to project development at our service center. Everything has been very thought out and it is a great way to learn. Everything [MCPER staff members] have done had an impact on our planning, development, and overall understanding of Write for Texas.”

# 10

## Conclusion

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The impact of Write for Texas is multifaceted. Participating teachers across content areas not only have a higher level of awareness of effective writing instruction practices, but also have developed the skills needed to implement the practices. Teacher survey respondents report favorable perceptions of Write for Texas and also report increased use of effective instructional practices promoted by the project. These layers of success are due to the unique structure of Write for Texas. Aligned with the Guiding Principles of Effective Writing Instruction, support includes a collection of sample lessons, demonstration videos, teacher resources and classroom materials; face-to-face institutes to enhance coach and teacher knowledge and share effective practices; an intentional and coordinated statewide network of collaboration to support the work of locally based coaches; and ongoing direct support to campuses and classrooms that is tailored to individual needs. This structure has helped to foster reflective and thoughtful practice and growth at all levels—among coaches, administrators, teachers, and student readers and writers, who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the Write for Texas project.

