

# Models *of* Inservice

## Southside Elementary Writing Focus: Site-Based Leadership Reforms the Writing Curriculum on the Other Side of the Tracks

by Nancy Remington and Robert McGinty

*Great Basin Writing Project  
Great Basin College, Nevada*

The National Writing Project at Work monograph series documents how the National Writing Project model is implemented and developed at local sites across the country. These monographs describe NWP work, which is often shared informally or in workshops through the NWP network, and offer detailed chronological accounts for sites interested in adopting and adapting the models. The programs described are inspired by the mission and vision of NWP and illustrate the local creativity and responsiveness of individual writing project sites. Written by teams of teachers and site directors—the people who create and nurture local programs—the texts reflect different voices and points of view, and bring a rich perspective to the work described. Each National Writing Project at Work monograph provides a developmental picture of the local program from the initial idea through planning, implementation, and refinement over time. The authors retell their journeys, what they achieved, how they were challenged, and how and why they succeeded.

Please see the inside back cover for more information and a list of all available titles in the NWP at Work series.

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National Writing Project  
Berkeley, California

## **NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT**

The mission of the National Writing Project is to improve the teaching of writing and improve learning in the nation's schools. Through its professional development model, the National Writing Project recognizes the primary importance of teacher knowledge, expertise, and leadership.

The National Writing Project believes that access to high-quality educational experiences is a basic right of all learners and a cornerstone of equity. Through its extensive network of teachers, the National Writing Project seeks to promote exemplary instruction of writing in every classroom in America.

The National Writing Project values diversity—our own as well as that of our students, their families, and their communities. We recognize that our lives and practices are enriched when those with whom we interact represent diversities of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and language.

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National Writing Project at Work, a series of monographs authored by teams of writing project teachers and site directors about their work, debuted in 2002 with four monographs inaugurating Volume 1: Models of Inservice. This series continues with a second set of monographs—of which this is one—concluding the volume on inservice at local NWP sites. NWP at Work began as a dissemination project with the goal of regularly producing easily accessible, well-written, and inviting documents on the extensive work of the National Writing Project. This first volume will be followed by volumes on NWP summer institutes and on sustainability and continuity of a professional community at a local writing project site.

Dissemination of learning and knowledge is a long-standing tradition within the NWP network. But typically such dissemination has been fleeting, done by word of mouth or shared in workshops. Over the past few years, teachers, site leaders, and national directors of the National Writing Project have begun more intentional and systematic documentation and dissemination of knowledge generated by NWP local site initiatives. The first volume of NWP at Work, focusing on professional development inspired by the mission and vision of the NWP, covers a wide range of teacher professional development models, including school-site writing series, starting and nurturing satellite sites, teacher research projects, statewide reading projects, school-site coaching, and professional development designed by teachers. The monographs present models of change in the classroom, school, district, and state. They illustrate the local creativity and responsiveness of individual NWP sites. Collectively, they are an important body of teacher knowledge about the multiple forms of professional development that teachers experience as useful and respectful. They show that there are many forms of successful inservice and support the NWP belief that there is no one right way to do this work.

Professional development of teachers is a pivotal component of school reform, and teacher voices are critical for this work to be successful. In these monographs, we hear why and when teachers commit to this work, what it does for them as educators, and how it helps change their professional self-images. We learn the authors' ideas behind their designs for reform; their grassroots theories about what it takes to transform school culture, teaching, and learning; and what support they need to do this work. The monographs show how school reform happens—how in a multitude of ways, large and small, in schools across the country, teachers make it work.

Looking at this first volume of monographs we notice several trends. First, the authors are veteran teachers who bring their extensive experience in schools, their reputations as leaders, and their extensive insider knowledge of their schools, districts, and states to their work. They wield the power of their insider status, their networks, and their knowledge of the systems to effect change. Second, in the projects described in these monographs, the teachers take on new roles—roles they

have never played before—and, consequently, they take risks. The risk taking involves failures as well as successes, and a notable strength of the monographs is the honest voice in which each is written.

Third, all of the projects presented in this series have equity at their core—equity for students and for teachers. Each monograph describes work that targets a population of students and teachers not being served. Fourth, the teachers and site directors were—or learned to be—politically canny, seeking alliances, partnerships, and funding for their work. Fifth, these teachers are not always working in friendly climates. They are attempting reform with staff who have burned out or are nearing burnout, with high teacher turnover, with too many simultaneous initiatives—in short, with all the realities of current public school education, especially in urban and rural schools of poverty.

Five of the monographs describe initiatives from NWP’s Project Outreach, which has an explicit goal of engaging teachers of students in poverty. The Project Outreach teacher-consultants and directors who plan these initiatives co-construct the projects with the teachers at school sites—teachers who are not necessarily NWP teacher-consultants. (While some of these teachers later attend an NWP summer institute, many cannot, but they are all the beneficiaries of NWP training.) Since these teachers design and implement their own professional development, one critical outcome is the emergence of new teacher-leaders.

We are pleased that the first volume of NWP at Work is about inservice programs. The work described will have much to add to the debate about effective professional development. In these times, when a significant percentage of teachers leave the profession after five years, these monographs document opportunities to engage teachers intellectually and feed their teaching souls. These are models of teacher learning and school improvement that keep teachers teaching.

It is with great pleasure and pride that we offer this next set of monographs in the National Writing Project at Work series. We are hopeful that teachers, site directors, policymakers, academics, and all who work in the realm of school reform will find much to think about in this series.

JOYE ALBERTS  
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## INTRODUCTION

*I certainly feel like part of a team. . . . I feel like I have this huge realm of resources; it takes isolation away.* —a Southside teacher

The story of the Southside Elementary Writing Focus is the story of how an outsider with community connections and a faith in teachers provided an opportunity for the staff at one school to inquire into the nature of writing instruction and ultimately to redesign curriculum and effect changes that reshaped the writing culture at a low-performing school.

*Southside Elementary Writing Focus* examines the process that fostered teacher leadership as a way of strengthening instruction and meeting some of the challenges typical in a school with a high minority student population, high student transiency, and low test scores. After five years, the key components of the initiative remain intact. The seeds for the initiative were planted in 1997 by Nancy Remington, then an English instructor at Great Basin College in Elko, Nevada, and a teacher-consultant with the Northern Nevada Writing Project (NNWP) in Reno.

Over the course of two years, fourteen Southside teachers collaborated in designing a school-specific, subject-specific, and teacher-specific professional development program that, since its inception in 1997, continues to influence instruction and foster cohesiveness among teachers at Southside School. Project Outreach grant monies provided the catalyst for Nancy's work. Elko County School District supported the effort by paying for release time for substitutes. The work Nancy initiated at Southside, in turn, became the beginning of a writing project culture in the community that ultimately generated a new writing project site, the Great Basin Writing Project. And perhaps even more important, because of the hard work of the Southside staff on projects like the Southside Elementary Writing Focus, in 2004, Southside Elementary was designated a "Distinguished Title I School" by the National Association of Title I.

The story of the Southside Elementary Writing Focus is a tale about community connections, teacher commitment, and the critical components of timing, opportunity, and personality. It is loosely a model for professional development in any school. The success of the initiative was contingent on the staff's eagerness for professional development, district support, and Nancy's leadership and her connections with the school district administrative staff—factors that are helpful to have in place but are difficult to guarantee or impose.

Although little has changed demographically at Southside School since 1997 (the school continues to have a significant minority population—a mix of second- and third-generation Latino students with some English language learners), the need for professional development has shifted radically from a hunger to nearly a glut. State and federal imperatives, school and district initiatives, and an onslaught of

programs and consultants occupy the time and the focus of teachers. Test scores, particularly the scores of subgroups, drive much of the professional development at the school.

When the teachers at Southside launched the writing initiative in 1997, they did talk about the issue of second-language students and English language learners, but the discussion was factored into the larger picture of their recognition that a majority of the students at Southside, regardless of ethnicity, have language problems—a limited vocabulary and a limited knowledge of language structure. The teachers' emphasis was on giving students a productive, supportive writing culture.

The following monograph is the collaborative work of Nancy Remington, founding director of the Great Basin Writing Project (whose voice appears in the first person), and Robert McGinty, current director of the Great Basin Writing Project and a regional coordinator for professional development in northeastern Nevada (whose presence is exclusively third person). This monograph is divided into two parts. The first part follows the history of the project. The second part tells of challenges and successes, provides a list of considerations for applying the Southside Elementary Writing Focus elsewhere, and offers some brief final reflections.

## THE SOUTHSIDE MODEL

*This whole collaboration is a real eye-opener for me . . . that I can't improve children's work, even if I care desperately about each child. I can't help . . . just me. The whole school has to team together.* —a Southside teacher

### The School

Southside Elementary School in Elko, Nevada, is a fairly nondescript red brick building typical of many K–6 schools: utilitarian and designed to blend into a sprawling suburbia of cookie-cutter houses more than into the blue-collar neighborhood of a Nevada railroad-ranching-mining town, with its cramped bungalows, single- and double-wide mobile homes sardined together, and World War II-era pastel clapboard houses squeezed onto five-thousand-square-foot lots. To accommodate growth in the school, modular classrooms are used, eating up playground space. The street that runs in front of the school, once a thoroughfare, now dead-ends at the Humboldt River, which bisects Elko. A concrete pedestrian bridge spirals up from street level and across the stream, a channelized trench that is often dry. Broad swatches of beige paint are evidence of the city's efforts to eradicate graffiti. Underneath the bridge, just a few hundred yards from the school, the typical detritus—discarded newspapers, broken wine bottles, the ubiquitous plastic grocery sack—is strewn among the cobble of river rocks. Mature elm, ash, and poplar trees shade the streets near Southside School in the summer and blaze buttery in the fall. On warm afternoons, children play kickball on the school lawn and ride skateboards down lightly trafficked streets.

Among Elko schools, Southside Elementary School has sometimes been seen as inferior—a wholly undeserved reputation. For years Southside was literally the only school on the other side of the tracks, solidly blue-collar and chiefly lower income. It serves nearly 700 students, and 51 percent of these are Latino, giving Southside the largest percentage of Latino students of Elko city schools. Another 18 percent of the students are Native American; 4 percent are African American. Over half, 58 percent, of Southside's students qualify for free-and-reduced lunches. In 1997, of the four elementary schools in the city of Elko, Southside alone was designated a "Needs Improvement" school, a designation indicating a high percentage of low-income students and achievement scores averaging below the fiftieth percentile.

## Background

Prior to the inquiry-based work that characterized Southside Elementary's Writing Focus, most professional development for teachers in northeastern Nevada consisted of one-time motivational speakers, a districtwide single day dedicated to professional development (which often turned into a "work-in-your-room day") at the principals' discretion, and, most commonly, district-sponsored Friday-to-Saturday inservice credits. Carol Harriman, former director of the Northern Nevada Writing Project (NNWP), which is based in Reno, some three hundred miles distant, had offered intermittent but successful writing project workshops in Elko, yet no writing project culture had taken hold. In sum, teachers' access to teacher-driven, sustained, meaningful, job-embedded professional development was limited.

And then the National Writing Project's Project Outreach Network (PON) initiative opened the door. PON initiatives are designed to make NWP sites more relevant to teachers of economically disadvantaged students. Nancy Remington proposed Elko as a site for a PON initiative.

Nancy had moved to Elko immediately after becoming an NNWP teacher-consultant and was eager to test her ideas. "When Joan Taylor, then director of the Great Basin Writing Project, offered me the Project Outreach site coordinator's role, I embraced the opportunity," Nancy remembered. "I envisioned a paradigm shift in professional development for all of northern Nevada—I dream big! Collectively, our team soon realized, however, that because of busy schedules and vast distances, each of us would need to take a piece of the work. Individually, then, each of us would carve out a little niche testing how we might best provide professional development with increased access, relevancy, and leadership opportunities for teachers in our area who work in low-income, isolated areas with racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse communities."

As part of the Project Outreach team, Joan and Nancy were interested in the emerging paradigms for professional development. They had listened to Ann Lieberman discuss the necessity and the benefits of teachers creating their own opportunities for sustained inquiry into their practices. Michael Fullan and Linda Darling-Hammond, as well as others promoting new models for professional development, influenced their approach. They were convinced that they could offer teachers something more—something better than they were accustomed to.

"By the middle of Project Outreach's first year," Nancy said, "I was feeling increasingly anxious about my role. I knew that I wanted to try to implement one of these new paradigms, but I was stymied. I didn't know how to begin. Although I was the Project Outreach site coordinator, that didn't mean much in an area where teachers weren't familiar with the work of any writing project. I couldn't just waltz into schools and announce that I was going to alter professional development. I was an outsider, just an English teacher at the local college, although I knew many teachers and had been doing some state writing assessment training for the district."

Nancy was intrigued by the idea of inquiry as professional development. The leaders of the Project Outreach Network were encouraging the teams to look at their own work through action research. “One morning in early December as I was showering—my best ideas come to me early in the morning—my action research question emerged succinctly and clearly,” Nancy said. She couldn’t wait to write it down and see how it looked. What she jotted down provided the focus for the Project Outreach initiative: “What happens when we provide a forum for teachers in a school community to address improving student writing specifically by designing their own professional development and by identifying and creating opportunities to improve student writing?”

In choosing a PON school, Nancy focused on Southside for several reasons. It had been identified as a low-performing school and had a high percentage of economically poor students and a high number of English language learner (ELL) students. Additionally, because of her work with state writing assessment training, Nancy was familiar with the staff. Because the Project Outreach grant was designed to help the teachers of students in poverty, Southside was a perfect fit. Finally, it was also close to Great Basin College. In Nevada distances are daunting, and the demands of travel often help in setting priorities.

To begin, Nancy resolved that she would just pose the question to the Southside staff and then watch and record what happened. If only it were that simple.

### **Getting a Foot in the School Door**

Now that Nancy had the question, some funding, and support, she needed a plan to implement. From her work at Great Basin College with shared governance, she had learned that initiatives have the best chance of working when the administration endorses the concept and the teachers—those who work most closely with the students—then shape the specifics.

“So to work from both ends,” Nancy said, “I first set up an appointment with the district superintendent, Marcia Bandera. We had worked together many years before in another college, and it was she who had asked me to assist with the district’s writing assessment training. When we met, I briefly described the National Writing Project, Project Outreach and its goals, and what I wanted to do. In our discussion I emphasized that I wanted to work with teachers in three schools to improve writing instruction. Having money behind my request was essential. The superintendent was supportive, I believe, because it created the appeal of an extended partnership with Great Basin College and the Northern Nevada Writing Project. To work out the details, she sent me to the district curriculum director, Diane Hecht. Together, Diane and I chose three schools—Southside Elementary and two more isolated ones—based on the schools’ at-risk populations and the students’ relatively low sixth grade writing assessment scores. Ultimately, because of the constraints of time and distance, I had to narrow the list to Southside. While I was sitting in her office, Diane called Mike

Clemans, the principal of Southside, and told him what I had in mind, and the second piece of my plan was solidified. Mike invited me to the whole-school professional development day the next month to present my idea to the entire teaching staff. I now had the chain of administrative support I needed and access to the teachers.”

### **Initial Meeting with Southside Faculty, January 1997**

Within a month of developing her question, Nancy was in the Southside Elementary School multipurpose room in front of the faculty enlisting volunteers for this project. Her initial meeting at Southside was brief. She explained, “I used my short time there, about twenty minutes, to tell them what I thought they would want to know: what I was doing there, what this had to do with them, what I wanted from them, and what was in it for them. And what the project had to offer them was four opportunities: first, time to inquire, reflect, and share with their colleagues; second, college credit; third, participation in a nationwide network of support through the NWP; and fourth, the chance to make more of a difference in their students’ learning. Finally, I invited those who were interested in working with me and their colleagues for two years to meet with me after the morning’s session. In retrospect, this inclusive approach was invaluable because the whole teaching staff had been invited to participate.”

Among the teachers in the audience was fifth grade teacher Jerre Lamb: “Sitting there listening to Nancy, I decided it was time to improve myself professionally. . . . I had reached a point, working in isolation in the classroom, that no matter what I tried, my students and our school did not improve.”

Nancy, of course, did not yet know how her message had been received by the teachers. She found it hard to predict how many teachers would show up. “I thought I’d have a couple, and then what would I do?”

But to Nancy’s surprise, seventeen teachers met with her that morning. Rather than laying out a specific plan, Nancy explained her theory that they, as teachers, had the best expertise for planning their own professional development; who better than teachers knows what students need to improve? Nancy emphasized that she was not there to impose an agenda or structure on the teachers. They would be responsible for holding themselves accountable, she explained; her role was to be their advocate. At first the teachers were hesitant. They had been accustomed to top-down agendas and were surprised that she did not have one. “I told them that if they signed on, they would need to commit to two years, give it their best effort, and keep a journal. I knew that it would be important for me to hear their recorded thoughts about the process because I would be accountable to the NWP and the Project Outreach Network for this work. I emphasized that their charge was to design and implement their own professional development to improve student writing in their school. I reinforced that because they already had approval from the superintendent and principal as well as support—

including funding—from Project Outreach and the National Writing Project, I felt any reasonable request they made would be considered. The group decided that what they most needed was time to develop a plan.”

### **First Meeting of the Writing Focus Group**

The teachers and Nancy decided to meet for one whole school day the next month and picked several possible dates. The school district offered to pay for substitutes, and, because the teachers wanted to be away from their school, Nancy reserved a conference room at Great Basin College. She enlisted the help of Sharon McLean, a sixth grade teacher in the group, to keep Southside’s faculty and administration informed about meetings and the focus group’s activities.

From February through June 1997, Nancy met with the focus group of seventeen teachers four times for full days of planning off campus. As it turned out, her role was complex. “Originally, I described my role as that of a facilitator, one who makes the desired conditions or environment available,” Nancy explained. “I scheduled a conference room at the college, okayed the day with the principal, and supplied the food. Then as we began working, I saw myself as a sort of coach or mentor. However, I found a more apt description is that of participant-observer, which means that while I was privileged to become part of the group, simultaneously I was able to maintain my initial stance of inquiry by observing and recording what took place. I think, now, that my role included all of these. What I’m sure of is that over the two years that we met regularly, I concentrated on three principles for guiding the group: (1) asking questions; (2) keeping the group grounded in sound principles for teaching, learning, and writing; and (3) honoring the collaborative process.

“I also recognized from the outset that the first meeting would set the tone and shape our work and that these teachers would expect some guidance and expertise from me, so I spent weeks preparing our first all-day meeting. I was worried about having a group for a whole day; I wasn’t part of the school; I didn’t know what to expect. I tested the ideas on our Project Outreach team and gained their advice and consent. Then I reviewed the readings that brought me to believe that the efficacy of these teachers to address their school’s problems was of primary importance, and then I called for help. I consulted two of my writing project mentors for advice—Elyse Eidman-Aadahl, director of national programs and site development for the National Writing Project, and Kim Stafford, director of the Oregon Writing Project at Lewis and Clark College. I had witnessed both of them expertly leading groups. Elyse encouraged me to keep everyone together that first day, to include some community-building activities, to plan a common writing experience, and to ask questions like ‘Why is writing important?’ ‘What is good writing?’ ‘What is a good writer?’ ‘What do our kids think is good writing?’ Kim’s advice still resonates with me. He agreed with the benefits of writing together and then offered, ‘Remember, it’s not just about writing; it’s about thinking, seeing—being human.’”

The first morning was filled with building community through writing activities, which turned out to be essential for the cohesiveness of the group since some of the teachers hardly knew one another. By way of introductions, Nancy asked that the teachers first focus their thoughts by writing about why they were interested in this project, what they wanted out of it, and what they expected of themselves and of her. As the teachers introduced themselves, answering these questions, Nancy scribbled notes to herself and observed that many of the teachers didn't know one another. Taking her cue from this, Nancy recognized that while building community was particularly important, building a community of teacher-writers was essential. So intermittently during that first day and every time the group met thereafter, they wrote together.

At times during that first day, the teachers entered into natural conversations about everyday school life, which kept everyone in the group engaged. Interspersed with these conversations were writing prompts that Nancy used to refocus the group or deepen the conversation. Keeping a steady supply of prompts on hand was one of her most critical functions. Nancy knew that balancing her guidance with the teachers' control over their activities would be important. She was vigilant about teachers having control of even the smallest details—where they would meet, how long they would meet, even when they would break for lunch. “I assumed that the teachers would want to press on all day and finish early,” said Nancy. “However, when I asked, their choice was unanimous—the group wanted to take a full hour for lunch and work until late in the afternoon. They told me that it was a real treat for them to have time at lunch to go to a real restaurant or to go home. Good thing I asked.”

After writing, talking, and settling housekeeping details, the group took a short break that first morning. When they reconvened, Nancy asked the teachers to make a list of what they had learned last month about teaching. “From the outset, we established the critical link between teaching and learning. After we had created our lists and shared them with a partner, we talked as a whole group about the lists. When it was my turn, I focused on my last point [on my list], which suggested that ‘I fail more than I succeed as a teacher.’”

A discussion followed that led into the next group activity: reading Glenda Bissex's article “Learning from Teaching” (1988), which focused on teachers not taking advantage of something that they know works. Nancy then asked the teachers to write about a time when they felt a similar kind of failure and what they learned or could learn from it. “What conditions foster reflection and learning?” she then asked. Thus the connection between learning and teaching was embedded in their writing and in their discussions. This continued to be an important component of the group's common understanding, and Nancy took care to nurture this connection.

The speed with which the teachers took control was startling. By early afternoon on the first day, the teachers had begun to take the reins. “Because I wasn't part of this school, I had no idea what to expect from these teachers,” Nancy noted. “So, as

usual, I had overprepared. I had backup: I'd brought videos of Peter Elbow, Mike Rose, Lisa Delpit and had planned other activities like making group posters. We didn't need those activities, however, because it didn't take long for the teachers to begin talking about their students and the needs of those students. From that time on, they were in charge of what we did and how and when we did it. I had hoped that the teachers would understand that they were in charge, but I was delighted at how quickly this happened."

By midafternoon, the teachers were anxious to have something tangible to show for their time. According to Jerre Lamb, "There was a real need to produce a product." They slapped sheets of butcher paper on the walls around the room—one for each grade level—and each teacher wrote a brief description of what made good writing and what was developmentally characteristic of good writing for each grade. The teachers discussed and then refined what in essence became both a developmental continuum and curricular hierarchy for writing instruction at Southside. However, this tension between production and reflection was evident from the beginning and continued throughout the project. Nancy consistently reassured the group that writing and reflecting about learning and practice are not unproductive.

They then set goals for the next meeting. The teachers knew that they wanted more time such as they'd had the first day. They were energized by the day's experience and needed to have similar opportunities. Even that first day, the teachers began to recognize their own strengths as professionals. They luxuriated in the time to listen to one another, to write together, and to collaborate on this whole-school project. Because of their experience with writing that day, they wanted to explore ways of creating more opportunities for teachers to learn more about writing by writing themselves. Most significantly, the teachers now recognized that they learned about writing by writing, a learning that they wanted to make part of their classroom practice. From teacher Sharon McLean's journal regarding that first day came this: "Good, solid, creative ideas came from everyone. I think that we all felt safe enough to risk our opinions. I think this 'safeness' was established during that first day when we were writing and talking about writing."

The teachers were off and running. Nancy continued to concentrate on asking questions, keeping sound principles in the forefront, and honoring the collaborative process. "I didn't have an end product in mind," she said, "but I did believe that what the teachers created would and should be theirs; therefore, it would be meaningful."

### **Subsequent Meetings, Spring 1997: Planning the Writing Focus —a Curriculum and an Assessment**

In preparation for the second meeting, Nancy asked the teachers to bring some student writing to share with the group. "I know that if teachers have student work in front of them, they'll never run out of ideas," she said. Nancy brought in samples showing the range of her college students' work as well as some examples of her

favorite writing, ranging from children's literature to academic prose. The day began as the teachers immersed themselves in writing. Almost immediately, the teachers again took charge in deciding what they were going to do and how they were going to do it. In three subsequent meetings held on the Great Basin College campus that spring, the focus group mapped out the writing curriculum for Southside Elementary School and produced the Southside Elementary Writing Focus, a straightforward document that combined a developmental continuum with a system of schoolwide assessment. The Writing Focus outlined a continuum of writing skills to be introduced, reinforced, or mastered in first through sixth grades and was implemented in October 1997.

After each meeting, the teachers took seriously their responsibility of sharing their work with the entire staff through grade-level meetings. They elicited feedback from their peers and shared what they gathered with the group. They felt that through the continual sharing of their work, they had the necessary buy-in from the entire faculty. Most of the feedback from the entire faculty came from weekly or biweekly grade-level meetings held after school. Also, about midway through the second year, the group created a survey and collected more formal feedback. This constant conversation made the work real for all of the teachers at Southside, not just the focus group. "My reminder at every meeting," Nancy said, "was that however much they loved what they were creating for the school, it was their responsibility to make sure that the other teachers in the school understood and loved it as well." They took her at her word.

The minor resistance offered by a few at the school was generally overcome by the group's will and persistence. When they encountered difficulty, they brought their concerns to the group and asked each other for help in strategizing ways to get around the barrier. Several times they elicited help from each other to convince a colleague. Nancy had witnessed leaders emerging within the focus group, but working with the general faculty demonstrated teacher-leaders moving beyond the safety of the group to the entire school.

Besides the Writing Focus document (appendix B), the teachers also designed the Southside Cumulative Writing Folder, which is a developmental portfolio containing each student's writing samples. Each folder has a rubric to score analytic traits and a grid for recording scores and student progress in writing from the first through the sixth grade. (See appendix A.) The folders were designed to give teachers and parents an easily accessible overview of each student's skills and progress. For the students, the folders were intended to be a personal history repository and a concrete record of their growth in writing. In addition to their intended usefulness to the entire Southside staff, however, the Writing Focus document and the student folder were important to the group as tangible signs of their efforts. As Sharon McLean put it, "The product is something that can be shared more than ideas can be."

At the spring meetings, the teachers also planned the Writing Focus assessment, two schoolwide Writing Weeks—one in the fall and one in the spring—for the

1997–1998 school year. During each Writing Week, all students at Southside would write to a grade-level-appropriate prompt over a three-day period. Teachers would then score the papers and place them in the student folders. The teachers had the choice of scoring their student work individually or in groups. The focus group felt that it was important to respect the teachers' choices.

### **Schoolwide Professional Development and Implementation, Fall and Spring, 1997–1998**

To prepare their colleagues for the Writing Focus, the teachers in the focus group, as they had begun to call themselves, planned professional development for the Southside staff. In June 1997 they requested that the school district provide release time at the beginning of the following school year for all Southside teachers to further their knowledge of instructional strategies for teaching writing. A subcommittee representing the focus group wrote a proposal and took it personally to the superintendent. Nancy accompanied them for support, but the teachers made the request. The superintendent approved the request and, in turn, took it to the school board. A day in September was then designated as a half day of instruction followed by an afternoon of whole-school professional development focused on improving student writing. The focus group arranged for an optional follow-up evening and Saturday session for teachers who wanted a more in-depth session, making it possible for teachers to earn inservice credit. In September the focus group brought in Carol Harriman and Karen McGhee, Northern Nevada Writing Project teacher-consultants and language arts curriculum specialists, to conduct the workshop focusing on teaching writing and scoring for the Writing Week assessments. All the teachers attended the Friday afternoon session, and more than a quarter attended the extended two-day workshop, which was designed specifically as a prelude to Southside's first schoolwide Writing Focus week.

After the inservice weekend, the Writing Focus group created the writing prompts for the Writing Week and wrote a short document, which they called "Suggestions for Organizing Your Writing Week." It included recommendations for time allotments and a scoring rubric to use during the Writing Week. Members of the focus group also facilitated grade-level meetings to introduce the entire staff to the student folders, scoring rubrics, and prompts.

In October 1997 Southside School held its first Writing Week. Every student wrote to a prompt tailored for his or her grade level. After teachers scored their own students' writing, they put each student's work in a writing folder that became a part of each Southside student's permanent record. Printed on the folders—glossy white with a bold blue cougar paw print signifying the school's mascot splashed across the front (see Appendix A)—are a rubric to score analytic traits and a grid for recording scores and charting student progress in writing from kindergarten through sixth grade. As part of the student's permanent record, the folders are then passed on to the junior high school. The folders themselves were purchased as a part of the

school's budget for about \$600. Each year new folders for kindergartners and students transferring into the school cost the school approximately \$200.

### **Refinements, Adjustments, and Continuity, 1997–2003**

In spite of changes in administration at the school and district levels, teacher transfers and retirements, and the growing political pressures faced by all schools, the writing focus at Southside remains intact. So far, the focus group has been able to sustain Southside's Writing Focus by fostering a sense of ownership among the whole staff and by adapting to and making accommodations for state and federal legislative mandates. Since 1997 the school has held its Writing Week twice a year; the first week is scheduled for September or October and the second week takes place in April or May.

The Writing Focus document has been refined. Originally, the rubrics and developmental skills omitted kindergarten, which resulted more from the makeup of the original group than from conscious omission. Today the writing folder makes accommodations for scoring kindergartners, though the rubric used still begins with first grade. The rubric itself—originally the work of the Southside teachers—has been aligned with the analytic scoring rubric used by the state.

As the focus group had hoped, the folders give teachers and parents an easily accessible overview of each student's skills and progress. For the students themselves, the folders become a personal history—a repository and a concrete record of their growth in writing—that is passed from teacher to teacher.

In the spring of 1998, the focus group surveyed the entire Southside staff to get a sense of the effectiveness of the writing initiative. They were delighted with and encouraged by the results. After gauging the staff's support, the group became convinced that what they had accomplished needed to be augmented with more activities to keep from stagnating. During an October 1998 meeting at Great Basin College—again a day on which substitutes were provided for teacher release time—several ideas emerged: a Writing Exchange for the entire school; a Writing Wall to display student work; an after-school writing program; a Community of Writers day on which people from the community would speak to classes about writing in their lives; and a newsletter. The Writing Exchange, the Writing Wall, the newsletter, and the Community of Writers were implemented that year.

The newsletter was maintained for only two years, but the Writing Wall remains, and the Community of Writers day has become a cornerstone of Southside's emphasis on writing. Each January the focus group develops a list of businesspeople, tradespeople, and professionals who come to Southside and give thirty-minute presentations to classes on how they use writing in their jobs. The Community of Writers gives students insight into everyday, real-world applications of writing—a perfect prelude to the spring Writing Week. The Community of

Writers itself is indicative of both the continuity and sustainability of Southside's Writing Focus and, perhaps, is a testament to the power of making community involvement a component of any such program.

In the fall of 2001, Southside Elementary changed administrators, a shift that can often signal the demise of long-established practices. Jerre Lamb, who was one of the original teachers to join Nancy's experiment, now heads the focus group. In September 2002 Jerre met with the new principal, Tom Klein, told him about Writing Week, and invited him to attend the group's meetings. Jerre's promotion of the school's writing program not only helped the new principal understand the school's emphasis on writing but also made him a supporter. "I think it's wonderful," Klein said. "[The Writing Focus] is one of the bright stars of this school."

Klein said he believes that Southside's writing focus puts his school ahead of many elementary schools, many of which have taken a "shotgun" approach to student improvement. The group's influence, Klein said, helps build cohesiveness among the staff and provides direction. Whether or not a causal link can be made between staff attitude and the empowerment that the Writing Focus provided teachers at Southside, Klein said that his staff impresses him with their willingness to engage in professional development training.

Though the use of the writing folders to a large degree depends on the initiative of individual teachers, the folders themselves remain a treasure of data on Southside students' writing. In January 2003, at a districtwide half day for professional development, the Southside teachers gathered to examine the student writing folders and use the data they contain—traits scores and writing samples themselves—as a way of focusing instruction to meet student needs. Using the folders, grade-level teachers identified areas that needed to be addressed in their students' writing and then wrote these concerns on poster paper, which they put on the walls of the school's multipurpose room. The activity gave the teaching staff a visual representation of the needed focus of the school's writing curriculum and emphasized the continuity of instruction from grade to grade. Such periodic schoolwide use of the folders is invaluable in revisiting curriculum and in reenergizing the teachers' devotion to writing.

## **PROGRAM ANALYSIS**

### **Successes**

The belief that teachers truly are professionals rarely drives policy or shapes staff development; however, nothing was more critical than this belief to the success of Southside Elementary's Writing Focus. Nancy Remington brought more than a belief in teachers to her work at Southside. Her role as leader and facilitator was formed by a passionate and abiding faith in their professionalism and the process of

professional development that the Writing Focus mirrored. Treating the Southside teachers as professionals both freed and empowered them. In a real way, the teachers were in control of their destinies. It was they who identified their needs and the needs of their students, they who collaborated in redesigning curriculum, and ultimately they who sustained the changes they initiated at Southside. It was their knowledge and their dedication to quality instruction and learning that enabled a fairly simple inquiry to blossom into a reformation of their school's writing program.

The initial investment of time and money and Nancy Remington's confidence in teachers changed a school, a curriculum, and the lives of many teachers. The fall and spring Writing Weeks, the Community of Writers, and the student folders are artifacts of and living testaments to the work the Southside teachers began in 1997. The broad investment of time, the continuity of curriculum, and, most important, continuing teacher ownership are the keys to the success and sustainability of Southside's Writing Focus.

The Writing Focus group—now twelve members, representing all grades—is a direct descendant of the original group of teachers who gathered in 1997 at Great Basin College. However, because of retirement, transfers, and promotions, few of the original Project Outreach group remain. Veterans recruit new teachers, and the focus group, which remains open to all who are interested, continues to refine and revise the writing program.

Among Southside staff, the Writing Focus and the folders serve multiple purposes. They are an integral piece of writing assessment from year to year (though student transiency frequently leaves gaps in the work), they maintain continuity in the writing curriculum from year to year, and they are vital in helping new staff. Teachers new to the school can see the emphasis Southside places on writing and get a sense of continuity in the writing program. For the most part, new teachers slide into Southside's writing culture with ease.

Sally McDermott, in her first year as a teacher at Southside, said that she first heard about the school's emphasis on writing when members of the focus groups talked about Writing Week at a faculty meeting in the fall. Later, in a meeting facilitated by one of the focus group members, Sally met with other sixth grade teachers and helped develop a prompt for Writing Week. She said the Writing Focus has helped her professionally by providing concentration on parts of the curriculum and by bringing teachers together. "I felt totally included," she said.

Another success of the Writing Focus can be measured in the lives of the teachers in the focus group. Nancy fostered leadership among the teachers, and because of the confidence they attained through their work on the focus group and the heightened sense they gained of themselves as professionals, several of the original seventeen teachers have completed master's programs. One now helps coordinate professional development in five Nevada counties, a job she said she never would have considered applying for before her experience with the focus group. Two have been

instrumental in piloting an all-day kindergarten for children who need more than a few hours will give them. Another has been promoted within the school as a literacy resource professional. Although many members of the original focus group have changed schools, retired, or put their efforts into other endeavors, the focus group itself continues on, a compliment to the original members, whose work gave the group a solid professional status at the school and whose efforts created a program valued by the majority of the faculty.

Jerre Lamb, who was among the original Writing Focus group teachers, has begun an inquiry into the efficacy of Southside's writing program. In September 2003 she began a long-term qualitative study of Southside students as they move from elementary school through junior high and high school and into college.

Ultimately, the momentum generated by the success and enthusiasm of the Southside teachers led Nancy Remington and Joan Taylor to hold an invitational summer institute in Elko, Nevada, in 1998 under the auspices of the Northern Nevada Writing Project. In 2000, after two successful NNWP Invitational Summer Institutes in Elko, the Great Basin Writing Project, which serves five counties covering some 44,000 square miles of Nevada's remote high desert, was established. Eight of the current Southside faculty are now Great Basin Writing Project teacher-consultants.

## Challenges

*We need to have time to continue our work. If we don't spend time on it, it will lose its importance.* —a Southside teacher

Southside teachers still get release time for professional development, generally districtwide half days, but the release time that teachers in the focus group are given to do their work has dwindled from four days to two to one. The group holds many of its meetings after school. Other matters—implementation of state standards, concern over test scores, state-promoted reading initiatives, additional county-mandated testing—make considerable demands on teachers' time. Southside Elementary School has also received considerable funding for initiatives in literacy, which has further diffused the teachers' energy and time.

The focus group's plan to make the student folders available to junior high teachers has had little success. Although the folders are passed on to the junior high as part of Southside students' permanent records, junior high teachers were initially unaware of the folders' existence. When members of the focus group visited the junior high to make teachers there aware of the folders, they were able to interest only two or three teachers in using them for assessment. Those teachers have since left the junior high, so, for now, Southside teachers in the focus group have abandoned efforts to interest the junior high teachers in using the student folders.

Though test scores on the state and county writing proficiency tests for fourth- and sixth-graders showed improvement the first year after Southside initiated its Writing Weeks, the writing scores since then have remained flat. There have been no efforts as yet to analyze the impact of the Writing Focus on the school's writing test scores. The impact on instruction, while not quantified, is considerable. In periodically revisiting the writing folders, Southside teachers have the opportunity to adjust the curriculum within each grade to address the needs of their students.

The growing emphasis on test scores and the measures imposed by No Child Left Behind for schools designated as "Needs Improvement" threaten to dilute or diffuse Southside's focus on writing. Low reading scores at the school, for instance, threaten to shift instructional time to target reading skills and isolate skills such as reading and writing, to the detriment of both. Significantly, however, the outcomes of the original focus group's work—the schoolwide investment of instructional time, the focus on writing, and the community involvement—remain intact.

### **Additional Considerations for Applying the Writing Focus in Other Schools**

Several factors, in addition to honoring teachers as professionals and trusting in the inherent processes of inquiry-based professional development, were critical to Southside School's success in the writing initiative. These factors helped that initiative resonate beyond the short-lived vigor that even the best top-down inservice offerings induce. None of these factors is particularly daunting, but each was critical to the success of the Southside experience, and schools hoping to experiment with a similar model ought to consider them.

**Fertile ground:** The staff at Southside School was eager, if not hungry, for opportunities in professional development beyond the staple of one-shot workshops that the teachers were accustomed to. The state's emphasis on writing and a perceived need for improved student achievement contributed to the school's readiness for change. The lack of a real writing culture among teachers in Elko County created a cutting-edge mentality, a sense that the work the Southside teachers were doing in shaping their writing curriculum, in taking leadership, and in participating in professional development was novel for the school and the district.

**Administrative support:** The enthusiastic, no-strings-attached support of the superintendent of schools and the advocacy of the Southside principal allowed teachers the freedom to shape a program that both articulated their values and met the needs of the students at their school.

**Outside leadership:** The presence of a professional, well-respected figure to initiate, facilitate, and support the work of the Southside teachers was critical. Because she had no direct ties to the school district, Nancy Remington was neither supervising nor evaluating the teachers who volunteered.

**Time:** Release time and an off-campus setting provided both a place and freedom for teachers to chart the direction professional development would take.

## Reflections

*We know our expertise and see how we can help the faculty. You have strength in numbers; you have more power.* —a Southside teacher

Because much of Elko County's economy depends on the resources of the land, the metaphors of worth that are common to the area pay homage to ranching or gold mining, the county's principal industries aside from gambling. Teachers, a county administrator once commented, are gold. Of course, gold is a nonrenewable natural resource extracted by leaching out the microscopic flecks of precious metal and leaving the landscape heaped with rubble and scarred by excavation.

What emerged from the Southside teachers' reflection on their experience in self-directed professional development was a stronger sense of themselves as a resource—not a commodity to be extracted for its utility or marketplace value (a model increasingly pervasive in evaluating teachers and students and schools). One of the Southside staff drove the point home: "Teachers," she said, "are a finite resource." The consensus was that too often teachers are seen as an infinite resource with infinite time, infinite energy, and infinite stamina; infinitely marketable and malleable and, like gold, capable of being stretched wire thin and rolled foil flat without breaking or losing their strength or resiliency.

More often than not, change and reform are imposed on teachers from the top down; teachers are squeezed from above by forces that never feel the pressure they exert. When Nancy Remington showed up at Southside School in 1997, she brought with her, besides the Project Outreach grant money that bought release time for teachers, an abiding faith in teachers themselves, and in their ability to shape curriculum and implement meaningful change for the benefit of their students. On one level, the Southside Elementary Writing Focus might be seen as two weeks dedicated to writing, a shared rubric for assessment, and a system of record keeping that uses folders that are passed from grade to grade. It's easy to imagine a similar program being initiated by a school principal or imposed by a school board. Similarly, the Writing Focus document and the student folder seem fairly unremarkable: each borrows heavily from other models and incorporates ideas that are extant in teaching writing. On another level, the Southside Elementary Writing Focus could be explained by serendipitous fortuity, like the tales of old prospectors stumbling onto the mother lode. The Project Outreach grant monies, Nancy Remington's interest in teaching, her position in the community, and a cooperative school administration were all necessary for Southside School's writing program to succeed. But without the Southside teachers themselves, the fortuitous combination of grant money, Nancy's interest and initiative, and the school district's administrative support would have been futile.

At Southside, the benefits of the school's Writing Focus have not been readily measurable by standardized tests or state assessments. Qualitatively, however, the benefits are compelling. A whole school holds writing as a centerpiece of its curriculum, a curriculum with the indelible stamp of teacher ownership and the flexibility and vitality that such ownership confers. Southside's Writing Focus persists in the face of changes in school administration, fluctuations in staff, and the insistent demands in education to realign, reconstitute, and reform. The paradigm shift in professional development that began at Southside in 1997 is not an instance of alchemy—turning base metals into gold. Like most teachers, the Southside teachers already are gold. By treating them as a treasure rather than a commodity, Nancy Remington simply allowed them to shine.

## REFERENCES

Bissex, G. 1988. "Learning from Teaching." *Language Arts* 65 (8).

APPENDIX A: WRITING FOLDER

(Front)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Southside  
Elementary



CUMULATIVE WRITING SAMPLES

(Back)

Writing Traits	K		1st		2nd		3rd		4th		5th		6th	
F - FALL	S - SPRING		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
<b>Ideas -</b>														
1 - Just beginning to figure out what the author wants to say. Not much information.														
3 - Some really good parts, some not there yet. Some general details, topic too big, sometimes fuzzy.														
5 - Writing is clear, focused and specific. Showing not telling, manageable topic, point of paper clear.														
<b>Organization -</b>														
1 - The order is jumbled and confused. No real beginning or ending, random.														
3 - Some really smooth parts, other need work. Details need work. Details need to be relevant, lose focus.														
5 - Order works well, keeps reader's interest. Details add to main idea, leaves reader wanting.														
<b>Voice -</b>														
1 - General statements, all telling no showing. No real personality, correct but lifeless.														
3 - Nice, but no strong feelings shown. Personality revealed occasionally.														
5 - Powerful, lots of personality, awareness of audience.														
<b>Conventions -</b>														
1 - Editing not under control. Spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraphs, not under control. Little or no editing.														
3 - Still has errors which need to be cleaned up but moving toward correct grammar, punctuation, etc.														
5 - Mostly correct, very few errors, could be easily cleaned up to publish.														

(Inside Left)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>1st Grade</b> Writing Sample Sentences With Illustration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three sentences</li> <li>• Capital Letters (beginning of sentences)</li> <li>• Appropriate ending punctuation</li> <li>• Spelling appropriate with age</li> <li>• Picture/Story Correspondence</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2nd Grade</b> Writing Sample Story with Illustration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Story Format – beginning, middle, end</li> <li>• Logical Sequence</li> <li>• Complete Sentences</li> <li>• Spelling, Capitalization and Punctuation appropriate to grade level</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>3rd Grade</b> Writing Sample Autobiographical Sketch/Incident</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collection of Paragraphs</li> <li>• Specific Focus</li> <li>• First Person</li> <li>• Spelling, Capitalization and punctuation appropriate to grade level</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>4th Grade</b> Writing Sample Friendly Letter &amp; Envelope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organized Paragraphs</li> <li>• Structurally Correct</li> <li>• Consistent Point of View</li> <li>• Spelling, Capitalization and Punctuation appropriate to grade level</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>5th Grade</b> Writing Sample Eyewitness Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple Paragraphs</li> <li>• Descriptive Language</li> <li>• Factual Information</li> <li>• Spelling, Capitalization and Punctuation appropriate to grade level</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>6th Grade</b> Writing Sample Persuasive Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly stated and developed idea</li> <li>• Logical and convincing organization and reasoning</li> <li>• Expresses clear cut conclusion</li> <li>• Spelling, Capitalization and punctuation appropriate to grade level</li> </ul>

**I. IDEAS & CONTENT**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Just beginning to figure out what the author wants to say.</li> <li>• Not much information</li> <li>• Details vague.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some really good parts</li> <li>• Some not there yet</li> <li>• Some general details</li> <li>• Topic too big</li> <li>• Sometimes fuzzy</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing is clear, focused and specific</li> <li>• Showing not telling</li> <li>• Manageable topic</li> <li>• Point of paper clear</li> </ul>

**II. ORGANIZATION**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The order is jumbled and confused</li> <li>• No real beginning or ending</li> <li>• Rambles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some really smooth parts, others need work</li> <li>• Details need to be reordered</li> <li>• Loses focus</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Order works well, keeps reader's interest</li> <li>• Details add to main idea</li> <li>• Leaves reader thinking</li> </ul>

**RITEFOLDERS**  
Project Folder - Series 6017 - Model 6 188  
**140306-1**

(Inside Right)

K-2 SCORING GUIDE											
<p><b>VOICE</b></p> <p><b>1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drawing/text is lifeless.</li> <li>• Reveals voice through dictation.</li> </ul> <p><b>3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drawing/text together begin to reveal personality.</li> <li>• Uses creative devices to emphasize voice.</li> <li>• Beginning audience awareness.</li> </ul> <p><b>5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drawing/text engage together to show distinct personality</li> <li>• Speaks to reader.</li> <li>• Audience awareness.</li> </ul>	<p><b>IDEAS &amp; CONTENT</b></p> <p><b>1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses pictures/scribbles to express ideas.</li> <li>• Dictates story or label for picture.</li> <li>• Writes random "letters".</li> <li>• Readers need help interpreting writers, pictures or text.</li> </ul> <p><b>3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picture/text support each other for meaning.</li> <li>• Meaning is clear/lacking details.</li> </ul> <p><b>5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text carries more meaning than picture.</li> <li>• Clear/focused topic.</li> <li>• Elaborate and gives good detail.</li> </ul>										
<p><b>ORGANIZATION</b></p> <p><b>1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Random marks on page.</li> <li>• Confusing.</li> <li>• No beginning or end.</li> </ul> <p><b>3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhibits some sense of sequential order.</li> <li>• Clear sense of balance between text and picture.</li> <li>• Possible beginning or end.</li> </ul> <p><b>5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of transitional words or phrases.</li> <li>• Definite beginning and end.</li> <li>• Work is visually appealing.</li> <li>• A "complete" text.</li> </ul>	<p><b>CONVENTIONS</b></p> <p><b>1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiments with print.</li> <li>• Exhibits prephonetic and/or phonetic writing.</li> </ul> <p><b>3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiments with upper/lower case.</li> <li>• Experiments with different forms of punctuation.</li> <li>• Phonetic spelling is more accurate.</li> <li>• May show knowledge of the printed page.</li> </ul> <p><b>5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moving towards correct usage of punctuation.</li> <li>• Shows consistent knowledge of the printed page.</li> <li>• Correct usage of upper/lower case.</li> <li>• Conventionally correct spelling.</li> <li>• May use paragraphs, titles, margins, etc.</li> </ul>										
<p><b>III. VOICE</b></p> <table border="0"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: center;">1</th> <th style="text-align: center;">2</th> <th style="text-align: center;">3</th> <th style="text-align: center;">4</th> <th style="text-align: center;">5</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General statements</li> <li>• All telling, no showing</li> <li>• No real personality</li> <li>• Correct but lifeless</li> </ul> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nice, but not real strong feeling shown</li> <li>• Personality revealed occasionally</li> </ul> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Powerful</li> <li>• Lots of personality</li> <li>• Awareness of audience</li> </ul> </td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		1	2	3	4	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General statements</li> <li>• All telling, no showing</li> <li>• No real personality</li> <li>• Correct but lifeless</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nice, but not real strong feeling shown</li> <li>• Personality revealed occasionally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Powerful</li> <li>• Lots of personality</li> <li>• Awareness of audience</li> </ul>		
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## APPENDIX B: SOUTHSIDE ELEMENTARY WRITING FOCUS

**Southside  
Elementary  
Writing Focus**



This writing guide has been designed to be in agreement with the Elko County Writing Curriculum and Nevada State Standards. It is not intended to address teaching strategies or stifle creativity. Rather, it is a compass to maintain direction and attain goals. It is imperative that each teacher concentrate on his/her instruction on grade-level objectives to ensure continuity in writing development.

Although grammar, spelling, and penmanship (all covered in standard 7.0) are not specifically addressed in this guide, as an integral part of language they should be taught in conjunction with writing. Also, the development of oral language is considered paramount and should be used in tandem throughout writing activities and integrated into all subject areas.

This companion is aligned to standards but assumes that teachers will also use and follow the district-adopted writing curriculum. These documents require that teachers use the writing process and teach writing traits in all grade levels. These processes have been outlined below as well as in the curriculum guide.

### **Writing Process**

*Prewrite*

*Rough Draft*

*Revise*

*Edit*

*Publish*

### **Writing Traits**

*Ideas and Content*

*Organization*

*Voice*

*Conventions*

## Grade 1

### MASTER

### REINFORCE

- Picture/story correspondence (5.1.3, 6.1.2)
- Oral skills—grade level suggestions (7.1.3, 6.1.7)
- Oral noun/verb agreement (7.1.1)
- Directionality—left to right, top to bottom, spacing (7.1.6)

### INTRODUCE

- Sentence recognition (7.1.2)
  - Complete idea (7.1.1, 7.1.3)
  - Punctuation ( ! ? . capitals) (7.1.3)
  - Months, days of the week, beginning of sentence (7.1.4)
- Graphic organizer (6.1.1, 6.1.2)
  - Brainstorm, lists, ideas, webs, story maps
- Oral summaries (6.1.7, 6.1.2)
- Friendly letter writing and addressing envelopes (5.1.2, 6.1.6)
- Poetry
- Journals—response to literature (5.1.4)
- Writing process (6.0, 6.1.1, 6.1.2, 6.1.3, 6.1.4, 6.1.5, 6.1.6, 6.1.7)
- Comma—date, city, state
- Story format
  - Beginning, middle, end (5.1.3, 6.1.3)
  - Informative paper (5.1.1)

*First Grade Writing Sample  
Sentences with Illustration*

*Three sentences*

*Capital letters (beginning of sentences)*

*Appropriate ending punctuation*

*Spelling appropriate with age*

*Picture/story correspondence*

## Grade 2

### MASTER

- Oral noun/verb agreement (6.2.1)
- Picture/sentence correspondence (6.2.1)

### REINFORCE

- Oral skills—grade level suggestions (6.2.6)
- Sentence structure (7.2.2)
  - Complete idea noun/verb (7.2.1, 7.2.2)
  - Punctuation (! ? . capitals) (7.2.3)
- Graphic organizer (6.2.1, 6.2.2)
  - Brainstorm, lists, ideas, webs, story maps
- Friendly letter writing and addressing envelopes (5.2.2)
  - Greeting and closure (7.2.3)
  - Identify audience
- Journals—respond to literature (5.1.4)
- Writing process (6.2.1, 6.2.2, 6.2.3, 6.2.4, 6.2.5, 6.2.6, 6.2.7)
- Comma—date, city, state (6.2.3)

### INTRODUCE

- Oral summaries (6.2.1)
- Story format
  - Beginning, middle, end (5.2.3, 6.2.3)
  - Informative paper (5.1.1)
- Fact/opinion (5.2.1)
- Informative paper—two sources (5.2.1)
- Editing symbols (6.2.5)
- Writing using a main idea (6.2.4)
- Autobiography (6.2.3)
- Poetry—respond to literature (5.2.4)

*Second Grade Writing Sample  
Story with Illustration*

*Story format – beginning, middle, end*

*Logical sequence*

*Complete sentences*

*Spelling, capitalization, punctuation  
appropriate to grade level*

## Grade 3

### MASTER

- Sentences—subject, verb . ? ! (7.3.1)
- Comma—date, city, state (7.3.3)

### REINFORCE

- Oral skills—grade level suggestions (6.3.7)
- Sentence structure (7.0)
  - Complete idea, subject/verb, verb tenses (7.3.1)
  - Punctuation ( ! ? . )
  - Capitalization (7.3.4)
- Editing symbols (6.2.5)
- Graphic organizer (6.3.1, 6.3.2)
  - Brainstorm, lists, ideas, webs, story maps
- Friendly letter writing and addressing envelopes (5.3.2)
- Poetry
- Journals—respond to literature (5.3.4)
- Writing process (6.3.1, 6.3.2, 6.3.3, 6.3.4, 6.3.5, 6.3.6, 6.3.7)
- Story format (5.3.3)
  - Logical sequence
- Comma—date, city, state (6.2.3)

### INTRODUCE

- Biography or autobiography (5.3.5)
- Point of view—first person
- Informative paper—3 sources (5.3.1)
- Simple bibliography
- Venn diagrams (6.3.2, 6.3.1)
- Writing conversations (7.3.3)
- Note taking
- Written summaries (5.3.4, 5.3.5)
- Similes
- Analogies
- Newspaper, fact/opinion (expository writing)

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**Grade 3 (continued)**

- Comma—series, compound sentence, direct address
- Paragraph (6.3.3)
- Types of sentences
  - Declarative
  - Exclamatory
  - Interrogative
  - Imperative
- Story details and development (5.3.3)
- Use of rubrics as a review tool (6.3.4)
- Introduce editing symbols for paragraphs (6.3.5)
- Capitalization of titles (7.3.3, 7.3.4)
- Letter writing and addressing envelopes (5.3.2)
  - Formal letter, thank-you, invitation

*Third Grade Writing Sample  
Autobiographical Sketch/Incident*

*Collection of paragraphs  
Specific focus  
First person*

*Spelling, capitalization, punctuation  
appropriate to grade level*

## Grade 4

### MASTER

- Commas in a series
- Time order words
- Editing symbols

### REINFORCE

- Sentence structure
  - Subject/verb agreement, verb tenses
  - Simple, compound, and complex sentences (7.4.2)
  - Punctuation ( ! ? . ) (7.4.3)
  - Capitalization of titles, names, and initials (7.4.4)
  - Four types of sentences
- Graphic organizer (6.4.1, 6.4.2)
  - Brainstorm, lists, ideas, webs, story maps
  - Venn diagrams
  - Note taking/paraphrasing
- Friendly letter writing and addressing envelopes (5.4.2)
- Commas
  - Compound sentences
  - Direct address
- Editing symbols
- Simple bibliography
- Expository writing (5.4.6)
- Written summaries (5.4.4, 5.4.5)
- Informative paper with a variety of sources (5.4.1, 5.4.6)
- Newspaper writing “expository writing” (5.4.6)
- Poetry
- Journals (5.4.4)
- Biography or autobiography (5.4.6)
- Similes
- Analogies

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### Grade 4 (continued)

- Writing process (6.3.1, 6.3.2, 6.3.3, 6.3.4, 6.3.5, 6.3.6, 6.3.7)
- Writing conversations (7.4.3)
- Use of rubrics as a review tool
- Formal letter, thank-you, invitation (5.4.2)
- Writing three parts of a paragraph (5.4.4, 5.4.5, 6.4.3)
  - Topic sentence, detail sentences, and concluding sentence(s)
- Story development (5.4.3)
  - Logical sequence of details
  - Characters and setting development
  - Significance of event

### INTRODUCE

- Point of view—first person/third person
- Comma—appositives
- Compare/contrast
- Graphic organizer
  - Outlining
- Figurative language
  - Metaphors
  - Personification
  - Onomatopoeia
  - Alliteration

*Fourth Grade Writing Sample  
Friendly Letter and Envelope*

*Organized paragraphs  
Structurally correct  
Consistent point of view  
Spelling, capitalization,  
punctuation appropriate  
to grade level*

## Grade 5

### MASTER

- Friendly letter writing and addressing envelopes (5.5.2)
- First-person point of view
- Commas
  - Compound sentences
  - Direct address

### REINFORCE

- Analogy
- Sentence structure
  - Subject/verb agreement, verb tenses
  - Simple, compound, complex sentences (7.4.2)
  - Punctuation ( ! ? . ) (7.4.3)
  - Capitalization of titles, names, and initials (7.4.4)
  - Four types of sentences
- Graphic organizer (6.5.1, 6.5.2)
  - Brainstorm, lists, ideas, webs, story maps
  - Venn diagrams
  - Note taking/paraphrasing
- Newspaper writing “expository writing” (5.5.6)
- Compare/contrast
- Editing symbols
- Simple bibliography
- Expository writing (5.5.6)
- Written summaries (5.5.4, 5.5.5)
- Informative papers (5.5.1, 5.5.6)
- Poetry
- Journals (5.5.4)
- Biography or autobiography (5.5.5)
- Comma—appositives
- Point of view—third person

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## Grade 5 (continued)

- Figurative language
  - Metaphors
  - Personification
  - Onomatopoeia
  - Alliteration
  - Similes
  - Hyperbole
- Analogies
- Writing process (6.5.1, 6.5.2, 6.5.3, 6.5.4, 6.5.5, 6.5.6, 6.5.7)
- Writing conversations (7.5.3)
- Use of rubrics as a review tool
- Formal letter, thank-you, invitation (5.4.2)
- Writing three parts of a paragraph (5.5.5, 6.5.3)
  - Topic sentence, detail sentences, and concluding sentence(s)
- Story development (5.5.3)
  - Logical sequence of details
  - Characters and setting development
  - Significance of event

### INTRODUCE

- Formal letter—"business" (5.5.2)
- Multiple paragraphs on one topic—"persuasive" (5.5.6)
- Persuasive writing (5.5.6, 5.5.3)
- Graphic organizer
  - Outlining

*Fifth Grade Writing Sample  
Eyewitness Description*

*Multiple paragraphs*

*Descriptive language*

*Factual information*

*Spelling, capitalization, punctuation  
appropriate to grade level*

## Grade 6

### MASTER

- Writing conversation
- Newspaper articles (5.6.5)
- Business letter (7.6.3)
- Third-person point of view
- Formal letter, thank-you, invitation
- Figurative language
  - Alliteration

### REINFORCE

- Sentence structure
  - Subject/verb agreement, verb tenses
  - Simple, compound and complex sentences (7.6.2)
  - Punctuation ( ! ? . ) (7.6.3)
  - Capitalization of titles, names, initials (7.6.4)
  - Four types of sentences
- Graphic organizer (6.6.1, 6.6.2)
  - Brainstorm, lists, ideas, webs, story maps
  - Venn diagrams
  - Note taking/paraphrasing
  - Outlining
- Compare/contrast
- Editing symbols
- Formal letter—"business"
- Multiple paragraphs on one topic—"persuasive" (5.6.6)
- Written summaries (5.6.2, 5.6.5)
  - Lists, memos
- Informative papers (5.6.1, 5.6.4)
- Poetry (5.6.5)
- Journals (5.6.4)
- Biography or autobiography
- Comma—appositives

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## Grade 6 (continued)

- Figurative language
  - Metaphors vs. similes
  - Personification
  - Onomatopoeia
  - Alliteration
  - Hyperbole
- Analogies
- Writing process (6.6.1, 6.6.2, 6.6.3, 6.6.4, 6.6.5, 6.6.6, 6.6.7)
- Use of rubrics as a review tool
- Persuasive writing (5.6.6, 6.6.3)
- Writing three parts of a paragraph (5.5.5, 6.5.3)
  - Topic sentence
  - Detail sentences
  - Concluding sentence(s)
- Story development (5.5.3)
  - Logical sequence of details
  - Characters and setting development
  - Significance of event
  - Appropriate transitional words

### INTRODUCE

- Alternative sequencing methods
- Formal bibliography
- Commas—introductory phrase/clause

*Sixth Grade Writing Sample  
Persuasive Writing*

*Clearly stated and developed idea  
Logical and convincing organization  
and reasoning  
Expresses clear conclusion  
Spelling, capitalization, punctuation  
appropriate to grade level*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Robert McGinty** is the director of the Great Basin Writing Project and currently works in professional development with five counties in northeastern Nevada, where his focus with teachers is on effective strategies for teaching reading and writing across the curriculum. Prior to his work in professional development, Robert taught high school English in Elko, Nevada, for twenty-five years. Professionally and personally, he is interested in—and sometimes troubled by—the impact high-stakes testing is having on writing instruction.

**Nancy Remington's** thirty-year teaching experience in Nevada spans the spectrum of preschool through graduate school. As lead faculty for the bachelor of arts degree in elementary education, she designed and implemented this degree program at Great Basin College. Particularly passionate about effective professional development for teachers and administrators, she is currently director of the Northeastern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program and is the founding director of the Great Basin Writing Project, Nevada. Nancy continues her work with the National Writing Project by serving on the leadership teams for the New-Teacher Initiative and the NWP Directors Retreat.







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