

Reading and Writing Workshop Enhances Florham Park's English Language Arts Curriculum

What is a workshop?

A workshop is a structure of teaching in which an educator delivers a targeted skill in the form of a teaching point, and also provides a step-by-step demonstration of how to perform the skill. Then, with teacher guidance, students practice the skill with each other, and as the teacher monitors student performance, completes a quick whole class assessment of the skill. Finally, students work independently at their appropriate level, while the educator differentiates instruction to meet student needs with individual (one to one) and small group conferences, including strategy groups.

Workshop in Florham Park

A Reading/Writing Workshop is one component of a balanced literacy program. Other components include: guided reading, small group instruction, word study, read a loud with accountable talk, interactive/shared writing, and shared reading. Reading and Writing Workshops are “structures” that are a part of a Balanced Literacy Program. You can find Reading Workshop in action in our K-5 classrooms, and Writing Workshop in action in our 6-8 classes. During the 2017-18 school year Reading and Writing Workshop will be fully implemented in all K-8 classrooms.

A Snapshot of Workshop in Action

A typical workshop class begins with a 10-15 minute mini-lesson in which a teacher delivers and models a direct teaching point, and coaches students as they practice with peers. After 10 minutes of whole group instruction, students begin to work independently on their individual writing piece, or by reading a just right text. As students work independently, teachers utilize various forms of data taken from word study assessments, running records, and ongoing performance in reading and writing notebooks) to plan and implement conferences and strategy groups. Through the constant analysis of whole class and student data, instructional support is consistently being delivered and transferred across the day.



A typical Reading Workshop classroom library where students can shop for books at their interest and “Just Right Level.” The Florham Park School District is grateful to the PTA for their partnership in helping us build our classroom libraries!

Why does Florham Park believe in workshop?

We learn 80% of what we experience & 95% of what we teach someone else!

-William Glasser

The Florham Park Public School District believes in the opportunity for students to spend the majority of their time engaged in the practice of applying skills. The greatest acquisition of skills comes when students are given the opportunity to reflect upon their learning, talk with peers, receive support, and apply their learning and understanding of skills throughout the day.

Through the workshop model, students maximize their time actively engaged in the practice of reading and writing. After direct and explicit instruction of a skill during a mini-lesson, the students then have the opportunity to practice independently, in partnerships, or in small groups. Instruction is differentiated for the needs of each student in a variety of ways. One way teachers differentiate instruction is to ensure that students read texts that are “just right” a majority of the time when reading independently. This means that students are reading texts in which they can decode 96% of the words, with strong comprehension. Instruction in writing is differentiated is by having students write texts on topics of personal interest or experience. Additionally, teachers differentiate in both reading and writing workshop by providing one to one instruction, small group instruction, and by layering in other Balanced Literacy components such as: guided reading, interactive writing, and shared reading and writing. As a result of the teaching and learning being done in a workshop classroom, students become more invested in their work and independently take charge of their learning as they set individual goals, and move along the continuum of grade level skills.

The Transformation of Teacher, Learner, and Instructional Coach

There's an old saying, usually attributed to Confucius, "Give a man a fish, and you'll feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you've fed him for a lifetime." A workshop model shifts the role of a teacher from the giver of fish, (fish=knowledge), to that of a coach who leads students to learning through self-discovery. Thus, teaching students how to problem solve, set goals, transfer skills, and take charge of their own learning!

In order to move students forward, classroom teachers are required to have an extremely in depth knowledge base of each student, and their needs as learners. In addition, teachers must also utilize a wide repertoire of literacy skills to guide a range of learners through the progression of grade level skills. When both these conditions are met, great gains in student achievement can be expected.

Teachers are continuously developing new strategies to meet learners' needs. In order for educators to keep up with the needs of every student in a class, and the consistent changes of best practices in the world of education, literacy coaches bridge the gap. According to Marzano, the number one effect on student achievement is the quality of the teacher in the classroom, therefore, coaches devote their time towards modeling lessons, planning units, analyzing data, planning interventions for students' needs, and teaching educators each step of the way. Thus, constantly growing the teachers' repertoire of skills and increasing their effectiveness for every student who enters a teacher's classroom for years to come.

Additional instructional support comes in the form of K-8 Teachers College Reading and Writing Project Consultants from Columbia University who provide professional development for teachers and administrators on an on-going basis. This training along with the support provided by our district coaches ensures that all teachers are exposed to new learning, and implement best practices in their classrooms.

