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March Academies
Canceled

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ACT

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Math CAMP

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Friday Focus

CARTER COUNTY SCHOOLS

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The Power of Writing

Kentucky students in grades 5, 6, 8, and 10 are assessed in On Demand Writing. According to KDE, "The On-Demand Writing Assessment gives students an opportunity to demonstrate independently the communication skills they have developed from effective and thoughtful writing instruction." In Carter County, we have adopted a District Writing Plan, developed by teachers, in order to help us ensure that our students are receiving the kind of effective and thoughtful writing instruction that will make them successful writers. One of the most valuable communication tools we have is the ability to write well. As teachers, we owe it to our students to help them become proficient writers.

The Carter County District Writing Plan is scaffolded so that beginning in first grade students should be able to write a 1.4 paragraph at the completion of the school year. This is a four-sentence

paragraph with a topic sentence supported by one detail. Moving on to second grade, these students have the target of writing a 2.6 paragraph by the end of their school year—a six-sentence paragraph with two supporting details and examples. The progression of paragraph and essay structures continues throughout elementary school until fifth graders are writing 3.8 essays. (Each structure is carefully outlined in the District Writing Plan.) This essay structure will follow them through middle and high school where it can be more fully developed. By giving the students a structure that can be built upon each year, it is the district's hope that students will start to gain writing experience and take ownership of organizational patterns that will follow them even into their college and adult writing careers.

On demand writing is not the only required writing in Kentucky's testing system. Constructed response questions also demand that students write. It is imperative that students learn to be clear and precise when an-

swering short answer and extended response questions. They must remember to cite evidence from the text when possible. They should always answer all parts of the question and be sure to do what the question is asking—the power verbs tell them what to do. Drawing models and showing work is important in mathematics. Labeling tables, graphs, and charts is vital. Effective communication, correct answers, and a student's ability to demonstrate complete understanding will impact how they score. According to the KPREP scoring guide, students will only get a four if their answers demonstrate insight and in-depth understanding.

Writing plays a powerful role in the lives of our students as they move through Kentucky classrooms. However, we should not view writing as merely "teaching to the test." In the grand scheme of life, being an effective communicator is crucial to getting jobs, expressing one's imagination, and becoming a well-rounded member of society. Therefore, as difficult as the task may be, let us embrace it as something we can and must do to help our children succeed in our classrooms and beyond.

The Challenge of Content Area Writing

Students can write for a variety of purposes and for a variety of audiences. Keeping these things in mind will help teachers of all subjects make plans for incorporating writing into their content areas.

Science students may be writing lab reports or designing experiments. They may be writing responses to questions posed by the teacher or making comparisons between the research of two important scientists. It is vital, however, that students are given the chance to write about science using both informal and formal modes of writing.

The same is true about social studies and mathematics or any content area. Journals, learning logs, and other informal response activities such as exit slips are important for getting students to show what they have learned by writing it down. It is equally important that they are given the chance to do research, question and debate, and even compose narratives about topics related to the content they are studying. These formal kinds of writings will provide them the experience they need to carry their composition skills from the classroom to higher education and beyond.

Writing is not just an isolated event that takes place in the language arts classroom. A successful writing program incorporates many opportunities for practice and refinement in every classroom of the school. In fact, writing can be used as a tool for learning in all disciplines.

Writing's still the
most difficult job
I've ever had - but
it's worth it.

— John Grisham