

## Another of “the Three Rs” — WRITING

Writing, as well as reading, is essential in a literate society. According to Peter Elbow in his book, *Writing First* (2004), “The process of writing helps children comprehend written language and control letters and texts, an understanding that they need when reading.” His statement is based on the discovery that very young children can write *before* they can read, can write *more* than they can read, and can write more *easily* than they can read — because they can write anything they can say” (Dalkins 1982, Graves 1083).

Judy Farris, Abilene Schools Reading Specialist, believes that “writing is the reciprocal of reading” and is a key component in teaching students to read.

Lori Portelli, the coordinator of USD 435’s Parents as Teachers (a research-based birth –to–three program), shared some interesting information that comes from the National PAT office. “Long before a child can pick up a pencil, the stage is set for the development of writing. When your baby uses her index finger and thumb to grasp object it is called the pincer grasp. This skill forms the basis for holding a pencil in a mature writing position.” PAT encourages parents to point out letters in books and other written materials, and suggests they provide preschoolers with materials for scribbling. In a publication designed for the parents of young children, PAT’s national office offers a list of steps children typically follow as they learn to write: 1) Experiments with writing tools by scribbling, 2) Scribbles left to right, 3) Understands the difference between drawing and writing, 4) Makes letter-like forms and perhaps some letters, 5) Write letters all over the page, 5) Strings letters together to represent writing, 6) Groups letters separated by spaces to imitate words, 7) Copies a letter by looking at a model, 8) Writes a first word, usually his name.

Using the core standards, teachers in our school system have identified grade level expectations for writing; these guidelines outline the knowledge and skills that students need to acquire along the pathway to writing proficiency.

For example, just a few of the expectations for students at the ninth grade level include:

- Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
- Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.
- Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic.

According to Vicki Cooper, ninth grade English teacher, “Currently, students are writing a synthesis essay answering the question, ‘What does society gain when students are held to high standards? —active voice, strong verbs, complex sentences, and overall analysis of the five pieces of data covered will be expected.” She added, “Students produce some amazing material. I just wish everyone could see what students are capable of writing.”

The importance of writing can be summed up by a statement offered in a recent report from the National Commission on Writing that says, “If students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with the details, wrestle with the facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else. In short, if students are to learn, they must write.”

Note: A link to the writing and language core standards for all grades levels can be found on our district website @ <http://www.abileneschools.org> -- District Tab/Superintendent Page.