Text from “Writing Next”---2007 *Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2007)*

Suggestions for school district improvement

The report identifies 11 elements of current writing instruction found to be effective in helping adolescent students learn to write well and to use writing as a tool for learning. These elements are supported by rigorous research and are expanded upon by Graham and Perin as follows:

**1. Writing strategies** involve "explicitly teaching adolescents strategies for planning, revising, and/or editing, which has a strong impact on the quality of their writing" (p.15). Graham and Perin also note that Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) is a good approach to teaching writing strategies. Citing De La Paz and Graham (2002) and Harris and Graham (1996), Graham and Perin list the six stages of SRSD, in which students are treated as active collaborators in the learning process, as follows:

* *Develop Background Knowledge*: Students are taught any background knowledge needed to use the strategy successfully.
* *Describe It*: The strategy as well as its purpose and benefits is described and discussed.
* *Model It*: The teacher models how to use the strategy.
* *Memorize It*: The student memorizes the steps of the strategy and any accompanying mnemonic.
* *Support It*: The teacher supports or scaffolds student mastery of the strategy.
* *Independent Use*: Students use the strategy with few or no supports. (p. 15)

**2. Summarization** "involves explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize texts" (p. 4), which may involve either a rule-governed or intuitive approach.

**3. Collaborative writing** "involves developing instructional arrangements whereby adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions" (p. 16). Graham and Perin cite studies showing that student writing quality improves when students are allowed to work together and help each other; they also note that collaboration shows a strong impact on improving the quality of students' writing.

**4. Specific product goals** "involve assigning students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete" (p. 17). This element of the writing process includes the assignment's purpose and the characteristics of the final product, such as writing a persuasive essay. Adding more ideas to an assignment when revising and using specific structural elements are two examples of goal setting, which is better than defining an overall goal for the product.

**5. Word processing** "uses computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing assignments" (p. 4) and "can be particularly helpful for low-achieving writers" (p. 17). Using computers to write can be accomplished under teacher supervision or in collaborative groups of students and can help with spelling errors and legibility.

**6. Sentence combining** "involves teaching students to construct more complex and sophisticated sentences through exercises in which two or more basic sentences are combined into a single sentence" (p. 18). One approach combines low achievers and high achievers in pairs for six lessons that teach combining simple sentences and embedding adjectives, adverbs, clauses, or phrases from one sentence to another.

**7. Prewriting** "engages students by involving them in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their assignment" (p. 4). Activities can involve information gathering or developing a visual representation of their project before they begin to write.

**8. Inquiry activities** require students to analyze concrete information "to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing assignment" (p. 4). "Effective inquiry activities in writing are characterized by a clearly specified goal (e.g., describe the actions of people), analysis of concrete and immediate data (observe one or more peers during specific activities), use [of] specific strategies to conduct the analysis (retrospectively ask the person being observed the reason for a particular action), and applying what was learned (assign the writing of a story incorporating insights from the inquiry process)" (p. 19).

**9. Process writing approach** "interweaves a number of writing instructional activities" (p. 4) that emphasize writing for real readers, self-reflective writing, personalized instruction, and the cycles of writing (planning, translating, and reviewing). The complexity of this approach may require specific professional development so that effectiveness can be optimized.

**10. Study of models** provides students with "good models for each type of writing that is the focus of instruction" (p. 20). In this element of the writing process, it is important to offer students the opportunity to read and analyze different types of writing and emulate these models of good writing in their own work.

**11. Writing for content learning** involves using writing as a tool for learning the subject matter. Although this approach has the least effect on writing quality and only a slight effect on learning content material, research shows it does have a consistent effect on both.