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WriterCoach Connection is Helping More Students



Writing coaches with their students at El Cerrito High School recently.

WriterCoach Connection (WCC) volunteers this semester are beginning to coach ninth graders at Oakland School for the Arts, pairing trained community volunteers to students to coach one-on-one through English writing assignments.

Volunteers began coaching at Berkeley High School 12 years ago, and the program rapidly caught on, expanding to Fremont High School in Oakland's Fruitvale district five years ago. A pilot program at Oakland School for the Arts last spring was so successful that the school asked the coaches to return.

The teaching of writing has long been one the weakest areas of instruction nationally. Last fall, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that only about a quarter of American 8th and 12th graders are proficient in writing, according to NAEP's inaugural computer-based writing assessment test.

When students cannot write well, they lose the ability to communicate in the classroom and complete college applications, and they also lose a valuable form of self-expression. Volunteers from WriterCoach Connection seek to help both middle school and high school students and teachers by supplementing regular classroom teaching with extra support from a caring adult through all stages of the writing process.

“The regular appearance of writer coaches helped my classes complete more than twice as many large writing assignments compared to last year,” said teacher Eric Jepson. WCC’s expansion to Oakland School for the Arts comes on the heels of the expansion last fall to Richmond High School and Portola Middle School in El Cerrito.

The program cannot operate, however, without dedicated volunteers, and more are needed to help coach in Oakland and at the program’s many other locations. All coaches complete a training, after which they help in a classroom four to six weeks in a semester for one to two hours each coaching session.

The time commitment is not demanding, but the connections forged with students are deep, and the dividends for students, teachers, and coaches are immense. Those who are interested in volunteering with WriterCoach Connection or know someone who might be, visit www.writercoachconnection.org] to learn more or to register of an upcoming spring training.

Those interested in coaching in Oakland can contact Camille Graves, Oakland Volunteer Coordinator, by emailing oakwcc@gmail.com or calling (510) 306-1792.