that’s our story for 2012-2013. We’re rockin’ in Richmond (see story at right), burgeoning in Berkeley (serving twice as many students this year at Berkeley High), and filling classrooms with coaches in Oakland, El Cerrito, and Albany. Meantime, the need for writing support never stands still and neither can we: we’re already planning our program for 2013-14.

If you have an inside view of WCC as one of our volunteers – thank you! And if you’re still thinking about it, I encourage you to jump into what many of our coaches describe as the best volunteer experience they’ve ever had.

Meantime, if you’re one of our generous donors, please know that all we do happens because of you, and I speak for a great many people when I express my deep appreciation.

Bob

Robert Menzimer
Executive Director
Community Alliance for Learning

“Juan asked to spend more time with me so he could write out the whole body paragraph…. This is a change from previous sessions when he was not able to focus and couldn’t wait to get out.”

The stories emerging from our Richmond High School classes echo our experiences at other coaching sites throughout the East Bay: students who at first may appear disengaged begin to apply themselves to their assignments, and look to writer coaches for guidance and encouragement.

Since 2010, WCC has generated powerful results in West Contra Costa County, like increased writing proficiency, higher grades and higher assignment turn-in rates, first at El Cerrito High and then at Portola Middle School in El Cerrito. This impact prompted Superintendent Bruce Harter to champion the expansion of WCC to Richmond High in fall 2012.

Volunteer recruiters Shelli Fried and Fernando Ramirez, a former Richmond High student, quickly spread the word about the coaching opportunity throughout the community of Richmond. Soon our volunteer coach roster was filled to capacity. WCC Site Coordinator Karen Larson now leads 76 WCC volunteers as they serve
156 English Language Development (ELD) Level 4 students in five classes. Coaches are meeting with every student in those classes 15 times throughout the 2012-13 school year. Each one-on-one coaching session lasts about 30 minutes.

And there’s more to come: the City of Richmond will use $25,000 of a Cities of Service grant to expand WCC coaching into mainstream classes at Richmond High in 2013-14 – our first opportunity to partner with a municipality. Highly competitive Cities of Service grants are awarded by Bloomberg Philanthropies to cities that propose new and innovative ways to harness the power of volunteers.

Richmond has welcomed its new writer coaches as a positive step in a community that is full of hope, energy, and dedicated community members. In turn, WCC celebrates yet another productive partnership between communities and schools! 📚

### Numbers and Writing: The Math of WCC

Metrics: you can’t escape the word these days. Funding for education is tighter than ever, and administrators need hard data to determine how to allocate scarce discretionary dollars.

Every year, school districts and individual school sites keep WriterCoach Connection on their must-have lists, and 2011-12 was no exception. Administrators, teachers, and parents see that the numbers consistently demonstrate the impact of WCC on student writing achievement.

In the most recent program assessment, El Cerrito High School teachers reported dramatic results in all areas of student engagement, writing skills and reading comprehension. In various classes served by our writer coaches, assignment turn-in rates were up to nearly 100%, average grades rose 10%, students earned 13% more As and Bs, and students who had been getting Ds and Fs earned a full grade higher.

And, since regular coaching meant that far fewer students slipped behind on assignments, one teacher was able to assign twice as many major writing assignments throughout the year.

At Fremont High in Oakland and at El Cerrito High School, where we work with large numbers of English Language Development (ELD) students, pass rates on the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) have soared among students served by writer coaches. In February 2011, after one semester of WCC coaching, 10th grade students showed striking improvement in the English Language Arts (ELA) section of the exam. The 63% pass rate far exceeded the district pass rate of 37% and the 35% pass rate for El Cerrito High ELD students the previous year, before WriterCoach Connection came to the school.

ECHS Principal David Luongo observes, “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Oakland Unified School District board member Christopher Dobbins put it this way: “WriterCoach Connection has proven to be an invaluable resource for Oakland students, teachers, and the community. Writing proficiency and CAHSEE pass rates are up dramatically among students coached by WCC. Members of the community are flocking to the program as volunteers, clearly attracted by the satisfaction of generating concrete results for the district’s students and teachers.”

The students themselves affirm these results. In 2011-12, 93% of the students with whom we worked pronounced the coaching to be helpful with their writing. Every one of the 38 teachers with whom we worked declared that coaching helped raise their students’ writing skills, rating the mean improvement at 3.3 on a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 indicating the maximum improvement.

In short: data continues to dramatically support the efficacy of WriterCoach Connection. But our proudest moments still come when we read and hear the words of students, one of whom remarked, “Now I feel proud of my writing.”

And here are more of our favorite words, from a WCC donor: “This is how the world gets better.” 📚

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**New!**

### WCC Online Gift Catalog

Need a meaningful gift for the holidays, a birthday, or a special occasion? Visit WCC’s new online gift catalog and choose a gift that represents WCC’s work with students, teachers, and schools!

Choose from:
- The Mighty Pencil
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- The Caring Coach
- The Star Student
- The Flash of Inspiration
- The Student Pack
- The Terrific Teacher
- A Spectacular Semester

At your request, we’ll even deliver a gift card to your recipient.

Visit www.WriterCoachConnection.org

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*At El Cerrito High, coach Leslie Cohen offers the attentive ear that helps inspire increased student writing achievement.*
Writing as Agency

by Cynthia Barnes-Slater
Lowell High School Class of 1970

My first experience with the power of the written word occurred in high school when I wrote a letter to the editor of The Lowell commenting on the school’s security system. That is when I first understood the role of writing in effectively influencing others.

San Francisco’s Lowell High School, the oldest public college prep school west of the Mississippi, is located right next door to San Francisco State University – similar to Berkeley High’s proximity to UC Berkeley. In 1968-69, SF State was the scene of huge student protests. To “protect” impressionable high school students, the Lowell administrators declared that students were not allowed off campus during the school day.

Lowell students were living in exciting times, in San Francisco, and the idea of closing us off from our immediate environment seemed pointless. So I wrote a letter to the editor of The Lowell, our school newspaper. I believed I had the right to speak my mind. My letter was reviewed by the editorial staff, the teacher/sponsor, and published.

The letter started a vigorous debate among students and faculty about free speech at Lowell. Many students congratulated me and agreed that having a closed campus was ineffective. Nevertheless, some teachers cancelled their subscriptions to The Lowell, saying my letter should never have been published as it diminished the authority of the administration. One dean supported me, the other lectured me. My parents read the letter, laughed, and, of course, supported me.

As a young African American teenager in San Francisco in 1968-69, I learned an important lesson from this event: being able to write clearly what you think is powerful and influential. Writing well can move people to act, to speak, and to think. My letter was grammatically correct and succinct. It would have been easy for the powers-that-be to dismiss and discount my thoughts if my letter had been poorly written. It would never have been published. Seeing my letter in print and experiencing the reactions it caused was a lesson I never forgot.

As a WCC coach, I want to help other teenagers find and honor their voices, to be able to understand the power inherent in the structure of writing in the English language. I want to be a WCC coach who supports their efforts to share in their own words their experience and perceptions about what they read and experience every day.

Visit www.WriterCoachConnection.org

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Visit our Donate page to view our Gift Catalog and learn about making WCC part of your workplace giving or estate planning. A bequest to WCC may offer substantial tax advantages.

The WCC Wishlist
Visit our Contact Us page if you would like to contribute your photography, videography, or graphic design skills. We also need community space for training sessions and meetings.
A Coach Takes to the Teacher Track

by Chris Lopez-Ceparo

Chris Lopez-Ceparo has been a writer coach since 2008 at King Middle School in Berkeley, Albany Middle School, and other sites. In 2011, Chris began a one-year teaching certification program at Cal State East Bay. Upon graduation, he hopes to teach English/social studies full-time.

Shortly after college, I volunteered with adult ESL learners, helping them to become fluent. When I moved back to Berkeley, friends suggested that I volunteer with WriterCoach Connection.

From the start, WCC blew me away. The training was terrific, but more importantly, it focused less on telling students right from wrong and far more on developing an audience/reader relationship with the students and developing their abilities, voice, and confidence.

Academic self-worth is something that’s still forming in 8th grade — something as simple as a one-page paper can overwhelm a student. That’s where coaches come in.

First, we validate their efforts: it’s okay to have a terrible first draft! Writing is a struggle for the F. Scott Fitzgeralds of the world. Writing is a struggle for almost everyone. I think students are truly relieved to hear that. We help them overcome the frustration that comes from being overwhelmed and not knowing what to do next or not knowing how to improve their work. We help them find the path forward with their writing. That may not sound revolutionary, but little course corrections have a very powerful impact.

During the coaching session, we’re giving students a skill set. We’re teaching them to think about writing: to think about audience, to ask questions of their own, and to give them a sense of writing as a fulfilling process rather than as something they “have to do.” And finally, we reinforce positive thinking about their writing to help them strengthen their sense of academic self-worth. At the end of the year, I want every student thinking, I am someone who gets As and Bs.

I was a coach for four years. In 2011, I began an accelerated, one-year teaching certification program at Cal State East Bay. I’m lucky to have a lot of kids who are inquisitive in the questions surrounding a text, but unfortunately, many students I meet don’t have a strong sense of academic self-worth. Some of them who could be earning As and Bs just haven’t set that expectation for themselves — yet. I’m working to change that for every student I can.

“WriterCoach Connection works. Student writing achievement goes up, teachers get much-needed relief with the extra individual attention to students, community members bond with their schools as they walk the hallways with their students and sit with them to help develop more effective writing and deeper critical thinking. Everyone wins, and we need more of it.”

Bruce Harter, Superintendent,
West Contra Costa Unified School District

El Cerrito High School student Kenyatta Marcellus shares his feelings about the written word and our writer coaches.