

Writing skills, confidence, and state assessment scores rise for students of all abilities in California K–8 elementary school

Voyager Sopris Learning's *Step Up to Writing* shines at Camino Union Elementary School

THE CHALLENGE

Transforming reluctant writers into inspired writers at every grade level

Administrators at Camino Union Elementary School District (CUSD) had long been concerned about the large number of children entering their elementary school writing below grade level and a history of poor state assessment test scores.

Of the 460 children attending CUSD, located in the Apple Hill agricultural area in El Dorado County east



Third graders at Camino Union Elementary School show off their *Step Up to Writing* skills with a presentation and a song in a special video. Watch the video here: <https://bit.ly/2x8AXTW>

of Placerville, Calif., 59 percent are socioeconomically disadvantaged, nearly 24 percent are English Language Learners, and a significant number lack proficiency in writing. To meet the needs of all their students—including at-risk students, ELLs, and gifted and talented students—school administrators wanted to find a research-based solution that had a track record of transforming students' writing skills and that could be easily implemented at every level of instruction.

THE SOLUTION

Nurturing students throughout their school experience

Ten years ago, after research and exploration, CUSD leaders selected Voyager Sopris Learning's *Step Up to Writing*®, an unparalleled writing solution designed for learners of all levels and types. Since then, the program has consistently helped Camino Union K–8 students not only reach grade level but become proficient, motivated, high school-ready writers.

Superintendent/Principal Matt Smith has been impressed with the results. “*Step Up to Writing* has really helped our students learn to be comfortable in breaking down the questions they’re asked so they can write clear and concise copy that gets to the point quickly and efficiently. It also helps them with their persuasive essays in English and other subjects, too, such as history and science.”

“I have witnessed students with little to no writing skills transform into confident, organized writers by eighth grade.”

**—Dione Stinnett,
Seventh-grade English teacher**

The results are apparent not only in students’ day-to-work, but also on state assessment tests where students at all grade levels are now demonstrating their understanding with each type of writing—informative/explanatory, opinion/argument, and narrative. After working with *Step Up to Writing* in the classroom, students can successfully read text on the same topic from different sources, answer multiple-choice comprehension questions, and write a short essay based on a prompt.

Dione Stinnett, seventh-grade English teacher, has seen the power of the program year after year. “I have



witnessed students with little to no writing skills transform into confident, organized writers by eighth grade,” she said. “The best part is: they can take the tools learned from *Step Up* and use them in high school and college.”

Stinnett explained that many students entered her class not able to answer a prompt which provides the writing task. Once they understood the writing task, students still struggled with how to organize their thoughts and then with grammar issues, such as sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

“The program helps writers of ALL writing abilities,” Stinnett added. “It’s for the struggling writers and the sophisticated writers. It helps students across the curriculum, providing students a tool to accomplish all writing tasks in every subject. How can you go wrong?”

Another aspect of *Step Up to Writing* teachers appreciate is that it sequences nicely as students move through each grade level, eliminating the need to recreate the wheel each year.

“I love *Step Up to Writing*,” third-grade teacher Emily Walker said. Her classes do 40 minutes of writing each day and break up the trimesters, with opinion writing covered in the first trimester, informational writing in the second, and narrative writing in the third. “*Step Up to Writing* has really helped me as a teacher,” Walker said. “It gives me a structure to teach from, and I feel much more confident and have a clear focus.”

THE RESULTS

Building confidence and proficiency, achieving higher scores on high-stakes assessments

After 10 years of use at CUSD, administrators and teachers are sold on the power of *Step Up to Writing* in transforming the writing experience for students at all ages and levels.

Smith said students who start the program writing at well below grade level not only reach grade level but become confident, proficient writers. And students at all levels are more successful on state assessment tests. According to the most recent California School Dashboard results, Camino Union received the highest performance level (blue) for English Language Arts, and its 2018 results were significantly higher than the state level.



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—Emily Walker,
Third-grade teacher

Beyond dramatically improved Dashboard progress, Stinnett says she especially appreciates how *Step Up to Writing* has helped students build confidence.

“Using *Step Up to Writing*, I have seen kids become less intimidated when they set out to write an essay or paragraph, and I have seen students less worried or stressed about having to answer writing prompts since the program’s strategies help them organize their thoughts,” Stinnett explained.

“Writing is subjective, and many students are uncomfortable with this. *Step Up to Writing* gives a little more structure and a writing formula for essays and paragraphs that they feel comfortable using, but still allows creativity,” she added. “In addition, students can use these writing strategies in other classes such as history and science. When students have an easy tool to quickly organize thoughts, they are far more likely to complete assignments and feel more successful in school in every class.”



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