

## ELA: Writer's Workshop FAQ

June 2023

**What is the shift in practice?** We are shifting our middle grades ELA/ELA Advanced classes to a new course named *ELA: Writer's Workshop*. This course will utilize curriculum units and resources from the Teachers College Units of Study, as well as locally designed resources. Please note that advanced ELA has not been eliminated, but it may look different in a workshop model. The phase in started in the 2022-2023 school year in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, will continue in 2023-2024 in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and will be complete in 2024-2025 in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. During the shift, we will gather feedback, examine student work, and review relevant data to monitor progress and make necessary revisions.

**How did we make this decision?** In 2019, a WP Writing Review Committee composed of teachers, administrators, instructional specialists, parents, and other stakeholders began the work of reflecting on our current practices in teaching writing, especially in our ELA courses. The committee explored state standards, curriculum, pertinent data, examples of student work, position papers, and professional readings on best practices. We also conducted surveys and interviews with students, parents, and staff.

The committee's work culminated in a report with a series of recommendations aimed at strengthening our teaching of writing in a way that lives up to our district's mission – “to educate and inspire **all** students, while nurturing their dreams, so they learn continually, think critically, pursue their aspirations and contribute to a diverse and dynamic world.” A key component of these recommendations was to shift our middle school ELA courses to the writing workshop model to bring advanced and extended learning opportunities to all our students.

**Why the workshop model?** This shift addresses multiple committee recommendations, builds on student success in and familiarity with the model in elementary school, is an established best practice, and shifts the focus to teaching the writer, not just the writing product. We are confident that this shift in our practice will support the success, growth, and achievement of **all** our students, as well as expand the opportunities for advanced work in a way that is developmentally appropriate for middle school students.

- The workshop model supports all students through standards aligned skills instruction and differentiation for student-specific learning needs.
- Built into the workshop model are opportunities for collaboration, one-on-one and small group conferencing, independent exploration, and student choice.
- Individual writing goals are identified – extension and acceleration are planned for in the writing progressions.
- The workshop model promotes and benefits from a diverse community of writers, who learn and grow through collaboration and the sharing of ideas and experiences.

**How did we prepare?** In anticipation of the shift in practice, teachers participated in professional learning opportunities, worked with curriculum and teaching materials, participated in multiple professional planning sessions, and received in-class coaching from our instructional specialists. In addition, teachers began implementing components of the workshop model and units in the years prior to the shift. This support is ongoing and will continue through each phase of the implementation.

**What about Critical Literacy?** As was the case before, students who do not require academic support services will be enrolled in Critical Literacy classes in grades 7 and 8. We have maintained additional support for students through Read 180, as well as other interventions.

**How does this impact students' enrollment in other advanced courses?** With this shift there is no negative impact on student enrollment in honors, AP, or dual-enrollment courses at the high school level. In fact, one of the intended outcomes of this shift in our practice is to prepare more students for success in our most challenging courses.

As we implement these shifts to our practice, we will continue to seek feedback, review relevant data, and reflect on our teaching of English Language Arts. We believe that these shifts are in the best interest of our students, will strengthen our instructional practice, and will result in improved student growth and achievement. Please feel free to reach out with additional questions and thank you for your support of schools.