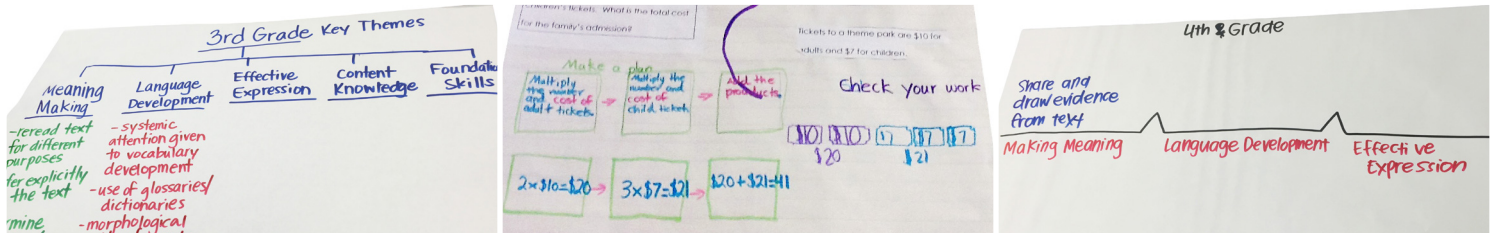




Magnolia School District, California



When Magnolia School District wanted to find a way to improve writing proficiency for their students, they turned to Thinking Maps for help. A Thinking Maps district since 2007, they added *Write from the Beginning ... and Beyond* to their implementation in fall of 2010.

Hanan Thornton, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, explains,

“Writing was one of the first priorities I was asked to focus on when I joined the district in 2009. Since teachers were already familiar with using the Maps, *Write from the Beginning* was a natural choice for us.”

SNAPSHOT

Magnolia School District

- 9 Schools (K-6)
- 300 Teachers
- 6,400 Students
- 50% English Language Learners
- 88% Free/Reduced Lunch

GIVING STUDENTS A VOICE

Magnolia is an elementary district near Anaheim, California. They have a highly diverse student body, with more than half of their students speaking a language other than English at home and 88% of students living in low-income households. “We want to empower our kids,” says Hanan. “Writing is an essential skill for college and career readiness. It’s how we engage in academic discourse. To prepare our students to be successful in secondary school and beyond, we need to give them the tools to be able to express themselves orally and in writing.”

Most teachers in the district were already using Thinking Maps, but writing effectively was still a challenge for many students. Their core English/Language Arts program provided writing instruction, but did not give students the level of support they needed. Hanan says, “*Write from the Beginning* is not about giving students a formula for writing. It’s really about developing thinking, and that’s what our students needed. It provides scaffolding and support so they can map out their thoughts prior to expressing themselves orally or on paper.”

“Our teachers have really embraced the program. Anytime you can give students more tools to support academic success, that’s not a hard sell to teachers.”



- Hanan Thornton,
Assistant Superintendent
of Educational Services

A WHOLE-DISTRICT WRITING INITIATIVE

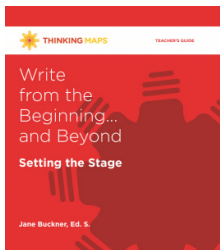
The district introduced *Write from the Beginning ... and Beyond* to the entire staff in October of 2010 with a full day of professional development focused on Narrative Writing. Designated Thinking Maps peer trainers and instructional practices coaches attended “Train the Trainer” workshops in advance of the full district training. Because of the critical importance of the writing initiative, Magnolia chose to have Thinking Maps consultants deliver the district-wide

training with the peer trainers/coaches providing extra support. Throughout the year, site level coaches extended and reinforced the training and were available to help answer questions, provide lesson planning ideas, and lead discussions during after-school staff development sessions.

In subsequent years, Magnolia has delivered additional full-district training sessions focused on different aspects

of writing, including WFBB sessions on Response to Literature, Expository Writing and Argumentative Writing. Each year, they also offer refresher and new teacher training for Thinking Maps and WFBB. Thinking Maps consultants deliver the annual full-day training with separate sessions for teachers in grade spans K-1, 2-3 and 4-6.

Write from the Beginning ... and Beyond is the only writing instruction the district is using apart from their core reading/ELA program. The district has created a scope and sequence and pacing guide to define the writing prompts and topics and ensure that they are meeting all writing standards.



“Our scope and sequence gives us the WHAT we need to teach, but *Write from the Beginning* is the HOW.”

- Hanan Thornton, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services

BETTER THINKING, BETTER WRITING

Since implementing WFBB, Hanan has noted a marked improvement in the quality of writing she has seen from Magnolia students. “We’ve seen a lot of growth in student writing,” she says. “Our students are showing a lot more independence in terms of their ability to synthesize responses. Their writing demonstrates that they are better able to plan and think through their

responses.” In a recent classroom visit, she observed students who were given a writing prompt automatically and independently bring out blank journals and start creating Maps before they began to write on the computer. “It’s really developing their thinking skills. Those are skills they will carry with them as they advance through the grades.”

But the two programs really complement each other. WFBB has added a lot of depth to our Thinking Maps work and made our implementation stronger.”

For the 2015-16 school year, Magnolia implemented the Thinking Maps Learning Community (TMLC). TMLC provides one more avenue for ongoing professional development and support for teachers. Students are now starting to use TMLC to build their Thinking Maps online; Hanan reports seeing a steady increase in student logins. “Our staff worked really hard to build a community around Thinking Maps to support reading comprehension, problem solving in math and now writing,” she says. “We’re empowering students to get their thoughts on the page and giving them tools for future academic success.”

Teachers have been enthusiastic, especially since seeing the results. All district teachers now use Thinking Maps and WFBB. One unexpected advantage of implementing WFBB is how well it has reinforced their Thinking Maps practice. “Initially, I was a bit concerned about starting the WFBB training because I was afraid we weren’t using Thinking Maps deeply enough. I thought maybe we would need to shore up Map use first.

