

THE TRUTH ABOUT WRITING EDUCATION IN AMERICA

*Let's Write,
Make Things Right*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Download full report at 826national.org/research/

Equal access to quality writing education has been a longstanding challenge in the United States and not enough has been done to move the field forward in recent years. In this report, we at 826 National aim to bring writing education to the forefront of public, policy, and funding conversations by examining its current state and issuing a call to action to the field. In the summer and fall of 2020, we interviewed 19 writing education experts, including authors, researchers, and educators, about the current state of writing education in the United States. We distill their reflections on the benefits, challenges, and inequities of writing education, and then draw on those reflections to outline recommendations for the field. Our experts were universal in their dismay about the current state of writing instruction, which they saw, with the exception of a few bright spots, as formulaic and constrictive.

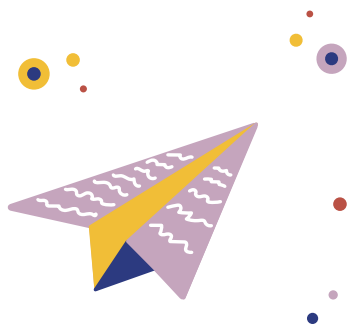
Our experts collectively identified three key challenges.

1. **TIME AND PRIORITY:** Writing should be at the center of instruction, reinforcing subjects like reading and STEM, but instead it has been pushed to the fringes.
2. **YESTERDAY'S CLASSROOM:** Limits in traditional writing spaces. Curricula, teaching methodologies, and assessment practices are outdated and don't put students and their diverse backgrounds at the center.
3. **TEACHER TRAINING:** Teachers receive little specialized support on writing instruction and have too few opportunities to explore their own identities as writers.

We put forward four recommendations which policymakers and practitioners can follow to strengthen writing education.

1. **REDEFINE THE CLASSROOM:** Encourage and support students to continue writing anywhere, anytime, on anything, and with any platform.
2. **REUNITE READING AND WRITING:** Make the relationship between reading and writing explicit through discussion, examples, and publishing student work. And start early.
3. **IDENTIFY TEACHERS AS WRITERS:** Establish communities of practice for teachers to learn, share, and grow as writers.
4. **LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD:** Invest in the writing education of those who need it most, who don't have the same level of access to high-quality educational opportunities.

We conclude with our understanding of 826's role in advancing the above recommendations. We are part of a complex system, and while we do not presume to solve these problems alone, we have a part to play. This report is the first in a series to come, which will continually examine the state of writing education by presenting the research and work being done in the field. And, we will share our best practices, what we've learned and are continuing to learn, working together to amplify the voices of young people and writing advocates. Collectively, we will demonstrate the power of writing and the potential of writing instruction, which is needed now more than ever. In a time that finds us all separated from our loved ones and fighting for our democracy, writing offers an avenue for communication, advancement, advocacy, and, when needed, escape.



ABOUT 826

826 is the largest youth writing network in the country. It was founded in 2002 in San Francisco by educator Nínive Calegari and author Dave Eggers. 826 National serves as the hub of the movement to amplify student voices and champions the belief that strong writing skills are essential for academic and lifelong success. The 826 Network now serves close to 120,000 students ages 6 to 18 in under-resourced communities each year online via **826 Digital** and through chapters in nine cities: Boston, Chicago, Detroit/Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York City, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Minneapolis/St. Paul. We work towards a country in which the power and the joy of writing is accessible to every student in every classroom. Together, we believe writing is the key to cultivating a new generation of creative and diverse thinkers who will define a better, brighter, and more compassionate future.

To learn more about how you can get involved with 826's movement for writing and creativity, please visit the 826 National website at 826national.org.

LET YOUR MIND BREAK DANCE

BY DIAMOND • GRADE 9, 826DC

Shine bright
burn their eyes
Don't be afraid
make yourself proud.

Open your wings fly
away
don't capture your thoughts
let them play.

Be free.
Let your imagination shout
aloud
don't stand by, stay on top
of the cloud.

Let the pen be your
key to all locked doors.
Let your mind break dance
on every single
floor.

The paper is the freedom
from all things
that enslave you.
Open your hands and let your words
take you.

