

THE TRUTH ABOUT WRITING EDUCATION IN AMERICA



Let's Write, Make Things Right

AN 826 NATIONAL PUBLICATION



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 approximately 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**.

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Title: "Let's write, make things right." by Paris A., 9th grade, 826LA

From "Serpent of Hatred" in 826 National's publication, *Poets in Revolt*

FOREWORD

The first time I knew I wanted to be a writer was in middle school. My 8th grade teacher Ms. Rai Bolden assigned Nikki Giovanni's 'Ego Tripping' to read and listen to that day. Giovanni's declarative cadence wrapped around my hair coils, weaving into my ears. Her word usage and the way she spoke of herself through poetry gave me a glowing feeling. Giovanni's words gave me a tangerine colored joy. Her words morphed into a palm raising my chin up. Most of all, 'Ego Tripping' affirmed my love for reading and writing. I saw myself in each strophe and I told myself: I want to make people feel like that too! In my class, my teacher made an effort to include Black artists in our curriculum. We studied common story archetypes through hip hop musicians, and we wrote our own poems with inspiration from the Black authors we read. Those middle school lessons helped build my path to writing-hood. Growing up in 826 New Orleans and my middle school English class pushed me to know that I had the ability to take up space in writing. And the space was all mine.



Having Black representation in those middle school journal prompts, readings, and a teacher who was committed to understanding her students were all imperative to my writing education. But my change in programs and schools shifted my artistic confidence. In the beginning of my high school years I became creatively insecure. I was assigned few Black writers and writers of color. White authors were normalized 'classics' for the curriculum and non-White writers were the bonus elective classes. The spines of my journals were aching from the heavy burden of trying to conform to Eurocentric standards of writing. I questioned my artistic abilities because the work I was reading affirmed White writers and my writing classes no longer felt like my safe space. Later in my high school years, I received mentorship from other Black writers in my community. I had the opportunity to explore young Black writing-hood through spoken word shows, master classes, and writing with young Black writers. Spaces that proactively decolonized writing education were and are most beneficial to my development as a writer.

The interviews of authors and educators sharing their thoughts on the state of writing education in this white paper allowed me to reflect upon my writing journey as a young person. I was lucky enough to receive the support I needed in my writing education, but so many students who look like me don't. Having access to equitable writing resources should not be given by luck of draw, it should be a right for all young writers. Equity and proper representation in writing education prepares students for the diverse world they're entering. Young writers know where they want to travel with their stories, but are we ready to give them the itineraries they need to enrich their literary expeditions?

Akilah Toney

826 New Orleans Alumni

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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.

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.



WHERE ARE WE?

“In this moment, writing instruction is how you learn to communicate effectively and how to be aware of falsehoods and manipulations. Strong writing instruction is central to the sustainability of our democracy, and that is in danger right now.”

KATHY CRUTCHER
FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
SHOUT MOUSE PRESS

In a year that finds us all separated from our loved ones and fighting for our democracy, writing offers an avenue for communication, advocacy, and, when needed, escape. Writing is all the more important in our current social and political landscape, as writing is “an act of activism and justice that can help students to harness the power that they have to do what they wish to do or change in the world”.¹ Recent headlines and reports have stressed that in classrooms across the country, students spend very little time writing and underperform on writing assessments.² While accurate, this narrative ignores an important truth: kids are writing all the time. They’re sending text messages, engaging in social media, and making signs to take to protests or hang around their neighborhoods, writing every day about the things that matter to them, seemingly more than any generation before. In our increasingly virtual and interconnected world, the ability to write, to communicate, to express our thoughts and feelings is essential to affecting change. Which is why we need to talk about writing education. Because despite all the informal writing and communicating that students do, they continue to struggle with it in traditional classroom settings.

In the summer and fall of 2020, we conducted interviews³ with 19 researchers, educators, writers, and experts in the field from across the country to better understand the current state of writing education in the United States. Across the board, we heard the same kinds of answers: Writing education is inadequate for all, abhorrent for most, and working for very few.

Figure 1. Words the interviewees used to describe the current state of writing education.



We asked our experts to choose three words that best described the state of contemporary writing education, which we defined as any writing instruction across genres and settings. The responses were bleak, with words like “limited,” “uninspiring,” and “underprepared,” just to name a few. The most frequent choice: “unequal.” As is the case in the rest of the American education system, the inequities in writing education are often split across racial and socioeconomic lines.⁴ Students of color and students from low-income communities often have less access to quality writing education and little to no representation in literacy curriculum. As a result, the voices and literacies of these students have long been underheard, underrepresented, and undervalued in traditional education spaces.

“Kids are writing all the time and we pretend they are not. They are always writing and hyperliterate and we just tend to not count it.”

ANTERO GARCIA
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION,
STANFORD UNIVERSITY

And yet, although the interviewees struggled to come up with positive words, they also made it clear that exemplary writing programs can, and do, exist in our educational spaces. They provided first- and second-hand experiences of working with individual teachers, schools, districts, and after-school programs who are championing interdisciplinary writing practices that both support and honor youth voice. In these spaces, students are learning not just the mechanics of writing, but also how to think, break down complex concepts, and communicate ideas with an audience. These skills help students succeed beyond literacy, as countless studies have shown that early mastery of reading and writing skills leads to higher academic achievement later on.⁵

Unfortunately, these exemplary writing programs are few and far between, and, in most cases, students are taught only a formulaic, rudimentary approach to writing. This does little to prepare them for college or the job market. Multiple studies have found that a majority of students do not enter, or leave, college with the writing tools necessary to succeed across industries and professions.^{6,7,8} A joint study that looked at readiness of new entrants into the workforce found that both high school and college graduates are “Deficient” in Writing in English and Written Communications⁹, which ends up costing both employees and employers. A study from College-Board determined that American corporations are spending a total of \$3.1 billion annually on remedial writing training for current employees and new hires.¹⁰

¹Serravallo, J. (2020, October 1). Personal interview [Personal interview].

²Goldstein, D. (2020). “Why Kids Can’t Write”. Education Life, *The New York Times*. (Original work published 2017).

³See Appendix

⁴Darling-Hammond, L. (2001). “Inequality in Teaching and Schooling: How Opportunity Is Rationed to Students of Color in America”. *National Academies Press* (US).

⁵National Center for Family Literacy (2008). “Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel. A Scientific Synthesis of Early Literacy Development and Implications for Intervention.” *National Institute for Literacy*.

⁶Kautzer, K. (2018). “Students are unprepared for college-level writing”. *WriteShop*.

⁷Butrymowicz, S. (2017). “Most colleges enroll many students who aren’t prepared for higher education”. *The Hechinger Report*.

⁸Selingo, J. (2018). “Why Are So Many New College Graduates Such Bad Writers?”. *Grade Point, The Washington Post*.

⁹Barrington, L. et.al. (2006). “Are They Really Ready to Work?: Employers’ Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce”. The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and The Society for Human Resource Management.

¹⁰The National Commission on Writing In American’s Schools and Colleges (2004). *Writing: A Ticket to Work...Or a Ticket Out*. The College Board.

So, where are we? Our writing education system is “ineffective” and “not-working.” Many students lack even basic access to writing education, and those who do have access struggle against a limited and formulaic curriculum. And the effects are long lasting. In a summary of literacy research by the National Center for Family Literacy, those who are low in literacy end up with lower paying jobs, are more often out of work, are less likely to vote, are less informed about civic affairs, and are more likely to have trouble with the law.¹¹ Students are being denied access to the socioemotional, cognitive, and creative benefits of writing that can help them succeed for the rest of their lives.

¹¹ National Center for Family Literacy (2008). “Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel. A Scientific Synthesis of Early Literacy Development and Implications for Intervention.” *National Institute for Literacy*.

WHY WRITING?

There are more benefits to writing than what at first meets the eye. While we’re learning to write, we also learn how to process complex ideas from different sources, reflect on our emotions and thought processes, advocate for ourselves and our communities, become more compassionate to others, and much more. Writing education does not just prepare students for academic achievement, but also prepares them for their life-long need to articulate their thoughts and communicate with others. When asked why writing is important and what skills it supports, all of our interviewees agreed that writing benefits us in almost every aspect of our lives.

Throughout this report, you will find “Why writing” sections that dive a little deeper into each of the benefit themes presented in Figure 2.

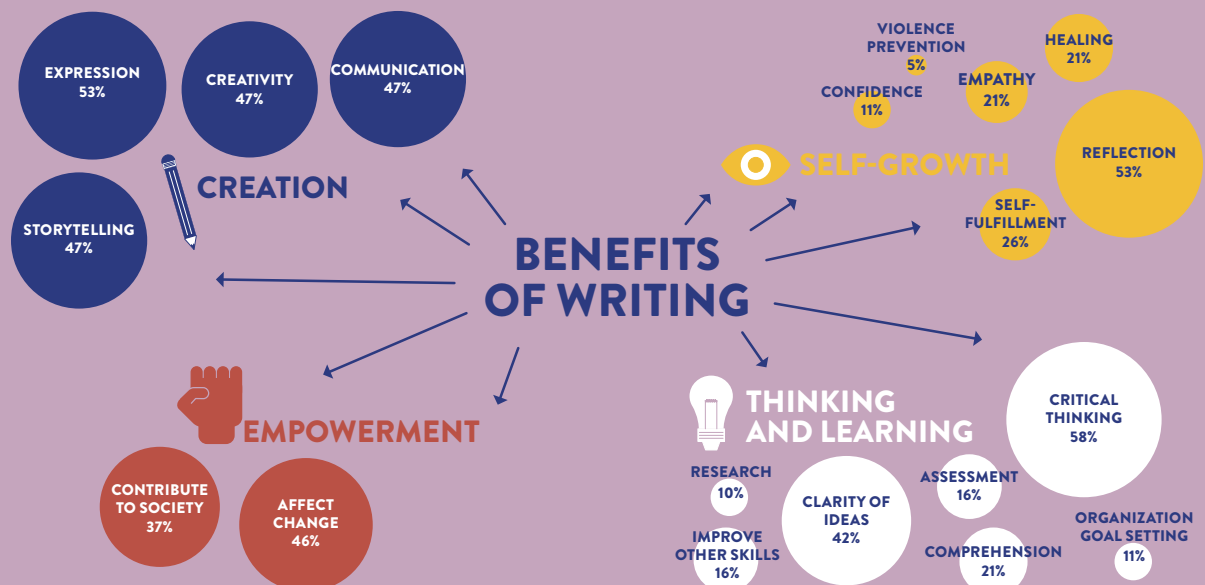


Figure 2. Benefits of Writing. We identified 4 themes from the interviews: Creation, Thinking and Learning, Self-Growth, and Empowerment.

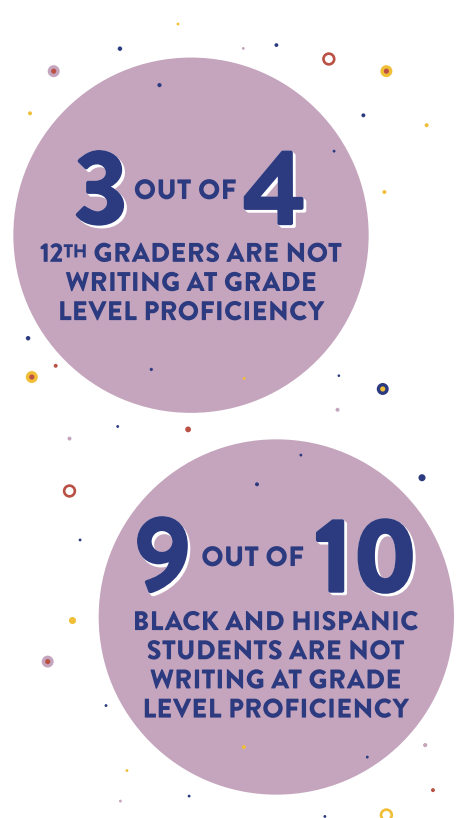
HOW DID WE GET HERE?

While educational standards have responded to the nation-wide push to increase and refine curricula around reading, writing remains on the sidelines of literacy education. Given that we know students write all the time, and the benefits of writing have long been established, why doesn't our education system reflect what we know?

In 2002, policies and standards set by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) prioritized reading and math; these standards were enforced in schools through the heavy emphasis on standardized testing. As schools shifted their focus to prepare students for standardized testing, less time in the school day was devoted to writing. Schools in low socioeconomic areas often underperformed on standardized tests, which left teachers in those schools with less independence, and fewer resources, to push back against prescriptive writing practices and teaching styles in their classrooms.¹²

During this period of educational upheaval, the College Board established the National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges in an effort to focus national attention on the teaching and learning of writing. In 2003, The Commission's inaugural report emphatically stated that "the nation's leaders must place writing squarely in the center of the school agenda." They called for high-quality and equitable writing instruction, increased time in the school day for writing, and better training to prepare pre-service teachers to teach writing.¹³ This call to action, and others like it in the years to follow, went largely unanswered. In 2011, The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that 3 out of 4 12th graders are not writing at grade level proficiency, with broad disparities by race/ethnicity, gender, and school location (urban vs. rural). Most notably, 9 out of 10 Black and Hispanic students are not writing at grade level proficiency.¹⁴

In an effort to strengthen American education by establishing nationwide academic standards, state school chiefs and governors coordinated a state-led effort to develop the Common Core State Standards. Alongside robust academic standards in mathematics and English language arts, the 2012 Common Core standards emphasized writing in educational policy, both as its own subject and within other disciplines. However, many teachers have critiqued the Common Core standards for prioritizing limited genres—argumentative and informative writing over poetry and creative writing—and devaluing the historical context of literature.¹⁵ The Common Core standards continue to limit writing education by not including the full breadth of writing genres and styles.



¹² Mccarthey, S. (2008). The Impact of No Child Left Behind on Teachers' Writing Instruction. Written Communication. 462-505.

¹³ The National Commission on Writing In American's Schools and Colleges (2003). *The Neglected "R": The Need for a Writing Revolution*. The College Board.

¹⁴ National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2011 (NCES 2012-470). Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

¹⁵ Strauss, V., & Pollock-Moore, D. (2016). "The 'seven deadly sins' of Common Core—by an English teacher". *The Washington Post*.

The NAEP writing assessment was given again in 2017, but no results have been released due to “confounding factors in measuring performance,” and the assessment itself has been criticized for offering limited genres and prompts, not allowing enough time for the writing process, and not taking into account the non-standard English spoken by English language learners and students of color.¹⁶ To date, there is still no standardized way to assess student writing. And, unfortunately, what is not tested is not taught, or funded. Standards have been unfairly tied to standardized testing, and the assessment of student writing needs to be rethought.

Although the past two decades of school reforms have sought to level the playing field in classrooms around the country, inequities across race, income, ability, and school location persist, both within the subject of writing and the education system as a whole. This is perhaps what separates writing from other disciplines in education: we know its worth, we know how to improve writing instruction and yet, it continues to be neglected in traditional education spaces and denied to the students who need it the most.

¹⁶ Applebee, A. N. (2011). Issues in large-scale writing assessment. *Journal of Writing Assessment*, 3(2), 81-98.



WHY WRITING: CREATION

**“I write because I want to give life to my thoughts.
I have stories that deserve to be remembered.”**

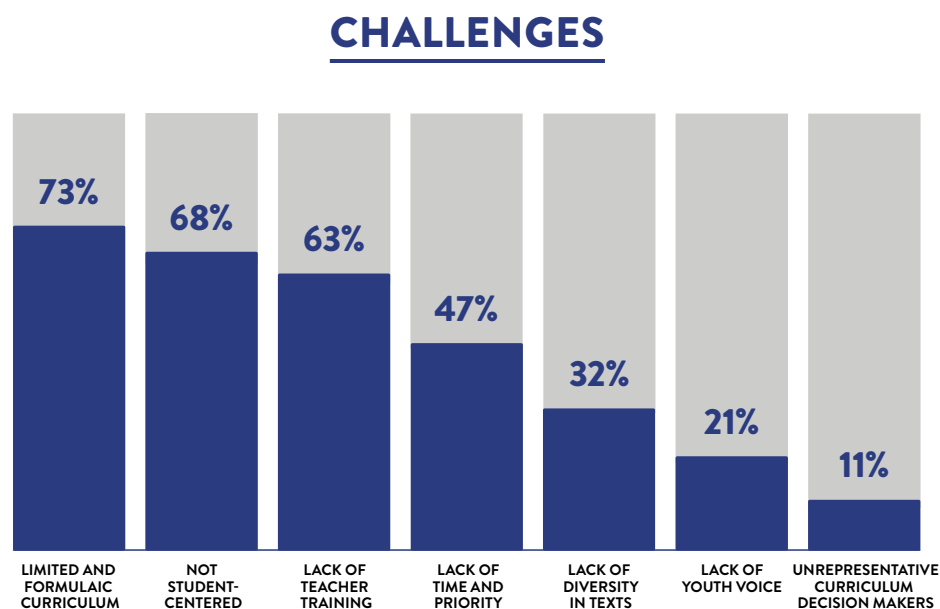
CARLOS G. • AGE 18, 826 VALENCIA

At its most basic form, we write to express ourselves, to share our stories with others, to be creative, and to communicate. This communication, or preservation of thought, happens not just between people, but across space and time. It’s how we share our stories, bringing the history of our people and culture from generation to generation. With writing, we can teach students how to reach different audiences and engage in healthy forms of discourse. “If you’re not writing, you’re only consuming. Writing is the medium of creation. It’s essential to being a citizen,” says Northwestern professor and founder of Digital Youth Network, Nichole Pinkard. As writers, students become educators and experts themselves, with the responsibility, and the power, to communicate an idea to the best of their ability.

WHAT ARE WE UP AGAINST?

Now, over 15 years later, we want to revisit the National Commission on Writing's call to action—and respond. To better understand their recommendations and what may have changed since the 2003 report, we asked our panel of interviewees to identify current challenges in writing education, as well as potential solutions. Unsurprisingly, many of the underlying challenges have not changed. We still face two overall issues: 1) unequal access to writing education and 2) the limited nature of existing writing instruction. However, with the knowledge and research we've gained in the last 15 years, the possible solutions have been refined and shifted to reflect where and how our students are writing, particularly in this digital age. Figure 3 below shows the challenges that came up in our conversations.

Figure 3: Percent of interviewees who mentioned the listed challenges.



Based on these challenges, we focused on 3 themes: Time and priority, yesterday's classroom, and teacher training.

LACK OF TIME AND PRIORITY IN THE CLASSROOM

“We don’t believe that kids should be able to have robust writing lives, so we don’t support them.”

KIMBERLY PARKER
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE TEACHER
TRAINING CENTER AT THE SHADY HILL
SCHOOL, CAMBRIDGE, MA; CO-FOUNDER
OF #DISRUPTTEXTS

One obvious challenge that remains is the lack of time and priority for writing instruction. In a 2020 report from the Learning Lab Agency¹⁷, only 25% of middle schoolers and 31% of high schoolers write about 30 minutes a day, which is the minimum recommended amount for a kindergartener (60 minutes for 1st graders) by the Institute of Education Sciences¹⁸ (IES). While the writing guide by IES is just for elementary school, the expectation for older grades may be to spend more time writing in a given day, building on skills learned in younger grades. As the 2003 National Commission of Writing report stated, “Writing is a prisoner of time.”

However, it may not just be a matter of lack of time, but also a lack of priority given to writing instruction within the structure of our education system. Qorsho Hassan, a 4th grade teacher in Burnsville, MN, told us she was trained not to consider writing a core subject. “That’s scary to me because writing in and of itself is so powerful,” she said. “It allows students to tap into their stories, lived experiences, and memories, their cultures and values.” Hassan was one of many interviewees who attributed the decline of writing to the rise of standardized testing. The last time U.S. students took a national writing assessment that was reported was in 2011.¹⁹

READING OVER WRITING

An effect of standardized testing is that reading has taken priority over writing in the literacy field. This imbalance starts early, as writing is rarely taught as a subject in early grades. “Young kids are very eager to write but they stop after a while because there’s no place for it in the curriculum,” says NYU Professor of Childhood and Literacy Education Susan Neuman. This is all the more tragic because research shows that reading and writing go hand-in-hand. Writing can help with reading comprehension, while reading can help with understanding the structure and styles of writing.²⁰

“There is something beautiful about explaining to students that the books they are reading, especially when they’re emergent readers, is still a story, and that is something that they can also do—they can also be writers.”

QORSHO HASSAN
4TH GRADE TEACHER, BURNSVILLE, MN

YESTERDAY’S CLASSROOM: LIMITS IN TRADITIONAL WRITING SPACES

NOT STUDENT-CENTERED

Almost 75% of our panel mentioned a lack of student-centered curricula. To effectively engage students in the writing process, they should have a voice in the topics they write about as well as the platforms and formats they write with. The way writing is being taught in classrooms “at times ignores other

¹⁷ Picou, A. (2020). Are schools making writing a priority? New study shows students are not spending enough time writing. Learning Lab Agency. Retrieved from https://www.the-learning-agency-lab.com/uploads/1/1/7/3/117316733/are_schools_making_writing_a_priority_tlab.pdf

¹⁸ Graham, S., Bollinger, A., Booth Olson, C., D’Aoust, C., MacArthur, C., McCutchen, D., & Olinghouse, N. (2012). Teaching elementary school students to be effective writers: A practice guide (NCEE 2012- 4058). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

¹⁹ National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). The Nation’s Report Card: Writing 2011 (NCES 2012-470). Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education

²⁰ Graham, S., & Hebert, M. A. (2010). *Writing to read: Evidence for how writing can improve reading*. A Carnegie Corporation Time to Act Report. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education

ways of composing that exist in the world and which can be more engaging to children,” says Jennifer Serravallo, an author and writing instruction consultant. Digital technology and social media have transformed what writing is, where it happens, and how it happens. Young authors can now play around with structure and format, whether by writing a graphic novel or a tweet—formats that are relatable to the ways they are consuming text. But that change is not reflected in classrooms, where students are asked to replicate traditional formulas for “effective” writing. Writing, especially for young people today, is no longer just a five paragraph essay. As Syracuse professor and founder of Writing Our Lives Marcelle Haddix says: “Schools need to get with it. We’re assigning writing, but we’re not really teaching writing. We’re not teaching the process or even cultivating spaces for young people to do the kinds of writing they’re doing beyond school.”

WHY WRITING: SELF-GROWTH

“I write poetry for young future-shapers needing a reminder of their powerful voices. I write poetry to empower and heal and question myself and others.”

AMELIA NAMITA PINTO • GRADE 8, AVESON GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

Less explicitly talked about are the emotional and cognitive benefits of writing. It is an incredible tool for self-growth and social-emotional processing that has even been shown to reduce symptoms of depression and break people out from self-defeating cycles.^{21 22} Thoughts are captured on the page and can be revisited and rethought at any time. Jason Reynolds, author and the Library of Congress’ National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature, believes that writing offers a way for reflection that no other medium does, saying “once you write something down, it’s no longer ephemeral, ethereal. The things that impact us the most are the things we can revisit.” Students can use writing to talk about what’s happening in the world, and within their own lives; they can express their feelings, and then constructively question why they feel that way. This reflective practice leads students to feel more confident in their thinking and more pride in their accomplishments. And, through the process of self-exploration, students can begin to heal from trauma, better empathize with others, and resolve issues without violence.²³ Digital Content Specialist Mandy Manning said that during this moment of remote learning and political upheaval, “Writing is not just an opportunity but an obligation. Kids are scared, they’re hurting, they’re missing people and human connection, and so I think that we can help them process some of that through writing.”



²¹Gortner, E.M., Rude, S. S., & Pennebaker, J.W. (2006). Benefits of expressive writing in lowering rumination and depressive symptoms. *Behavior therapy*, 37(3), 292-303.

²²Wilson, Timothy (2011). *Redirect: The Surprising New Science of Psychological Change*. Little, Brown and Company.

²³Taylor, E., Jouriles, E. N., Brown, R., Goforth, K. (2016). Narrative writing exercises for promoting health among adolescents: Promises and pitfalls. *Psychology of Violence*, 6(1), 57-63.

“Language is the cornerstone of culture.”

JASON REYNOLDS

AUTHOR; LIBRARY OF CONGRESS’
NATIONAL AMBASSADOR FOR YOUNG
PEOPLE’S LITERATURE

LACK OF DIVERSITY

As a field, we need to engage students not just with an understanding of what or how they write, but who they are. We want to empower our youth to express their authentic voices. However, Inaugural Youth Poet Laureate of the United States Amanda Gorman asks, “Who are our students reading? Usually [they] aren’t alive and don’t look like them. It’s a trail of white dead men. And so you get a bunch of students who believe their voice needs to be a certain way.” This limited canon effectively limits who students believe can be successful “authors,” and ignores the deep literary traditions of non-White cultures. By asking students to adhere to a monolithic curricula, we ask them to limit their own writing and, often, ignore their own personal or cultural approach to storytelling. The focus on teaching students a prescriptive, “standard” English means that form has become more important than the content itself, which turns writing into a gatekeeper skill rather than a tool for self-growth and expression.²⁴ David Mura, an author and board member for Voices of Our Nation Arts Foundation says, “Often, students of color, no matter what their age, can go through their education and not feel they are told stories of people like them, either in history, or in literature, and they don’t find it oftentimes in the greater culture. It is imperative for the education of anybody to be able to tell your own story and understand how

²⁴ Shor, I. (1997). Our apartheid: Writing instruction & inequality. *Journal of basic writing*, 91-104.



WHY WRITING: THINKING AND LEARNING

“I hope that when people read my poem it will make them want to learn more. If people were more aware of what is going on, they may be inspired to speak up and spark change.”

EFFAT KHALIL • GRADE 8, PIONEER MIDDLE SCHOOL PLYMOUTH, MI

On the cognitive side of things, learning to write helps students build critical thinking skills so that they can effectively analyze and form opinions on different kinds of media and situations. Writing has been shown to increase students’ comprehension of information in other subjects and aids students in reading comprehension.^{25 26} Through writing, students can imagine and articulate themselves as scientists and historians, and engage with interdisciplinary concepts that interest them. When students write, they are not simply consuming information, but processing it. They are organizing and connecting thoughts to form a story, and evaluating and reevaluating their ideas through revisions. As many of the experts expressed, no other skill allows you to think and learn in this depth like writing does. Which is why writing is also a great tool for assessment, as teachers can read student writing to see what they truly know, how they think, and what they don’t yet understand. In essence, they can see the student’s thought process on paper. Madeline Kobayashi, a curriculum coach and former classroom teacher, said, “I saw the way that writing transformed my students and helped me build relationships with my students in a way that I had not ever experienced. I felt like I had a secret window into our students’ lives.”

²⁵ Sege, I. (2013). Writing supports reading comprehension. *Eye on early education*.

²⁶ Graham, S., & Hebert, M. (2010). *Writing to read: Evidence for how writing can improve reading: A report from Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Carnegie Corporation of New York. Washington DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

to relate to those who come before you and to be encouraged by that.” The sociopolitical climate and challenges of 2020 have been a reminder of the importance to share stories from different cultures and to have discussions about these stories inside and outside of the classroom.

LACK OF CURRICULA

In order for teachers to engage students with diverse materials that provide choice and put students at the center, we need new curricula. “We do violence to kids because we think the five paragraph essay is the be-all, end-all,” says Kim Parker, Assistant Director of the Teacher Training Center at the Shady Hill School and co-founder of #DisruptTexts. While the Common Core provided new standards, corresponding curricula have been slow to follow. “We’re adopting standards and not yet consistently and effectively supporting teachers in how to enhance their practices to reflect the direction of the standards,” says content and curriculum consultant José Torres Guadarrama.

Further, beyond needing curricula that’s aligned with standards, we need curricula that go beyond the classroom. We need to “[make] sure students are able to write for public consumption and an audience. Given all the social networks and different ways of sharing, we need to find more ways to prepare students to communicate in the mediums that we want them to be communicating in once they leave our classrooms,” says Northwestern professor and founder of Digital Youth Network Nichole Pinkard. We shouldn’t teach students how to write so that they can pass a test; we should teach students how to write in ways that prepare them for their life-long need to articulate their thoughts and communicate with others.

LACK OF MEANINGFUL WRITING ASSESSMENTS

While we need to rethink and reprioritize how testing gets used, assessing student writing is still valuable, to both educators and students. Through the drafting process, teachers can assess student writing in order to give meaningful feedback. It is also useful for students to assess their own writing and share a common assessment language with their teachers so they understand how to improve from draft to draft. However, with the writing assessments we have in place, “we’re not assessing student’s ability to create a compelling argument on their own merit. We’re assessing their ability to regurgitate a pre-popped formula which then becomes part of a larger thought machine,” said Amanda Gorman. There was agreement among many interviewees that too much emphasis has been placed on grammar, spelling, and following a formulaic writing structure, with not enough emphasis on the content itself (60%), the feedback and revision process (44%), the impact of the writing (19%), and the demonstration of different writing modes and platforms (19%).

“We take the most valuable piece in the education system [teachers] and make it the least effective possible. It’s as if we’re telling teachers, ‘Don’t think; just use this scripted curriculum.’ We need to rethink that. That’s a product of a culture that doesn’t value the expertise of teachers.”

ASAO B. INOUE
PROFESSOR AND ASSOCIATE DEAN IN
THE COLLEGE OF INTEGRATIVE SCIENCES
AND ARTS, ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

“As a teaching profession, we’re afraid of ceding power to allow young people’s voices and ingenuity because we don’t know how to grade and assess around someone’s TikTok. We don’t know how to account for those acts of writing that are revelatory and prolific.”

ANTERO GARCIA
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION,
STANFORD UNIVERSITY

SCARCITY OF TEACHER TRAINING

Alongside a shift from a traditional classroom to one that supports modern youth writing, we also need new teacher training. More than half of the interviewees talked about teacher training as a challenge in our writing education system. “Teachers experience the beautiful mess of creativity of their students,” says Pirette McKamey, Principal of Mission High School in San Francisco, but as many of the experts point out, are then overwhelmed or unprepared to help students bring their writing to the next level. A 2010 national survey of 4-6 grade teachers found that two out of every three teachers reported they received minimal to no preparation to teach writing from the education courses they took during college.²⁷ Further, in a 2014 national survey of high school teachers, a similar lack of overall writing instruction training was found, as well as a lack of activities involving the use of digital tools, report writing, and written arguments.²⁸ By 2016, still, only 47.5% of surveyed teachers reported having taken one or more college courses with some content devoted to writing instruction and about half (49%) felt that they did not have sufficient professional development to successfully implement the current standards.²⁹ To create a more modern writing classroom, teachers need to be trained on new curricula, how to incorporate new platforms of writing, and how to best facilitate conversations around writing that are representative of the students they serve, and much more.

²⁷ Graham, S., & Hebert, M. (2010). *Writing to read: Evidence for how writing can improve reading: A report from Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Carnegie Corporation of New York. Washington DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

²⁸ Gillespie, A., Graham, S., Kiuahara, S., & Hebert, M. (2014). High school teachers use of writing to support students’ learning: A national survey. *Reading and Writing*, 27(6), 1043-1072.

²⁹ Troia, G. A., & Graham, S. (2016). Common core writing and language standards and aligned state assessments: a national survey of teacher beliefs and attitudes. *Reading and Writing* 29, 1719-1743.



WHY WRITING: EMPOWERMENT

“Being a poet in revolt is, above all, liberating. I became engaged in politics and social justice out of fear for my future; being able to use my words in insubordination has allowed me to reclaim it with a renewed hope.”

EMILY SIEGEL • GRADE 10, COLLIERVILLE HIGH SCHOOL COLLIERVILLE, TN

Above all else, writing is power—the power to use your voice to advocate for yourself, to share your ideas, to enact change, and to build community. Writing is an essential tool that students can use to affect change and contribute to society. Young people have opinions, and questions, about the important political and societal issues of our time that they have long been excluded from. Our role as educators is to give students the tools, attention, and time to learn how to develop their voice and engage healthily with opposing ideas. Writing is a tool for self-advocacy, a way for students tell their story and fight for the things that matter to them. As Inaugural Youth Poet Laureate of the United States Amanda Gorman told us, “writing is important regardless of your occupation or position. The ability to communicate your ideas and share your voice is a gift and a right that everyone should be entitled to have.”

However, even before teachers get training on specific strategies, many of the interviewees discussed a larger need for an identity shift for teachers to begin viewing themselves as writers. Most teachers were brought up in the same writing education system we are now describing, resulting in educators who don't feel confident with their writing and do not identify as writers. "One of the impediments is that teachers themselves are often afraid of writing and eschew opportunities to write. If they can't do something, they have a tendency to not encourage their students' to do it," says Susan Neuman. Teachers need to write in order to understand how to model it to students.

To help teachers shift their identities to also being writers, they need to be part of a community of practice where they can share not only their own writing, but how to then teach about writing. "When you write in a community of writers, all that struggling with the act is hugely informative for being a teacher of writing," said the Executive Director of the National Writing Project Elyse Eidman-Aadahl.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Now that we've identified the disconnect between how we educate students to write and how students are actually writing, how do we bridge the gap to meet students where they are? Based on the challenges and also the solutions in Figure 4 suggested by our experts, we present 4 recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION 1. REDEFINE THE CLASSROOM: Encourage and support students to continue writing anywhere, anytime, about anything, and with any platform.

The traditional classroom isn't working. We need systems to honor student writing. First, this means making writing a priority. We need to engage with students where they are writing, both in and outside the classroom. Second, we need to provide curricula that reflect students' interests, incorporate the platforms they use, and build their choice and agency. Third is to reassess our assessment practices to align with student-centered curricula, measuring content, process, impact, and use of appropriate platforms. Assessment is important not just for funding purposes, but also for informing how we can help improve student writing.

RECOMMENDATION 2. REUNITE READING AND WRITING: Make the relationship between reading and writing explicit through discussion, examples, and publishing student work. And start early.

Reading is consuming what someone has written and writing is producing what someone will read. This connection will always exist, but its importance has been lost through our education system. Discussion of writers, their writing style, and analyzing text through the lens of a writer should be part of literacy instruction. And, learning about the publication process and seeing your own writing published for someone else to read adds meaning to being a writer and understanding of a reader.



While this recommendation could be wrapped with redefining the classroom, we call it out here as its own recommendation to give it the weight it needs. It was also the most mentioned “solution” by our experts. It is the clearest path to prioritizing writing in the classroom. Writing should still be taught independently and across multiple subjects. But let’s start with getting writing into the classroom through reading, as making that connection is not just direct and arguably easy, but also necessary.

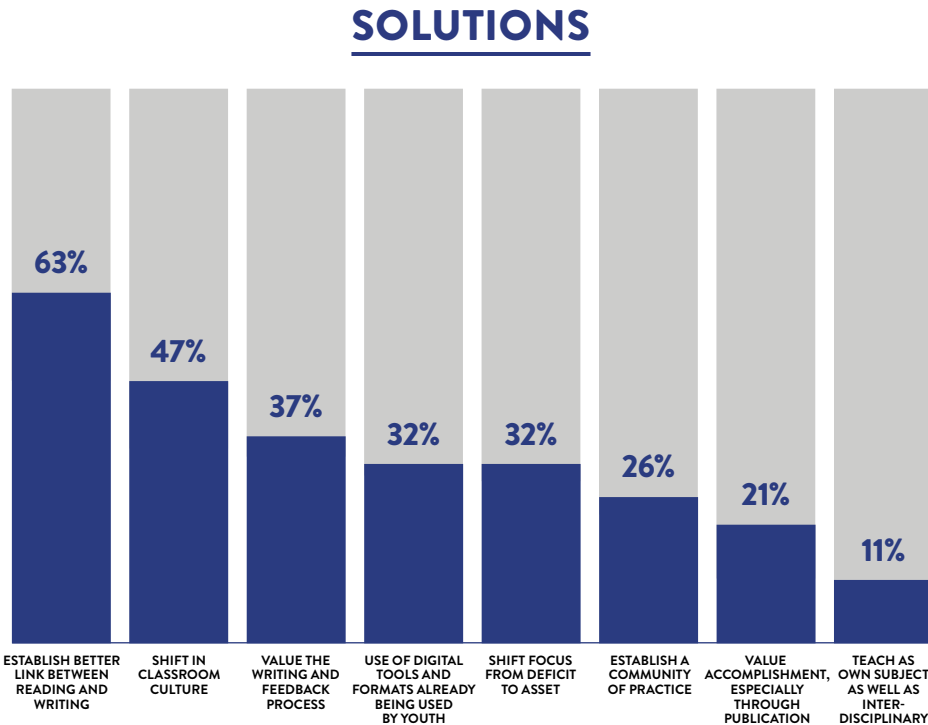
RECOMMENDATION 3. IDENTIFY TEACHERS AS WRITERS: Establish communities of practice for teachers to learn, share, and grow as writers.

Yes, we need more teacher training in writing. But simply providing resources and training on methodology and strategies seems to only get us part of the way there. Writing teachers need to be writers and supported through communities of practice. They need to experience firsthand the methodology and strategies they will teach. To do so, they must write themselves. By doing so, they can better understand how to apply their training and model it to students.

RECOMMENDATION 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.

As discussed, unequal was the word most chosen by our interviewees when describing our writing education system. When they were describing the challenges, they were thinking about the schools and situations where writing education was failing our students. These schools are usually under-funded public schools that serve students of color and other under-resourced communities. We must level the playing field by first providing access to those who need it most, and also by improving teaching practices, materials, and training through a lens of equity.

Figure 4. Percent of interviewees who mentioned the listed solutions.



WHY WRITING: IN ACTION

The best way to talk about the benefits of writing is to show it. In Ashley Blake's poem, she has documented what she is seeing in the world around her. She has taken the past and present truths, analyzed it, and formed an argument for why action is needed. She's reflected on what actions have been taken and what more needs to be done. Through her words, Ashley brings her truth to light and puts out her call to action.

ONE TRUTH, ONE RHYME

ASHLEY BLAKE • 12TH GRADE, BROOKLYN TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL, NY

slavery's been redesigned.
equality redefined.
laws have changed, civil rights given,
yet the social construct keeps us
confined. disinclined
to succeed and always a few steps behind.
the truth, it isn't present in our minds.
we think we're woke, but we're blind.
we think we're moving forward,
but the future is in rewind.

poverty and crime intertwined.
diversity unappreciated, we are colorblind.
divided by political party
instead of thinking multi-dimensionally with our minds.
we conform instead of allowing our authenticity to shine.

our intelligence has been greatly undermined.
because equal rights were ensured to all americans
since the declaration of independence was signed,
but fair opportunities are just an abstract thing
that many never find.

men hating other men
because of superficial differences.
bigots saying some humans are of a lower kind.
but if we wish to advance ahead
we have to leave our hatred behind.

it's only a matter of time until
truth crushes fabrications and deceptions to a grind.
it's hard to know what's really going on, when
the darkest secrets and truths are never headlined.
augmented reality in the media, no story that hasn't been refined.
but we can't let the world burn around us,
while our attention is sidelined.



OUR ROLE

At 826, we have been reflecting on our own practices through this report-writing process. Research like this will be our cornerstone moving forward, as the assessment of where we're at and understanding where the gaps are will only make what we do richer. As the largest youth writing network in the country, we have a major role to play. For 18 years, the 826 Network has activated and inspired writing education that celebrates the power of youth voice, promotes an effective approach to supporting literacy development, and emphasizes the importance of writing in the cultivation of the next generation. We are excited to incorporate the findings from this report in our practice both to reinforce what we currently do and to explore what more we can do. And, to point the way towards a future where every student in every classroom can access the power and joy of writing

Specifically, we offer here how 826 can take action around the recommendations and be part of the solution. In doing so, we hold ourselves accountable for the work we do with young people and educators. Additionally, we recognize that each of us cannot solve this problem alone. Join us so we can be part of the solution as a community. Here is how we will answer this call to action—how will you?

ACTION STEPS FOR REDEFINING THE WRITING CLASSROOM

TIME AND PRIORITY

At 826, we are committed to teaching writing to young people and to amplify their voices both in and outside of the classroom. We provide an average of over 10,000 hours of writing instruction each year and will continue to make time for young people to write. We hope to help redefine what the classroom can be by providing safe and creative spaces across our chapters for students to write **outside** of the classroom. This can be seen within our core programs such as **After-School**, where students can come be part of a community while writing and doing school work, **Workshops**, where students strengthen their writing skills with projects ranging from cartooning to college essays, and **Field Trips**, where we bring classrooms into our centers to create their own book from start to finish. And, we will continue to extend writing opportunities **within** the classroom through our school partnerships and core programs. This includes **In-School** projects that range from a school newspaper to oral histories and the **Young Authors' Book Project**, where we partner with local teachers to support students as they publish their own books with the help of 826 staff and tutors, as well as professional writers and editors. Through these core programs, we hope to provide students with opportunities to write not just when they are with 826, but to inspire them to continue their writing and to use it as a tool in life.

“We’re on the verge of redefining writing. With all the development of new digital tools, what is writing anymore?”

STEVE GRAHAM
REGENTS AND WARNER PROFESSOR
IN THE DIVISION OF LEADERSHIP AND
INNOVATION AT MLF TEACHERS COLLEGE,
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

We are excited to explore ways to deepen our connections and partnerships with the local communities within each of our existing chapters to make writing a continued priority. As our chapters evolve from a new voice to a

leader in their community, we strive to build long-lasting relationships with our students as well as their teachers and families. We will continuously improve our programs to encourage attendance session after session, year after year. And, we aim to build an alumni network to create a community of mentorship and young leaders.

STUDENT-CENTERED CURRICULA

What defines our core programming across our chapters is a commitment to project-based learning, amplifying youth voice, collaboration and community, student-driven learning environments, and space for exploration. We provide writing examples and bring in authors and professionals that represent diverse voices for our students to work with. In 826 programs, students experiment with different genres from poetry to personal narratives and in forms that range from newspapers to podcasts. Our chapters also have **Student Editorial Boards** and programs that engage youth more deeply in book design, publishing, and professional writing experiences.

We are eager to develop relevant lessons to help students as they learn how to best express their voice, explore their identity, advocate for themselves and their community, and achieve academic and professional success. Currently, we focus our content development on the areas of social-emotional learning, neurodivergent learning, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

ASSESSMENT

Research in general at 826 is a core value. 826 will continue its work with the National Writing Project and our use of the Analytic Writing Continuum assessment, including the refinement of a rubric reflective of the diversity and cultures of our students. We will leverage this work to help our staff and students build a common language for how we talk about writing and all that we believe writing can be. We believe this is important in helping to facilitate the writing and feedback process and in informing our overall program and content development.

We aim to further develop our assessment work to include deeper measures of other benefits of writing, such as socio-emotional learning, creativity, and the long-term personal and educational impact of writing. We aim to share what we learn with the field, with this report being the first of many to come.

ACTION STEPS FOR REUNITING READING AND WRITING

From this research, we recognize the importance of our work to partner with professional writers who work with our students in workshops and events, making it salient that there's a person writing the books that they see and read. We also publish many of our students' writing. On average, we produce over 750 unique student publications each year across our network. A tenet of 826 is to publish student work as we believe the publication process benefits students in multiple ways. First, seeing their own writing celebrated and produced in an official way that honors their work gives them a sense of accomplishment and pride. Second, it closes the circle of reading and writing—their writing has led to a book someone can now read. Lastly,



“Writing can help you read for comprehension but you can also start seeing the craft— you can become a much more conscious reader. It’s by writing that kids understand that authors do things on purpose.”

LUCY CALKINS

FOUNDING DIRECTOR, READING AND
WRITING PROGRAM AT TEACHERS
COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

being able to see and read books by their peers, who they can often identify with, affirms to students that they can be writers too.

While our programs have these features in place, there is of course more we can do to link reading and writing more explicitly. We can facilitate discussion with professionals in writing so students can understand the process and choices writers, editors, and book designers make. We can also amp up our efforts in publishing and distributing our students’ work. We aim to do so especially in the younger grades, where establishing the relationship between reading and writing is essential as they develop their literacy skills and perspectives.

ACTION STEPS FOR IDENTIFYING TEACHERS AS WRITERS

826 Digital is our free online platform for educators with over 9,500 subscribers who have access to more than 300 lessons and resources. Teachers can also access student writing examples to both help them understand what to expect from their students and to share with their students for inspiration from their peers. While we know that our teachers find these writing samples valuable in that it helps their students to share in the writing process of other students, we hope that our teachers will recognize that it is equally important to share in the writing process themselves as well.

We feel inspired by this research to explore ways to grow 826 Digital as well as our relationships with teachers through our school partnerships. While nascent, we see 826 Digital as a priority area for further development to support educators in creating communities of practice. 826 Digital puts us in a unique position to work with and connect teachers from every state from a wide range of communities. There is value, especially with writing, in hearing stories from those who share similar experiences as well as different ones. 826 Digital also has the potential to be the virtual place for not only 826 to share our best practices and lessons learned, but also for our teachers to share with each other.

ACTION STEPS FOR LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

826 is dedicated to its mission to provide writing education to students who most need to access the power of writing and self-expression. We currently serve 40,000 students across our chapters each year across the country. Our chapter outreach focuses on serving a student population that is representative of the local communities where our chapters are located. Ninety percent of the students who participate in 826 Network programs are students of color and approximately 38% of students speak a language other than English at home. Almost all of our 800+ school partnerships are with public schools, 86% of which have a student population where the majority of students qualify for need-based programs, including federal free and reduced price lunch.

While we have a strong network, we also recognize that there are many students in need of writing education beyond the reach of our chapter locations. So we developed **826 Digital** for educators, making the 826 approach to teaching writing possible anywhere in the world. It provides educators access to writing curriculum across subject, genre, and grade levels. Through this work, we have educators using 826 Digital across 60 countries, in all 50 states across the U.S., and in over 900 cities.

Our goal remains to bring 826 programming to new and diverse communities and classrooms, both through our chapter and 826 Digital networks. Additionally, we will increase our efforts to ensure that the resources and materials that we use, the partnerships we bring, and the people the students work with are all representative of our student population. To do so, we need to continue our efforts to seek funding and to work with organizations, donors, and investors who believe in and support our mission to provide writing education to those who need it most.

BRING THE TRUTH TO LIGHT

The truth is, young people write, but not all are given equal opportunity and the tools to do so. Join us as we work towards a future in which young people have access to the power and the joy of writing—and in doing so, define the trajectories of their lives, of their communities, and of the world.

“Let’s write, make things right. Stop making the colors of our skin / sound like a sin. / Let’s write, put our differences aside.”

FROM “SERPENT OF HATRED” BY PARIS A., 9TH GRADE, 826LA



APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWEES

The methodology for this report was to conduct interviews to gain the perspective of people from different roles within the writing and education field. Our expert panel is comprised of classroom teachers, curriculum and instruction developers, researchers, authors, writing organization leaders, and professional development instructors from across the country. Interviews were transcribed and coded to identify themes.

LUCY CALKINS

FOUNDING DIRECTOR, READING AND WRITING PROGRAM AT TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

For more than thirty years, Lucy Calkins has supported hundreds of thousands of teachers, principals, superintendents, and policymakers across the country and around the world in literacy instruction, alongside authoring scores of professional books and articles.

KATHY CRUTCHER

FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SHOUT MOUSE PRESS

Kathy Crutcher has been mentoring young writers inside and outside the classroom since 2003; she now works to amplify underheard voices through publication as a way of combining her passions for writing, youth mentorship, and social justice.

ELYSE EIDMAN-AADAHL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT

Formerly a high school English and journalism teacher, university professor, and evaluation consultant, Elyse Eidman-Aadahl's research focuses on studies of literacy and learning in the context of our new digital environment and how educators from diverse backgrounds reason together about this social transformation for themselves and their youth.

ANTERO GARCIA

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Previously an English teacher in South Central Los Angeles, Antero Garcia studies how technology and gaming shape youth learning, literacy practices, and civic identities.

AMANDA GORMAN

INAUGURAL YOUTH POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

At 22 years old, recent Harvard graduate Amanda Gorman is called "the next great figure of poetry in the U.S.," as she made history in 2017 by becoming the first ever Youth Poet Laureate of the United States of America. Amanda is also a member of 826 National's board of directors.

STEVE GRAHAM

REGENTS AND WARNER PROFESSOR IN THE DIVISION OF LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION AT MARY LOU FULTON TEACHERS COLLEGE, ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

For more than 40 years, Steve Graham has studied how writing develops, how to teach it effectively, and how writing can be used to support reading and learning, using his findings to publish influential research and influence writing curriculum in schools.

JOSÉ TORRES GUARDARAMA

CONTENT LEADER, INSTRUCTION PARTNERS

José Torres Guardarama has worked in education for the past 14 years, first as an elementary school teacher and now as a Primary Elementary ELA Content Leader, working with schools and school systems that are interested in supporting early literacy as they transition their curricula into high-quality learning materials.

MARCELLE HADDIX

DEAN'S PROFESSOR AND CHAIR OF READING AND LANGUAGE ARTS, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF EDUCATION; FOUNDER OF WRITING OUR LIVES

Marcelle Haddix's scholarly interests focus on the experiences of students of color in literacy, English teaching and teacher education, as well as the importance of centering Blackness in educational practices and spaces, which led her to found Writing Our Lives, a project for urban youth writers.

QORSHO HASSAN

4TH GRADE TEACHER, BURNSVILLE, MN

Qorsho Hassan is the first Somali American female to receive the Minnesota Teacher of the Year award, recognized for her equity and diversity efforts as well as her student-centered approach to classroom instruction. Qorsho is also a member of 826 MSP's board of directors.

ASAO B. INOUE

PROFESSOR AND ASSOCIATE DEAN IN THE COLLEGE OF INTEGRATIVE SCIENCES AND ARTS, ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Alongside teaching writing to university students, Asao B. Inoue has published research that focuses on antiracist and social justice theory and practices in writing assessments.

MADELINE KOBAYASHI

CURRICULUM COACH, CHICAGO, IL

Using her experience of 14 years as a classroom teacher, for which she received the 2014 Golden Apple Education Fellow, Madeline Kobayashi supports teachers in curriculum development, designs, plans and facilitates professional learning for teachers, and observes classrooms to provide feedback and lesson planning.

MANDY MANNING

DIGITAL CONTENT SPECIALIST, WASHINGTON EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

For almost a decade, Mandy Manning taught English to newly arrived refugee and immigrant students, earning recognition as the 2018 National Teacher of the Year for her experiential projects like map-making, which helped her students process trauma, celebrate their home countries and culture, and learn about their new community.

PIRETTE MCKAMEY

PRINCIPAL, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Pirette McKamey is the first Black principal of Mission High School in San Francisco, and has taught high school English and history for 26 years, co-founding and co-leading the antiracist teaching committee at Mission High.

DAVID MURA

AUTHOR; BOARD MEMBER AND TEACHER AT VOICES OF OUR NATIONS ARTS FOUNDATION AND THE INNOCENT PROJECT

David Mura is a writer whose latest book, *A Stranger's Journey: Race, Identity & Narrative Craft in Writing*, explores the issues of race in the teaching of creative writing.

SUSAN B. NEUMAN

PROFESSOR OF CHILDHOOD AND LITERACY EDUCATION, NYU

Susan B. Neuman is a specialist in early literacy development and former U.S. Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, whose research and teaching interests include early childhood policy, curriculum, and early reading instruction for children who live in poverty.

KIMBERLY PARKER

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE TEACHER TRAINING CENTER AT THE SHADY HILL SCHOOL, CAMBRIDGE, MA; CO-FOUNDER OF #DISRUPTTEXTS

A former high school English teacher and instructor in the Boston area, Kim Parker is deeply committed to the success of young people of color, for which she was awarded the NCTE 2020 Outstanding Elementary Educator Award.

NICHOLE PINKARD

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL POLICY, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY; FOUNDER & DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL YOUTH NETWORK

With a B.S. and M.S. in Computer Science and a Ph.D. in Learning Sciences, Nichole Pinkard is interested in connecting students with digital literacies, with her work and research focused on the design and use of pedagogical-based social networks, new media literacy learning outcomes, ecological models of learning and developing pathways for urban youth.

JASON REYNOLDS

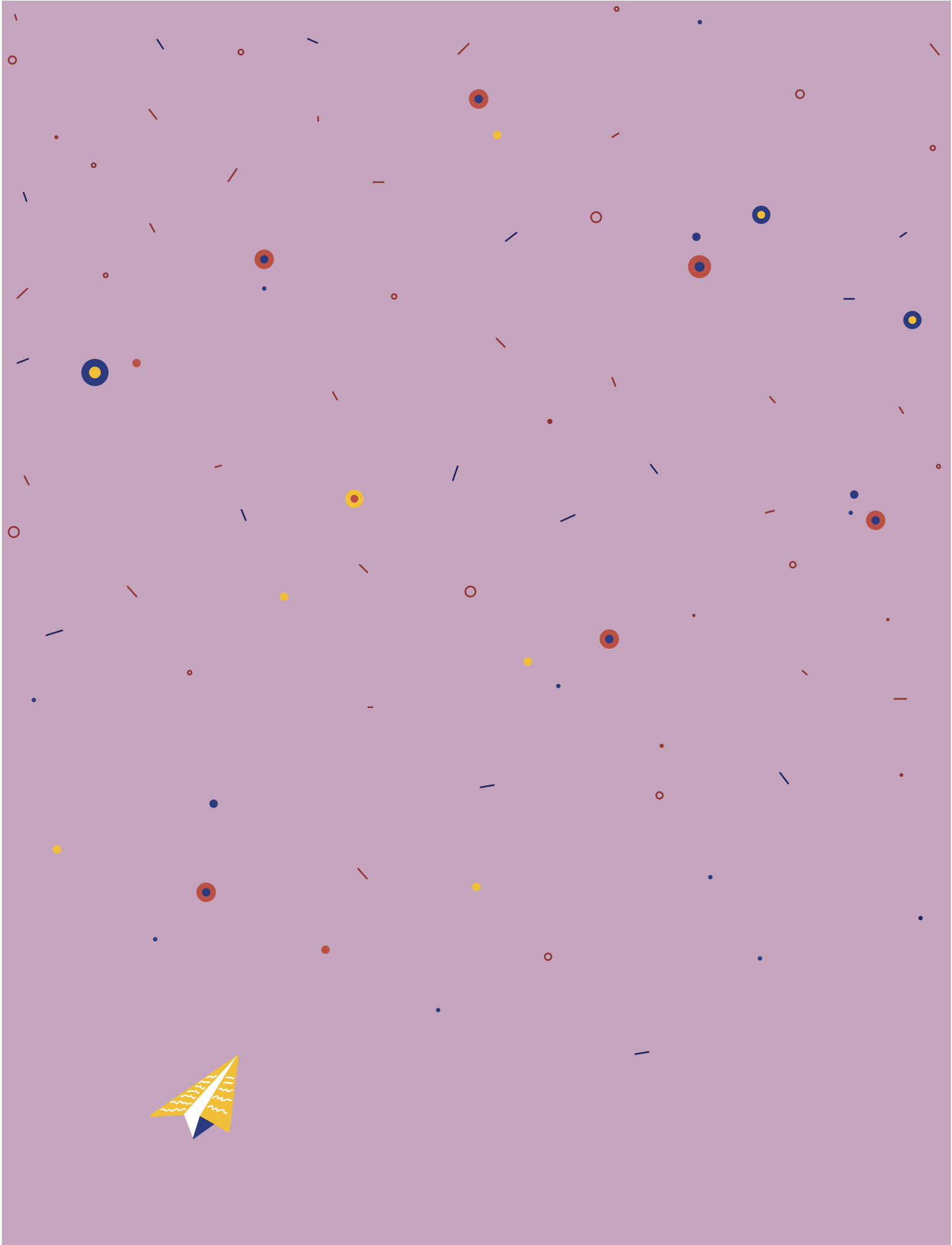
AUTHOR; LIBRARY OF CONGRESS' NATIONAL AMBASSADOR FOR YOUNG PEOPLE'S LITERATURE

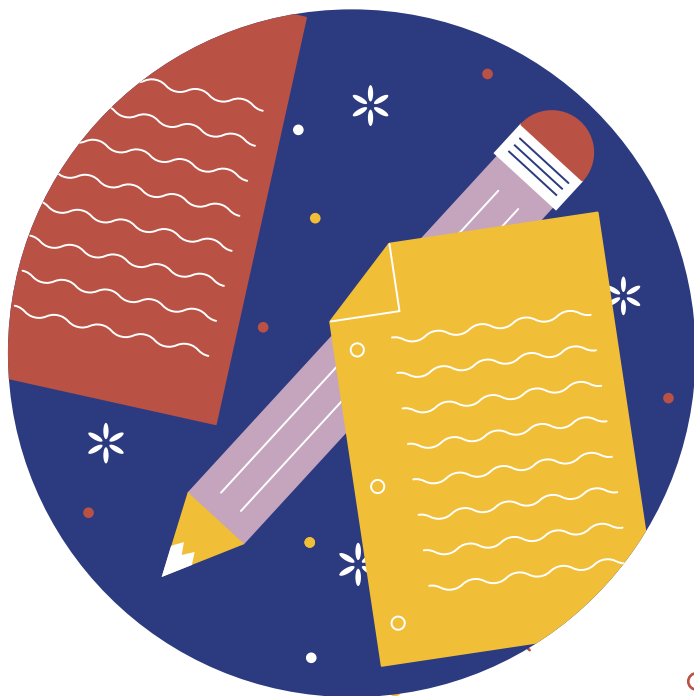
Jason Reynolds is a *New York Times* bestselling author of novels and poetry for young adult and middle-grade audiences, who describes himself as the “cool uncle” of literacy education, engaging young writers across the country to stretch their imagination and to learn to write authentically.

JENNIFER SERRAVALLO

AUTHOR & WRITING INSTRUCTION CONSULTANT

The author of multiple popular books on literacy instruction and a sought-after professional development consultant, Jennifer Serravallo has spent over a decade helping teachers across the country to create literacy classrooms where students are joyfully engaged and the instruction is meaningfully individualized to students' goals.





826national.org