

THE 826 WRITERS' ROOM

A Room Where I Can Be Who I Am

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Writers' Rooms are imaginative spaces within a school dedicated to writing. In these rooms, students immerse themselves in the craft, build their writing skills, and explore the depths of their imaginations on the page in a creative, supportive environment. Through 826 Writers' Rooms, students improve their writing skills, gain confidence and pride in themselves and their writing, and build skills they will use throughout their lives. Drawing on research conducted by Northeastern University, this report provides evidence of positive outcomes and details the essential elements of a Writers' Room so that students and schools everywhere can experience what makes these writing spaces so special.

WHY WRITERS' ROOMS?

Evaluative Studies by Northeastern University

Beginning in 2016, external evaluators from Northeastern University conducted multiple studies on the 826 Writers' Room program:

STUDY 1

School and Student Outcomes:

This study interviewed students, teachers, and school leaders, using first-hand user experience to identify high and low points of the Writers' Room program.

- The study found that 826's pedagogy and programming positively impacts both students and school outcomes.

STUDY 3

Lessons Learned:

Focusing on the 826 Writers' Room experience from the 826 chapter staff perspectives, this study draws out important principles, best practices, and pitfalls to avoid.

- Chapters identified student leadership and building strong relationships with schools as key factors of success.

STUDY 2

A Lasting Impact:

Following a cohort of students from 9th grade to senior year, this study found that the Writers' Room program not only positively impacts students' outcomes, but does so in an enduring way.

- The majority of students started with negative perceptions of writing in 9th grade—only 24% thought of themselves as writers; however, by 12th grade, the majority of students (53%) identified themselves as writers—a 30% gain over four years.



HOW TO CREATE A WRITERS' ROOM:

Best Practices by 826 National

Based on what we have learned from Northeastern's research and our own experiences, we put together some best practices for how to create a Writers' Room-like space in your community:

DEDICATE A UNIQUE SPACE.

It is important that the Writers' Room looks and feels different than a traditional classroom space, allowing students to immerse themselves in writing and creativity without the fear of being graded.

PUBLISH AND CELEBRATE STUDENTS.

Invite teachers, students, parents, and other members of the community into the space to celebrate student writing.

LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS.

It is essential to build pathways for student leadership; students should be partners in the work, deciding what to write about and playing a role in creating a publication that represents themselves and their classmates.

BALANCE CONTENT.

Provide time for structured projects (an essay, newspaper, publication, etc.), but also engage students with content that allows for agency and decision-making opportunities.

STAFF STRATEGICALLY.

A key aspect of the Writers' Room is the focus on individualized support, and 826 chapters indicate that staff and volunteer capacity is the biggest barrier to a thriving program.

ABOUT 826:

826 is the largest youth writing network in the country. 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 more than 470,000 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. 826 National was established in 2008 to support a growing network of writing centers founded by author Dave Eggers and educator Nínive Calegari in San Francisco in 2002. We work toward 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.

