

Engaging Students in Adolescent Writing



District Name
**Socorro Independent
School District**

District City, State
El Paso, TX

Superintendent
Dr. Nate Carman



Connect And Commit

Building a Diverse Team and Identifying the Challenge

Challenge Statement

Teachers need innovative strategies to help them design authentic writing opportunities that support and nurture scholars' creative expression through a medium of their choice. Scholars need opportunities to use their distinctive creativity to enhance their learning through writing across all content areas.

During the 2020-21 school year:

69.7% Students classified as economically disadvantaged

25% Students classified as English Language Learners

11.4% Students from military-connected families

91.8% Overall graduation rate

\$61.7 Million in scholarships and grants

Solution Concept

Create opportunities for scholars to increase their confidence in writing and authentic, creative expression through writing across all content areas.

Inquire And Investigate

Conducting Research to Gather and Analyze Data

Understanding The Challenge

The team noticed that many middle school scholars demonstrated a lack of confidence and comfort with writing. Many expressed self-doubt based on past challenges, struggled to express their ideas using academic vocabulary, and seemed to lack enthusiasm for writing. The team hypothesized the challenges were due to an overemphasis on academic writing and too few opportunities for meaningful self-expression.

Hypothesizing The Root Causes

The team started by hypothesizing root causes and then prioritizing the factors that seemed most relevant. To test their hypotheses, students spoke with current students and alumni, teachers spoke with colleagues, and parents and community members spoke with peers. The team then analyzed the community input and identified three root causes.

Identifying Goals And Outcomes

The team identified a set of targeted outcomes:

- Scholars demonstrate increased confidence as writers.
- Scholars engage in opportunities for authentic, creative expression through writing.
- Scholars write across the content areas.

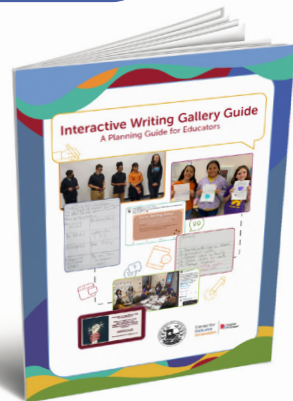
Challenge Area	Choice	Relevance	Trust
Root cause	Students feel disconnected from prescribed, structured writing and want more opportunities for free writing.	Students want to write about topics they're interested in and use diverse forms of expression.	Students need trusting relationships with teachers to counteract the fear of being judged and previous adverse experiences.

Sustain

Creating spaces for student voice, choice, and contribution

Sustaining The Work

School leaders and scholars have demonstrated an interest in sustaining the work that has been developed through this project. Ernesto Serna Fine Arts Academy (previously Ernesto Serna K-8 School) now has a dedicated space and budget for student ambassadors to continue leading the small writing group "Serna's Writing Army". Students at SSG Manuel Puentes Middle School developed materials for incoming students to continue hosting the small writing club "Final Drafters" for the years to come.



Design And Develop

Creating Solutions to Address the Challenge

Confidence And Creativity Across Content Areas

The team designed three concepts to engage students in opportunities to build confidence and foster creativity across content areas.

Student Ambassadors

Student ambassadors create, advocate and lead small writing groups on their campus.

Small Writing Groups

Small writing groups provide safe spaces where scholars are encouraged to share their writing and ideas without judgment.

Interactive Writing Gallery

This online space enables scholars to share their writing and receive peer feedback. Teachers can post writing prompts, including ones focused on culturally relevant topics, and students can use guidelines generated by their peers to provide constructive feedback. The team generated an Interactive Writing Gallery Guide with guidance and templates for use in planning and implementation.

Designing A Solution

The teams began by creating student personas focusing on the students furthest from opportunity. The team designed and implemented a student survey and analyzed almost 200 responses, focusing on students who indicated disengagement and challenges with writing. They brainstormed and prioritized solution concepts and stretched their concepts to maximize a focus on equity and innovation.