

 **AUDIO**  
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## State Support of Writing Instruction

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### Topic **TEACHING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TO BE EFFECTIVE WRITERS**

#### Highlights

- » As states transition to the Common Core State Standards, districts and schools may discover that their instruction is not aligned with the new standards.
- » Most teacher preparation programs place a heavier emphasis on reading skills than on writing skills. Elementary school teachers may know less about development, instruction, and assessment in writing.
- » States can take four main steps to address these challenges: a) assembling teams of experts in the writing area; b) conducting a needs assessment; c) determining state professional development needs; and d) developing documents that align state standards with Common Core State Standards and evidence-based practices.

#### About the Interviewee

Natalie Olinghouse, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of educational psychology and a research scientist in the Center for Behavioral Education and Research at the University of Connecticut. Dr. Olinghouse earned her doctorate in learning disabilities at Vanderbilt University. Her research interests include writing assessment, relations between reading and writing, and vocabulary in writing. Dr. Olinghouse's recent research, funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, seeks to identify key aspects of states' writing content

standards and assessments that are related to students' writing achievement. She has published numerous journal articles and book chapters on writing assessment and instruction for both research and K-12 educator communities. Dr. Olinghouse also is a former elementary special education teacher with 12 years of experience.

## Full Transcript




**00:05** This is Natalie Olinghouse. I am an assistant professor of educational psychology at the Neag School of Education, located at the University of Connecticut. I was a member of the panel for the Practice Guide *Teaching Elementary Students to Be Effective Writers*.


**00:19** It's specifically helpful to know the link between the Common Core State Standards, or the states' current standards if they have not adopted Common Core, and to each of the Practice Guide recommendations. As an example, the W5 Standard, which is what I call the Process Standard, it requires students to develop proficiency in planning, drafting, revising, and editing their writing. But Common Core State Standards doesn't specify how to best teach the writing process. Recommendation 2A in the Practice Guide specifically describes the writing process and how teachers can best support students in engaging in the writing process.


**00:55** As another example, in Recommendation 3 in the Practice Guide, which is "teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing," is well aligned with the language standards, specifically L1, which is around grammar and usage, and L2, which is around capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. Teachers probably need more support in order to improve the writing abilities of students than in other areas like reading.


**01:20** This means that there are several steps that states can take to help districts, schools, and teachers develop better writing instruction. The first is to assemble English language arts teams in the Department of Education that include writing experts. Many general

English language arts specialists tend to be stronger in reading than in writing, which means they often have less knowledge around how to support districts and schools in the area of writing.

 **01:43** The second step is to conduct a needs assessment from districts and schools. What do districts, schools, and teachers already know, and what do they need to know? What do they currently have, and what do they still need? The needs assessment should focus on a couple areas. One, what is the knowledge base of teachers and specialists in the state, and what are the current curricular needs? Have the districts and schools adopted a writing program? If yes, does the writing program represent evidence-based writing instruction? What components are missing, and what still needs to be supplemented? If not, what are potential writing programs that will meet the needs of states' students in writing?

 **02:19** The third step is to determine the states' professional development needs. This could be professional development to district-level administrators and specialists that then support local schools. It could be looking at material development that shows districts, schools, and teachers how to use resources such as the Practice Guide to support student learning.

 **02:37** A fourth step can be to develop documents similar to crosswalk documents between state standards and Common Core State Standards that show how Common Core State Standards and the recommendations from the Practice Guide are aligned. States can then work with districts and schools to use this document to evaluate current and potential writing curricula. Does the writing curricula support students in making progress towards meeting grade-level expectations in writing? Does the writing curricula include evidence-based writing practices?

 **03:06** One important area of leadership at the state level is to create a feeling of investment in writing. First of all, states need to communicate that writing is important, and it's important in society both in work-related communities, personal communities, and our

students need to be prepared to participate in these communities. This means creating an infrastructure to support schools, particularly low-performing schools, in which we focus not only on reading and math but also on writing because we understand how important writing is.

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