Eagle View Elementary School

4500 Dixie Hill Road
Fairfax, VA 22030
Dr. Patricia Granada, Principal

Situated in the large suburban district of Fairfax County, Virginia, Eagle View Elementary School serves a highly diverse population of approximately 860 students in grades pre-K–6. The school is a model of how to integrate writing into daily instruction across all elementary-grade subject areas, as supported by the fact that 90% of the school's fifth graders score proficient or better on the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) writing assessment.

- Pre-K–6
- 38% Asian
- 27% White
- 15% Hispanic
- 14% Black
- 6% Other
- 21% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- 30% English Language Learners
- 13% Special Education

Eagle View teachers understand the importance of writing and, by extension, the importance of implementing the four research-based practices—providing daily time for writing, teaching the writing process and writing for a variety of purposes, teaching foundational writing skills, and building an engaged community of writers—to teaching effective writing skills. Grounded in the belief that "every student soars every day," the Eagle View vision emphasizes the school's belief in success and achievement for all students at Eagle View, and there is clear evidence of teachers' and students' high level of engagement in writing visible throughout the halls and classrooms.

Providing Daily Time for Students to Write

Teachers embed many writing activities throughout the school day, seeking to make student writing relevant. Students and teachers talk about why writing is important for communication and point out all the writing that they see around them in their daily lives at home, at school, and in the community. Making writing a part of their daily lives helps students value writing as an important tool to communicate effectively.

Every classroom teacher sets aside 45 minutes for a daily "writer's workshop." During this time, teachers work with all the students, giving mini-lessons and providing individualized and small-group instruction, scaffolding additional support in the writing process for struggling students. Throughout the workshop time, students are engaged in a variety of writing activities such as independent writing, sharing with peers, or typing and editing their writing on computers. Writing is also integrated into daily science, social studies, and math lessons. For example, in math classes, teachers consider students to have mastered a concept when they can explain it in writing, using a real-world example.

Since the writing planning processes vary across content areas, teachers provide graphic organizers appropriate for the task and content type. Many assignments require students to explain their thinking through both pictures and written real-world examples. In social studies, they may publish a newspaper about colonial events such as Paul Revere's midnight ride, while a math assignment may include writing an

explanation of how to calculate such things as the distance around a soccer field or how much water is in a pool.

Teaching the Writing Process

Explicit instruction of the writing process begins in kindergarten and continues throughout all elementary grades, with teachers helping students move toward increasingly complex tasks. To help students in the writing process, teachers have established a list of "non-negotiable" steps students must complete: students must plan their writing, use the plan to draft the piece, provide a strong introduction, give three to five sentences of detail, pay attention to voice and word choice, and finish with a conclusion. Teachers provide grade-appropriate tools and templates to help students engage in the writing process. For example, in fifth grade, teachers guide students in writing a narrative by comparing the writing piece to a sandwich, with the topic sentence and conclusion represented by the bread and the events shown as the fixings. In this way students can understand how to build a logical narrative piece of writing.

Teachers also focus on helping students write for a variety of audiences and purposes. They have students examine high-quality examples of different types of writing—called "mentor texts"—and answer questions such as "what do I notice?" to identify the characteristics that make the writing effective. In examples of informational nonfiction writing, students might observe that "facts are presented in a timeline," or "informational texts help you learn and provide information about a topic." Using advertisements as examples of persuasive writing gives students the opportunity to look for techniques such as humor, questions, sensory appeals, alliteration, and memorable slogans while teachers provide mini-lessons on catchy leads, target audience, and audience appeal. For a more traditional mentor text in persuasive writing, they read *I Wanna Iguana* by Karen Kaufman Orloff and David Catrow. In this story, a child writes a series of persuasive notes to ask for an iguana, while the mother responds with counterarguments. Students then practice writing persuasive pieces relevant to their lives, like requesting to spend the night with a friend, acquire a new pet, join a sports team, or get a raise in their allowance.

In early grades, teachers guide students through using the writing process to record personal experiences. They use mentor texts including *A Chair for My Mother* by Vera Williams or *Kitchen Dance* by Maurie J. Manning and then ask students to write about major events or things that are important to them. Older students practice letter writing in a math lesson by writing letters to younger students to explain, for example, the concepts of volume, perimeter, and area.

In all writing assignments, students reread and use a variety of strategies to revise, focusing on refining leads and conclusions, avoiding passive voice, using subject-specific vocabulary, and using tools such as a thesaurus to find just the right word.

Teaching Foundational Writing Skills

Foundational writing skills are integral to Eagle View's schoolwide approach to writing instruction. In early grades, teachers focus on basics such as spelling, handwriting, and sentence construction, requiring students to keep a personal spelling dictionary. Across grades, teachers provide tools and checklists to remind students to edit their writing for mechanics including punctuation, plural nouns, "just right" words, and other elements.

Teachers often use simple subject-appropriate sentence frames to help students with sentence construction. For example, a typical sentence frame in math ("There are _____ more _____ in the other _____") might be completed as, "There are 10 more apples in the other basket." As students progress, sentence frames become more open ended, such as, "I realize that _____" or "This makes me think _____."

In all grades, teachers focus on teaching larger text structures, using anchor charts posted in classrooms to remind students of common structures: sequential/chronological, cause/effect, problem/solution, question/answer, compare/contrast, and description. Students practice identifying text structures in mentor texts, with an emphasis on the structural differences between fiction and nonfiction. They learn to choose a text structure based on audience, purpose, and topic.

Creating an Engaged Community of Writers

At Eagle View, the school culture values writing as a critical avenue for learning, communicating, and growing as individuals and as a community. Teachers are committed to building an engaged community of writers in the classroom and across the school.

Students and teachers keep personalized writer's notebooks. Teachers explain that these notebooks are for thinking about and trying out writing techniques and recording impressions, observations, thoughts, and initial seed ideas (fears, hopes, dreams, and ambitions) that may be used later in formal writing opportunities. Students and teachers have frequent opportunities to share their writing with peers, students in other grade levels, and with the whole class.

Students and teachers use writing to enrich the school community, writing notes to classmates and other students at and across grade levels. Student and teacher writing is frequently published and displayed throughout classrooms and the school. Students and teachers provide helpful feedback and seek to learn from others' writing.