

## Writing Rules!

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*Chanhassen Elementary School  
Chanhassen, Minnesota*

A local writer brought out the best in elementary students' prose last year during a literary arts initiative at Chanhassen Elementary School. The new Writing Rules! program turned a dozen students into published authors and helped to raise reading test scores throughout the school.

Chanhassen's Action Team for Partnership (ATP) decided to implement its version of Writing Rules! to promote one of its improvement goals for the year: increasing achievement in writing for all of its students in kindergarten through fifth grade. District officials had already mandated that all schools teach writing according to Writing Rules!, a six-point plan emphasizing organization, ideas, word choice, fluency, conventions, and presentation.

Parent volunteers on the school's ATP thought that, with their participation, the school could do more than simply implement the curriculum in the classroom. One member, a grandparent and professional writer, decided to create a tool to help parents encourage good writing at home. She wrote and edited a quarterly newsletter that explained the basic rules of the program and gave parents tips to help students edit their work. Taking things a step farther, she hosted an after-school writing workshop where the students in the upper grades worked on their writing in a creative setting.

The school newspaper publicized the program, and included a registration flier. The grandparent volunteer visited classrooms to get students excited about the program. The staff also featured the Writing Rules! program during the annual "Arts and Academics" open house, giving visiting parents an opportunity to learn more about it.

The grandparent volunteer led five sessions of the Young Authors Workshop, emphasizing the "voice" aspect of writing and encouraging students to get really creative with

their words. Students shared their work with one another and participated in a peer editing process. At the end of the Young Authors Workshop sessions, parents attended a student reading of their work. Each student left the workshop as a "published" author with their writing in a bound collection, complete with student illustrations.

By the end of the semester, Chanhassen's program had yielded success for its students. Thanks to the new writing resources, test scores were up across the school. Parents had a better understanding of the writing model and learned concrete ways to help their children improve their writing. These parents said they were eager to have their children practice writing, thus, reinforcing the classroom work.

The workshops cost about \$300. The school used funds provided by the PTA and some district funds to cover the expenses.

Chanhassen plans to continue the program and hopes to include others writers, especially in the workshops.

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