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Project has children writing at Wyandotte

Rick Longley/Education Writer

Wyandotte Avenue School students are writing and reading more these days thanks to a writing training project their teachers are using to build positive results. Principal Julian Diaz and resource teacher Vicki Silva presented information on the project Wednesday night to Oroville Elementary School District Trustees.

The project was started two years ago, Diaz said, after the school found some students were not writing at grade level.

Concerned about this situation, teachers turned out for a Saturday training workshop sponsored by California State University, Chico's California Writing Project.

To Diaz's surprise, 95 percent of the teachers showed up that first Saturday. "I thought they'd be crazy to give up a Saturday," he said, but they did.

The focus of the workshop was to see what teachers could do to get kids to write.

Eventually, **Wyandotte** Avenue School staff did a summer writing training with Oakdale Heights and Stanford Avenue schools this year to expand the benefits, Diaz said.

Student writing assignments can be seen on the walls of **Wyandotte** Avenue classrooms as the kids have pride in their work, he said.

The principal noted, however, some kids write about very personal things, so teachers don't always share their work with the rest of the class.

A video on the California Writing Project showed smiling students busily writing stories while their teachers observed.

Two or three kids read essays they'd written with the theme "I am the One."

A boy said "I am the one who loves animals. I am the one who loves dogs, and I am the one who loves video games."

Other students did book reports on biographies, wrote summaries of books and discussed claims made in books or stories.

A report a girl did on England's Queen Elizabeth I amused the OESD Board and staff when she noted Elizabeth was a "good queen, except that she cut her sister Mary's head off." This caused the group to laugh.

Silva said the writing project is a rare opportunity for staff to get together and talk about learning in the classroom.

She added students are required by the state to master quite a few writing skills by the end of 12th grade, and she is glad to see OESD teachers supporting grade levels down the line by introducing some upper grade concepts into their classes.

A shift to daily writing also has happened, Silva said. Students write in "Think Books" which provide ideas for different

writing projects.

Silva emphasized this is a writing project rather than a program, but it works on a variety of skills.

Students discover how to process and write about math problems, how to respond to literature they've read and how to explain a science project, she said. This goes beyond merely writing journals like kids used to do.

Kindergarten teacher Carlene Burnum is a 38-year teaching veteran who said she was amazed to discover she could bring eighth-grade standards into her kindergarten class with the "Think Book." They are writing with more focus and doing paragraphs, she said.

Another teacher appeared on the video to explain his students are writing with a purpose and a voice. They did it by writing about a simulated shipwreck where they drew a picture and wrote about the fictional experience, he said.

Teachers teaching other teachers what to do for the writing project is another big plus, according to Nicole Krieder who is now visiting other school districts in this area to share her expertise. OESD Superintendent Don Remley complimented her for her work.

The project costs each school about \$6,000 a year, but there is a discount for having a fifth school involved. However, most OESD schools are now participating in one form or another, officials said.

"I'm excited about it," OESD Trustee Tomasa Frazier said. "I wish I'd had it when I was in school."

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