

Curriculum Quarterly

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In This Issue

- Learning Addresses All Students
- Curriculum Guide(s) Available
- Reminder: Schools Now on Trimesters
 - Report Card Update
- Introducing *My Access!* Writing Program

Zook's Nook

At Hawthorn, you often hear our Mission Statement of "Learning for All — Whatever It Takes." I speak for all of our educators when I tell you that this isn't just a motto. All that we do here is designed to support and challenge every learner toward higher achievement. No child is unreachable or unteachable. It is our mission to unlock the potential in each student.

It's true that in today's world of "No Child Left Behind" legislation, test results are important. That said, I am proud to tell you that Hawthorn continues to teach to the student, not to the test. I am also pleased to be able to report that our learning-focused methods work. Our students learn, grow — and score very well on standardized tests in the process. (*FYI, ISAT scores are expected in early November.*)

Curriculum Guide(s) Available

All Hawthorn schools follow the same standards-based comprehensive curriculum. The full Hawthorn Curriculum Guide is a very detailed document numbering more than 120 pages. While we'd love every parent to take time to digest this powerful resource, we know that's not practical for most of us. To help parents stay informed, we've developed our new grade-by-grade Curriculum Guides, offering a synopsis of key learning goals for the year. You should have received summaries in early September. These guides, as well as the complete Hawthorn Curriculum, are posted on the District's curriculum page (learning.hawthorn73.org/curriculum).

Reminder: Schools Now on Trimesters

In an effort to improve consistency across the District, all Hawthorn schools have moved to trimesters. The first trimester ends November 19, with report cards coming home on November 30. In addition, parents will receive a "mid-term progress report," planned for distribution on October 12. This report will cover progress toward the core concepts covered during the first six weeks of school.

Report Card Update

Curriculum Quarterly readers know that over the past couple of years, a large group of teachers and administrators, working with parents and assessment experts, has developed an updated report card. The updated report card accomplishes several goals:

- **It provides a consistent reporting tool across the District.** Up to this point, our different schools have had different reports.
- **It links what students are learning (the curriculum goals) directly to report card categories.** It offers "apples to apples" correlation, emphasizing key learning areas at each level.
- **It separates academic achievement from work habits.** The report offers progress on both "learning" and "habits" — two very important and very different things. By handling these topics individually, parents will get a more realistic picture of how well their student is learning the material as well as how they work toward that goal. (Consider a student who doesn't turn in assignments, yet masters the content in the end. This picture is different from a student who is fastidious about homework efforts, yet still needs support to reach the learning goals.)

Change is always a challenge. We are fortunate that many of you took the time to ask questions and become involved in the Report Card Initiative. While the bulk of the community has supported the team of educators who advocated a faster-track roll-out of the updated report card, we did take a slower approach.

To that end, the new standards-based report card is being piloted in all Kindergarten, 3rd and 6th grade classes beginning with the late-November first trimester report cards. The longer-term plan is to roll an updated report card to grades 1, 4 and 7 next year, and be District-wide by the 2009/2010 school year.

Some parents receiving the updated report card will find it very similar to what they've been seeing. Others may need more time to digest new categories and progress indicators. Your teacher and principal are able to offer insight both on your student and this report card. Information is posted on the District website (learning.hawthorn73.org/report_cards). You may also contact me directly at zooks@hawthorn73.org or 847-990-4244.

Introducing *My Access!* Writing Program

When it comes to the “3 R’s” — Reading, ‘Riting and ‘Rithmetic — educators will tell you that teaching writing is often a challenge. While we can present all sorts of pre-writing graphic organizers, content development strategies and practice opportunities, the bottom line is that students need to write every day to become better writers. The challenge is to find meaningful writing opportunities, while also providing timely, actionable feedback.

For the past several months, we’ve been investigating a new computer-based writing program designed to address these challenges. **The program, called *My Access!*, will be available to all of our 4th through 8th grade classes beginning later this fall.**

How Will Students Use the Program?

Students using *My Access!* will log on to their own portfolio to create written pieces. (Students can work anywhere they have Internet access.) Once they log on, students will receive computerized support for the entire writing process — pre-writing graphic organizers, writer’s checklists, self-scoring rubrics, and tools such as grammar explanations, word counters, word banks and spell checkers — which teachers can choose to turn off, depending on the assignment.

How Am I Doing?

Perhaps most exciting about *My Access!* is the fact that students receive feedback on their efforts *immediately*. Students earn a score as well as explanation on where they can improve. Research has found that this sort of immediate feedback is crucial to learning. Students then turn right around to use this specific feedback to improve their efforts, which can again receive immediate feedback.

How Does It Do That?

The *My Access!* scoring system is an “intelligent” scoring system that emulates the process carried out by expert human scorers. The system was “trained” through a process that included the creation of high quality marker papers, which were then scored by a pool of expert human graders to build the scoring model.

While no computerized scoring model is perfect, neither are human scorers. In fact, test results we examined indicated that the *My Access!* computerized scoring was more likely to agree with an expert human scorer than were two expert human scorers grading the same paper. At any rate, our expectation is that the highly objective

computerized scoring, combined with immediate and actionable feedback, will result in tremendous benefits to our students.

What Classes Will This Support?

My Access! not only supports the writing process, but also the entire curriculum. Teachers can choose from hundreds of writing topics that explore key curriculum points covered by national standards as well as the most popular textbooks. The program is just as useful in supporting science and social studies learning as it is in language arts.

Teachers can customize the program, feeding in their own questions and writing prompts, as well as adding to or overriding the computerized feedback. The program also offers features to support ESL students.

Does It Work?

According to research studies as well as our discussions with teachers using *My Access!*, the system results in significant writing improvement as measured both by standardized tests and the program’s own student tracking system. Students report that they feel more confident about their writing.

What About Existing Writing Programs?

While *My Access!* is an exciting resource for our 4th through 8th grade students, it will not take the place of existing curriculum and writing programs. All of our students will continue with the 6 Traits of Writing exercises and assessments, which we have found to be valuable at all grade levels.

For more information about *My Access!* visit the District website (www.hawthorn73.org).

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Have you signed up for Parent/Teacher Conferences? The District-wide conference time is scheduled for November 19 and 20. Teachers and administrators are also available throughout the year.

Contact Information

The *Curriculum Quarterly* offers information related to student achievement and staff development programs here at Hawthorn. It is sent home with students approximately four times each year, as well as posted on the District website, www.hawthorn73.org. Questions or comments may be directed to Sue Zook, Ed.D., at 847-990-4244 or zooks@hawthorn73.org.