

International Writing Centers Association

Position Statement on Secondary School Writing Centers

Approved by the IWCA Executive Board: April 22, 2015

We have long known that success in school, college, and work depends on the ability to write well. Consistent with recommendations of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the National Writing Project (NWP) to foreground writing to learn and writing across all disciplines, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and other curricular initiatives reflect a growing commitment to writing instruction in our K-12 schools. These curricular mandates present challenges alongside opportunities, especially for the many schools and communities experiencing growing populations of students with diverse linguistic, educational, and financial backgrounds who require additional assistance as they negotiate the challenges of writing in new languages, in new contexts, and for new purposes. Writing centers have proven to successfully support the teaching of writing school wide. These centers support and enrich writing instruction by drawing on trained tutors as accessible experts who engage students in academic discourse, build confidence in writers, and help them navigate expectations of audience, purpose, and clarity in writing.

Because each secondary school writing center serves the needs of its unique population, they may differ in size, shape, source of staffing, funding, and implementation. Profiles of secondary centers include writing, literacy, and learning centers staffed by peer tutors before and after school and during free periods, embedded composition courses in which students tutor, writing fellows courses embedding tutors within particular teachers' classes, and community-supported centers with trained volunteer tutors. Many secondary school writing centers are teacher- and or student-led initiatives, while others have been the result of successful partnerships with universities. Across the range of profiles and implementation models, secondary school writing centers uphold the following core beliefs:

- One-to-one conversations about writing increase student learning, build a culture of student and teacher leadership, and reinforce writing instruction.
- Writing centers are based on current writing center theory and pedagogy and train tutors to address revising student writing before editing or proofreading.
- Both tutor and tutee are inherently guided by essential 21st Century skills of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication.

Outcomes of Secondary School Writing Centers.

Successful implementation of secondary school writing centers yields the following outcomes for all stakeholders in the writing process:

- *Student writers* benefit from writing centers in the following ways: through critical engagement with an invested partner to receive low-stakes feedback on and authentic responses to their writing; differentiated instruction; social interaction; increased confidence in and motivation for writing; and reinforcement of lifelong writing habits.
- *Peer tutors* benefit from writing centers through an increased understanding of the writing and collaborative learning process, improved oral and written communication skills, critical analysis, adaptability, leadership skills, and preparation for academic and professional communication.
- *Teachers* of all subject areas benefit from writing centers as they reflect on writing pedagogy, support formative assessment practices, and engage in professional dialogue with other teachers and with peer tutors and student writers.

- *The school community* benefits from writing centers as an institutional commitment to writing becomes public, inclusive, and engages all stakeholders as students become true leaders among their peers in learning communities and as writers' voices are empowered.

Recommendations for Implementation of Secondary School Writing Centers.

Institutional support of a writing center, its director, and its peer tutors in terms of space, time, budget, tutor training, and professional development is crucial for long-term sustainability and success. Secondary school writing centers need to be strategically implemented, adequately funded, and institutionally supported according to the following best practices:

- Writing centers should reflect the local needs of the school; considerations of hours, staffing, training, and outreach should reflect the school's instructional schedule and academic priorities. School administrators and teachers should work together to assess the needs of the school when designing the best program for their site.
- Writing center directors should be compensated appropriately to reflect the hours spent managing and administering the writing center beyond their regular teaching contracts. This compensation may take the form of a salary, stipend and/or a partial or full release from teaching a full course load.
- Tutors within the writing center should reflect the demographic, ethnic, and gender diversity of the student body to whatever extent possible.
- Tutors should receive appropriate, comprehensive, ongoing training via methods suitable to local context (for example, a course, a practicum, or a training period).
- As appropriate to their instructional missions, writing centers should be provided a physical space and location conducive to the variety of services provided. Writing with technology should be encouraged and supported; however, a campus writing center should not primarily be perceived as or operated as a computer lab.
- Writing center directors should be compensated for professional development and ongoing training, and directors and tutors should be supported in their professional participation in such training whenever and however possible (for example, attendance to local, regional, and national conferences and submitting items for publication).

Bibliography

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