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MAKING ROOM FOR GROWTH: THE WRITING  
ASSESSMENT PROGRAM IN THE SCHOOL  
DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

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The informing principle of the Writing Assessment Program in the School District of Philadelphia is that writing instruction and writing assessment should and can enhance one another. Just as the best kinds of classroom writing instruction are embedded in meaningful contexts, so does information about students' developing abilities as writers need to be generated within a staff development context that makes such information applicable to teacher and student growth. Since the inception of the Writing Across the Curriculum Project in 1984, Philadelphia educators have given increasing attention to the importance of situating classroom writing activities within a meaningful instructional context.

The Writing Assessment Program in the School District of Philadelphia, currently (1988-

89) in its third year, combines several components for maximum impact on teachers and students alike. These components include: (1) providing teacher-led staff development, focusing on the design of effective writing assignments and on instructional strategies for contextualizing those assignments in the classroom; (2) training teachers in the development of criteria for evaluating student writing, using their own students' writing as the data from which those criteria are elaborated; (3) bringing together teachers from all areas of the city and from several different disciplines (English/language arts, social studies, mathematics, science), in order to generate greater districtwide agreement on expectations and objectives; and (4) building into all workshop activities the kinds of formative information that enable participating teachers to undertake classroom writing instruction more effectively.

Program components and highlights for 1988-89 include: (1) a sequence of citywide workshops on assignment-designing and evaluating student writing for 120 teachers of grades three, five, seven, and eleven; (2) implementation of school-based, school-site writing assessment programs in four pilot schools (two elementary, two senior high); (3) a Saturday symposium, "Nurturing Student Writers," open to all educators in the School District of Philadelphia; (4) publication and dissemination of *Making Room for Growth: A Documentary Portrait of the 1987-88 Writing Assessment Program in the School District of Philadelphia*.

The Writing Assessment Program, initially conceived as a discrete three-year (1986-89) initiative, is now poised to become a permanent, ongoing component of professional development for teachers and administrators in the School District of Philadelphia. The guiding aim of the program, as it continues into 1989-90 and beyond, is to enable critical reflection on students' writing abilities and teachers' instructional practices in ways that will enable both to improve.