

How Harmony Public Schools Increased Student Writing and Boosted Teacher Effectiveness in Grades 3–12

Harmony Public Schools is a system of 60 public charter schools in Texas. More than two-thirds of Harmony students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and one-third speak languages other than English at home.



Harmony Public Schools, Texas
www.harmonytx.org

District Data

- 45,575 students
- 60 schools
- Grades PK–12
- 67% economically disadvantaged
- 33% multilingual learners

Student Data

- 11% African American
- 19% Asian
- 52% Hispanic
- 3% Multiple Races
- 15% White

Challenges

- Teachers needed to adapt instruction to new digital, writing-heavy state assessment
- Students in previously untested grades ill-equipped to demonstrate their learning
- Gaps in existing ELA curriculum
- Inconsistent use of writing- and grammar-focused instructional materials
- Lack of teacher confidence and capacity for writing instruction
- Lack of insight into students' writing progress

Implementation

- NoRedInk Premium
- Grades 3–12

Results

- Increased grade 3 writing submissions by 75% in four months
- Increased grades 4–12 writing submissions by 135% in two years
- Improved consistency and effectiveness in systemwide writing instruction
- Teachers are more confident writing instructors; students are more confident writers



Testing changes prompt shift in writing instruction

When state lawmakers announced a redesign of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), Harmony leaders decided it was time to change their approach to writing instruction. Like many districts, Harmony had only been emphasizing consistent writing instruction in grades that were tested on writing.

While the STAAR had previously assessed writing only in grades 4 and 7, the new test would assess students in grades 3 through 10. The redesign would also move the assessment online, reduce the percentage of multiple-choice questions, and prioritize cross-curricular passages and evidence-based writing.

“Our English language arts and reading curriculum had gaps in writing in the grade levels that were not previously tested on the STAAR,” said Dr. Amy Chankin, Assistant Area Superintendent of the Central Texas District, one of seven districts in the Harmony system.

Teachers lacked insight into students’ writing progress, and the materials teachers were using varied from class to class. “Because teachers were relying on such a wide range of materials, **there was some ambiguity in grading, and instruction varied.** Our teachers were using some great instructional practices, but they were very labor-intensive and often lacked a digital component,” she said.

Many teachers also felt unprepared to teach writing effectively. “We have amazing educators in Harmony, but **most teachers expressed that because they never received explicit instruction in writing pedagogy, they felt ill-equipped to teach it,**” said Chankin.



Increasing writing frequency by nearly 2.5x in grades 4–12

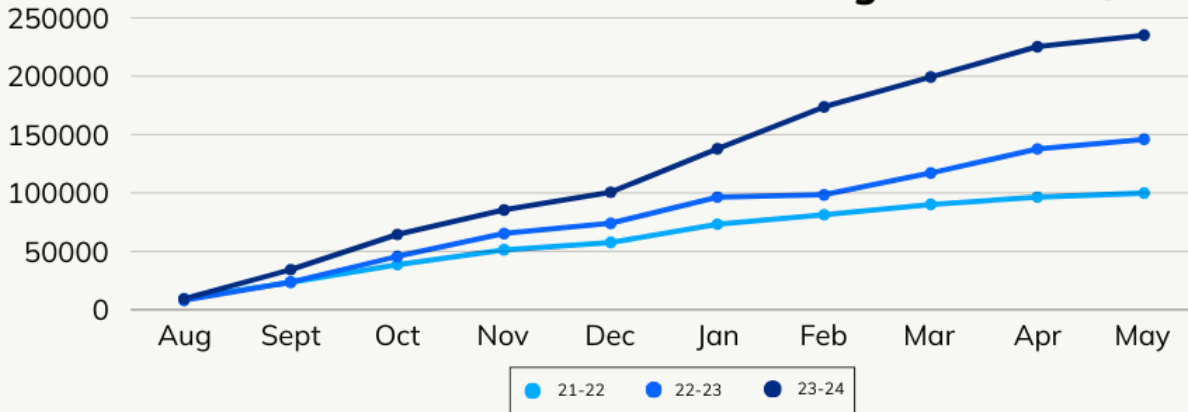
After conducting a small pilot with secondary students, Harmony launched NoRedInk Premium in grades 6–12 across all of its districts and then added grades 4–5 as well. “We chose NoRedInk because we wanted a platform that would help all our students, and particularly our emergent bilingual (EB) students, build their writing and grammar skills,” said Chankin.

During 2021–2022 — the first year that NoRedInk was used systemwide in grades 4–12 — students completed roughly 100,000 writing assignments. **By 2023–2024, that number had increased to 232,000 student writing assignments** in grades 4–12.



Diving into the data

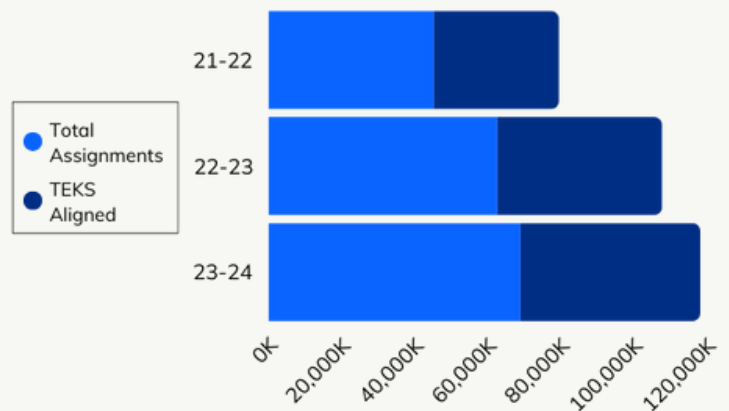
Cumulative Student Writing YoY



Prior to NoRedInk, we didn't have a systematic procedure for capturing student writing, so I didn't see a lot of pen to paper. Last school year, I saw more students producing more writing than in any other year," said Chankin.

The number of skill assignments aligned to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) increased as well.

Skill Assignments and TEKS Alignment YoY





Keri Bell, Director of Literacy Programs for Harmony Public Schools, agrees. “NoRedInk gives students **multiple at-bats to engage in writing**—and in a more authentic context than test prep booklets, multiple-choice questions, or daily oral language activities can provide. Students can engage with a writing prompt or practice exercises knowing they’re getting what they need to perform well on the STAAR,” she said.

Thanks to these strong results, when Harmony leaders heard that NoRedInk was launching an offering specifically tailored to the needs of learners in grades 3–5, they were eager to give it a try.

Expanding NoRedInk to grade 3

During the 2023–2024 school year, six schools in Harmony’s Central Texas District piloted the new NoRedInk for Grades 3–5 offering with 418 third graders. Throughout the pilot, Harmony leaders worked closely with the NoRedInk team to embed the comprehensive writing platform into their curriculum and instruction.

“NoRedInk linked **specific activities to our scope and sequence** so teachers could easily see all the resources available for a skill and pull exactly what they needed, when they needed it,” said Elise Koestner, Harmony’s Curriculum Director for English Language Arts and Reading in grades 3–5. “It’s a great help to teachers because their time is so valuable.”



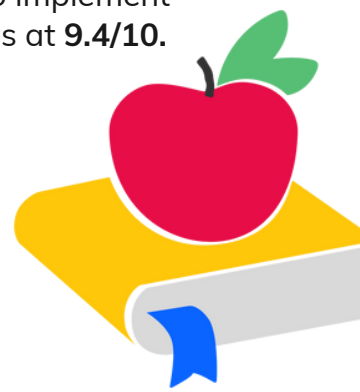
Equipped with NoRedInk’s **standards-aligned diagnostics, adaptive skills exercises, scaffolded writing activities, and comprehensive instructional support**, Harmony teachers were able to simplify the process of building strong writers through a variety of approaches.

“NoRedInk is used in our ‘blended learning model,’ where students work in small groups with teachers and then practice independently,” said Chankin. “It’s also used during core instruction with the ‘I do, we do, you do’ model, where teachers model a skill or task, engage students in collaborative practice, and then allow students to work independently.”

“The platform is so versatile,” added Bell. “It’s easily searchable, and **assignments can be tailored to an individual or to a group of students.**”

Empowering teachers with pedagogy-focused PD

To build teacher confidence and capacity for teaching writing, NoRedInk conducted three in-person professional development sessions during the pilot. The sessions were attended by the 26 third-grade teachers participating in the pilot, as well as fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in the pilot schools. Attendees rated the **sessions’ effectiveness at 9.9/10** and rated their preparedness to implement NoRedInk after the sessions at **9.4/10**.



“The professional development empowered our teachers,” said Chankin. “They left each session feeling excited to apply the strategies they learned. **To see both new and veteran teachers having joyful conversations about teaching writing is a stamp of success, and I know students are benefiting from that joy.**”



Teachers walked away from the sessions with a confidence boost,” said Bell. “Even teachers who didn’t love teaching writing before—or who had never taught writing—saw that they could become great writing teachers.”

This confidence boost positioned teachers to take Harmony’s NoRedInk implementation to the next level, and resulted in Harmony third graders collectively completing more than 750 pieces of writing between November 2023 and January 2024. “It was like going from zero to full force,” Chankin said.

Building more fluent writers while reducing planning time

NoRedInk’s expansive Quick Writes library made it easy for Harmony teachers to improve students’ writing fluency and give them multiple opportunities to apply their skills in context.

“The prompts are super fun. NoRedInk has done a good job of differentiating the prompts so they’re engaging at different grade levels,” said Koestner.

The Quick Writes library has also made work easier for Koestner and her curriculum support team. “The prompts are already made. We can send them to teachers for their classes. We can edit them if we want to. We even created Quick Writes tailored to the texts our students are reading so they get additional practice writing short constructed responses,” she said.

Bell was also quick to point out that drafting is just one step of the writing process. Feedback and revision are just as important to spurring students’ growth.

“NoRedInk provides a structure where students can submit drafts, receive feedback from their teacher or their peers, and then revise their work,” she said. **“This feedback loop fosters a growth mindset.** It encourages students to **think critically about their own writing** and about how they might contribute to their peers’ writing. **This not only builds their confidence, but it allows them to see themselves as real writers. It gives them a more holistic picture of what writing is.”**

Making writing more accessible to EB students

As with its initial implementation, providing robust support to emergent bilingual (EB) students was an important piece of Harmony's grade 3 pilot.

The adaptive nature of NoRedInk's skills exercises was critical to this effort. As students worked toward mastering standards-aligned writing and grammar skills, **their exercises would adapt in real time to meet them where they were.** Within the NoRedInk platform, the difficulty of each question in an exercise is determined by the student's performance on previous questions, and students receive targeted feedback and step-by-step remediation as they need it.

Additionally, instant data and live tracking capabilities made it easy for teachers to monitor student progress and intervene if a student needed extra support. **"NoRedInk gives teachers data points they can use to close gaps,"** said Koestner.

Harmony teachers also used the platform's Guided Short Response assignments to provide students with clear, engaging scaffolding as they built paragraphs sentence by sentence.

"We have over 14,000 multilingual learners in our schools," said Bell. "Breaking down the writing process into smaller chunks—with feedback embedded throughout—lowers students' affective filter so **they can approach the work with confidence, not fear.** It makes writing feel very accessible to our EB students."

Building a culture of writing spanning subjects, grades, and schools

Ultimately, during the 2023–2024 school year, third graders in the Central Texas District mastered an average of 35 discrete writing skills, from using evidence effectively to producing complex sentences. They also submitted more than **3,000 writing samples** across the six pilot schools.

In response to these strong results, Harmony rolled out NoRedInk in grade 3 across all its schools for the 2024–2025 school year.

"With NoRedInk, we now have a common platform and a common language from grades 3 through 12. **Everyone is unified, and teachers no longer view writing as an add-on; it's now an integral part of the day,**" Chankin said.



"We're also starting to see more writing in subjects like social studies, science, and math. It's spreading to other parts of the day beyond the writing block. It's becoming part of the culture of each school."

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Bell has seen other positive changes as well.

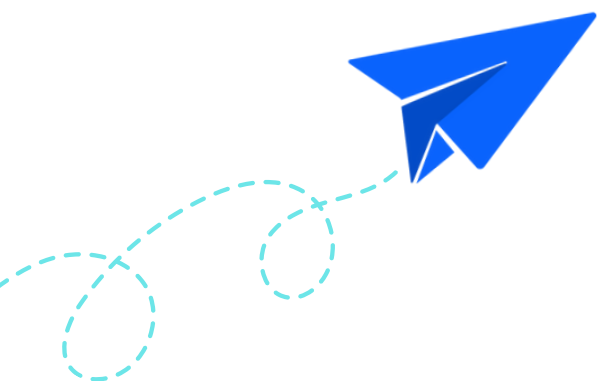
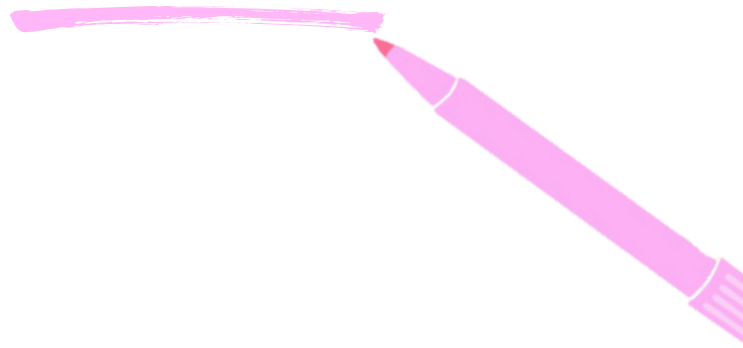


Teachers used to say that they didn't like writing or didn't want to teach writing because of the way they were taught. NoRedInk provides a way to break that cycle with our students."

"It exposes students to the kinds of questions and decisions real-life authors encounter every day. It allows them to experience writing as it exists in the real world so they see that **we are all writers**," she said.

Bell encourages other districts to explore the value of NoRedInk for themselves. "I suggest visiting a classroom in a district with NoRedInk or piloting the platform at one campus," she said.

"Watch students interact with NoRedInk, then watch them interact with a workbook and decide which is more engaging and which is going to produce better writers. **You'll see why it works."**



Join the 60% of US school districts already enhancing their ELA curriculum with NoRedInk.

[Learn more or request a meeting](#)