

Recap of the Writing Lab Training Session

The best training is hands-on and we would like to get all our volunteers into the lab and working with the kids ASAP.

This will summarize what was covered at the training and focus on the practical matters (sign-ups, parking, clearance documents, bell schedules, cancellations, etc.), as well as give you the 1-2-3's of doing a writing conference with a student. We discussed the roles of each of the participants: teachers, writing lab clinician, volunteers, and students and went over the nuts and bolts. We are hitting only the key points here. After reading this, if any new volunteer is still hesitant to sign-up, please contact us so that we can arrange for you to observe another experienced volunteer do a conference and then we promise you will be ready to jump in and help.

Who's Who

Mrs. Melissa Kelly is the Writing Lab Clinician. She is an English teacher who works with all teachers and students in all three grades, and she is in charge of the Writing Lab and responsible for organizing parent volunteers who assist in the lab. The best way to contact her is via email at mkelly@mtlsd.net

The Golden Rule: Confidentiality

The first and most important rule that we must strictly adhere to is confidentiality. Information learned about a child or instances observed while volunteering must remain confidential. Do not discuss a particular child with anyone other than the teacher or Writing Lab Clinician. Please guard against accidental slips, both in school and outside. Remember that children have "big ears" and may misinterpret or misuse the things they overhear about themselves or other students, so please guard against inclusion of students' names even when seeking advice from other volunteers.

Sign-ups

You will receive an email with a link to the spreadsheet containing the latest schedule. Sign-up by adding your first initial and last name (ex. MKelly) next to those periods on the schedule that work for you. We will regularly re-email the link to the schedule so that you will be able to check where we need help. If possible, sign up for two or three periods in a row, rather than just one period, because the first period you work with the students, you are getting familiar with the assignment, and by the second period, you are "on a roll." However, if you can only sign up for one period, please do so because all help is valued by the kids! The teachers like to have more than one volunteer for each period to help reach the maximum number of students.

Reliability & Cancellations

When you sign-up to volunteer, we rely on you to fill that time slot. If you know in advance that you need to cancel, please remove yourself from the schedule. If you need to cancel at the last minute for illness or other emergency, send Mrs. Kelly an e-mail.

Wearing Different Hats

Please remember that when you are in school to volunteer that you should not approach the teacher about other matters. Save the "parent hat" for another time. This is courteous to the teachers who are busy working with the students and would prefer a time when they can focus on your parental concerns completely.

Bell Schedules

The bell schedule of class periods is different for the 6th, 7th and 8th grade through the lunch periods. This sometimes causes confusion when volunteers are signing up for the Writing Lab. Please pay careful attention to the times listed on the sign-up sheet. The bell schedules, including the ones for Tuesday Talk days and days with late starts can be found here. <https://www.mtlsd.org/uploaded/JMS/About/JMSbellschedule.pdf>

Parking, Sign-in Procedure & Reporting to the Writing Lab

Please park in the JMS parking lot. All volunteers must stop in at the attendance office to sign in and get a visitor tag. In the office, the secretary will check to make sure you have all of your clearances. If you have a card verifying this, you can show it to the secretary. Otherwise, she can check the District list. Then, proceed to the Writing Lab (the last door on the right of the first floor before the library) to get your assignment from Mrs. Kelly. When you are done, don't forget to check back in with Mrs. Kelly to turn in your materials before signing out at the office.

Cell Phones

Please turn off your cell phone or put it on vibrate so you can focus 100% on working with the student sitting beside you.

How To Do a Writing Conference

Arrive at the Writing Lab about five minutes early and check in with Mrs. Kelly. For each volunteer, she will have a copy of the student assignment and conference sheet with the teacher's "rubric" or check-list of the things that the teacher wants you to look for as you work with the student. Mrs. Kelly always has specific advice to share about what the teacher is emphasizing in each assignment and any particular problems that the students need help with. She will also have marked pages in the Writing Tip Book which can help you coach the student. Mrs. Kelly will then direct you where you will be working with students. This is usually directly outside the labs, but it might also be outside the teacher's classroom or inside the classroom with the entire class. Each student should arrive with not only his paper but also a copy of the Conference Sheet for you to fill out and sign, and a pencil.

Five Easy Steps of the Writing Conference

1. Ask the student to sit next to you. Introduce yourself to the student and ask her if there is anything she would specifically like help with when you are reviewing the piece.
2. Have the student read the paper out loud, and when she is done, start by saying something positive ("I like your topic," or "You have lots of supporting detail," or "You have a good topic sentence" or "I can tell you worked very hard to.....").
3. If the student is struggling with the assignment, start by asking her, "Tell me what your main point is." If she doesn't have an answer (a rare occurrence, but you will encounter shy students), you can ask her to look back at her prewriting materials.
4. Send the student back with one or two points on which to work. Do not overwhelm her with changes, and do not fix grammatical errors (although you may direct her to check for punctuation, run-ons, fragments, spelling etc.). Remember, the revisions are the responsibility of the student. Let the teacher's conference sheet and Mrs. Kelly's comments be your guide. If you do not get through the entire conference sheet because you focused on one problem or you ran out of time, that's okay. You can make this note on the conference sheet or mention it to Mrs.

Kelly if you feel the child needs to have another parent conference.

Out of respect for the student and to help teach her that revisions are her responsibility, refrain from writing on the student's paper. Your comments should be made on the conference sheet or a sticky note—only the student's pencil should touch her paper.

5. Smile, relax and listen! Your smile makes the student more comfortable. Also, relax and listen when the student is reading her piece, and we guarantee that ideas for helping the student will jump out at you. Remember, we greatly appreciate the time and attention you are giving the students.

Clearances

Please make sure you have completed the necessary clearances and have copies on file with the District. More information can be found on the District website.

Bring a Magazine or Book!

We try hard to keep the volunteers busy . . . but we're working with kids, and this is not a perfect system . . . so there will occasionally be moments where you won't be working with a student. Bring a magazine or book with you if you have a few moments of "down time."

Please Sign-up

A schedule will be sent to you soon with the first requests for volunteers. Sometimes, we do not have enough parent volunteers to meet the demand of our students. We do not want to disappoint the students or leave them struggling to fulfill a requirement for an adult conference, so please consistently volunteer your time. You will not regret it; we promise. Also, you can help with any grade—so do not limit yourself to your child's grade or class.

Please jump in! Working directly with the kids is not only the best training but also one of the most rewarding volunteer experiences you will have.