Analyzing Student Samples

One effective way of targeting common problems faced by students in your school is to engage in analysis of student work samples. Here are some suggestions for undertaking an evaluation of student work samples drawn from classes across the school.

Create evaluation groups
- Determine how many student papers from each class you would like to evaluate.
- Determine the type of sample you would like to select.
    - Some schools choose to have teachers selects two papers from each grade range: 2 A papers, 2 papers in the B range, etc. This method may be most helpful for establishing grade norms among instructors.
    - Some schools choose to have teachers select papers at random based on a student's number on the class roster: All teachers submit the paper for (for example) the 2nd, 5th, 9th, 17th students on the roster. This method may be most helpful in assessing students' overall progress.
- Have teachers send all samples to the instructional leader, who removes the names from samples.

Distribute writing and assessment criteria
- The instructional leader should divvy up the anonymous samples evenly among the teachers participating in the assessment. Ensure that no teacher has his or her own students' work.
- Provide instructors with criteria for evaluating each sample.
- Have instructors assess each sample, then summarize their results. Some programs may find it helpful to have instructors write a brief summative paragraph outlining the strengths and weaknesses they observed in their sample portfolios.

Conduct a follow-up Discussion
- One useful way of beginning a conversation about student work samples is to compare responses to the assessment criteria.
- Discussing conflicting interpretations and variations in the assessment of students' choices will help provide instructors with additional insights and strategies for responding.
- Encourage instructors to share their strategies for responding to student writing that does not meet benchmark standards. This may include:
    - Sharing examples of prewriting assignments for scaffolding
    - Sharing examples of lesson plans
    - Sharing samples of end comments

Gere, Anne Ruggles, Hannah Dickinson, Melinda McBee Orzulak and Stephanie Moody. *Taking Initiative on Writing: A Guide for Instructional Leaders.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2010.