Writing Instruction in the Middle School

We propose to investigate the factors that influence success in students' reading and writing skills. We are particularly interested in examining how the focus changes from reading in kindergarten-12 to writing in post-secondary contexts. For example, in elementary through high school, most statewide assessments are directed toward the assessment of reading skills. However, when a student goes on to post-secondary education the focus transitions to the assessment of writing skills. Factors which may be important in the development of students' writing skills are student demographics, teachers' instructional strategies, the school locale, and/or whether the school has a four or five day schedule. Using the Montana statewide longitudinal data system and the data the state collects on various assessments will allow us to assess how students progress through this transition while controlling for other factors.

In Year 1, we propose to analyze the writing scores from Montana's middle school students' SBAC data to understand patterns of proficiency across schools and student demographics. We also plan conduct a series of interviews and focus groups with middle school teachers and administrators across Montana to collect their insights regarding the school wide factors that support Montana students' writing success. In Years 2 & 3, we proposed to continue these analyses through examining longitudinal patterns that emerge as middle school students transition to high school and then enter Montana's MUS.

As a result of this research, we plan to produce: a dissertation study, 2 or more state research presentations, 2 national research presentations, and at least 1 journal article for publication.