POWER OF THE PEN

2008

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Completed by:

Ashland University

Telego Center
For Educational Improvement

Dwight L. McElfresh, Ed.D
Assistant Dean

Tom Lavinder
Director

Submitted by:

Oscar McKnight Ph.D.
Ashland University
Research Consultant
IN A NUT SHELL

This report highlights an independent program evaluation for POWER OF THE PEN (PoP). As an overview, two-hundred and seventy-seven stakeholders (i.e. teachers, n = 277) were sent a series of emails that encouraged them to respond to an enclosed survey addressing the mission and goals of PoP. The initial response and participation rate was 62%. However, 18 teachers later phoned in their comments; two student focus groups (n = 17) and seventy-six field interviews (State Finals) brought the total participation rate to 283. Therefore, a representative sample of PoP was obtained (see Table 1).

Table 1

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<tr>
<th>POPULATION OVERVIEW</th>
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SWOT ANALYSIS

Strength

The strength of PoP is evident both from qualitative and quantitative findings; for example, most teachers voiced in some fashion, that: “the quality of the stories and individual student growth among young PoP writers has exceeded all my expectations.” Quantitatively, when completing a mode analysis, 15/15 items representing the goals or mission of PoP had a significant positive rating.

Weakness

The most consistent qualitative and qualitative finding addressed the lack of a collaborative environment that includes community support and involvement. For example, many teachers spoke of lack of administrative support from both their school system and PTA organizations. As a secondary note, many teachers wished for more teacher to teacher support or a better first-year teacher orientation.

Opportunity

Without doubt, the number one suggestion or recommendation was to extend PoP to high school. This sentiment was expressed by student, parent and teacher. Likewise, most participants either wrote or voiced their support for PoP to be a National program.

Threat

Two common themes emerged: first, the cost of participation and second, the judging.

SUMMARY

This report contains a wealth of information concerning PoP. The remainder of this evaluation highlights responses on each posed question. Also, included is a qualitative section that details email responses and field interviews. No individual teacher, student or administrator is identified; however, their comments are included for perspective. This report lists all the significant findings for all stakeholders to examine.
Table 2

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
TEACHERS

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Missing System 1 .8
Total 131 100.0
POWER OF THE PEN is in the process of completing an independent program evaluation. Please take a few moments and complete this email survey. Instructors please forward this survey on to current and past participants; as well as, any stakeholder and encourage their involvement in this study. All responses should be sent to Dr. Oscar McKnight Ph.D. omcknigh@ashland.edu

For simplicity, underline your responses and fill-in where appropriate. Please write a brief response to the final three open-ended questions. Thank you very much for your participation.

Describe yourself: Male Female

Student Teacher Parent Administrator

How many years have you been involved with POWER OF THE PEN? _______

**Do you believe POWER OF THE PEN:**

1. …is the leading interscholastic program in written expression for writers at the 7th and 8th grade levels?
   
   Absolutely Not No Maybe Yes Absolutely Yes

2. …assists teachers in the on-going task of facilitating writing?
   
   Absolutely Not No Maybe Yes Absolutely Yes

3. …provides quality tools and resources to identify, challenge and reward excellence in writing?
   
   Absolutely Not No Maybe Yes Absolutely Yes

4. …provides an educational network that shares ideas and instructional materials?
   
   Absolutely Not No Maybe Yes Absolutely Yes

5. …inspires a love for the beauty and power of language for writing as a life skill?
   
   Absolutely Not No Maybe Yes Absolutely Yes

6. …encourages creative and critical thinking?
   
   Absolutely Not No Maybe Yes Absolutely Yes

7. …enriches and enhances the writing curriculum of schools?
   
   Absolutely Not No Maybe Yes Absolutely Yes

8. …provides a collaborative environment that includes community support and involvement at all levels?
   
   Absolutely Not No Maybe Yes Absolutely Yes
9. …motivates schools to develop greater proficiency in writing?
   Absolutely Not  No  Maybe  Yes  Absolutely Yes

10. …provides an enriching writing experience that is not available in the traditional classroom?
    Absolutely Not  No  Maybe  Yes  Absolutely Yes

11. …improves the expressive writing skills of participating students?
    Absolutely Not  No  Maybe  Yes  Absolutely Yes

12. …affords a student a valuable personal experience in interscholastic competition?
    Absolutely Not  No  Maybe  Yes  Absolutely Yes

13. …improves the content areas of writing beyond what could have been learned traditionally?
    Absolutely Not  No  Maybe  Yes  Absolutely Yes

14. …teaches skills that transfer to other academic disciplines?
    Absolutely Not  No  Maybe  Yes  Absolutely Yes

15. …provides an academic experience that promotes life-long learning and achievement?
    Absolutely Not  No  Maybe  Yes  Absolutely Yes

*From participating in POWER OF THE PEN*

**What has exceeded your expectations?**

**What has fallen short of your expectations?**

**Do you have any general comments?**

Thank you
**Question Stems**

**Do you believe POWER OF THE PEN:**

1. …is the leading interscholastic program in written expression for writers at the 7th and 8th grade levels?
2. …assists teachers in the on-going task of facilitating writing?
3. …provides quality tools and resources to identify, challenge and reward excellence in writing?
4. …provides an educational network that shares ideas and instructional materials?
5. …inspires a love for the beauty and power of language for writing as a life skill?
6. …encourages creative and critical thinking?
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15. …provides an academic experience that promotes life-long learning and achievement?

**Summary Table**

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*Note.* Where Absolutely Not = 0; No = 1; Maybe = 2; Yes = 3; and Absolutely Yes = 4
Do you believe POWER OF THE PEN:

1. …is the leading interscholastic program in written expression for writers at the 7th and 8th grade levels?

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**Do you believe POWER OF THE PEN:**

2. ...assists teachers in the on-going task of facilitating writing?

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3. …provides quality tools and resources to identify, challenge and reward excellence in writing?

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4. …provides an educational network that shares ideas and instructional materials?

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5. …inspires a love for the beauty and power of language for writing as a life skill?

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Note. Where Absolutely Not = 0; No = 1; Maybe = 2; Yes = 3; and Absolutely Yes = 4
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6. …encourages creative and critical thinking?

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7. …enriches and enhances the writing curriculum of schools?

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Do you believe POWER OF THE PEN:

8. ...provides a collaborative environment that includes community support and involvement at all levels?

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Do you believe POWER OF THE PEN:

9. …motivates schools to develop greater proficiency in writing?

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Note. Where Absolutely Not = 0; No = 1; Maybe = 2; Yes = 3; and Absolutely Yes = 4
Do you believe POWER OF THE PEN:

10. …provides an enriching writing experience that is not available in the traditional classroom?

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Note: Where Absolutely Not = 0; No = 1; Maybe = 2; Yes = 3; and Absolutely Yes = 4
Do you believe POWER OF THE PEN:

11. ...improves the expressive writing skills of participating students?

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Note. Where Absolutely Not = 0; No = 1; Maybe = 2; Yes = 3; and Absolutely Yes = 4
Do you believe POWER OF THE PEN:

12. ...affords a student a valuable personal experience in interscholastic competition?

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Note. Where Absolutely Not = 0; No = 1; Maybe = 2; Yes = 3; and Absolutely Yes = 4
Do you believe POWER OF THE PEN:

13. …improves the content areas of writing beyond what could have been learned traditionally?

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Note. Where Absolutely Not = 0; No = 1; Maybe = 2; Yes = 3; and Absolutely Yes = 4
Do you believe POWER OF THE PEN:

14. ...teaches skills that transfer to other academic disciplines?

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Note. Where Absolutely Not = 0; No = 1; Maybe = 2; Yes = 3; and Absolutely Yes = 4
Do you believe POWER OF THE PEN:

15. … provides an academic experience that promotes life-long learning and achievement?

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Note. Where Absolutely Not = 0; No = 1; Maybe = 2; Yes = 3; and Absolutely Yes = 4
### Overall Descriptive Breakdown

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Valid N (listwise) | 171

Note. Overall Mean = 3.13

#### Question Breakdown

![Question Breakdown Graph](image)

Note. Overall Mean = 3.13

#### Descriptive Statistics

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**Valid N (listwise)** 171

*Note.* Overall Mean = 3.13

### Question Breakdown

![Question Breakdown Graph](image)

*Note.* Overall Mean = 3.13

### Significance Table

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23
One Standard Deviation (Positive)

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Do you believe POWER OF THE PEN:

6. …encourages creative and critical thinking?

10. …provides an enriching writing experience that is not available in the traditional classroom?

11. …improves the expressive writing skills of participating students?

12. …affords a student a valuable personal experience in interscholastic competition?

One Standard Deviation (Negative)

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Do you believe POWER OF THE PEN:

4. …provides an educational network that shares ideas and instructional materials?

8. …provides a collaborative environment that includes community support and involvement at all levels?

9. …motivates schools to develop greater proficiency in writing?
Qualitative Data
(Email responses)

STUDENT

What has exceeded your expectations?

The overall scale and the large pool of schools have exceeded my expectations.

I think the level of rewards has really exceeded my expectations. I never expected to get any of my stories published at 14 but now I have two stories in the book. That really inspired me to continue writing.

I've been impacted in the way that Power of the Pen improves the expressive writing of many young writers, including myself.

Everything!

What has fallen short of your expectations?

Inadequate/unqualified judges!

Limited chances for students/ lack of the realization of the importance of each competition to each student, it seemed there was too much of the "it's only one kid" mentality, and personal problems were ignored

Lack of accommodation (science fair/ POP snow-date reschedule conflict -- IGNORED, affected many)

PoP is focused too much on "winning" and achievement.

Hasn't been a problem for my school, but the price keeps other schools out.

Very subjective grading!

How easily the judges will change scores just to fit the guidelines (like 2 rank points away at regional level). I worked in the Tab Room last year and witnessed firsthand how little thought was often time put into a student's score.

Not much has fallen short.

We didn't always have enough time as we would have liked to meet new people with the same interests as us.

I really enjoyed participating and I wish you would make one very similar for high school!

Although Power of the Pen helps tremendously with creative writing, some of the expectations for higher English classes are not met by Power of the Pen. When I got to high school, Power of the Pen did not help me at all with my English class.

Do you have any general comments?

I was very disappointed in this program this year and last. When I participated my 7th and 8th grade years, I did exceptionally well, and thought very highly of the program. I went back to my grade school to help coach, as we were having many problems in our English department. I've worked with our team this year and last, and have become increasingly surprised at what goes on at the other end of the program. Most of what fell short of my expectations was listed above. What I don't think those who are running this program, including judges etc., realize is that when they make some sort of concession or an unfair grading, and a
student fails to move on, it will affect that student the rest of his life, often turning him away from writing altogether. From personal experience, I know how frustrating it is to be told that your story didn't follow the prompt, and receive Merit points, when in fact it did follow the prompt. Instances like that can keep a student from moving on, and there's no apparent system of checking that, and a lot of the judges, who ultimately decide who moves on, are under-qualified. If this program is trying to inspire writing, it's doing a rather poor job. A 12 year-old is crushed when they don't move on, especially when it's not for a legitimate reason. Power of the Pen has lost its "vision" amidst the obsession with prizes, and rewarding, and rankings. It's highly disappointing what this has turned into, since it should have been a great program.

Power of the Pen is a great experience for all people who love writing.
TEACHER

What has exceeded your expectations?

The students are able to be themselves and are accepted and encouraged to be that person. It is a place/program where they are not confined and can reach beyond what they thought was their potential to a new level. Also the interaction with other students who have the same love of writing they have.

This group of student's desire to achieve in the competition exceeded my expectations.

The students' natural ability to find the creativity within has exceeded my expectations.

The quality of the stories and the individual growth among young writers has exceeded my expectations.

I am amazed at what creativity my students are able to display given a prompt and a forty-minute time frame. Their ability to work well under pressure is amazing. Also, students are able to develop a story and life-like characters so quickly. Many students have commented that participation in Power of the Pen has helped them in every aspect of their educational experiences. The ability to think and write quickly has been an asset in high school and college.

I am inspired by the energy at State competition and know that the students who attend feel it too.

My students who are gifted in writing have excelled greatly. I also use it in my classroom somewhat.

The amount of time the students want to continue meeting, even if they do not go to the next level.

I have been involved with Power of the Pen since Lorraine Merrill first began putting together smaller writing competitions. It's amazing to me how big the program has become. There are so many schools and writers taking part across the state.

My former writing team students ALWAYS come back to me and tell me how much the writing we do in team has helped them in other writing situations they've faced in high school and college.

The power of the history of winners to the school's reputation comes to mind. When you build a tract record, people notice. It empowers the students and the teachers benefiting the whole school.

The camaraderie of the students, coaches and parents have far exceeded my expectations. I have found that a "club" atmosphere with complete teamwork has been the theme for all of the groups that I have coached.

The scope of the program is so impressive. To have so many schools and so many people involved, it reinforces with our kids the value of written expression and of reading. It provides a community and a culture that, in the past, has not been available to kids whose expertise lies outside the athletic arena. By giving kids a team and peers who share with them a love for the solitary labor that is writing, it provides them with valuable connections and important feedback to nurture their passion. I truly believe PoP makes these kids into lifelong readers and writers which is something that you can’t measure with a standardized test.

The excitement and enthusiasm of our students for the program – we have 50-60 students try out for the team.

The influence on student writing - many students have come back to tell me Power of the Pen has helped them in high school writing.

The tournament experiences validate a love of writing and an appreciation for their own and other students' ability to write.
The students always enjoy the social aspect of the practices and the tournaments. It's exciting to see them excited about writing. I'm also impressed by the parental support of the program. It's good to see parents encouraging an academic extracurricular activity versus athletics.

The number of students who seriously try to earn a place on our Power of the Pen team is great. Each year, dozens of kids work hard to earn of our 12 slots.

My expectations were exceeded when the students wanted to continue to write even when the competition was over. They were continuing with a high level of enthusiasm toward writing. Some are seeking to have other writings published now.

I was amazed at the exhilarating energy of the tournaments. There was an excitement that I did not expect. In addition, the entire tournament was superbly organized. I felt honored to be a part of such a fine event. I am looking forward to the State Tournament at Wooster College later this month.

The excitement and enthusiasm my students have for the program each year is very gratifying to me as their teacher and coach.

I have been thrilled to see the recognition that our writers receive for a job well done. It has made writing a "cool."

I've seen the program grow in my own school, and we have larger turnout every year. It's exciting that the program provides a niche for those students seeking growth in their own creative skills and celebration of their love of writing.

We’ve had more students participate than I expected.

The extent to which students get the opportunity to compete; the immediate feedback students receive

The impact on the student writers has exceeded my expectations. I thought it would be a good experience for 7th and 8th grade, but the number of participants who have been inspired to go on in writing is quite high.

The amount of time the teachers and students put into this contest.

Watching the faces of those announce to be finalist is the best part.

The amazing talent of 7th and 8th grade writers; they are truly an inspiration.

The organization of each level of competition is amazing!

The dedication to the program and the abilities of my students! The desire of former students to come back and mentor current POP team members is wonderful.

I hold writing club every Monday after school. The students that have profited from writing club the most are my mediocre participants. For them, to hear quality writing and the exchange of ideas has profited their writing and creativity.

The recognition component at the end of tournaments is great to watch. The excitement and enthusiasm channeled toward honoring writers is amazing to watch.

I am pleasantly surprised and pleased with the involvement of my alumni Power of the Pen writers with the middle school program. The alumni writers return to help the new team each year, they volunteer their time at the district event to help run various aspects, and they join the group at the end of the year recognition night for current Power of the Pen team members. My 7th and 8th grade teams have such enthusiasm for this program, especially as other team members’ move forward in the competition. Current
writers are more than happy to join the practice every week and continue to work at their creative writing whether they are going to the next competition or not. They truly keep me excited to be a good writer and work at my own craft and to be the best coach I can be!

The quality of writing produced by seventh and eighth graders in a timed writing process with no prior knowledge of the topic is fantastic.

The overall quality of the program and the continuous effort on the part of the director and coaches to constantly and consistently maintain the integrity of the program has exceeded my expectations. It is also amazing that the director herself reads all of the number 1 papers from each round of writing to insure that all good writing is recognized. The director will also review any piece at the request of the coach. This dedication to excellence is unsurpassed.

The thrill of the competition and success for the students is fun to watch. Most of them have been very proud of their writing.

Seeing students get competitive with writing and making the program competitive on the district, regional and state levels is impressive.

Elevating it to that of a sports competition is great.

I am amazed at how students really get into this aspect of writing.

I am amazed with the students. They continue to amaze me in their creativity, the beauty of their writing, and their love of the program.

I am always so pleased at the enthusiasm of all of the kids at the competition. They really rejoice with each other and support each other, and they're just so excited when they're recognized in any way, no matter how small!

The quick and efficient process of tabulating scores for an expedient award ceremony has exceeded my expectations.

The level in which one student has progressed over time has exceeded my expectations.

I have been totally amazed at the drive and success of my students. The sky is the limit when it comes to their writing. This is my fourth year and all four years we have had students compete on the state level. In fact, this year I have the siblings of three former state competitors making it to the state.

The quality of my finalists writing has helped those in the classroom want to write more and those in the classroom want to know what they need to do to be part of the ‘team.’ I love it!

The prompts stimulate critical thinking.

The insight into their own writing that my students gain from having their work evaluated by an outside source exceeds all my expectations.

Regardless of winning, students find it a highly motivating experience. The contest provides an authentic audience for a student's writing.

I like the fact that kids are awarded for competition in a non-traditional way. There is acceptance of the love of writing.

The amount of time and effort it takes to keep this program running astounds me. I had no idea what expect when I started coaching Power of the Pen, so the entire program has exceeded my expectations. The thing that I think I find impressive is that the program and the skills are not forgotten when students enter
high school. I have had kids come back and tell me how much power of the pen has prepared them for both
high school and college. The program has given them skills that they can use for the rest of their lives. I
think that is invaluable.

How may students love to write and want to write on their own.

I use Power of the Pen student examples as I teach the elements of the short story. I use materials
published by Power of the Pen as well as the sizeable collection of my own writers' examples. Students
hear the work of I am pleased at the reception my students give to my lessons on plot, characterization,
setting, for example, as we read and analyze. Before Power of the Pen, I never approached literature from
the point of view of the author and his/her challenges as a writer. I think because of this perspective, my
students appreciate the creative process the author experiences.

The organizational management of the program is excellent.

How much students enjoyed participating.

How well my students did.

The response from my students - especially 7th graders who want to participate

The love of writing that the students carry forward to high school continues to exceed expectation.

The degree to which my writers blossom each season seems to always exceed my expectations!

I am always amazed at how the students are so enthusiastic about the experience and how they are able to
come up with original story over and over again.

I am always amazed at how students' critical thinking skills improve. In the traditional classroom
instruction, lessons tend to go from teacher to student in a linear pattern of topic-related teaching. In Power
of the Pen, students write, listen, learn, share, and learn more. The writing process is more holistic. Writers
learn to hone their skills by listening and participating in the critical analysis of others writing, as well as
their own.

Students learn to love their own power of critical thinking, without tests and graded papers. They respond
to the immediacy of this learning process. By writing and work shopping the pieces of others, it is quickly
apparent that the students have the power to evaluate, analyze, criticize a piece and comprehend when a
piece works and why. If teachers used this process in small groups, even just once a week, the teaching of
writing would be so much more simple and effective.

Comparing the students' writing of the first weeks of Power of the Pen meetings and their stories three
months into the year, I am always amazed to see how easily they comprehend and incorporate the unity of
the elements of narrative writing into their own creations. Even by incorporating writing practice and
analysis into the curriculum just once a week, teachers would see children as young as eleven transfer the
same critical thinking skills to their writing and to critiquing short stories, novels, and even movies with
great sophistication and accuracy.

For seven months, we meet twice a week for an hour and a half after school. We write, we eat, we share,
we think, not for credit, but because these students have recognizable writing skills, or love to write,
usually a very private love. Power of the Pen offers these often very raw and private writers a place to open
up in front of peers in a supportive environment with no internal competition. It gives their writing an
authentic audience. Power of the Pen gives the listening audience involvement. Without grades and
tests, these writers and the students in the roles of listening writers develop. They also develop camaraderie
and identification as a member of a club-- writing groups need not be adult gatherings, only. Some of these
students are also involved in seasonal sports and the once-a-year-high school musical, but Power of the Pen
lasts all year for my students and they come because something they need as writers and adolescents and is being met.

Power of the Pen students tend to be the average to excellent students, but the one thing they all have in common is there is no outlet for their writing, other than achieving A's, B's, and C's in language arts classes. (Unfortunately, getting grades for written expression renders writing irrelevant and turns their creation into just another piece of paper to drop in the trash.) They tend to be the more introverted, different students, or the extroverts whom are also the oddly artistic ones, as well. Without Power of the Pen, these middle school students would have only the seasonal sports, and chorus parts in the annual high school musical as co-curricular opportunities. Power of the Pen gives these creative students a home port, safety in the turbulence of middle school with the freedom to be expressive.

When I see them come week after week, and watch them writing, heads bent over their papers for forty minutes of silence at the end of the school day, I am so impressed that the only reason these fifteen or so students come is the love of the creative writing.

I'm a tough coach, so I know it is not for love of me, they come. Perhaps we win just enough to whet their appetites, but for two years, Power of the Pen writers come and write. Then, once they cross to the other side of the building, they disappear into the halls of high school and rarely look back.

Since I started coaching in 2000, all former Power of the Pen students have been successful in high school language arts, nearly all have taken AP English in their senior year, and all have gone on to 2 or 4 year college.

I am continually surprised that students eliminated from the competition request and attend practices every week. Their desire to write is almost daunting.

This is a program that makes students feel good about writing and gives them a channel for others to tell them that they are good writers.

I am so impressed with how much my kids have improved within one year. It's not just about good writing, it's about interpretation and applying taking different approaches to make a story stand out. I wasn't sure if I would enjoy it but it has really opened my eyes as a teacher to the joys of creative writing.

The professional quality of the state tournament is very impressive.

The students!

I have had as many as 40 students participate in an after school club for Power of the Pen, and even though I assign writing prompts for the week, they continue to attend. I average @23 students a year and keep them coming long after our POP team is chosen.

I think that it would be the continuing progress of the writing skills of my students and their desire to continue to grow and write. Power of the Pen has challenged my students to explore the written word to give it a voice. Although writing is always been there it gives the student a slightly new forum to express themselves in a way they might not have approached.

The positive effect it has on my kids. They appreciate that self-expression and creativity is valued in our school rather than just athletics.

I have been very pleased with the quality of the prompts and the caliber of competition for my students.

The tournaments are run professionally and smoothly. We have always enjoyed them, and they are something we look forward to. The prizes and trophies have also exceeded my expectations. They are very nice and highly sought after by my writers!
The number of schools involved continues to grow each year. The support from various community agencies, companies, etc. continues to grow. The enthusiasm of both teachers and students for the program is great. The professional way the Power of the Pen staff handles the tournaments and the results so efficiently.

The talent of the students, the enjoyment they have being part of Power of the Pen.

My participating students are much more excited than I thought they would be. I am also surprised by the encouragement and support of nonparticipating students.

In the big picture of the organization, the students and their writing come first, always. That commitment is fierce and absolute. Students are made to feel that their voices matter. That is a really powerful thing.

The amount of schools and students that participate have exceeded my expectations

The competitions have been wonderful for he students. They have loved competing! The sample stories have also been very helpful.

The excitement I see in the student participants. They are motivated to become better writers, and they love to come to practice to write and talk about writing.

The quality of the work that I read as a judge has consistently exceeded my expectations.

Sometimes, my students amaze me.

The rewards of watching my students grow, mature and excel in writing. Their confidence grows as they tackle each level of competition. Parents appreciate all the time and effort coaches put into their "team" of writers.

The quality of writing which the students have produced has been exceptional. Our students have few opportunities because we are a small, rural school district. This program has allowed them to step out of their comfort zones and explore other options in writing.

One aspect that has exceeded my expectations is that the high school students wanting to come back and share their experiences with the present team writers. Parents of present and past writers have expressed appreciation of how their student has benefited from the program. I have seen students go into the writing profession because of the positive experience they had with Power of the Pen.

The compassion that all teachers have for their students to succeed has exceeded my expectations. The support from Loraine when a concern or problem arises is amazing. Her professionalism and respect she has for all people who take part in this program.

The whole experience from district to state is wonderful. Especially state where students can meet real writers and meet others from all over the state that are interested in writing.

The years of dedication shown by the founders and supporters of Power of the Pen exceeds all expectations.

The students' joy and excitement generated from participating in Power of the Pen is amazing to see and be a part of. Also, the writing skills are enhanced through their participation. The accomplishments of many of my students have exceeded my initial expectations.

The excitement the students show toward writing...even on a weekend.

The overall enthusiasm that the writers bring to the experience astounds me. Students feed off one another as they write and share.
The state level competition has exposed the contestants to many accomplished professional authors and has given them a truly unforgettable experience competing on a college campus.

The students that I work with in Power of the Pen have really put forth a tremendous effort to improve their writing skills and to share ideas with other team members.

Reading the work done by seventh and eighth graders in a limited brief time - 40 minutes and three stories back to back with a ten minute break between is absolutely an amazing feat. How many adults can handle sitting two straight hours and writing feverishly on unknown topics with the insight of fresh and creative ideas?

What really has exceeded my expectations is the students' capability to meet the level of performance.

Quality of the program in terms of management and organization has exceeded my expectations. The forum and format for the students is excellent and encourages writers to excel and exceed their abilities.

I have been impressed by the importance the team members place upon their writing. The athletes who often have meeting conflicts go out of their way to fulfill their writing obligations. They give writing and team membership a high priority.

I am surprised by the respect shown the writers by their peers. When we choose the "Most Creative" individuals for their yearbook, POP members are always among the candidates because they are creative writers.

I host a regional tournament and have to raise funds; I am always pleased by the community's positive response to the program. Many have given financial donations to the program for all of the 16 years that our school has hosted a tournament.

The desire and willingness of our students to do as much writing as they do, exceeds all of my expectations. They truly enjoy the stimulation of writing and writing under pressure.

How many kids were involved in PoP?

Our students bond with students from other areas. As a teacher it has mad me more objective when it comes to scoring writing.

Level of writing that students develop within one academic year I get students returning to work with new team members because they see themselves as leaders and they miss it so much. They comment about the ease of Honors English writing and college application essays because of POP writing practice.

Some of these kids are not athletes and this gives them the team concept and an avenue to work with other kids like themselves outside of the school day.

My latest testimony was from a young man who came back to tell me that he had been accepted to Brown University. One of 2,700 applicants and the first from our HS to go Ivy League; he is also ranked first in the senior class. He said, “I know Power of the Pen helped me get in because I was not nervous at all to write the application essays.”

Students who go off to HS often ask if there is anything like POP in the HS. It makes me sad to see how much they miss it.

The ability of our students’ to continue to strive to do well each time they are competing in the writing rounds. They expand their level of creativity each time they receive the prompt.

The way my students who have participated have improved at creative writing; the comradery among the participants.
I am impressed by the wide variety of writing styles that develop during the course of a POP season. I am also excited by the fact that students can experience a real "sense of team" from a writing group.

I feel the director is EXTREMELY good at being an advocate for good writing. She reads stories and rewards writing that simply should not be overlooked. I am impressed with the integrity with which the program is run.

PoP exceeds expectations by allowing my students to achieve academically like their peer in athletic competitions while adding enrichment for the students with writing talents and abilities.

The organization of the event is great. I also enjoyed meeting other English teachers with whom I was able to discuss classroom writing.

The quality of writing by the students has definitely exceeded my expectations. The dedication of the student writers has also been fantastic.

The level of enthusiasm my writers have for tournaments, even the ones who don't place come away having had fun and a mostly positive experience.

How many students are willing to write for fun is fantastic.

The coordinators at the District competition were wonderful. The organization of the event and the pride they instilled at the awards ceremony were phenomenal. Through District and Regional tournaments, 10 of the 12 prompts used by our 7th and 8th graders were very open-ended and inspiring. I was impressed by the prompts.

I have formed and solidified lasting relationships with former students. It has been a joy to work with creative, thoughtful kids in an atmosphere that is different from the regular classroom. I have seen quiet, shy young adults bloom within the nurturing, encouraging atmosphere that I have created in our afterschool sessions.

State tournament - excellent!

The gains my students have made in creative writing has exceeded my expectations.

Having numerous students reach the state competition level despite having a comparatively small student base and limited meeting time with my writers.

The organization of all elements of Power of the Pen have exceeded my expectations because it takes vision to have made such a wonderful experience come to light with all who partake, being students, teachers, volunteers, and school staff. I see Power of the Pen to continue to flourish and to continue to inspire young minds to strive for excellence in writing.

I was amazed that my students did so well in competition. I did not realize that my writing instruction would take them as far as it did.

My students’ involvement and their creativity in responding to the prompts have exceeded my expectations.
What has fallen short of your expectations?

The high and continuing rise of the cost of the program makes it hard to keep running since it only included a very limited number of students. It needs to be extended to lower and higher level grades.

I believe that there is a need for on going training workshops sponsored by the Power of the Pen to help train and teach the teachers how to facilitate the writing in their classrooms.

The time frame opens to practice with the students, with sports, clubs, busses, other obligations. As is often the case, it is the busiest kids who want to excel and participate.

There is a lack of organization. Not really anything to share within classroom--no guidance. Some outdated stuff--recycling of prompts.

I think especially for beginning coaches there should be more resources available to help the instruction.

The costs of Power of the Pen are difficult to justify to administration at times. It is very difficult to continue to find sources for funding in an economically challenged society. Another disappointment is the negativity of some teachers/coaches. I am always amazed at the amount of complaining by some teachers/coaches.

There is a lack of parent support for some writers.

I'm sometimes dismayed with the quality and objectivity of the judges. Some of the readers of the papers don't take into account that they are reading papers from 7th and 8th graders.

Although I know the program tries to insure that judges are trained to judge this type of competitive writing, I am not sure that the judging is always consistent. Because each school has to provide judges (who volunteer their day), some schools have to beg people to take part in it.

Also, I think the program is quite expensive for the amount of students who can actually travel to the competitions to compete. Luckily, my school has been willing to support me, but for 12 student writers and a few alternates, it's pretty costly.

It takes a lot of time and organization and commitment.

The only disappointment would be the timing of certain competitions. I feel that the state competition, held the day before Memorial Weekend, limits some of our students from attending in the way they would want, a total two-day event. Some of them have to leave early on Friday due to family commitments. In addition, we have had conflicts at the regional level with the Cleveland Spelling Bee two years in a row. It's difficult for students to have to make a choice whether to attend the spelling bee (if they qualify) or the regional competition.

I don’t think PoP has fallen short in any way. I think what the program has done is that it has made me think about the way writing is taught in my public school. I get to know my (Power of the Pen) kids so well during their time with me that real teaching can occur...constant, monitored practice along with one on one instruction. It makes me wish that I was only teaching 20 kids so that I could provide them all with the quality education that I am giving my PoP writers outside of the school day. Time limits how effective I can be with 100 students.

Some people are too critical. I do not want to mention names or positions. I love PoP but if it was not for my love of writing and the students, I would prefer not deal with the administrators.

There could be provided more tips or ideas for coaching writers, ones that does not require extra payment.
The lack of materials that would assist in preparing students for the competition has been disappointing. Also, the lack of information about state competition until very close to the deadlines for registering is not a good thing. Many schools will not pay for the fees and parents have to make decisions about their son or daughter attending state and paying fees. Another thing that could be utilized better is the web site; it would be helpful in communicating up-to-date information to coaches. Currently, there is not a lot of new information that gets posted in a timely manner.

The price continues to rise, making it very difficult to continue to participate. The judging does not always seem consistent - people do not always follow the same criteria when judging papers.

Not all coaches are even close to being equal.

The cost to participate in Power of the Pen has become too high. I answered "maybe" and "no" to several of the questions above because much of what the students get out of the program depends on the coach. The students aren't necessarily gaining any writing skills by participating in the program—it's more that the students in the program receive extra training with their writing skills through the practices they attend in preparation for Power of the Pen. Power of the Pen hasn't provided me with any materials that I am able to use in my classroom or in our school wide writing program. In fact, many of their materials explicitly state that the materials cannot be used for those purposes because of copyright issues. My school has been considering dropping out of Power of the Pen for the last two or three years (and many schools in our area have already done so) because it's not worth the expense. Not enough is gained through the program to merit the cost.

I really cannot think of anything except the price is quite high for each participant even with the grants and sponsorship we have.

I've always wished that schools that didn't place in the top four at the district and regional tournaments could know what numerical place they did place.

Sometimes the financial aspect has been tough- it feels like we're being "threatened" by fees and late charges. Also, when we attended state last year, I was lambasted by someone for the way I handed in the fees. I understand as the organization grows, it is important to be organized in this area. However, we as coaches do the best we can to keep the program going, and we get discouraged when we are "chastised" by the members/organizers of the program.

Some judges seemed to judge in a harsh way.

Sharing ideas and strategies with other coach/teachers could be better.

The lack of help and support from the staff at Power of the Pen as well as other teachers/coaches at the event has been a let down.

There has been a lack of support from community and PTA in my school district. It's disappointing that not everyone catches the vision of POP.

Too few students are invited to participate. At a middle school with 800 7th and 8th graders, I could only select 14 students to write in the first competition. After the regional level of writing, half of the "team" did not advance to the next level, and their "writing experience" was over, after only one competitive writing event.

I wish everything that Power of the Pen offered was not SO Expensive! I feel that I am always asking people for money to enable us to compete. I think more schools, especially urban and rural, would participate if everything weren't so costly.
I am disappointed that my school that has a student population with over 33% free and reduced lunches competes with schools that rarely have an after school club group yet win each competition. Those schools have a write-off and the top winners compete. Because their school and home environment is so rich in all the experiences that we know create quality writing, they turn out quality writing. Because of my Monday after school meeting, students that do not have rides home cannot participate; students that are members of other organizations cannot participate. (I take strength those students that are involved in after school programs are more likely to be successful in school.) Of course this bias is a part of our school society and little can be done to create equality. On the other hand, is it possible to not hand out school trophies beyond the district level? Once my school is reduced to 3 writers and another school has 6 writers there is no hope that my school would win a trophy.

I am disappointed that judges write few comments on the evaluation sheets. For most of my writers that is what they walk home with. They wonder why their piece is #6 in the room when the judge writes "good job". On the other hand, judges write comments about spelling, capitalization, punctuation, paragraphing, etc when the comments are to address the prompt, the creativity, and the use of language. All the judges' remarks are taken to heart by my writers.

The rigidity of the state tournament - it always falls during our spring DC trip - which I realize will never change. So that's not a complaint - just a condition of life!

The program is a little unorganized. The people running it are very creative, but not necessarily the most equipped to deal with the business and organizational aspects of the program. Also, there should be a venue for creative writing coaches to share their opinions and ideas so we can collaborate to provide the kids with the best activities for sharpening their writing skills.

I am disappointed in the lack of quality judges who are teachers and coaches themselves. At competitions, I feel that many judges are not concerned with the students behind the writing. We can do such a better job as a whole at giving kind, critical, and constructive comments. Many times, more than I choose to recall, my student writers have received a glowing comments or good comments, but a low rank score. There is no reason given so as to justify why the writer got a low rank score; there is no comment of "work on such and such for the future."

Nothing about the program itself, although it is sad that sometimes there are coaches that try to undermine the system during the scoring process. I also have concerns at the regional level where coaches from the same school are judging together and concurring on the rank of all rounds, thus eliminating some very good pieces from attaining top rank points. However, I do understand that for the purposes of an unbiased grid this is the easiest way to pair judges.

Getting answers from the state office at times is difficult. I have sent several e-mails which have not been answered. I also feel that the expense of the program, though necessary I am sure, has discouraged some schools and/or students from participating. The caliber of judging, at times, seemed to have been deficient. I realize this is difficult to control, but maybe more training would help solve this problem.

Many students are let down after their middle school years because there is not a comparable writing tournament at the high school level.

On rare occasions, it's sometimes disappointing to the see the comments made by other judges to our students' writing--comments that are too short, non-descriptive, or don't give critical feedback.

I wasn't quite sure what to put for the question about materials. I do love the book of winners, and my co-coach and I enjoy putting together lessons, but other than that we don't really use any Power of the Pen materials.

There are many fees/expenses/penalties involved with this competition. Too bad we couldn't find more grant money to defer some of the costs.
My school system does not compensate the teachers for coaching and judging. Everything we do is on our own time. This sends the message to the teachers, that Power of the Pen is NOT important!

Every year it gets more and more expensive. This bothers me because we are from a private school and I am afraid one of these years my school might just say we cannot afford it anymore.

The judges need more time for training. Practice sessions would be helpful before the competition day. It was very difficult to know how to score after just reading the manual (several times) and sample papers. Also, there was not enough time for scoring. At the regional’s, the veteran judge told me I needed to pick up the pace. I felt rushed and overwhelmed.

Another area of concern is the fees. I was not aware of the cost for state competition until my students qualified and I received the packet. I don't know if we'll compete next year because we are a small school with a limited budget. The approximate fees should be listed in the manual so schools can make an informed decision and plan for it in their budget.

The judging is often uneven especially at the district levels. The regional levels it is still a problem. Also, it seems like more and more students are coming with writings already prepared ahead of time. Also, many students are very disappointed to learn that Power of the Pen doesn't continue when they are in high school.

The growing cost of participation and the penalty fees incurred for circumstances outside one's control.

The only thing I have been disappointed in is some of the other judges. Writing is so subjective so how well your kids do all depends on who the judge is. However, I realize that there is no fail proof way of judging. I can't think of a better way to judge. The system that is in place for the most par works really well. It is efficient, effective, and quick.

I believe that Power of the Pen is a great competition for writers but it is limited to only 6 seventh and eighth graders; this is bad. I also feel that is very expensive- too expensive to participate in at times.

Need more ideas from POP

I thought there would more interesting and/or valuable experiences for the students during the "down time" than watching inane movies.

Because we are a small school, students are in so many activities that Power of the Pen is not able to be developed into what it could be. The students work with me in class and attend the tournaments, but due to time/overlapping activity schedules, there is not much additional time spent preparing. The first tournament is difficult to schedule with my students because it usually falls during basketball tournaments and most of my writers also participate in basketball. Again - with less than 40 students per grade level, our rosters are spread pretty thin.

The paper work!

I STRONGLY believe that the district and regional competitions should be based on Quality Points and broken by rank points, just as it is done at the state competition. Sometimes, stronger writers do not qualify for the next level of competition if they happen to land in difficult rounds. I have also seen much weaker writers advance, by virtue of having competed in easier writing rounds. I have actually seen writers who have placed ninth, even though their quality points would have ranked them 2nd or 3rd. Consistency at ALL LEVELS is a must!

It never ceases to amaze me how difficult it is to get the logistic support for this academic-related co-curricular. We do not command gate entry monies, so raising money is always a chore - a back-breaking feat, a spirit-busting undertaking. But the willingness of Power of the Pen writers to do anything to earn the monies to get our writers to State always lifts my wilting spirits.
When the administration questions our use of a school bus to get to State Finals, I just want to give up. The inequity is astounding when I compare our needs to the needs of the districts’ sports teams. I believe the district should help co-curricular like Power of the Pen more—our developed skills are measured by the OAT, the OGT, the AP tests, the SAT, and ACT. Why do I have to grovel for logistic support when fan buses are made available to take students to sports' tournaments without the bat of an eye?

As we head into State Competition I know that certain students will win because the points accumulate. This process makes me think about how the OAT tests test one day of a student's life, an argument about how assessment should be different.

The cost of State Competition is large, and I do understand that it is a huge undertaking, but it is difficult to rationalize the cost in these days of budget cuts. Is there some other way to run it?

The structure of the judging creates at times unfair results.

We have a solid number of kids trying out for Power of the Pen but I wish more kids could compete.

More time needs to be spent educating some judges/coaches on how to evaluate writing. Students who write using fragments or write from the second person points of view are sometimes given lower scores as these are deemed incorrect or inappropriate by novice or elementary judges. In addition, some judges give high scores to students who wrote from a dog's perspective simply because they were "creative" when choosing a perspective. It’s disappointing that some higher level writers who write well are given lower scores than a lower level writer who chose to write simplistically from an animal’s viewpoint.

The quality of judge training and resources available to coaches is less than desired.

I would like to see schools be able to submit more than one team per grade level.

I have run into some situations where student papers were grossly misjudged due to hurrying on the part of the judges. (Metaphorical relationships were missed etc.)

I believe that quality points should weigh more than rank points.

The only thing that I feel could be improved is the training of the judges. I think the program is much better at the regional level because having two judges for each round really reduces the subjectivity of the judges.

I cannot say that it has fallen short in any expectation. I will always marvel at the students' ability to be given a prompt, sit down, and write for forty minutes and produce a good piece of written work. I expect to see my students writing skills progress and mature and Power of the Pen is meeting that expectation.

Our student involvement and desire to participate is huge. This can create a conflict in a large district where only 6 kids from each grade level can participate in competition.

Registration for competitions is a nightmare. Correspondence with the state is difficult and frustrating at times, thus impacting the tournament experience. Also, many paperwork errors occur at the state office and it is not handled professionally or apologetically by any means. When you are spending a great deal of money to have many kids participate, transporting and supervising them on your free time, it is frustrating to feel as if you are being treated rudely when/if a problem does arise.

I am fortunate to be in one of top school systems in the state. With that said, the students that are not able to participate from our school are better than most of the competitors I see from some of the other districts. It seems unfair and often de-motivates some great student-writers.
The only aspect of the program that has been somewhat negative has been my experience speaking with people at the Power of the Pen office; if the liaison between coaches and facilitators provides harsh and critical feedback for no apparent reason, coaches may be discouraged from participating in the future.

We get a lot of prompts and sample writing from the book of winners, but I would like more information on how to develop the really good writers and the really low writers.

The costs continue to rise so much that we are considering not participating. The fees for drops are too high. Students, coaches and judges want to be in attendance, but emergencies do happen. There are usually enough extra people in the Tab room to cover any missing judges.

Increased costs, the attitude that money is so important, the way Lorraine treats the volunteers who keep the program going.

I feel that there is little support for first year coaches. It's more of a “sink or swim” type scenario. There seems to be a lack of organization and communication in many ways.

It's tough because no matter how objectively it is structured, there is still a subjective element (though that is a great lesson for aspiring writers to learn). Judging, though, is uneven. Despite lots of instruction, some judges continue to give unhelpful feedback--vague, without any constructive criticism, which is really hard for a student getting a 3 or 4 or lower. I don't know how this gets fixed--I know judges are told that saying "great job" isn't enough--but that's still sometimes the gist of the feedback for pieces, leaving no explanation of why it wasn't given higher rank or quality points.

The judges training and the rules seem to fall a little short, because I found that how I interpreted the rules and how others did were quite different.

I would like to know how other teachers/coach's work their Power of the Pen Programs. Examples from other schools would be very helpful.

The expense of sending a student to state competition is daunting, and the person at the highest level of administration tends not to treat coaches in a professional manner.

Some of the judging is not objective and the administrators of the program don't consider the other demands that the teachers/coaches have on them, especially at the end of the year.

I think the program accidentally results in an emphasis on speed and creating a great first draft, which leads to a de-emphasis on revision. Some great writers are very slow, and they are not rewarded by the program, which can't be helped but is still true. I have had great writers lose self-confidence because they are not successful in competition. These are messages that sometimes conflict with my message in the rest of our classroom life.

Nothing disappoints me except the ability of this program to expand into the high school and other states to establish a National competition.

It seems that the same schools always "win." I know that there is not way around this, but it definitely is related to socio-economic status. Schools in which the participants are the sons and daughters of college professors and professional people have an advantage over those students who come from farming, factory-worker parents. The kids from lower class families have to work doubly hard just to be competitive and to move beyond the regional level. If these kids get to state, we coaches just praise and praise the fact that they were selected for state--not thinking about them winning, but just encouraging their participation. I wish that there were some way to present more recognition to those youngsters who really don't have the homes which encourage strong writing skills, but who overcome this and write despite the lack of home support.
Some of the judging especially at the District Tournament level, I have been disappointed in. Too often it seems that grammar and spelling are entering into the decisions. Also, it seems that judges are not consistent when looking at the prompt as to how it is interpreted. I realize that it is very subjective, but more consistency needs to be stressed.

What needs to be looked if possible is that State tournament. It truly needs to be moved to the central area of Ohio. Columbus is the center point. For those who live in the Southwest area it takes close to 4 hours to drive to State. Please know that I am not complaining, however it strongly needs to be looked at for future times.

When judges write negative comments on student’s writing. We are here to encourage them not turn them away.

There are not enough students recognized for outstanding achievement.

For the most part, I am very pleased. Sometimes the judge’s comments can be very vague and subjective. A few times there were no comments made at all. This was discouraging to the students.

Student motivation can be difficult to manage; varying abilities of judges can be a factor in uneven scoring of competitors.

Writing is such a hard thing to be subjective about...the only short coming I have experienced is judge differences; for example, judging something off prompt.

I would like to see the program extended to high school.

I honestly can't think of anything except - money / financial cost = I know other contests are not as expensive such as the Spelling and Geography Bees however the amount of paper work and preparation is not as extensive.

Support from community at my school, obviously not the fault of the program.

I do not think it has fallen short of my expectations, but I wonder if some of the teachers whose students consistently succeed in the competitions could be convinced to participate in a professional development program. We used to do some of this but it was always at state, and we always had students for whom we were responsible. It just was not the best time to offer the opportunity to share ideas. But then most of us would probably be more willing to take professional leave than to give up another Saturday, and it would need to be inexpensive, so maybe it would not work. It is just a thought. Northern Ohio's writers always seem to do so much better than we do in southern Ohio.

The difficulty of a round with many strong writers and a round with many weak writers is disappointing. Number 3 in one is much better than Number 1 in the tough round. I just can't think of another way to evaluate or compete at the same pace.

It is my opinion that the administrators of Power of the Pen are not as caring about the students as they should be. As a couch I see this as a way for Power of the Pen to make money from schools, not encourage the love of writing. I also believe that the procedures for communicating with coaches are unreliable and outdated.

Other competitions are not as expensive and they have national inclusion.

They didn't have very good prompts.
This year I was disappointed with the website - it wasn't user friendly or updated enough. I know that is a big job but I kept looking for information about the tournaments and it just wasn't there. I know the weather affected a lot of tournaments but a little blurb on the webpage would have let us know that results weren't coming out for awhile. I kept looking and looking for the information in the mail.

Getting good judges is always hard. Sometimes it seems that judges are not prepared and do not write constructive comments. The judges training packet helps, but the training on site is the m

The knowledge and expectations of how students are evaluated is very subjective. Each school has their own interpretation of the scale and therefore not every student is given the same evaluation. Also, it seems that a few schools understand what is necessary to win and place, while others are there just to participate. Schools who place consistently as a team should share their program that has proven successful with other schools. Power of the Pen shouldn't be about the same schools winning each year but sharing the knowledge and allowing all students the opportunity to win.

The way fees are assessed for late entries is something I've not experienced in any other organization. I'd like to see the way fees are set for the State Tournament changed. I would like students to be able to attend the dance, for example, without paying an additional $25 if their parents decide to stay off campus and not purchase the meal plan.

I would like to see the POP organization more streamlined. Some minor problems during tournaments and the preparation for tournaments (like adequate supplies and forms) create a lot of stress, when it seems these types of issues should have long ago been resolved.

There are times when the directors becomes impatient and take it out an exceptionally dedicated and capable volunteer staff - to the point where some have stopped their work with the program, due to the way they were treated.

I would like more information on how to prepare for a tournament. Many of the same schools always win, and don't always share their preparation secrets

The cost of the event is high since it only benefits a minority of students. Teachers have many, many tasks & expectations in the classroom & at times may not meet a deadline. It is way too costly for us to pay additional fees - I know they are set up to encourage timeliness in returning forms, but it is SO expensive & I as a teacher who is not getting a stipend for doing POP, am unable to afford the fees. Also, the distance of the meets is far & costly in gas.

Another issue is phone conversations. Courtesy would be nice over the phone, yet I feel that I am talked down to and belittled over the phone. Lengthy discussion about the work that goes into the event is not needed - teachers have a lot of work too & are on a time crunch as well.

My biggest disappointment in the program has been the cost. This program is quite expensive.

The overall quality of the judging is disappointing. There are far too many judges who don't know the rules. Just this past year, one of my writers was told he wasn't allowed to write a rough draft, one was asked to pray before starting, one brought home her work with the comment, "this would have been a 1 but other papers were better." One student was accidentally handed a judge's folder with no paper, and the classroom judge told her to look again, then made her wait 20 minutes before coming up with a plan. This was a writer who placed 6th (or so) in districts, but at regionals was so shaken, everything she wrote got a 6.
Then, there is the issue of judging the writing itself. In question 13, you ask if P o P improves the content of what is learned traditionally, but even if it does, when the writing is judged by those who are teaching traditionally, it negates what we are trying to accomplish. Once, in judges training, someone was talking about parameters for judging, saying, "you can't write a good story in one page," but the fact is you CAN, if you choose words carefully. One of my writers DID, and the judge commented that the story could have been developed, without adding that it didn't have to be. It was a beautiful, compact story full of imagery and characterization. I sent it to an English professor friend, who said, "I wish MY student wrote this well," but based on the judges comments, my student thought that the piece came up short.

Uniform judges' expectations and remarks would be great.

It is a little costly to participate in the various tournaments - especially the State Tournament - it is VERY expensive! The cost has probably deterred some schools; I know it did for my son's school.

I felt zero support as a first year coach and often felt chastised by the director of Power of the Pen (TOLD that I needed to thank her and TOLD that I owed her an apology, as if I am a child). The professionalism, courtesy, and communication from POP was dreadful, especially when it came to the too-quick turn-around for the postponed Regional tournament and the escalating fees meant to punish participants.

I have been disappointed with the judging at both District and Regional levels. Even though adults are supposed to judge impartially and objectively, I see adults constantly judging on the basis of personal feelings. I have had a few students in the past who wrote "darkly"... exceptional writers in my opinion. However, they have been reamed by judges on more than one occasion for their choice of subject matter. They have been told they have "no right" to be writing about rape, or murder, homosexuality, or abortion or whatever. The quality of the material was not even considered. I don't know why. I have personally speculated that it may be because many of the schools in my district and region are private, church-related schools. Whatever the reason, it is still wrong in my opinion. We are told not to allow our personal feelings to enter into the judging. However it does. And it seems to be getting worse, not better.

District and regional tournament organization could be better.

A few of the prompts, though it is difficult to predetermine how well they'll be received by the student writers. Also wondering sometimes if the other judges are being fair to the writers in some of the rather low scores - in a few cases over the years it seemed that a few were possibly using that as a means to ensure a better chance for their own teams. Having attended several different districts over the years, more recently the present districts have generally been what one would hope for.

I have no regrets with Power of the Pen, other than possibly who receives awards. I would like to see more ribbons given. This year is a great example of a very talented writer, who happened to qualify for State, yet never received any award for his writing at district or regional. We left both competitions defeated, yet he qualifies for state! Somehow that aspect needs to be realigned. He should have gotten a ribbon or something if he is high enough to qualify for state.

I'm disappointed in their organization at the events and their scoring techniques. Do well in the district and it improves your chances at the regional contest. The more people you bring to regional, the better your chances should be for a high score. I really think they need to look at how things are weighted when it comes to team points past district. The system is not set up for a lot of individual recognition. Some of the "older" judges have the system down so pat, that it really doesn't benefit the individual writer. When you see two judges huddled over one paper, reading it together, then how can you say each individual judge looked at the paper with an independent view? The scoring needs a statistical analysis. The scoring system would give a mathematician a nightmare. The process is too subjective. Get in a group with five vs. six students, were odds just increase. Your team has a few situations like that, and it really increases. They believe it is only a five point difference, but that makes a big difference when looking at total team scores!
I am disappointed that Power of the Pen is only available to 7th and 8th graders. Each year, my 8th grade students have expressed a desire to continue writing in high school but there has not been a venue available to them. I feel that this is a very viable option that needs to be explored and developed. I know there is Power of the Pencil, but I feel that the quality of the writing of students in high school lends itself better to competition.

Another problem I have had has been with the judging. I have had several students' work misjudged by people who either did not understand fully how to score the stories or did not pay attention to the instructions not only in the manual but at the orientation sessions at the competitions. Since scoring the stories is so subjective to begin with, there needs to be a better way for students' work to be given a fair and unbiased score that reflects the quality of the work. I have brought this up to Lorraine Merrill and she has been very helpful straightening up matters in the past.

Because of the speed factor, I believe that we are creating journalist and not writers. It is my only problem with the program.

I would not give two-cents for your judging system. Thank God my students realize how incompetence of the PoP judges and scoring.

I don't feel there's a lot of communication in the organization. I feel a little on my own when it comes to figuring out what materials to use/lessons to teach/how to teach them, etc. I've also become disappointed in the lack of consistency in judging, especially at the district and regional tournaments.

The judging! A pair of judges seriously misunderstood the prompt in the 8th grade Power of the Pen at the 2007 State Tournament. They clearly did not understand the word “epiphany.” I wrote a detailed, exacting letter to Power of the Pen and never heard a word back. This was very disappointing. Also, it has become a little tiresome to read the old comment, “Keep writing.” The message within the message is that the youngster may consider giving up writing for life unless the judge writes this lame statement. It’s not as if these young writers are so fragile that they are teetering on the verge of throwing their pens away forever as “Keep writing” implies. Finally, I do not think that any paper at the Regional or State level should receive a score in the 70's unless it is clearly off prompt. Even at that, I do think that I would give a score that low to a writer who has already made it through a District Tournament.

There seems to be a lack of assistance for first year coaches. A better network of teachers in your area would be helpful, as well as some getting started tips for forming and coaching a team. It would be difficult for a parent to coach a team, and if the language arts teacher at your school isn’t stressing a lot of writing, some schools won’t participate.

Receiving support of other coaches in terms of training, techniques and process is deficient.

I think networking between schools could be enhanced and would be helpful to students, especially state qualifiers.

**Do you have any general comments?**

POP really needs to become much more technologically advanced rather than relying on items to constantly be mailed in and faxed. It is incredibly old fashioned and SLOW.

My first contact with Power of the Pen was as a parent. Two of my own sons participated in the program, and I feel their experiences assisted them later in life. One son became a participant in his speech team in high school and college, and did especially well in impromptu and extemporaneous speaking; utilizing many of the skills he developed in POTP tournaments. Another son went on to write for and edit both his high school and his college literary magazines. Both of them earned college scholarships based on a competition where they were asked to write to a prompt given a set time limit. Both these students gained confidence and skills that have been critical to their success later in life.
Power of the Pen is such a wonderful program! My students love the opportunity to compete in this type of a competition. My eighth graders are always sad to hear that there is not a high school division! I do think the cost of the program is a bit high, especially in this day when enrichment programs are being cut due to lack of funds.

I would like to see more work done to encourage teachers/coaches to share ideas. Maybe past coaches could facilitate clinics for new coaches. This is difficult because if you and your teams have been successful, you tend to be a bit hesitant to give up the keys to your success. In the past, there have been seminars at state; however, many coaches are busy with duties or their teams to take advantage of these. Offering classes on OEA day in October or another teacher in-service day might be successful. I have found Power of the Pen enhances the experience of those who are interested in writing and develops their skills. I'm not sure that it provides motivation or if it responds to a need in the hearts of those who already have the desire to be good at creative writing.

It is a costly program that involves a small number of students.

Overall, I have enjoyed my association with POP. One can certainly NOT underestimate the importance of writing in today's society, and this program does offer students who enjoy writing creatively a "rewarding" way to enjoy their craft.

I have only heard excellent reviews from our parents and staff about Power of the Pen. Our school system does not start middle school until 7th grade, so I feel that we are at a disadvantage in encouraging our 5th and 6th grade youngsters to start looking ahead to Power of the Pen. I would like to see more competitions at the elementary and high school levels.

Thank you

I'd like to see the program extended into high school

I wish this program existed outside of Ohio…to have more kids in the program and maybe even a national championship. I also wish it existed at the high school level. It's just a wonderful, vital program that glorifies intelligence and creativity…it places kids in the spotlight who otherwise may never feel the euphoria of achievement…of belonging…of success among one's peers. I cannot say enough about the program that Lorraine Merrill has given to the youth of Ohio. How lucky we are to experience it!

I had a student last year tell me that they quit sports because of the pressure…now they are feeling even more stress by participating in PoP. I don't know what the balance or answer is, but I wanted to voice my concern with the growing competitive nature (especially giving money awards) of PoP.

I wish there could be another way of judging other than subjectively but I guess that is the nature of the beast. I have enjoyed my experience as a POP coach and working with creative, motivated children.

Power of the Pen is a great event for academic-minded students who want to participate and improve their writing skills. I wish that it was not so difficult to get judges for this at the school level. I am only able to do one grade level due to the high fees involved in hiring extra judges for another grade level.

I would like for students to be able to continue to participate in Power of the Pen at the High School level.

Power of the Pen is a great concept (allowing students to compete in writing teams against other schools). However, the people who run the program can be difficult to deal with at times, and other than organizing and running the tournaments (which I understand is a monumental task) I'm not exactly sure what Power of the Pen has done to enhance the writing skills of my students that I'm not already doing in my classroom.

I am a huge fan of the Power of the Pen program. Any difficulties and disappoints far outweigh the good it does for so many young writers.

Just that I have really enjoyed my association with it over the years.
PoP should be primarily a high school program. I believe eventually it will be a stellar high school experience. The new program, Power of the Pencil seems like such a waste. I guess it has good intentions but no promise. Go to the high school!

I wish there was a way to figure out the exact number of judges that are needed for a tournament. I brought three qualified judges to the regional tournament only to have one work in the Tab room. I also brought a parent along. He could have worked in the Tab room, and the teacher would not have been needed. Such a waste of teachers' valuable time! I also feel paying $100 to hire a judge at the state tournament is a bit exorbitant. I only have one student going, and I have a family wedding that I need to attend so I can't be there to judge. All school budgets are tight these days, I just feel it is a bit much to ask, especially when I brought the required amount of judges to the Regional, and one wasn't even used. It needs to be figured out, so schools can still afford to come, and the qualified judges' time is not wasted.

I continue to enjoy my experiences as a coach.

PoP should be in the high school. When I first heard of power of the pencil I thought it was destined for the high schools and stressed the necessity of revision and rewrites. PoP has wasted valuable time.

The POP program fills a need for the students who love to write. I’m constantly awed by the creativity shown week after week. Also, substantial growth in writing abilities is demonstrated by returning the year’s papers at the last meeting. They take pride in how far they’ve come!

I believe that Power of the Pen is an important project as it is the only academic extra curricular activity in my middle school. It gives my students a chance to shine and grow in their love of the written word and creativity. Many of my students involved in Power of the Pen are not involved in any other extra curricular activity. These students grow as a team as well as individually. Many former students of mine remember their time in Power of the Pen with fondness and have taken their love of writing along with them to high school and beyond.

Thanks to Power of the Pen (Lorraine Merrill) for an amazing program!

Power of the Pen continues, from year to year, to be a wonderful experience for my students and for me!

Overall, this is a good program that would be very beneficial to any school in any state. I would love to see Power of the Pen expand into the high schools and even beyond! This is a very positive program, and I am so pleased that I can say I have been a part of it.

I would be interested in the results of this study. Is that possible?

The program is wonderful opportunity for young people to showcase their writing ability. Many of the participants are saddened that the program is only at the seventh and eighth grade levels.

Nobody wants to openly discuss a key issue for PoP so I will take this opportunity to introduce this topic and hope confidentiality applies. What is the future of PoP? Frank and Lorraine will not be here forever. Likewise, their children are remarkable and outstanding with their help, but how long can we expect them to assist when their parents retire. Many of us have talked about taking PoP to the high school. I know of two teachers who are actually investigating taking a program on their own to the high schools (without PoP).

I have enjoyed this experience but was very disappointed when the regional meet was canceled due to snow and was rescheduled for the same day as the district science fair. Consequently, two of our best writers did not get to compete at the POP regional due to the conflict with science fair.

POP has been an outlet for those students who are very creative and talented writers, and often can be bored or not challenged in the classroom.
Power of the Pen is a unique program that Ohio is fortunate to have in place. It would be fantastic if the program could reach beyond Ohio's borders. We have visiting authors come to our school each year and meet with our Power of the Pen team members; they are always impressed by the quality of the program and its impact on young writers.

I think it’s an amazing program, and we've seen kids come back year after year gushing about how much it's helped them and how much they enjoyed being a part of a writing community.

I believe newer judges should complete more thorough training for district and regional competitions. While subjective judging of writing is always present, I would like to see the rank points and quality points match up in a more "concrete" manner. For example, papers written at a rank of 6 should only be able to score at quality points of 81-76. The range of quality points is often mismatched with the rank points. I believe quality points are often scored lower/higher than the rank deserves. I also believe coaches of one district should judge at another district, so as not to have an indirect influence of the scores of their schools.

This interscholastic competition often bolsters the self-esteem of those students who don't often get recognition in this academic area. I love to see the positive affect of students who do well. But, I have also seen judges comments crush self-esteem of writers, which in turn at this "tender age", discourages them to continue their love of writing.

Our system will only pay teachers for this type of program if it extends to the high school. PoP is considered a club. Please consider extending this great program to the high school; it would benefit both the student and teachers.

I love the competition for writing and I feel honored and privileged to be a part of the Power of the Pen. It is too bad that from state competition we could not have a national competition.

I would like to see the use of word processors. This would benefit the students who have difficulty with penmanship and the judges who are trying to decipher the handwriting. I used the computer lab with prompts and my students said that was one of their favorite activities.

My students and I both have benefitted from our experiences with Power of the Pen.

The program is extremely well run by Lorraine and Frank Merrill. They are the heart and soul of the program. The concern, of course, becomes what will happen when they are no longer about to carry on in the running of the program.

Power of the Pen is a wonderful program that benefits so many different students on so many different ways and in many different areas. I am amazed at the vision of woman and what has grown out her love for writing.

Who or what organization will run PoP in the future? Frank and Lorraine may be full of energy now, but even the energizer bunny runs out. Will one of the kids take over or will a college enter the picture? Wooster has sponsored several state meets; will they eventually take over?

Some judges don't recognize the creativity of what the students are writing. They want them to write to the prompt and not use the prompt as a tool to write a creative story.

I've been very impressed with Power of the Pen in this our first year.

Power of the Pen has provided me with the idea/opportunity of a way to incorporate more creative writing into my classroom.

I truly believe in what the Power of the Pen promotes.

I love Power of the Pen! It is my passion!
Power of the Pen continues to provide a positive experience for my students, and an opportunity for competitive creative writing not available in the classroom. It provides a “team” spirit for my students who love to write and who are not athletes.

I want to see Power of the Pen extend to the high school! There are more co-curricular open to those in high-school, but there is still nothing for the creative writer specifically.

I appreciate the time and effort, and the personal willingness to answer all questions on an individual basis, provided by Lorraine and Frank. So generous. I am reminded of another issue. At last year's State competition final round I posted a low score only to be told that that was too low for a State round. I was surprised and, although I did not check it out, wondered if there are different 'rules' or even expectations, at the State level.

I think Power of the Pen is one of the hidden gems in education. It has been one of the most rewarding programs I have been involved in as a teacher or coach. I know my writers see it as one of the most valuable activities that will actually help them progress as students and as human beings. I love it!

Some type of high school forum needs to be developed so that students who experience success at the middle school level have an opportunity to continue with the program.

The program is good because it is the only one; however, if the costs keep increasing and judges are not trained properly – there is talk of another splinter program starting (I believe it will have a national affiliation).

It would be advisable to remember that coaches working to help kids and in the end the coaches’ keep this organization afloat...it might be wise to support them!

I am a huge proponent of Power of the Pen. I am sure it is largely due to the impact it has had on my students.

I hope that this is not construed negatively; however, plans should be made to recognize Frank and Lorraine for all they have contributed to this program. I suggest a very large banquet and naming ceremony; however, the secondary function would be to announce a board or director who will take POP into the future. It is time for Frank and Lorraine to bow out gracefully. I have heard more negative things lately than ever before. I love Frank and Lorraine and do not wish for them to stay longer than will benefit PoP.

Power of the Pen is one of my favorite projects in my career. I am very thankful that my students feel the same. Power of the Pen has offered my students more than the opportunity the write; in several cases, it has been a way of coping with grief, depression, fear, and anger. Two years ago I had a student on my team who suffered the tragic loss of her father during the writing season. It was a sudden death and her feelings of guilt and anger were consuming her. She came to me and said that she didn't want to be on the team anymore; she was going to quit. I finally convinced her to stay on the team and use her "pen" as a tool to say all of things she didn't have a chance to say. She agreed and in the end, Power of Pen became her counselor. She placed in the top ten at the state level and was invited to write in the Power Round. When it was all over, she came to me and told me that Power of the Pen changed her life. She was finally able to deal with the loss of her father and move on. This experience with Power of the Pen has changed the way I feel about writing. In the years following I have taught students the "power" of the pen. It is a tool that can provide inner strength and healing. It can be a way to release many feelings that the writer is afraid of sharing... it can be "therapy." Last year I had a student on the team who was living in a foster home. She had suffered the majority of her childhood living in a crack house with her mother and her multiple drug-dealing boyfriends. Upon placement in a loving foster home, she was finally provided with an opportunity to shine. She participated in Power of the Pen two years in a row and went to state both years. She has told me that Power of the Pen was the best part of middle school. She not only gained a close network of friends, she was able to prove to herself that she could be anything she wanted to be... regardless of where she came from. Through the creation of her characters and their
unfortunate circumstances, she was able to find perseverance for all of them. I could go on and on discussing the life-changing opportunities that Power of the Pen has offered my students, but this would become a book instead of a response to a questionnaire. I can tell you that the story does not end there; I have parents of a sixth grader already asking me to allow their child an opportunity to write on the team next year. You see, this family suffered the loss of a 15 year-old daughter this school year and they are trying to find different ways of coping with the grief.

Compared to the athletics, we seem to have such few academic venues where our students can compete and achieve. It is not the athletics but the academics that will take our students into the future and help to continue the success of our country. The written word and how we express ourselves will always have an impact just as it did in the forming of our nation.

My main concern is training of judges (consistency of recognizing good writing) and professionalism from the state office in dealing with communication.

The coaches have their secret techniques to improve writing. The program is so competitive that overall student growth is not fostered. It is like football coaches with special playbooks. I thought that we were better than that.

This is my first year in Power of the Pen. I started off with 18 students this year. We all had a great experience writing and sharing in our meetings. Also, the experience we had at tournaments was phenomenal. Word has spread throughout the lower grades at our school about what Power of the Pen is, and now I have students and parents calling and emailing me about next year’s team!

I highly respect the fact that Power of the Pen provides a competitive arena for student writers; rarely do students get the chance to use their academic prowess to succeed in competition, and the experience Power of the Pen offers student writers is incomparable.

I think Power of the Pen is a great experience for any writer that joins. It is such an enriching experience that they can't get in the regular classroom. Too often, the good writers are ignored because the teacher has to work with the struggling ones. Power of the Pen is a haven for the good writers, a place where they can go to be challenged and stretched beyond what can be done in the regular classroom. It is a place where a really good writer can get the recognition they deserve beyond the usual A grade they always get. It is also a place where a writer of any level can go and improve their writing. I am always asked if POP is at the High School level. The kids love it and don't want it to stop!

It is funny; I got into this because I love writing and thought of coaching a competitive sport as more hurtful to students than beneficial. However, this desire to win often causes me to act like a football coach. I am not sure if I like it.

Just to try not to have tournaments when schools are on spring break and families as well as teachers are traveling. Consider having the tournament on Thursday instead of Friday for the state due to a holiday weekend and such horrible traffic. Consider having the state tournament closer to the center of the state as it is really unfair to us in the southern part of the state to have to travel over 3 hours one way.

We have lost support due to Lorraine's treatment of volunteers. The program is worthwhile, but has room for improvement.

Power of the Pen requires so many fees! I feel like we are constantly forking out money. For a small school district, this can be quite cumbersome, particularly when students are moving from level to level. It is also difficult for new school to find judges, especially when they must be “trained”. Outside of those of us already coaching, there are very few people who are willing to devote that sort of time to training and judging.

While I have enjoyed watching the kids grow as writers, if there was a more affordable, “user friendly” program out there, I would probably join it instead.
Students love it; they miss it when they go on to Upper School. It would be great to have a similar competition open to older writers! Or some kind of continuation...our students wax nostalgic about the experience years after it's over.

I really don’t want to complain, but this program has the potential to be so fruitful. L and F have planted a great seed; it is now time for someone else to nurse it to maturity.

I think it’s a great program for aspiring writers. Keep it up!

Keep up the good work Power of the Pen!

I do not encourage my students to enter online or mail-in writing competitions because they never know who actually wrote the pieces they are competing against. Power of the Pen is the only writing competition where students are assured that they are competing against other students and not adult “editors.”

I love being part of Power of the Pen. I coach, run tournaments, tab room supervisor, and help with the state tournament. There is nothing more rewarding than having a student bring praised for their ability to create stories that touch people's lives.

Good professional teachers are dedicated to helping all students achieve and develop their writing skills; I sometimes question the selectivity of PoP. In my school, I see what happens to those students who are not selected or even worse are those students who will not try because they know they cannot compete against the top students.

As long as this remains just a middle school program, it will never have the reputation and potential that it deserves.

Even the football team allows you to walk-on. Some consideration should be given to those good writers that could become great if they had a chance at PoP. I also question the emphasis on speed and writing, but my husband says speed is the most important thing in football also.

Power of the Pen is wonderful! The facilitators do a wonderful job of organizing such large and complicated events. The students truly love their experiences and benefit greatly from competing and participating. I am very proud to be a coach and to be involved.

I am counting on a Ph.D. researcher to release the findings to the general public. I have been witness to judges doing strange things behind closed doors; I hope this is not true of a university researcher. I participated because I wanted to really know how the program is doing.

By participating in Power of the Pen, I feel I have grown as a teacher of writing. I have delighted in the writing abilities of my students and in the excitement for creative writing the competition has generated.

My students have had wonderful experiences competing as a team. This gives kids who are academically talented a chance to achieve recognition equal to the recognition given for other extracurricular activities (sports).

They tell me that the administration of the program used to be a friendly and positive experience; I would guess that many participants would no longer say this. I am not going to name names, but I think you know to whom I am referring. I hope they take any negative comments professionally and not personally.

I have participated in several National Programs, and I truly believe Power of the Pen needs to be recognized as a National Program. It is so valuable to the goal of increasing higher level productive citizens capable of being entrepreneurs and great leaders of this country. Fostering creativity and problem solving is priceless to the economic growth and the health of our nation. I would really like to see Power of the Pen in every school and every state of this country. Writing needs to be emphasized and rewarded.
I hope it continues. It is one of the few programs at my school where excellence in academics, like writing, is recognized and rewarded.

I've been surprised this program is not picked up or started in other states. It's wonderful to have a team recognition that is not a sporting activity.

Power of the Pen is a great activity, but the money that is required is ridiculous. The late fees and entry fees are out of control.

I think the tournaments are run very well. The day is structured well.

The funding is always a struggle with my district. It is very difficult to be a host school because the cost of copies and building use has to come out of the middle school budget. The brunt of the responsibility comes back to the coach. I have had to sell candy, work concessions at track meets, and hold after school dances just to help the budget. That was very stressful.

I know that people will talk about the judging, but someone should mention the team selection process. I am in my first year and have questions as to how some students were not on the team the previous year.

It is important for schools to share their good ideas on making the program work, fundraising, etc.

Overall, POP has been a positive and rewarding experience for me and my students. With all the emphasis on academic writing because of proficiency testing, this is a pleasant, almost counter-cultural experience.

I have truly enjoyed my involvement with this program. It is a wonderful interscholastic program. I LOVE this program and feel strongly that this is a phenomenal opportunity for students. I think highly of Lorraine and Beth, however, I feel obliged to give my honest opinion, but I'm trusting that the surveys are confidential.

I am grateful to have this program in Ohio, and many former students would participate if it were offered in high school.

I believe this is a great opportunity for the students involved.

Being a power of the pen coach has helped me become a better teacher. When I work with a smaller number of students on writing enrichment, I am able to share what we learn about the writing process with students in my classes.

PoP is a wonderful program on the whole, and I believe any problems have more to do with the fact that so much of it is volunteer run. We all do our best, but you get what you pay for. As far as expanding to HS, I have one student who is in 9th grade, but comes to write with us once a week, and next year, promise to have more.

I love that my writers can earn applause for academic pursuits.

With technology today, the PoP process is outdated and somewhat embarrassing. I would give you my suggestions but they would fall on deaf ears.

The paperwork for the state tournament is extremely cumbersome, repetitive and hard to understand.

I truly value the experience for my students, but will not continue to offer POP to my classes. I have a VERY hard time asking parents and administrators who are already strapped for cash to pay the inflated fees for the honor to participate. The original registration fee, in my opinion, should cover the cost of any students who advance to higher levels. They are, in fact, punished with a $30 registration fee and a $25 conference fee for being the top writers in the state. Then, when parents and grandparents who have supported their child all season long wish to continue that support at the state level (just to be waiting in the
building with smiles when the writers finish), they each must pay for conference passes. For the State
tournament, the coaches and judges have to leave their classrooms where their schools must hire a
substitute teacher, and then also pay the $25 or more conference pass fee for the privilege of judging. 
Someone is making a lot of money on this project. I understand that it was someone's idea and creativity
that put this whole event together, but it has gotten out of reach financially. In the business world, they call
it cost-benefit analysis. Between the school, parents, and my personal wallet, we have given over $700 to
Power of the Pen this season. I don't see that much benefit, even with 7 Regional qualifiers and one State
qualifier.

The cost is prohibitive for many districts; hence, it is not even really a state program (i.e. no equal access).

I am so glad an evaluation is in process. This tells me how serious the program is with regards to self-
assessment and improvement. I would expect to see as many negative comments as positive. It is the nature
of all creative writers and professionals. Will we automatically receive a copy of this report or will there be
an extra hidden cost (something we have come to expect – my only complaint).

Lorraine should consider positioning PoP to be run by a university or a group of universities. Lorraine has
done an outstanding job but other than this survey I have not seen a long term plan or funding source. The
costs are escalating and we need to be at the high schools and national. Power of the pencil is heading in
the wrong direction – it is a curriculum based program competing with or used in conjunction with others. I
think it was just too difficult (physically and emotionally) for Lorraine to enter the high school. Lorraine
has been great for the program but she may be holding it back now.

While I understand that the cost of everything is rising rapidly, I believe that the cost of being a part of
Power of the Pen has skyrocketed. And no one seems to know exactly. The majorities of coaches/advisors
are volunteers or are paid minimal stipends by our schools. So why does Power of the Pen need to charge
such exorbitant rates? The host schools at District and State don't charge anything. Those schools must
come up with the money for trophies and ribbons, and further they do so to Ms. Merrill's directions or
undergo a scathing comeuppance by Ms. Merrill. I understand that at State level the College of Wooster is
charging for dormitories and meals, but even that is ridiculous. A $25 walking around the campus fee?
There are so many corporate sponsors that seem to be giving big bucks to this enterprise. But we advisors
wonder, where does all that money go? It doesn't seem to equate to prizes at the State level. While the
prizes are good, if corporations are contributing so much, where do all of our hundreds of dollars per school
per year go? Many of us feel those monies are just lining the Merrill's already full pockets. And Lorraine's
legendary temper tirades seem to grow, not diminish, with her age. While the program is beneficial, it is not
as good as it used to be. My school may not be able to afford to continue for much longer.

And though you obviously know where this email originates, I do expect my responses to remain
anonymous; because if not, my students will suffer.

I have really enjoyed my 6 years coaching. However, due to repeated unpleasant phone calls to my home
from Ms. Merrill, this will be my last year.

Lorraine and her team have done wonders over the years in creating, developing and expanding this
worthwhile program!

I am troubled by the schools who participate. It is not a diverse list. I can break it down as follows: private
academies; top public schools; white suburban or white rural schools. PoP should aspire to include all
systems within the state. PoP should be a national program, but then I can only imagine who would
participate.

The program has excited interest in many of our students and certainly has been a worthwhile challenge for
them.
General concerns about rising costs - typical of the general economy - but some of the smaller schools (private, especially) are having a greater difficulty preplanning a budget for the program. More and more must seek community/business grants in order to fully participate.

Overall, Power of the Pen has changed my life and I know it has had a profound effect on the students who have participated in it. I am so impressed with what it has done for so many young writers, who may have never realized their talent otherwise!

Thank you Lorraine!

This year due to an unexpected snow storm, our regional competition was cancelled and re-scheduled. Unfortunately, it was re-scheduled for the very next weekend, and I lost three students due to the fact that our spring break started that weekend. I feel that the regional competition could have been re-scheduled for a later date - they even had trouble getting judges due to the quickness of the re-scheduling. I feel that there was plenty of time to re-schedule the event for later, perhaps after all the schools’ spring breaks. Since the dates are given at the beginning of the year, I make sure my students are able to attend each level of competition - they make plans to do so. Changing the date so quickly did not give them enough time to re-arrange their schedules. I really feel that my teams were 'short-changed' due to this schedule change. I hope that in the future, more consideration will be given to changing already established competition dates. I know we can't control the weather, but we can control when we schedule the events.

"Power of the Pen" has become an established activity at my school and I will continue to have students participate as long as I am teaching there. (I don't think my students will let me quit, anyway!)

I have been involved with Power of the Pen for some time; however, I have never participated in an evaluation. I really want to see the results. Will they be emailed?

I love Power of the Pen. I wish it would move across states and higher up into the high school level.

Some of the judges are about as creative as a paint-by-number artist kit.

Lorraine and Frank Merrill should think about turning PoP over to an independent board or state function; PoP will not survive after they retire. PoP should be a public run function, and then it would be easier to go National.

The program has inspired writing in our school. The interest in getting into the program and being part of the team has increased every year since I've been involved.

As a result of the program in our school, our students go on to high schools knowing that their writing ability is above many of their classmates.

Our Power of the Pen afterschool meetings offers many students their first chance to discuss their stories in depth, hear others, and give constructive feedback in a comfortable atmosphere. With the increased emphasis on test scores and standards, it is a valuable piece of time to work on creative writing/thinking with students who want to be there!

The management of the entire program can turn people off. In fact, I know of some schools who have quit because of the hoops that one must jump in order to participate. (…and often the student's best interest is not taken into account--the financial aspect is.)

This is an expensive program and is somewhat prohibitive especially for public school systems. Most of the teams are from private schools.
The time management of Power of the Pen needs to be enhanced. The time it takes to tally points, send information regarding tournaments and arrange needed materials is incredibly too long. Having taken part in Science fair type competitions from the local level through the state level, I have never had to wait for hours or even weeks before being told the results and who will advance, and in addition, all of these contests had a vastly larger number of participants than any Power of the Pen event.

I am thrilled to be part of this program and believe highly it what it does and can do for students. I am amazed every year how well the students do and am able to see how they try so hard to continue to stretch their abilities.

PARENTS

What has exceeded your expectations?

PoP has increased my daughter's self-confidence in her writing skills dramatically.

As a parent last year the state tournament was wonderful. I think the author, the extra events and the facility as a whole made the students feel special. The ease of speaking with the Power of the Pen staff is also nice.

What has fallen short of your expectations?

Nothing. Anything we can do to help improve writing skills will only help a student further in life.

I was unaware of the extra judges fees that would be required if our team did well. We ended up needing to pay an extra $100 for the fees. If I would have known earlier I would have prepared another judge. We were also unable to stay on campus because of the cost of the stay. We had to choose off campus lodging for the state tournament as our school is not financially supportive of the team and it was too costly.

Do you have any general comments?

We were late coming to the program and wish it would continue through high school.

Overall Power of the Pen is a wonderful program. My students have done very well this year. This is not a paid position to be the writing coach, however I have been thrilled with the opportunity in watching these students grow and compete on an academic topic!
Administrators

What has exceeded your expectations?

The philosophy is good.

The students themselves have exceeded my expectations. Their writing and interest level has been phenomenal. They never complained about giving up their Saturday and were more than willing to practice, write, and compete.

What has fallen short of your expectations?

Cost

I have spoken with teachers who are dissatisfied with the feedback given by organizers.

The judging has fallen very short. I judged several times and was shocked that there is no rubric or guidelines for the judges. There is no consistency. I know that this is a tough area, but some judges rate the students very low, some high. Writing is subjective, but there are ways that it can be very much improved.

Do you have any general comments?

My concerns are related to information that is sent regarding registration for tournaments. I suggest it be condensed and simplified. It is lengthy and would be easier to read with the use of bullets. I appreciate the time and effort that goes into scheduling, and would hope that the administrators of the organization recognize the need to be flexible and listen to the concerns of participating schools.

The cost is becoming prohibitive. Since the judges are volunteers and the teachers take on so much of the work themselves, where is all of this money going?

Will this report be made public? I would like very much to see the final report.
Field Interviews: State Finals
(Summary)

STUDENTS

Every student interviewed commented on how much they enjoy participating in PoP. Likewise, as a group they wanted this experience to continue in high school. Students stated that they think more about how to express ideas and believe that PoP has helped them become a better writer. The only concern expressed came from when students compared their program with others; there seems to be differences in how often teams meet and practice. Several groups commented that they love meeting and preparing for the State Finals, but they really have not had an opportunity meet as team; whereas, other teams met all the time both in preparation for the State and throughout the year.

Field Interviews: State Finals
(Summary)

PARENTS

Some of the parents had already heard about how a PoP evaluation was in process; therefore, they were very interested in sharing their opinions. First and foremost, parents all had the highest praise for PoP and the opportunity it provides students with in regards to creative expression. Several parents commented on having multiple children and getting an opportunity to travel with their PoP child on competitions balances out trips to stadiums. Parents reflected how their children get psyched up for competitions and even get disappointed if they have to miss a team meeting. Most of the parents openly stated that it is sad (or even wrong) that PoP is not at the high school.