



## HHS SYDNEY LAUREN TABAKIN WRITING LAB

During the past ten years, thousands of Homestead High School students have become stronger writers thanks to the generosity of the Sydney Lauren Tabakin Memorial Fund and the Mequon-Thiensville Education Foundation. The Sydney Lauren Tabakin Writing Lab is a popular spot for drop-in writing help during and after school. Sydney, a 17-year-old HHS student who died in a tragic 2010 car accident, loved writing, and her college essay hangs on the lab wall. The Tabakin family is "dedicated to strengthening and funding the activities dear to Sydney's heart" through generous grants, like this ten-year gift.

Since the 1970s, the lab, formerly called the ISWAC Lab (Improving Student Writing Across the Curriculum), has served the entire HHS community. It aims to promote writing across the curriculum because strong writers not only excel with greater ease at the college level but also rise above their peers in the workplace and become empowered leaders in their communities. HHS English teachers consider the impact of the one-on-one editing experience one of the most influential forces promoting excellent student writing in the school: a necessary counterpart to high-quality large class instruction. While many colleges have writing labs, a lab of this kind is rare at the high school level.

Once students see the benefit of the Sydney Lauren Tabakin Writing Lab, they become repeat customers; moreover, students who use the lab



coupled with classroom instruction can see tremendous growth and develop a value of the editing process itself as fundamental to achieving excellence. Additionally, having help with college essays offers students a sense of relief and validation before hitting the final college application submit button.

During the pandemic, a virtual lab process became necessary. **According to English teacher Rachel Rauch, whose master's thesis work focused on the Writing Lab model, "Many students expressed that they prefer the in-person lab because the one-on-one communication helped them ask questions that arose during the editing process and allowed them a much more personalized and thorough edit."**

Thankfully, face-to-face conferencing is back. Additionally, the digital platform option remains and is a popular option for students who do not have the

opportunity to visit during the day or after school. Due to this access increase, a record 1,138 college essays and student papers from all grades and disciplines received meaningful content feedback and grammatical edits during the 2020-2021 school year. And, the first trimester data suggests that 2021-2022 numbers will beat that record!

English teachers have also seen an increase in gratitude from students, many of whom have taken time to express via email their thanks for the help. **English Department Chair Angie Cicero summed it up: "Many other aspects of the last few years have been difficult; however, the English Department of Homestead High School is pleased to report that the lab is alive and thriving, serving students in new ways. Students are extremely grateful for the support of MTEF and the Tabakin family."**