The PRIME Project, a collaboration of two urban high schools and UMass Lowell faculty, addressed the need for teacher professional development in reading and writing in the content areas, in math and English content and pedagogy, and in college readiness skills. As we analyzed gaps and identified academic goals, requisite skills and behaviors, and grading protocols at both levels, we found significant differences between high school and college teacher expectations for student performance, both academic and behavioral, and the need to address specific aspects of the high school curriculum and classroom practices.

Spotlight on Year Three: For this final year, our work focused on George Hillocks’s scaffolded instruction in reading and writing arguments; this approach draws on students’ competence as they learn how to identify the elements of an argument: claims, evidence, and warrants. It dovetailed with our continued efforts to address and improve students’ college readiness skills.

UML faculty worked with high school teachers to help them design lesson plans that would teach students how to analyze and write increasingly complex arguments. By the end of the year, teachers submitted research projects that presented and evaluated their efforts to improve students’ reading and writing of arguments.

Elena Apostolos, Steven Ferri, Kathleen Keefe, and Kristen Morey report on one Lowell High class: “During this exercise, done as a whole group, all areas of verbal argumentation improved - claim, data/evidence, warrants, counterclaim, and rebuttal. The hands-on nature of this case made for a lively discussion with students offering a variety of counterclaims and rebuttals.”

Stacey Hall and Kendra Bauer from Lowell High report: “Overall, the class saw a marked improvement in many of the key areas of argument writing. Because there was so much improvement, we had the opportunity to look at the results in terms of presence of claims and evidence, as well as overall strength of student claims and evidence.”

RESOURCES: David T. Conley, College and Career Ready and George Hillocks, Jr., Teaching Argument Writing