

Member Spotlight – Todd McKinley

The Bio: I began my teaching career in 1996, dedicating the next 26 years as an eighth grade teacher. Although I focused mainly on teaching ELA, I also taught math and social studies. During that time, I earned a Master’s degree and became a teacher-consultant in the Maine Writing Project (2015). I left classroom teaching in 2022 to assume a leadership role as an Instructional Strategist in southern Maine. In 2023, I earned a PhD in Literacy Education from the University of Maine. Most recently, I served as vice president for the Maine Council for English Language Arts. I moved to Vermont in 2025 where I now work as a curriculum coordinator for South Burlington schools.

A Favorite Book: As much as I love dystopian literature, I would have to choose *A New Land: 30 Groundbreaking Poems by Youth Poets* as my favorite text to teach. Published by The Telling Room, it captures the voices of young Maine authors and provides remarkable models. The Telling Room also offers a journal to accompany the poems; the prompts paired with each poem give my students many avenues to express their voices.

Something Personal: When I am not working with educators, I devote much of my time to writing. Mainly crafting poetry, I seek inspiration from fellow writers and from the natural world, where I spend many moments: riding my bikes, hiking mountain trails, or paddling open waters!



An Influence: Much like the idea of students learning with each other, my relationships among colleagues have had the most impact on my teaching. The Maine Writing Project, in particular, centers instructional leadership and professional learning on a model of teachers teaching teachers. This network builds relationships within and across districts to foster effective writing practices — for themselves and for their students.

A Strategy: If I had to choose one instructional strategy for teaching, I would always turn to any approach to cultivate student discussion. Whether a simple “Think-Pair-Share,” weekly book club meetings, or working through a group task, student discourse drives learning and allows students to make meaning for themselves and alongside their teachers.