1. Description of the humanities program or program series:

"Harmony with Voice III – Our Poems Go Trans-Pacific" (HWV3) is an on-going humanities program begun in 2007 with "Harmony with Voice" and in 2009/2010 was in its third year. The program involves 7th graders working with a local African American poet Bonnie Lynn Tolson and sharing their poems with a local women’s homeless shelter. Tolson writes about life in the inner-city and performs and shares her poetry with many. In 2009/2010, Bonnie was at the University of Hawaii so she worked with us through Skype and Google Docs. HWV3 addresses humanities through communication arts (CA), social studies, visual arts, and culture and is done through our 7th grade poetry unit. HWV3 has evolved into a multi-media, community service project that involves students district-wide.

"HWV3" was created for very important reasons. The district vision is “Together, we will enable each child to become more than he or she ever hoped to be.” We take this very seriously at Harmony. We empower our students to become responsible citizens. Citizens are concerned for others and work together to impact the world around them through positive and constructive ways. It isn’t enough for us to live in a safe environment, but that we work so everyone has that opportunity. 7th grade CA curriculum and state standards include poetry and figurative language. Promoting literacy via poetry improves our students’ affective beings, literacy and student achievement. Finally, HMS is in the suburbs but within minutes of the urban core of Kansas City, Kansas and Missouri. Our HMS population is becoming more multi-cultural with 25% of our students being racially, religiously, and socio-economically diverse. There is a greater need for understanding in our changing community.

HWV3 provided Blue Valley students the opportunity to see outside the “BV bubble.” We started HWV3 in the LMC with a presentation by True Light Family Resource Center on “a day at the shelter.” They brought former patrons turned volunteers/employees to talk about their life before True Light. Then we Skyped with Bonnie and she shared her poetry from her book Naturally Nappy and talked about self-esteem and personal pride. She worked to motivate and encourage students to explore and express their feelings through poetry. Students then wrote poems for True Light’s patrons and shared their poems through blogs with other 7th and 8th grade art students in our district. The art students created “Empty Bowls” that represented the poems. The bowls were auctioned to the community and almost $1750 was given to True Light. Two years before a few of our student poets actually shared their poems at an artist’s studio for the public! Giving our student poets and artists an opportunity to work for their extended community is a win-win situation for everyone. “HWV” actually began as a collaborative unit through our HMS PLCs to raise test scores in figurative language but has grown into so much more. “HWV3” opened the minds of our students about diversity and homelessness. It also taught them new 21st Century skills like blogging, Skypeing, and using Google Docs. Most important, our students learned from True Light. You can’t meet them and not learn a respect and empathy for all humans.

*The collaborative team consisted of the LMS, 3 HMS CA teachers and 1 HMS art teacher, and 3 other middle school art teachers, our district Secondary Tech Specialist, the Director of True Light, and poet Bonnie Tolson. The LMS met weekly with the CA teachers before the unit, and then daily once the unit started. These meetings determined our schedule, goals, standards, and technology tools needed. The LMS wrote and received a $1000 grant from the Blue Valley Ed. Found. for this program. The grant was funded by our local Walmart. Once Bonnie worked with the students and the poetry was finished, the LMS met with the art teachers and matched poets with artists so the blogging could begin. Again we discussed goals, standards, tech needs, time, and dates for the bowl completion and auction. Throughout this process the LMS kept in daily e-mail contact with everyone. We also met daily with Bonnie during the poetry process to reflect and decide how to proceed. We started the collaboration in Nov 2009 and implemented it in Dec of 2009 with poet and students. Students then blogged with artists in Jan of 2010 and the finished bowls were auctioned in March 2010.

*The following is a day by day description of “HWV3.”

**Day 1** – True Light made a presentation about daily life in the shelter. The director brought her team. We videotaped the session for the art teachers to show before starting the bowls. Students were asked to listen carefully because the information they learned would be part of their poems for True Light and the artists. This presentation really set up the student work later because it was so moving and enlightening.

**Day 2** – Poet Bonnie Lynn Tolson, and author of Naturally Nappy, shared her poetry through Skype with the students and talked very pointedly about prejudice, bias, pride and self-esteem. Bonnie used music and drama to present her poetry and the students were captivated by her message. These same issues are very important to our 7th graders and True Light so they were able to relate to Bonnie and her poetry. Students were asked to listen carefully and write down any words or images that Bonnie spoke about that might be important to their poetry.
Day 3 — Bonnie Skyped with students on her writing technique “From a Paragraph to a Poem.” She used a power point with the students that showed six different homeless people. Some looked homeless and some didn’t. Of course students already knew this because True Light stressed the importance of not stereotyping the homeless. Bonnie used the photos to have students write a paragraph. They could also use this visual in their poems. She stressed using strong, meaty words that depicted the student’s voices and using figurative language wherever possible for more powerful poems. Students were also instructed to write “I can’t think of anything to write” when they got stumped so that they were always writing. Finally, Bonnie mind-mapped with the students by having them close their eyes and picture themselves homeless. She asked them questions like “What does it smell like? What sounds do you hear? What do you see?” When they opened their eyes she had them write another paragraph. They now had two paragraphs to use for writing their poems.

Day 4 — The CA teachers picked 2 students that were willing to share their poems. We wrote the poems on an easel but Bonnie had them on Google Docs so she and the student could edit the poem in front of the students. Bonnie, with everyone’s help, went through and removed the useless words. Bonnie’s poems aren’t wordy rather she uses forceful and compelling words to send her message. Students were encouraged to do the same. The students constantly re-read the poem until it sounded perfect to both the poet and Bonnie. All of this was done with the help and support of teachers and classmates. Bonnie worked with two students in each class and with time left she had students turn to their neighbor and try it with their own poems.

Day 5 and 6— Today we brought in Carol Bartolac from district office to show students how to use Google Docs. 40 of our students did not have emails so our principal agreed to ask parents for permission to use their personal email or have the library give them a G-mail. Students then worked on putting their paragraphs and poems on Google Docs. This amazing program allowed the librarian, CA teachers and most importantly Bonnie to go in and make editing suggestions with students. Every student had at least one adult comment on their poems, including comments from the library para-professionals.

Days 7 - Students worked finishing their poems in the LMC and computer labs. For the struggling students or those needing extra help we set up 2 MAC computers. 1 computer had Bonnie in Hawaii through Skype and the other had the student’s Google Doc pulled up. Bonnie also had the Doc pulled up on her computer. Together they were able to work side by side and with a click of the SAVE button they could see the finished product!

Day 8 - Students practiced reciting their poems for their peers and Bonnie, as well as typing up the final copy of their poem for the library. The LMS reviewed with students the criteria for a good read-aloud: annunciating, speaking up, taking your time, and gesticulating when your poem called for it. Students were reminded of how good Bonnie was in presenting her poetry and we discussed making their poetry come alive. Students paired up to practice recitation and teachers and the LMS staff walked around to help where needed.

Day 9 & 10 - We Skyped with Bonnie both of these days and she just listened, commented and verbally evaluated the students as they recited their poems. She made a big deal about standing after they finished and taking the positive feedback from their peers in the form of finger clicking or clapping. Students were assessed using a rubric designed by the collaborative team. The LMS assessed presentation and the Google Docs work and the CA teachers assessed the 6 Trait Writing Process and figurative language.

Day 11 - 20 - When we returned from winter break students were given the name of their student artist. The LMS reviewed how to use a blog and appropriate blog communication with peers. Students were instructed to post their poems with their artists and to check the blog daily for any questions or comments the artist might have. The blog was the medium by which symbols and meaning were shared between poet and artist. During this time the artists created their “Empty Bowls.” The only criteria for the bowls was that a line, image or theme from the poem be somewhere in or on the bowl. Some bowls were pottery and 1 school did woven bowls.

March 25, 2010 — “Empty Bowls” made by students were auctioned off at HMS. Bowls were displayed with the poems and parents were encouraged to buy the bowls. We Skyped with Bonnie so parents could see how we had worked with her earlier, and she read one of her poems aloud. There was an open microphone for students wishing to share poems. The HMS PTA also provided refreshments, and we raised $1750 for True Light! In April, True Light came to HMS for the check presentation at 7th grade lunch. The ceremony was taped so the artists could see it as well.
2. Impact of program or program series in the humanities:

*“Harmony with Voice 3: Our Poems Goes Trans-Pacific” (HWV3) is part of our 7th grade Communication Arts curriculum. The program affected 200 student poets at Harmony Middle School, 50 8th grade artists at Harmony Middle, and 200 7th and 8th grade artists at Prairie Star Middle School, Overland Trail Middle School, and Blue Valley Middle School. Some 450 Blue Valley students were directly a part of HWV3.

*When True Light visited Harmony and talked to our students about homelessness and its roots in fate, poverty, and mental illness students were forced to think outside of their box. They weren’t just learning about facts and issues that affect those that patronize True Light, but they realized these facts and issue might affect their own lives at some point. The people that count on True Light look just like our students and their families and friends. Students can see the similarities in their own lives and realize that many of their families could find themselves in these same situations and on the street. It takes higher order thinking skills to make these connections. Students heard Bonnie Tolson read her poetry from Naturally Nappy like “It Don’t Rub Off” about her personal experience with racism, and again they made inferences about their own fights with self-esteem and peer pressure. Bonnie’s use of metaphor in her poems ring true with many of our students and their teenage struggles. When they saw the conflicting photos of homelessness they began to form their poems for the people at True Light. Writing a poem from new knowledge, metaphors and photos forces students to think and create on a higher level. Blogging with art students gave students a chance to share their poems and the reasons behind their chosen words. They worked hard to justify their thoughts and visions in their poems with another human being. That human being then created art from their poems. The artists too were thinking on a different level when they created meaning from their blog collaboration.

*On every level, HWV3 was beneficial to the learner as well as the people at True Light Homeless Day Shelter. Students had to write a poem and then communicate its meaning to an artist so that the final product could be created for sale. The rubric contained assessment criteria for content, vision, voice, performance, figurative language, rhythm, blogging, and Google Docs usage. Students also wrote a reflection which we passed on to Bonnie as a thank you note. Students were asked to be honest in their evaluation of this experience so Bonnie would know how to improve the experience for next year. The student artists were also assessed using a visual arts rubric. The criteria for the artists included exploring ideas through sketching, brainstorming and researching, identifying elements of art, identifying the stages of clay, demonstrating scoring, slipping and smoothing, constructing a ceramic, and illustrating the poem successfully. Students also reflected on their strengths and what they could improve on with this project. What we found with this program is that high-achieving students sometimes struggle writing poetry and students that aren’t always successful in writing performed at high levels. Maybe it’s because poetry has no boundaries and capitalizing and punctuating aren’t important? Maybe they were touched by True Light and Bonnie and it came out in their poetry? Whatever the reason we continue to be amazed at how all of our students are affected in different ways when it comes to writing poetry. Truly, some of our struggling student’s poems were the most creative we received!

*HWV3 was funded by our Blue Valley Education Foundation. This was the third year they funded this project. We are the first district project in the 20 years of the foundation that has been funded for more than one year! The director and funding committee were impressed with the innovation of the project, the high number of students it affected, and the impact it had on student test scores and character education initiatives in our school district. We also had collaborative help for the project in our building, including our speech and drama teacher helping with the presentation piece of the poetry as well as our principal and vice-principal helping students write their poetry by checking their work. We had HMS PTA assistance at the Empty Bowls auction when they provided refreshments and help with set-up for the event. Finally, the $1750 check we gave to True Light came from district parents and patrons that bought the bowls at the auction.

**“HWV3” was exemplary because it was learning through seeing, hearing, feeling and using your heart. Students didn’t just write poetry for a grade using their text books they wrote poetry that ultimately helped another human being in great need. Even beyond this amazing feat, they learned about themselves and how they feel about the world around them. True Light is only 20 minutes away but it might as well be halfway around the world because it is so far removed from our student’s experiences. HWV3 gave them the ability to be human.
3. Relationship of the Program to the Curriculum:

*“Harmony with Voice III: Our Poems Go Trans-Pacific” (HWV3) focuses on the arts and cultural literacy. It does this through self-examination, writing, performance, blogging, creating, and sculpting. All of these meet district and state standards including those for communication arts and the visual arts. HWV3 works hard to make our students better citizens and human beings so it also includes 21st Century skills. This project meets multiple standards including all of the following:

21st Century Skills – Students think creatively, work creatively with others, are open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives, incorporate group input and feedback into the work, demonstrate originality and inventiveness
- Interacted with True Light, Wrote poetry, blogged with student artists, and created bowl sculptures.
- Reflect critically on learning experiences and processes, identify and ask significant questions that clarify various points of view and lead to better solutions – Wrote poem reflection/thank you note or visual arts reflection, blogged meaning of poem between poet and artist
- Articulated thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written and nonverbal communication skills in a variety of forms and contexts – Completed paragraphs, poems and sculptures, communicated poem’s meaning through blogging
- Listen effectively to decipher meaning, including knowledge, values, attitudes and intentions – Read to the True Light Presentation, Bonnie Tolson lessons, Peer-reading of poems, and blogged with artists
- Use communication for a range of purposes (e.g. to inform, instruct, motivate and persuade) – Communicated feelings through their poems, blogged with artists, created sculpture to represent the poems
- Demonstrate an ability to work effectively and respectfully with diverse teams – Worked with Bonnie Tolson and their teachers, blogged with student artists
- Exercise flexibility and willingness to be helpful in making necessary compromises to accomplish a common goal – Ability to take direction from Bonnie Tolson and teachers when writing or sculpting, willingness to compromise with artists that were sculpting their poems and visa-versa during blogging
- Assume shared responsibility for collaborative work, and value the individual contributions made by each team member – Student poets worked with student artists they didn’t know and appreciated their bowl even when it wasn’t how they’d originally envisioned their poem

Communication Arts Standard 1: Benchmark 3: Indicator 9 – The student reads and comprehends text across the curriculum and identifies and determines the meaning of figurative language including similes, metaphors, analogies, hyperbole, onomatopoeia, personification, and idioms – Students used figurative language in their finished poems.

Standard 3: Benchmark 2: Indicator 2 – The student writes effectively for a variety of audiences, purposes, and contexts and use a writing process that includes preparing, drafting revision, editing and publishing to produce a written text and while using pre-writing strategies to gather ideas on a topic – Students wrote poems on Google Docs for the student artists and for True Light Homeless Shelter.

Standard 3 Benchmark 5: Indicator 5 – The student uses authentic and appropriate voice and writes to convey mood and personality in a manner appropriate for purpose and audience – Students wrote poems for the people at the homeless shelter that showed compassion and empathy.

Visual Arts Standards – Student will conceptualize, transfer, and explore ideas through sketching, brainstorming, and research – Students blogged with poets and created a bowl sculpture that represented the poem.
- Evaluate meaning through interpreting subject matter, symbols, and ideas in their works – Students created sculpture from poetry.
- Art enhances and relates to other disciplines – HWV3 combined visual art, CA, and 21st Century Skills

*Every school in our district and probably our city studies and is assessed in poetry and figurative language. What sets HWV3 above these is the collaboration with others schools, other curriculums, and other communities. Students are asked to create something that benefits others. Most lessons lack this important piece. HWV3 wouldn’t be the same without it!
4. Replicability:

"Harmony with Voice III: Our Poems Go Trans-Pacific" (HWV3) has grown since its inception. The use of a local poet has remained constant every year. The first year we just wrote poems for Safe Home, a local domestic abuse shelter, and made MP3 clips using Garage Band and posted them to the library web page so young people staying there could access them. The next year we wrote our poems for True Light, the local homeless shelter, and collected items the ladies at the shelter needed. We made a book of the poems and worked with 24 8th grade art students at Overland Trail Middle. Student poets volunteered to blog with the art students and they made drawings for the shelter. We were invited to a local artist’s studio that spring to share our poems and drawings and several students were able to do this. However, in 2008/2009 we made blogging mandatory for all poets and because of the success of the year before we had two additional schools participate in the art piece. Our own HMS art teacher found information about a national project called “Empty Bowls” and the LMS and art teachers planned together and adapted this idea with our poetry. When we talk about the program at district LMS, Communication Arts, and Visual Art’s meetings teachers want to know how they can duplicate HWV3 or adapt it to their needs! So in 2009/2010 we had 4 middle schools including HMS participating in the art component of HWV3.

The key components of HWV3 are multiple and diverse. Key for the library was the inclusion of the 21st Century skills and the collaborative piece with the art teachers and True Light. Key for the teachers was the meeting of district and state standards and the poetry curriculum. Key for the students was the technology piece which includes social networking through blogging, Google Docs, and Skyping. The students also connected with Bonnie Tolson and her ethnicity was a positive cultural experience for them. Several of our students have gone on to work in soup kitchens and with the homeless because of HWV3. Key to the art students was producing an art piece for sale. They also love working with ceramics! Blue Valley Middle School’s artists worked with fiber for HWV3 and the blogging consisted of talking about color and touch. Key to the parent and school community was the student’s work with an African American poet which is significant to their global education. Finally, the key to the greater community was our collaboration with the homeless shelter. All of these key components were and are essential to the continued success of our program.

HWV3 involves poetry and having Bonnie Lynn Tolson share her work with our students is important and constructive. Depending on the community, the outside collaborative expertise could come from any number of fields and cultures. However, HWV3’s format could be used in world language, cultural studies, drama, and music. Replicating HWV3 would be fairly simple because students can learn from any expert in the humanities disciplines and create and share through technology their poetry, art, music, dance, etc. The critical outcome is that their efforts impact the human condition. We have found that when our students write with a purpose, for Safe Home or True Light, their work goes above and beyond. This empathy and compassion piece is essential to the program’s success. The service component was very beneficial to our students. Every community has needs that would interest students and help them understand the wider world around them; animal shelters, assisted living and nursing homes, domestic shelters where even younger students could benefit from a humanities program.

We are fortunate to have Bonnie Lynn Tolson in our community to use for this project and she is very important to this program. However, if a local poet isn’t available there are poets on-line, videos of poets reciting their work, even having students in higher grades coming to help with the poetry would be possible. Public libraries would also have information about local poets.

I would be eager and willing to participate in a conference program or online meeting to showcase “Harmony With Voice III: Our Poems Go Trans-Pacific” and help libraries replicate the project. It has been an amazing experience for our students and one they and their parents look forward to every year when they get to 7th grade at Harmony Middle School.