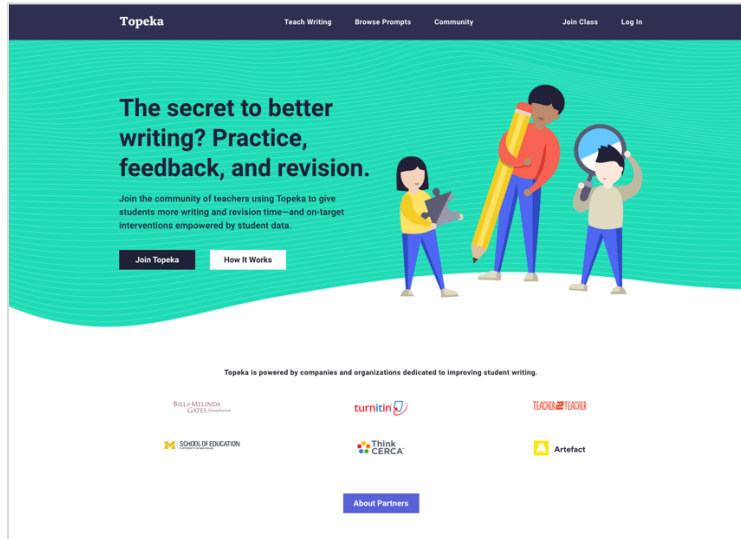# Project Topeka: A Brief Explanation for Parents

About Project Topeka

Your student's class is helping to test a new tool for teachers called Project Topeka. Project Topeka is a free, online, automated essay-scoring service that equips English Language Arts teachers with greater insight into students' argumentative writing capabilities. It is designed to support teachers in working more directly with students to improve their skills.

Project Topeka focuses on argumentative writing, a kind of writing that asserts a position on a given topic based on cited evidence. Argumentative writing is an essential life skill.

Project Topeka challenges students to write a short, argumentative essay in response to a prompt their teacher selects. As they write, students get real-time suggestions for grammar and structure to improve their essay. After students submit their essay, Project Topeka provides teachers with an evaluation of their work. Teachers get immediate, student-specific performance data, more time to work individually with students, and resources for helping students improve. Students get more opportunities to practice writing, more one-on-one attention from their teachers, and feedback that better addresses their particular strengths and weaknesses.

Currently, use of Project Topeka is restricted to select teachers and schools to facilitate early testing of the product. Project Topeka's creators aim to eventually make the product available to schools and teachers across the United States, free of charge.

Project Topeka: A Brief Explanation for Parents

Who created Project Topeka?

Project Topeka is being developed by a coalition of businesses and nonprofit organizations committed to improving student's argumentative writing skills. The project is overseen and funded by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Project Topeka and privacy

Project Topeka has been designed with safeguards for protecting information about students. Personally identifiable student information, including essay scores, is provided to teachers to help them tailor their instruction for each student. The same information is stored on a secure database accessible by researchers at The University of Michigan, who use the data to evaluate Project Topeka and create new strategies for improving student writing. Anonymous versions of student data are shared with the team behind Project Topeka to enable improvement of the product. Student data is otherwise not shared, and is never sold.

For more information about Project Topeka, see the FAQ at www.projecttopeka.com/faq. If you have further questions, please talk with your student's teacher.