



Press Release

45 Columbus Avenue, New York, NY 10023-6992 T 212 713-8052 F 212 713-8184 www.collegeboard.com

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Contact: Sandra Riley or
Chiara Coletti
212 713-8052

Louisiana Teacher Is Recipient of First Bob Costas Grant for the Teaching of Writing, Announced by the College Board

NEW YORK—Billie J. Smith, chair of the English department at McKinley High School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, is one of six teachers in the nation who have been awarded the first College Board Bob Costas Grants for the Teaching of Writing, the College Board announced today. The grants are in recognition of the innovative methods these teachers use to inspire and develop their students' writing skills. The award was named for Bob Costas, the Emmy Award-winning broadcaster and author, due to his dedication to the craft of writing and his generous public service work on behalf of the National Commission on Writing. Each teacher will receive a grant of \$2,000.

"The honorees are remarkable teachers who are creative and successful in their approach to get young people excited about writing and learning," said Costas. "Their commitment is clearly reflected in the confidence they are building in their students, who are developing lifelong skills of incredible value. I'm honored to be associated with this national program recognizing such noble work."

One grant recipient was selected from each of the College Board's six regions. Smith will be honored at the College Board's Southern Regional Forum on February 9, 2006, at the Rosen Centre Hotel in Orlando, Florida.

Billie J. Smith

As a Title I school, McKinley has experienced significant growth since Hurricane Katrina, accommodating hundreds of displaced students as well as teachers. Smith guided her students to write poetry and make journal entries about the storm and its aftermath. She plans to use the Bob Costas Grant to help her students interview storm survivors, visit and photograph New Orleans, and create an anthology of writing to document what Smith describes as "the loss and renewal, the past and the future of our lives and our region."

Seventy-five students are at work on the project that Smith hopes will provide a forum in which to share their progress as writers, and will foster a sense of responsibility and pride in their work. "The 'demystification' of writing is

accomplished by writing frequently and sharing that writing in whole-class discussions, teacher-student conferences, and peer response groups,” wrote Smith. “If a great poem starts as a lousy journal entry, students suddenly realize that good writing takes patience and work.”

Smith is a teacher consultant for the National Writing Project and the Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project. Student Leslie Ellis admitted that she was nervous about taking Smith’s English III class because of its reputation for rigor, but Smith’s enthusiasm and her accessibility assuaged her fears and helped her develop new skills. Ellis wrote, “My writing skills improved exponentially, even though it was difficult in the beginning . . . I experienced a change in my attitude. I stopped walking into class with my head down. I became more confident.”

Gaston Caperton, president of the College Board, said: “These winners, along with many of the other highly qualified applicants, are doing critical work. To succeed in the classroom and later in life, students need to acquire strong writing skills. We were heartened by the overwhelming response we received in the first year of this program and to learn about so many great efforts being made across the country to inspire students to write well.”

The College Board established the National Commission on Writing in 2002 to create more national support for the teaching of writing. Bob Costas, a *New York Times* best-selling author, has received numerous Emmy Awards, including two for writing, and has been honored as Sportscaster of the Year a record eight times by the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association. He has supported the Commission’s work by producing a national public service announcement encouraging young people to develop strong writing skills for success in the classroom and the workplace.

Teachers of grades 6–12 from any discipline, in both public and nonpublic schools, are eligible for the Bob Costas Grants, as are writing programs that take place within schools or the community. For more details about the award and the other honorees, visit www.collegeboard.com/costasgrants.

The College Board is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the association is composed of more than 5,000 schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves seven million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,500 colleges through major programs and services in college admissions, guidance, assessment, financial aid, enrollment, and teaching and learning. Among its best-known programs are the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT®, and the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®). The College Board is committed to the principles of excellence and equity, and that commitment is embodied in all of its programs, services, activities, and concerns.

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