Erin Lynn Cunningham has been teaching Literacy in The School District of Philadelphia for 20 years in South Philadelphia. The first 18 years, she taught Literacy/Social Studies to seventh and eighth grade students at Edwin H. Vare Middle School, while the last two years she taught Literacy to eighth graders at Walter G. Smith Elementary School. Ms. Cunningham has been an advocate for the writing curriculum inside Philadelphia public schools since her appointment in 1993. She has sponsored afterschool writing clubs, poetry programs, classroom newspapers, and school-wide writing contests. For the last four years, she has been heavily involved in La Salle University’s Writers Matter Program.

The Writers Matter program has been the catalyst for giving a voice to middle school students in her two schools. This program allowed young adults in inner city schools an opportunity to reflect on their neighborhood, their relationships, their past, their futures, and their own existence. The improvement in her students’ writing has been noticed across the city with various accolades and awards in her student’s work. Through this program, her students have been recognized and have won many contests by Philadelphia Young Playwrights in their Middle School Monologue Festival and Middle School Playwrights Contest. The ability to think outside the box and take ownership of their writing has inspired her students to “come alive” and write beyond their expectations. Her students have also been recognized for writing a beautiful poem for The World AIDS Day Writing Contest.