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Presidential Transition Team for Education
451 6th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Presidential Transition Team for Education:

Strong writing and literacy skills are essential in this digital age. As you and President-Elect Obama prepare for the new Administration, we want to provide you with up-to-date information about the National Writing Project (NWP). Writing project leaders, both K-12 teachers and university faculty, are well-prepared to support an education agenda that draws upon an extensive network of outstanding instructional professionals and promotes strong literacy skills for all of the nation's young people.

The mission of the NWP is to improve writing and learning in the nation's schools. Our goals are:

- to improve student writing and learning in kindergarten through university classrooms;
- to extend the uses of writing in all disciplines;
- to provide schools, colleges, and universities with an effective professional development model;
- to identify and enhance the professional role of successful classroom teachers.

Founded in 1974 at the University of California, Berkeley, NWP began as a single local writing project serving the San Francisco Bay Area. In 1991, NWP was authorized as a federal education program, allowing the network to expand to previously underserved areas and to begin to invest in an underlying support infrastructure that ensures quality and a permanent capacity for improvement. NWP has grown into a network of 199 local writing project sites housed on university and college campuses in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. NWP represents a significant investment (local, state, and national) in our nation's teachers, their capacities and quality, as well as their ability to innovate and provide effective leadership in their schools.

NWP sites provide professional development programs to local schools and districts in the geographic service area surrounding the host university. With a goal of placing a local writing project site within reach of every teacher in the country, NWP now has sites within 50 miles of 80% of the nation's K-12 teachers. Writing project sites are co-directed by university and K-12 faculty to ensure that writing project programming links research, theory, and practice in ways that best serve practicing teachers and provide opportunities for ongoing learning and innovation.

The NWP model begins by investing in local leadership through an annual four-week summer institute at each site. Experienced teachers of all grade levels and disciplines attend these institutes, where they prepare for leadership roles by demonstrating their most effective practices, studying research, and improving their knowledge of writing by writing themselves. They then place their expertise in the teaching of writing in the service of schools and districts in their region.



The content of NWP school programs is aimed at improving student achievement in writing. To that end, local NWP sites work with school leaders to design programs that provide research-based strategies for teaching writing. Writing project teacher leaders annually conduct about 7,500 programs serving nearly 92,000 individual teachers; nearly half of these teachers participate in multiple programs, reflecting a “turnstile” capacity of over 132,000 participants annually (St. John, 2008).

The NWP network was federally funded at \$21.5 million in 2006-07, and local sites leveraged an additional \$23.8 million (53% of total funding) from host universities, fees for service from local schools, state funds, and local grants.

Positive Impact on Students

NWP has initiated a program of research with local sites to examine the impact of writing project programming on student writing performance. Nine individual studies conducted from 2004 to 2007 across writing project sites in six states show significantly greater gains in writing performance for students whose teachers participated in NWP programs. These studies took place in rural, urban, and suburban areas across the country and included students with diverse economic, language, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. (Detailed research reports are available online at: http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource_topic/research_nwp.)

Data gathered by an independent evaluator, Inverness Research, show the scale of NWP as it affects students. Approximately 1.95 million students are taught every year by teachers who received professional development services from writing project sites. (Data available at: <http://www.inverness-research.org>.)

Positive Impact on Teachers

In an era when many teachers leave the profession within their first five years, 98% of NWP summer institute participants remain in education until they retire, with 70% staying in the classroom throughout their careers. Nine out of ten summer institute participants who remain in teaching say that the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they gained from the writing project continue to influence their work.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you or to provide you with additional material and resources. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sharon J. Washington
Executive Director, National Writing Project