

**The National Writing Project Model:**  
A five-year retrospective on findings from  
the Annual Site Survey

A talk given by Mark St. John  
November, 1999

*This paper is based on a talk given by Mark St. John, President of Inverness Research Associates, at the 1999 annual meeting of the National Writing Project in Denver, Colorado. Over 800 site directors and other key NWP leaders from the 154 NWP sites gathered at the meeting. In his talk, Dr. St. John highlighted findings from five years of survey data gathered annually from all NWP sites, and folded the findings into an easy-to-understand story that explains the significance of key features of the NWP model. The purpose of this paper is to capture the main ideas and reflect the tone of that presentation.*

It is a pleasure to talk to you today and to discuss the data that you all have carefully collected and sent to us for analysis. For the last five years (1994–95 through 1998–99) each site of the National Writing Project has completed a survey documenting the scale and scope of its activities. Thanks to the survey, we know the number of participants who attend each year, and the number and types of the activities that NWP sites sponsor. We also know about the funding sources and funding levels of each site.

We believe that the data that sites have provided to us tell an extraordinary story. We believe that this story should have a wider audience, especially among public and private funders who are investing in professional development. Over the last decade, Inverness Research Associates has studied dozens of other professional development projects – and it is very clear that the National Writing Project is quite a different phenomenon

from typical professional development projects we have evaluated for many different funders.

Before I begin to tell you the results of these surveys, I want to make the point that it is a clear affirmation of the strength of the NWP as a community that all of the sites provide us with all of the data every year. This means you get a 100% return rate!



***Why is the investment in the NWP so different from other professional development projects?***

The usual way that projects get funded is that they are given a large amount of money for a short time. We call this “the big hammer theory.” It postulates that the best way to give momentum to educational reform efforts is to apply a large force for a very short time. It says that professional development projects are probably best done in two or three years, and that it makes the most sense to put a lot of money into the system quickly – rather like hitting something once with a large hammer in order to get it moving.

But the National Writing Project represents a very different kind of investment. It is doing what Milbrey McLaughlin calls the slow, “steady work” of reform.<sup>1</sup> ***Rather than having one large hammer making a single impact in one location over a short time, the NWP can be imagined as 161 sites all having little mallets, steadily tapping away for 20 years!***

The other thing that is very different about the NWP is that it is dynamic, it is cumulative, and its capacity is ever-increasing. It has grown itself – much like a small business grows itself. Many professional development projects start with a given capacity, they take the money, and they spend the money doing their work. In this sense most investments in professional development are expenditures and not investments. The projects expend their funding, and then they are gone. During that short

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard F. Elmore and Milbrey W. McLaughlin, *Steady Work: Policy, Practice, and the Reform of American Education* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1988).

period of time, their capacity for doing the work doesn't change much.

This static picture is not at all true of the Writing Project. The Writing Project is like growing a small business – more accurately, a franchise business. In the Writing Project there are many different sites (like franchise outlets), each doing good work over many, many years, and each growing its own capacity as it goes along.

We can use the survey data we have gathered to show that the NWP represents this very different approach to professional development. The data show that the NWP concentrates on slow and steady growth so that over many years the Project as a whole builds its own capacity to do work that is ever-increasing in both its quality and its quantity.

In our evaluation work we have focused on several different dimensions of the work of the Writing Project. We have carefully documented the quantity and scale of its work. We have tried to measure its relative cost. We have also studied the quality of the work that gets done (and we have separate evidence from what we present here that work of the NWP is perceived to be of very high quality).

Interestingly, using the survey data we present a perspective on the work of the NWP that even the most ardent long-term NWP site directors may not have. They work every day, day in and day out, serving teachers, talking with principals, dealing with schools, and so on. But our data show what is almost impossible to see – the collective work of the Writing Project over many years! Extending the “big hammer, little mallet” metaphor that we introduced earlier, we hope that NWP site directors will be encouraged by this bigger picture of their work. While each one of you may feel that you are just “tapping away” at your sites, we can assure you that both individually and collectively your work is, in fact, adding up to a large impact.

We also believe that the data we present here can make the NWP model very real and very concrete for funders and other professional developers. You understand the NWP model as a set of assumptions and principles that

define the approach you take in designing professional development experiences. But, when the 161 sites of the NWP all follow the same model, the NWP as a whole is able to accomplish things that other professional development projects don't.



*The annual NWP survey*

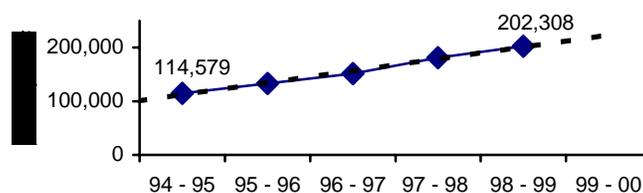
We collected site survey data for the first time in 1994–95 and our most recent data are for 1998–99, so we have five years of data to examine. Each year the survey includes a core set of questions about the activities, participants, leadership and funding of each NWP site.

*The growth of the NWP:  
Participants*

We will look first at the growth of the Writing Project over the last five years, and then think about what it tells us about the Writing Project model. There has been a fairly steady increase over the last five years in the number of participants at Writing Project sites. (Participants are defined as people participating in site activities. A person is considered a participant each time she or he attends one program; if a program has multiple sessions participants are counted just once.)

---

Figure 1: Overall increase in annual participants



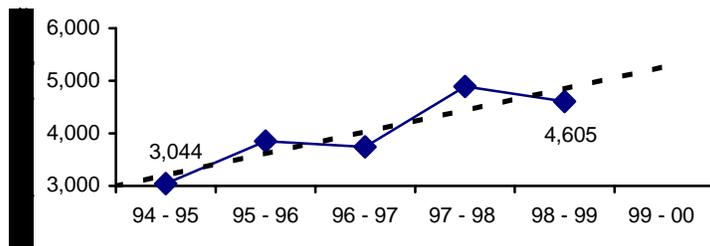
From 1994–95 to 1998–99, the NWP has grown from 114,579 to 202,308 participants overall. That represents a growth rate of approximately 15 to 20% per year. (Most businesses would be happy to do this well!)

*The growth of the NWP:  
Site-sponsored activities*

Not only is the NWP serving more participants, they are also mounting more activities. In 1994–95, 154 sites sponsored a total of 3,044 activities, while in 1998–99, 161 sites produced 4,605 activities. We see a 51% increase in activities overall, for a growth rate of about 13% per year.

---

Figure 2: Overall increase in annual site-sponsored programs

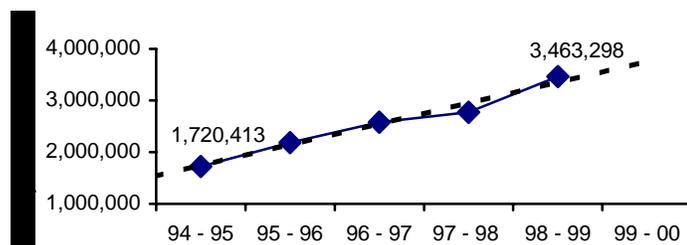


*The growth of the NWP:  
Participant contact-hours*

Sites are also sponsoring more participant contact-hours.<sup>2</sup> This is a key finding because you otherwise might think that sites are increasing the number of participants they serve each year by offering less in-depth activities. But this is not the case. Indeed, contact-hours have increased from 1.7 million in 1994–95 to nearly 3.5 million in 1998–99. Each year, sites sponsor approximately 20 to 25% more contact-hours than the year before.

---

Figure 3: Overall increase in annual participant contact-hours



---

<sup>2</sup> To calculate participant “contact-hours” we multiply the number of participants by the number of hours each of them participates.

*The growth of the NWP:  
Hours of programming per  
participant*

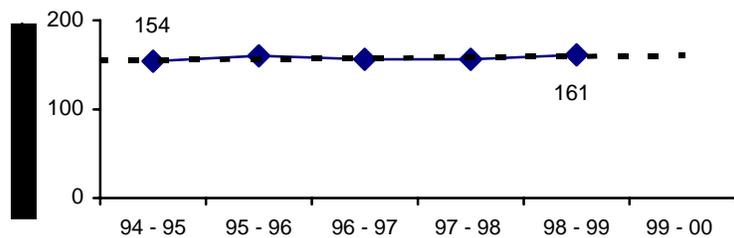
The fact that the growth rate for participants is similar to the growth rate for participant hours – about 20-25% per year – means that during this period of growth, every participant continued to receive, on average, 17 hours of site programming. This is not a trivial amount of time per participant; it translates to about three full days of workshops, on average, for every individual who comes to an NWP activity. And among these participants are 1,080 teachers engaged in 120 intensive invitational institutes.

*The growth of the NWP:  
The number of NWP sites*

During the same period that the NWP has been experiencing rapid growth in participants and activities, the number of NWP sites stayed close to the same. In 1994–95, there were 154 Writing Project sites and in 1998–99 there were 161 sites.

---

Figure 4: Growth in the number of NWP sites



But it is also important to note that this is not the exact same set of sites as were operating in 1994–95. The Writing Project has been careful to bring on new sites and to let sites go that have not been able to get the work done. Overall, however, 84% of sites existing in 1994–95 were still operating in 1998–99.

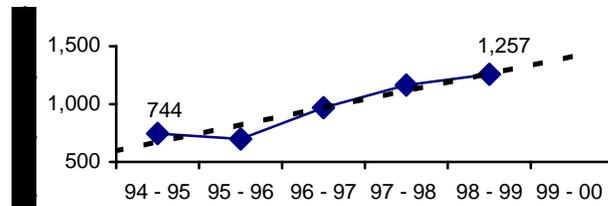


***How does the National Writing Project continue to grow?***

The overall amount of work done by the NWP has increased *because the work done by each site has, on average, increased*. If we look at the average number of participants per site, per year, we see that number rising from 744 to 1,257 in five years – almost a 70% increase.

---

Figure 5: Increase in average annual number of participants per site



We want to note that while teachers are the primary community and constituency of the Writing Project, sites appear to be increasingly reaching out to students and the community.<sup>3</sup> In 1994–95, on average 10% of the participants attended Young Writers’ Camps, family programs and the like. By 1998–99, for every two teacher participants, there was one other youth or community participant engaged in activities sponsored by the NWP.

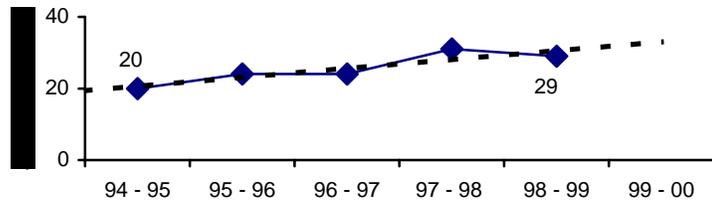
---

<sup>3</sup> The change in the program mix is partially an artifact of changes in reporting. The NWP has given growing emphasis to providing programs for students and the community and also to documenting the scope and scale of activities involving non-teacher audiences.

The average annual number of activities offered by each site has also gone up nearly 50%. On average, in 1994–95 each site offered 20 institutes, contracted workshops, open institutes, teacher research groups, and other activities. In 1998–99 the number was up to 29. Individual sites have been able to offer more activities and serve more participants.

---

Figure 6: Increase in the average annual number of activities sponsored by each site



*A closer look at the Writing Project model*

Now the story becomes a bit more complex, but it illuminates how the National Writing Project model works.

*Levels of site development*

It is important to note that sites vary considerably in their age, their “maturity,” and their scale. Consequently, not all NWP sites do the same amount of work, and not all sites have increased their numbers to the same degree. To better understand the work of the numerous sites of the NWP, we devised definitions for sites at different levels of development.<sup>4</sup>

- **Level 1** sites are defined as beginning sites, new to the NWP, that sponsor an invitational institute and are beginning to develop other activities.
- **Level 2** sites are sites that have been in existence for a few years and are growing. These sites are developing a portfolio of activities, but they do not yet believe that they are offering all of the activities that they would like to or that they are serving all potential participants in their service region.
- **Level 3** sites are the mature sites, offering multiple teacher-led activities, and supporting a region-wide network of teacher leaders. Because they have built up their capacity over many years, these sites generally also have a high capacity to respond to new opportunities.

In order to study the NWP sites’ move through these levels of development, we decided to look at sites that were operational in 1998–99 that had been new or continuing sites back in 1994–95. We were able to track the development of a total of 135 sites. In 1994–95, 10 of these sites were level 1: that is, beginning sites – brand new to the NWP network or affiliated with it for only a year or two. Seventy-five sites described themselves as level 2 or “growing.” And 50 sites said that they met the criteria for level 3, or “mature,” sites.

---

<sup>4</sup> Sites decide which of the developmental profiles fits them best and reassess their current status each year when they complete the annual survey.

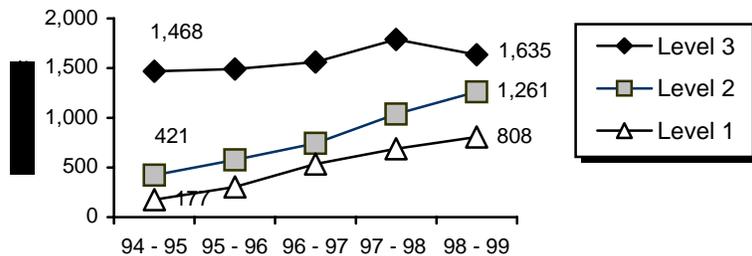
*The growth rate of  
developing sites*

In Figure 7 on the following page, level 3 sites are represented by the uppermost curve. It is obvious that these mature level 3 sites serve more participants than level 1 or 2 sites. That corresponds to the idea that sites do indeed grow in their capacity.

But if we look at the growth in the number of participants at these 135 sites, you can see that it is the level 1 sites that have the highest growth rate (i.e., the steepest upward curve). Instead of serving 177 participants they now serve 808, so they have grown four-fold. Level 2 sites have grown more slowly, from an average 421 participants per site in 1994–95 to 1,261 participants in 1998–99; still, they have grown three-fold. Level 3 sites are continuing to grow and they still serve many more participants, but they don't grow as rapidly as level 2 and level 1 sites. Level 3 sites are serving 1,635 participants, up 11% from 1,468 participants in 1994–95.

These data tell us that the Writing Project is capable not only of starting new sites, but also of developing the capacity of these new sites until they become level 2 sites. Level 2 sites, in turn, become level 3 sites. And level 3 sites also continue to grow, albeit more slowly. Their flatter curve represents a different kind of growth from that experienced by level 1 and 2 sites. Level 3 sites are getting more efficient, therefore inching ever upward, but quicker growth of the younger sites is where the Project most rapidly builds capacity. Collectively, the entire network of sites increases greatly its capacity to serve thousands of participants each year.

Figure 7: Increase in participants at the average NWP sites (by level of site development)



But how does all this happen?

In a level 1 site, you start with the invitational institute, and out of that come leading teachers who can become teacher consultants for the site. (A small site can thus grow rather rapidly because these teacher consultants provide the people power that you need to create new activities.) As these sites move to level 2, they continue to grow teacher leadership – with each teacher consultant taking on more activities and programs. For example, you might do a series of contracted inservice workshops in a school district, and the next year do an open institute and more contracted series.

At the level 3 sites, you have probably built up a group of 30, 40 or 50 leading teachers working for the site. Your site is doing a lot of work. While you probably are going to continue to add on new activities, the growth rate is not as steep. Also, it may well be that at level 3 sites, growth is not so much in numbers as it is in a deepening of quality and leadership capacity, as well as developing a greater variety of programs, covering more territory, and taking on special initiatives.

I think the main point to be made here is that the NWP, unlike other professional development projects, has a process whereby: 1) each site can grow itself, and 2) new sites can be added to the overall network. ***Thus, over the years, the NWP builds its network of sites, expands its pool of teacher leadership, develops new activities, and steadily increases the number of teachers it serves.***



*The presence and steady contribution of teacher leadership at Writing Project sites*

Now let's look a little more closely at the nature and role of teacher leadership. In 1994 and 95, we asked each site to tell us how many active teacher consultants they had at their site, and how many teacher participants those leaders were serving. One of the things that is rather remarkable is that we looked across all of the sites and found a ratio of 1:12. That is, for every leading teacher that sites were able to put to work at their site – for example, as an open institute leader or a teacher consultant going out to schools in a contracted series – they were able to serve 12 participants. In 1995–96 we asked the same question, and the ratio was 1:15. Since then, the estimated ratio has remained fairly constant, with one active teacher consultant reaching about 12 to 15 participants on average.

There is an amazing stability in this ratio. It basically says that for every leading teacher that a site is able to interest in working at the site, they are able to serve 15 teachers that year. This is a remarkable concept because it means that for a site to grow its capacity, it must grow the numbers of leading teachers who are involved and active with the site. It isn't as if the same number of teacher consultants are going to serve twice as many people.

From these data it makes it clear that the National Writing Project is able to initiate sites, grow those sites, and, in turn, have those sites develop a growing pool of leading teachers who are active as teacher consultants. Then for every active teacher consultant we see 15 other teachers served by the site. This stability sounds paradoxical but it really is the heart of the matter. Up until this point you have seen graphs that rose dramatically. But if the ratio of teacher leaders to

individual teachers were in graph form, it would be a steady, horizontal line.

This constancy also has extraordinary implications for issues of quality. The fact that the ratio has not changed much over the years says that it actually is possible for one individual to affect or work with 15 other people. If a site reported a ratio of one teacher consultant for every 40 or 50 participants, it would immediately raise questions of quality. This is in contrast to many other projects that we know about. We often see professional development initiatives where a teacher leader is working with hundreds of people a year. When we study other initiatives, for example, they often use the term “scale up.” Scaling up involves reaching many, many more teachers than you were able to reach in the beginning of the initiative. But because the capacity of the initiative isn’t built through the steady accumulation of teacher leadership, you end up having the same few leaders serving many, many more teachers, and in fact you have real quality dilution.



*Growing teacher consultants*

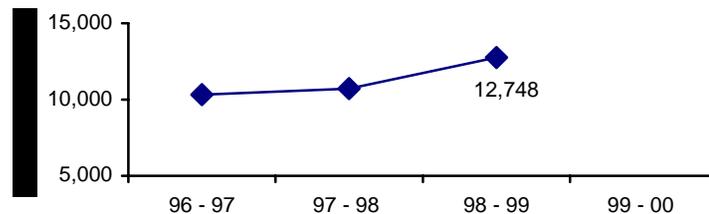
\* “Teacher consultant” is a term unique to the NWP. What does it mean to be a NWP “teacher consultant”?

Teacher consultants (“TCs”) have completed a NWP invitational summer institute, where they work in very careful and supported ways to share their classroom practice with others, where they write, and where they learn more about writing and its teaching. Then, they work with the backing of the site in structured ways, offering, for example, a Saturday seminar for other teachers in their region or presenting a workshop in a school inservice series. In their work with others, they are always building out from their own practices and knowledge, sharing aspects of writing and teaching they know well through experience. Sites support teacher leadership in such a way that teachers build upon their strengths when working with others, rather than being “trainers of trainers” in areas they know less about. There is continuing coaching for articulation so that TCs increase, over time, their ability to describe what they do in their teaching and why they do it. A site also gives TCs chances to keep building their knowledge through a variety of “continuity” programs.

In the graph below, you can see that the overall number of active teacher consultants\* in the NWP has risen steadily since 1996–97.

---

Figure 8: 24% increase in the number of teacher consultants at NWP sites since 1996



---

*In 1996–97, we created a more precise definition of “active teacher consultant” for the survey. Therefore, our calculations for the above graph begin with that year.*

In the Writing Project, when the model works well, you bring leading teachers on, you acculturate them to the site, and you support them as they work with other teachers. The site then becomes a home for high quality teachers who are well prepared and well supported by each other to work with other teachers. And, they do this on a ratio of about 15:1. The typical mature, or level 3, site has 50 to 55 active teacher consultants. Some of the Writing Project’s largest and most active sites engage far more than that. ***So that is another way of thinking about what a National Writing Project site is – a home for teacher leadership – and it builds the capacity to serve other teachers in a rather structured and careful way.***

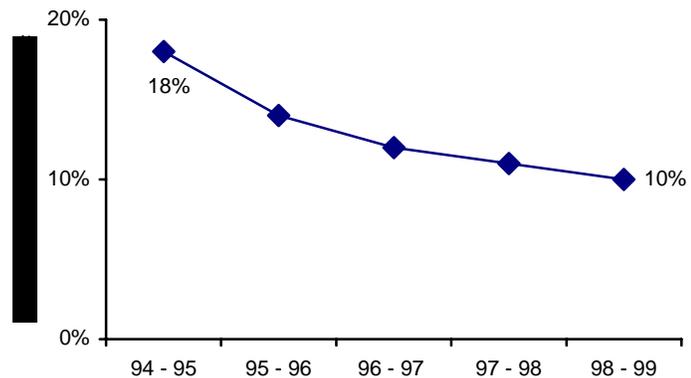
Now, another part of this model that you wouldn’t normally think about is that teacher leadership can extend beyond the teaching field. We have found in our field research that many teacher leaders evolve into principals, curriculum coordinators, and district administrators. They bring to their new jobs the multiple benefits of their experience in the NWP.

*The role of the invitational institute*

In the NWP model, the invitational summer institute is the “leadership generator” for the site. What is interesting to note, however, is that in 94–95, 18% of all of the annual contact-hours were in invitational institutes. That is, less than 20% of all NWP work took place in invitational institutes. The other 80% of all NWP work happened in the activities that teacher consultants produced, such as open institutes and contracted inservices. By 1998–99, the ratio of invitational institutes to other kinds of activities had dropped to 10%.

---

Figure 9: Percentage of all participant contact-hours that occur in invitational institutes



This declining ratio, shown by the downward curve on the graph in Figure 9, is a good thing. Why?

It means that sites still have roughly the same amount of invitational institute activity happening, or even an increased amount (so you are still generating teacher leadership), but the institute is becoming a smaller percentage of the whole of a site’s activities. Why is this true? Because those teacher consultants are out doing all of the other activities. In fact, you have about a 9:1 ratio that says that for every hour that you invest in the development of a teacher as a leader, you get about nine hours of leadership in return.

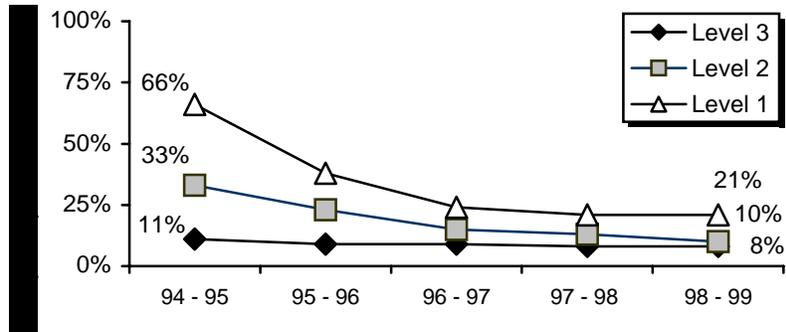
Sometimes people ask why there are so few teachers in an invitational institute; they think that more could be served. But that shows that they do not deeply understand the model. The key paradox here is that you want small, but very high-powered and intensive invitational institutes. ***That invitational institute represents a major investment – an investment in your leadership pool – which is the horsepower and brainpower for all the site’s activities and all the site’s growth.***

So I believe that these data provide proof that the NWP model is working. A smaller and smaller percentage of the total work of NWP is taking place in the invitational institute – which represents investment in leadership – and a growing percentage of the work of the NWP is taking place in other kinds of activities – which represents the pay-off from the investment in the teacher leadership.

And again, if we look at this same phenomenon across different levels of site development, you can see that the data are pretty much as we would expect. At level 1 sites, which are just beginning, 67% of all of contact-hours are taking place in invitational institutes. Why? Because they are making a heavy investment in growing their initial teacher leadership pool. And as the years go by, the same sites in 1998–99 have to devote only 21% of their contact-hours to teacher leadership activities. So I think of investment in leadership development as similar to growing a seed crop – an investment that will repay the effort 10-fold and more. And the level 3 sites, which were already well developed in 1994–95, still continue to do more, but at a less dramatic pace. Their proportion of participant-hours occurring in institutes goes from 11% down to 8%.

So these data are a wonderful statistical confirmation of the way in which you all work, and of the validity of the NWP model. It explains rather clearly how you have some sites that serve thousands of teachers every year. What it also demonstrates is that you need to always have a strong invitational institute at every site every year. You can’t ever stop doing this. To extend the seed crop analogy, your initial seed crop has to be big, and then you have to keep replenishing it every year.

Figure 10: Decrease in the percentage of participant contact-hours that occur in invitational institutes (by level of site development)



***Federal costs for the NWP***

Now let me back up and create a context here. When you look at the cost of professional development – and I know something about the National Science Foundation’s investments, for example, and the Eisenhower investments – you find that the National Science Foundation operates basically on a budget of about \$30 per teacher contact-hour. When we studied Eisenhower projects a few years ago, we found that the cost to the funder was around \$22 per teacher contact-hour. That was the level of federal investment it took to create high quality professional development experiences for teachers.

We see a dramatically different picture when we analyze the costs in federal dollars for the National Writing Project. Not only are the absolute costs lower, but the cost to the federal government for every hour of professional development produced is much much lower. It is in fact approximately three to five percent of the cost of other federal investments in professional development!

*The increasing cost-effectiveness of NWP sites*

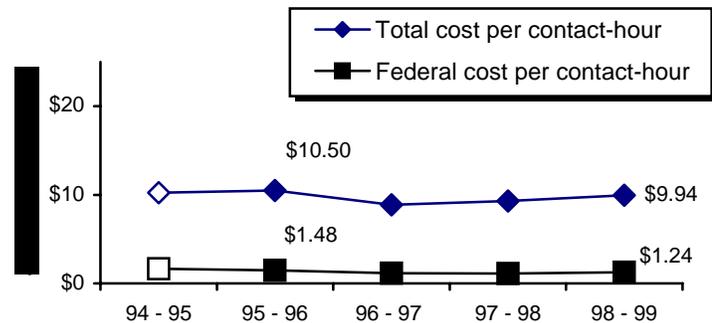
There are two points I want to make about the next graph.

One is that the absolute cost of the professional development provided by the NWP is low – both the total cost as well as the cost borne by the federal government.

The second point to make about this graph is that the costs of NWP work decrease over time. And the reason they decrease over time is the same reason the sites increase their capacity to serve more teachers through their ever-growing pool of teacher leaders.

---

Figure 11: Federal and total costs per teacher contact-hour



***These data make real the fact that the money the federal government is putting into the National Writing Project is, in fact, an investment that continues to yield returns (as opposed to a one-time expenditure for professional development services).*** You might say that the federal dollars are basically paying for the invitational institute and the ongoing development of the site’s teacher leadership. And, if you think of it that way, then the work of the teacher leadership as they serve their local schools, districts and colleagues very much represents the “return” on the federal investment.

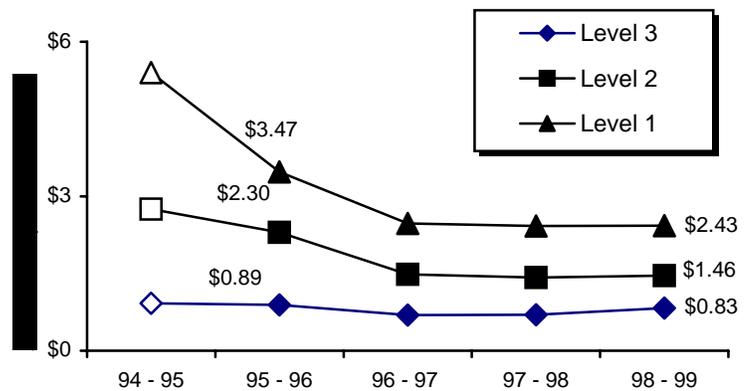
A key point to remember here is that much of the local work done by NWP sites is paid for by other institutions and agencies – by the schools that are contracting for workshops, by state funds, or by other grants from

both public and private foundations. As a result, the federal funds are “highly leveraged” which is different than other federal investments in professional development, where the federal government pays nearly the full cost for all of the professional development that happens. In the case of the NWP the federal dollars are paying for the core capacity-building effort of the site, and again in the graph shown above, you can clearly see that the costs are low to begin with and they also decrease over time as the sites continue to build their capacity.

If we look at the different developmental levels of sites, we see the same story illustrated even more dramatically. When the NWP brings on a new site (level 1) the costs are relatively high.<sup>5</sup> In 1995–96 the federal costs were \$3.47 per teacher contact-hour, and by 98–99 the same level 1 sites were down to \$2.43 per teacher contact-hour. The level 3 sites were extremely cost-efficient to begin with, costing less than \$1 for each hour that a teacher participated in 1995–96, and even less in 1998–99.

---

Figure 12: Federal cost per teacher contact-hour (by level of site development)



The figure below shows that there is yet another way to understand these cost data. If you gave a typical site

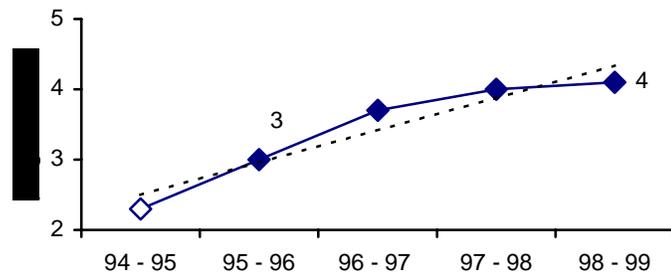
---

<sup>5</sup> Though they are not absolutely high compared to NSF programs, for example.

\$100 of federal funding in 94–95, that site could produce two NWP program hours. In 1995–96, the average site could produce three hours, and in 98–99 the site would produce four program hours. (And, on average, each program hour of the NWP includes 17 participants).

---

Figure 13: Number of program hours produced with \$100 of federal funding



You could also look at the \$100 investment in terms of teacher contact-hours. If you gave a typical site \$100 from the federal treasury in 94–95, the site would have provided 67 hours of teacher contact time. In 98–99, the same \$100 would yield 81 hours of teacher contact time. Not only is this growth significant, but also it is important to note that this comes out to be a little over a dollar per teacher contact-hour. This involvement is extraordinarily cost efficient, in terms of the use of federal dollars.

*The NWP as a lightly subsidized, market-driven model*

These findings of cost efficiency are really important. People have to understand that these numbers aren't just abstract – they represent very, very minimal expenditures by the federal government. And these minimal expenditures are used by sites to create local leadership and support it in providing high quality professional development to lots of other teachers. This cost efficiency allows the federal government to play an appropriately supportive role in state and local educational settings. In the NWP, those few federal dollars go into an investment in teacher leadership that pays off in local school support for NWP inservice,

which means payoff in terms of programs offered and participants reached.

In essence, the NWP model is not really a federally *funded* model, but rather is a more a *lightly subsidized, market-driven model*. That means that if a site does good work, it will use the federal money to build leadership, create a local demand for services based on its reputation, and attract other public and private funds.



*Understanding the power  
of the Writing Project  
model*

I believe these data, and the story that goes with them, provide a way to look at and understand your work from a rather different, and I believe, important perspective. The data can help others – and you – better appreciate the Writing Project model. The fact that the data are so congruent with the basic tenets of the NWP model should be very reassuring to you.

It really is important for people to understand that this approach to professional development is very different than the kind of episodic, repetitive funding of short-term projects in which the capacity of the project doing the work doesn't change – and the leadership doesn't develop. And, going back to our previous metaphor, the Writing Project is not just tapping away with little mallets rather than a big hammer, but the mallets have been tapping for 25 years, not for just three years. In these data we paint a five-year picture, but it is a five-year picture that is at the end of a 25-year picture. There once was one site, then there were 15, then there were 50. Now there are still new sites coming onboard – which can also grow themselves into level 3 sites. Through this steady work, and through this growing of local capacity, the NWP is a totally different approach to investing over the long term in the professional development of the country's teachers.

I believe that what makes the NWP radically different is not merely the way it is structured and organized. Rather, one needs to understand that *all of the good results that our data illustrate come fundamentally from one source – and that is that the NWP inherently trusts in and believes in teachers. NWP knows, and puts into practice, the profound idea that the best*

*teacher of a teacher is an accomplished and thoughtful colleague. The NWP has found a way to make that belief a very workable reality.*

## **Appendix A**

### **A survey of NWP participant satisfaction**

*In the talk for the NWP directors, Dr. St. John went on to describe the results of a special survey conducted in the summer and fall of 1999.*

In summer 1999 Inverness Research Associates conducted a study to meet a U.S. Department of Education requirement that programs assess the degree to which participants find their professional development experiences valuable and satisfying. The NWP asked all 161 Writing Project sites across 46 states to distribute a short survey of “client satisfaction” to all participants at the invitational institute that each site sponsors. The three-to-five week invitational institute is the core program by which each NWP site develops teacher leadership. A total of 2,122 participants completed the survey.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Survey results**

Participants at NWP invitational institutes are nearly unanimous in their very positive assessments of the value and usefulness of these programs. Their high ratings of the institutes far exceed the “target” indicator of client satisfaction (positive ratings from 75% of surveyed teachers) agreed upon by the Department of Education and the NWP.

The overwhelming majority of NWP invitational institute participants rated very highly the overall quality and comparative quality and value of the institute they attended.

- 97.4% rated the institute as “very good” or “excellent.”<sup>7</sup>
- 95.2% judged it to be “better” or “much better” than other professional development activities in which they have participated recently.

In similar programs that we have evaluated, ratings of the applicability of professional development activities to classrooms are often lower than ratings of the general quality of the activity. However, 95% of the surveyed teachers gave high ratings (4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) for the institute's contribution to their understanding of the teaching of writing and its usefulness for their own classrooms and students.

- 76.8% of the participants report that the institute contributed “a great deal” to their understanding of how to teach writing effectively; another 18% said it contributed “quite a lot.”
- 77.5% believe that they will be able to use and apply what they learned at the institute “to a great extent,” and another 17.3% say that they will be able to apply “quite a lot.”

---

<sup>6</sup> Sites distributed the same survey to participants at another NWP activity of their choice later in 1999; findings will be available in 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Percentage totals represent participants who gave ratings of “4” or “5” on five-point scales where “1” represents a very negative rating, “3” is a neutral rating, and “5” indicates a very positive rating.

## *The National Writing Project Model: A Five-year Retrospective*

---

Not only do participants judge NWP invitational institutes to be of high quality and utility, even more importantly, they believe that their experiences at the institute will translate into improved writing skills for their students.

- 74.8% say that their experience will contribute a great deal to improved writing skills for their students and another 20.3% believe that quite a lot will translate to the classroom.

The experiences participants take away benefit classrooms that include a large number of at-risk students.

- 74% of the participants teach classes in which at least some students do not speak English as their first language.
- 93% have students who are eligible for free lunches and the same percentage teach students of color.

## **Appendix B**

### **Three studies of Writing Project teacher leadership**

*Dr. St. John did not refer to the following studies of teacher leadership in his presentation to the NWP directors. However, we include a summary of them here because so much of the data he reported emphasized the importance of teacher leadership.*

Inverness Research Associates conducted two studies of the nature and work of teacher leaders affiliated with the eight California Subject Matter Projects (CSMPs), including the California Writing Project, in 1994 and 1996.<sup>8</sup> These studies affirmed the soundness of the Writing Project's goals and strategies for nurturing and supporting teacher leadership. They also documented the contributions of teacher leaders such as the Writing Project teacher consultants to the profession.

#### **What experiences further teacher leadership?**

The first study<sup>9</sup> consisted of in-depth case studies of 12 teacher leaders, whose words and experiences were then used to create a survey of over 200 teacher leaders in California. In this study and those that followed, teacher consultants for Writing Project sites were surveyed. Writing Project consultants and teacher leaders from the other Subject Matter Projects identified those experiences that are most supportive of their own teacher leadership activities. The experiences that these exemplary teachers most frequently identified as furthering their leadership are ones that Writing Project sites provide: participating in a culture of critical inquiry and reflection on teaching practices; articulating a vision of teaching and learning in the discipline; presenting a workshop to colleagues; serving in a range of Project leadership roles; and mentoring or coaching other Project teachers.

#### **How should professional development be designed to foster teacher leadership?**

Based on the interviews and survey results we proposed a set of design principles for professional development projects to foster teacher leadership. These principles are precisely the ones that characterize the Writing Project model.

- Identify, select, recruit and support good teachers who are already strong leading teachers.
- Focus on the sharing and critical examination of real classroom practices.
- Offer teachers many opportunities to teach each other the practice of teaching.
- Offer teachers many opportunities to practice leadership in multiple ways.

---

<sup>8</sup> Copies of reports from these and other Inverness Research Associates studies are available. Please see their web site at: <http://www.inverness-research.org/>.

<sup>9</sup> See K. Medina and M. St. John, *The Nature of Teacher Leadership: Lessons Learned from the California Subject Matter Projects*, Studies of the California Subject Matter Projects, Report 13 (Inverness, CA: Inverness Research Associates, 1997).

- Create a professional home for teachers that is based upon a culture of inquiry, experimentation and reflection.

### **What are the spheres of influence of teacher leaders?**

In 1996 we surveyed over 1,300 teacher leaders<sup>10</sup> identified by the CSMPs to better understand the spheres of influence of their teacher leadership – at the site; in schools and districts that contract with sites; and in schools, districts and other professional settings not formally connected to the sites. We found that the Writing Project was highly successful in the degree to which it was able to support and deploy large numbers of teacher leaders in the state. We found that:

- Writing Project teacher consultants are typically affiliated with their site for at least five years;
- through teacher leaders, Writing Project sites have had a major presence in schools, districts and counties; and
- the Writing Project supports teacher leadership in multiple venues, but particularly concentrated at the level of the classroom and local school.

### **How do teacher consultants contribute to their colleagues?**

In a third study<sup>11</sup> the following year we identified the contributions of the Writing Project and other CSMPs to teacher leaders, and through them, to their colleagues. When we looked at the Writing Project alone, we found that 99% of the 63 teacher consultants who responded have shared concrete ideas for lessons and activities that they have used successfully in their own classrooms; 95% have added to their colleagues' content knowledge; and 76% have helped other teachers find ways to reach students that they have not been successful with.

---

<sup>10</sup> See M. St. John, J. Hirabayashi, and K. Dickey, *The Work of CSMP Teacher Leaders: A Summary of Key Findings From a Statewide Survey*, Studies of the California Subject Matter Projects, Report 14 (Inverness, CA: Inverness Research Associates, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> See L. Stokes, J. Hirabayashi, and M. St. John, *Contributions of the California Subject Matter Projects to Teachers' Classroom Practice and Leadership: Results of a Survey of CSMP Teacher Leaders*, Studies of the California Subject Matter Projects, Report 16 (Inverness, CA: Inverness Research Associates, 1998).