

# UNDERSTANDING THE NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT:

## An Evaluator's Perspective

*June 2015*

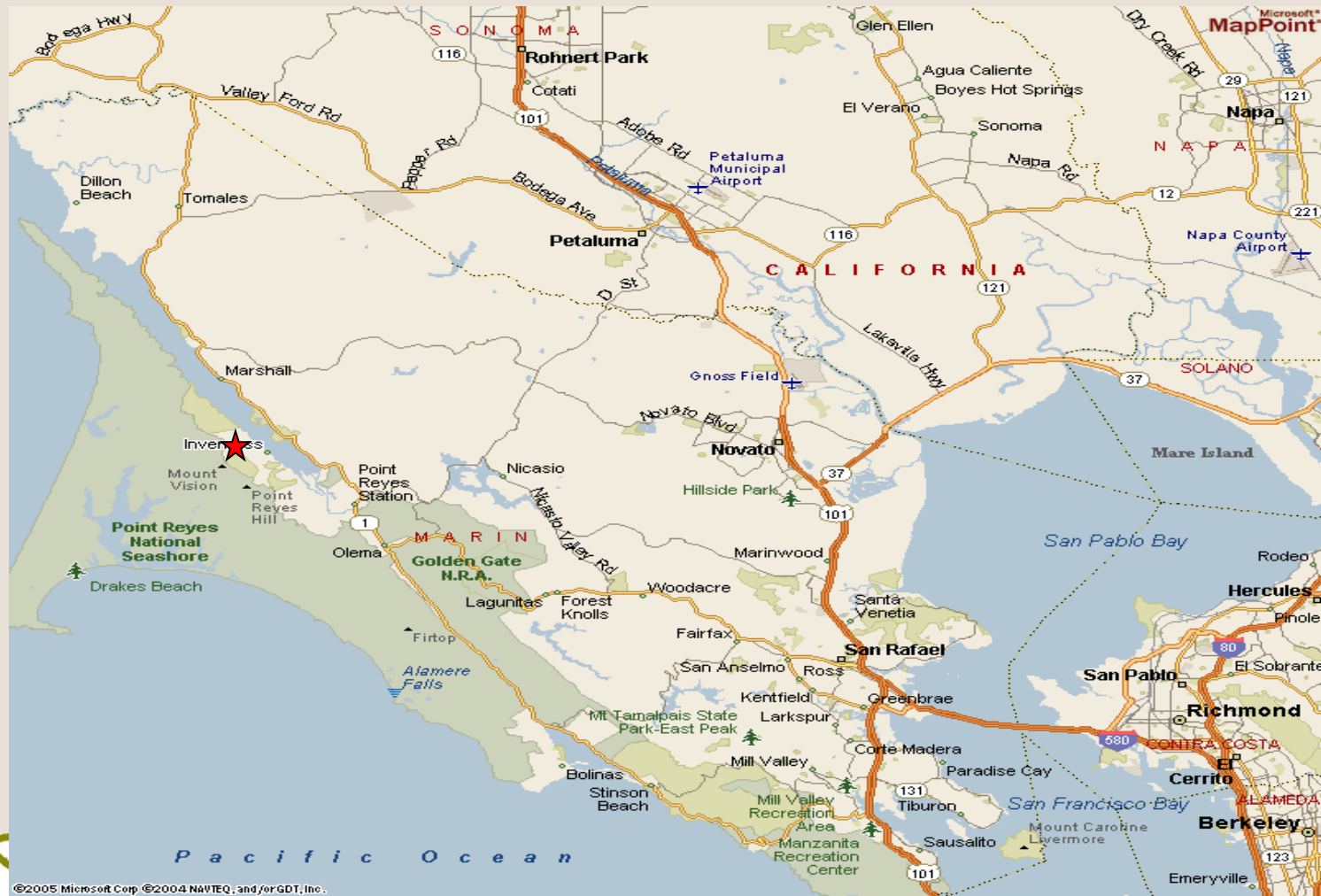
*Mark St. John and Laura Stokes*

*Inverness Research - Our Roles  
and History with the NWP*

# Inverness Research

- We study and help design external investments made in the improvement of education
- Our group is 35 years old
- We have worked with the NWP for ~20 years

# Inverness, CA



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INVERNESS  
RESEARCH

# Inverness California



# Our Roles with NWP

- Critical friend
- Documentation and portrayal
- Help NWP make the case for external investment
- Assisted with many different tasks over the years
  - Annual survey of all sites
  - Critical issue studies (e.g. new teachers, technology)
  - Teacher leader studies
  - 13 grant/College Ready Writers Program qualitative study (current)

# Inverness Perspective on the NWP

- A. A unique very large scale and effective professional development program
- B. A national networked organization
- C. A seminal example of an investment in a national improvement Infrastructure

# ***A) The NWP Is A Unique Large Scale And Effective Professional Development Program***

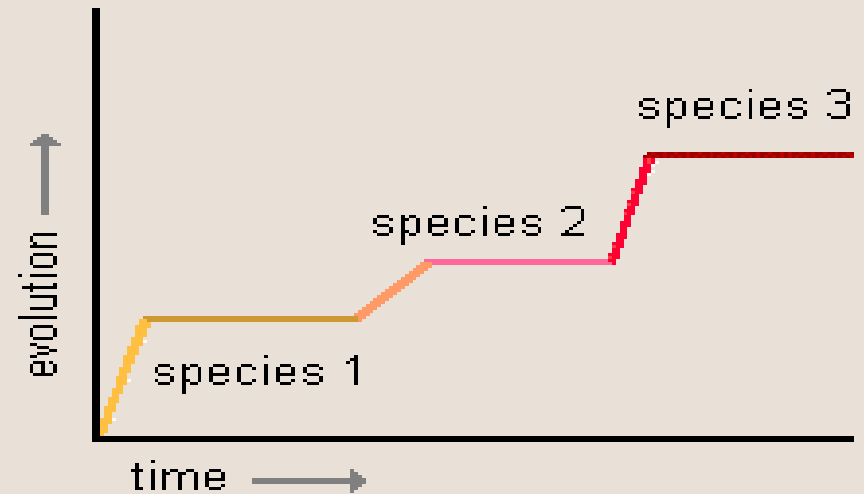
***The National Writing Project is the largest and  
longest-standing professional development  
program for teachers in the history of mankind ...***

***Mark St. John, Inverness Research***



# ***NWP has a Forty Year History with 3 Distinct Phases***

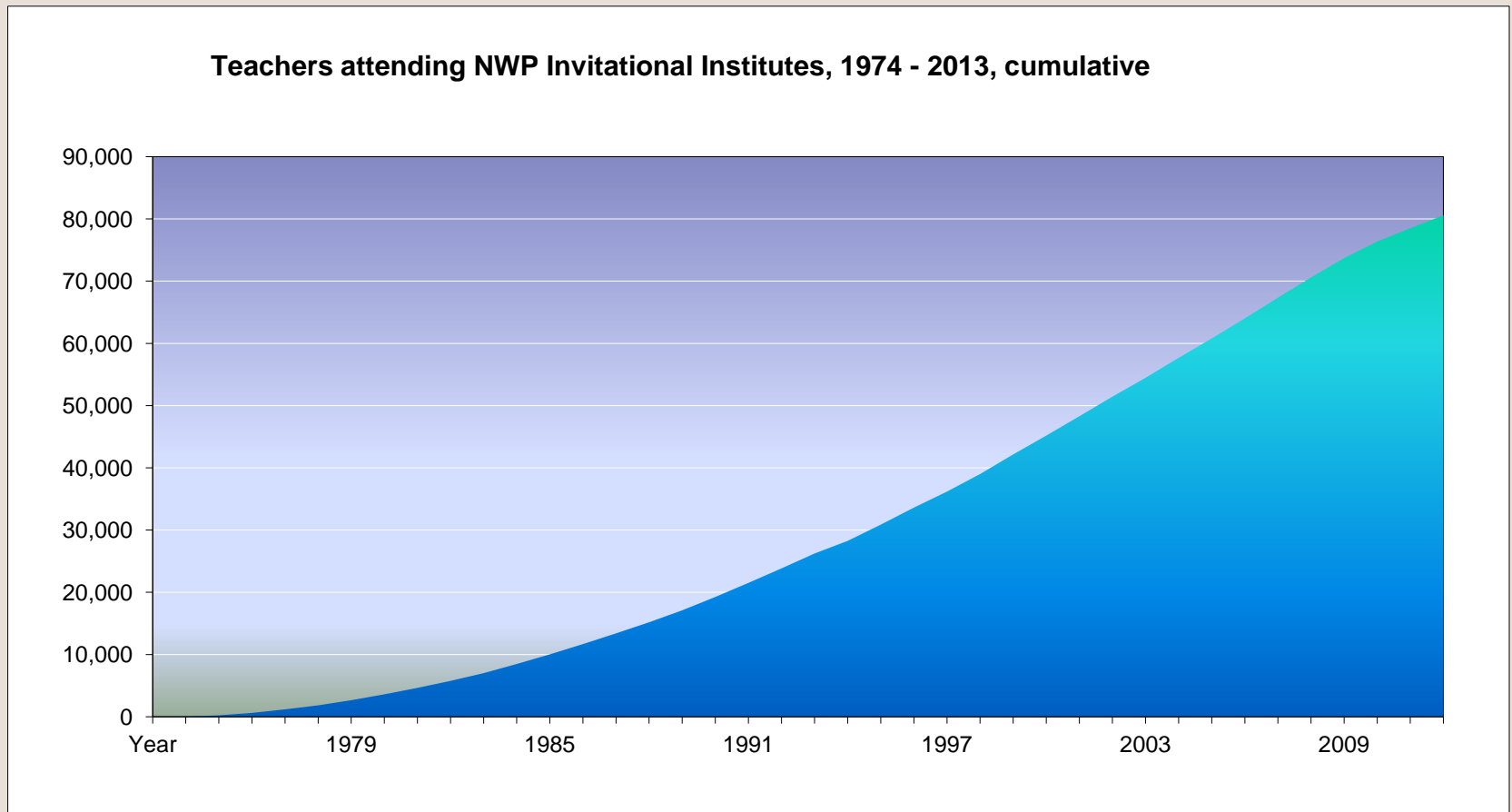
- NWP's First Phase—  
Patchwork of startup/growth grants in the 1970's and 80's
- Second Phase—  
Stable federal support in the 90's and 2000's
- Third Phase—  
Multiple large grants in the new competitive era



*Punctuated equilibrium: “Long periods of stability and short episodes of change” due to “major environmental changes.”*

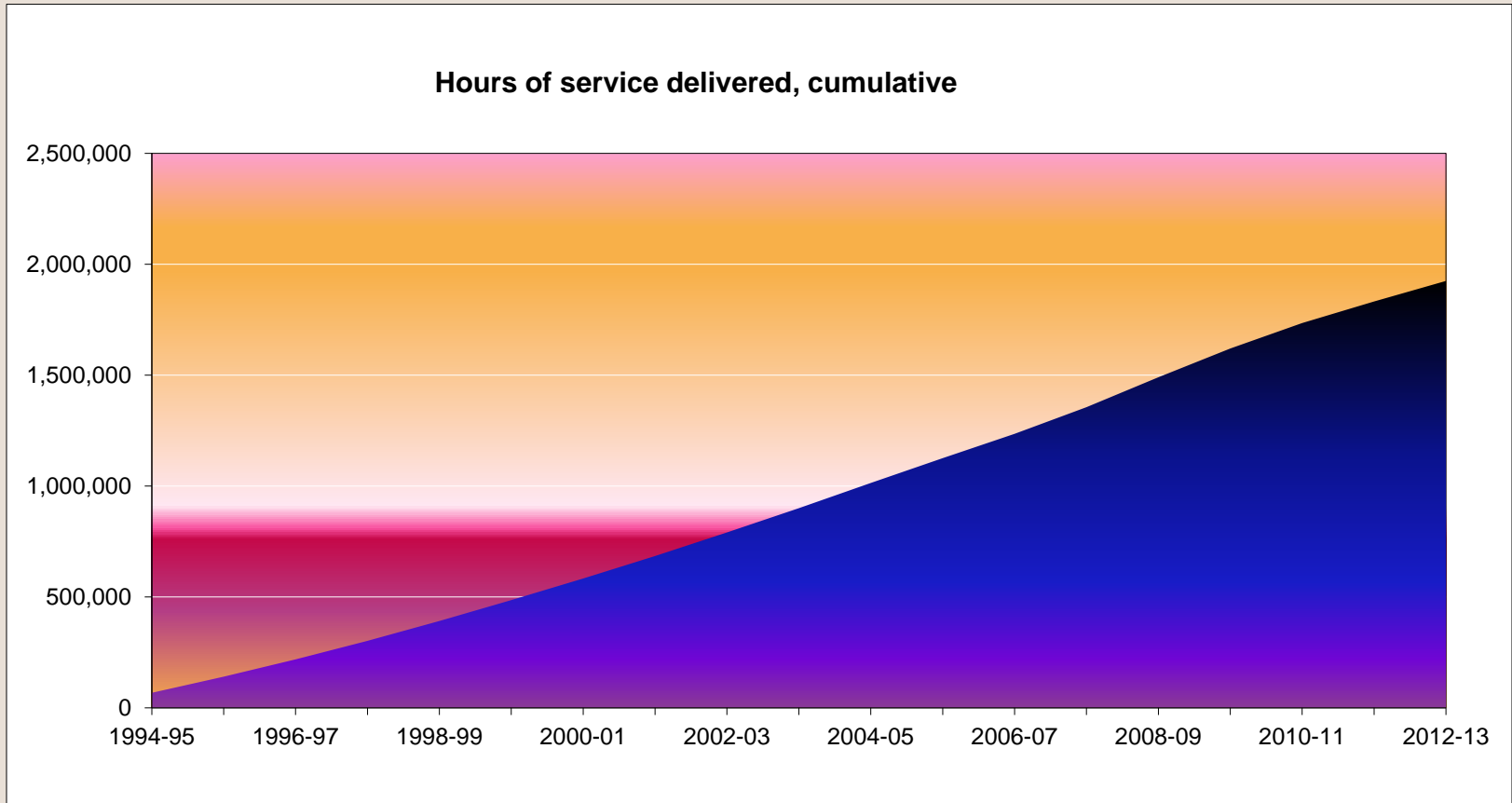
# *Cumulative leadership development*

Over 80 thousand teachers have participated in Summer Invitational Institutes since 1974



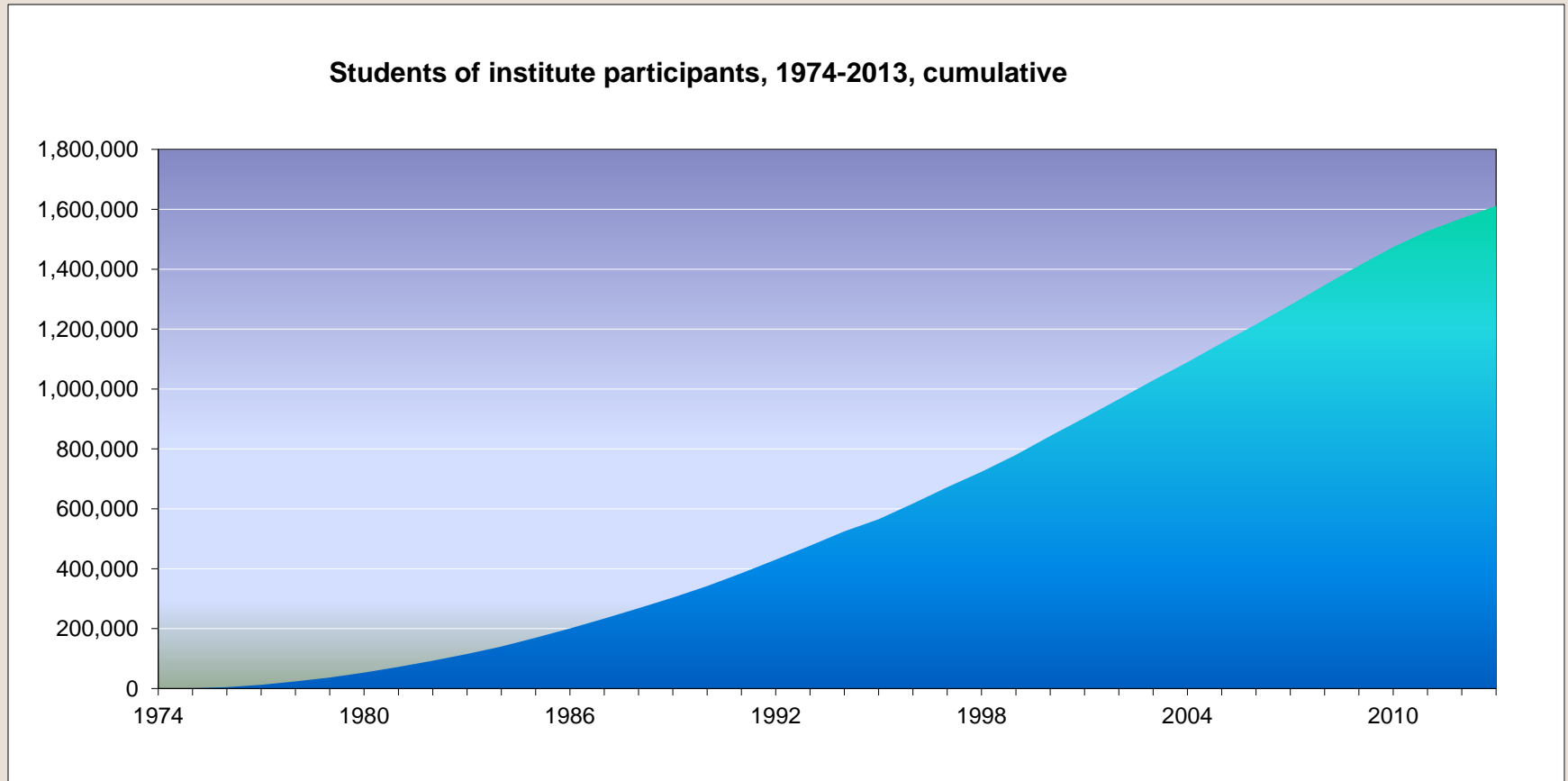
# ***Scale of cumulative program-hours***

Over 1.9 million hours in institutes, inservice, continuity, and community since 1994



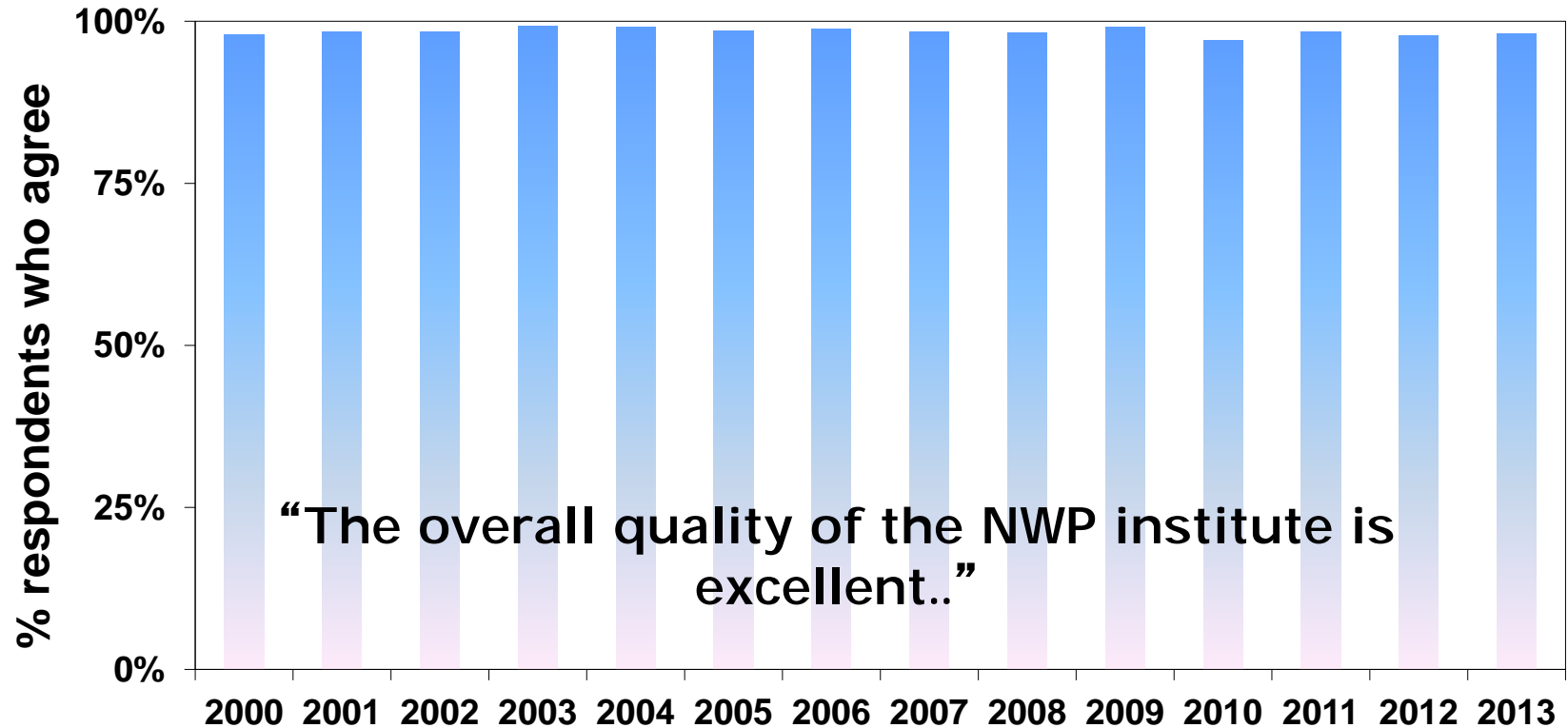
## *Scale of reach to students*

Cumulatively, over 1.6 million students have been taught by Institute participants since 1974



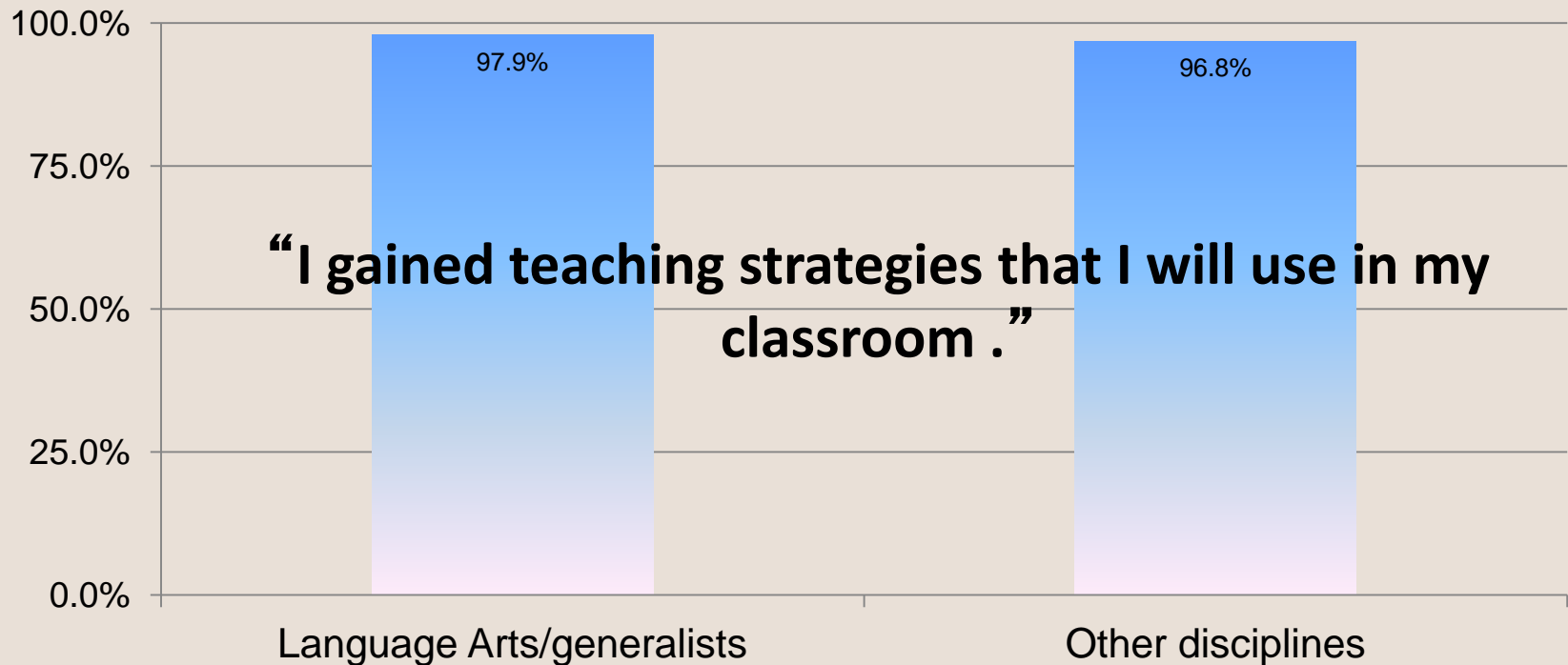
# ***As the scale increases the quality stays high***

For the past 14 years of data collection for invitational institute programs, ratings have stayed in the high 90<sup>th</sup> percentiles on satisfaction surveys.



# ***NWP institutes are equally effective for teachers of all content areas***

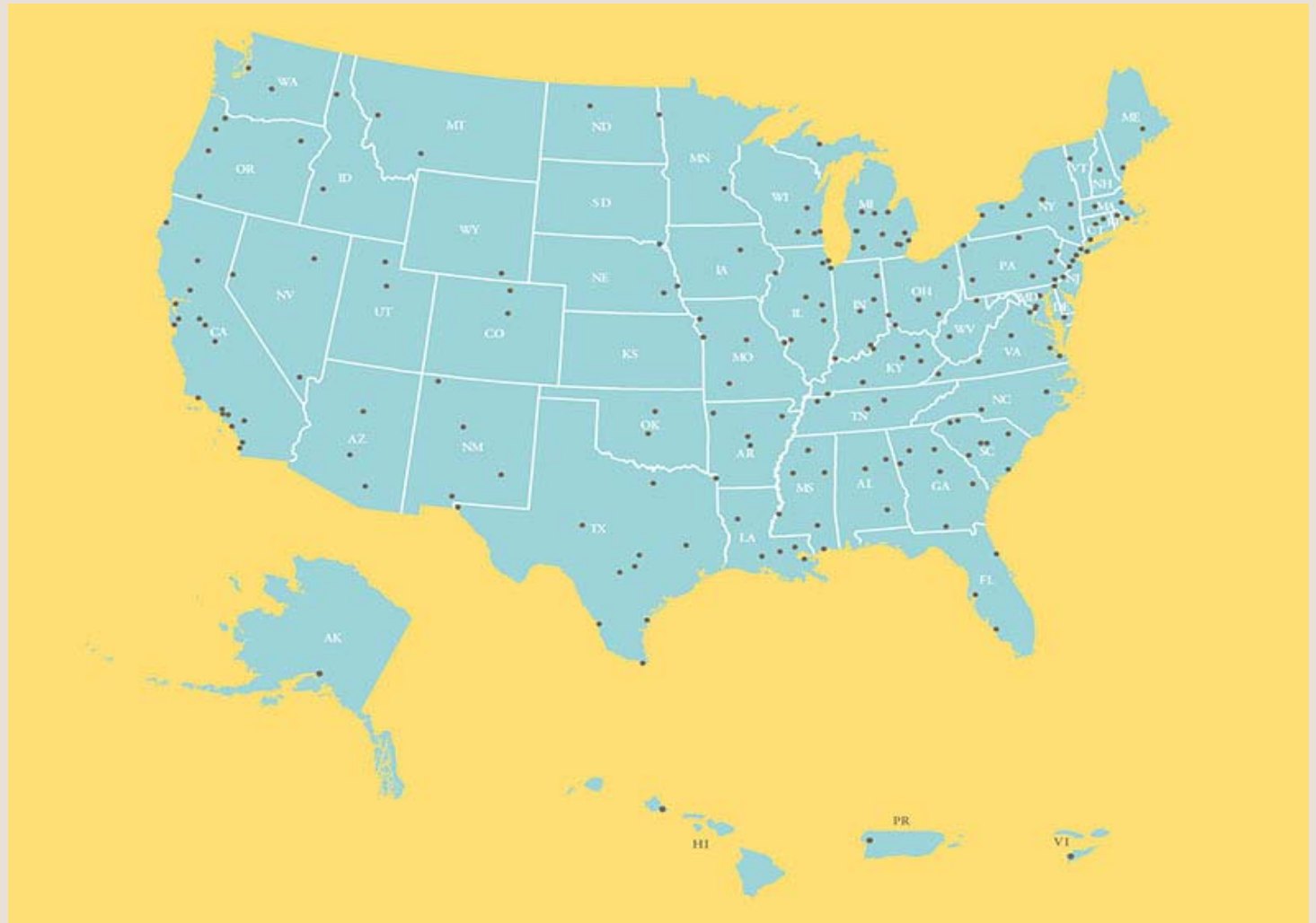
This 2013 comparison is consistent with survey data over 12 years



# ***NWP sites have a track record of serving high-needs schools***

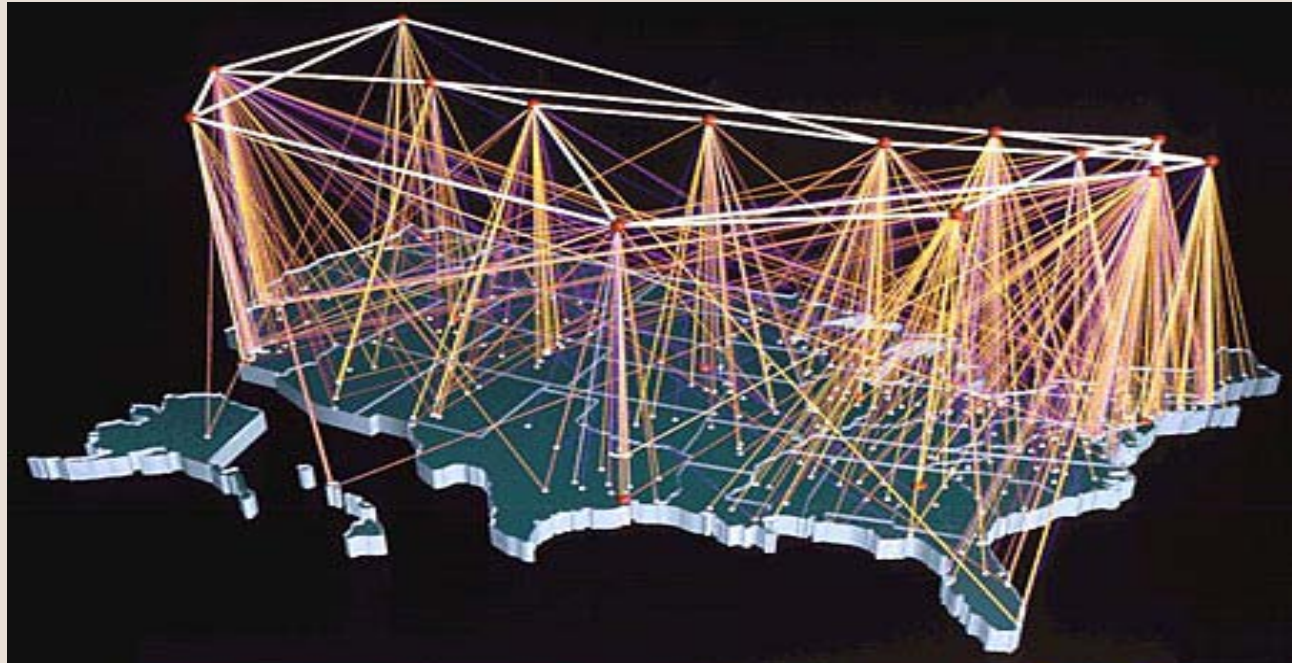
- In 2011 and 2012, 66% of active public school teachers who participated in an ISI worked in Title I schools.
- In 2013, the proportion of ISI teachers and administrator participants from Title I schools rose to 69%.
- With SEED (Supporting Effective Educator Development) funding:
  - Writing Project sites are providing 30 or more hours of professional development to teachers from 50 high-need schools during 2013-14
- With funding from i3 (Investing in Innovation):
  - 12 Writing Project sites in 10 states are providing 90 hours of professional development in 22 high-need rural districts in 2013-14 and 2014-15, ultimately reaching over 12,500 students

# What makes the NWP uniquely capable?





# ***B) The NWP Is A National Networked Organization***



# *The NWP is a networked organization*

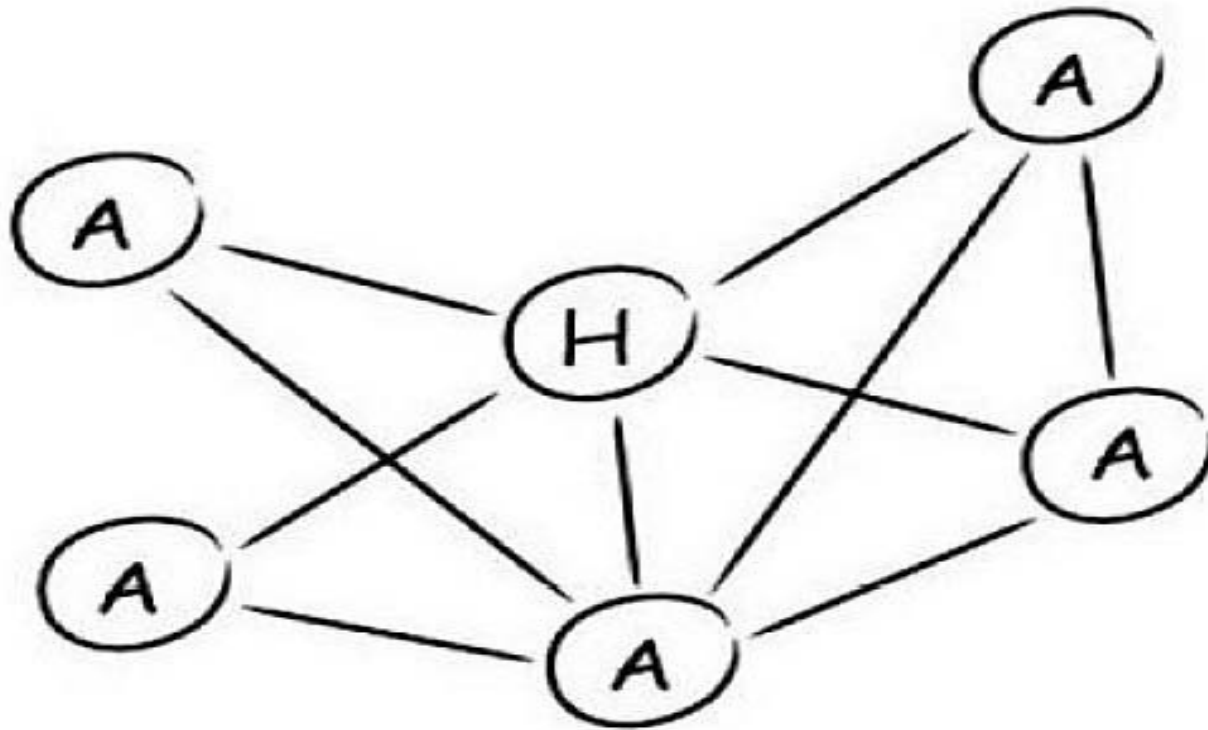
The NWP is neither a franchise nor simply a grant-making entity.

Rather, it is a network of organizations and also of people:

- Unified by shared mission, values, and generative structures
- Generating shared knowledge and shared experiences
- Encouraging local entrepreneurialism and spread of innovation
- Encouraging individual growth and trajectories of leadership through career

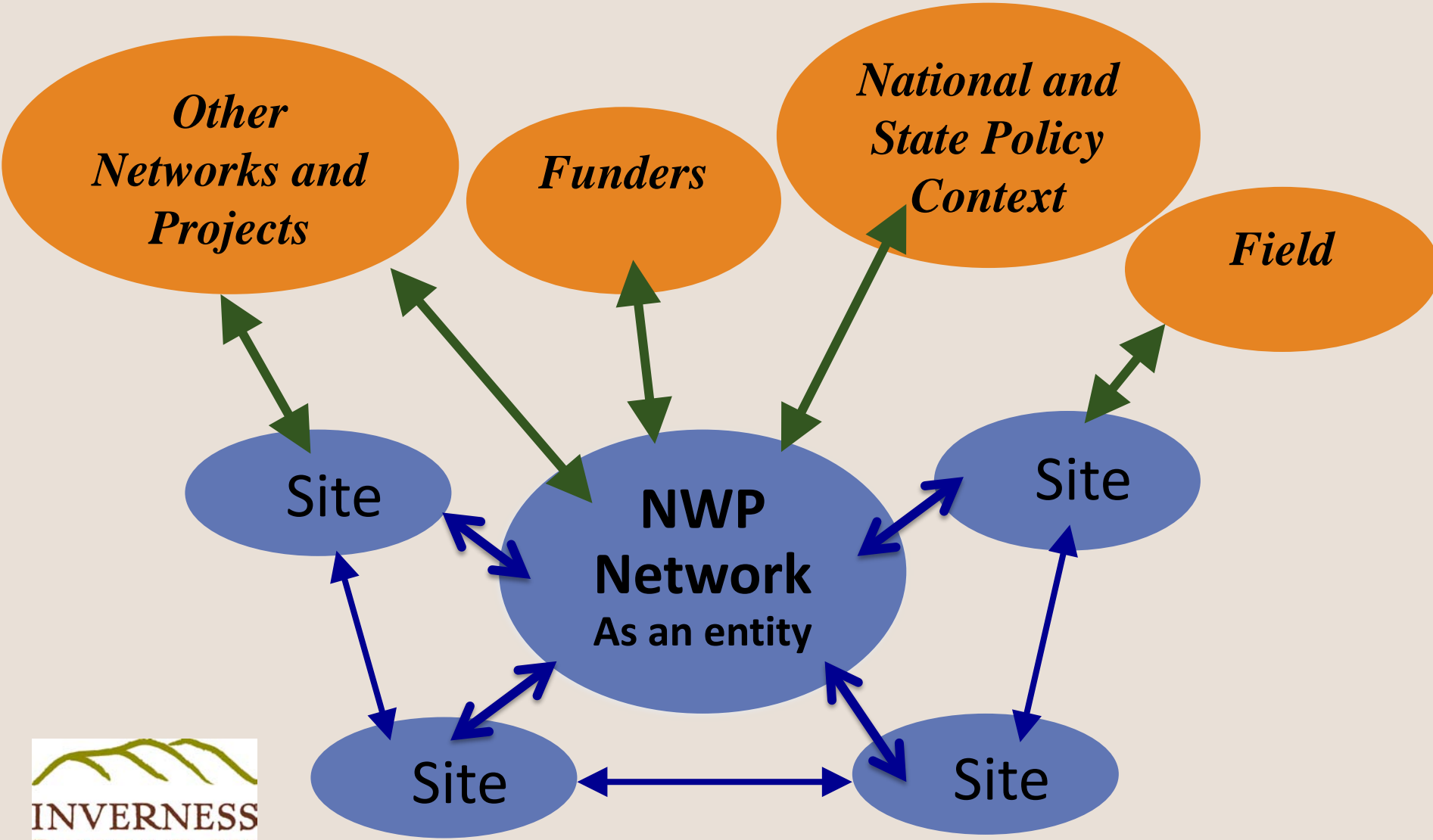
# The “networked organization” is a popular idea—but difficult to make real

Basic building blocks are **hubs** and **affiliates**.  
What makes it work are the **links**.

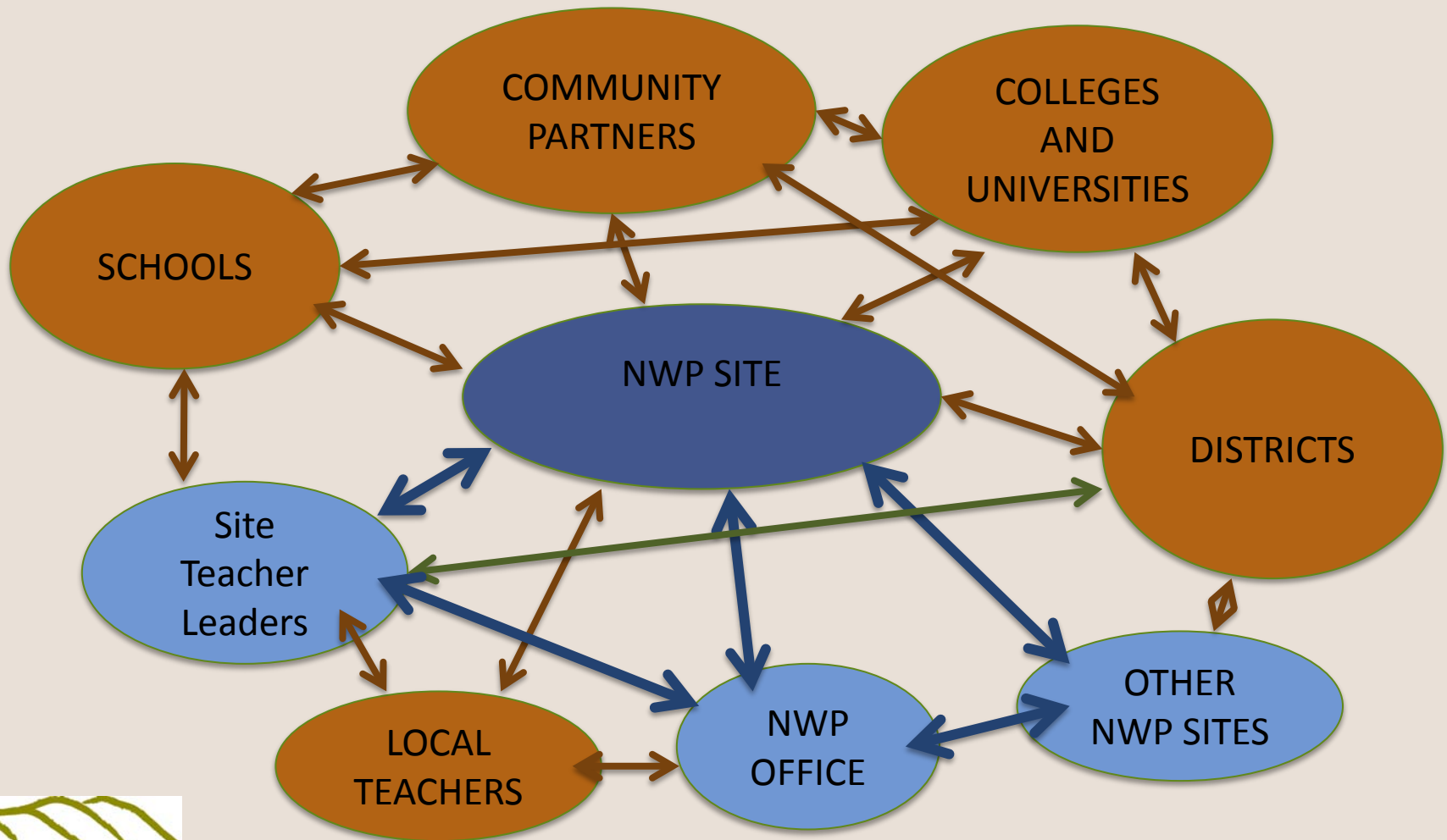


From Ken Everett: *Designing the Networked Organization*

# Internally strong networks build stronger external linkages



# Each site is a teacher-centered network—a hub for creating linkages among individuals and organizations



# Multi-way linkages build NWP strength



TTT

#write2connect  
2013 National Day On Writing

28  
EDUCATOR  
Innovator  
NWP  
NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT



155k 20k 9k  
g+  f



#engchat

2k  
DIGITAL IS  
NWP  
NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT



#literacies

1k  
NWP  
NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT  
#clmooc

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# Effective and lasting networked organizations

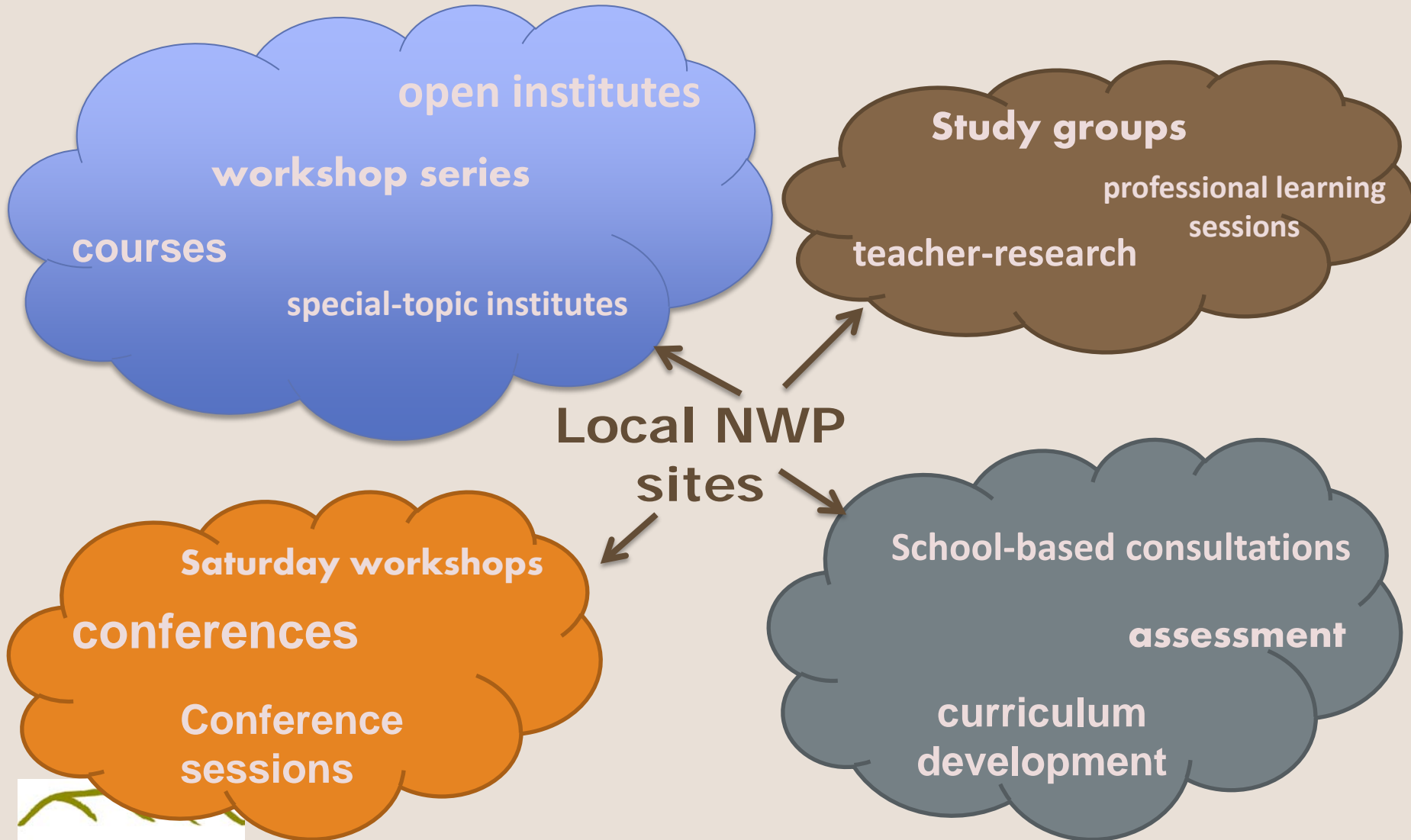
- Are primarily mission- and relationship-based, rather than transactional
- Anchor the links between the nodes to shared core values related to mission
- Support and reward what humans deeply value: both autonomy and interdependence
- Are nimble (within mission and values)
- Respond more to cultural leadership than positional authority

# Networks do not necessarily imply

- Common level or type of involvement of all nodes (sites)
- Uniformity across the network
- Consistent membership



# In fact, NWP sites offer variety and depth of service customized for local teachers



C) NWP Is A Long Term  
Cumulative Investment In An  
Improvement Infrastructure

# The National Writing Project is an investment not an expenditure

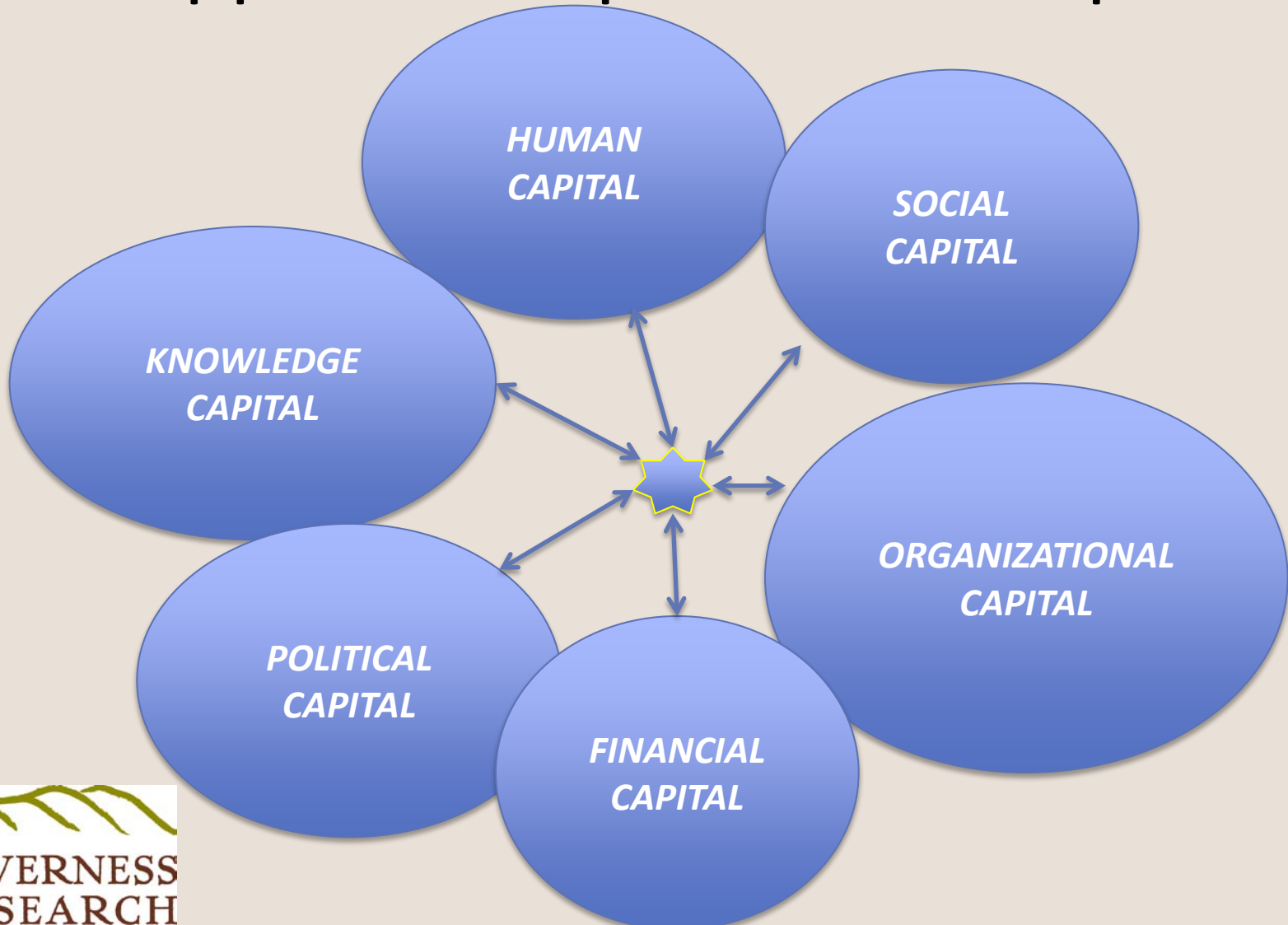
Expenditures are outlays for products and services.

Investments create **capital** that can be used in the future production of goods and services.

# What is “Capital”?

- The accumulated wealth of an individual, company or community, used as a fund for carrying on fresh production
- Wealth in any form used to help in producing more wealth
- Assets that yield income and other useful outputs over long periods of time

# NWP generates multiple forms of mutually supportive improvement capital





# Assembled and integrated capital becomes infrastructure



# Doug Engelbart



# Doug Engelbart and the improvement infrastructure

Every organization has a “capability infrastructure” — what we use to do our jobs. (Jim Spillane)

Organizations also need an “improvement infrastructure” — **what we use to get better at getting better.**

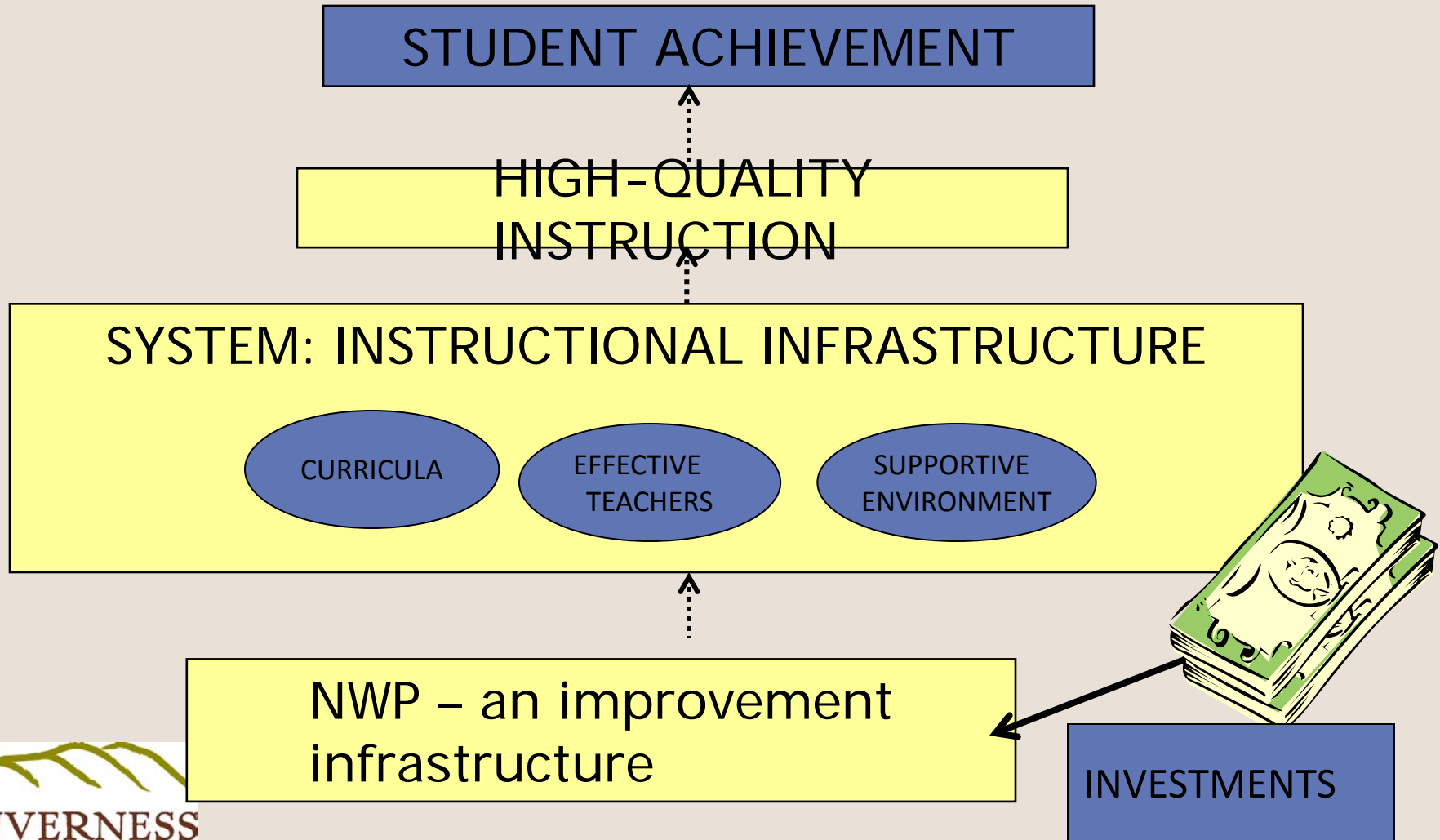


# The Improvement Infrastructure

***Engelbart argues that we... are still focused around projects and task forces with short-term expectations and short-term lifecycles, and have been too much in love with chasing after the latest tools and technologies...The most important activity we can do is to develop the improvement infrastructure... and to encourage and fund cross-functional "improvement communities" whose members work on common challenges to explicitly improve improvement.... In essence, the human network, supported with a stable, sound technology network, is the way to get better at getting better.***

– From the 21st Century Intranet, Jennifer Stone Gonzalez

# *The Nature of Investments Made in Educational Improvement*



# *Does NWP meet criteria for assessing the success of investments made in infrastructure?*

- Address important needs?
- Empower a wide array of local activities?
- Bridge gaps or critical disjunctures?
- Provide for equitable access?
- Assure consistently high-quality services?
- Allow for cumulative growth and development of capacity (scale up or down as needed)?
- Are cost-efficient, garnering multiple sources of funding?
- Provide a vehicle for future efficient investments?

(See [inverness-research.org/abstracts/ab2008-12\\_Rpt\\_NWP\\_ImprovementInfrastructure.html](http://inverness-research.org/abstracts/ab2008-12_Rpt_NWP_ImprovementInfrastructure.html) )

*The NWP is a stellar and important example of a different way to invest in the improvement of the US educational system*



The largest organism in the world is the Aspen grove, sharing a single root system that nourishes the whole while generating new growth.



End