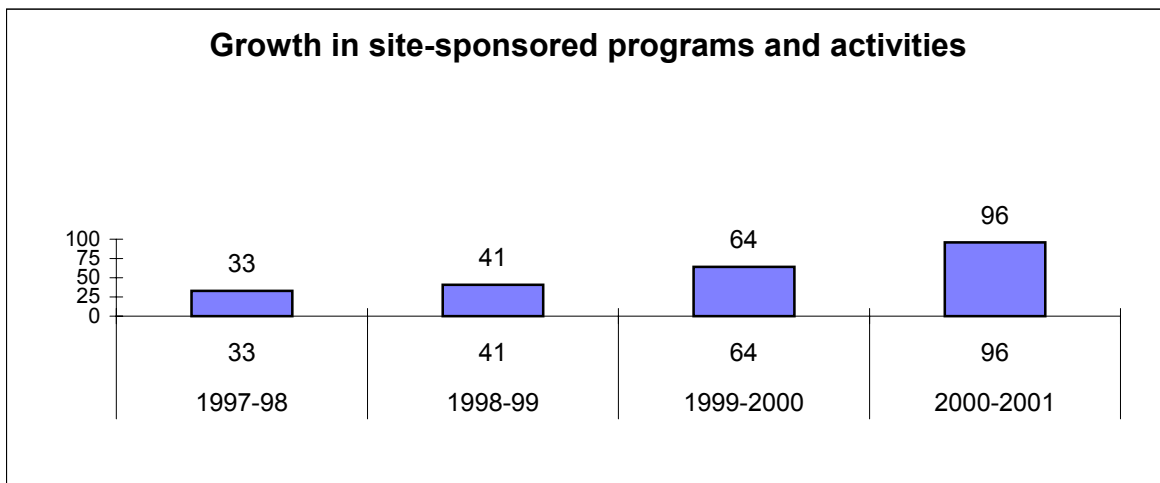


HISTORY: The Minnesota Writing Project and the National Writing Project

An active site of the National Writing Project since 1991, the Minnesota Writing Project (MWP) is committed to improving the writing of all students, strengthening university and school collaboration on writing instruction, and increasing the professional power of classroom teachers. The Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing (CISW) at the University of Minnesota provides MWP with meeting space, administrative support and personnel, equipment, and a library of research articles and books. The University provides a context where we celebrate the talents of Minnesota teachers at all levels. At the University of Minnesota teachers are recognized for their intellectual pursuits and their accomplishments as writers. We assume that by creating a rich environment for sharing these interests, we enable teachers to use their talents more effectively in their classrooms. Statewide, more than 200 teachers have become MWP teacher-consultants who provide their colleagues, schools, and districts with the latest research and exemplary practices in the teaching of writing. Our site-sponsored programs and activities have been steadily increasing (please see figure below).



For eleven years, MWP has been involving Minnesota’s teachers across all disciplines and levels (K-college) in the best practices of writing pedagogy and promoting the mission and basic assumptions of the National Writing Project:

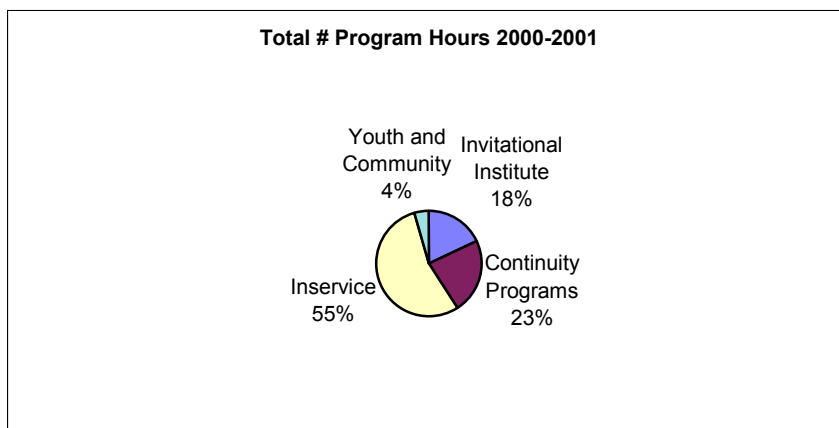
- The mission of the National Writing Project (NWP) is to improve the teaching of writing and improve learning in the nation's schools. Through its professional development model, the National Writing Project recognizes the primary importance of teacher knowledge, expertise, and leadership.
- The National Writing Project believes that access to high quality educational experiences is a basic right of all learners and a cornerstone of equity. Through its extensive network of teachers, the National Writing Project seeks to promote exemplary instruction of writing in every classroom in America.
- The National Writing Project values diversity – our own as well as that of our students, their families and their communities. We recognize that our lives and practices are enriched when those with whom we interact represent diversities of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and language.

Now in its 28th year, the National Writing Project (NWP) is a professional development program dedicated to improving writing and learning in our nation’s schools. Successful teachers are invaluable in accomplishing this goal (*Profiles of the National Writing Project*, page 4). Each of the 167 NWP sites offers an intensive Institute every summer and invites distinguished local teachers of writing, from all grade levels (K-16), to attend. The Institute focuses on these teachers, examining their exemplary classroom practices, supporting their work with research studies, and encouraging them to develop their own writing. These teachers become the teachers of other teachers during the school year, and make credible mentors because they come directly from their own classrooms to lead professional development workshops. NWP professional development consists of long-term programs, as opposed to “one-shot” presentations, and is responsive to local needs because local expert teachers are the instructors.

The National Writing Project is the most successful teacher development program that I know of in the whole United States! I think this is because it creates ways for teachers to learn, lead and teach each other, encouraging the development of a strong professional community of peers.

–Ann Lieberman, Senior Scholar, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

MWP structures its annual activities and programs so that each reinforces and builds upon the others. The Invitational Institute, held every summer, is the cornerstone and is designed to develop teacher consultants. Participants develop plans to assume leadership roles in their respective districts/schools. Upon their return to their districts in the fall, they help to organize Continuity programs, which have the primary purpose of developing leadership skills and creating an ongoing professional community, as well as forging a connection to teachers involved in writing instruction across the state. Our primary Inservice programs provide professional development to teachers, administrators, schools (K-16), and districts statewide (please see figure below). Because universities serve as hosts of writing project sites, the arrangement fosters ongoing collaboration between university and K-12 faculty. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the NWP model depends on the number of teachers who voluntarily spend their summer vacations, their school-year weekends, and their after-class time in NWP programs.



Summer Programs

Selective Institute

In keeping with our primary mission, the Minnesota Writing Project conducted the 11th Annual Selective Institute for teachers in the summer of 2001. The Selective Institute, as always, was designed to provide an intellectually stimulating community for teachers in which they can learn from other teachers about writing instruction, explore current theory and practice, and develop ways to share their strengths in consultation and collaboration with other teachers. We also added a research component to the program, which will help to motivate teachers to continue this process in their own classrooms by systematically experimenting with new teaching techniques and honing their current skills. Teachers' reflections on their experiences at the Selective Institute have been positive:

"Some very dynamic and thought-provoking presentations by innovative teachers have fueled my creativity both around teaching and writing. I have so many new resources." – Linda Varvel, Anoka-Ramsey Community College, 2001 Selective Institute Fellow

"The network of teachers working and learning together is very valuable – absolutely necessary for continued growth and development as educators." – Stacey Kadrmas, Monroe Community School, 2001 Selective Institute Fellow



"This Institute facilitates dialogue in a powerful way about the best practices of teachers; it creates a powerful network and resources and support outside of our respective buildings." – Melissa Borgmann, Minneapolis North Community High School, 2001 Selective Institute Fellow

"I have never felt such a strong sense of community with other teachers." – 2000 Selective Institute Fellow

"This whole 'project' has been the next step – a step I needed to take to move to the next level of professionalism, the next level of growth. Thanks for the opportunity to open my mind and push myself." – 2000 Selective Institute Fellow

Open Institute

The Open Institute is a two-week seminar that provides educators with the opportunity to improve their teaching of writing and to establish reading and writing groups within their districts. Included as a benefit for Institutional Member schools and districts, the Open Institute is patterned on the Selective Institute and provides leadership training for our Teacher Consultants and Selective Institute participants. Participants of the Open Institute, who are selected to attend by their districts, contributed positive feedback regarding their experience at the Open Institute:

This is an excellent opportunity for teachers of all subjects and levels to share their process and teaching of writing.

The Project has given me the confidence I need to pursue serious personal writing.

MWP has given me the opportunity to develop further my skills as a writer and as a teacher of writing.

As in the past, we trust that the success of the Open Institute will lead some participants to apply to become Selective Institute Fellows.

Continuity

Executive Committee and Policy Board

The Executive Committee, consisting of our Co-Directors, our Outreach Coordinators, and administrative support staff, oversees the ongoing operation of MWP and updates the Policy Board. The Policy Board's role entails approving the annual budget, reviewing the evaluations of Summer Institutes and the success of ongoing activities, and discussing strategies for increasing the Project's impact across the state.

Programs

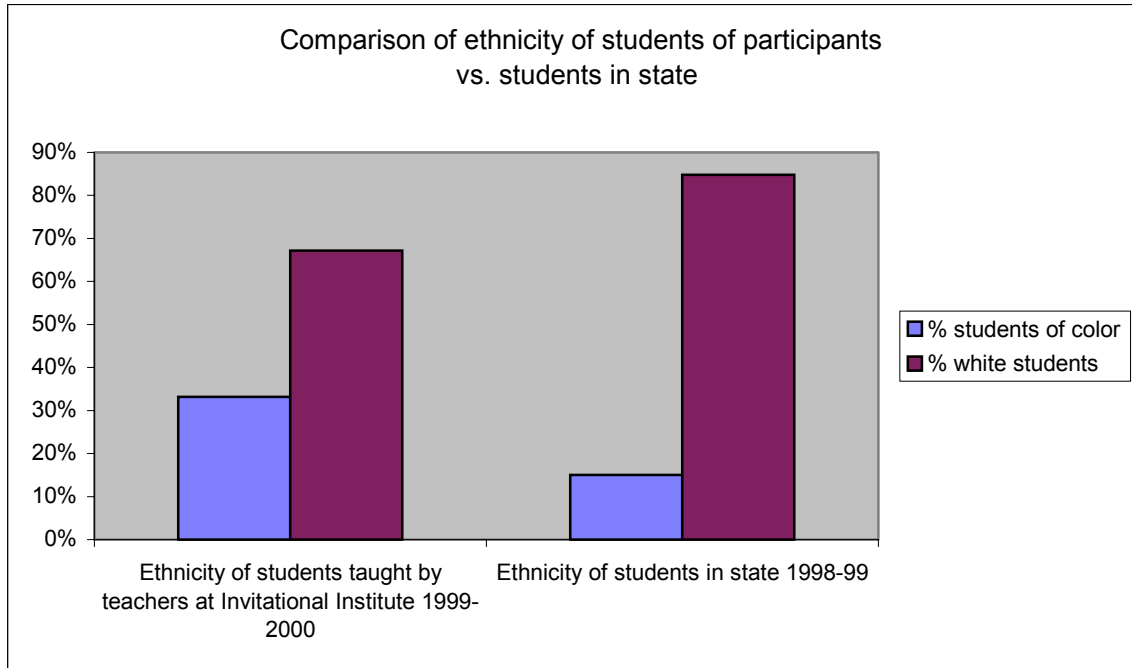
- **Young Writers' Conference**

During the 2000-2001 school year, MWP funded a young writers' conference involving 60 middle school students from St. Paul and surrounding districts. One principal and two teachers from participating districts, who also serve as MWP Teacher Consultants, planned and facilitated the conference. The workshop met for three days on the University of Minnesota Campus, and consisted of an art museum tour and an exercise in which students responded to a writing prompt, worked with published poet Jude Nutter, and shared their writing in peer workshops facilitated by students from the School of Education & Human Development at the University. They also learned about how books are made at the Center for Book Arts. Students' writings were compiled to create an anthology.



- **Diversity Task Force**

In 1999, the Policy Board established a Diversity Task Force, whose aim is to increase the participation of inner-city teachers, teachers from traditionally underrepresented groups, and teachers who work with disadvantaged students. Minnesota teachers and those attending the Selective Institute are predominately white. As MWP continues to strategize how to attract teachers of color to participate in the Institute, we have discovered that those teachers attending our programs are often those who serve a growing population of Minnesota's most diverse students.



The Diversity Task Force identified several goals:



Ray Suarez, senior correspondent for PBS “NewsHour with Jim Lehrer,” autographing books during diversity event.

- The promotion of professional activities for “target teachers” – teachers either of diverse backgrounds or who work with diverse student populations at all levels, K-College.
- Improved literacy for students of diverse populations.
- A more diverse K-College curriculum for all students.
- Partnerships between Minnesota schools and the University.
- Recruitment of students of diverse populations to the University.

Literacy issues for ELL students has moved to one of our top priorities, given the changing demographics of students in Minnesota schools. To support the efforts of this Task Force, MWP has sought and received grants from both the National Writing Project and the University of Minnesota. We are in the midst of administering a program in which we hope to identify and train new Teacher Consultants to run subsequent programs – in-district workshops and summer mini-institutes – covering similar material for an even broader audience.

- **State-supported Programs**

Basic Skills Test: Pilot Program

During the summer of 1999, MWP conducted a two-week Pilot Program with 68 students who had failed the state's Basic Competency Test in Written Communication. This program was made possible by financial support from the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning via a Best Practices Seminar Grant. Several MWP board members had reported that their school districts had no plans to intervene with the failing students prior to the July 1999 retest; consequently, MWP's Policy Board constructed an outline for this pilot program and sought a sample of 50 students from a chosen district to investigate the backgrounds and needs of the students, in order to discover possible reasons for failure, to develop strategies to help students earn a passing score, and finally to test a more authentic model of training teachers in good writing practice. Ultimately, fifteen MWP Teacher Consultants worked on-site in five member districts with 13 cooperating teachers and 68 students. This model proved exceedingly successful (75% of participating students – all of whom had failed the state's Basic Test in Written Composition in January – passed the retake) and appealing to district administrators. One site had five students and a 100% pass rate. Of 18 students involved at the second site, fourteen passed – 78%. At the third site, 25 of 29 students passed – 86%. The fourth site, with all special education or ELL students, had five of 11 pass – 45%, and the last site had a pass rate of 50% – 5 of 10 students passed. Seventy five per cent of the students involved in the writing classes passed the retest.

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment

Although we continue to encourage sustained staff development and extended workshop time, we have learned that we must adapt our methods of delivery to meet the needs of Minnesota's students and teachers, and to strategically respond to the mandates of the State. MWP was one of 27 applicants to receive a Best Practice Seminar Grant, which enabled us to provide a program entitled **Instructional Strategies to Improve Student Writing at the Intermediate Level**, one-day seminars held throughout the state to address the state's intermediate writing standard and modes of writing on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment.

Advanced Leadership Institute: Reading & Writing Strategies to Improve Student Achievement

The Advanced Leadership Institute was made possible by a Best Practice Seminar Grant from the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning and was designed to develop district leadership in reading and writing. In order to be considered for selection, applicants needed to have attended an MWP institute or have equivalent educational experience.

Educators participated in writing groups to improve their own skills as writers, worked in response groups, discussed two texts, observed demonstrations of strategies that



work in the instruction of reading and writing, and created Individual Growth Plans (IGPs) that relate to school improvement and connect with individual school/district curriculum goals.

The Institute provided a memorable opportunity for committed educators to strengthen their own careers by increasing their awareness of new pedagogy, enhancing their own teaching strategies, strengthening the Best Practices Network, and taking advantage of additional opportunities to network. The following two quotations reflect participants' response:

Everything that the MWP touches turns to gold. I'm very grateful for my fellow MWP connections and friendships, and my classroom, grade level, and school system will be touched by all I have learned here. Thanks for a meaningful workshop. I feel very spoiled and am fired up to go back to share this with my co-workers!

I relearned, as I do every time I participate in an MWP workshop, that there is nothing more satisfying in my professional life than being with fellow lovers of writing & literature.

The overall reaction to the experience suggested the great need to provide ongoing opportunities for these educators to come together to share ideas and to gain new resources. We continue to seek ways to offer additional programs.

- **Upper Midwest NWP State Network**

On October 5 and 6, 2001, MWP hosted the first Upper Midwest NWP State Network Conference at the Minnesota Humanities Center. Representatives from South Dakota, North Dakota, and Minnesota attended. The primary purpose of this retreat was to discuss the benefits of creating a regional network. Because of our isolated locations in the Upper Midwest, state networks are non-existent in our states. In addition to allowing us to make connections with each other, this retreat gave our sites the opportunity to discuss successful programs, strategize ways to strengthen our sites, identify common problems, and envision future endeavors. The possibility of offering on-the-border workshops between states emerged. Such workshops would increase the visibility of our individual projects and provide opportunities for teachers in these areas to gain the benefits of material presented by Teacher Consultants from our adjoining states.

Outreach

Inservice

MWP draws from over 200 K-College teacher-consultants who have attended the Summer Institutes to share their learning with other teachers. Workshop topics have included writing at particular grade levels (primary, intermediate, etc.), writing across the curriculum, 6-trait assessment and instruction, state writing assessment preparation, college/university expectations for writing and best practices in general. Of the 51 workshops we conducted this past year, 26 were in districts with partnerships with MWP, 21 were one-time contracts, and four were through a CFL grant. Our consultants have worked with district committees developing philosophy statements, scope and sequence plans for instruction, and expected learner outcomes. Many MWP fellows are part of the Best Practices Network in Writing (a state-supported teacher resource) and thus are selected to deliver statewide workshops and to serve on state committees. Since the State of Minnesota implemented a complex set of competency-based graduation standards, these standards and tests have been the primary focus of teachers, administrators, and educational policy makers. We have chosen to use our expertise to reinforce good pedagogy and informed assessment practices in this environment focused on assessment; we have maintained our integrity as teachers of writing and have used our strong values as advocates for emphasizing effective writing pedagogy, not simply teaching to the tests. We know that building solid writing skills *will* increase student achievement; toward this end, we seek to aid schools and districts to strengthen and diversify their methods of teaching writing skills. Our Outreach Coordinators implemented several changes in the services offered to districts with Institutional Memberships, and we now provide districts with a list of specific topics they can choose from for workshops in their districts.

Institutional Memberships

MWP is proud of its strong partnerships with school districts across the region. Since we created our two-year Institutional Memberships, which school districts have the option to purchase, these partnerships have become the heart of our system for delivering inservice workshops and consulting services. Over 50% of our Institutional Members have renewed their initial memberships. We are able to develop the kinds of long-lasting relationships we know are so vital to effective educational reform.

Institutional Memberships continue to provide MWP an opportunity for outreach and to work with districts, schools and individual teachers through ongoing programming. Instead of offering a predetermined set of services with the membership, MWP coordinators work with each member district to customize the services according to its need. For example, Anoka-Hennepin School District, the state's third largest, is one of our active institutional members. The outreach coordinator assigned to that site meets periodically with the district curriculum resource teachers to plan the MWP/district projects. During the past year, these projects included an intermediate writing course, a course on writing across the curriculum, repeated workshops on preparing for the state's 5th grade writing assessment (focused on the four types of writing: narrative, description, clarification and problem-solution) and a workshop for all high school language arts teachers on college/university writing standards and expectations, led by Co-Director Lillian Bridwell-Bowles. In addition, individual schools within that district contracted with MWP for workshops on writing across the curriculum and preparation for the fifth grade writing assessment. The district also recruits teachers for the summer Open Institute and pays them a stipend with the expectation that they provide leadership in writing for the district and their schools.

Past and present Institutional Members include the schools and/or districts listed below:

Anoka-Hennepin School District
Bloomington Public Schools
Burnsville-Eagan-Savage Public Schools
Carver-Chanhassen-Chaska-East Union-Victoria (Independent School District #112)
Cornelia Elementary School (Edina)
Eden Prairie Public Schools
Edina Public Schools
Farmington Public Schools
Minneapolis Public Schools
Minneapolis Special School District #1
Mounds View Public Schools
North Saint Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale (Independent School District #622)
Northfield Public Schools
Osseo Area Schools
Osseo High School
Owatonna Public Schools
Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan (Independent School District #196)
Saint Paul Academy
Saint Paul Public Schools
South Washington County Schools
Staples Elementary School
Stillwater Area Schools
Wayzata Public Schools
White Bear Lake Area Schools

MINNESOTA WRITING PROJECT INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERSHIP

School districts investing in an Institutional Membership in the Minnesota Writing Project for \$3000 are entitled to purchase the listed services at the quoted rates. Once the \$3000 fee has been used, additional services may be purchased at the listed prices. Districts without an Institutional Membership must pay fees 20% above these prices.

CLASSES OFFERED IN THE DISTRICT

Each class is conducted by MWP experts and trained fellows and runs for 10 hours and is available to participants for credit (for an additional tuition fee). The cost for each class is \$1250. Topics for these courses can be developed according to district needs, covering a variety of possible areas:

- a. Writing process – primary
- b. Writing process – intermediate
- c. Writing process – secondary
- d. Writing across the curriculum – intermediate, secondary
- e. Working with ELL students – elementary, secondary
- f. Assessment
- g. Early literacy, the reading-writing connection

WORKSHOPS OFFERED IN THE DISTRICT

Workshops offered to member districts (on topics similar to those described above) cost \$125 per presentation hour.

MENTORSHIPS

Districts may hire retired teachers to mentor new teachers at a rate of \$550 for 20 hours of mentoring time. That time may be split between two teachers.

CONSULTATION TIME

Districts may purchase the services of MWP to evaluate district or building writing programs. Rates are \$70 per hour.

OPEN INSTITUTE

MWP offers a two-week intensive institute on writing for teachers K-College during July. The institute is open to teachers of member districts at a charge of \$400 per teacher.