Thank you, Margarita, for that lovely introduction. I am delighted to be here. Education has been my life’s work, as I am sure it has for many of you in this room, and so I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to present the work of the National Writing Project to you.

Before coming to the NWP, I was the Provost at Spelman College and a faculty member at several other colleges and universities, including Kent State University and Springfield College. And I don’t need to tell you that strong writing skills are essential to success in school, in the workplace, and for full participation in civic life.

Now that we are all living in this data rich, 24/7, information age, writing is more important than ever!

Before I introduce my writing project colleagues, I’d like to share some hot-off-the-press news with you. The National Writing Project just received a one-year grant from the MacArthur Foundation to support our efforts to create and disseminate resources and learning opportunities for teachers as they develop effective practices for teaching writing and new media literacies.

This is an exciting time for working on improving the teaching of writing—and we are very pleased to be able to connect with other national organizations that are working on many different aspects of digital media and learning for young people. We look forward to sharing more information with you about this project in the near future.

Your packets contain basic information about the National Writing Project, and so I only want to provide a brief overview of how the 200 writing project sites conduct their work.

- Writing project sites are located in local universities and colleges in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands
- Each site provides a four-week Invitational Institute every summer to develop a constantly growing pool of teacher-leaders.
- During every school year, each site offers follow-up programs so that teachers have a real structure for their continuous learning.
- Also during the school year, sites partner with local schools and districts to provide professional development. It’s the teacher-leaders from the summer institutes who conduct these professional development programs for their colleagues. In this way,
the project reaches out to all teachers to improve the teaching of writing and learning for students across the country.

- Writing project sites offer more than 7,000 programs to approximately 135,000 participants annually.

The NWP also sponsors ongoing research. Some of our most recent research results are in your packets. In addition, we have contracted with SRI International to serve as an independent external evaluator for a 5-year national evaluation. This study will examine NWP partnerships with schools and the impact of these partnerships on the teaching of writing and on student writing achievement.

Today, we have four esteemed leaders from the writing project sites closest to you—two directors and two teacher-consultants, our term for the teachers who are the leaders and mentors in our project. They will describe how writing projects work “on the ground” to improve writing and learning in our nation’s schools. As you can see from the agenda, we have left a good deal of time at the end of the session for questions and discussion. I’ll introduce them in order:

1. **Donald Gallehr**, Director of the Northern Virginia Writing Project at George Mason University
2. **Judith Kelly**, Director of the DC Area Writing Project at Howard University
3. **Michelle Ohanian**, teacher-consultant from the Northern Virginia Writing Project, and classroom teacher at Mountain View Alternative High School in Centreville, Virginia.
4. **Elizabeth Davis**, teacher-consultant from the DC Area Writing Project, and classroom teacher at Charles Hart Middle School, here in Washington, DC.

Donald Gallehr
Director, Northern Virginia Writing Project
George Mason University

In 1975 I designed and taught an excellent teaching of writing class at George Mason University, a course in which I, as a college teacher, was telling kindergarten-12 teachers how to teach. I kept track of my students after they left my course, and a year later, you would never know they had taken it because they returned to their classrooms and were soon overcome by the status quo—the curriculum, a lack of continuity, the demands of the school system, and the school environment. I taught the course again in 1976, and again the same thing happened—an excellent course that had no lasting impact on the teachers.

I first heard of the Bay Area Writing Project in 1977, and when I read the proposal guidelines, it dawned on me that Jim Gray, the founder of the National Writing Project, had solved my problem. We applied for funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities to establish the Northern Virginia Writing Project and held our first summer institute in 1978—25 kindergarten-university teachers, each giving a 75 minute presentation, each participating in a reading/writing group twice a week, each reading and discussing the theories and research on the teaching of writing and the uses of writing to learn. After the summer institute, these same teachers, now called teacher-consultants of the Northern Virginia Writing Project, gave their presentations in inservice courses and workshops, continued to write and to meet in their reading/writing groups, and continued to come together in
continuity meetings in which they discussed their teaching, the latest research, and ways to impact the curriculum. The result: their teaching changed for the better; they were instrumental in changing the curriculum; and they became excellent consultants as they worked with other teachers in their own schools and colleges, and outside contract time in other schools, colleges, and universities.

The impact on teachers and the profession has been profound. Teacher-consultants (TCs) stay in the profession (from 1978 until about 1995, not a single teacher-consultant retired); TCs attend statewide, national, and international NWP events to share their expertise and to grow as professionals; TCs start such things as teacher research and writing across the curriculum programs; TCs continue to write, and year after year about 40% of the teachers from each summer institute publish at least one piece of personal or professional writing within a year of attending the institute; TCs attract teachers from across the curriculum—teachers from math, science, physical education, history, social studies, and business; and several TCs have reached out to hold writing workshops for government and corporate employees.

The impact of the project on students has been equally impressive. Because of the project, students now select their own topics and write multiple drafts to revise and edit into a more sophisticated prose; they write to real audiences for real purposes; they write in many subjects, not just English; they publish (one high school student from Prince William County in the 1990s published a short piece in Parade Magazine, the most widely read magazine in the country); they grow in knowledge of their own writing process; and they enter college knowing how to write both academic and real-world pieces. As you know, demographics have changed dramatically in the past 30 years, but we’re still able to meet the needs of students from all over the world.

The Northern Virginia Writing Project now reaches into every level of education, public and private, throughout Northern Virginia and, through our satellite site, into the Shenandoah Valley west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Each year we publish a volume of teacher-consultants’ students’ writing called Falling for the Story; each year we hold a two-week student summer institute for approximately 130 students in grades five to twelve, and each year we hold young authors workshops for the same age group on six Saturdays during the year. Our George Mason University Writing-Across-the-Curriculum program is listed as the 4th best in the country by U.S. and News and World Report, and NVWP is considered by many to be the best professional development around.

Allow me to end with a personal anecdote. In the early 1980s I began noticing that each year a few of my English 101 students were coming to me with exceptional writing abilities. When I asked them where they had gone to school, they cited schools where we had teacher-consultants or where we had conducted considerable inservice. After a while I played a guessing game. I’d say to a student, “You wouldn’t by chance have gone to Chantilly High School, would you?” If the student said, “Yes, as a matter of fact I did,” I’d say, “And, by chance, did you have Vic Kryston as your English teacher?” “Oh my god,” the student would yell. “Yes, I did. Mr. Kryston was great!”

I want to end by saying I could not have done this alone. The National Writing Project not only gave me a model that worked, it gave me the guidance and support all along the way. Thousands of teachers and close to a million students have been touched by our site in the past 30 years, an achievement made possible by all of us working together.
Good morning. I am Judith Kelly, director of the District of Columbia Area Writing Project. I was a 1995 participant in our first invitational summer institute, became co-director in 1996 and director in 2001. I introduce myself in this manner because in this short time, our work with DCPS has been under seven different DC public school superintendents. We have outlasted seven DC public school superintendents! And now we have a chancellor.

Why or how are we still here? The answer is simple. In this midst of all of the different administrations and the endless cycles of new reforms—which, by the way, were always introduced with great fanfare but abandoned with each leadership change—the DC Area Writing Project is a constant in teachers’ professional lives. We are the anchor that represents sustained enhancement of day-to-day literacy teaching. The teachers with whom we work know that all along, through all of these different administrations, in spite of some seemingly overwhelming challenges, we have not given up; that we have persevered and have continued to provide high-quality professional development by and for teachers. Our renewal meetings, our continuity programs, our coaching, our writing groups, our partnerships, our inquiry groups and our workshops support the professional needs of DC teachers. In fact, the DC Area Writing Project is one of only two long-standing DC professional development programs operating in DC and can truly be described as sustained professional development. The other program is 13 years old. We are 14 years old.

Time after time, year after year, we have shown that our model results in the improvement of teaching and learning. For instance, we have successfully worked in many schools in the District of Columbia, such as Sousa MS, Thurgood Marshall ES, Eastern SHS, Roosevelt SHS. Our work at Malcolm X ES is but one example of our positive impact. Malcolm X is located in a low income area in far southeast Washington. Malcolm X was the kind of school that was always at or near the bottom of those lists that rank schools. Nothing seemed to have worked for them. The school was scheduled to be restructured if the test performance did not improve. In restructured schools, the principal and the teachers are dismissed and have to reapply for their positions. Naturally, there was a high level of anxiety. So, in 2006, the principal at Malcolm X was dismayed that student writing on brief constructed responses was still below basic as it had been for several years. He had heard about our work at Sousa and asked us to work with teachers in his building to reverse that statistic. We did. For a whole year, we conducted workshops, led focus groups, modeled strategies with the Malcolm X students and mentored teachers of the benchmark grades. When we started, the teachers scoffed and characterized us as another one of those quick-fix miracle cures that never really worked. Their morale was low and they appeared to be resigned to their condition.

However, after only a few weeks, the Malcolm X family bought into our model. Why? We were teachers; not a think tank; not a one-size-fits-all program. We were local and understood their situation. We customized our professional development for their school. Most important, we didn’t just talk about what works; we modeled the strategies with the Malcolm X students. Our teachers took over the work with the students, while their teachers met in focus groups to talk about the theories that undergirded what we were doing and strategies that could help them to improve their teaching. The teachers also kept reflective journals that allowed them to think deeply about what
and how they were doing, helping them to make necessary changes to approaches that were ineffective and to note the successful approaches.

The results: for the first time, Malcolm X students met AYP on the DC standardized test. The principal, the staff, and the students were overjoyed.

Key to this good fit was that, without being judged, the teachers had many opportunities to talk with colleagues about their teaching, share strategies, receive and offer suggestions for revisions in their instruction, to work together to figure out solutions to problems. The school had become a professional community. The message here is that with the right supports, teachers do teach better and students really learn more and can show what they have learned. Our motto at Malcolm X was “getting better together.” The Malcolm X principal has since retired, but our experience there confirmed for us that what we are doing is worthwhile and is having a positive impact on teaching and learning.

I would also like to mention another highlight of our work in DC: our New-Teacher Initiative. You know, networks are powerful. As a National Writing Project site, we had an opportunity to take part in the national initiative to support new teachers. The DC Area Writing Project was one of nine NWP sites accepted to participate. Our participation was so successful that we infused the NWP Initiative into our regular site work and included the cost in our regular budget. For the NWP New-Teacher Initiative, we proposed TOC for DC teachers—Teachers on Call. To my knowledge, we have a unique program. I do not know of any other program like ours. We made our cell phone numbers available to new teachers in DC who felt they might need immediate assistance in carrying out their duties.

We understood that the school system had a mentoring program for new teachers, but ours was different. First of all, we promised to get back to the teachers within 24 hours. The school system’s mentors were generally available much less frequently. Second, as follow-up, if more support was needed and was requested, we visited the teachers at their schools.

A major difference, however, between TOC and the school system’s program was that our help was with content, as opposed to a focus on how to navigate the logistics of the school system. Now, do not get me wrong; we were asked to and did provide help to teachers to organize and manage such responsibilities as grouping for differentiated instruction and lesson planning. But for the most part, and as our promotional literature described, we were able to focus on content.

After our first semester with TOC, we realized that the teachers also needed face-to-face contact with seasoned teachers, so we sponsored a Saturday program for new teachers. This past December, we sponsored our 6th annual Saturday program at Howard University, open to public and charter school teachers. Nu State of Delta Kappa Gamma Society International partners with us to provide a plethora of teaching supplies for the new teachers. In addition to concurrent workshops, we have roundtables set up for the teachers to discuss specific concerns, such as inclusion and parental communication. Based on the teachers’ responses, we count TOC as one of our most successful endeavors. TOC is now enhanced by a listserv that provides teaching ideas to the new teachers who participated in the Saturday program and the Net Pals blog that provides a space for dialogue among the teachers who post dilemmas, successes, surprises, and other comments and questions about their teaching.
My last example of why the DC Area Writing Project continues to have such a powerful impact is one of our partnership programs. Since 1999, we have partnered with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to conduct writing programs based on field studies at the museum. At Kramer MS, again one of those low achieving schools, the special-needs students with whom we worked toured the museum, talked with survivors and wrote. At their school, they read stories about the ghettos, about children who lived during that time and wrote. When they encountered the stories of the Swiss bank accounts, their research led them to see the need for saving and they wrote.

It was so unusual for special-needs students to engage in activities outside of the school grounds that word spread about the program. The manager of the neighborhood Citibank heard about it from some of the students who stopped by the bank with questions about saving accounts. She was so impressed that she allowed the students to shadow the employees, set up savings accounts and write about their experience. The end result of the Kramer project was a student anthology—Never Again, Never Again—and a book signing that drew parents, community members, and several school system officials. The student editor was featured in the Washington Times newspaper because, in her words, she had never written anything except her teachers’ worksheets.

We are pleased that our Writing Rights partnership with the museum was replicated in six other schools: Eastern HS, Sousa MS, P.R. Harris EC, Roosevelt SHS, Garnet Patterson. Students published anthologies in each of those schools. Writing Rights is currently being implemented at Ron Browne MS and Hart MS, Thomas ES, Ann Beers ES, and Ideal Academy Public Charter School.

The District of Columbia Area Writing Project owes much of its success to its affiliation with the National Writing Project. Being a part of a national network of teachers allows us to provide the high-quality, sustained professional development that is needed to make a real difference in teaching and learning in the District of Columbia.

Without question, we have proved over and over again that the writing project model helps us to get better at our craft. By collaborating among ourselves and with other writing project teachers from all over the country, we empower ourselves to advance ongoing and meaningful professional growth.

As urban teachers, we understand that our task is great, but it is not insurmountable. The DC Area Writing Project is the constant that encourages us, that energizes us, and that helps us to be better teachers.

Michelle Ohanian
Teacher, Mountain View Alternative High School
Teacher-Consultant, Northern Virginia Writing Project

Over the last 12 years, I have taught Spanish to Baltimore City High School students, English language learners (ELL), to first and second graders at an Alexandria City Elementary School, then to seventh and eighth graders at a Fairfax County suburban middle school. An opportunity came to join the district’s ELL office and I took it, but I missed the students so went back into the classroom. For the last 5 years, I’ve been teaching ELL at an alternative high school in Fairfax County called Mountain View.
So I have had about as many transitions in my life as the DC public schools. Thankfully, there has been a steadying force which keeps my practice relevant for teaching first through eleventh graders as well as teaching teachers. When I moved from Baltimore, Maryland to Virginia, I lost a tight-knit professional learning community that challenged and supported me, a local version of Teach for America. Soon after being in Alexandria, I saw the flyer for a writing and teaching class being offered by the Northern Virginia Writing Project. I signed up and loved the resources as well as the model of teachers teaching teachers so much that I applied for and was accepted to the Northern Virginia Writing Project’s summer institute in 1999. I became a teacher-consultant and have been teaching teachers for the last 10 years in addition to my classroom teaching.

The writing project model has made analysis and reflection a keystone of my teaching practice. That first summer Don Gallehr, my director here, and the other teacher-consultants on the staff, asked me the difficult questions. Why is this lesson right for your students? How do you implement it differently for a variety of students? Why are you doing this? That summer I got it. One size teaching doesn’t fit the needs of all students.

The Northern Virginia Writing Project gave me two teaching gifts: 1. Challenge students with the difficult questions; 2. Do so in a safe and caring writers’ workshop environment so students are learning with and for each other. Put the learners in the center. My graduate classes instructed me to do this, but the Northern Virginia Writing Project showed me how.

In my current teaching context, my students don’t all fit into one size of anything. They range in age from 16 to 22 and some up to 27. They are from Korea, China, Ethiopia, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Peru.

- Few have prior academic backgrounds comparable to their current grade level;
- Some of the girls attended female-only schools;
- Some attended schools in their countries up until the 3rd to 6th grade;
- Some repeated grades;
- Some fled as tortured political refugees;
- Some are pregnant or parenting teenagers;
- Some were sent to the United States by parents they hadn’t seen since infancy and don’t want to be in this country;
- Some work full time to support their families.

I’m not telling you this to feel sorry for them but to understand how my teaching must accommodate their needs. Each student has his own reason for coming to school and earning a high school diploma. I can make it happen because I have my own network of support in the writing project; otherwise I wouldn’t still be teaching.

Asking the difficult questions transformed one of my students, Shyam, from a memorizer of isolated facts into an American style critical thinker. He came from Nepal and wanted to graduate fast. I told him our school wasn’t McMountain View and there wasn’t a drive-through window to order a high
school diploma. “Why? Why?” he asked. “I just want to graduate.” To him, learning meant memorizing a page from his biology book or googling answers on the Internet. Shyam shopped for answers like most Americans shop for shoes on the Web. He didn’t understand why his American teachers wanted more; we were so different from his previous ones.

I needed something to hook this disbeliever. I had seen a history presentation at our writing project site linking history with writing, using an inquiry approach to make it alive for students. At national conferences with the NWP, I attended sessions on social justice issues and learned how presenters linked them with their state learning standards. So I pulled resources together to create a unit with three big questions: How did slavery come to America? How did it grow? How did it end? The initial hook was “Why is a hanging noose a symbol of racial hatred in America?” My immigrant students didn’t understand at the time why the Jena Six case was so prevalent in the news. Once they got started, my class was on fire to keep studying the history of slavery and write about social justice issues in their lives. Initially, Shyam was a reluctant history scholar and writer. In our readers’ and writers’ classroom community, he read the other students’ writing and had to give feedback as well as answer questions about his own writing. He joined in the discussions and began to question the sources of his information. Shyam became a critical thinker in a writing community with his peers. My goal as a teacher is not for my students to leave with only memorized facts, but to link them to larger issues and concepts that affect their lives.

In addition to teaching ELLs, I work at our local site, teaching teachers in Northern Virginia about the great possibilities there are for English language learners and writing. I have also worked for NWP on the leadership team for the English Language Learners Network, making professional connections with teachers from California, Texas, Montana, and New York, to name a few. From these national connections, I found a model for students to write and record their stories, taking publishing beyond the page. The Rural Sites Network of NWP created a recorded voice project for CDs called Rural Voices Radio. Students of teacher-consultants in rural areas recorded stories focused on place-based experiences. Two years ago I adapted the project for my English language learners. My students embraced mixing their personal writing with voice recording. We burned a copy of the CD for every teacher in the school and gave it to them with a can of soda so they could listen to it while driving home.

There were two memorable outcomes from this project: how my students wrote with precision for each other and how the faculty came to learn more about these students. One student, Rodrigo, chose to write a difficult story but wouldn’t share the whole story aloud in writers’ workshop, only parts. On the last day to record, he came to me. While reading about immigrating to the U.S., he broke into tears. He had never shared with anyone outside of his family how humiliating and dangerous it was for them. Other students in the class came to his side, understanding his pain. Many of them had written about a parent’s death and other deep losses. They became a community of writers; this was a safe place to take risks and write the difficult story.

After the faculty listened to the CDs, there was a buzz in the halls of the school. Most teachers said, “I never knew that about this student.” The students glowed with pride at being published authors and part of something they considered cool.

The quality of the radio story writing is usually the best of all assignments because it means something to them and their voices are literally heard. They care about grammar, word choice, and
pronunciation. All of my students from last spring who exited the ELL program went right into English 11 and passed the state exam for reading and writing this school year.

This fall I hooked my new students with a cutting-edge blend of writing and technology. The NWP’s Technology Liaisons Network sent out an open invitation for all teacher-consultants to join the online project, Writing Our Future, for high school students to post letters to the next president of the United States. Writers drafted, revised, edited, and gave feedback to each other via Google Docs, an online writing tool. By Election Day, thousands had published their letters on the website. My English language learners published on the site and read what other teenagers were thinking around the country. They felt part of a larger writing community and saw how their writing skills measured up as well as their political beliefs. Jiawang wrote in his reflection, “I love technology. Let’s do this more.” Ray asked, “Do you think the new president will read it?”

Students come to my class to learn to read and write not because of who they are today, but who they dream of becoming in a year, ten years, in their lifetime. If I don’t believe each and every student can learn, then who will? A person’s circumstance is not an excuse for future failures. I am the bridge from what they can do today to who they can become in the future. The National Writing Project is my bridge and the bridge for thousands of other teachers who believe we can become better writers and teachers for our students today and for future generations.

Elizabeth A. Davis
Teacher, Charles Hart Middle School
Teacher-Consultant, District of Columbia Area Writing Project

Good morning. I’m Elizabeth Davis, a computer-aided design teacher at Charles Hart Middle School in SE Washington, DC. Hart MS is located in Division IV of the district and is the residence of more than 40% of the student population in DC public schools. As I listened to Judith Kelly talk about the revolving door of our superintendent’s office over the past ten years, I couldn’t help but think about the impact it has had on me and other teachers in the district. With each of the nine superintendents and our newest school leader, Chancellor Rhee, came different reform initiatives and of course different ways to enact them. This also would include new reform models for restructured and reconstituted schools and the professional development that comes with the reform package. Needless to say, over the past 10- to 15 years, DC teachers have suffered the consequences of a lack of sustainability in the area of professional development. Fortunately, during these constant changes in school leadership, I and hundreds of other DC teachers have had the ongoing support and sustained professional development provided by the DC Area Writing Project, and collaboration with thousands of teachers affiliated with the National Writing Project. For DC teachers, the professional development provided by the writing project has been the one constant that has sustained us over the past 15 years.

Having said that, I’d like to share how my affiliation with the writing project since 1995 has impacted my professional growth as well as the academic achievement of my students. Over the 30 years I’ve taught in six DC public schools, five of which were over 50 years old. Fifty-year-old school buildings, unless modernized, don’t fit well with 21st century curriculum and technology. In 1995, the same year I joined the DC Area Writing Project, I was assigned to John Philip Sousa Middle School, which was one of the five schools included in the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court Decision. In
2001, the school was designated as a National Historic Landmark. But at the same time, the school district had decided to demolish the school and build a new one. It was a teachable moment not only to inform my students about the Bolling v. Sharpe and Brown v. Board cases, but also to empower them to question social realities in their lives and take control of changing unsatisfactory conditions in their school and community. Although I expected push back from students when I asked them to research and write about the cases, I was pleasantly surprised by their response. Something happens to reluctant readers and writers when the text is connected to their lives and lived experiences. They readily identified with conditions of the run-down school facilities reserved for black children in the 50s because they were the same conditions existing at Sousa at the time, as well as at many of the public schools in DC. Students compared and contrasted these conditions 50 years after the Brown decision. Their testimonies were compelling.

After researching the Bolling and Brown cases and the significance of Sousa as a Historic Landmark in their community, students explored options for getting a new school while maintaining Sousa’s designation as a National Historic Landmark school. They wrote letters to their parents, petitions to fellow students, and testimonies to the School Board and City Council members to have the school modernized. On the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board, they were invited by Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton to testify at the Congressional Black Caucus’s forum on Brown and later by Representative Pelosi and Senator Kennedy at the Senate’s Commemorative Ceremony for Brown. That year, several of my students won national awards for their essays on Brown v. Board.

After the school Board voted to have Sousa modernized, a two-year modernization process began. But the students remained in the facility during the first year. After one advisory of sitting in classrooms without air and later without heat, the students initiated a campaign to move out of the school for the remainder of the modernization period. They started with letters to their parents about conditions in the school. Parents and students began presenting their testimonies before the School Board and City Council about why students and staff needed to move out of the school during the modernization process. At the same time, 43 of the students entered a national School of the Future design competition sponsored by the Council of Educational Facilities Planners International. Their model was a replica of the old school with a 21st century infrastructure. After submitting their scale model, a 900-word narrative, video, and PowerPoint, they appeared before a panel of 15 judges for an hour and a half to defend their project. They won 1st place and $2,000. The school has been fully modernized due to a $2 billion school modernization bill introduced by Mayor Fenty before he was elected Mayor and passed by the Council. But not after a tremendous effort in getting the bill passed. The students drafted a petition letter to their City Council member for fellow students, parents, and community members to sign in support of the bill. On the evening of the public hearing on the bill, over 400 of these letters were delivered to the Council members at the hearing. A network of teachers in the DC Area Writing Project agreed to have their students do the same. At some point, there was collaboration between students from school to school about the importance of getting the bill passed. For the first time, I observed students excited about reading, writing, and research. While discovering the rich resources for learning in their own neighborhood and city, they were able to use their reading and writing skills, prior knowledge, and community history to affect changes in their lives. Prior to joining the writing project, my students and I regarded reading and writing merely as skills needed to pass a test. However, this experience, and others that are continuing to unfold with students at my current school, have proven that writing helps students to connect the dots in their learning from subject to subject and from the classroom to the real world.
For me, it has proved to be the most powerful tool for including the lives, experiences, and interests of the diverse population of students entering my classroom today.

I am now at Charles Hart Middle School, also in Division 4 of the district. But the lessons I’ve taught and learned from my years at Sousa are transferable. Some of my students at Hart have already won writing awards for their letters, essays, and poetry. In the upcoming school year, students at Hart will discover the rich resources for teaching and learning in their own neighborhood by focusing on using community history to affect learning outcomes, especially reading and writing skills.

In closing, I hope that you will take away these three critical facts from the perspective of a classroom teacher and those who support quality teaching and learning:

- Writing is critical and needs to be part of all conversations about school reform.
- There is an ongoing need for high-quality, sustained professional development for teachers that leads to improved student achievement in writing.
- In order to bring about these changes, teachers need more support. We must have opportunities to learn new approaches, to experiment with the new technologies that fill the lives of students, and time to develop and apply comprehensive strategies for using writing in these new contexts. In my humble opinion, the National Writing Project is the proven model that has embraced these beliefs and remains the best place to look for answers to questions regarding best practices for the teaching of writing. Thank you.