



# Legislative Update

## NWP Teachers, Directors Turn up the Heat in Washington

BY ANDY BRADSHAW

Facing an array of challenges to the National Writing Project's continued federal funding, more than 150 writing project teacher-consultants and site leaders (representing 39 states and the District of Columbia) converged on Washington, D.C., in April with two goals in mind: to educate their elected officials on the important role played by the writing project in their local schools and communities, and to urge these officials to support reauthorization of the 27-year-old professional development program for teachers.

Under President George W. Bush's recently released education budget plan, federal dollars once allocated to the writing project and other small education programs would be given directly to states and local school districts. That would take the decision of how to spend such dollars out of writing project hands, putting the national network in real danger of termination. Republicans and "new Democrats" have introduced similar plans in both the House and Senate, as the momentum for block-granting continues to build.

Despite these trends, NWP has several points in its favor. While the language in the Bush proposal is not what the writing project had hoped for, NWP's D.C. consultant, Ellin Nolan, points out that the White House has, in fact, set aside funding for the program, albeit in a less favorable format than in years past. This is better than being zeroed out altogether, Nolan says. If NWP can get its Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) authorization language changed, she adds, the project could find itself in good shape later this spring in terms of federal funding. There is much work to be done between now and then, however.

Additionally, the project continues to enjoy the support of both Sen. Thad Cochran (R-MS) and Rep. George Miller (D-CA), reflecting a history of strong bipartisan support in both the House and Senate. Cochran has reiterated his support for the writing project on numerous occasions this year, calling NWP one of his top priorities and assuring that he will do everything he can to keep the project funded via ESEA. Miller, the ranking minority member on the House

Education Committee, continues his deep commitment to the project and includes federal support for the project in his Excellence and Accountability in Education Act (H.R. 340).

Both Miller and Cochran have introduced "stand-alone" reauthorization bills for the writing project—numbers S. 403 in the Senate and H.R. 1192 in the House. Given the array of education proposals and "what-if" scenarios swirling around Washington at this time, NWP's task in the days ahead remains surprisingly simple: secure as many co-sponsors of these reauthorization bills as possible. This helps to show the breadth of writing project support nationwide, putting even more pressure on the White House and Congress to keep NWP federally funded, regardless of the ESEA plan that is finally approved.

As the NWP Spring Meeting kicked off in Washington on April 5 with a Thursday morning meeting in the Senate Mansfield Room, senators gathered in chambers across the hall to vote on the federal budget and other issues. In the Mansfield Room, congressional supporters of the NWP provided insight into this year's ESEA reauthorization process and tips for promoting the project's work to our legislators. Greeted by thunderous applause, a standing ovation, and personal greetings from NWP's Mississippi delegation, Sen. Cochran eloquently addressed the group, discussing the role of education in his personal life (both of his parents were educators) and making clear his pledge to continue supporting the project throughout ESEA negotiations.

Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI) echoed similar themes, as did longtime project supporter Rep. Roger Wicker (R-MS), who was introduced by Ellen Shelton of the University of Mississippi Writing Project. Shelton, a co-director at the Oxford-based site, happens to teach 11<sup>th</sup> grade A.P. English to Wicker's daughter. Jane Oates, a senior legislative aide to Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and a former Philadelphia Writing Project TC, inspired the group with a passionate speech on the project's impact on teachers and students in the Northeast while Ellin Nolan, NWP Executive Director Richard Sterling, and Co-director Mary Ann Smith familiarized the group with new data

on the impact of NWP programs nationwide and advised participants on key points to make when visiting congressional offices.

Energized and armed with fresh knowledge, writing project TCs and site leaders scattered across Capitol Hill to urge their senators and representatives to co-sponsor NWP's reauthorization bills. The reception they received, overall, was outstanding.

A group of Georgia TCs and directors convinced Rep. Johnny Isakson (R-GA), a key member of the House Education Committee, to sign on as a co-sponsor, while Iowa Writing Project Director Jim Davis met with congressional aides representing every federal legislator in his state. Marie Coleman, a Boston Writing Project TC who lives in New Hampshire and works in Massachusetts helped secure co-sponsors on both sides of that state line, while Mary Mackley, director of the Connecticut Writing Project at Storrs, sat down for a 20-minute private meeting with NWP supporter (and now co-sponsor) Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT).

As of press time, 50 members of the House and 19 senators have agreed to co-sponsor the National Writing Project, and that number is expected to increase significantly in the coming weeks. Given the outstanding turnout at the spring meeting and the excellent reception received on Capitol Hill, NWP expects this year's co-sponsor total to match or exceed last year's (more than 50 in the Senate, about 100 in the House). Visit the NWP Web site at [www.writingproject.org](http://www.writingproject.org) for weekly co-sponsor updates.

Keep a close eye on your email and stay tuned to *The Voice*. This year's federal campaign could be a long and difficult one, but with enough perseverance and the continued participation of TCs and directors nationwide, NWP is optimistic about maintaining its federal funding and keeping the national infrastructure and network alive and intact.

If you have any questions about the federal reauthorization of the writing project, please contact Andy Bradshaw at [abradshaw@writingproject.org](mailto:abradshaw@writingproject.org).

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