NWP Sites Host America Goes Back to School Events

by Denis Udall

America Goes Back to School is a nationwide annual effort started by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) that focuses attention on improving education during the back-to-school months of August through October, and rallies parents, community leaders, colleges, universities, neighborhood organizations, and others to be involved and volunteer in their schools. America Goes Back to School began in 1994 and is sponsored by the Partnership for Family Involvement. America Goes Back to School focuses primarily on community-based events that kick-off the school year. This year six National Writing Projects in five states will be holding America Goes Back to School events. These sites have found this DOE initiative to be an excellent opportunity to showcase the work of their teachers, build public support for best practices of teaching reading and writing, conduct outreach to non-NWP schools and teachers, and widen the circle of community leaders, organizations, schools, and businesses that NWP sites come in contact with.

Below is an overview of what the six NWP sites have done or are planning to do.

1. Northern and Southern Nevada Writing Projects have designed a parent workshop program which is being offered in seven counties throughout the state. The focus is on understanding and using Nevada’s Six-Plus Trait Writing Assessment in ways that will foster better writing and learning. Parent workshops with local teachers consultants will demonstrate how the state writing examinations are designed and delivered, and will give parenting tips on family activities to improve writing and revising strategies.

2. Area 3 Writing Project will work with teacher consultants who participate in a transition-to-college English program. Each year, eleventh graders in this program write a “college search” research paper as a way to research a college or university they are interested in attending. Students find out more about their selected college’s admissions requirements and procedures as well as the college’s academic and program strengths. As their final research product, students create a brochure for the college that they have researched. As its America Goes Back to School event, teacher consultants will work with students to present their research to ninth graders in the same high school, informing them about what they learned both about their college and about how to research a college. The best presenters will be selected to make additional presentations to junior high school students on their findings.
3. **San Diego Writing Project** will host two events that will bring together university freshman composition teachers, parents, administrators, and high school writing teachers to discuss hurdles that freshmen face in making the transition to college, especially with regard to students as writers.

4. **Puget Sound Writing Project** will organize several events that are similar to the Nevada Writing Project's events—involving parents in workshops that will help them better understand Washington's standards and assessment system. Also, the site will engage parents in conversations about what they can do to promote their children's writing.

5. **Rio Grande Writing Project.** The high school where Rio Grande Writing Project co-coordinator Rudy Miera teaches held an event in mid-October. Key components of the school's school-to-work program are the strong partnerships it has developed with local businesses, non-profits, and public agencies. During the year, students undertake internships at preschools, community youth centers, retail stores, and hospitals. The school used the event as an occasion for students, parents, and community members to celebrate and recognize the contribution the partners have made to the school and its students.