A goal of education is to expand students’ sense of their possibilities and roles in the world. Argument writing plays a role in students’ identities in their careers, as college students, and as citizens.

The National Writing Project received a validation grant from the US Department of Education’s Investing in Innovation program.

Each of the participating 44 districts are economically poor (but culturally rich) rural communities. The central goal of the College Ready Writers Program (CRWP) is to help students become skilled at writing arguments from non-fiction sources. Teachers in each district were asked to attend 45 hours of professional development a year; some in workshop settings, but often in coaching, classroom demonstrations, and co-teaching situations. The materials were constructed by teacher-consultants on the CRWP leadership team and site leaders, and emerged from the needs of the district teachers.

CRWP materials include multiple texts, often with competing points of view, on a single subject. According to Tom Fox, the program’s Associate Director, “What we hope students can do is to make sense of these competing points of view that come at them, read them carefully, assess their relevance, look at the value of their evidence, and take a stand within that conversation that exists already. We feel like that is a way that rural students, who are often isolated from these important conversations, can step up and participate with some agency in those conversations. It’s a very exciting and ambitious program.”

A number of benefits are arising from the College Ready Writers Program. Participating teachers report that CRWP-created materials provide students with a new level of engagement in argument writing. Both teachers and CRWP staff members were pleased at just how deeply engaged students were in making their arguments. And more importantly, the students are looking at other points of view and changing their positions when appropriate.

The College Ready Writers Program also invites a genuine shift in the classroom, where students are at the center of learning and everyone learns together. All students’ perspectives are invited and teachers’ modeling draws the learners in. The program works long-term with teachers and though operating in rural districts mostly in the Southeast, it has gained a reputation as an effective model to improve the teaching of writing and therefore improve students’ academic writing in secondary schools.

STUDENTS AS FUTURE CITIZENS
Thoughtful citizens read, criticize, analyze, and create arguments daily - watching the news, surfing the internet, talking among friends, family, and co-workers.

STUDENTS AS FUTURE COLLEGE STUDENTS
Argument is the common language of academic writing. Successful college writers know about making a claim, supporting it with relevant evidence, and citing evidence according to academic conventions.

GOALS FOR ARGUMENT IN THE PRESENT
Developing skills in argument writing is not just about students’ future. By practicing arguments, students become more thoughtful citizens of their school, better learners, and more capable test-takers.

STUDENTS AS LEARNERS
Researching and writing arguments improve student learning beyond specific skills in writing. Students learn content knowledge, broaden their ideas, and stretch their mental capacities.

For information about the College Ready Writers Program, email i3@nwp.org.