Impacting writing in local schools

By Douglas Clark

The Northwest Indiana Writing Project (NWIWP) at Purdue University Northwest (PNW) recently received a $20,000 grant from the National Writing Project to participate in a national research project to develop materials for high school teachers, especially those teaching dual credit courses.

Dual credit is the term given to courses in which high school students can earn both high school and college credit concurrently. Indiana law requires high schools offer a minimum of two dual credit courses.

Carolyn Boiarsky, PNW professor and NWIWP director, said the grant will be used to teach educators the kind of essay writing required in most first-year college composition courses and how to evaluate student assignments.

This is the second year PNW and NWIWP have received the grant, which is part of the National Writing Project’s College, Career and Community Writers Program (C3WP), the goal of which is to assure teachers have the ability to teach college- and career-ready writing.

With last year's funding, PNW and NWIWP offered a series of training workshops and webinars for 17 educators from nine different schools. Overcoming complications of coordinating across two different time zones,
those successes are leading to new opportunities to deepen the program's impact this year.

Besides again underwriting NWIWP's Summer Institute for educators, slated for June 18 to July 12 at PNW's Hammond campus, the grant also funds a more robust partnership with Clark Middle/High School in the School City of Hammond district.

Six years ago, Clark was on the Indiana State Board of Education list of failing schools. Since then, the school has made great strides. The high school now ranks 51 out of 756 in the state of Indiana, and its scores in math are 17 percent above the state average. While Clark has modestly improved its Language Arts scores during that time, Clark’s principal Robert Wilson is convinced that the Northwest Indiana Writing Project and the C3WP approach will have an even greater effect.

Two teachers from Clark, Matthew Adams and Gina D’Angelo, attended the NWIWP Summer Institute last year. After seeing the difference the C3WP methods had in their teaching and their students’ learning, they are excited to introduce their colleagues to the program. Both will serve as facilitators and mentors for the program in the middle and high school this year.

Boiarsky says that because of the nature of the program, as well as the principal's support, there is opportunity to work with teachers in subjects besides English and Language Arts at Clark, like social studies, history, and STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

Through the partnership, teachers at Clark Middle/High School will be able to introduce C3WP materials and activities into their classrooms throughout the 2018-19 school year. Simultaneously, they will be participating with approximately 80 other schools around the country to test the teaching materials.
Teachers interested in applying for the upcoming NWIWP Summer Institute should contact Assistant Director Connie Farrell at cfarrel@pnw.edu. Tuition is waived for those teachers accepted to the program.

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