

SRI Finds Positive Effects of the College, Career, and Community Writer’s Program on Student Achievement

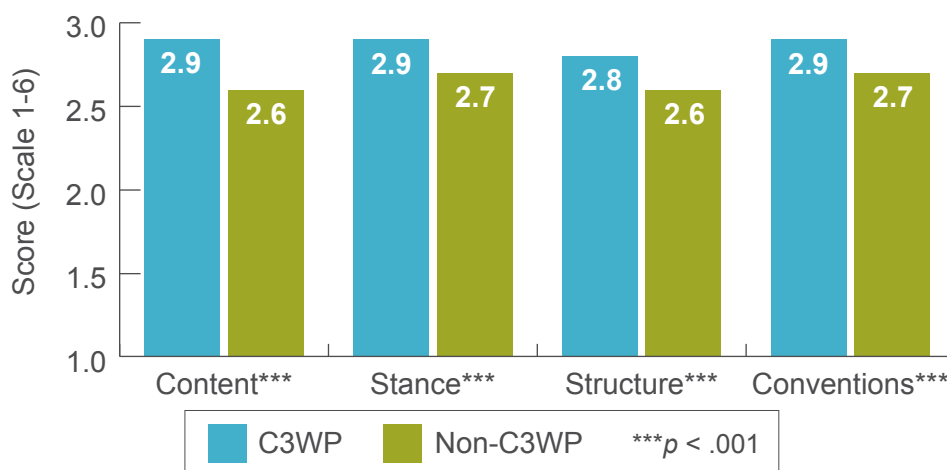


The National Writing Project’s (NWP) College, Career, and Community Writers Program (C3WP) is designed to improve students’ argument writing through intensive teacher professional development, instructional resources, and formative assessment.¹ In 2016, based on evidence of C3WP’s prior success in improving student achievement, NWP received a federal Investing in Innovation (i3) Scale-up grant to test C3WP in new contexts.

As part of this grant, SRI International (SRI) conducted a 1-year random assignment evaluation of C3WP in grades 7–9 that found consistent program implementation and positive, statistically significant impacts on student writing achievement.

This is the third evaluation of C3WP in secondary grades, all of which have found positive and statistically significant effects on student achievement.² The size, scale, rigor, and independence of these three studies provide a strong evidence base to support C3WP’s effectiveness in improving students’ secondary writing achievement at scale and in diverse contexts.

Impacts of 1 Year of C3WP on Four Attributes of Students’ Source-Based Argument Writing, Grade 7–9



¹ C3WP was formerly called the College-Ready Writers Program, or CRWP.

² NWP has expanded C3WP to grades 4-6 although no evaluations have been conducted of the program in these upper elementary grades to date.

Executive Summary: Evaluation of NWP’s Scale-up of C3WP

In this study, SRI conducted a randomized controlled trial of C3WP in 47 rural, high-need districts, finding positive and statistically significant effects of the program on student achievement. SRI measured student achievement using a writing task similar to those in some state assessments (e.g., Connecticut) and national assessment consortia (i.e., Smarter Balanced). Adjusting for baseline performance, students in C3WP districts outscored students in business-as-usual comparison districts by about 0.21 on a 1- to 6-point scale on each of the 4 measured attributes.

At the study’s onset, SRI randomly assigned the districts to either C3WP or a business-as-usual comparison condition. In the 23 districts assigned to receive C3WP, local Writing Project sites provided grade 7–9 English language arts teachers with 1 year of C3WP training. SRI measured grade 7–9 student writing outcomes in all 47 districts at the beginning and end of the study year. Randomized designs are considered the “gold standard” for measuring program impact in education research because they ensure that, on average, receiving C3WP training is the only difference between the C3WP districts and the comparison districts.

“Instructing students in argument writing in a step-by-step process has been a big change. Breaking all the parts into individual skills has been an improvement brought about by C3WP.”

–C3WP teacher

To measure impacts on students, SRI administered a 2-day student writing assessment. On day 1, students received approximately five non-fiction sources designed to provide multiple perspectives on a complex issue. On day 2, students were asked to write an argument from the source materials. Students’ writing was scored using the Analytic Writing Continuum for Source-Based Argument Writing (AWC-SBA). **C3WP had a positive and statistically significant effect on all four attributes of writing measured by the AWC-SBA**—content (quality of reasoning and strength of evidence); structure (organization to enhance the argument); stance (tone and establishment of credibility); and conventions (differentiation of source material from original writing, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization).

This is the third evaluation of C3WP in secondary grades. All three studies:

- Were conducted using random assignment and designed to meet the Department of Education’s highest standards for research: What Works Clearinghouse standards without reservations and ESSA Tier 1 (Strong Evidence).
- Used the AWC-SBA to assess impacts of student achievement.
- Were conducted by SRI as an independent, 3rd-party evaluator.
- Found positive and statistically significant effects on student achievement.

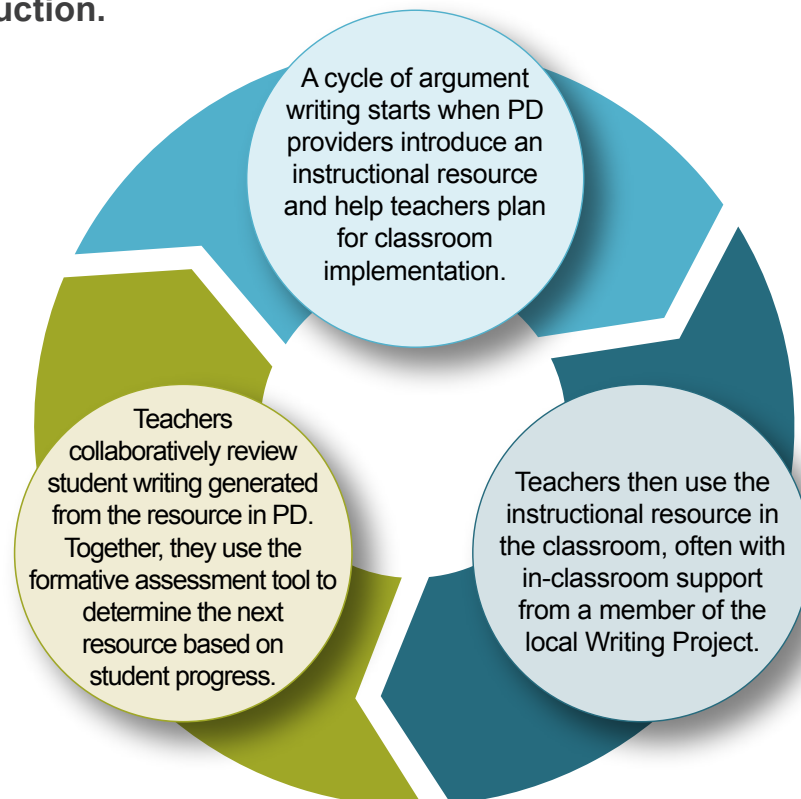
For more detail on these studies, see Park, et. al. (2021), Arshan, et. al. (2019), and Gallagher, et. al. (2017).

What is C3WP?

The College, Career, and Community Writers Program (C3WP) is designed to improve students' argument writing by supporting teachers in new, skill-based instructional practices and formative assessment. National Writing Project work is delivered through local, university-based site affiliates that provide the professional development in their service areas. C3WP has three components:

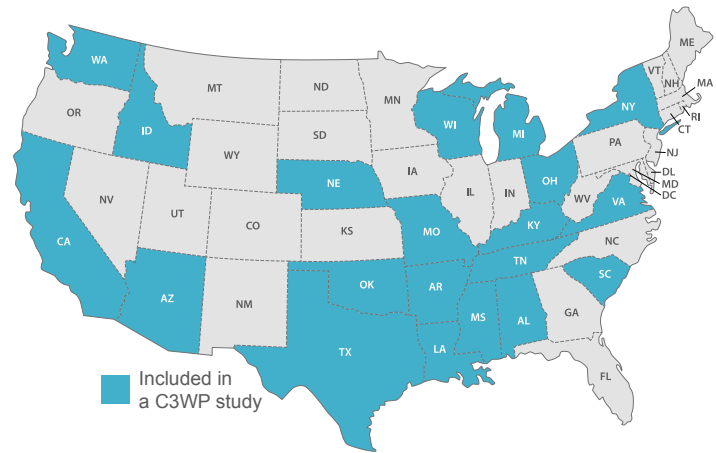
- **Intensive professional development to support classroom implementation.** The teachers in this study received approximately 40 hours of professional development, emphasizing support for classroom enactment of C3WP instructional resources via demonstration lessons, co-planning, co-teaching, coaching, and the use of a C3WP formative assessment tool.
- **Instructional resources that focus on key skills for argument writing.** Each resource includes a 4- to 6-day sequence of activities focusing on a specific skill or practice in argument writing (e.g., selecting and annotating evidence in source material) and a set of texts that represent multiple points of view on a complex, engaging topic.
- **Formative assessment to focus analysis and inform next steps.** C3WP formative assessment tools focus teachers' analysis of student work on the key skills targeted by the instructional resources. The tools are designed to support teachers to identify what their students can already do with argument writing and where they need additional teaching.

C3WP is characterized by cycles of argument writing. With the support of local Writing Projects, 83% of study teachers completed at least 4 cycles of C3WP instruction.



Through three rigorous studies, C3WP has demonstrated effectiveness at scale and in diverse contexts.

SRI’s three independent evaluations of C3WP spanned 228 diverse schools in 20 states. These three studies of C3WP provide an unusually robust body of rigorous, independent evidence of program effectiveness.



78% Rural

22% Urban and suburban



61% White students
39% Students of color



65% Students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch



Source: School-level NCES data from the year student outcomes were measured in the three studies: 2013–14, 2015–16, and 2018–19. We average the school-level means to produce these estimates.

Note: Rural schools are those with NCES locale codes 32, 33, 41, 42, or 43. Urban and suburban schools include all other locale codes.

Citations

- Arshan, N. L., Park, C. J., & Gallagher, H. A. (2019). *Impacts on students of a short-cycle implementation of the National Writing Project’s College, Career, and Community Writers Program*. SRI International.
- Gallagher, H. A., Arshan, N., & Woodworth, K. R. (2017). Impact of the National Writing Project’s College-Ready Writers Program in high-need rural districts. *Journal of Research on Effectiveness in Education*, 10(3), 570–595. DOI: 10.1080/19345747.2017.1300361
- Park, C., Arshan, N., Milby, A., & Goetz, R. (2021). *Evaluation of the College, Career, and Community Writers Program: Findings from the i3 Scale-up grant*. Technical report. SRI International.

Funding Acknowledgement

This report was prepared by SRI International with funds provided by the National Writing Project under an Investing in Innovation Scale-up grant from the U.S. Department of Education (grant #U411A160004). However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the U.S. Federal Government.

Suggested Citation

Arshan, N. L. & Park, C. J. (2021). *Research brief: SRI finds positive effects of the College, Career, and Community Writer’s Program on student achievement*. SRI International.

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